DOKTORI DISSZERTÁCIÓ

FEMALE IDENTITY IN FEMINIST ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

NŐI IDENTITÁS A FEMINISTA SHAKESPEARE ADAPTÁCIÓKBAN

PUSKÁS ANDREA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The dissertation investigates female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. The research was carried out by two major objectives. One is to introduce and outline the basic theoretical background for feminist Shakespeare criticism and to compare and contrast the great diversity of theoretical standpoints on adaptation, feminism, female identity and feminist Shakespeare criticism, itself. The other is to apply the theoretical background to actual literary works. This was to be accomplished by combining the theoretical dimension with close reading techniques and textual analyses in order to analyse female identity in three particular feminist adaptations of Shakespeare: *Ophelia* by Bryony Lavery, *Lear's Daughters* by the Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, and *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, written by Paula Vogel.

The study also centres on the need to clarify and scrutinise the basic concepts of adaptation, feminism, female identity in order to reach the main purpose of the work. The results of the research have proved that feminist adaptations of Shakespeare are deeply rooted in and linked with feminist interpretations of Shakespeare. Furthermore, female identity in feminist adaptations is depicted as a social construct made up of a range of elements. It is more adequate to identify which factors have an important role in the *formation* of female identity than which factors actually *comprise* that identity. Race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, idiosyncratic personal experience (a wholly unique store of experiences), religion, political views and intellectual abilities are among the central categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another, always contributing to the creation of personal identity. The language of plays, the space the characters are given to express themselves together with the political motivation of feminism and its interest in social, political and cultural issues are all determining factors in the formation of female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare.

INTRODUCTION

The study of literature readily transforms into an exploration of one's own identity. For those immersed in it, interpretation of literature becomes a very personal matter. Delving into the world of Shakespeare attempting to understand the interior and exterior landscapes of his female characters, female scholars quite understandably come to feel that their own 'being' is rich in literary parallels. For any scholar concentrating on female identity in literary works, feminism becomes an ineluctable gateway opening onto broad political, social and cultural avenues of pursuit – including its influence on literature and Shakespearean studies. It is clear that feminism has had a significant effect on Shakespeare criticism, and has contributed much to both the interpretation of Shakespearean plays and the creation of feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. Both Shakespeare and feminism provide readers and literary critics with universal topics connected with self-expression, self-discovery, both of them offer questions that encourage thought and deed.

The scope of this dissertation is to explore and analyse female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. When deciding on the work's title, it became evident that it is crucial to clarify some basic terminology, such as feminism, adaptation, feminist adaptation and identity as such, in order to properly delineate the central theme and purpose of the work, to set clear goals and, finally, to obtain (at least some) adequate answers. Similarly, one must scrutinise what it means to be female, what it means to be a female literary character, and what it means to be a female literary character in a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare.

The dissertation consists of seven chapters and has two major objectives. One is to introduce and outline the basic theoretical background for feminist Shakespeare criticism and to compare and contrast the great diversity of theoretical standpoints on adaptation, feminism, female identity and feminist Shakespeare criticism, itself. The other is to apply the theoretical background to actual literary works. This is to be accomplished by combining the theoretical dimension with close reading techniques and textual analyses in order to analyse female identity in three specific feminist adaptations of Shakespeare: *Ophelia* by Bryony Lavery, *Lear's Daughters* by the Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, and *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, written by Paula Vogel.

One of the key initial steps was differentiating between feminist interpretations of Shakespeare – feminist accounts and opinions, the revisions of Shakespeare – and feminist adaptations of Shakespeare – new, independent plays penned by feminist playwrights. The intention of this dissertation is to prove that all feminist adaptations incorporate a broad, thorough study and feminist interpretation of Shakespeare; *Ophelia*, for example, could not have been written without a feminist interpretation of *Hamlet*, which means that feminist adaptations of Shakespeare are rooted in and closely connected with feminist interpretations of Shakespeare, though the two must never be confused.

The first chapter concentrates on the nature and understanding of adaptation. It examines terms such as adaptation, source, intertextuality and quotation, and gives special attention to authorship, text, social and cultural context and the phenomenon of adapting, recycling Shakespeare. In order to reveal what a feminist adaptation means, one is blatantly obligated to first investigate what feminism stands for. Chapter 2 is devoted to the complex and challenging enterprise of defining the basic concepts and essence of feminism, then moving on into feminist literary criticism.

Feminism is definitely an integral part of today's society and culture. Both men and women have been exposed to and formed their own, personal understandings of it. It is an issue that concerns not only women but the whole structure of society, which per force includes men. Feminism has evolved to such extent that it can now embrace differences rather than fight for equality or sameness. It aims to build new models based on tolerance and diversity. Feminism continuously revises concepts and notions such as identity, sexuality, sin, death, literature, choice and power. It deviates from the traditionally accepted viewpoints and analyses these concepts from an entirely different angle. However, it is difficult to define feminism universally, since different historical periods, cultures and political beliefs all suggest something different and betray a divergent focus towards feminism and feminist criticism. The second chapter intends to prove that there is no single definition of feminism, as it overlaps several theoretical fields or critical schools, such as deconstruction, poststructuralism or psychoanalysis. An outline of feminism's historical development underscores how the goals of feminism have varied throughout the decades and how it has been, and will likely continue to be inseparable from political, social and cultural issues. A subchapter focuses on the relationship between feminism and literature, examining such notions as gynocritics, 'common female experience' and the reading process. It examines theories on the

differences between reading as a woman and reading as a man, and differentiates between female and feminist reading.

One of the most crucial debates within feminism is whether gender entitles a writer or any other person to see the world differently, to accept or understand a scientific fact differently. Does being a woman writer have an impact on the final product of the writing process? Does being a woman reader influence the reading process and the interpretation of the text? The most basic feminist definition holds that women suffer from unfair treatment in society and have been socially, politically and sexually oppressed, a proposition which leads to the conclusion that this sense of exclusion, social 'injustice' and discrimination definitely does contribute to giving women a different platform on which to stand, a particularly distinct perspective on mainstream values and reality. Differences among feminists stem from the extent to which they treat sex as a determining trait and the ways they treat or react to the roles of women and the spaces women inhabit in literature, culture and society.

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks of this dissertation is accomplished in Chapter 3, which is devoted to the exploration of female identity. Here, the objective is to establish a definition and identify the core components of female identity. The chapter introduces and expounds on various approaches to defining female identity, while at the same time grouping them according to their primary focus or emphasis. It ties together feminist theories that pay special attention to historical development of female identity, theories that emphasise the social construction of identity, that focus on the female body, The chapter underlines the differences between collective and individual identity, presents, compares and contrasts the different understandings of the sex/gender system and the place of female identity in this system with special attention to the poststructuralist theory in feminism on sex and gender. One of the most frequently discussed issues within feminism is the connection between identity and language. This facet of feminist theory is discussed in a subchapter which focuses on the notion of language acquisition, the relation of language to society, and the links between feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis. An additional subchapter narrows the topic of female identity down to the more specific issue of female identity in a literary text.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the intersection of Shakespeare and feminism. Here various feminist approaches to Shakespeare are grouped, categorized and differentiated; inconsistency within feminist criticism of Shakespeare is also highlighted. Special attention is devoted to a historical feminist approach to Shakespeare and to Juliet

Dusinberre's provocative idea that Shakespeare was actually a feminist. This chapter also examines and analyses various text-based approaches to Shakespeare and outlines their scope of study and focal points. A special subchapter is devoted to feminist adaptations of Shakespeare and probes the differences between feminist performances of Shakespeare and feminist "rewritings," the adaptations of his works.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 reflect the practical application of the complex dynamics that emerged in the theoretical investigation of the preceding chapters. Primary focus is placed on the examination of female identity in feminist adaptations of three of Shakespeare's plays: *Hamlet, Othello* and *King Lear*. These chapters mirror the initial assumption of the research that analysing female identity in a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare necessarily involves an analysis of the adapted Shakespearean play or, better stated, a feminist interpretation of the particular play. Each chapter starts with an analysis of feminist reactions to Shakespeare's original play and draws attention to its implications for the feminist adaptation. The three plays, *Ophelia*, *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* and *Lear's Daughters*, form a chronological triangle, each utilising a different choice in chronological setting: *Ophelia* takes place after, *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* during, and *Lear's Daughter* before the action of their respective Shakespearean counterparts.

Chapter 5 explores the nature of tragic female identity, the redefinition of tragic endings, death, sin and sexuality. The limitations of literary identity and how Lavery's character of Ophelia challenges the interpretation of Shakespeare's Ophelia are also discussed. This chapter analyses the social aspects of identity and recognizes multiplication of identity in the case of Lavery's Ophelia.

Chapter 6 investigates the different feminist treatments of *Othello* and their interpretations of the way women are represented in this tragedy. The aim is to show the influences of these theories on the creation of the female characters of Vogel's play, *Desdemona*. Throughout its analysis of female identity, the chapter's primary reference point is the nature of identity as a construct. It discusses notions of social background, class, religious beliefs, the relationship between race and gender and the influence of this relationship on female identity. Chapter 6 strives to show that female identity as depicted in Vogel's *Desdemona* challenges the more general concept of common female identity and concentrates instead on the complexity of individual female identity.

Chapter 7 deals with the colourful variety of feminist approaches to *King Lear* and their respective interpretations of female identity. This culminates in an analysis of female

identity in *Lear's Daughters.* The chapter highlights the presentation of female characters in different subject positions and examines representation of female power and the consequences of that power. Lastly, the analysis concentrates on the absence of male characters, the influence of language and family structures on the formation of female identity.

The basic expectations and the over-arching aims of the dissertation are to prove that feminist adaptations of Shakespeare are closely linked with the feminist approaches and interpretations of Shakespeare, that for example the investigation of the identity of Lavery's character Ophelia is not possible without a thorough investigation of the feminist interpretation of Shakespeare's Ophelia. Furthermore, the dissertation aims at proving that adaptation always melds with theory, that feminist adaptations and the depiction of female identity of feminist adaptations are deeply politically motivated and inseparable from contemporary social, political and cultural issues, social realities that determine the formation of female identity. The final hypothesis of the dissertation is that female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare is pictured as a construct, the outcome of the interplay between the interior and the exterior, the private and the public, an entity, which is many times trapped by social forms, but is capable of change, is able to choose and possesses the power to change the outside, social norms and forms.

CHAPTER 1

ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare, the 'great father,' has always been a reference point for every subsequent playwright. No matter the period in which a playwright lives, s/he is compelled to go back and give an opinion, a standpoint on Shakespeare, either positive or negative. For more than four hundred years, playwrights have been going back to Shakespeare and have been using, remaking, revising, interpreting and quoting from his plays. That is how we come to encounter Ophelia, Desdemona or Rosencrantz in the plays of 20th or 21st century playwrights. Yet, going back to Shakespeare is not a 21st century phenomenon. The most frequent word used for describing such plays is 'adaptation.' What exactly does this word mean? What *is* adaptation?

In order to achieve an ultimate definition or thorough discussion of the term, 'adaptation,' one has to look at what happens with a text, a piece of drama, after it gets out of the hands of its playwright. It can be understood either as a piece of writing, a written text, or as rough material ready to be performed. One must also concede that a play comes fully to life only on stage, when its words are performed in the theatre. The text of a play does not fulfil its purpose without being performed. Reading the words on paper is a totally different experience than watching the play and listening to its words when uttered by skilled actors.

Up to a certain extent, a theatrical production, the production of a Shakespearean play for instance, depends on the interpretation and creative solutions of a director, actors and other theatre-people. There are not two productions of *Macbeth*, for example, that would be the same, though based on the same text. The very same text has to be 'adapted' to different practical criteria, such as the size of the stage, the actors, technical features, the availability of costumes, lightening, financial sources, the cultural background of the audience and the performers and different directorial practices. Whether a particular play is performed outdoors or indoors, by professional or amateur actors, are among the essentials factors contributing to the wide variety of outcomes in stage productions.

In the Introduction of *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays*, Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier discuss the nature of theatrical productions. They claim

that "every drama text is an incomplete entity that must be 'translated' by being put on stage."[1] This means, for example, that staging the play *Hamlet* requires a certain kind of reworking, modification of the drama text, as the words of the play have to be translated from page to stage, i.e. from a two-dimensional entity to a three-dimensional space. Movements, body language, lightening, the choice of music, costumes, etc. always give an extra meaning to the play and are parts of a certain interpretation. In his production of the play *Hamlet* in 2001 in the Theatre of Andrej Bagar, Nitra, Slovakia, Alföldi Róbert, Hungarian actor and director, shifted the setting of the play into the 21st century and Claudius's introductory speech as a new king was performed in the form of a press-conference, with photographers and journalists in attendance. Hamlet and Laertes were chatting on the internet and the whole production was permeated by the computer and technology-centred culture of the modern age. Hamlet was roller-skating on stage, he put the words "To be or not to be" on the wall as a piece of graffiti, and he raped Ophelia. All of the surprising or perhaps shocking innovations of this production took place without altering the words of the original Shakespearean play. Is it Shakespeare, then? Is Alföldi's *Hamlet* something new, a form of reworking, interpretation – or let us say, adaptation – of the original play, or is it merely an ambitious, extraordinary stage production of *the original* Shakespeare employing unusual techniques? The answer is clearly set in the Fischlin-Fortier anthology: "Theatre is always a form of reworking, in a sense the first step toward adaptation."[2]

It is interesting to have a look at the audience's reactions when such shocking innovations are put on stage. The reactions of audience as well as critics show whether they are ready to accept unusual techniques and reworking that change or even distort the picture they had about the 'standard *Hamlet*,' and what happens when their expectations about how *Hamlet* should look are not fulfilled or can even find the new image to be offensive or shocking. Concurrently, the necessity of unusual techniques and the extent of extreme changes are also thrown into question.

It may be posited that theatre production is the initial stage of the process, while the final stage is adaptation. However, I believe that every theatre production is an implicit form of adaptation, as putting a play onto the stage always implies a critical reading and interpretation, and of course a certain amount of alteration.

[1] Fischlin-Fortier, 2000, p.7
[2] Ibid., p.7

Adapting Shakespeare's texts to create new ones is a much more radical process than putting a Shakespearean play onto the stage. This process moves from a two dimensional entity and at the end of it one finds a two dimensional creation, the text of a play is used to create another, new text, so the changes that happen during the process of creation are of a different nature than those that occur during the creation of a theatrical production.

Making a new play out of Shakespeare's works of drama can be done in different ways. It can be accomplished by rewriting the language of the play, simplifying or rearranging its words, or by changing the genre and outcomes of the play (e.g. Nahum Tate gave a happy ending to *King Lear*[3]). Likewise, adaptation can be created by adding new passages to the play and/or by omitting others, or by breaking up the chronology of the play by writing sequences that examine what happened before the action of the play begins. Adaptations can speculate about the possible lives of Shakespeare's minor characters or the lives of those characters who did not have enough space in the bard's play to express their thoughts and feelings. Fischlin and Fortier point out that, "In some cases, what the source text clearly leaves out, becomes an opportunity for adaptation."[4] Bryony Lavery's play *Ophelia* deals with Ophelia's feelings and attitudes, her friends and female companies; The Women's Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein, in their play *Lear's Daughters,* concentrate on the three sisters' lives before the time of Shakespeare's tragedy, and Paula Vogel's play, *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* presents the lives and inner feelings of Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca the night before Desdemona's death, presenting the lady's inner feelings, motivations and dreams. All of these aforementioned plays work with the opportunities that are offered by Shakespeare's plays and fill in the gaps contained in *Hamlet, King Lear* and *Othello.* Furthermore, adaptations can be created by using only Shakespeare's characters and putting them into a different context; for example, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the absurd play of Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead.*

Fischlin and Fortier stress that the basic difference between theatrical production and adaptation (henceforth, the word 'adaptation' will only be applied to written texts of plays, rather than theatrical productions) is that adaptation melds with theory and always implies an interplay between creation and criticism.[5] They explain that the word

[3] Tate, 2000, pp.66-96
[4] Fischlin – Fortier, 2000, p.10
[5] Ibid., p.8

adaptation comes from the Latin *adaptare*, to fit to a new context, to make suitable, which means that the process of adaptation implies a way of making Shakespeare fit a particular historical moment or cultural and social requirement. Accordingly, one can conclude that adaptation always has something to do with some theory or criticism, which spotlights Shakespeare from a different, unusual perspective. These theories can include different critical approaches such as postcolonial, feminist criticism, psychoanalysis, etc. It is like looking at Shakespeare filtered through several glasses of different colours, each representing a different angle, need or contemporary expectation.

1.1. Source and Adaptation

Let us continue to explore the notion of adaptation for a while. It is interesting to examine the relationship between the 'original' play and the adaptation, and between the author and the adaptor. An examination of these links warrants a detailed examination of terms such as originality and authorship.

When talking about the link between an adaptation and its Shakespearean predecessor, the latter is usually referred to as 'source' or 'the original.' Many times, the adaptation is put into a secondary position and is regarded as something lower or subordinate, borrowing its subject matter or characters from a source, a play written by 'Shakespeare, the Great.' Shakespeare's name has become mystified; he is viewed as a genius whose plays stand above all others and who is the origin of every literary or dramatic action. He is the 'author' of magnificent plays and thus he possesses 'authority' above those plays. In this sense, it is ironic that Shakespeare, long dead, does not have the copyright to his own writings, and the adaptor is free to use and do whatever s/he wants with these plays, and can also prohibit further publications, workings, alterations or adaptations of his/her adaptation. Of course, Shakespeare is still attributed a kind of moral or ethical copyright and that is why, for certain critics, he stands above the adaptations.

It tends to be forgotten that Shakespeare himself was an adaptor, as he used existing texts, stories and chronicles, from whence he borrowed his plots and characters. Fischlin and Fortier refer to Gary Taylor, critic and editor, who discusses the originality of Shakespeare and claims:

> "Shakespeare, of course, was as guilty of theft … as any author … Shakespeare

> stole with a clear conscience. He copied plots, characters, speeches, images and aphorisms from classical authors and from his own contemporaries, without acknowledgement."[6]

It would be misleading to call Shakespeare 'original,' as he himself went back to earlier materials and sources, or he borrowed from his contemporaries. *Hamlet, f*or example, is very similar to Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy,* or an earlier play called *Ur-Hamlet,* which was apparently never printed though its performance is dated prior to or in 1596.[7] Shakespeare's main source for *King Lear* was the *True Chronicle History of King Leir,*[8] and for *Macbeth* it was Holinshed's Chronicles.[9] Many other examples could be given, if we just think about Shakespeare's historical plays coming from Plutarch's and Ovid's writings. This means that Shakespeare's plays are adaptations themselves, though many times the 20th century adaptations, such as Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* Edward Bond's *Lear* or Bryony Lavery's *Ophelia,* change much more in Shakespeare's play than Shakespeare changed in the play from which he drew his inspiration.

On the other hand, Gary Taylor's words — 'theft', 'stole', 'conscience', 'copied' — I think are a bit strong when talking about the playwright. What Shakespeare did was not regarded as theft in the Renaissance, but as a natural thing. Plays had to be produced very quickly, in a short period of time, and writing them was treated as craft and not art. Theatrical practices and the box office were more important than authorial rights; producing a new, successful play was far more crucial than the acknowledgment of sources or other authors. The collaboration of authors or copying from other sources was highly supported and regarded as an important cog in the wheel of business. Nevertheless, the Renaissance encouraged people to go back to and learn from ancient scholars and imitate them. Borrowing plots or characters from the ancient teachers was not considered stealing, but to the contrary, it was a good and advisable thing to do.

Shakespeare, of course, did not merely take subject matters, characters or plots from his sources mechanically, but engaged in a lot of revision and interpretation and shaped his sources in order to make them live up to the historical, political, and religious contexts of Elizabethan England, as well as the expectations of the different strata of audiences, the number of available actors, censorship, and several contemporary stage

[6] quoted in Fischlin – Fortier, 2000, p.9
[7] Jenkins, 2003, p.82
[8] Marx, 2000, p.61
[9] Muir, 2003, p.xxxvi

practices. In his monograph, *Shakespearean Intertextuality: Studies in Selected Sources & Plays*, Stephen J. Lynch examines the relationship of Shakespeare's plays to their sources and claims that in his revisionary practices, Shakespeare borrowed selectively and artfully from his sources, but also reacted against them, often by developing and expanding upon contrary suggestions already present in those sources.[10] In this sense, sources themselves seize to be static blocks or raw materials for plot or character; on the contrary, they become dynamic fields of textuality, offering suggestions and opportunities for further adaptation. Lynch emphasises that Shakespeare uses these opportunities in a very skilful way. He writes:

> "Shakespeare seems extraordinarily adept at extracting and developing implications that remain underdeveloped in his source text, while at the same time layering into his plays additional and often oppositional themes and suggestions. In other words, Shakespeare seems consistently to write both with and against his sources, seizing upon and developing suggestions already present in his sources, while complicating his plays with developments that counter and refute his source texts."[11]

Lynch further explains that, for example, in "refashioning" the *True Chronicle History of King Leir* into *King Lear,* Shakespeare does not simply reject the explicit Christian setting and happy ending of Leir, but "engages and responds to the highly reformational and at times Calvinistic tendencies of the source play."[12] Shakespeare's plays, therefore, are not simply the products of early modern culture, but are distinct expressions of Shakespeare's revisionary skills, his talent of reimagining the texts of other writers as well as his extraordinary creativity to produce multilayered plays that provide opportunities for further revision, reimagining and adaptation.

By noting that Shakespeare is not the only source for 20th century adaptations, Shakespeare seizes to be an authoritative figure and is no more the untouchable 'legal owner' of plays such as *King Lear, Hamlet* and so forth. He cannot be called the 'original' anymore, as we know that he used sources as well. To call those sources 'originals' would be misleading too, as many times they were translations of other pieces of writings. Therefore, one has to ask the question as to whether it is important to find the

[10] Lynch, 1998, p.2
[11] Ibid., p.3
[12] Ibid., p.2

real original, the real basis, the owner of the original idea of for instance, *Hamlet,* in order to judge and compare Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Lavery's *Ophelia.*

The enthusiastic quest to make things clear in the field of copyright and authorship is usually initiated by the fact that adaptations of Shakespeare in fact question the integrity of the Shakespearean play (or the play preceding Shakespeare). They show that the structure of *Hamlet,* for example, can be effective and exciting when presented in another way as well; they offer another alternative, other opportunities and new challenges. On the other hand, of course, it is like a parasite which keeps the title and some characters from the old play and uses the old play's prestige to generate its own status.

To conclude, the adaptations of Shakespeare's play offer a great variety of interpretations and provide a wide range of opportunities, as they come up with totally new ideas. They re-examine categories such as marriage, power, language, or collective and individual identity. By shifting well-known Shakespearean characters into unusual or sometimes even bizarre contexts and by equipping them with deeply developed motivation and identity, these adaptations encourage us to think in a new way and examine old things from a completely different point of view.

1.2. Intertextuality – Text and Meaning

When talking about Shakespearean adaptations, it is impossible to avoid the term intertextuality. As Graham Allen puts it, intertextuality is one of the most commonly used and misused terms in contemporary critical vocabulary.[13] Many times plays such as Lavery's *Ophelia* or *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief,* by Paula Vogel, are described as examples of intertextuality or literary texts incorporating strong intertextual references; consequently, these plays are defined in terms of their intertextual relations. When talking about adaptation, it is important to clarify the term, intertextuality, and examine its position and implications in the study of adaptations.

In his monograph *Intertextuality,* Graham Allen provides an overview of the origins, development and employment of the term intertextuality. He explains that the emergence of intertextuality is typical for the move from structuralism to post-structuralism, which was often characterized as a period "in which assertions of

[13] Allen, 2000, p.2

objectivity, scientific rigour, methodological stability and other highly rationalistic-sounding terms are replaced by an emphasis on uncertainty, indeterminacy, incommunicability, subjectivity, desire, pleasure and play."[14] The text, then, ceases to carry any kind of independent meaning and the act of reading becomes a process of moving between texts, since by reading, the reader is driven into a network of textual relations. The text becomes an intertext.

The word 'intertextuality' was coined by Julia Kristeva to describe the necessary dependence of literary texts upon those that came before. Graham Allen describes Kristeva's theory of intertextuality and definitions of meaning, interpretation and the act of reading. Kristeva stresses that notions such as author, reader, analyst or text are not stable entities, but instead represent a process of continual production. Meaning is continuously produced, the reader is encouraged to step into the production of meaning. In her work, *The Bounded Text*, Kristeva explains that authors do not create their texts from their own original minds, but rather compile them from pre-existing texts, which means that a text is "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality in the space of a given text," in which "several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another."[15] Furthermore, she argues that texts are also made up of the so-called 'cultural or social text:' all the discourses, ways of speaking, institutionally sanctioned structures and systems which make up culture. In this sense, texts should be understood in their relationship with culture and ideological structures, since an individual text and the 'cultural text' are made up of the same textual material and cannot be separated from each other. Kristeva stresses that all texts contain within them the ideological structures and struggles expressed in society through discourse. In light of this theory, a text is dependent not only on previously written texts, but also on the ideological struggles and cultural features embodied in past texts. A text is not a singular, isolated object, but rather a compilation of cultural textuality and it cannot be separated from the larger cultural and social textuality out of which it was constructed. This means, for Kristeva, that the intertextual dimensions of a text cannot be studied as mere sources or influences. Graham Allen explains this notion through the following example:

> "If a novelist, for example, uses the words 'natural' or artificial or 'God' or 'justice' they cannot help but incorporate into their novel society's conflict over the meanings of these

[14] Allen, 2000, p.3
[15] Kristeva, 1980, p.36

> words. Such words and utterances retain an 'otherness' within the text itself. Intertextuality, here, concerns a text's emergence from the 'social text' but also its continued existence within society and history."[16]

This idea can be applied to the notion of Shakespearean adaptation as well, both on a literary and social level. When a dramatist incorporates characters such as Ophelia or Cordelia in his/her play, s/he also incorporates the Shakespearean Ophelia and Cordelia, society's understanding and judgment of these characters, along with the history of these characters in literature. On the other hand, incorporating the character of Ophelia, for example, also includes the notions of madness, femininity and obedience, "society's conflict over the meanings of these words," the way society has defined these terms.

In her essay, 'Word, Dialogue, Novel', Kristeva claims that communication between author and reader is always partnered by communication or intertextual relation between poetic words and their prior existence in past poetic texts. Authors communicate to their readers and at the same time, their words or texts communicate the existence of past texts within them. Kristeva distinguishes between the horizontal axis, the subject-addressee relationship, and the vertical axis, the relationship of the text and context and the way they coincide within the work's textual space. She concludes:

> "(…) any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double."[17]

French cultural theorist Michel Foucault writes that the book "is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network."[18] In this sense, meaning becomes dependent upon current conventions of language and culture, and interpretation is only possible within intertextual forms of understanding.

Allen explains that according to Roland Barthes, literary meaning can never be fully stabilized by the reader, since the literary work's intertextual nature always leads readers on to new textual relations.[19] Allen also points out the importance of Ferdinand de Saussure's redefinition of sign and linguistic structure, which he considers the origin of

[16] Allen, 2000, p.36
[17] Kristeva, 1980, p.66 quoted in Allen, 2000, p.39
[18] Quoted in Fernie, E. – R. Wray – M. Thornton Burnett. 2005, p.4
[19] Allen, 2000, p.3

the theory of intertextuality. Saussure stresses that in reading literature the reader becomes intensely aware that signs employed in any particular text have their reference not to objects in the world but to the literary system out of which the text is produced. Allen supports this theory with the following example:

> "If a modern author, for example, presents a characterization of Satan in their text they are far more likely to have in mind John Milton's representation of Satan in his epic poem Paradise Lost than any literal notion of the Christian Devil. Similarly, if we read a novel in which a young heroine is pursued by supernatural forces before being imprisoned by an evil uncle in a ruined castle, our thoughts will be less of what actually happens in the world than of the tradition of the Gothic novel, popular since the eighteenth century. As Barthes and others have argued, even apparently 'realist' texts generate their meaning out of their relation to literary and cultural systems, rather than out of any direct representation of the physical world."[20]

This consideration suggests that a reader is no more a singular, independent, interpretative entity, but an agent who moves in and out of the network of pre-existing literary and linguistic structures. Without (either conscious or unconscious) knowledge of previous texts, the reader is unable to understand the unstable meaning of the text. The idea quoted above generates many follow-up questions. Does interpretation depend on previous reading experience? What happens with a reader who is not familiar with Milton's Paradise Lost and lacks thorough literary education? Is it impossible to grasp meaning without previous literary experience?

Evidently, critics and theorists working from a feminist or postcolonial standpoint might not find Roland Barthes' idea of the death of the author so liberating and definitely argue for the involvement of cultural, social, and even subjective personal elements. If a feminist critic reads a text about a young heroine pursued by supernatural forces or imprisoned by an evil uncle in a ruined castle, his or her thoughts are definitely not primarily about the tradition of the Gothic novel.

The centrality of the text in the phenomenon of intertextuality is inevitable. Let us analyse the relationship between a Renaissance text and that of a 20th century author, e.g. Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead.* Intertextuality states that the text is an intertext, a kind of mediator, a link between other texts, one part of a network, something that leads the reader to other textual relations. In this sense, when

[20] Allen, 2000, pp.11-12

reading *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* the reader is led back to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the tradition of Shakespearean tragedy.

In the case of Renaissance texts, the 20th or 21st century author or reader inevitably goes back to a Renaissance text. Employing the term intertextuality suggests the interaction of the new, 20th or 21st century text with that of a Renaissance one. However, it must not be forgotten that in the period of the Renaissance there was no such thing as a fixed text. The Shakespearean texts we read today are in fact collaborative texts and are the products of revision, theatrical production, and the contribution of editors, actors and theatre companies.

In his monograph, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*, Jeffrey Masten emphasizes that it should not be forgotten that collaboration was the Renaissance English theatre's dominant mode of textual production and the production of texts was a social process, rather than the act of a singular and sovereign author.[21] This fact not only pushes the sovereignty of the author into the background, but also questions the reliability of the text. The Renaissance text stops being a reliable element of the (inter)textual network and proves that different texts of different periods carry different characteristic features and many times go hand in hand with other elements, such as performance, the printing industry and other human contributions.

Often, early modern manuscripts have either not survived or have survived in multiple versions, with several changes due to manuscript circulations, actors' contributions or the author himself changing certain parts for different performances. There are also often significant differences between the Quarto texts of Shakespeare's plays and the versions edited in the First Folio in 1623. Perhaps the most striking example of the emphasis of textual differences is the Oxford edition of Shakespeare's complete works. The editors decided to print the Quarto (1608) and the Folio (1623) versions of *King Lear* as two distinct plays.

Terms like 'text' and 'collaboration' are given a special definition when used before the emergence of authorship and attribution. Masten also notices the importance of this difference:

> "(…) collaborative texts produced before the emergence of authorship are of a kind different (informed by differing mechanisms of textual property and control, different

[21] Masten, 1997, p.14

> conceptions of imitation, originality, and the 'individual') from collaborations produced within the regime of the author."[22]

In the Renaissance, the construction of texts and meanings was polyvocal. The process of making a new play began with a manuscript, which was then revised, cut, rearranged, modified by other writers, theatre companies and copyists, elaborated and improvised by actors in performance, accompanied by music and costumes, body language — all combined to produce a completely different outcome, a play different from what the playwright had originally put on paper. To call these elements the context of textual creation is highly misleading, since such factors were active parts, constituents of play-texts. Textual and theatrical production of meaning in the Renaissance are inseparable, where textual production was one out of several elements of theatrical production. Therefore, it is more relevant to apply the theory of the horizontal and vertical axis of the text on texts and periods where textuality is more reliable and more central.

1.3. Source and Quotation

Intertextuality has been analysed from various standpoints and certain critics have repeatedly pointed out their shortcomings. Judging the significance and relevance of intertextuality frequently depends on whether critics put the emphasis on the author, the reader, textuality, theatrical production or the social or historical context.

In *Quoting Shakespeare: Form & Culture in Early Modern Drama,* Douglas Bruster points out that theories of intertextuality and criticism devoted to exploring intertextual relations have serious shortcomings. He states that current criticism seems less interested in knowing which books authors used in order to produce their own, and claims that it is more important to pay attention to what authors read and to how they used and replied to precursors and their texts. He argues that it is crucial to examine the position of texts, in texts, over time, and when examining the relationship of earlier and later texts related to a literary work he claims that instead of terms such as source, borrowing, appropriation or intertextuality, the term "quotation" should be used. He explains that it is in the nature of texts to overlap with each other. He calls this overlap "quotation," which he defines in the following way:

[22] Masten, 1997, p.15

> "By quotation I understand the textual incorporation of such discrete components as words, events, and identities, a process that links texts to specific elements in the world outside them. Quotation in this sense stands midway between imitation and citation, and refers to both the borrowed matter of texts and the activity of borrowing itself."[23]

Buster's understanding of quotation stands in contrast with the contemporary sense of "quotation," the incorporation of one text into another, using the words of another author with acknowledgment, due to the notion of respecting verbal property, copyright and authorship (which has its own rules of attribution, punctuation and protocol). Bruster's "quotation" means quotation in a broader sense. He highlights that "sources" no longer need to precede a literary text, they are instead part of a single cultural system. They have become the bricks of particular cultures, the elements that a given culture chooses to build into its own circulation. The choice of texts, events and identities dispersed into later texts can often tell us extraordinary things not just about the text that incorporates them but also about the author and culture. The fact that Renaissance playwrights went back to ancient texts and emphasised the importance of the classics reveals a lot about the character of the age, contemporary values and thinking, and also about the theatrical practices of the age. In the early modern period, playwriting was regarded as a kind of craft, where the playwright was encouraged to go back to and learn from classical authors and also contemporary playwrights and audiences. Ann Moss calls this practice "the genre of Renaissance compilation literature."[24] "Quotation," therefore, reveals more than the structural dependence of writers on earlier materials.

Concentrating merely on textual sources simplifies literature and the process of writing. However, it is equally important to expand the traditional definition of source to include ideas and phenomena outside books and texts. In this sense, the initially chronological examination of the relationship between texts is turned into a synchronic analysis of texts and phenomena, shifting the focus from the impersonal relationship of texts to the author–text-reader triangle and at the same time, including the cultural, historical and social aspects of literary creation. In the words of Jonathan Dollimore, what a text says or does, depends on the threefold process of "articulation, context and reception;"[25] that is, on what is said to whom, in which circumstances and with what

[23] Bruster, 2000, p.4
[24] quoted in Bruster, 2000, p.21
[25] Dollimore, quoted in E. Fernie – R. Wray – M. Thornton Burnett, 2005, p.4

results. The context of a literary work also contributes to the creation of meaning, since if a literary work is placed into a different context, a different text will emerge. Such recontextualization becomes especially important for critical schools and approaches such as feminist criticism or post-colonial criticism, groups (e.g. women, the lower classes, other races and homosexuals) who have not been given the opportunity to express themselves fully throughout history and who have now grasped the opportunity to highlight and celebrate plurality and diversity.

1.4. Adaptation and/or Intertextuality?

It is now time to examine and conclude how the phenomena of intertextuality and adaptation can include or exclude each other and whether it is possible to draw a parallel between them. Intertextuality is more impersonal, involving the relationship between or among texts rather than authors or readers. The emphasis is on the link between previous texts in the past and the texts of the present, whereas present texts are also ready to contribute to the creation of new texts in the future. This phenomenon presupposes the idea that the authors of texts are insufficient elements in the literary process; the text is given a superior position over authorial intention. It is not only past texts that influence new ones, but the identities, philosophies, ideas and also characters and plots involved in previous texts which gain special significance as well.

Unlike intertextuality, the term adaptation includes the human element, the contribution of the adaptor, the creator or constructor of a text, the person who takes a past text and shapes, uses and alters it in his/her own way. One's ambition, intention and skills definitely rule the process of adapting and have a relevant presence in the final product, the piece of adaptation. The verb, 'to adapt,' suggests the idea of using or changing something with a special purpose in mind, as if the adaptor had a concrete idea of how the world should look like and what elements or parts should be changed in order to reach that kind of world or in order to communicate his/her individual message.

The processes of intertextuality and adaptation, however, do not exclude each other. Intertextuality is a phenomenon that concentrates on the text and timeless influences, interventions, the effect of the reading experience as if it was trying to liberate literature and the reading process from the contemporary ruling cultural, social and political assumptions by noting the differences between different contexts. It is a more

general process, which can take place even unconsciously in the world of literary production. Adaptation, as if it was a more specific form of intertextuality, however, concentrates on the importance of the author, narrows the process of textual influences down to the more concrete and intentional process of textual creation. It incorporates both the possible instability of the previous text and the wide social and cultural context or political motivation of the adaptor.

1.5. Recycling Shakespeare

Going back to Shakespeare can be realised in two ways. Firstly, critical approaches and schools go back to Shakespeare and apply their theorisations upon his plays. They interpret, analyse, examine, compare and contrast in order to strengthen or weaken his place in the canon. The second approach is the literary approach, which means that an author goes back to Shakespeare and uses his characters, plots or words to create a new literary work that fits to the new circumstances and expectations of the age. This approach is not simply interpretation, but also means one step forward; after interpreting and revising the Renaissance play, the author provides a new alterative by writing his/her own adapted version of the Shakespearean play.

Adapting, interpreting, quoting, revising, interpreting, writing. But why Shakespeare? Why does a 21st century author go all the way back to Shakespeare and analyse, interpret and adapt his characters or plots?

In his essay, 'The Literature of Exhaustion,' John Barth writes about "the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities,"[26] claiming that literature has faced an "intellectual dead end."[27] His famous metaphor of the "Library of Babel" can be linked with the idea of intertextuality and provides a certain degree of explanation for the phenomena of recycling. Barth claims:

> "(…) the 'Library of Babel' houses every possible combination of alphabetical characters and spaces, and thus every possible book and statement, including your and my refutations and vindications, (…) the number of elements, and so of combinations, is finite

[26] Barth, 1990, p.71
[27] Ibid., p.77

> (though very large), and the number of instances of each element and combination of elements is infinite, like the library itself."[28]

According to this rationale, it is not just texts but also characters, plots, vindications, et al. that are repeated in literary history. He points out that it is difficult — and suggests that it is also probably unnecessary — to write "original works of literature," since intellectual and literary history have well exhausted the possibilities of novelty.

Barth illustrates the core of literature in a way that strips literature and the process of writing literary texts to the very basic idea that throughout all times the fundamental element that drives authors has been the need to explore one's identity, the principle workings of the world and to reveal the essence of central values and categories, as well as to reveal the ways of reaching those values and uncovering the meaning of those categories. The metaphor of the 'Library of Babel' suggests that there has always been a link between plots, characters and subjects matters, as they come from one "house" and are thereby rooted in the same ground. Similarly to the idea of intertextuality, which highlights the link between texts, the idea of a 'Library of Babel' offers a link between literary elements such as plot, character, themes, etc. and locks them into a limited framework. On the other hand, as Barth acknowledges, the combination of these literary elements is infinite. Authors are free to choose from the limited series of constituents; their creativity to make up new, original ideas or characters is somehow pushed to the background, though they are able to generate a creative, new combination of these elements, a combination that perhaps fits to the cultural, social and historical expectations of the rapidly changing ages and times. This points back to the idea discussed previously, that the same combination of elements (plot, characters, subject matters, settings, etc.) have a different outcome if put into a different context. This outcome definitely depends on the reader's interpretative skills as well as his/her cultural, social and personal background. The process of providing new contexts for the same material is similar to the process of recycling, where things are given new forms, purposes and updated functions while keeping intact the essence, the very basis, of their material and content.

Recycling Shakespeare, a very stable member of the literary canon and still a cultural authority, is inevitable for the critical approaches that set out to examine basic concepts in different contexts and decided to redefine certain conventions. Placing Shakespeare and his combination of characters, plots, subject matters, settings and ideas

[28] Barth, 1990, pp.83-84

into a different context is perhaps one of the most challenging literary enterprises. His eternal themes, human issues and fundamental subject matters follow the very basic questions and investigations of humanity, helping to explore one's place in the world, the essence and workings of human relationships, and providing help in discovering one's own identity.

CHAPTER 2

FRIGHTENING FEMINISM

"Was Eve inferior to Adam because she was created second, or was she superior to him because she was God's final effort?"

(Dusinberre, 1994, p. xiv)

Anytime the word 'feminism' is uttered, almost everybody within earshot is astonished and angry, or at least unlikely to join in a debate about it. The principle of feminism has acquired a negative connotation over the years, especially among men. For many of them — a lot of women, as well — 'feminism' evokes a picture of unsatisfied, angry women, who pretend to be superior to men and refuse to fulfil the responsibilities society expects of them, like doing the housework or having children. For them, feminism connotes competition, proving whether women or men are the best, the question of status, superiority and inferiority. However, the matter of feminism is a more complex one and long ago moved beyond its initial stages of fighting for women's basic rights and equality; for example, equal job opportunities and equal legal status in society.

A lot of people are usually frightened of or even angry with feminists, they deny the rightness of the dissatisfaction of women. Juliet Dusinberre emphasises that the way a society thinks about and treats women is often considered a means of measuring how civilised it is.[29] According to the latest studies by Slovak sociologists, which gave birth to a movement called "*Piata žena*" [The Fifth Woman], every fifth woman in Slovakia is either physically or emotionally abused. If Dusinberre is right, we have much to do and many things to change.

In her monograph, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women,* Juliet Dusinberre accepts that in the 1970s, feminism was inseparable from anger. It was about asking questions to provoke thought, about protesting against the "enclosure of common land."[30] This "common land" included education, politics, public life, art, culture, media, science, literature and many other fields, out of which women were continuously excluded. They

[29] Dusinberre, 1994, p.1
[30] Ibid., p.xxxiii

were fighting against male dominance and for equal jobs, educational opportunities, and the same rights and treatment for both women and men. However, Dusinberre argues, so much has been achieved by now that women can afford to celebrate difference. Today, the battle is no more about demanding equality in the sense of sameness, as man and woman, Adam and Eve, can never be the same. The aim of feminism is to blow up structures of thought and tradition created by the dominant culture of (white) men over many centuries, within which both men and women were expected to operate in acquiescence. These structures are to be replaced by new models based on tolerance, respect and variety, rather than superiority, inferiority and dominance.

2.1. Feminism – A Historical Overview

Feminism has become such a broad term that today it is almost impossible to declare oneself simply 'a feminist.' One can or has to be a materialist feminist, a liberal feminist, a Marxist feminist, a lesbian feminist, a deconstructionist feminist, it might even be possible to be a male feminist. There has been a wide range of feminist subgroups each combining the more general aims and ideas of feminism with a specific theory or area of interest.

Feminist criticism has grown to be such an enormous field of study that it has overlapped with other fields of theoretical discourse: structuralism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis are but three examples. Therefore, when dealing with literary criticism, it is definitely impossible to avoid overlap into what feminism is about or what implications it carries for literature. However, the definition of feminism and the idea(s) it represents are matters of continuous debate. There has been disagreement around the definition even among feminist critics; some of whom have gone so far as to question the necessity of defining feminism at all.

The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* defines feminism in the following way: feminism is "the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power and chances as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state."[31] *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics* gives the following definition:

[31] 1995, p.512

> "Feminism is a way of looking at the world, which women occupy from the perspective of women. It has its central focus on the concept of patriarchy, which can be described as a system of male authority, which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions."[32]

Warhol and Price Herndl claim:

> "Feminist critics agree that the oppression of women is a fact of life, that gender leaves its traces in literary texts and on literary history, and that feminist criticism plays a worthwhile part in the struggle to end oppression in the world outside of texts (...) feminists are always engaged in an explicitly political enterprise, always working to change existing power structures both inside and outside academia."[33]

Weedon's definition of feminism is the following:

> "Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become."[34]

The American Susan Faludi, a Third Wave feminist, provides the following explanation:

> "The meaning of the word "feminist" has not really changed since it first appeared in a book review in the Atbenaeum of April 27, 1895, describing a woman who "has in her capacity of fighting her way back to independence". It is the basic proposition that, as Nora put it in Ibsen's A Doll's House a century ago, "Before everything else I'm a human being." (...) Feminism asks the world to recognize at long last that women aren't decorative ornaments, worthy vessels, members of a "special-interest group." They are half (in fact more than a half) of the national population, and just as deserving of rights and opportunities, just as capable of participating in the world's events, as the other half. Feminism's agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to "choose" between public justice and private happiness. It asks that women be free to define themselves – instead of having their identity defined for them, time and again, by their culture and their men."[35]

[32] quoted in Osborne, 2001, p.8
[33] Warhol and Price Herndl, 1991, p.x, quoted in Green, Keith-LeBihan, Jill, 1995, pp.228-229
[34] Weedon, 1987, p.1 quoted in Green, Keith-LeBihan, Jill, 1995, p.229
[35] Faludi, 2006, p.15

Dympna Callaghan's definition of feminism is that it "is about creating the future differently by looking at history differently,"[36] which suggests that feminism is about re-evaluating the past in order to be able to shape the future. Her definition also includes the interconnection of the past and the future with the present, having a strong creative power and emphasising the importance of conscious and mindful steps and activities, where feminism has the power to provide tools for such steps and activities.

Different historical periods, different sexual orientations, different cultural identities and different political beliefs all suggest a different definition and a different focus for feminism and feminist criticism, and provide distinctive approaches and versions for discussion. Many feminist critics see this diversity, represented by several viewpoints within feminism, as one of its major strengths, proof of its tolerance, flexibility, opportunities and a high degree of literary communication, as well as the reason for its continued promulgation. On the other hand, this diversity may suggest that feminism is too wide, too loose to represent fixed ideas and theories, too colourful to be taken seriously. Yet almost all feminists agree that the political undertones and motivations of all feminist approaches and branches keep them intertwined and provide issues that are universal and of primary importance to all schools of feminism.

Using varied definitions offered by several feminists, it is possible to identify certain issues that are of central concern to feminism and feminist literary criticism, and which stand in the spotlight of constant debates, conferences and workshops. Definitions and judgements depend not only on political intention — for example, Marxist feminism defines the goals of feminism differently than lesbian feminism — but also on historical period. A feminist in the First Wave period provided different definitions and ideas on femininity or female identity than a representative of the Second or Third Wave. Presumably, different historical periods provide different challenges and each period highlights its own central issues. It is impossible to claim that one of the main goals of feminism is equality between men and women without keeping in mind that the notion of equality between the sexes meant something different for a woman at the end of the 19th century than it means for a woman today, who gained the right to vote long ago and whose understanding of equal opportunities goes far beyond free access to education.

[36] Callaghan, 2000, p.xv

2.1.1. The Suffrage Movement

The roots of feminism lie in the late 18th and early 19th century and are linked with the revolutionary ideas, struggles and activities of the 'women's movement.' Although the term, 'women's movement,' suggests integrity and understanding within the movement and seemingly presupposes the stability and uniformity of the term 'women,' even the very early appearance of signs of feminism reveals that this superficial unity encompasses a colourful diversity. Of course, there is no doubt that the strongest unity and understanding was shown during the earliest periods; the further one proceeds in time in the history of feminism, the more diversity one discerns. However, the multiplicity of ideas, philosophies, claims and standpoints is one of the basic, characteristic features of the initial stages of both the 'women's movement' and feminism.

The first period of feminism is usually called the First Wave, a term which was applied to the period retroactively, when the phrase 'Second Wave' began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement and a new era in the history of feminism. To avoid any confusion in terminology, it is important to clarify that the term, feminism, is a coinage of the late 19th century; 'women's movement' activists in the late 18th and early 19th century could hardly dare to use this phrase to label themselves. Activists and attempts to advance women's issues before the existence of the feminist movement — during the age of enlightenment, for example — are frequently referred to as representatives of 'protofeminism,' or 'protofeminists' themselves. The 'women's movement,' identified as First Wave feminism in the late 19th and first half of the 20th century, focused primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage, which is why First Wave feminism is more commonly referred to as the suffrage movement or the suffragist period.

The fight for women's suffrage embodies one of the most fundamental struggles of women, because denying representation in legislative bodies clearly epitomizes the message of second-class citizenship. One of the most crucial dilemmas of the early period was whether men should be involved in the movement. Both the inferiority complex and anger of women stemming from the exclusion from political, social and cultural life signified and determined the initial attitudes of women activists. Men were frequently seen as a group of suppressing enemies — 'others' — who needed to be convinced, persuaded and changed in order to obtain political representation for women and, eventually, gain equal political, social and cultural status. Furthermore, this dilemma also

raised the question as to whether men could understand women's positions and fight for women's rights with equal enthusiasm and devotion. Apart from the radicals, feminists and especially middle- and upper-class women, realised and admitted that the friendship and support of men in influential political positions and important connections could offer a boost to the advancement of women's rights.

One of the founding members of the London branch of National Societies for Women's Suffrage was the philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who in 1865 was elected to Parliament and wrote many articles on women's rights. Under his leadership, the London branch emphasised the importance of "feminine decorum"[37] and claimed that enfranchisement was the key to freedom for women. However, the Manchester branch, led by Lydia Becker, believed differently. In their *Women's Suffrage Journal*, they pointed to the importance of legal and political reform, citing cases of brutality and drawing explicit parallels between black slaves and women. Many women saw a link between the abolitionist movement and the women's movement, which many times highlighted similarities between women and the slaves they were trying to emancipate. To achieve their own emancipation, the two stated goals of the women's movement were essential: equality of education and enfranchisement. These two fundamental goals determined the nature of the activities of the women's movement, but also betrayed the fact that different groups of women were using different tools to achieve them. Even the very beginning of the women's movement, like the origins of feminism, immediately revealed a strong presence of diversity from within, both the diversity of women and of the problems they faced.

In her book on the history of feminism, called *Feminism*, Susan Osborne details how two strands had emerged in the campaign for women's suffrage in Britain, the moderate and the more militant strand. The moderate strand was led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett, a supporter of John Stuart Mill. This branch included mostly middle-class women, who, unlike the militants, found it impossible to perform violent and provocative acts, such as smashing windows or going on hunger strikes. The militant strand appeared in the 1880s and 90s, and was much more engaged with highlighting the problems faced by working class women and women's labour, while suffrage was pushed into the background. They were represented by organisations such as the Women's Trade Union League and the Women's Cooperative Guild, and later by the Women's Social and Political Union set up by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903. Osborne points out that the move

[37] Osborne, 2001, p.20

towards militancy within the suffrage movement really began in 1905, with the arrest of Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst after they interrupted a Liberal election meeting, demanding to know the party's stance on giving the vote to women. In 1908, the militants chained themselves to the Ladies Gallery in Parliament. This was the point when the moderates disassociated themselves from the militants. Middle-class women found these steps too confrontational and insulting, poorly meshing with middle-class values.

British women over thirty were enfranchised in 1917 and full voting rights for women in Britain were finally secured in 1928. The right to vote was given to women in acknowledgement of their contribution to the war effort. There was hope that due to women's extensive involvement in the First World War (being nurses, taking over work in factories, etc.) there would be a little advancement in their employment opportunities after the war. However, there was still much to be done in the battle for equal rights. Those women who had found wartime jobs in areas of work previously confined to men found themselves without work once the war was over. Apart from equal voting rights, other crucial points appeared on the palette of feminist goals; these included equal moral standard with men, the promotion of women candidates as MPs, equal pay for equal work, equal employment opportunities, widows' pensions, equal education opportunities, as well as birth control and making the discussion on women's sexuality more open. The efforts of feminists in the 1920s aimed at making men and women uniform in the political and social fields by providing them with equal rights and opportunities — a most challenging goal to achieve.

In 1920, Oxford University finally admitted women for degrees and in 1923, British women were allowed to sue for divorce on the grounds of adultery. During the Second World War, women stepped into men's jobs again, but just as in the previous war, pay and conditions did not match what had been on offer to men. Again when the war was over, women had to give up these jobs to make space for returning soldiers. In the late 1940s and 1950s, emphasis was firmly placed on the joys of marriage and motherhood: the imagery of a perfect, ideal family embraced a stay-at-home wife and mother. This image and social expectation did not seem to meet women's needs, at least not all women's needs.

2.1.2. The Second Wave

> *"Often called the 'second wave,' the first wave being the suffragists, women's liberation grew into a vibrant, sprawling movement that eventually seemed to encompass as many factions as there were women in it. Just as the militant suffragists had found themselves in the spotlight, the second wave of feminists attracted a good deal of media attention not to mention derision in some quarters."*[38]

The late 1950s and 1960s mark the birth of another wave of women's liberation, the Second Wave. It was a time when the 'woman question' managed to become the centre of attention and women's pages started to appear in British newspapers such as *The Times* and *The Guardian*. The main issues were the problems facing women at work, equality between the sexes, and childcare. Different discussion groups started to appear which aimed to help women understand the nature of their position and different aspects of 'oppression.' These discussion groups were at the core of the movement and the topics they raised represent a milestone in the history of feminism.

The two writings that most intensified these discussions were Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which appeared in translation in 1954, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. *The Second Sex* explained that being a woman is in fact a social construct of the patriarchal world: women are not born into their positions, they are defined as 'other' than man and have become the 'second sex.' In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan revealed that under the surface of a happy and content housewife there is misery and frustration, and she pointed out the discontent of educated, middle-class American women. Friedan helped establish the National Organisation of Women (NOW) in America in 1966, whose main aims included campaigning in the media and carrying out political lobbying, along with filing complaints against newspapers such as the *New York Times* for its sex-segregated job advertisements.

In 1966, Juliet Mitchell published an essay in Britain, called "Women: The Longest Revolution," in which she shifted the feminist debate away from emancipation and towards 'liberation' from the many constraints that oppressed women. The militant vocabulary is very typical for the First and Second Waves of feminism. The frequent usage of expressions such as 'fight against oppression,' 'liberation,' 'to win seats in

[38] Osborne, 2001, pp.25-26

Parliament,' and 'struggle for equality' connote aggression, anger and serious attacks on current political and social circumstances.

While the suffrage movement was more or less united around the cause of suffrage, the women's liberation movement was extraordinarily diverse. Numerous subgroups and attitudes appeared within the movement: black women protested against racial oppression, while lesbian feminists emphasised discrimination based on sexual orientation and raised topics connected with homosexuality and body image. However, there were some central topics on which most feminists agreed, regardless of which feminist fraction they represented. These were the right to abortions and birth control, and obtaining equal pay for equal work.

Abortion has been a controversial issue among feminists and non-feminists alike. From the 1960s onward, many women have campaigned for the legalisation of abortion: firstly, to end dangerous, illegal — often tragic — back street abortions; and secondly, to give women the right to choose what happens with their own bodies. In 1968, legislation was passed in Britain which enabled women to obtain an abortion, providing that two doctors agreed that pregnancy would endanger the mental or physical health of the mother. An important milestone in the sexual revolution and sexual freedom of women was achieved by the advent of birth control pills, which meant that it was no longer men (ostensibly husbands), who unilaterally decided when and how many children women were going to have. This step was celebrated as an important one towards the liberation of women from sexual oppression. Concurrently, the consequences of abortion were less frequently discussed, such as the psychological and spiritual schizophrenia it caused, or the gap it created between sexual liberation and the desired harmonic state of motherhood, together with the Judeo-Christian commandment, 'Do not kill.'

Beauty competitions were at the centre of feminist vitriol, as they were considered to be extremely symbolic of the degradation and humiliation of women. Both in the USA and Britain, beauty competitions were attacked and disrupted by feminist demonstrators. In 1970, the Miss World beauty competition in London was interrupted by a theatrical demonstration of several women protestors, who ran onto the stage mooing like cows and wearing headlines such as Miss-conception, Miss-treated, Miss-placed and Miss-judged. Demonstrations like this were aimed at catching the attention of the public, pointing out that the images of women in society are degrading, and that women are many times treated like objects defined solely in terms of their body shape, et al.

Homosexuality was a subject that second-wave feminism could not avoid talking about and integrating into its agenda. Lesbian feminists took on a louder voice and started to discuss issues of sexuality in the fight against "lesbian oppression."[39]

2.1.3. The Third Wave

In 1991, Anita Hill accused Clarence Thomas, an Afro-American man nominated for a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court, of sexual harassment that had allegedly occurred ten years earlier, while Hill was working as his assistant at the U.S. Department of Education. Thomas denied the accusations and after an extensive debate, the Senate voted 52-48 in favour of confirming Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice. The case attracted much general media attention as well as the attention of feminists. In response to the Senate's decision, Rebecca Walker published an article in a 1992 issue of *Ms*. entitled "Becoming the Third Wave." She wrote: "I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the third wave."[40] The Hill-Thomas case highlighted the ongoing occurrence of sexual harassment in workplaces and made it clear that sexual harassment and other issues brandished by Second Wave feminism had hardly been resolved.

The Third Wave of feminism is actually rooted in the 1980s, when there was much debate over a post-feminist world in which women had achieved equal rights and therefore no longer needed a movement to campaign for change. Feminists were being caricatured by the media as it communicated the message that women's fight for equality had been won.

A new generation of feminists, including writers Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe and Susan Faludi, emphasised that it is crucial to put feminist issues back on the agenda and create a new understanding of femininity, as well as including new issues of debate. An important milestone in the birth of the Third Wave was a book by Susan Faludi, a Pulitzer Prize winning writer, entitled *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, first published in 1991 in New York. The book won the National Book Critics Circle Award for non-fiction that year, and has been an object of debate ever since. Faludi believes in the existence of a media driven "backlash" against the feminist advances of the 1970s. She cites several examples of how the media tries to persuade women to feel

[39] Osborne, 2001, p.29
[40] Walker quoted in Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitory_of_Feminism, in 29th October 2009

guilty for wanting to succeed in a career, and claimed that feminism and the women's liberation movement were depicted as the source of many of the problems alleged to be plaguing women in society. "Backlash" excerpted articles from influential newspapers and journals, such as *Newsweek*, *The National Review*, *Time* magazine, and the *New York Times*, which were writing about how single women suffered from "man shortage"[41] and childless women were depressed and confused. Faludi describes how this backlash had created an impression that though women are now free and equal, they have never been more miserable. The idea of despair is exposed in women everywhere, backlash is everywhere: in the news, on TV, at the movies, in Hollywood films, in advertisements and doctor's offices, academic journals and in pop culture. Professional women and women with careers received the brunt of such attacks, supposedly suffering from 'burnout.' Faludi claims health advice manuals inform the public that "high-powered career women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of "stress induced disorders, hair loss, bad nerves, alcoholism, and even heart attacks."[42]

For Faludi, the repeatedly stressed 'equality' between the sexes does not exist. She references several opinion polls, statistics and other data in an effort to prove that women have not only failed to achieve equality, but also suffered from a decline in the achievements of feminism, since the situation in the 1990s was statistically worse than that of 10 or 15 years prior. She highlights that women then represented two-thirds of all poor adults; 75% of full-time working women were earning less than $20,000 a year, (nearly half the male average); the average woman's salary still lagged behind the average man's; an average female college graduate was earning less than an average man with no more than a high school degree; and, an average female high school graduate was earning less than a male high school dropout. Furthermore, she explains, nearly 80% of working women were still stuck in traditional 'female' jobs (secretaries, administrative support workers and salesclerks), less than 8% of all U.S. federal and state judges, less than 6% of all law partners, and less than one-half of 1% of top corporate managers.[43] Faludi writes about issues such as childbearing, unfair conditions for maternity leave, lack of childcare facilities, and sexual violence against women. She explains that reported rapes more than doubled from the early 1970s onward, nearly twice the rate of all other violent crimes and four times the overall crime rate in the United Sates. At least one-third of women were

[41] Faludi, 2006, p.1
[42] Ibid., pp. 1-2
[43] Ibid., p.5

killed by their husbands or boyfriends, and the majority of that group were murdered just after filing for divorce and leaving the home.[44] Faludi explains that the backlash has convinced the public that women's 'liberation' should be stopped, by using women's private anxieties such as questions of marriage and children to break their political will. Faludi emphasises that the phenomenon of backlash is not coordinated by a single body. She writes:

> "The backlash is not a conspiracy, with a council dispatching agents from some central control room, nor are the people who serve its ends often aware of their role; some even consider themselves feminists. (...) A backlash against women's rights succeeds to the degree that it appears not to be political, that it appears not to be a struggle at all. It is most powerful when it goes private, when it lodges inside a woman's mind and turns her vision inward, until she imagines the pressure is all in her head, until she begins to enforce the backlash, too – on herself."[45]

The argument is that backlash works with a "divide-and-conquer strategy: single versus married women, working women versus homemakers, middle- versus working-class. It manipulates a system of rewards and punishments, elevating women who follow its rules, isolating those who don't."[46]

A middle- versus working-class debate is included in the agenda of Third Wave feminism. One of the main, characteristic features of Third Wave feminism is that it attempts to move away from the domination of feminism by white middle-class women to a more inclusive movement, concentrating on and addressing racial minorities, sexual orientation and physical disablement. Their intention is to give prominent space to race-related subjectivities and investigate the intersection(s) between race and gender. They claim that Second Wave feminism many times over-emphasised the experiences of upper- and middle-class white women, though women are of many colours, ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds.

In 1995, the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, highlighted the need for recognition of women's issues. The Third Wave Foundation was set up in 1996 to promote such issues as social security reform, especially important for women in and out of the work force, voter registration and women's health. The Foundation offered scholarships and stipends to help young women campaign against

[44] Faludi, 2006, p.9
[45] Ibid., pp.13-14
[46] Ibid., p.14

inequalities and fight against oppression and discrimination based on race, creed, sexual orientation or poverty.

The Third Wave aims to support and encourage the political representation of women, raising the number of women in 'top jobs' (senior management or executive positions), creating shelters for the victims of domestic violence, fighting for better conditions for maternity leave and better and more widespread childcare services, and making women free to choose if and when they give birth.

2.1.4. Feminism Today: The Third Wave or Post-Feminism?

The representatives of the Third Wave stand in sharp contrast to the representatives of post-feminism, who declare that feminism has contradicted itself, that women *have* gained equal rights and opportunities. Post-feminism is interpreted in two ways: firstly, it is seen as the involvement of feminism with other 'post' approaches, such as post-structuralism, postmodernism or post-colonialism. Secondly, post-feminism is interpreted as an age in which we have moved beyond feminism to some other, post-feminist, stage. Naomi Wolf emphasises that women have colluded in their own oppression because they fail to realise how much power they have won. What does feminism mean and what can it offer in the 21st century?

A lot of women agree with the basic goals of feminism, though they would not label themselves as feminists. The term 'feminist' has gained a negative connotation and radical undertone. Many women disassociate themselves with the 'militant' branch of feminism and refuse to 'fight' against men and to emphasise the victimization and oppression of women. This negative reaction to feminism is partly due to a confusion of definitions: the definition of feminism and the diverse formulation of its goals. It is still common to combine feminism with anger and militancy, though feminism is not merely about victims and oppressors. Then, the lack of sympathy is also connected with the fact that in several areas, feminism has become paranoiac, looking for discrimination and oppression where they do not exist. Furthermore, certain issues raised by feminism — abortion, exclusion of men from some areas of debate, (for example, Showalter's gynocritics in literary criticism), the idea of 'female experience,' and so on — are met with suspicion by a great deal of women.

Men and women can never be the same, but they can be equal on political, social and cultural levels. Women throughout the world have won the right to vote, equal access to education and equal employment opportunities. However, there is still much to do in order to provide women with an unrestricted freedom of choice.

One failure of both the First and Second Waves of feminism was that in achieving equal job opportunities and careers, women ended up working full-time *and* doing the housework and childcare as well. This indicates that on a social level, further activities need to be carried out in order to ensure true equality for women; for instance, it is important to pass legislation on providing more efficient and available childcare facilities. However, changing laws is not enough; it is also important to change the mindsets and the ways people — both men and women — think about responsibility for household chores, family roles and social position.

Feminism has undeniably won much for women. Throughout the history of feminism, the diversity of viewpoints and goals has proven that it is pointless to imagine women as a uniform group with the same interests and needs. Today the emphasis should instead be placed on the celebration of diversity and individuality.

2.2. Feminism and Literature

"We who write are survivors, "only's." One-out-of-twelve."[47]

Literature and language belong to the basic concerns of feminism. As men long possessed the advantage of education, they also 'owned' the right to create and promulgate their ideas with literature.

In their monograph *Sweet Freedom*, Anne Coote and Beatrix Campbell notice that both literature and art were defined by men, men were the centres of "cultural universe."[48] Moreover, they are convinced that truth and beauty were judged and evaluated only from a male perspective in the culture. A similar overview is provided in Tillie Olsen's work, *Silences*. Olsen discusses the fact that only one out of twelve writers in the 20th century is a woman. She reminds us that one should not speak about women writers without

[47] Olsen, 1980, p. 39
[48] Coote-Campbell, 1987, p. 226

speaking also of "the invisible," "the born to the wrong circumstances."[49] She provides a brief overview of the past in relation to women, which was dominated by exclusion, powerlessness, silence, seeming, isolation, different treatment for boys and girls, restriction, fear and male strength. She points out that literature has long been predominantly male, depicted women superficially, just on surface, and presented "masculine experience" as the human one, expecting women to identify with it. She notices a certain constriction to the stereotype of a *"biological woman"* (a breeder, sex-partner), which leaves out everyday female realities like motherhood, the maintenance of life, housework, working at paid jobs as well, and so on. Olsen emphasises that all of these roles and realities determine the experience of most women, and also limit them to publishing their work only in their forties, fifties or sixties, as finishing a book takes them years and years.

Ellen Moers is also concerned with women's places in literature. In her essay, "Literary Women", she points out the advantage of male writers, who have always been able to group themselves into movements, fight with their contemporaries, to exchange their thoughts and ideas and study at universities. Women, on the other hand, were isolated in their homes, excluded from universities and were able to express their thoughts and feelings only within their friendships.

Judith Fetterley argues that to create a new understanding of literature is crucial, in order to make the system of literature open to change. She writes that it is important to discuss and question the ideas and mythologies about women and men which exist in society and are confirmed in literature. She suggests that literature reflects culture; therefore, discussions on both cultural and literary issues are inevitable. Literature includes a closed system of power, from which women are excluded, and such a closed system cannot be opened up from within but only from without. It must be entered into from a point of view and powerful consciousness that can question its values and assumptions. Feminist criticism, she concludes, provides that point of view and embodies that consciousness.[50]

The task of feminist criticism and a feminist approach to literature is not easy to define, since different waves of feminism have defined it differently. The First and Second Waves definitely concentrated on the absence of women writers from literature and tried to give reasons for this absence, as well as fighting against the exclusion of

[49] Olsen, 1980, p. 39
[50] Fetterly, 1993, p.497

women's writing from publication and mainstream academic study. Many feminist critics, including Coote, Campbell, Olsen, Moers and many others, argue that the political, social and cultural situation of women determined the number of female writers and writings, as well as the way women were represented in canonical texts. Feminist critical writings and the goals of feminist literary criticism are strongly politically motivated, given that they analyse the social position of women writers and the oppressive nature of a male-dominated literary universe.

One form of feminist literary criticism goes back to the influential texts of the canon and looks for the 'images of women,' examining how women have been represented in several ages and circumstances, often focusing on the absence of a female voice. Such an approach simply remains on the level of subject matter or theme, because the only structure it can analyse is the position of women in a given piece of literature and the relationships between female characters. On the other hand, the analysis of canonical text from a feminist perspective can be prosperous ground for the creation of new texts: feminist or simply female texts with strong, determined, self-aware female protagonists.

Feminist criticism demands the inclusion of more female writers in the canon, but is the inclusion of new authors based on sex a legitimate literary criterion? The common argument for changing the canon is that women writers should be equally represented, since women can depict experiences such as childbirth, rape, and motherhood more thoroughly than men. This argument leads to an important question: can only women write convincingly about women's lives and experiences? Certainly, there are some issues that certain writers and readers are more sensitive about, but the sex of the writer is only one contributing factor in the final outcome of a literary creation, just like the age or cultural background of the writer. Inevitably, authors might be more sensitive about particular topics resulting from their personal experiences, but an author's input is not enough or at least not the only factor involved in the literary process.

The debate on the sex of the author and its implications for a literary work goes hand in hand with the analysis of the process of reading and the 'reader-debate,' which analyses whether reading as a woman is different from reading as a man.

2.3. The Reader — Reading as a Woman and Reading as a Man

The scope of study of feminist literary criticism involves a number of issues of debate and several areas of academic pursuit. One could approach a summary of this broad scope by narrowing it down to three basic areas.

Firstly, feminists examine how women have been depicted in the history of literature, the amount of space and type of roles female characters have been given, and the discourses they were allowed to enter onto the pages of literature. They analyse the 'images of women' throughout literature and the way those images have influenced current ones, both social and literary. Secondly, feminists focus on authorship, the author's special role in the creation of meaning, and the author's gender. Some even argue that the sex of the author, the biological factor, leads to such a crucial difference in the creation of literary texts that it has an impact on the choice of language and themes. Thirdly, feminists analyse the reading process, the sex of the reader and the impact it has on the creation of meaning and interpretation. Most feminists agree that there is a difference between reading as a man and reading as a woman; furthermore, they differentiate between the experience of a woman reading male writing and a woman reading female writing.

Feminist criticism's interest in theories of reading raises both general and specific questions. Does a woman read differently than a man? Does the text manipulate the reader or does the reader manipulate the text in order to produce meaning? What is the relationship between the reader and the text during the process of reading? Feminist critics investigate this relationship, but for feminists, gender – both the gender built into the text and the gender of the reader – is crucial.

In her essay, "Toward a Feminist Poetics: Women Writing and Writing About Women", Elaine Showalter introduces a new approach to the analysis of women's literature, one which heavily relies on the processes of reading and writing, and the examination of the reader-writer relationship. This approach, called 'gynocritics' (sometimes referred to as 'gynocriticism'), is described as a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, one that develops new models based on the study of 'female experience.' Gynocritics is related to feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology and sociology, the constructs of femininity, the occupations, interactions, different roles and consciousness of women. Female identity is defined in terms of this framework and is considered to be a project rather than a given matter or issue, and is

subjected to continuous reconstruction. The emphasis here is on the word 'construct,' for gynocritics seeks to determine the constituent elements of the 'female world,' both on a social/political and a literary level. It claims that female identity or female experience has many times been defined in terms of sexuality, reproduction and ideas about the body. In place of such definitions, gynocritics offers new theoretical formulations about 'female experience,' introduces parts of identity that had been neglected or left out from the 'construct,' e.g. underlining the importance of gender and encouraging the creation of non-genderized identities.

Gynocritics essentially focuses on two basic processes: the first is coding female experience into the text (the writing process) and the other is decoding it from the text (the reading process). This approach presupposes the idea that a text has become a transparent medium through which 'experience' can be seized and communicated. It also suggests that female experience is a definable, firm ground that is distinguishable from the more general 'human' experience, characterised by many feminist critics as controlled and dominated by (white) males.

Literary identity and everything that is said between two characters is filtered by the reader, who decodes and interprets it. Supposing that the reader is a woman – and she must be, as we are still operating within the framework of gynocritics – she is receiving the experience and identities of literary characters in comparison to her own experiences and identity, which is also a construct, and of course filters through her reading experience, but also through certain critical techniques, some aesthetic or even political criteria. A literary character's identity includes some extra elements, other than the identity of a woman, a human being. It also includes the reader's perception and (female) filter, the experience of social and familial structures, the angle of vision, the "glasses" through which those characters are examined.

The reading experience is twofold: it consists of the (female) reader's individual sensitivity to women's roles in literary works, the observations and perceptions of the individual reader, and also the history of women reading and interpreting female characters in different literary works. Jonathan Culler argues that women's experience leads women to value literary works differently than their male counterparts; female experience results in different responses and evaluation of literary works.[51] The identity of a literary character that the reader receives with the help of the decoding process depends on the type or way of reading. Therefore, it is evident that a woman reading is

[51] Culler, 2003, p.45

not necessarily a feminist reading; a woman reading is not inevitably a gynocriticist reading. Feminist and gynocriticist readings are not produced by recording what happens in the mental life of a female reader as she encounters the words of a particular literary work (though it is an important element of female experience); rather, it is a theoretical standpoint, a hypothesis that has an impact on the apprehension of a given text. Virginia Woolf describes this different standpoint as "difference of view, the difference of standard," which is not given, but produced by differing.[52] Annette Kolodny emphasises that reading is a learned activity which, like many other learned interpretative strategies in our society, is inevitably sex-coded and gender-inflected.[53] That is why gynocritics encourages the promotion of a 'different female reader' with a 'female experience' who questions the literary and political assumptions on which her reading is based. It is a kind of radical force that subverts the concepts and structures of traditional discourse and celebrates new, feminist discourse. Underlining the importance of the reading process and claiming that the interpretation of the text depends on the reader's 'experience' and interpretative skills, strategies and inheritance echo the assumptions of reader-response criticism and make the identity of the literary character ultimately dependent upon the reading and interpretation of the reader.

By establishing the 'common female experience' and the woman reader, gynocritics excludes or neglects the notion that experience (male or female) is greatly subjective — one woman's 'female experience' may be different from another's — and by doing so, also emphasises the assumption that the reading process must be sexual/cultural code-oriented, it has to be conscious of the sexual and conventional cultural codes in the piece of reading. My observation is therefore that gynocritics concentrates too much on the public, rather than the private; operating on a political level, it becomes a political act, forcing the text into a predetermined goal.

Is it really so easy to get rid of or delimit oneself from the reading experience of the 'traditional' discourse and the long history of representation? If this were so, it would mean that all readers and interpreters would exist in a literary vacuum. The representation of Ophelia throughout the centuries, for example, and the interpretation of her character, are an integral part of literary consciousness that cannot be ignored. Elaine Showalter explains that the tendency of representing women as madness, incoherence, fluidity, silence, negativity, absence or lack in the past, is typical for patriarchal language, and

[52] Quoted in: Culler, 2003, p.50
[53] In: Culler, 2003, p.51

representing Ophelia through madness is in fact a cultural stereotype.[54] Such stereotypes become inevitable parts of the reading experience. Moreover, as a character in a Shakespearean adaptation, Ophelia's identity also includes the 'prejudices' that the reader has in his/her mind, as s/he has probably encountered Shakespeare's Ophelia first in 'Hamlet,' long before s/he met Lavery's Ophelia, and s/he is already well acquainted with her 'story' and the story of her interpretation based on contemporary cultural codes. This pre-knowledge is difficult to disregard when dealing with an adaptation, because there is a clash between the female images that have been portrayed in the past, throughout the centuries, and the images of women depicted in feminist adaptations. The adaptation itself relies on this certain 'pre-knowledge,' e.g. Ophelia's anger and desire for revenge is much better understood (and probably celebrated) in light of Hamlet's behaviour in the original Shakespearean text. This prejudice, also often the disappointment in these prejudices or expectations, becomes an integral part of the character's identity and of the reader's perception of the character in a literary text.

2.3.1. Feminist Reading

Feminist criticism claims that the process of reading is the process of communication between the writer and the reader, wherein both the author and the reader are autonomous figures. Catherine Belsey defines this process in the following way:

> "The reader is invited to perceive and judge the 'truth' of the text, the coherent, non-contradictory interpretation of the world as it is perceived by an author whose autonomy is the source and evidence of the truth of the interpretation. This model of inter-subjective communication, of shared understanding of a text which re-presents the world, is the guarantee not only of the truth of the text but of the reader's existence as an autonomous and knowing subject in a world of knowing subjects."[55]

Reading involves the author, the text and the receiver of the text, the reader. Reading is not only communication and receiving, it is also a form of interpretation. It is important to distinguish between what reading and feminist reading is. Furthermore, it is

[54] Showalter, 1992, p.282
[55] Belsey, 1993, p.599

crucial to highlight that feminist reading does not equal female reading. Warhol and Herndl claim:

> "A feminist reading, (...) would be an interpretation of a text assuming gender's centrality to what the text means. In "a feminist reading" of a text, gender can come into play as something represented in the text (...); as something shaping the experience, and therefore the writing, of the author; or as a significant influence in the life – and, therefore, the interior experience – of the particular reader who is trying to understand what the text says."[56]

Feminists agree that reading does involve the reader; it refers directly to the interior experience of readers, who are active participants in a communicative, receptive process. The process of reading includes not only the personal experience, personality and cultural background of the reader, but also his/her previous reading experience. Warhol and Herndl examine the process of reading from the point of view of reader-response criticism and provide another definition of feminist reading based on the assumptions of this critical approach:

> "Feminist reading, then, would be the reception and processing of texts by a reader who is conceived of not only as possibly female, but also as conscious of the tradition of women's oppression in patriarchal culture. The feminist reader – whether in fact male or female – is committed to breaking the pattern of that oppression by calling attention to the ways some texts can perpetuate it."[57]

In the introduction of her monograph, *The Resisting Reader*, Judith Fetterley claims that literature is political.[58] She talks about the pretence that literature speaks universal truths through forms. She explains that in American literature, and literature in general, only one reality is encouraged, legitimized and transmitted; male experience is treated as universal, therefore reading the American canon requires one to "identify as male," to sympathize with masculine heroes. This has led, Fetterley says, to a confusion of consciousness, an "immasculation" of the woman reader, who must "identify against

[56] Warhol – Herndl, 1993, p. 489
[57] Ibid., p.489
[58] Fetterley, 1978, p.92

herself as she reads, thus becoming a divided self."[59] She argues that both women's experience of reading and the content of what is read are characterized by powerlessness.

> "Power is the issue in the politics of literature," she writes, and "to be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness — not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self".[60]

In her essay, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", Patrocinio P. Schweickart admits that there are two basic factors that a feminist perspective includes: gender and politics. There is a focus on 'political struggle,' investigating the difference between men and women, "the way the experience and perspective of women have been systematically and fallaciously assimilated into the generic masculine, and of the need to correct this error."[61] She claims that literature is "an important arena of political struggle," it is a crucial tool of the project of interpreting the world. She emphasises that feminist criticism is "a mode of praxis," the point is not just simply interpreting literature in several ways and investigating the process of reading, but the point is to change the world, since literature acts on the world by acting on its readers. Schweickart's theory suggests that literature is a kind of communicator, one which has an influential impact on its readers and is even able to change the perspective, the 'worlds' of the readers.

Schweickart stresses that for feminists, the question of how feminists read is inextricably linked with the question of what they read (regardless of whether the literary text was written from a male or female perspective). She agrees with Annette Kolodny that the reading activity is a learned activity and is strongly influenced by the "androcentric canon and androcentric modes of reading," as well as androcentric interpretive strategies.

Annette Kolodny writes:

> "Insofar as we are taught to read, what we engage are not texts, but paradigms. (...) Insofar as literature is itself a social institution, so, too, reading is a highly socialized – or learned – activity. (...) what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent on what we have

[59] Fetterley, 1978, p.89
[60] Ibid., p.93
[61] Schweickart, 1989, p.24

> already read [works from which we have developed our expectations and learned our interpretive strategies]. What we then choose to read – and, by extension, teach and thereby "canonize" – usually follows upon our previous reading."[62]

Schweickart argues that feminist criticism started with the critique of male texts and ended up with gynocritics, the study of women's writing, which naturally has always been one of the most crucial feminist issues. Feminist criticism does not only involve reading male and female texts, but also pays much attention to critical strategies contributing to the canonization of texts. Schweickart urges the revision of the canon to include a significant body of works by women and the development of reading strategies. She states that "we also need a community of women readers who are qualified by experience, commitment, and training, and who will enlist the personal and institutional resources at their disposal in the struggle."[63]

Schweickart sees reading theory as a potentially powerful tool for "building and maintaining connections among women." She explains that a woman reader becomes a feminist during the analysis of literary texts, more specifically in the process of reading, when she realizes that the text has the power to structure her experience. The feminist reader recognizes the power of the text and becomes aware of her essential role in the process of reading.

[62] Quoted in Schweickart, 1989, p.29
[63] Schweickart, 1989, p.30

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS A WOMAN? – FEMINIST VIEWS ON IDENTITY

Female identity is one of the crucial questions of feminist criticism. Perhaps the greatest challenge a feminist critic faces is expunging an image of 'female' that is promulgated by and highly dependent upon male culture, social conventions or other foci of indoctrination, and then exploring the truest and most accurate meaning of female identity. Cheri Register[64] argues that the arts, or more specifically, literary works, are responsible for providing 'role-models' for this identity and that by portraying women whose identities are not dependent on men they are able to create new language, definitions and symbolic orders.

Disclosing the components of female identity is not just one of the crucial tasks of feminist criticism, it is also an integral part of self-discovery for women, a way of exploring the constituents of the mysterious female 'mechanism.' Many feminist theories that elaborate female identity create a list of identity components, e.g. race, class, ethnicity and religion, and they invariably end the list with 'etc.' What does this 'etc.' stand for? Is it possible to measure, materialise and make a numbered list for such a complex phenomenon? Many times these theories have a forceful political background, which raises the issue of 'literary correctness' and whether it is right to talk about philosophical and social categories in terms of influences and underlying intentions.

In carrying out this investigation, I expected feminist criticism to contribute to the comprehension of my own (female) identity, to teach me new ways and modes of comprehension. I attempted to understand what female awareness and consciousness mean, what it simply means to be a woman. The research has shown that the question asked in this chapter cannot be responded to with a single answer or definition. The category of woman has been defined from various perspectives and different approaches highlight different aspects of female identity. At the same time, these different perspectives, when collected and joined into a whole, can create a colourful patchwork embracing all the aspects and standpoints of womanhood.

[64] Register, 2004, p.236

3.1. The Historical Perspective

One approach to the understanding of both female identity and the literary canon is a kind of historical perspective, best articulated by Virginia Woolf, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar. They stress that women can be on the right path towards comprehending their identity and position only if they go back to the past and have a look at what happened to their mothers and grandmothers. This personal historical analysis can be a tool for self-knowledge and the ability to change one's position in society.

This approach is heavily based on the fact that one important element or constituent of female identity is history, the past; it therefore suggests that all women have internalised certain historical models, past social roles taught and dominated by our fathers and grandfathers. Consequently, this leads to the conclusion that the approach posits certain role models are somehow genetically coded into the social consciousness of women. Other feminist critics consider this revolting and misleading. Héléne Cixous claims that the future must no longer be determined by the past, and therefore she refuses to look back.[65] On the other hand, she also writes about refusing to strengthen the effects of the past by repeating them, which obviously – whether she likes it or not – takes us down a path directed by the aforementioned past effects, even if that path leads us in the completely opposite direction.

Connecting the exploration of female identity with an analysis of the past and the history of women is very typical of the approaches used by feminist literary history. It is very tempting to identify with the goals articulated in the several stages of feminist activities, ranging from proto-feminism and the suffragettes to the Second and Third Waves of feminism. When studying different characteristics of the historical periods of feminism, starting with its beginnings, the researcher might go through the same stages of development on an individual, private level. Studying history helps in becoming more conscious about feminist issues in general, but also about the more particular elements of female identity, as well as the effects of social changes that feminism has achieved. Moreover, the study of feminist history and highlighting the goals of the particular historical periods of feminism elucidates the political background and political motivation of feminist movements. It draws attention to the link between the public and the private, and the way the feminist movement has developed, which many times resembles the

[65] Cixous, 2004, p. 320

personal, inward developmental stages of an individual – particularly an individual female.

3.2. Solving the Inferiority Complex

Another feminist approach to defining identity highlights the power of a female sense or feeling of inferiority. Representative of this approach are the Afro-American writers, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, who seem to be involved with analysing the effects and influences of the dominant patriarchal culture and its 'oppression of women,' including their exclusion from the 'common land.' Their objectives probably root in their own experience of subordination in society and culture and they presumably aim at changing this unfair condition through a better understanding of female identity, which leads to the creation of more self-aware, determined and independent women.

They are purposefully looking for the characteristics and determining factors of the so-called 'female subculture[66]' and find deep similarities between the experience of being a woman and being Black or being Jewish, while being a (white) male puts one far at the other end of the scale. It also suggests permanence, a deep, basic and inevitable difference between male and female ways of perceiving the world, where the most typical features of the female world – a 'minority group' – are marked by oppression and therefore, female self-expression is always determined by a woman's relationship with the dominant, i.e. male, society. Consequently, self-discovery, the discovery of female identity, can only be realised through liberating women from this inferiority complex, protesting against the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and eventually defeating the dominant standards and values. "The life we save is our own,"[67] writes Alice Walker. The vocabulary these writers use (e.g. protest, dominate, defeat, save) makes one think of military training, suggesting that tradition is always necessarily bad and persuades women to do things that are unnatural or unfair. This angry and many times even aggressive 'protest' encourages women to take men and traditional values as their lives' reference points and deliberately depart from those values – regardless of whether they are good or bad. This strong desire to challenge conventions and cultural heritage leads to the creation of an alternative to tradition, which many times becomes a

[66] Eagleton, 2004, p. 15
[67] Walker, 2004, p. 33

kind of intolerant deviation, full of tension and cramp that excludes anybody who thinks differently, who happens to assert that women no longer belong to a 'minority group' and the understanding of female identity should not be carried out by concentrating on oppression and the redefinition of traditions, which should not always be considered to be negative and unfair.

3.3. Identity as a Social Construct

A significant approach to defining female identity is offered by Simone de Beauvoir, who penned one of the most remarkable milestones in feminist literary criticism. While she shared the convictions of Virginia Woolf, she also suggested a further, broader approach. Her monumental work, *The Second Sex* was published twenty years after Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. The analysis emphasises the social construction of female identity; by analysing the role of women in literature, she reaches the conclusion that 'woman' is defined in relation to "man," and not as an independent, separate entity. Beauvoir goes back to Aristotle and St. Thomas, discussing their definitions of woman ('an imperfect man,' 'an incidental being'[68]), which reveal an assumption that humanity is male and woman is to be defined not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Beauvoir writes:

> "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other."[69]

Defining the 'self' in terms of the 'Other' is discussed by Judith Butler as well, who talks about "a strategy of domination that pits the 'I' against an 'Other' and, once that separation is effected, creates an artificial set of questions about the knowability and recoverability of that Other."[70]

Discussing identity as the outcome of social construction does not originate in feminist criticism. Many sociologists and structuralists emphasise this phenomenon. In their classical text, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas

[68] Beauvoir, 1990, p. 307
[69] Ibid., p. 307
[70] Butler, 1990, p. 369

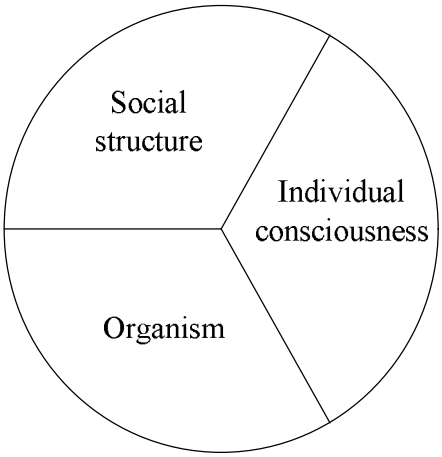
Luckmann deal with the constituents of identity. They approach 'identity' in the sense used by sociology. It is interesting to compare their understanding of 'identity' with the point of view of a feminist critic, Zuzana Kiczková, based on her article "Jej inakosť, jej identita?"[Her Difference, Her Identity].

Berger and Luckmann connect the discussion on 'identity' with two key terms, 'reality' and 'knowledge.' They define 'reality' as "a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition."[71] This means that 'reality,' as thing, phenomenon or quality, exists independent of whether we are aware of it or not. "Knowledge," they write, is "the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics."[72] However, they point out that 'reality' is not a stable concept, it is not permanent, but 'socially constructed,' and both 'reality' and 'knowledge' depend on social contexts.

The observable differences between societies determine the constituent elements of 'reality.' What is 'real' to a Tibetan monk, may not be 'real' to an American businessman; similarly, the 'knowledge' of a criminal differs from that of a criminologist. Therefore, the terms 'reality' and 'knowledge' must be carefully applied; we must always be aware of their subjectivity, which is indicated by the questions of who possesses knowledge, who possesses language, who speaks, when and where do they do so.

Berger and Luckmann argue that identity is a key element of 'subjective reality' and like 'subjective reality,' it also stands in a dialectical relationship with society. They emphasise that identity is formed by social processes and is continuously maintained, modified or even reshaped by social relations and social culture. They define identity as the interplay of "organism," "individual consciousness" and "social structure."[73] This division can be visualised in the following way:

[71] Berger – Luckmann, 1973, p. 13
[72] Ibid., p. 13
[73] Ibid., p. 194



As one can see from the above chart, Berger and Luckmann concentrate on the relationship of identity and society. They stress that identity is socially, psychologically and biologically determined. Under the term "organism," they write about biological drives; more precisely, sexuality and the drive for food and nutrition. They use the phrase "sociology of the body"[74] in order to emphasise that society also determines the 'activity' of the body, the functioning of the organism.

Zuzana Kiczková's assumptions follow the line and perspective of Beauvoir, and are very much connected with the theory of Berger and Luckmann just discussed. When dealing with the quality and the formation of female identity, she returns to some basic definitions of terms, like sex, gender, sexuality and identity in general. She points out that feminist philosophy has to analyse the term of 'identity' from a new perspective and redefine it in relation to female existence. Though both theories, of Berger and Luckmann and of Kiczková, point out the social construction of identity and its subjectivity, the basic difference between them is that Kiczková adds the category of gender to the discussion on identity as one of its most important constituent elements.

Kiczková concentrates on the difference between male and female identity. "*She* is different from *him.*"[75] She argues that feminist philosophy needs to revise the definition of 'female,' which, she writes, was constructed by men. She explains that the discussion on female identity has long been determined by the Platonic idea of 'woman' and also, by the biological category of female. Women were connected with nature. Their role was only biological, having a different body with a singular biological function – to produce a child – they were not supposed to be able to think abstractly. Women stood for emotions,

[74] Berger – Luckmann, 1973, p. 194
[75] Kiczková, 1994, p. 12

body, nature, passivity and the private sphere. By contrast, men were representatives of culture, activity, mind, soul and the public sphere. Kiczková points out that the dualism of the body and spirit that originates with Plato neglects the fact that sexuality is not just a biological notion, but also an historical and political phenomenon. She adds that this dualism of body and spirit is typical for "phallocentric thinking"[76] that continued through Descartes to Sartre.

At this point, there are some evident parallels between the definition of identity made by Berger and Luckmann and Kiczková's point of view. She argues that the human body – what Berger and Luckmann call "organism" – is not the only constituent of one's identity. She writes that one is not just an organism that was born, one is also constructed by society and his/her own self. She quotes Simone de Beauvoir to support her argument: "One is not born, one becomes a woman."[77]

Kiczková clearly differentiates between sex and gender; in her definition, which recalls the sex/gender definition of the 1960s, 'sex' is a biological category that differentiates between male and female, and 'gender' is a political, social and cultural category that determines the social roles men and women play in any given culture. Therefore, the category male/female is neither natural nor biological; to find one's self, one's identity is a project, not the fulfilment of biology. With the distinction of sex and gender, Kiczková enlarges Berger's and Luckmann's view on identity by overlapping 'organism,' 'social culture' and 'individual consciousness.' The result is that gender becomes another constituent of one's identity.

The social construction of identity is attached to the assertion that subjectivity is culturally constructed as well. The cultural construction of subjectivity has become one of the central issues for feminism. In her essay, "Constructing the Subject,"[78] Catherine Belsey describes and comments on the theory of Louis Althusser, who investigated ideology and ideological apparatuses. She writes that according to Althusser, ideological practices are supported and reproduced in the institutions of society which he calls "Ideological State Apparatuses" (ISAs).

> "The central ISA is the educational system, which prepares children to act consistently with the values of society by inculcating in them the dominant versions of appropriate behaviour as well as history, social studies and, of course, literature. Among the allies of

[76] Kiczková, 1994, p. 13
[77] quoted in Kiczková, 1994, p. 13
[78] Belsey, in Warhol-Herndl, 1993, pp.593-610

> the educational ISA are the family, the law, the media and the arts, all helping to represent and reproduce the myths and beliefs necessary to enable people to work within the existing social formation."[79]

In her discussion of social construction of identity and subjectivity, Belsey makes the expression 'social construction' more concrete, by naming all the tools of society used for controlling and standardising individuals' lives, tools especially important and influential – for example, education and the media, an establishment which can easily be used for the manipulation, the construction of individuals. Belsey claims that the destination of all ideology is the subject (the individual in society) and it is the role of ideology to *construct people* as subjects. The social construction of identity, thus, becomes an important political question.

3.4. Collective Identity — "Female Imagination"

Defining identity through the application and close analysis of 'female imagination' is one of the most mystified and most complex approaches to female identity. A great number of feminist critics emphasise the importance of a 'female consciousness;' among them is Elaine Showalter, who claims:

> "the 'female imagination' cannot be treated by literary historians as a romantic or Freudian abstraction. It is the product of a delicate network of influences operating in time, and it must be analyzed as it expresses itself, in language and in a fixed arrangement of words on a page, a form that itself is subject to a network of influences and conventions, including the operations of the marketplace."[80]

Showalter argues that woman's identity is not defined solely by her relation to a male world and a male literary tradition. She considers the bonds between women powerful and crucial factors in women's lives.[81]

Discussion of what a woman is immediately raises the question of the relationship between the particular and the general. Likewise, it is crucial to distinguish between individual and collective identity. Showalter's idea of "female imagination" seems to be

[79] Belsey, in Warhol-Herndl, 1993, pp.594
[80] Showalter, 1977, p.15
[81] Showalter, 1985, p. 201

in favour of the second, suggesting that individual female identity results from the collective common female identity and experience. Imagining women as one or being members of the same community with the same interests, carrying the same imagination fails to recognize the diversity of women or other constituents of their identity, such as culture, religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation. The theory of 'common female imagination' continues to seek justice and equality for women and is heavily politically rooted. It suggests that women belong to the same interest group with the same needs and wants. However, the failures of 'sisterhood' and sameness have already turned out in the very beginning of the 'women's movement' and the emergence of feminism. The greatest weakness of the idea of 'common female identity' is that it fails to realise the other constituent parts of female identity such as religion, social background or language. The experience of womanhood of a Tibetian woman is different from that of an upper-class white American lady.

3.5. The Body

Female identity has long been defined in terms of the biological differences between men and women. This biological determinism has affected women's places in society and culture, shaping even their own sense of identity. The body's biology can influence female identity in two ways. Firstly, the workings of the female body, such as menstruation, pregnancy or menopause, can influence female everyday life and reality, just like one's race, ethnicity, cultural background contribute to a person's understanding of the world. This biological factor can make women experience their bodies more actively and face the fact that their bodies have an impact on their identity. Secondly, the body can influence a woman's life and identity in a social context. The social understanding and acceptance of the body and biological differences can control the place of women in society, the tasks they can handle and the opportunities they are given.

The biological determinism of the 19th century set the framework for discussions on women's rights and the character of early feminist activities and struggles. In her collection of essays, *What is a Woman and Other Essays*, Toril Moi describes the theories of biological determinism and its contribution to shaping female identity. She recounts that two basic theories emerged in the 19th century which controlled the social differences between men and women and shaped the understanding of the human body, as well as

contributing to the general degradation of women in society. The first came from W.K. Brooks, a professor of biology at Johns Hopkins University, who published a book entitled *The Law of Heredity* in 1883. His starting point was that "among the higher animals (…) the males are more variable than females."[82] For Brooks, it is obvious that social differences between the sexes are caused by their physiological differences. He even emphasises the intellectual differences between men and women, claiming:

> "men's brains enable them to grasp the unknown: discoveries, science, the highest artistic and philosophical insights are reserved for them. Women's brains can deal with the known, the ordinary, and the everyday, keep track of traditions and social customs; in short, take care of everything that requires rational action without reflection. Women preserve the old, men discover the new. (…) any attempt to improve the condition of women by ignoring or obliterating the intellectual differences between them and men must result in disaster to the race."[83]

The extent of scientific negotiation directed towards explaining women's intellectual inferiority sounds so bizarre to modern ears. Although the very premise has by now been refuted so many times – simply consider the number of female scientists, scholars, and holders of Nobel Prizes to-date – analysis of such theories shows how certain intellectual leanings attempted to use biological facts and most times misleading data to justify inequitable social structures. Though most people in the 21st century would generally disregard such propositions as preposterous, they were nevertheless treated with utmost seriousness in their own day.

The second influential, 19th century text on biological determinism was the work of Scottish researchers Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, entitled *The Evolution of Sex*, first published in Britain in 1889. Geddes' and Thomson's central claim is that "males and females exhibit different metabolisms. Females are anabolic, males katabolic; males tend to expend, and females to conserve, energy. (…) It is generally true that the males are more active, energetic, eager, passionate, and variable; the females more passive, conservative, sluggish, and stable."[84] Just as Brooks predicted the end of the 'race' if the position of women were to change, Geddes and Thomson believe that "the

[82] Quoted in Moi, 1999, p.15
[83] Ibid., pp.16-17
[84] Ibid., pp.17-18

'species' will come to a ruinous end unless women are kept out of economic competition with men."[85]

Biological determinism presupposes that social norms are grounded in and justified by biological truths. Toril Moi explains that for writers such as Brooks, Geddes and Thomson, a man is essentially an enormous sperm cell, a woman a giant ovum. Furthermore, she continues, biological determinism presupposes a pervasive picture of sex.

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that the body is not a thing, it is a situation. Just like Brooks or Geddes and Thomson, she points out the biological and anatomical differences between men and women and describes the facts of female sexuality and the female role in reproduction. She concludes that women's role in reproduction is more dangerous and time-consuming than men's. A man can father a hundred children without any physical damage to himself, a woman cannot even have ten children without taking the risks of lasting physical injuries or even death. For Beauvoir, such biological facts are extremely important and constitute an essential element in the situation of women. However, unlike Brooks or Geddes and Thomas, she believes that biological facts cannot establish a fixed and inevitable destiny for women, cannot be the basis for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes.[86]

In claiming the body is a situation, alongside her assertion that "One is not born a woman; one becomes one,"[87] Beauvoir echoes the premises of Existentialism, especially the assumptions of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose basic conception of it lies in the idea that man is nothing but what he makes of himself. To say that to be a woman is always a project, also means to declare that women are always in the process of making themselves what they are: we give meaning to our lives by our choices and actions. Similarly, declaring that the body is a situation allows us to draw the conclusion that it is capable of change – change that depends on individual choice, a personal project; it is both an integral part and the result of personal experience, not just simply a piece of biological 'matter.' Merley-Ponty writes that the body is our general medium for having a world.[88] The idea of the body as medium generally suggests personal freedom and the power of the individual over social forms and norms.

[85] Quoted in Moi, 1999, p.19
[86] Beauvoir, quoted in Moi, 1999. p.62
[87] Beauvoir, quoted in Cavallaro, 2003, p. 12
[88] Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Moi, 1999, p.63

What does the body mean at the social level? When talking about the influence of the body and its contribution to human identity, along with its contribution to social valuation and expanding social roles, it is not just women who get involved in the debate, but also handicapped people and people of different races and sexual orientation. Discussions on the body on a social level, thus enlarge the group that is concerned, it is not just women who insist on political correctness and social justice.

Questions about the body can never remain limited to the individual, private level. Debate immediately moves into the public realm, raising socio-political issues, such as acceptance of the handicapped and homosexuality, the meaning of the body in human society. Definitely, a woman is not merely a human with a female body. Simplifying female identity, reducing it to sexual and other biological differences is no longer satisfying for feminist criticism; in fact, it would produce a negative, mirror image of sexism and the biological determinism of the 19th century.

3.6. Identity in the Sex/Gender System

Toril Moi describes the development of the sex/gender system from the 1950s and 1960s. She emphasises that it was first used by psychiatrists and other medical personnel working with transsexual patients to refer to the transsexuals' dilemma of being 'trapped in the wrong body.' The lack of correspondence between the sex of the body and the sex of the mind led psychiatrists to acknowledge a clear distinction between sex and gender. Initially, sex referred to the body and gender to the mind; they were purely psychological assignations trying to explore one's self and sense of belonging to one sex together with the sense of feeling different. This schizophrenic condition inspired other researchers and social theorists, as well as feminist thinkers, who together lifted the issue of sex and gender to a more general social and cultural level.

In 1963, the American Robert Stroller first formulated a concept of gender identity, which, he explains, refers to one's self-image of belonging to a specific sex. Stroller developed four different concepts: sex, gender, gender identity and gender role.

> "I prefer to restrict the term *sex* to a biological connotation. Thus, with few exceptions, there are two sexes, male and female. (…) *Gender* is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations. If the proper terms for sex are 'male' and

> 'female,' the corresponding terms for gender are 'masculine' and 'feminine'; these latter may be quite independent of (biological) sex. (…) *Gender identity* starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not to the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even a man who fantasises being a woman. *Gender role* is the overt behaviour one displays in society, the role which he plays, especially with other people, to establish his position with them insofar as his and their evaluation of his gender is concerned."[89]

One of the most crucial aspects of Stroller's distinction is his differentiation between sex and gender; more importantly, he highlights that sex belongs to the realm of biology, science and medicine, while gender is more psychological and cultural, belonging to the scope of sociology and culture. Stroller's terms were quickly adapted by feminist theory and started to be widely used both in feminist social studies and in feminist criticism, although the term gender role soon disappeared from view in feminist theory.

With the emergence of the sex/gender distinction in the 1960s, feminists intended to react against biological determinism rooted in the end of the 19th century. Responding to biological determinism by clearly distinguishing between nature and social norms meant there was a strong defence for feminist theory. The common terminology used with sex is male and female; the terms used in connection with gender are masculine and feminine.

Gayle Rubin was one of the first feminist critics to appropriate Stroller's categories for her own feminist purposes. In 1975, she published her influential essay, entitled "The Traffic in Women," in which she created her own concepts with the purpose of combating sexism and discrimination. She writes about a sex/gender system in society, which is "the set of arrangements by which society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied."[90] Furthermore, she claims that the sex/gender system designates a system that oppresses women. She is more interested in the definition and analysis of gender, rather than sex. For her, sex and sexual differences are biological, while gender is social. She writes:

[89] Stroller, p.9-10 quoted in Moi, 1999, p.22
[90] Rubin, 2006, p.93

> "Hunger is hunger, but what counts as food is culturally determined and obtained. (…) Every society also has a sex/gender system – a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be."[91]

For Rubin, the fundamental meaning of gender is oppressive social norms. Gender is the result of oppressive social production, where the active intervention of society and its influence on individuals is emphasised. Rubin uses the sex/gender system to illustrate that women are victims of male power. She dreams of a "genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love."[92] She points out that to expect someone to be masculine just because he is male or to deny someone the right to behave in a masculine way just because she is female is simply reinforcing the sex/gender system and maintaining the discriminatory workings of social norms, since it is social norms that determine what it means to be masculine, what a man (or woman) should be like.

In poststructuralist theory, sex and gender gain a very different and unique understanding. Feminists employing poststructuralist thought are unhappy with the way the 1960s' understanding of sex and gender influenced the definition of personal identity and the body. Poststructuralists deny the existence of biological facts independent of social and political norms. It means that sex is constructed by social norms and roles, by gender; consequently, there is no difference between sex and gender, for sex has been culturally constructed as well.

One of the principle voices of the poststructuralist approach in feminism is Judith Butler, whose monograph *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990, represents a milestone in the history of sex and gender theory. She claims that sex is as culturally constructed as gender and is the result of cultural and social production. She writes:

> "If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex (a juridical conception); gender must also

[91] Rubin, 2006, p.93
[92] Rubin, 2006, p.97

> designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts."[93]

In Butler's argument, sex is seen as a cultural construct, which undermines the traditional sex/gender distinction, as both sex and gender are now products of the same discursive norms, sex is not the grounds for gender, but the result, the effect of it.

Judith Butler's analysis of identity is politically motivated; her intention is to examine what further political possibilities and consequences a radical critique of the categories of identity leads to. In the first chapter of *Gender Trouble,* she claims that there is very little agreement on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. She explains that the term, 'woman,' has become troublesome because of its multiple significations. If one is a woman, she writes, that is surely not all one is and hence, the term fails to be exhaustive. She explains:

> "(…) gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, (…) gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained."[94]

Butler makes the discussion of identity and analysis of gender inseparable from politics and social practices, questioning the necessity of defining the term 'woman.' The political assumption that there is a universal basis for the definition of 'woman' leads to the assumption that there must be one universal basis for feminism and also, to the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form. Feminism is much more diverse than this and the notion of universal femininity and universal patriarchy has been widely criticised. Though there are still ideas about universal patriarchy and structures of domination which have produced theories on women's common subjugate experience, such ideas no longer enjoy much credibility and popularity. Butler asks a very important question, one which points to the weaknesses inherent in generalizing definitions and attempts to make female experience universal:

[93] Butler, 1999, pp.10-11
[94] Ibid., p.6

> "Is there some commonality among "women" that preexists their oppression, or do "women" have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? Is there a specificity to women's cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures?"[95]

The investigation of whether women have unique, characteristic features specific only to them, specifically feminine – as differentiated from the masculine – also supports the notion of the universality of femininity. Therefore, some feminist critics question the importance and even the point of analysing the singular notion of identity and underline its limitations. Identity is always contextual, always functioning in a certain discourse, therefore, it is necessary to examine the context in which it operates and by which it is influenced, as well. Butler talks about "the variable construction of identity"[96] and insists that female identity should not be the foundation of feminist politics, since the formation of identity takes place within a field of power. It is power relations that have to be examined and need to be interrogated first, since these power relations condition and limit dialogic possibilities.

By shifting the discussion of identity onto a political level, Butler enlarges the categories of sex and gender, and states that there are in fact more than two genders. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex and proves the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality, which she understands as a regime of power. Inevitably, Butler's theory is in favour of homosexuality and her critiques of heterosexuality and homophobia have inspired a lot of theorists by encouraging them to realise the importance of political motivation.

Toril Moi argues that one of the most famous claims in poststructuralist understanding of sex and gender is Judith Butler's contention that gender is performative.[97] Moi analyses the concept of 'gender performativity' and concludes that when a critic speaks of 'gender performativity' s/he intends to oppose 'gender essentialism,' meaning that against the being of sex, s/he is asserting the doing of gender. In Moi's understanding, gender is an act and not a thing. For Moi, 'gender performativity' means speaking of "how we fashion ourselves through our acts and choices."[98] For instance, she explains that when a man behaves in ways that are socially acceptable for

[95] Butler, 1999, p.7
[96] Ibid., p.9
[97] Moi, 1999, p.54
[98] Ibid., p.55

men, then he feels more convinced than ever that he is a 'real' man. It might also mean that if a man behaves in an idiosyncratic way, it helps to transform our understanding of how men behave. Moi concludes that generally speaking, 'gender performativity' means that when most people behave according to certain gender norms, this ensures that the norms are maintained and reinforced. Further consideration of Moi's idea leads us to the assumption that the contrary can likewise be declared, that 'gender performativity' also means the more men behaving in an idiosyncratic way, i.e. not in accordance with asserted gender norms, will help to upset and transform the norms and social codes. This raises the question of whether social norms are maintained by political authorities and power systems, and pushes the question of individual responsibility and power of change into the foreground.

The discourse on the individual's power to change social norms and the understanding of sexual difference definitely depends on whether we understand gender as something we *do* or something we *are*. The difference between doing and being a certain gender introduces discourses on active and passive participation in the formation and alteration of both personal identity and experience, and social systems and norms. Understanding gender as a cultural construct implies the governing role and effect of society and an impersonal outside influence that guides and forms the individual's life and values. On the other hand, the interpretation of gender as something personal, a part of one's identity, points to the responsibility of the individual in forming and structuring her/his outside social network, an inward element that is an integral part of human identity and has the power to influence more general, social norms. In this sense, gender becomes inseparable from the question of identity[99] and personal experience.

Unlike Gayle Rubin, poststructuralists do not dream of a society without gender; rather, they wish to achieve greater freedom, justice and happiness by being able to be free to mix and match the social concepts of masculinity and femininity as they like.

Poststructuralism seems to remain on a theoretical level. While discussing the nature and essence of sex and gender, it fails to explain what the implications of defining sex as a cultural construct are and what this theory should do with the image of the body as flesh and blood. It is difficult to see whether the aims and objectives of poststructuralist

[99] The analysis of identity is often referred to as identity politics (e.g. by Toril Moi, Judith Butler), a term I shall avoid since it strongly connotes connections with politics and power, whereas I intend to consider the question of identity on a more colourful and variable, both general and personal level, not limiting it to the level of political and social practices and applications.

feminism are different from the aims of Simone de Beauvoir or other feminist theorists of sex and gender.

If we consider the poststructuralist perspective outlined by Butler, her idea on how sex becomes as discursive as gender, it is difficult to imagine how this theory fits into the widespread belief that sex or the body is concrete with concrete biological functions; the body is represented as material, whereas gender and social norms are abstract and immaterial. The relation of power to the social construction of sex also becomes a matter of debate, because Butler's theory operates as if power was the creator of sex, of matter, an idea that can hardly be acceptable. On the other hand, if we consider that the poststructural theory which shows sex is a social construct also presumes the belief that if something is not constructed, it is natural, the theory's acceptability is modified or at least highlighted from a different point of view. If something is natural, it is common to associate it with stability and fixed essences, impossible to change, something given. As soon as sex becomes as constructed as gender, it becomes a social and cultural construct, it gains changeability, variability and provides an opportunity to be changed through social and political action. Female discrimination and homophobia can be defeated by eliminating theories about fixed and unchanging sexualities and 'born' characteristics.

The poststructuralist view on sex and gender works on a theoretical basis and is similar to the 1960s sex/gender distinction in the way that both attempted to use their theorisation on sex/gender systems with a political aim in mind, determined to achieve political effect.

3.7. Identity Through Language

A great number of feminist critics investigate the relation of women to language. This approach goes hand in hand with gynocritics, though its implications necessarily consider the power of language to be of primary importance. They examine whether men and women have different relationships to the languages they speak and write. Language is an important element of self-expression and an organic part of identity. Therefore, it is one of the major and most central concerns of feminist approaches to female identity.

Cora Kaplan explains that to be a woman *and* a poet presents many poetesses with such a profound split between social and sexual identity (their 'human' identity) and their

artistic practice that the split has become an insistent theme of much women's poetry.[100] This conflict is connected with a deep longing for the use of high language, in both private and public speech. Longing for the extensive use of language and considering this desire a significant part of female identity is, to a certain extent, politically embedded, somehow representing women's desire to gain access to the 'common land,' to have an equal share in the written forms of high culture: theology, philosophy, politics, sciences and literature.

Acquisition of language is one of the most important factors in forming personality and shaping one's view of the world, as language is one of the most crucial forms of human communication, a medium between the individual and the outside world. The individual expresses his/her inner processes by means of language, uses it to establish contact with others and it is by means of language that we become social beings and engage with culture. Of course, this is a two-way process: language acquisition and engagement with culture are moulded by the cultural environment that surrounds an individual. The ideological constraints of a given culture, its social conventions, teach us 'acceptable' forms of behaviour, and help constitute our identity. The external world and the language we are provided from childhood have enormous impacts on our understanding of the world as well as our self-awareness. Many feminist critics have analysed the complexity of female language and come to the conclusion that social silence is a part of female identity. Sanctions against female obscenity, against telling jokes and the use of wit by women have had a great impact on choice of language and verbal self-expressing in general.

Understanding the history of silence and exploring social relations through language, balancing silence with speech are crucial parts of female identity and central concerns of both feminist literary theory and the study of identity. Catherine Belsey examines the role of language in the formation of personal identity, 'the self.' She buttresses her theory with the ideas of Emile Benveniste and other, feminist, theorists, concluding that

> "(...) it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I,' as the subject of a sentence. It is through language that people constitute themselves as subjects."[101]

[100] Kaplan, 1986, p. 312
[101] Belsey, 1993, p.595

Many feminists quote Derrida in explaining the relationship of the individual speaker with his or her social surroundings through the lens of deconstructionism. Belsey asserts that the individual speaker is the origin of the meaning of his or her utterance, since it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. In this sense, the words we are taught, the linguistic basis by which we undertake communication and establish social relationships, determine both our understanding of the world and the way other speakers perceive and understand us. Stress is applied to the words *contrast* and *differentiation*, since language is based on contrasts and differentiation, the individual constitutes himself/herself through them: 'I' cannot be conceived without the conception 'non-I,' i.e. 'you;' therefore, (as Belsey frames it) "dialogue, the fundamental condition of language, implies a reversible polarity between 'I' and 'you.'"[102] These kinds of feminist assumptions echo Derrida's concept of binary oppositions, which proposes that we are too sure about central categories such as truth, culture, speech, etc. Instead of describing a rigid set of categories, we should concentrate in discourse on binary oppositions, where the opposing terms (e.g. speech versus writing, maleness versus femaleness, homosexuality versus heterosexuality, I versus non-I, nature versus culture, body versus soul, or black versus white) are actually fluid and impossible to separate entirely. They need one another and always imply one another.

The study of language acquisition and its impact on the formation of identity evidently shows that feminist theory shares similar, characteristic features and parallel outcomes with psychoanalyst criticism. Feminist critics relying heavily on the works of Jacques Lacan and the umbrella of psychoanalyst criticism believe that gender – female identity – is primarily constructed through acquisition of language, rather than social or cultural phenomena.

Catherine Belsey summarises Jacques Lacan's theory and concludes that, according to Lacan, entry into the symbolic order, i.e. language, liberates the child into the possibility of social relationships: the child is enabled to articulate his or her needs, desires and demands. However, at the same time a division within the self is constructed. In offering a child the possibility of formulating her/his own desires, the symbolic order also engages in a betrayal, since it cannot aid the child in formulating those elements of desire which remain unconscious. Belsey underscores that the subject is thus the site of contradiction, and is consequently in the process of construction; influenced by changes

[102] Besley, 1993, p.595

of language and social formations, therefore, she concludes, the subject is capable of change, it is a "process" carrying the possibility of transformation.[103]

Belsey claims that identity, subjectivity, is "a matrix of subject-positions."[104] She supports this with the psychoanalytic idea that when learning to speak, children learn to identify with the first person singular pronoun and this constitutes the basis of subjectivity. A child learns to recognize itself in a series of subject-positions ('he' or 'she,' 'boy' or 'girl,' etc.), which are the positions from which discourse is intelligible to oneself and others.

It is interesting to examine the "matrix of subject-positions," since there is a range of positions as well as discourses. Augmenting this idea that language provides the self with contradictions and makes the subject an entity of transformation, the number of positions a subject takes also gives that subject a more contradictory character, since multiple positions may be incompatible or contradictory.

3.8. Female Identity in a Literary Text

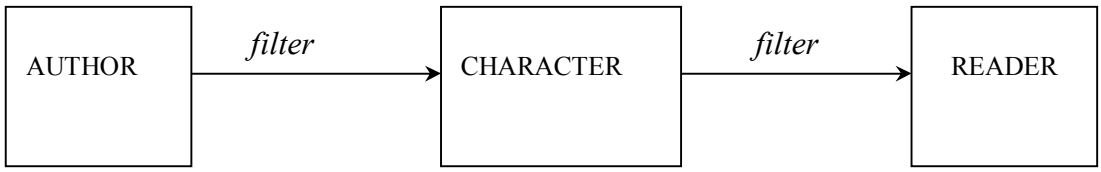
Female identity and experience obtain different understandings when discussed in the context of literary characters in a literary work. This is due first to the fictitious nature of the characters, and second, to the reader and the reading process.

A fictional character, obviously, was *created* by its author. The character's identity is determined by the space the author provides him/her in which to speak and act, also by what other characters are saying about him/her and the way they are acting towards him/her. The "conversational behaviour" [105] (a term used by Mick Short) of a character is determined by the space s/he is allowed to enter, for example the length of his/her speeches. Only within this space it is possible to reveal a character's motives and investigate his/her identity; the space a character is given in a literary text influences the reader's ideas (a result of the reader's decoding process) about that identity. In another words, in the case of literary characters, the definition of identity shifts as it is extended with the addition of further elements, such as artificiality, restriction, the reading process and the reading experience.

[103] Belsey, 1993, p.597
[104] Ibid., p.596
[105] Short, 1996, p.172

The identity of a character in drama is one of the most challenging tasks to investigate, since drama is the most living genre, the one that relies on dialogue, conversation and words the most. The space a character is allowed to enter, the length of the speeches of the character may become crucial in the formation of his/her identity, since there is no narrator to tell his/her story or past instead of him. The identity of a character in drama becomes more complex in cases where the play employs the element of a play within a play.

In his book *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose,* British linguist Mick Short concentrates on the analysis of language in plays. He introduces arguments intended to delineate the extent to which drama is like real conversation and the extent to which it is not. He presents drama as the literary genre which is most like natural conversation, though not entirely the same, since conversations in plays are designed to be 'overheard' by an audience.[106] He explains that there is a "double structure" in drama which consists of at least two levels of discourse: the author–audience/reader level, and the character–character level (further on, when dealing with a written text and not a performance; I will use 'reader' instead of 'audience/reader'). The message delivered between two characters is filtered through the mind of the reader, who decodes and then interprets. This point can be visualised as a simple progression:

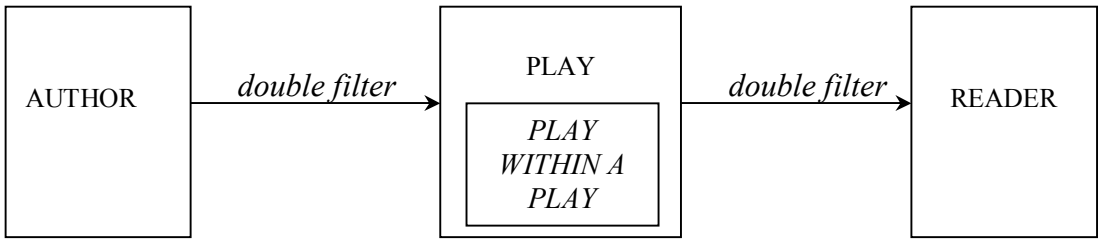


The filtering process is amplified when the text uses the device of a play within a play. According to Robert W. Corrigan, a play within a play continually draws our attention to its theatricality, the reader is reminded of the fact that what is occurring on stage is not 'real' but a representation of 'reality.'[107] Therefore, a play within a play simultaneously widens the distance between the author and the reader while serving a particular purpose, the purpose of alienation and the purpose of emphasising the theatricality and the construction of the characters' identities along with the identity of the

[106] Short, 1996, p.168
[107] Corrigan, 1981, p.4

reader. Short emphasises that if the readers are not completely involved in what they watch or read, it distances them (to some degree), so that they can examine what is happening with greater ease and critical insight.[108] In other words, a play within a play serves not only the function of alienation, but also encourages critical thinking in the reader.

A play within a play can be visualised this way:



Returning to Short's analysis, within the language of plays, he focuses on "normal non-fluency:" mistakes, voiced fillers, small silent pauses, mispronunciations, unnecessary repetitions, elliptical sentences, abandoned grammatical structures – characteristic features of ordinary conversation. He adds that if non-fluency elements occur, it is because they have a meaningful function in the eyes of the playwright. Short uses the term "conversational behaviour," which is characteristic for each character in a play and the 'vehicle' through which one discovers his/her motives.

3.9. Female Identity: A Summary

The present investigation into what a woman is has shown that different approaches contribute differently to a definition of female identity. The answer to the question of what a woman is has turned out to be that there is more than one. Moreover, it is easier to identify which factors have an important role in the *formation* of female identity than which factors actually *comprise* that identity. Stating that identity is a sum of particular constituents would mean claiming that identity itself is fixed. The exploration of female identity is a long-distance adventure in which one can reach fixed points and

[108] Short, 1996, pp.171-172

milestones, but new gates immediately open, new questions are asked and new issues appear that are in need of examination.

The most common and simplest understanding of what a woman is comes out of the assertion that she is a person with a female body. This assumption highlights the anatomical and physical differences between men and women, but more importantly, points to the importance of the body in a social context. Defining identity in terms of the body has been shown to have certain weaknesses, and the damaging effects of biological determinism have stimulated feminist activities to shift emphasis from biology and anatomy to sociology, culture and politics.

Toril Moi stresses that investigations into the meaning of femininity in specific historical and theoretical contexts are indispensable to the feminist project of understanding and transforming sexist cultural practices and traditions. An historical overview and analysis of the investigation of female identity is unquestionably useful for highlighting sexual discrimination and undermining unfair social practices and norms.

When it comes to thinking about what a woman is, the sex and gender distinction seems inadequate — or at least not satisfying. It is misleading to imagine that a human being is made up of the sum of 'sex plus gender.' Race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, idiosyncratic personal experience (a wholly unique store of experiences), religion, political views and intellectual abilities are among the central categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another, always contributing to the creation of personal identity.

It is important to note that the word 'female' encompasses a particular group of people and the word 'feminine' will not necessarily include all or even most of the same group. Therefore, the phenomena of common female identity should be reconsidered. As Wittgenstein puts it, in most cases the meaning of a word is its use. The word 'woman' takes on very different meanings and implications when used by different speakers in different situations. There is even a difference between connotations of 'woman' and 'women;' the plural category of 'women' suggests collectivity and unity, that there is some kind of basis upon which women share the same characteristic features. However, the singular form 'woman' connotes that each woman is an independent entity with particular features, background and personal experiences and each woman contributes to the idea of 'common female identity' in a peculiar, colourful way.

CHAPTER 4

SHAKESPEARE AND FEMINISM – FEMINIST APPROACHES TO SHAKESPEARE

It is as difficult to define feminist criticism as it is to define feminism, itself. Invariably, feminist criticism concentrates on women, paying attention to women's position both in literature and culture. However, female representation is not the only focal point of feminist criticism, which also examines relationships between men and women, social structures, and how society shapes individual identities and vice versa. More generally, it focuses on the extent the individual is able to influence social institutions and culture.

It is important to emphasize that it is not enough to be a woman in order to be labelled a feminist critic. Feminist critics should be distinguished from female critics. Feminist criticism entails more than concentrating on female characters and analyzing certain specific subject matters; it is rather a matter of perspective. Even a man can be a feminist critic if he shares this particular perspective and bent of critical thinking. In their anthology, *The Woman's Part,* Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Neely summarize the distinctive features of feminist criticism and claim that "feminists assume that women are equal to men by that their roles, more often than men's and in different ways, have been restricted, stereotyped, and minimized; their aim is to free women from oppressive constraints."[109] The above definition suggests that feminist criticism incorporates the assertion that women suffer from unfair and discriminatory treatment in society, culture and literature, that their choices and self-expression are limited and restricted. This assertion is rooted in and especially typical for the First and Second Waves of feminism. Though the Third Wave still continues to assert this same critical viewpoint, it can also afford to celebrate diversity, the variety of female roles and, instead of focusing on women's subordination and misrepresentation, it is now able to create new female models in literature.

[109] Lenz, C. – G. Greene – C. Neely, 1980, p.3

Feminist criticism of Shakespeare is very special terrain within this field. The first question that comes to mind when dealing with feminist criticism of Shakespeare is, quite simply, "Why Shakespeare?". How does Shakespeare fit into the larger domain of feminist literary studies? According to the definition given above of feminist literary criticism, one can assume that it primarily concentrates on the position of women both in culture and literature, and analyses and restores the texts of women writers, where women's position is typically more visible and purposeful. So why do feminist Shakespeareans, the critics of a male author writing in a period when women generally possessed less satisfying positions in society, culture and literature than they do today, boast such an influential and large contingent within feminist criticism? There is no doubt that Shakespeare is a milestone in literary history, a dramatist of extraordinary range. If feminist criticism wants to prove itself to be a respectable, trustworthy and dignified critical pursuit, it cannot avoid taking on such a great icon of literary history. Furthermore, feminist analysis of Shakespeare can reveal how a huge, influential body of canonical literature might look from the perspective of women; more specifically, feminist women. Of course, the techniques of feminist criticism must be used in a cautious way with Shakespeare, a celebrated male dramatist with a significant reputation and very dominant place in literature, whose work has generated a long tradition of critical study and judgement. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the attention garnered from feminist criticism stems from the fact that Shakespeare's plays offer extensive opportunity for discussion on a wide range of themes, motifs, positions, and characters, and extraordinary challenges for interpretation and analysis. The number of feminist adaptations of Shakespeare's work confirms that it is rich and deep enough to inspire dramatists and critics even hundreds of years later, providing enough space and opportunities for ample, limitless exploration.

The tradition of female and feminist responses to Shakespeare can be traced back to the Ladies' Clubs formed to appreciate his works in the 18th century. From the time of the Restoration, when women could appear on the public stage in England and began to act in Shakespeare, Shakespeare was the centre of attention not just of female audiences (as paying customers), but also of female theatre people, actresses and critics.

Initially, and until the emergence of the First Wave, Shakespeare was celebrated as a genius who had the ability to enter into women's minds and hearts, and express their deepest feelings. Shakespeare, according to Mary Cowden Clarke, his first female editor,

"has best asserted women's rights."[110] Marianne Novy recounts that from the late 17th century onward, female writers, such as Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Gerorge Eliot and many lesser known women authors, have engaged in a kind of dialogue with Shakespeare. Very often, these writers analysed Shakespeare's portrayal of women to claim him as a supporter and to do so on behalf of women.[111] Although some of the first women's studies of Shakespeare already perceive certain voids and inadequacies in the female roles, they forgive Shakespeare for these on the account of his age and social practices. For example, Mrs. Launch Macluarin delivered a paper at the Dallas Shakespeare Club in 1897, in which she pretended to search for the character of a businesswoman in Shakespeare's plays. Finally, she concludes by asking "(...) how could he anticipate her, great man that he was, any more than he could the typewriter and the phonograph and other pleasant and surprising things we have?"[112]

Generations of women have been going back to Shakespeare to interpret and analyse his plays, trying to find justification for their empowerment and to establish their place in the cultural universe. Their strategy has been to make Shakespeare – cultural icon that he is – their ally.

With the appearance of First Wave feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century, the validity of enthusiastic responses to Shakespeare was called into question. In 1910, Dorothy Richardson claimed that "there was no reality in any of Shakespeare's women. They please men because they show women as men see them."[113] Virginia Woolf also commented on Shakespeare in *A Room Of One's Own*, where, though she expressed admiration for Shakespeare, she also noticed that his female characters are depicted mainly in relation to men. The Second Wave of feminism, beginning in the 1960s, continues to point to the lack of universality in Shakespeare, whereas the Third Wave has shifted emphasis and expanded its scope of analysis to incorporate issues such as race, sex and culture, redefining basic categorisations, such as representation, minority, canon, femininity, etc.

The tendency of emphasising Shakespeare's "misogyny" and women's victimization in his plays was a typical feature of the Shakespeare criticism in Second Wave feminism; however, I believe that today this represents a marginalized theorisation. In her essay, "Misogyny is Everywhere," Phyllis Rackin interrogates the feminist

[110] quoted in Rackin, 2005, p.72
[111] Novy, 1999, p.2
[112] quoted in Juliet Fleming: The Ladies' Shakespeare, 1999, p.5
[113] quoted in Novy, 1999, p.3

assumptions that in early modern England men were anxious in the face of female power, women were disempowered, and "misogyny" was widespread and extensive. Rackin instead suggests that reports of women's victimisation and misogyny were not so frequent in Shakespeare's England, they are rather present in late twentieth-century cultural criticism. She writes:

> "Reminders that women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient probably occur more frequently in recent scholarship than they did in the literature of Shakespeare's time."[114]

Furthermore, she explains, it is important to remember that feminist criticism began with a political agenda and has provided arguments that can just as easily be used to neutralise women's oppression as to oppose it.[115]

The contemporary feminist assumption about the bases for and nature of feminist criticism of Shakespeare is founded on the essential difference and concomitant struggle between two competing understandings of culture. Kate Chedgzoy describes these different understanding as follows:

> "One (…) represented the highly valued aesthetic recreations consumed by a privileged élite as a treasury of the British national heritage that should be graciously extended, in special circumstances, to the uncultured masses. As so often, Shakespeare was constituted in this crisis as the site where élite, popular and national interests converged. The second understanding of culture (…) conceives it as a set of social and artistic practices, which can be made and shared by a collectivity of people – a collectivity that may be internally diverse in terms of class, ethnic or racial positionings – and which are valued according to the pleasure and satisfaction derived from this active participation."[116]

In this sense, the first understanding is based on the prevailing position and interpretation of a predominantly white male middle-class community, where the Shakespearean heritage is handled as something sacred and untouchable, to be researched and analysed by privileged scholars. This understanding of Shakespearean heritage and culture in general has evoked strong reactions and disagreement from literary schools and movements positioned besides the mainstream and trying to redefine the canon. Politically motivated, critical fields such as feminist criticism or post-colonial criticism

[114] Rackin, 1999, p.44
[115] Ibid., p.47
[116] Chedgzoy, 2001, p.2

share the common view that Shakespeare belongs to a collectivity of people, a collectivity characterised by diversity: sexual, racial, and ethnic diversity. Shakespeare wrote for the public with the intention of satisfying the needs and interests of all layers of a Renaissance audience and therefore, this standard should be embedded in 20th and 21st century approaches to Shakespearean heritage, as well. The second understanding of culture delineated by Chedgzoy includes active participation of the diverse "target group." This suggests not just the involvement of different classes, ethnic and racial groups – different layers of society – in the investigation and examination of the Shakespearean heritage, but also active participation of these groups in the alteration of the canon and the creation of new plays and performances that together contribute to a modified understanding of Shakespeare as cultural icon.

In order to discuss what feminist criticism of Shakespeare means, it is crucial to first make clear what its scope of study includes. Clarifications are also needed to highlight the difference within its basic areas of concern and to examine its often confusing terminology. Feminist criticism of Shakespeare characteristically moves between the past and present, driven by a commitment both to intervene in contemporary cultural politics and the literary practices of contemporary literary scholarship, and to interpret Shakespearean plays from a new perspective, one with anxieties about gender, sexuality, race, class and culture in order to unveil a new sense of the literary heritage. Hence, one important field of study for feminist criticism of Shakespeare is the analysis of female representation on the Shakespearean stage based on a historical analysis of women's position in Renaissance England and the impact of this representation on cultural and social positions and privileges. This field of feminist criticism asserts that cultural and literary roles can be understood through an analysis of contemporary historical sources; it relies on the assumptions and tools a historical approach can provide. In this field of study, feminist criticism often melds with the practices of New Historicism, examining issues such as Renaissance family structures, the institution of marriage, social positions, wealth, women's work, legal procedures, occupations, the hierarchy of status and rank, clothing, the attitudes towards women, as well as women's representation in literature, theatrical practices, the absence of actresses and phenomenon of cross-dressing.

The aim of a historically-based feminist criticism of Shakespeare is not merely collecting historical data about women's places and experiences in Renaissance England, but also to expand and enrich the range of interpretations of the Renaissance texts and

their original historical settings. Additionally, a historically-based feminist criticism focuses on discovering and analysing new texts: texts of female Renaissance writers, ranging from plays and poems to letters and diaries (for example *Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry*, a play by Elizabeth Tanfield Cary). The intention here is to change dominant positions and hierarchy in the canon. The theoretical background to the massive effort to recover and study Renaissance women's writing and the social, political and cultural position of women in Renaissance England, lies in the assumption that it is possible to change the way we perceive Shakespeare, by changing the cultural and historical context in which he is placed. The main representatives of such a historical feminist approach are Phyllis Rackin, Joan Kelly-Gadol, Kathleen Casey and Juliet Dusinberre. Dusinberre's surprising (perhaps even astonishing) ideas about the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries – which she claims to be "feminist in sympathy," and Shakespeare, to be a feminist – will be further discussed in section 4.2.

The second approach within feminist criticism of Shakespeare is more text-based, neglecting history and the historical background of the Renaissance, or at least not overstating the influence of history and revelation of historical and social phenomena in literary texts. Instead, this approach concentrates on exploring female realities in the Shakespearean texts. The objectives are to investigate what the text can offer, as well as examine the critical tradition, reactions to Shakespeare, and, more specifically, feminist critical responses to Shakespeare, with a particular focus on how changes in the history of feminism and feminist consciousness have changed women's responses. The emphasis is placed on close reading and the analysis of both text and characters, as well as the responses to the critical tradition.

The third scope of study found in feminist criticism of Shakespeare is the highly complex phenomenon of feminist adaptation of Shakespeare. This field includes feminist texts; rethinking, adapting and rewriting Shakespeare by putting women characters and feminist theorization at the centre; and, letting Shakespeare's women tell their stories differently. Feminist rewriters of Shakespeare evoke feminist criticism's concern with women as writers, expressing attitudes they hold toward the cultural image of Shakespeare while at the same time, giving voice to their own motives and responses. Writing a feminist adaptation of Shakespeare, an independent new play, is a complex process which includes a critical analysis of the 'original' Shakespearean play and the Shakespearean cultural and social context in general; it is also a manifestation of a certain

political belief and critical standpoint, the demonstration of a politically loaded literary articulation.

4.1. Shakespeare as a Reference Point – The Historical Approach

Attitudes toward women during the Renaissance are definitely an important theme in feminist criticism of Shakespeare. The feminist historical approach to Shakespeare intends to relate the position of women in the plays to the position and status of women in that era. Feminist historians generally agree that women's positions and attitudes toward them were changing in the Renaissance, but they disagree about the extent and direction of that change.

Three different subgroups and approaches can be distinguished within the umbrella of the feminist historical approach to Shakespeare. The first assumes that Shakespeare's time is in no ways different from other periods before the 20th century, when women obtained basic political rights and social positions. Critics such as Joan Kelly question the liberating effects of Renaissance humanism and reformed religion on the position of women. Kelly assumes that "there was no renaissance for women – at least, not during the Renaissance."[117]

The second historical approach in feminist Shakespeare criticism holds that the Renaissance period witnessed several social and cultural changes, including changes in the status of women, which evidently led to their more liberal treatment. This change is reflected in drama as well. Jean E. Howard emphasises that women were paying customers in early modern theatres, including respectable women such as the wife of John Overall, who was Regius Professor of Theology at Cambridge and Dean of St. Paul's.[118] Playing was a commercial enterprise, so it was in the players' interest to please as many paying customers as they could, including women customers. Yet this approach also admits that while in comparison to other periods the Renaissance allowed for more liberal ideas toward women, it still failed to provide them with equal opportunities. A lot of women could not read and write; they were deprived of economic power and lacked unlimited access to education.

[117] Kelly, 1999, p.21
[118] referred to in Phyllis Rackin, 2000, p.52

The third perspective within the feminist historical approach to Shakespeare is the contention that "the drama from 1590 to 1625 is feminist in sympathy."[119] The founder of this approach is Juliet Dusinberre, whose thought-provoking, provocative idea of declaring Shakespeare to be a feminist has remained at the centre of current debates since it was first published in 1975. Although her theory has been challenged by several feminist historians and scholars, her work has acquired a significant place in feminist Shakespeare criticism.

In *Shakespeare and Women*, Phyllis Rackin, a feminist historian critic affiliated with the second type of historical approach, examines women's places in Shakespeare's world and their roles in his plays using historical context. She emphasises the importance of constructing a historical context and underscores how crucial it is to recognise that a 21st century reader's encounters with Shakespeare's plays are inescapably different from those of the Bard's original audiences. Furthermore, she suggests that the reader's experience and understanding of Shakespeare's plays, and the way the reader perceives Shakespeare's women, are influenced by both "the accumulated tradition of Shakespeare scholarship and reception"[120] and present history, i.e. the world in which the reader lives. In this sense, becoming familiar with the social status of women in the Renaissance contributes a great deal to the reader's understanding of Shakespeare's representations of women, as well as his/her acquaintance with critical responses and the historical background of the critic.

Rackin argues that feminist criticism has to go hand in hand with historical criticism and a historical research and it requires the analytic instruments New Historicism provides. She claims that the gender of the reader is relevant, as well as his or her commitment to "the feminist political project."[121] Readers who share that commitment are more critical about women's roles in Shakespeare's plays and about the roles women were assigned in Shakespeare's England. Rackin is one of the few feminist critics who admit that the political motivation of feminist criticism has an impact on the target of analysis and consequently, the output of feminist research. She analyses "patriarchal power," "male misogyny," "women's oppression"[122] and "Renaissance misogyny and the oppressive practices it produced;"[123] however, she examines these

[119] Dusinberre, 2003, p.5
[120] Rackin, 2005, p.5
[121] Ibid., p.2
[122] Ibid., p.2
[123] Ibid., p.17

notions while giving the period a certain kind of alibi. When reading her arguments, it seems she is suggesting that overemphasizing women's oppression might lead to a misleading theorization of the past and create another (feminist) system based on dominance. Rackin emphasizes that though a critic cannot afford to ignore "women's subjugation,"[124] it makes no sense to entrench in it, either. "Overestimating past repression can easily slip into a dangerous complacency about present progress."[125]

> "We now know, for instance, that a great many women exercised their own choice in negotiating marriages for themselves and for other women as well, but we still tend to assume that patriarchal control was the norm. We also know that the majority of executors of wills in Shakespeare's England were women, but we still assume that most women were deprived of economic power and authority. We now have evidence of women's widespread participation in pre-Reformation drama, but we still tend to assume that women's exclusion from the London professional companies followed a long-standing tradition of all-male performance. We know that in Shakespeare's London, women were a visible presence all over the city, including the playhouses, but we still tend to assume that Shakespeare's plays should be read from the point of view of a male spectator who would have responded to representations of women's power and autonomy as occasions for anxious hostility."[126]

Instead of interpreting women's positions in the Renaissance and in Shakespearean plays as a set of negatives, Rackin offers a well-balanced analysis that stresses both the positive and negative features of women's social position. Meanwhile, she highlights that when evaluating the past, the practices of a critical approach are always influenced by certain kinds of motivation and predetermined goals. There is no such thing as an independent, neutral criticism. Examining the position of women in Renaissance England from the point of view of a male spectator, for example, results in a different understanding of women's positions. As Sandra Harding has wittingly remarked, there is no such thing as a "view from nowhere."[127] However, the critic, the reader should be aware of taking the position of a certain point of view, and when analysing for example, "misogyny" and "women's position" in Shakespeare's plays, the critic or the reader should view the textual evidence for these phenomena more critically, considering both the social background of the writer and the social or political motivation of the critic.

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[124] Rackin, 2005, p.2
[125] Ibid., p.2
[126] Ibid., pp.2-3
[127] quoted in Rackin, 2005, p.17

4.2. Shakespeare, the Feminist?

In *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, Juliet Dusinberre deals with the place of women and attitudes towards them in the Elizabethan period of English history. She analyses the period's impact on Shakespeare's plays and examines the positions of Shakespearean female characters. Dusinberre's perspective leads to a surprising and provocative conclusion: she calls Shakespeare a feminist. To understand her point, one has to first become acquainted with her ideas about feminism, as such.

Elizabethan society, Dusinberre argues, was influenced by "the powerful presence of a woman's voice in public life."[128] The 'Golden Age' assigned to the prosperous reign of Elizabeth I was a significant milestone in the development of attitudes towards women. Dusinberre notes that as the Renaissance was a period of questioning many 'orthodoxies,' it would have been surprising if attitudes to women had been neglected.

Dusinberre points out that the Protestant ideology put forth by certain humanists, like More and Erasmus, brought with it new, liberal perspectives on women, especially at the end of the Elizabethan period. At centre stage were reform of women's education and the institution of marriage (they were attacking customs such as forced marriage, marriage for money, child marriage and marriages between old men and young women). "Social structures do eventually change if enough questions are asked,"[129] Dusinberre writes. It is especially interesting that she even talks about divorce. She points out that between 1595 and 1620 the number of divorces increased and in concert with the change in ideas about marriage, attitudes toward women changed as well. At this point, it is important to highlight that although Dusinberre talks about divorce, one should not forget that this was a privilege entertained only by wealthy women, who could afford to be alone and maintain themselves in a society where opportunities for education and jobs for women were limited. Still, Dusinberre argues that although the number of questions asked was not much and the position of women did not change dramatically, this period was, in her terms, "feminist in sympathy."[130]

The climate of the Elizabethan era, a period interested in change and questioning conventions, influenced its dramatists. Dusinberre explains that these dramatists asked the same questions about women as philosophers or religious people. They were concerned about the nature of women, about men's attitudes toward them, and about the roles

[128] Dusinberre, 1994, p. xxvii
[129] Ibid., p.xvii
[130] Ibid., p.5

women played in society. Shakespeare's modernity, Dusinberre continues, is found in his treatment of women. The success of the dramatists of the Elizabethan period, Dusinberre emphasises, lies in their ability to grasp the really interesting, burning or fashionable questions of their time and think about them in depth. Shakespeare could simply not avoid dealing with the existing assumptions about women and giving them a place in his works.

Dusinberre explains that for her, feminism is about having a voice, choice and the pursuit of happiness. She returns to Roland Barthes's essay, "The Death of the Author," in which he argues that a text is free of its author. According to Barthes's idea, Dusinberre adds, whether the author is a man or a woman is not significant. Therefore, as women's voices definitely appear in Shakespeare's writings, Shakespeare himself – in spite of the fact that he is a man – can be considered a feminist.

Dusinberre examines women's relation to language and notices a new awareness of women both as users of language and as parts of language structures in Shakespeare's plays. She argues that words were historically "the weapons of powerless women" and in Shakespeare's plays, men are conscious of "being effeminised" if their only weapons are words.[131]

Kathleen McLuskie provides a critical account of Dusinberre's admiration of Shakespeare's 'feminism,' a term used by Dusinberre as appropriate both for the 20th and 17th centuries. McLuskie claims that the strength of Dusinberre's argument lies in its description of the literary shift from the discourses of love poetry and satire to those of drama. However, McLuskie explains, Dusinberre's assertion about the feminism of Shakespeare and his contemporaries depends upon a mimetic model of the relationship between ideas and drama. By focusing on the representation of women in Puritan advice literature, Dusinberre privileges one side of a contemporary debate and arbitrarily asserts more progressive notions as the dramatists' true point of view. McLuskie points out that sex, sexuality, sexual relations and sexual division were all areas of conflict in the Renaissance, together with the complexity of legislation and other forms of social control over sex and the family. She emphasises that, "Far from being an unproblematic concept, 'the nature of women' was under severe pressure from both ideological discourses and the real concomitants of inflation and demographic change."[132]

McLuskie offers a less author-based alternative to Dusinberre's theorisation by accepting that feminist criticism (like all criticism) is a reconstruction of the play's

[131] Dusinberre, 1994, p.xxvii
[132] McLuskie, 1999, p.28

meaning, and by asserting the specificity of a feminist response. Her procedure differs from the theory which claims Shakespeare's views as feminist, since she refuses to construct an author behind the plays. Instead, she pays attention to the narrative, poetic and theatrical strategies employed to construct the plays' meanings and position audiences to understand their events from a particular point of view. She explains:

> "For Shakespeare's plays are not primarily explorations of 'the real nature of women' or even 'the hidden feelings in the human heart'. They were the products of an entertainment industry which, as far as we know, had no women shareholders, actors, writers, or stage hands. His women characters were played by boys and, far from his plays being an expression of his idiosyncratic views, they all built on and adapted earlier stories."[133]

Phyllis Rackin might disagree over the absence of women shareholders and "stage hands" in Shakespeare's London. She cites several examples of the involvement of women in the off-stage activities of professional companies in London:

> "Susan Baskerville owned shares in Queen Anne's company and in the Red Bull, and two women – Marie Bryan and Margaret Gray – were shareholders in the second Fortune. The fullest record we have of a company's day-to-day business, Philip Henslowe's Diary, contains numerous references to women who were directly or indirectly involved in that enterprise. Agnes, Henslowe's wife, is listed several times as lending money to actors. (…) In addition to these offstage activities, women also participated in the business of the theatrical companies as gatherers or box-holders. Standing at the doors to collect entrance fees from the playgoers (…) One of them, Elizabeth Wheaton, held that position at both Blackfriars and the Globe."[134]

The contradiction between Rackin and McLuskie is a typical example of the problems with which historical approaches must struggle. The contradictory and changeable nature of materials and documents historians work with provide further difficulties in establishing fixed definitions and arguments. Moreover, as Rackin admits in another essay, "in historical research you're likely to find what you are looking for,"[135] which means that historical research, i.e. working with historical data and documents, always implies a changeability in interpretation based on varying perspectives and intentions.

[133] McLuskie, 1999, pp.28-29
[134] Rackin, 2005, p.42. when mentioning the above data Rackin relies on the following sources: S.P.Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (eds.), Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) pp.159, 174-175 and Gerald Eedes Bentley, *The Profession of Player in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp.94-95
[135] Rackin, 2000, p.42

Furthermore, McLuskie seems to overemphasise Shakespeare's dependence on previous sources and neglects his own creative contribution to the structure and meaning of his plays.

Dusinberre's idea about Shakespeare's women having a voice is appealing; however their freedom to choose and their possibilities for the pursuit of happiness are questionable. If one considers Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where she appears in only five of the play's twenty scenes, one sees that her freedom as well as her voice are limited. In her essay, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism," Elaine Showalter deals with the 'voice' and the representation of Ophelia. She underscores that for most critics, Ophelia has been an insignificant minor character who is of interest only in what she tells us about Hamlet. Showalter refers to another feminist critic, Less Edwards, who concludes that it is impossible to reconstruct Ophelia's biography, her life and love story, from the text. It is possible to imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet.

There is a sharp contrast between Dusinberre's idea of a feminist author (which is based on Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author") and Showalter's image of a feminist writer and critic. While Dusinberre concentrates on the voices of women in a text and neglects the role of the author (from her point of view even Shakespeare can be considered a feminist), Showalter emphasises the importance of gender, both of the author of the text and the critic who interprets it. Dusinberre's theory simply cannot fit into Showalter's larger concept of gynocritics, i.e. a female framework, and therefore is often attacked and labelled as male-oriented, failing to realise that women in the Renaissance were supposed to live up to the standards and expectations created by men and that their supposedly more liberated position in the Renaissance was only one step forward in a male-dominated structure, a men-centred universe.

A basic problem in Dusinberre's theory and a historical approach to Shakespeare in general, lies in its general understanding of the relationship between life and art. They presume that art reflects life and that a literary text from a particular period serves as a social document providing historical data for that period. This assumption fails to realise that a literary text should not be seen only within a historical context, but also in a literary, aesthetic context and that of an individual, since it was created by an individual artist during a certain period of history. A very good example of the fact that a play does not simply reflect the social context of its age is given by *Romeo and Juliet*. Lenz, Greene and Neely note that demographic historians postulate a late age of menarche and a very

late average age of marriage for women, that of 24, and men, that of 28, during the Renaissance.[136] However, in *Romeo and Juliet* the lovers get married at a much younger age. This of course does not mean that Shakespeare knew and deliberately altered contemporary statistics. It just points out that the relationship between life and art is not linear and one cannot be derived directly from the other.

It is likewise necessary to mention that Dusinberre did not pay attention to the fact that Shakespeare's choice of female characters was limited. There were no actresses; female parts were played by boys, who were possibly able to impersonate young women but could hardly personify all female realities, other 'faces' and ages. In addition, Shakespearean women become free only when they adopt the positions of men. Shakespeare gave women the chance to act for themselves, to put on male masks to experience certain freedom; for example, Viola in *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*. In spite of this, women always have to submit themselves at the end. If they cannot find themselves in the existing 'male-society,' if they cannot fit in, the only solution is suicide, the choice made by Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

To summarise then, although Shakespeare did incorporate the more or less liberal attitudes toward women of the late Elizabethan period into his plays, he can hardly be called a feminist. He analysed women within a structure created by men over millenia and expected them to speak, make choices and pursue their happiness in a male-centred universe. The word 'feminist' is much more radical and conscious of female issues than Shakespeare could have afforded. Therefore, Dusinberre's usage of the word feminist and "feminist propaganda"[137] in relation to the position of and attitudes toward women suggests confusion of terminology and the juxtaposition of two contradictory phenomena.

4.3. Restoring Women to Shakespeare's Plays

The second, text and character-based feminist approach to Shakespeare embraces a great variety of tone, style, attitudes and interpretation. Unlike the historical approach, this feminist critical enterprise, or more appropriately enterprises, examine the women's parts in Shakespeare's plays and try to compensate for the long 'male' critical tradition

[136] Lenz – Greene – Neely, 1980, p.8
[137] Dusinberre, 1994, p.6

that has tended to emphasise male characters and themes or to alter the negative images of female characters supported by traditional criticism.

Carolyn Lenz, Gayle Greene and Carol Neely identify four common motifs that feminist critics of Shakespeare share. First, they write, feminist critics try to liberate Shakespeare's women from the stereotypes to which they have too often been confined. Second, they examine women's relations with each other, calling attention to the importance and intensity of female friendship. Third, feminist critics analyse the nature and effects of patriarchal structures. Finally, they explore the influence of genre on the portrayal of women; they may note, for example, that women characters have different characteristic features in comedies than in tragedies.

Liberating women from stereotypes is closely connected to a thorough character analysis and psychological profile of female characters and to the reinterpretation of the critical tradition, the traditional interpretation of Shakespeare's female characters. Feminist critics might point out that characters such as Ophelia, Lady Macbeth or Desdemona are not simply saints, monsters or victims, such as they have long been perceived by critics. It is important to highlight that as with the male characters, these women are complex, rounded characters with an existence and importance beyond the male character's perception of them. Feminist critics also explore the extent to which stage productions and film adaptations contribute to maintaining such stereotypes of female characters.

In her essay, "Counsels of Gall and Grace: Intimate Conversations between Women in Shakespeare's Plays," feminist critic Carole McKewin concentrates on women's private conversations in Shakespeare's plays and assumes that these intimate talks provide opportunities for self-expression, adjustment to social codes, release, relief, rebellion and transformation. They provide space in which women can express their own perceptions and identities and can comment on masculine society. McKewin notices that women's shared companionship, mutual affection and intimacy take place apart from the world of men and therefore create a kind of subculture, which she describes as "counter-universe," a term first used by Simone de Beauvoir. The exploration of these scenes and this "counter-universe,"[138] McKewin explains, reveals the freedoms and constraints of women in the patriarchal society of Shakespeare's plays. She claims that nineteen of the plays include scenes of private talks between women, in which their dialogue is conducted apart from the spoken or silent presence of male characters.

[138] McKewin, 1980, p.118

McKewin explains that these private talks share some general characteristics. Privacy seems to be more emphasized in women's conversations than in men's, and the conversation is often set in an interior, such as the bedrooms or dressing rooms in *Much Ado About Nothing* or *Othello*, or the specific exclusion of society is evident through dialogue or stage directions. She claims:

> "Some feminine conversations in Shakespeare's plays circle around estates of mood or feeling (romance, unease, despair, frustration, anger). As such, these scenes seem like walled cities cut off from the metropolis. They are talk for talk's sake, and not the talk which gets things done. But such conversations can reveal a vital private truth and the springs of identity."[139]

The most frequently discussed private moments between women by feminist critics include the relationship and private conversations of Adriana and Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors*, Rosalind and Celia in *As You Like It*, Portia and Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, Regan and Goneril in *King Lear*, Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*. McKewin explains that although Shakespeare's comedies offer a rich variety of women's private scenes, the development of those conversations from the early to the later comedies shows that after the early comedies, the atmosphere darkens or is strained and minimal until finally, the "counter-universe" diminishes or vanishes altogether. She argues that the conversations of Rosalind and Celia in the forest have no equal in Shakespeare's other plays. In *Much Ado About Nothing* the atmosphere is darker and the scene in which Hero, Margaret and Beatrice converse in Hero's dressing room lacks the atmosphere of shared experience and understanding: Hero does not invite the others into her confidence. In the entire play, McKewin writes, the opportunity for honest, open exchange is lost. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola has no confidence and we are not invited into Isabella's crucial conversation with Mariana at the end of *Measure for Measure*. In the late romances, McKewin emphasises, Shakespeare apparently finds little use for such scenes. She concludes that the lack of dramatized communication between women may mean a darker comedy, or it may indicate that intimate conversation is no longer necessary for a woman's physic and social ease. Furthermore, it may point to the fact that Shakespeare may have chosen other ways of revealing a female character, soliloquy being one example.

[139] McKewin, 1980, p.120

McKewin's essay highlights the position of women from an unusual point of view. She concentrates on creating bonds between female characters – on sisterhood – and unlike other feminist critics who complain about and concentrate on women's absence in the plays in their analyses, McKewin points out that although the opportunity of women to establish friendships and express themselves verbally is limited – nineteen plays represent just a minor part of the Shakespearean heritage – these private talks *are* opportunities for self-realization and self-expression, and indicate Shakespeare's "art of overhearing the voices of women in an oppressive context, or the voices of women who are free, or discovering to be free."[140] The most typical examples of female friendship in tragedies are the friendship of Emilia and Desdemona in *Othello* and the relationship of Regan and Goneril in *King Lear*, who are connected by sisterhood and shared childhood experience as well as the evil nature of their intentions to gain power. These friendships will be dealt with and analysed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

The nature and effects of patriarchal structures are constant feminist issues. The general feminist standpoint is that patriarchy is the prevailing structure in the Shakespearean canon: the plays are characterized by male dominance. The patriarchal order can be analysed through various notions; however, its most conspicuous signs lie in the position of the father-character, his power and his status as a ruler, as well as the relationship of husband to wife. Feminist critics analyse the extent to which women characters challenge or attempt to resist the structures of patriarchy and if so, what consequences such resistance leads to.

Another topic that repeatedly engages the attention of feminist critics of Shakespeare is the different roles women play in different genres. Lenz, Greene and Neely analyse the differences between women's portrayal in comedies and tragedies, concluding that in comedies women are most often nurturing and powerful, and mutuality between the sexes may be achieved; in tragedies, the roles of women are more varied, constricted and precarious. While in comedies female characters achieve their ends by playing a part, in tragedy they are condemned for acting or relegated to the position of audience for male acting. The authors state:

[140] McKewin, 1980, p.129

> "Good women are often powerless, and powerful women are always threatening and often, in fact, destructive. (...) the women in the tragedies almost invariably are destroyed, or are absent from the new order consolidated at the conclusions."[141]

It is often a point of discussion to what extent the male disguise of the female characters in comedies makes possible their efficiency, freeing them from social restrictions, while in tragedies, women do not have the benefit of disguise. The all-male cast of Shakespeare's stage and its influence on women's representation encourages continuous discussion in feminist criticism. For critics such as Lisa Jardine, there are no women on Shakespeare's stage. She argues that the spectacle of a boy playing "the woman's part" was "an act for a male audience's appreciation."[142] She explains that women characters in the play were in fact transvestite boys and evoked homoerotic desire. What Jardine seems to forget is that there were women in the audience along with men (the epilogue of *As You Like It*, for instance, directly addresses women playgoers). Shakespeare's intention was greater than provoking erotic desire in his audience. The fact of cross-dressing was a daily part of dramatic practice. It becomes even more complex and complicated when some female characters in comedies are cross-dressed. Many feminist scholars analyse the circumstances and consequences of cross-dressing in plays such as *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It* and most agree that cross-dressing is a liberatory tool that helps the woman character obtain positions that could only be obtained by a man. For example, when Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* adopts male dress, she proves herself more than competent in entering the masculine world of the courtroom. Her disguise as Balthazar enables her to step out from the social limitations of her sexuality. Other feminist critics argue that the cross-dressing of female characters on stage fails to resist the patriarchal system. Jean E. Howard explains that ironically, instead of getting rid of gender difference or challenging male domination, female cross-dressing "often strengthens notions of difference by stressing what the disguised woman cannot do."[143] She concludes that although some plots show women gaining male power and male authority, they almost invariably end with the woman character ready to put off male clothes and, presumably, male privileges.

[141] Lenz – Greene – Neely, 1980, p.6
[142] quoted in Rackin, 2005, p.75
[143] Howard, 1998, p.50

4.4. Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare

Feminist adaptations of Shakespeare take place in two major fields. Firstly, feminist re-interpretations of Shakespeare happen on stage, throughout the performance of the particular Shakespearean play. Secondly, the feminist adaptation of Shakespeare is realised in the writing of new plays, adapting Shakespeare's characters and plots, making them fit to a new feminist context. The first concentrates on and demonstrates very well the phenomenon of woman as reader: a woman who reads, interprets and produces a creative output. The second highlights woman as writer: an independent artist who creates her own plots and, apart from interpretation, is also able to write and produce literary texts which challenge further interpretation.

The difference between feminist performances of Shakespeare and feminist 'rewritings' of Shakespeare is clearly indicated by the title of Lizbeth Goodman's essay, "Women's Alternative Shakespeares and Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare in Contemporary British Theatre." 'Women's Alternative Shakespeares' refers to the alternative performances of Shakespearean plays by feminist adaptors, whereas 'Women's Alternatives to Shakespeare' signals the crucial presence of female adaptations of Shakespeare's characters and plots in new plays which challenge the hegemony of the Shakespearean canon and give more space to the discussion and presentation of contemporary issues, providing more opportunities for women both to discover and rethink their own Shakespeare and explore, express and include their own identity in the canonical images and structures. On the other hand, a more liberal wave of feminist criticism refuses to use the term 'alternative' when discussing feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. Tilda Swinton explains that the term 'alternative' connotes less power, and in the controversy of mainstream and alternative theatre, it is always the alternative which is less influential. She claims:

> "My position is not alternative to me. (…) As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing "alternative" about my work at all. If I were to say that I'm taking an alternative stance, that's saying that I consider myself less powerful than someone else, less powerful than I could be. The work that I'm doing is the work that I need to do in order to be at my most powerful and most effective."[144]

[144] Lizbeth Goodman, 'Subverting images of the Female: and Interview with Tilda Swinton', New Theatre Quarterly, 6 (Aug. 1990), 222. quoted in Goodman, 1999, p.78

Swinton's insistent refusal to be defined as alternative and the effort of feminist criticism to define women as the mainstream can hardly be called a finished and complete achievement. It is hard to swallow that the work and projects of contemporary feminist criticism and theatre has fought its way into the mainstream and gained general acceptance and reputation. I even find it unnecessary to compete with or even ignore the cultural power of the Shakespearean heritage. The phenomenon of offering 'alternatives' to Shakespeare represents a more profitable path in making the literary canon more colourful and providing women the opportunity to have their own share of the cake without a pointless disregard of literary tradition. The history of feminist adaptations of Shakespeare is too short to claim itself part of the mainstream and even to declare that it is as powerful and effective as the Shakespearean heritage. It would contradict the basic idea of feminism as well, which includes a re-evaluation of power systems and redefinition of basic literary categories. Feminist adaptations of or alternatives to Shakespeare have a long way to go; it is time that will prove their innovative and creative power, their ability to change our perception of the representation of women in Shakespearean drama, and to offer us new (and presumably relevant) female positions, roles and perspectives.

The staging of a Shakespearean play by a feminist director is preceded by thorough review and discussion, together with a systematic reinterpretation of Shakespeare and the involvement of feminist critical theory. However, more and more feminist directors and actresses seem to realise that the parts for women in Shakespeare are comparatively few and composed largely of supporting rather than leading roles, which provides limited opportunity for feminist 're-thinkers' of a Shakespearean play to carry out their attempts to deconstruct the Shakespearean canon and provide an appropriate alternative. Therefore, more and more women directors and actresses in the late 20th century began to admit that the idea is not that women cannot play Shakespeare well, but rather that they can do more; perhaps they should move to more challenging roles, those written for them by other women. The question posed is not *how* to play Shakespeare but *whether* to play Shakespeare.

This question is not as simple as it first may sound. Firstly, this is because if feminist criticism and theatre refuses to play Shakespeare, it immediately has to provide an alternative to it. The only fruitful and adequate alternative would be provided by feminist adaptations of Shakespeare – meaning new texts by feminist authors. Secondly, the larger, related issue to this question is whether feminist writers and adaptors of

Shakespeare have something to say which is not contained in and cannot be interpreted from an original Shakespearean text: something creative which deserves funding, encouragement, performance and risk at the box office, the financial security provided by the cultural dominance of the Shakespearean canon. Can feminist adaptors provide a play which is not merely a parasite using the Shakespearean play's characters in order to ensure its own popularity, but an independent play asking new questions and offering challenging answers and opportunities, exploring part of the world that has previously been neglected? Can these new plays create or re-create Shakespeare's women and offer roles for strong female characters investigating the colourful sides of female identity which were omitted from the male texts of the past?

The appearance of feminist textual adaptors of Shakespeare alongside the emergence of new female playwrights fills in a gap on the palette of British playwrighting. Sue Parrish and Sue Dunderdale learned that out of the 620 plays produced by the major British repertoire companies and venues in 1982-83, only 42 (less than 6.8 %) were written by women. Of these, 22 were written by Agatha Christie. Of the 42, 14 were produced in studios (none by Agatha Christie). Parrish and Dunderdale therefore conclude that only 6 plays (less than 1 % of plays produced on main stages) were written by women other than Agatha Christie.[145] Lizbeth Goodman references a 1990 survey conducted by researchers for a Channel Four television series on women, which shows that of 435 plays produced by the National Theatre, only 10 were written by women.[146]

Although almost all of Shakespeare's plays have been at the centre of attention of feminist criticism and of interest to some 20th century feminist playwrights or directors, there are some genre- and play-related differences in the type and level of interest. Shakespeare's comedies have long been celebrated as an area of relative visibility and power for women; the comedies, especially those with cross-dressing and with talkative, strong female characters have held particular interest.

Shakespeare's historical plays have been least considered by either feminist rewriters of Shakespeare or feminist Shakespeare critics. In the Introduction of her anthology, *Transforming Shakespeare: Contemporary Women's Re-Visions in Literature and Performance*, Marianne Novy claims that the reason for this is that there are few

[145] Statistics compiled by Sue Dunderdale for the Conference of Women Theatre Directors and Administrators (CWTDA), published in Drama, 152 (1984), quoted by Goodman, 1999, p.72
[146] Goodman, 1999, p.72

large roles for women in the best known of them. Ironically, she points out, it appears that some historical plays, perhaps because of their relative unfamiliarity, have emerged as an area of greater opportunity for women directors.[147]

It is, however, Shakespeare's tragedies that have been the centre of attention of rewriters and re-thinkers, men and women alike. The adaptations of tragedies occupy the most space in the field of feminist Shakespeare adaptations. Marianne Novy explains that the relation of women writers to the past has often been thematized as a father-daughter issue, the common metaphor of 'the great fathers' and the missing mothers to describe the prevailing patriarchal practices in literature and male dominance in culture and society. Novy claims it is therefore not surprising *King Lear* has been of increasing interest to women in recent years.[148] Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, for example, a novel which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, follows *King Lear*'s plot; or Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, a novel that rereads *Lear*.

Novy's anthology suggests that the novel has long been the privileged place for women writers to rethink Shakespeare's plays. She states that women playwrights have been fewer by far than women in other genres. She lists the following plays as the best-known feminist drama adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy: *Ophelia* by Melissa Murray, *Lear's Daughters* by Elaine Feinstein co-authored with the Women's Theatre Group, *Pinball* by Alison Lyssa, *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* by Paula Vogel and *Goodnight Desdemona (Good morning Juliet)* by Ann-Marie MacDonald. I would complete the list with the play of the British dramatist Bryony Lavery, entitled *Ophelia*.

These adaptations do rely on the reader's or the audience's acquaintance with the Shakespearean text. However, they play with this knowledge, challenge it; they are able to store cultural inheritance, the messages of ancient and previous cultures, the prevailing systems of the canon, just as a computer stores multiple volumes of information. However, this cultural inheritance or cultural code is transformed, shifted into a new dimension, by the adaptor's commands. The 'postmodern computer' stores, cuts, juxtaposes, shifts, transforms, combines, accepts commands, from time to time deletes, and of course adds new elements, backgrounds and updated contexts.

[147] Novy, 1999, p.4
[148] Ibid., p.5

Novy claims that it is often the treatment of a subordinate group in Shakespeare that mobilizes authors to re-visions.[149] Feminist adaptations lift the minor (female) characters of the original plays into major positions, expanding their roles while relegating the major (male) characters to minor roles. The effect they achieve is that female issues become more central and more updated. They also undermine the reader's conventions about what major and minor roles mean and suggest that the two – just like other binary oppositions – can easily be exchanged and subverted.

The manifold aspects and colourful methods of both feminist adaptations and feminist criticism of Shakespeare in general represent crucial and complex ways of attempting to define and express female identity. They prove that both the form and the 'content' of Shakespeare's plays are open to further interpretation and can be implanted in new contexts where both men and women play a part. In Marianne Novy's words: "His plays are too powerful to forget, but twentieth-century writers, directors, and performers can make us remember them differently."[150]

[149] Novy, 1999, p.8
[150] Ibid., p.9

CHAPTER 5

FEMALE IDENTITY IN *HAMLET* AND *OPHELIA*

5.1. Hamlet and the Feminists

The aim and focus of feminist approaches to *Hamlet* vary widely, as does the colourful nature of feminist criticism in general. The broadest definition of feminist criticism works under the assumption that women have been oppressed by men and by social, cultural and literary structures. Accordingly, feminist approaches to *Hamlet* accept this assumption and concur that the representations of the female characters are limited, determined by social prejudices and restrictions. At the same time, feminist criticism of *Hamlet* asserts that the analyses and reception of the women in *Hamlet* have highly been influenced by critical tradition, which has been predominantly male and has many times misinterpreted, devalued or ignored women altogether. Therefore, feminist criticism does not simply attempt to focus on women, it also tries to 'restore' women in the play, and to highlight the nature of patriarchy and its consequences on women.

Feminist focus usually falls on the characters Ophelia and Gertrude, but critics have taken different stances in their analyses of both male and female characters in the play. Feminist criticism also calls attention to the institution of marriage, by focusing on Gertrude's relationship with Claudius, the relationship between the personal and the political, women's status, sexuality, patriarchal social structures that shape women's lives, women's representations, family relations, and the constituents and formation of both male and female identities.

One type of feminist approach to *Hamlet* derives from feminist Shakespeare criticism, which concentrates on Shakespeare's powerful women characters and celebrates their virtues, manipulative power and assertiveness, reinterpreting the characteristic features and roles of women who appeared more subordinate and insignificant in traditional criticism. Critics may call attention to the power of Gertrude, who was able to maintain the power she had when she was the wife of old Hamlet via her marriage with Claudius. Her hasty marriage is portrayed as necessary for both her survival and Hamlet's protection.

In a mirror image of this approach, Ophelia's madness is not merely passive and symbolic, but dramatically and psychologically revelatory. What Ophelia presents to the court of Elsinore in her speech are in fact fragmented images and references to the court's corruption and wickedness. Her songs of madness are interpreted as songs of protest, Ophelia's choice not to be silent anymore. This 'choice' becomes questionable when one considers that her songs and revelations are the manifestations of a disturbed and unstable mind.

Another feminist approach to *Hamlet* emphasises the subordinate positions of Gertrude and Ophelia in the play. It acknowledges that these women characters are very much victims of male power and patriarchy. Coppélia Kahn writes about "Hamlet's well-known misogyny and preoccupation with Gertrude's faults."[151] Lisa Jardine argues that the drama serves men's needs to contain women's power, reflecting "the period's misogynist anxieties."[152] This type of feminist reading of *Hamlet* concentrates on the limited roles of Gertrude and Hamlet, emphasising that they are defined and define themselves in relation to men; more specifically, to the men they love. Until her madness ensues, Ophelia is dominated and subordinate, repeatedly an object of male authority, manipulation and control. Her father and brother control her chastity; Claudius uses her as a tool to trap Hamlet; Hamlet calls her a whore and orders her to a nunnery. Her identity is defined via her relationships to men and her self-expression is restricted by silence, her lack of language and the limited space she is given in the play.

5.2. A New Perspective on Endings

Anglo-American feminist literary criticism analyses the structure and elements of classical genres, including tragedy. Among the structural elements given a central role by feminist theatre critics are feminine and masculine rhymes and tragic endings.

J. A. Cuddon defines masculine rhyme as a single monosyllabic rhyme, such as thorn/scorn at the end of a line. He points out that this is the most common type of rhyme in English.[153] A stressed syllable at the end of a line can be called a masculine ending. Feminine, or double rhyme, Cuddon writes, is when words of two or more syllables

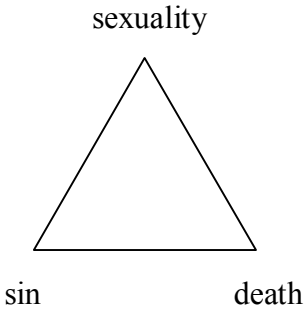
[151] Kahn, 1981, p.133, quoted in Hattaway, 1987, p.64
[152] Neely, 1987, p.15
[153] Cuddon, 1992, p.531

rhyme; feminine ending has an extra, unstressed syllable at the end of a line of verse.[154] Feminist criticism encourages reconsidering the naming of certain structural elements in literary criticism and aims to redefine the conventional understanding of the endings of tragedies. Philippa Berry is one of the central figures among feminist critics and brings to the interpretation of Shakespeare's tragic endings an unusual slant. In her provocative book, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies,* she reinterprets the critical perceptions of death in Shakespeare's tragedies from a feminist perspective. Through close-reading of the main tragedies, including *Hamlet*, she shows that these plays disfigure death as a bodily end through a network of images gathered around female characters.

Berry points out that in a traditional approach to Shakespearean tragedy, critics (for example Michael Neill) say that tragedy is a deeply teleological form which stresses that the meaning of the work lies in its tragic ending. She points out that, according to Neill, both the formal structure and the narration of tragedy are directed towards *telos*, or the end, in and through which heroic male identity dominates.[155]

Female critics, however, concentrate on the language, especially on the process of word games, which are found in the texts of Shakespeare's tragedies. Unlike Neill, Berry points out that concentrating on language, especially that of female sexuality in tragedies, leads us to a completely different way of understanding these endings. Berry calls them "unfinished, female endings."[156] She also questions the absolute physical destruction of the characters in the endings and redefines the "end" of tragedy into the beginning of meaning. She attacks our acceptance of the convention of the physical destruction of the characters. She reads it differently, accepting it as a new beginning. Berry explains that during the Middle Ages, the Christian concept of identifying sin with death is supported by the connection of female sexuality with death. This explicitly means that any sign of sexuality represents Eve's moral evil and is a source of human sin, i.e. death and eternal damnation. She says that expression of sexual desire is connected with female seduction, moral guilt, and is therefore "justifiably" punished in traditional medieval society. She sees the sexuality–sin–death relationship as triangular, more clearly illustrated by a triangle of relations:

[154] Cuddon, 1992, p.337
[155] Berry, 2001, p.133
[156] Ibid., p.134



Berry notes that Shakespearean tragedies make the triangle of sexuality–sin–death stronger and even more complicated. These plays, she writes, show the connection between sexuality and death through the erotic desire of the heroines and their process of dying. Berry explains that Ophelia is represented in two roles. At first, she is the "Queen of May," a symbol of fertility, carrying several symbolic flowers. Later, Ophelia – more specifically, her body – becomes a symbol of death, through the possible interference between body and water. Berry concentrates on Gertrude's description of Ophelia's drowning and discovers that Ophelia's drowning in the river is a special type of metamorphosis, where the relationship of the body to water is highly erotic.

Gertrude
There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down the weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and endued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,

Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

(*Hamlet*, Act 4 Scene 7, 138 – 155)

Berry posits that the flowers stand for Ophelia's sexuality and the willow for her disappointment in love. It is possible to extend and uphold Berry's argumentation with another example from Shakespeare's play that maintains the image of Ophelia as "Queen of May," symbol of fertility:

Ophelia
There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray, love, remember. And there is pansies; that's for thoughts.
Laertes
A document in madness – thoughts and remembrance fitted.
Ophelia
There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb-grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died. They say **a** made a good end.

(*Hamlet*, Act 4 Scene 5, 175-184)

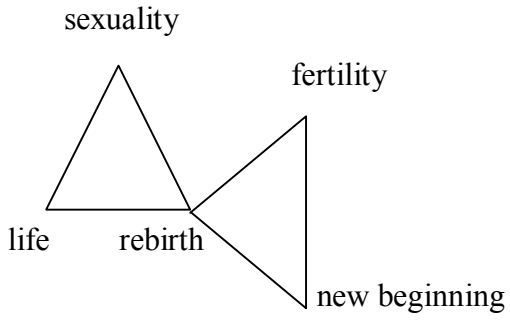
In her madness, Ophelia brings different flowers, each carrying a symbolic meaning. In his edition of Shakespeare's complete works, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blackmore Evans explains the symbolic meaning of Ophelia's flowers: The rosemary is the symbol of remembrance, mainly of weddings and funerals. This one she gives to Laertes. The fennel and columbines are symbols of flattery and ingratitude, respectively, and she gives them to the Queen. The rue is a yellow flower, but as a verb 'rue' also means to feel sorry about an event and wish it had not happened, to regret bitterly. Therefore, the rue flower symbolises sorrow. Ophelia gives rues to King Claudius. Daisies and violets are the symbols of dissembling, faithfulness and unhappy love;

together with some rues, these are the flowers that Ophelia keeps, as if she was keeping sorrow, regret, dissembling and faithfulness for herself.[157]

To return to Berry's assumption and Ophelia's second role of representation (more concretely in Act 4 Scene 7), Ophelia's effort to crown the boughs of the willow reminds Berry of the pagan decorations and garlands made during the feasts in May. Berry explains that, according to Joel Fineman, the willow is associated with male desire and gives this tree male and highly erotic personification. He writes that when Ophelia wants to hang her garlands on the "hoary leaves" of this tree, the "pendent boughs" are like male genitals.[158]

Berry emphasises that Ophelia's death carries the sexual vitality of May games. She plays with the word "hoary," which, she writes, evokes womanly desire or desire for a woman, based on the similarity of the expressions of "hoar" and "whore." She adds that a mermaid, to which Ophelia was compared, was a label for prostitutes, while the sexual act was associated with sinking under the water and song of mermaids. Ophelia falls into the river, onto her back, then her clothes spread wide as if her body was growing larger, as would the body of a pregnant woman.

Berry explores the Christian triangle of sexuality–sin–death from a totally new point of view. It is based on the "sexual process" and the "duality of Ophelia's death" in the water. Berry perceives the image of Ophelia's dead body lying in water as rebirth, a new beginning.[159] She explains that Ophelia's death is depicted as erotic dissolution in water, it carries the dimension of fertility and is associated with the birth of Venus (the goddess of love) out of water. Hence, the triangular relationship is exceeded and enlarged. So, in Berry's essay I see a double triangle, i.e. two attached triangles, which I illustrate in the following way:



[157] Evans, 1974, p.1174
[158] Berry, 2001, p.137
[159] Ibid., p.138

As the reader can see, Berry changes *telos*, death by rebirth, which is understood as fertility and a new beginning at the same time. The reader receives a new point of view through which physical destruction gains new meaning; it becomes the starting point of new life, revived hope and a new beginning. Ophelia's death – or better to say rebirth – takes the reader into a completely different sphere of perception, as if it was the opening of redefining conventions about death, acceptance and 'rules' of existence. Therefore, both the triangle of sexuality–sin–death and the conventional understanding of the endings of tragedies are altered. Sexuality means sin no longer; the ending is 'unstressed,' open and unlocked, a springboard looking forward to a new 'flowery' dimension.

5.3. Limited Identity: Space for Ophelia and Space for Hamlet

"Ophelia: And I, of ladies most deject and wretched"
(*Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 1, 95)

The space any given characters are afforded in a literary text influences the reader's idea about the identity of these particular characters. Analysis of this space points to the amount of space a character is allowed to enter and the chance s/he is given to express his/her identity. This seemingly formal analysis also highlights the extent to which meaning and interpretation are influenced by space and representation in the play.

Ophelia appears only five times out of the twenty scenes of the play, while Hamlet is given the chance to speak in thirteen of them. This simple statistic reveals why so many critics neglect or raise so many different, even contradictory, ideas or interpretations of Ophelia.

The relationship of the character with other characters is another aspect according to which the character's space is worth examination. In these relationships, the character is able to express his/her thoughts, feelings, desires, wishes, agreements or disagreements. The importance of friendship in the expression of a character's feelings and thoughts is expressed by Rosencrantz:

Rosencrantz
You do freely bar the door of your own
liberty if you deny your griefs to your friend.

(*Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 2, 325-326)

This means that if the character is not able to share his/her thoughts with other characters – friends – the character cannot be regarded as free.

We can see Hamlet as being in the centre of a whole net of relationships. Horatio, Bernardo, Marcellus, his friends from Wittenberg, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his friends from childhood, are all helpful 'means' of revealing the character of Hamlet. Hamlet himself prefers calling his relationship with Horatio 'friendship,' which suggests an intimate exchange of thoughts.

Hamlet

I am glad to see you well.

Horatio – or I do forget myself.

Horatio

The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

Hamlet

Sir, my good friend; I'll change that name with you.

(*Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 2, 160-163)

In addition to his friends, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia and even Polonius are characters who provoke Hamlet to speak and enable his self-expression. Furthermore, the text also provides a number of comments on Hamlet's attitude and behaviour, and these are through the speech of other characters. In his preface to *Hamlet* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, G. Blakemore Evens points out that different characters construct different theories about Hamlet, about his madness. For example, Evens notes, Polonius explains it as disappointed love; the Queen says it is because of the recent death of king Hamlet and her sudden marriage ("His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage"); Rosencrantz and Guildenstern point at "thwarted ambition" and Ophelia at "simple lunacy."[160] It is important to stress that the more comments, the more contradictions within the comments we get from the text, the deeper and fuller the character's identity becomes. The text itself suggests the contradictory and complex nature of Hamlet's identity and the great range of possible interpretations.

[160] Evans, 1974, p.1138

If we examine Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, we learn that the network of her friends or company is much more limited. She is surrounded by people and authorities, 'tellers' (e.g. Laertes, Polonius), rather than friends, 'listeners'. Her feelings are hidden from the reader, as her role is restricted to 'seeming' rather than 'being.' She does not have any friends who would inform the reader/audience about her childhood, reflect on her behaviour, or add anything to her identity. She seems to have no past; the only information we know about her education is that she is supposed to be obedient to her father and male members of the family. The authorities that surround her – Polonius, Laertes, Hamlet – tell us more about social restrictions and influences in the formation of female identity in the period rather than about Ophelia's personal identity, her inner feelings and identity formation. She is an object rather than an active subject, she is denied the space to speak, lacks language and therefore her identity seems to be reduced to the phenomenon of madness, which is then interpreted as a catalyst for Hamlet's self-formation.

The lack of space provided for women in *Hamlet* has encouraged feminist critics to make female images sharper by lamenting and trying to answer questions that surround the characters. These would include: Was Gertrude involved in the murder of her previous husband? Did she have an affair with Claudius before the death of old Hamlet? How deeply involved were Ophelia and Hamlet? Speculations and answers have been created to make up stories for female characters, the intention being to give them a past and make their 'story' less minimal and subordinate by shifting them from minor characters to protagonists. However, for other feminist critics, including Linda Bamber, what is not included in the text does not exist. She claims that Gertrude's involvement in the death of the former King Hamlet, her innocence or guilt is not really at issue at all.[161] Gertrude is simply a character whom we can never fully know. Her involvement in the crime is ambiguous, firstly because there is no firsthand evidence; no information is revealed by the text concerning Gertrude's feelings or thoughts. Just as with Ophelia, she is denied a voice in her own defence or self-expression.

The space female characters are given to express and develop their identity in *Hamlet* also depends on the mode of representation and the images by which they are represented. These images reveal much not only about Ophelia's and Gertrude's identities, but also about attitudes toward women in general.

[161] Bamber, 1982, p.75

Ophelia is mainly represented through symbols. She appears as Queen of May, distributing her flowers, giving away wild flowers and herbs, symbolically 'deflowering' herself in her madness. Her connection to the natural world serves as juxtaposition to the artificial construct of the court of Elsinore. Elaine Showalter claims that Ophelia's death by drowning is associated with female fluidity, as opposed to masculine aridity. She highlights the symbolic connection between women, water and death in literature and states that water is the organic symbol of "the liquid woman whose eyes are so easily drowned in tears, as her body is the repository of blood, amniotic fluid, and milk."[162] The interpretation of the symbolism of Ophelia's representation is more like creating a post-identity for Ophelia through the history of critical interpretations, which proves that apart from textual analysis, linguistic elements, relationships and "conversational behaviour," the history of critical discourses also contributes to construction of the literary character's identity.

Hamlet's attitude toward women and his frequently discussed "misogyny" denote an important theme in the discourse of female representation in the play and its attitude toward women. "Frailty, thy name is woman," says Hamlet in his first scene, which suggests deep disappointment in female morality. However, Hamlet's attitude toward women reveals more about him than it does about the play's message regarding the true nature of women. I believe that the play does not provide evidence to support Hamlet's criticism of women, though neither does it challenge those views to any great extent. Hamlet's disgust of women stems from his disgust at his mother's sexuality and seeming unfaithfulness to his dead father, which he projects onto Ophelia, as well. His disgust of and disappointment by women is not larger than his disgust of men: "Man delights not me – nor woman neither," he says to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in Act 2 Scene 2, 309-310. Hamlet notoriously refers to himself as a promiscuous woman when he finds himself unable to revenge his father's death.

Hamlet
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,

[162] Showalter, 1992, p.284

A scullion!

(*Hamlet*, Act 2 Scene 2, 578-583)

He calls himself a "whore," a "drab" and a "scullion;" however, his seeming hatred of female sexuality and vanity stems from his disgust of his own inability to act. His confession to have loved Ophelia deeply later in the play and his deep sorrow over the loss of love because of his own refusal and inability to accept it arouses pity in the reader and at the same time makes the image of Ophelia more positive, a symbol of the innocently mistreated victim. Linda Bamber claims that Hamlet's "misogyny" is the consequence of his father's death, a version of anger he feels because his previous world, in which his identity was given priority, comfortably centred on the "masculine Self"[163] and based on the relationship between father and son, has been destroyed together with his sense of centrality. His aggression toward women, Bamber explains, is later transformed into political aggression as soon as Hamlet himself is transformed into "a man of action." According to Bamber, Hamlet's "misogyny" ceases at the point where he makes his voyage to England and arranges the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; his doubt and hesitation are transformed into action and deed. With this change, the representation of women in the play shifts, lifted onto a more positive level that becomes less morally loaded and blameful. However, Hamlet's change in attitude does not prevent the tragic death of either Ophelia or Gertrude, nor does it provide any reconciliation for women.

5.4. Shakespeare: Hamlet versus Ophelia – From Life to Death

Understanding female identity as a social construct, the target of social influences and the interplay between interior and exterior, puts the place of Ophelia and the outcome of the play into an interesting light. The development of the plot is heading towards an ambiguous outcome, where destruction and death are the main features. Female identity is depicted as being dependent upon male authorities and, after the disappearance of these male characters, it totally collapses, turning out to be weak until eventually it vanishes.

One of the main engines that the dynamics of Hamlet is based on is revenge. Shakespeare was quite familiar with vindictive plays, which had also frequently appeared

[163] Bamber, 1982, p.72

in previous periods, and he integrated the characteristic features of this type of play in a particular way. In his book, A Preface to Shakespeare's Tragedies, Michael Mangan deals with the problem of revenge plays and concentrates on the theological understanding of revenge. He claims that Hamlet's revenge is problematic, since he is hesitant to act. However, his hesitation is reasonable. Both the Church and the State, the founders of conventional morality, considered revenge sinful. It was generally acknowledged by both the Church and State that private revenge was not to be tolerated, as it would endanger the soul and social position of the revenger. The basic position of the Church was based on the Bible, where, Mangan writes, revenge was clearly stated to be the 'privilege' of God. He quotes:

> "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord"[164]

Thus, private revenge is condemned, as it is against the law and the order of God. Christian ideology is based on love, including the love of one's enemies.

> "But to you who hear I say, Love your enemies; do well
> to those who hate you;
> Bless those who curse you, pray for those who revile you.
> To him who beats you on the cheek, offer the other
> also, and from him who takes away your cloak, do not
> withhold your tunic either."[165]

Such ideology cannot tolerate revenge.

The condemnation of revenge by the State, Mangan explains, is based on the privilege of the State to make decisions and give orders in questions of justice. Mangan returns to the definition by Francis Bacon, the philosopher and lawyer. Bacon writes:

> "If the Church condemned revenge because it was contrary to the law of God, the state condemned it because it usurped the function of the law of the land. The revenger, by taking the law into his or her own hands, was implicitly challenging the political authority of the state."[166]

[164] The Bible: Romans 12:19, quoted in Mangan, 1991, p. 68
[165] The Bible, Luke 6:27-29
[166] Bacon: Essays, quoted in Mangan, 1991, p. 69

The above assessment indicates that from the point of view of the State, taking revenge means employing violent, individually arbitrary solutions as well as questioning the competence – the very authority – of the State and the rightness of the law, culture and official order. One can conclude that a revenger is gambling with his/her soul, destroying his/her surroundings (the network of earthly relationships), and building a path towards eternal damnation.

The problem of revenge and breaking the law of the Church and State introduces a crucial question. Mangan notices that the revenger has lost faith in "the proper mechanism of justice."[167] This means that the revenger does not agree with the existing state, he is disillusioned and considers the system a certain deviation. This raises the following questions: What happens if the existing order fails to fulfil its original function? Do we have to obey the law of a system that is no more in accordance with the rights and liberties of its individual members? Mangan explains that in the official order, the universe is controlled by Divine Providence; however, the will or order of this Divine Providence is realised by an "earthly authority."[168] In other words, the 'good will' of God can be carried out only through the actions of human beings. However, if people decide not to 'participate' in the realisation of this 'good will,' the system becomes corrupted and poisoned. In his book, *An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism: Hamlet*, Michael Hattaway deals with the question of revenge in *Hamlet*. He quotes John Bradshaw, who claims "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."[169] In this sense, the revenger gets permission to take revenge.

Hamlet's knowledge about the Church's and State's ideas regarding revenge is clear. He is aware of the consequences of committing such a deed, which stands opposite to the teaching of the Bible; he imagines his possible punishment, the punishment of his soul and conscious.

Hamlet

To sleep, perhaps to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

(*Hamlet*, Act 3 Scene 1, 67-68)

[167] Mangan, 1991, p.69
[168] Ibid., p.69
[169] Bradshaw: The Oxford Book of Quotations, cited in Hattaway, 1987, p. 29

On the other hand, his admiration of his father and disgust toward his mother's new marriage incite him to revenge his father's shameful murder and get rid of the usurper, Claudius. He has two options: the first is to remain silent and passive ("But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue." *Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 2, 159), and become part of a corrupted system. The other is to seize the power of distributing justice and to restore the original order. However, his delay and inability to act causes his own suffering. As it is typical for the Renaissance hero, Hamlet makes a mistake in the translation of his thoughts into reality. Hamlet cannot decide, hesitates too long and poisons too many relationships (including his relationship with Ophelia) during his wait. This leads to catastrophe and the result is physical destruction.

What is the woman's part in this world of revenge, law, justice and duty? How does Ophelia fit into this social structure, the realm of Biblical law and the law of the State, and what is her contribution to the outcome of the play? Ophelia's role, and female role in *Hamlet* in general, do not play a significant part in the realisation of revenge and the great dilemma between duty and conscience, passivity and action. It can neither influence nor urge decision-making, it cannot do anything in order to avoid revenge and subsequent destruction. Ophelia herself lacks the option of free choice, and without the ability of decision-making, her identity seems to be socially restricted and directed. How could she influence the flow of action if she could not control her own decision-making and thoughts? She appears in several subjected positions –daughter, sister, lover – however, there is no relationship in the play within which she appears as a truly independent subject. Though we do not know a lot about her past, her previous education must have included absolute obedience to the male members of her family, relying on other people's judgement and placing chastity and the reputation for chastity above all other virtues. She is driven into a rather passive, objectified position. She is surrounded by powerful men, who tell her how to behave and what to think.

Ophelia
I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
Polonius
Marry, I will teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay
Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly
Or – not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,

Running it thus – you'll tender me a fool.

(*Hamlet*, Act 1 Scene 3, 104-109)

Polonius is not just telling his daughter what to think, but also intends to protect his own interests: Ophelia should "tender [her]self more dearly" otherwise she will "tender [him] a fool". His primary concern is that Ophelia act according to basic social criteria and expectations, following the appropriate rules of behaviour because her deeds reflect back on him as a father and an important public figure.

Ophelia's identity is constructed out of social expectations and familial relationships based on patriarchal structures and male dominance. Her identity rests upon her relationship with men. When these powerful men disappear – Hamlet cruelly refuses her, Polonius dies and is killed by her lover, Laertes is on the other side of the world – her identity collapses; the removal of male dominance results in her loss of identity. She cannot live in a society any longer where she is not able to maintain her identity independently, without 'outside' props. She goes mad.

Ophelia's madness is definitely a determining symbol in the play. In her essay, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Criticism," Elaine Showalter analyses the connection between female insanity and female sexuality. She argues that female madness is connected with the female body and the play incorporates Elizabethan conventions for depicting female insanity, usually connected with hysteria, a typically female state of mind and way of behaviour. Moreover, Showalter refers to the traditional understanding of Ophelia's madness proffered by the psychiatrist, R. D. Laing. Laing, Showalter writes, views Ophelia's madness as schizophrenia. He stresses that Ophelia represents an "empty space," there is no one in her madness, it is a dead, empty space without action and utterances, "a vacuum where there was once a person."[170] This idea of Ophelia's vacuum stands for mental destruction and absence. Although her madness liberates her from social restrictions and ways of proper behaviour, she cannot be claimed to be free, since her final assertion of individuality could only be carried out behind the mask of insanity, the irresponsibility of mental distraction. She is not able to break free of her prescribed roles; on the contrary, she becomes helpless and hopeless. In the world of Elsinore her only choice is suicide. However, her death is not heroic, it is tragic.

[170] R. D. Laing. *The Divided Self*. Quoted in Showalter, 1992, p. 291

Apart from Ophelia's inability to find a place in the existing social structure and maintain an independent identity, the development of the play's dynamics from life to death is further supported by the contrast between the figures of Hamlet and Fortinbras, and the ultimate consequences of this contrast. Both of them are young men, men of 'high degree,' though they stand for different lifestyles. Both Fortinbras and Hamlet have a certain duty: both are concerned with revenge. Fortinbras, as we find out from other characters' speeches in the text (for example Horatio's speech in Act 1 Scene 1), wants to re-conquer the lands taken by Denmark. Although he is inexperienced, he is determined and quick, definitely a man of action. He is also a soldier, the head of an army, who decides to solve the existing problems and change the existing order by violence: war. In strong contrast, Hamlet stands for philosophy; he is a man of thoughts. During his studies in Wittenberg before the death of the old king, he was never persuaded to perform action, his life was devoted to philosophy. After Hamlet's death and the tragic massacre, Fortinbras appears and takes control over the country. Symbolically, this can be viewed as the victory of 'action,' in fact, of violent action, as Fortinbras represents fight, army and war. Ironically, Hamlet, the man of philosophy is buried as a soldier. Even the last words of the tragedy are connected with war:

"Go bid the soldiers shoot."

(*Hamlet*, Act 5 Scene 2, 357)

In other words, with the victory of Fortinbras, the system of thoughts, philosophy, hesitance, but also corruption and intrigues, are replaced by another regime: a system of violence, war and military dominance, a system which brings destruction and death.

5.5. Ophelia Revised

Bryony Lavery's play, *Ophelia*, originates from a feminist theatre undertaking of the Stantonbury Campus and Collage Theatre Companies, in which a group of female actors intended to stage a Shakespearean play, but found out that the number of good female parts within the plays was not satisfactory. Finally, the two companies decided to do a production which would bring together a number of female characters from several

Shakespearean plays. The director, Rosemary Hill, asked Bryony Lavery to write a script for them.

Lavery's play is in fact not a rejection of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; rather, it is an attempt to queue his strongest female characters, interpreting them in ways which raised gender issues, and giving them excuses and explanations for some of their actions in the Shakespearean play. Though the play includes several female characters, the central role is taken by Ophelia and the plot is a kind of continuation of *Hamlet*, as it starts when the soldiers of Fortinbras look through the castle and take the dead bodies away. They find a group of actors in the basement rehearsing a play written by "a young lady of the court" called *The Tragedy of Ophelia, Lady of Denmark*, which is an allusion to the Shakespearean full title, *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. Fortinbras commands them to perform it and the play-within-a-play starts, retelling the story of *Hamlet* from Ophelia's perspective. In the end, it is revealed that the author of this play performed to Fortinbras' court is none other than Ophelia.

The primary concern of *Ophelia* is to challenge the interpretation of the character of Ophelia as an obedient, depressed, rejected young lady who pursued happiness and love partly to complete her familial duty, which led her to destruction. Ophelia is not just a character in the play nor its protagonist, but also the author of the script of the play-within-a-play, and its director as well. She turns out to be the leading actor found by Fortinbras; being an excellent swimmer, she survived her 'drowning,' returned to the castle and joined the group of actors, wrote a play about her story and after performing it for Fortinbras, decided to leave Elsinore and give birth elsewhere to her child, whose father is not Hamlet, but her brother, Laertes. The role of Ophelia as a playwright and director, an independent, self-conscious subject ready to make decisions and without need of any authorities to express her identity, juxtaposes the representation of *Hamlet*'s Ophelia, speculating on how the ending of *Hamlet* and the destiny of Ophelia might have been different. It also reinterprets our understanding of female identity in *Hamlet*. Lavery's Ophelia is not an object, she is an active subject, an agent who directs other characters, gives commands and decides who speaks as well as where and when they are allowed to speak. She is free to express her opinions and feelings: like sadness, disappointment, even anger and revenge. She is given a nurse and female friends (e.g. Raag, Tottir, Katherina and Celia). Her network of relationships is expanded and her 'seeming' is replaced by action, by 'doing.' The plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is extended by adding a story-line in which she is sexually abused by her brother, Laertes, and the

result of this incestuous relationship is that Ophelia becomes pregnant, expecting the child of her brother. Apart from the social position of women, Lavery raises some burning familial issues; she portrays incest and sexual violence as a weapon against women in an oppressive, patriarchal family. Ophelia cannot tell anyone about this incest and her brother's behaviour, and the characters who know about it are either powerless to do anything about it (e,g, the servants) or are paid to be quiet (e.g. the Nurse). Lavery also points out the failure of the father-daughter relationship by depicting Polonius as an uncaring, domineering figure of authority rather than a worried father.

The play is characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity, the reader constantly feels driven to the borderline between fiction and reality. Uncertainty is supported by the metatheatrical element, the fact that there is a play-within-a-play. Ophelia is both the actor and the author of the play. The structure of the play is doubled. As John Barth emphasises, when the characters of a work of fiction become authors or readers of the work they are in, as in Ophelia's case, we are reminded of the "fictitious aspect of our own existence."[171] The emphasis of theatricality makes us doubt the certainty of our everyday 'reality.' The structure of the travelling players and Ophelia's play itself represents a framework in which Ophelia is saved, and in the end, this imaginary framework turns out to be reality, the reality of Fortinbras' time, Ophelia's reality, which is again fictive for the reader/audience.

The text and the plot of *Ophelia* is a wonderful example of the phenomenon of 'carnivalisation,' as if it was part of a playful and colourful carnival. It employs different characters from different plays, from different periods (Iras and Charmian come from the ancient times, the time of Cleopatra), from different countries (Lady Macbeth from Scotland, Lady Capulet from Italy, Goneril from England, etc.). The gathering of these characters, for example in Scene Nineteen, provides a great opportunity for the director to exhibit different costumes and styles, just like in a carnival. Bakhtin, the inventor of the term 'carnivalisation,' suggests that a carnival is a feast of becoming, change, and renewal, where people have the chance to discover illogical forms, the 'inside out,' the 'turnabout.' It liberates the individual to put on any kind of mask, to choose any kind of lifestyle and identity s/he wishes. The life of Ophelia, who is now an active participant in the 'carnival,' is completely changed and renewed at the end of the play. The actors take off their costumes, dismantle the scene and begin a new life, leaving the old one behind. Ophelia leaves all the bad things, fears and frustrations on the stage, packs them into a

[171] Barth, 1967, pp. 81-82

box together with the costumes and the props of the play she wrote, and is looking forward to a new beginning. This turning point is accompanied by music, singing and bright light, the signs of feasts and celebrations.

Ophelia
and all lies, betrayals, unkindness, woe
will henceforth happen only here upon the stage,
and in no other many-blessed worldly place!
(The light is now wonderful. Music has started, and
grows. Ophelia sings.)
the dawn
a new fresh day
the dew is fresh upon the grass
(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty-Three)

She is able to grab the opportunity and shape her future, to make a world for herself, where she can be what she pleases, where she can freely experience, explore and express her identity. The text constructs new worlds. Ophelia's new world is the one she creates in her play, the play-within-the-play, the world she imagines for herself and which eventually comes to pass. When finishing the performance, the actors, including Ophelia, collect the scenery and props to indicate the artificiality of their construction. At the same time, they point at the artificiality of the external world, the constructed world of the reader.

Uncertainty is an integral part of the characters' behaviours. The reader is not sure about Ophelia's future life, and even Ophelia is uncertain about her own fate.

Ophelia
I am content.
It is what you deserve.
What comes to me as yet is hid.
Go, cold dead man, to England.
(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty)

Among all of the characters, Hamlet is the most uncertain. He is not even sure about the stability of his "book-built ivory tower" (Scene Twenty); he is hesitant and lacks the ability to make a decision. He talks about the weaknesses and powerlessness of human will, and about the uncertainty of the future.

Hamlet
There'll be no more debate, Horatia,
all books lie
nothing happens as we intend
then we die.
(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty)

The reader's perception is disrupted, as well. Although Lavery uses the same characters that are in Shakespeare's tragedies, she disrupts our perception by giving them different genders. Horatio is replaced by the female Horatia, the intimacy of Horatio's and Hamlet's friendship is shifted onto a new level, compared to the intimacy of a female-male relationship. The characters steal the words of characters from other Shakespearean plays, for example Lady Macbeth uses Cordelia's 'nothing' in her speech:

Lady Macbeth
I take nothing with me but an empty space,
fear not, some germinating seed will soon,
occupy its echoing place…
tho 'nothing nothing nothing' it's only sound
twill grow within me and once more make me round…
(*Ophelia*, Scene Nineteen)

There are several characters from other Shakespearean plays: Lady Macbeth from the tragedy of *Macbeth*, Lady Capulet and the Nurse from *Romeo and Juliet*, Goneril from *King Lear*, Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, Charmian, a servant of Cleopatra, and so on. They remind us of several topics and discourses, and break the unity of the play. They are also a sign of indeterminacy, for they transform the meaning or the message of the play into a mixture of the messages of several plays, and disrupt the individuality of the play *Ophelia*. However, these female characters are not empowered in

the play. Though they support each other, they are not able to change the course of events. Goneril and Portia help Gertrude deal with Hamlet by arranging his voyage to England, but they cannot prevent his return and his duel with Laertes. Portia's wonderful skill of diplomacy and her wisdom are used only for solving a quarrel over sleeping arrangements. The Nurse is taking bribes, but she is only working in a system where she has no power to intervene in the flow of action. Katherina is talking about her true reason for obedience: "You have a prick keeps other pricks from shafting you!" Lavery's Katherina is as angry as the untamed shrew. She is depicted with the strong image of a pair of boxing gloves, pummelling her pillows in sleep. Lady Macbeth appears as a mother figure, who arrives at Elsinore heavily pregnant, but later suffers a miscarriage. Iras and Charmian appear as servants. Iras is murdered by Gertrude and her sister Charmian is determined to take revenge, unlike Shakespeare's Charmian, who commits suicide after Iras's death. However, Charmian cannot take revenge and instead she becomes an element in Gertrude's cruel games. Gertrude is the only one out of Lavery's female characters who appears as a villain. The traditionally negative representation of Gertrude is not challenged; on the contrary, Gertrude is the one who attempts to kill Ophelia. However, Gertrude is the most difficult character in the play. Her evil character is also given an element of pity, supported by an analysis of her marriage and her desire to have a child and be loved.

The relationship between Gertrude and Claudius is likewise highlighted from a different angle. Claudius, the brother of Gertrude's dead husband, the possible murderer of the previous king, does not deserve the status of a husband in *Hamlet*. Prince Hamlet is disgusted by the body of his mother and by imagining the sexual relationship between his mother and her uncle. The possibility of having a child as the fruit of a new marriage is not even mentioned in *Hamlet*. In *Ophelia*, this becomes one of the central questions. Gertrude is given a chance to express her feelings about her two marriages, about her preference for the second one, a marriage based on "fragrant love" and not a "thorny branch." She longs for the fruit of this marriage and the question of her age, that she could be too old for a new child, disappears as her desire is treated as normal and natural.

Gertrude

In Denmark's garden now two rose trees grow,
I planted this red one with Hamlet, my first spouse,
on its thorny branch grew Hamlet, my one son,

’tis the family tree of a Royal House…
I planted this white one with Claudius my fragrant love,
its perfume draws me to it across the air,
no white-petalled flower yet nestles in the green,
but God, I want to see it there!

(*Ophelia*, Scene Nineteen)

Lavery points out the coldness of the relationship between Hamlet and Horatia, through which the traditional, conservative approach to sexuality, human relations and the impersonality of intellectualism is figured out.

Hamlet
I will some English book bricks bring with me
and crenellate the ramparts with white Dover
chalk!
(They smile at one another. A pause. They shake hands.)
Why cannot all intercourse between our sex
be warm as this?

(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty,
the parting of Hamlet and Horatia)

Lavery’s *Ophelia* introduces ‘female issues’ such as control of female body, menstruation, loss of virginity (the Nurse finds a bloodstained sheet in the laundry), and housework (distributing laundry). She provides a picture of the complexity of the female world and the individuality of female identity. Lavery introduces a whole range of emotions, from positive to negative. These include envy, hypocrisy, selfishness, desire for keeping one’s high status and competition, all of them natural parts of female life.

The text of *Ophelia* requires a high degree of active participation both from the side of actors and directors and the side of the reader/audience. The text has to be ‘solved,’ yet there is an endless array of solutions. The punctuation of the text provides great freedom for the actors. In the last scene, there is a song performed by Ophelia. However, there is neither punctuation nor capitalisation, which would indicate pauses or intonation. Throughout the whole text, there is frequent usage of ‘…’ (ellipses), which may stand for different moods and emotions.

Player King

She'd have a life, a future, and a child…

Ophelia

All of which she has…

And friends to travel with…

(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty-Three)

It is upon the actor and the director to decide the meaning of these elliptical spaces, to choose suitable movements, gestures and moods. For example, in the aforementioned example, Ophelia can be determined, ironic, hesitant, nostalgic, and she may perform several activities during the song. The text provides so much freedom that two performances with two directors working with the same text may result in two totally different productions.

Active participation is not related only to directors and actors. The readers or the audience of the play can no longer remain passive spectators. *Ophelia* attacks the conventions, the cultural code and the cultural knowledge of the reader. If s/he wants to understand what is going on in the text or on the stage, s/he has to recollect his/her knowledge about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and compare it with this new interpretation. This is a cognitive process, or better said, a branch of processes which may result in a complete revision of conventions.

5.6. Lavery: Ophelia versus Hamlet – From Death to Life

Similar to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Lavery's *Ophelia* also deals with madness and revenge, though the realisations are different from those in *Hamlet.* The dynamics of the play and the development of female identity are led through a complex process which starts to develop on the 'ruins' and bad experiences of Elsinore, on the heap of dead bodies and heads towards a new beginning: the birth of a child and new opportunities.

Revenge gets into the hands of Ophelia. She is neither hesitant, nor afraid. The one who stands at the centre of her revenge, her target point, is Hamlet. Her first reaction is to revenge him physically, to destroy his body, just like he did with her father, so she collects weapons, guns and swords. In contrast to Hamlet, she is ready to act, led by

passion, bitter disappointment and anger, all of which motivate her to be active without the slightest hint of hesitation.

Ophelia
This will do!
I'll cleave the arm that thrust...separate it from its trunk,
just as it separated my father
from his life!
(*Ophelia*, Scene Sixteen)

Lavery highlights the fact that while Hamlet has lost a father, Ophelia has lost not just a father, but a lover and brother, as well. In addition, there was no mother to protect her. Therefore, Ophelia is the one who has the right to take revenge. Up to the sixteenth scene of Lavery's play, she intends to take her revenge with a weapon. However, when she emerges out of the water and meets Hamlet on the ship, the realisation of revenge takes a different direction. It is as if water had cleared her evil intention and changed her mind to choose another path. This road is not the road of killing, yet still, it brings a kind of 'intellectual' satisfaction. She confronts her 'watery' passion, vitality and courage with Hamlet's hesitation, coldness and intellectuality, and proves her emotional superiority. She is given the opportunity and space to express her anger and frustration.

Ophelia
You killed my father because you loved not yours!
You took my love and gave not yours!
You gave your grief to me but took not mine!
You told me all your nightmares
You talked of love
that said your words were play.
You gave me hope...
then snatched it straight away!
(Finally. she is exhausted. There is silence. Stillness.)
(*Ophelia*, Scene Sixteen)

After her speech, Ophelia is exhausted, she stops speaking. However, there is something mysterious in this silence, something powerful and victorious. She avoided murder, death, still she is content and free. She has chosen life. The sea and water in general are central symbols of the play, it highlights the positive and creative implications of the connection between water and femininity. "Mother Sea … let your waters break / and break me" says Ophelia in the first scene, suggesting a motherly image for the sea, rather than the connection between water and destruction, drowning. Water gives her freedom and energy; unlike in Hamlet, she is, ironically, an excellent swimmer and gains her freedom and new life via the liberating and cleansing energies of the sea.

The play's vitality and positive outcome are supported by the characters' search for identity, especially Ophelia's diverse and multiple identity. While Hamlet is characterised by a certain kind of selflessness and loss, Ophelia's strength and power to create a new beginning is supported by the multiplication of identity. In Scene Twenty, the reader is provided with a perfect picture of Hamlet's loss of and his search of identity. Hamlet seems to be hesitant even about his beliefs and worldviews. Although he is disappointed and tired, he is forced to continue his studies and obtain more intellectual experience in the realm of books and definitions. Still, it is Horatia who encourages him.

Horatia
My Prince, we know the nights at sea are long,
Here's a stout book, many many pages long,
and full of argument and sides and several
points of view…
Hamlet
(takes it) Here's an anchor. Here's a holding lead
…that I'd never cast myself from learning!
(*Ophelia*, Scene Twenty)

After Ophelia's arrival, Hamlet is impressed by the nature of Ophelia's vitality and identity. He strongly realises his 'absence' from the world and from action, the emptiness of his existence. The "cold dead man" envies "warm, living Ophelia" and his hesitance and absence are defeated by the determinacy and presence of her identity.

In Ophelia's case, we can recognise the multiplication of identity. Ophelia is depicted in many different roles, multiple 'selves' appear around her, all of which make

her even stronger and more stable. First of all, she appears as a victim. She is the victim of Hamlet, who killed her father, refused and deceived her; then she is the victim of Gertrude, who pretends to be a new mother to Ophelia, but intends to get rid of her by trying to drown her. Then, Ophelia appears in the role of a revenger, she is ready to take revenge on Hamlet, she hurts him physically to prove his insensibility and lack of life.

Ophelia
I'll fire this at his head,
show Man's invention unto Man!
(...)
Stand back, there's vengeance must be done!
I'll kill the first one stops my way!
(She points the musket at them.)
(*Ophelia*, Scene Sixteen)

The relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia has been analysed by many critics. There are many ideas about the quality of this relationship, to what extent they were close to each other. Lavery's answer is unambiguous and presented in Scene Eighteen.

Nurse
My girl Ophelia grows with child
yet no virgin blood the night of Hamlet wild
so who's the father, that is who pays?
the one has most makes childhood happy days!
(*Ophelia*, Scene Eighteen)

The Nurse is suggesting that the Ophelia was no longer a virgin the night she first slept with Hamlet. The sexual relationship between Laertes and Ophelia results in Ophelia's pregnancy. Lavery does not pay much attention to Ophelia's sibling incest; though she points to the crucial social issue of familial violence and rape, her emphasis is rather symbolic, it is depicted in the outcome of this relationship. The child that Ophelia is carrying stands for new life, a new beginning and free choice. The child cannot be Hamlet's (the child of the "cold, dead man" Scene Twenty*),* this would mean the continuation of coldness and insensibility. The new life that "warm, living Ophelia"

(Scene Twenty) is carrying in her body comes from Ophelia's family, her warmness, emotions and vitality.

To sum up, Ophelia's type of revenge, her action and finally her baby guide the play from disappointment and destruction to new hope and a new beginning.

CHAPTER 6

FEMALE IDENTITY IN *OTHELLO* AND *DESDEMONA: A PLAY ABOUT A HANDKERCHIEF*

6.1. *Othello* and the Feminists

There are only three women in *Othello*: Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca; however, the way these women are represented and behave, and how the male characters treat them have become of central concern to feminist Shakespeare criticism. The play provides a wonderful opportunity for feminist Shakespeare critics to investigate and expound on the roles women inhabit or are assigned in Renaissance society, contemporary female stereotypes, and the structures of patriarchy and how female characters accept them. A more text- and character-based feminist approach examines the space female characters are provided in the play to express their thoughts and identities verbally. It also elucidates the ways in which they comment on masculine society and what the nature of their private talks reveal about their relationships, women's relationships with each other, and their own identity.

The most frequent feminist critique of *Othello* and the representation of women in *Othello* is that they reflect the limited circumstances of women in that historical period, presenting a female stereotype that is obedient, subordinate, silent and passive. Gayle Greene surmises that the tragedy of *Othello* stems from men's misunderstandings of women and women's inability to protect themselves from society's conception of them.[172] Certainly, Desdemona appears as a soft, obedient character. She herself declares, "I am obedient"[173] and obeys Othello's orders from the early, happy phase of their relationship through to the later stages of his jealous ravings. She appears to have completely accepted her role as a subordinate and obedient wife. Considering her qualities of obedience and gentleness, she is ill-equipped to deal with Othello's aggression, dominance and authority. She never defends herself in public; she is unable to believe that such

[172] Greene, 2004, p.658
[173] *Othello*, Act 3, Scene 3, 89

accusations can even occur, let alone be true. In her childish, naive goodness she cannot even conceive of such vice.

Desdemona
Dost thou in conscience think (tell me Emilia)
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?
(*Othello*, Act 4, Scene 3, 58-60)

On the other hand, her passivity or ignorance to Othello's insane rage also indicates a resistance to accepting her husband's 'new identity', she refuses to acknowledge or accept any negative opinions of the husband she has chosen, nor will she let the accusations and torture cause the slightest diminution of her love for him. Her perseverance to love Othello despite his physical aggression and humiliation highlights Desdemona's strength and strong will to keep her marital oath. Furthermore, Othello's and Desdemona's secret marriage suggests that she has willingly made her own decision. She defies both parental authority and social conventions when she marries her lover, an outsider, without her father's consent. In Venice, she flexes an independent, strong will, and wisely defends her choice in front of her father and in public. She is not satisfied just hearing Othello's tales of adventure, she wants to be part of the scene and accompanies him to Cyprus, leaving the comforts and security of Venetian society behind and entering a distant and isolated military centre. Here Desdemona is no longer the strong-willed woman who stood up to her father Brabantio; the unconditional love that toughened her in Venice softens her in Cyprus, where she is no longer strong enough to survive.

Desdemona reveals the most about her inner feelings and confusion in the company of her only confidant, Emilia. The intimacy of their private talks shows how female characters accept patriarchal structures and what their opinion about them is. However, it is Emilia who seems to be the more outspoken of the two. She argues that women are physically no different from men – they also have desires – and it is their husbands' fault if they do wrong.

Emilia But I do think it is their husband's faults
If wives do fall: (Say, that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasuries into foreign laps;

Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us: Or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite)
Why we have galls: and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know,
Their wives have sense like them: They see, and smell,
And have their palates both for sweet, and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do,
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is: and doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is't frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections?
Desires for sport? and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well: else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

(*Othello*, Act 4, Scene 3)

Still, this opinion is shared with Desdemona in moments of privacy, Emilia does not express such thoughts in the presence of men. Emilia is treated as an empty-headed female by her husband, when, for example, he tells her it is none of her business what he intends to do with the handkerchief. Though Iago has no respect or love for his wife, Emilia still hesitates between loyalty to her mistress and duty toward her husband. When she finds the handkerchief, she mentions to the audience that Iago has always wanted her to steal it from Desdemona and now, finally, she can give it to him, though she knows that Othello asked Desdemona to keep the handkerchief forever. Emilia supports her husband even though she does not receive love or respect in return, until the moment she learns of the consequences of Iago's intrigues: Desdemona's death. She first breaks silence when she defends the chaste Desdemona against Othello's cruel accusations, and when she discovers the dead body of Desdemona she is not afraid to expose Iago's treachery to the world. Her voice becomes more and more passionate throughout the play; however, she proves her belief "it is their husbands' faults/If wives do fall", she has no place in patriarchal society with such a vicious husband. In Act 3 Scene 4, she speaks of men:

"They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;
They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,
They belch us"

(*Othello*, Act 3, Scene 4, 104-106)

Emilia's words sound bitter and cynical; her tone is one of anger, yet it betrays a touch of helpless acceptance, her own frustration with her inability to fight the system into which she has been born.

Bianca, the third female character of *Othello*, the jealous lover of Cassio, reinforces the stereotype of women as temptresses. Despite her brief appearance on stage, she plays an important role in Iago's plan to incite Othello's jealousy of Cassio. She is regarded as a prostitute: Iago calls her a "housewife"[174] and a "strumpet".[175] Being a woman of questionable morality, her role in the play reinforces the stereotype of women as temptresses, but her jealousy of Cassio also proves her true affection and interest in Cassio's feelings and her love towards him. Her mistreatment by the beloved one at the same time encourages the reader/audience to feel pity for her; she becomes a refused and disappointed lady in love.

Lisa Jardine, a feminist historicist, concentrates on the historical context of *Othello*, the importance of historical and cultural background in relation to the position of women. She emphasises the significance of recognizing the relationship between history and the text. She analyses Desdemona's defamation and damaged reputation from the point of view of socially significant circumstances. She argues that "It does not just matter that a woman is called a 'whore', it matters when and where she is."[176]

Jardine claims that sexually charged utterances concerning women in *Othello* play a remarkable part in the action. The three women, she explains, Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca, of three different social ranks, are all wrongfully accused of sexual misdemeanour in the course of the play, though the incidents which provoke the slander are of distinct types. Each woman, Jardine explains, takes the accusation extremely seriously, but the ways these accusations are dealt with by the women themselves have very different consequences, which Jardine finds crucial for a 'historical' understanding of the plot's final outcome. She lists and interprets several defamation cases from

[174] *Othello*, Act 4, Scene 1, 95
[175] *Othello*, Act 4, Scene 1, 97
[176] Jardine, 1996, p.20

Ecclesiastical Court records throughout England dating back to the early modern period, in order to prove that the storyline of *Othello* was formed in response to public accusations of unchastity and reflects the importance of the circumstances of the accusations. The case of Othello and Desdemona reflects the contemporary social practice that if "some ostensibly verbal incidents between individuals (…) spill over into the community space, [they] become recognized as events."[177] The charge of 'whore' in public was apparently more substantial than other charges of dishonesty. The crisis point in *Othello*, Jardine claims, in the presentation of Desdemona comes in Act 4, Scene 2, when Othello publicly defames Desdemona and Emilia repeats and circulates the defamation, thus reinforcing and confirming it.

Othello	Impudent strumpet!
Desdemona	By Heaven you do me wrong.
Othello	Are not you a strumpet?
Desdemona	No, as I am a Christian.
	If to preserve this vessel for my Lord,
	From any other foul unlawful touch
	Be not to be a strumpet, I am none.
Othello	What, not a whore?
Desdemona	No, as I shall be sav'd.
Othello	Is't possible?
Desdemona	Oh Heaven Forgive us.
Othello	I cry you mercy then.
	I took you for that cunning whore of Venice,
	That married with Othello. You Mistress,
	Enter Emilia.
	That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
	And keeps the gate of hell. You, you: ay you.
	(*Othello*, Act 4, Scene 2, 82-93)

It is Emilia's premature return that results in her overhearing Othello call Desdemona a whore. The charge moves from the intimacy of the bedroom to the public space, where Iago comes to learn of it.

[177] Jardine, 1996, p.27

Iago	What is the matter Lady?
Emilia	Alas, Iago, my Lord hath so bewhored her,
	Thrown such despite and heavy terms upon her
	That true hearts cannot bear it.

(*Othello*, Act 4, Scene 2, 116-119)

In contrast to Bianca, who is also accused of being a 'whore of Venice', Desdemona's social rank and position in the community, with different parameters for social relations, make the consequences of her accusation diverge from those experienced by Bianca. Being publicly accused of being a 'whore' damages Desdemona's reputation, one of the most fatal things that can happen to a woman of high social rank, no matter how innocent she is. From that point onward, as Jardine puts it, "there is no casual innuendo, no lewd comment on Othello's wife's behaviour or supposed sexual appetite. Desdemona's two remaining scenes focus on her now supposedly culpable sexuality, culminating in her suffocation on her bed, in a state of undress – a whore's death for all her innocence."[178]

The conclusion of historicist feminist criticism of *Othello* is that Othello murders Desdemona for adultery, not out of jealousy, a thesis based on the relationship between the text and cultural context.

6.1.1. Race and Sexuality

A wide range of feminist critics analyze the relationship between race and gender and its implications for the interpretation of female identity in the text. The subject matter and text of *Othello* provide fruitful ground for the examination of what race tells us about the representation of femininity. Feminist critics such as Dympna Callaghan, Karen Newman or Jyotsna Singh use the capacity of blackness in *Othello* as a tool to explore and detect the depth and elements of female identity, together with the impact of the common (or different) condition and relationship of white women and men of colour on patriarchy. Feminist critics claim that the play's central subject matter is not embodied by Othello's individual blackness, but the relation of that blackness to Desdemona's fairness

[178] Jardine, 1996, p.29

and purity and the consequences of the union of a black man with a white woman. However, feminist conclusions about the parallels and differences in attitudes towards racial and sexual difference, and their implications on society, vary.

Dympna Callagan draws a parallel between blackness and femininity on the level of social exclusion and at the level of dramatic representation. Neither Africans nor women performed on the public stage in Elizabethan England. Despite the intensive use of 'exotic' characters and their popularity in the theatre, they were always depicted by white actors. Callaghan assumes that the role of blackness was to intensify and absorb all aspects of otherness and to mark and sharpen 'othering' and difference. On the other hand, whiteness was the colour of perfected human beauty, especially female beauty.[179] This means that race – the opposition of blackness and whiteness – goes hand in hand with a certain conceptualization of sexual difference. Callaghan assumes: "Race – black and white – thus becomes cosmeticized, but in the case of whiteness, also feminized."[180] She adds that no other colours were so frequently used to denote polarization. Based on this theory of stage cosmetics, the marriage of Othello and Desdemona appears as the union of opposites: black and white, man and woman, both absolute antitheses. The combination of race and concept of gender and sexuality have some serious further implications for feminist criticism; namely, the question of how the interaction of race and gender influences the representation of women, and whether the interracial in *Othello* symbolically challenges or overturns racial hierarchy and the conventions of patriarchy, or instead reinforces the patriarchal structures.

Jyotsna Singh contends that while there are certain parallels in Renaissance attitudes towards racial and sexual differences, it is not possible to elide the condition of black masculinity with that of white femininity. She writes:

> "Historically we know the taboo of miscegenation was not so much based on fear of the femininity of the white woman as it was on the potential phallic threat of black men, who, incidentally, bore the brunt of the punishment for violating this taboo."[181]

Singh shows how cultural constructions of white women as the victims of black men buttress patriarchy. In contrast to Singh, Karen Newman's central essay, "And Wash the

[179] Callaghan, 1996, p.198
[180] Ibid., p.198
[181] Singh, 1994, pp.290-291

Ethiop White: Femininity and the Monstrous in *Othello*", argues that white women and black people share the potential to overturn patriarchal conventions.[182]

Newman opposes the conventional theory that Desdemona's fairness and purity, the idealization of fair female beauty this implies, underscores the contrast between Desdemona and Othello. Newman argues the contrary, that femininity is not opposed to blackness and monstrosity, as white is to black, but identified with the monstrous, an identification that makes miscegenation fearful.[183] Newman concentrates on textual allusions to bestiality and the demonic when referring to Othello; until the third scene the Moor is not even named, which dramatizes Othello's blackness. He is referred to as a "black ram", a "Barbary horse". He internalizes alien cultural values and appears as 'other'. The preoccupation of the play's white male characters with black sexuality, Newman explains, is of the "feared power ad potency of a different and monstrous sexuality which threatens the white male sexual norm represented in the play most emphatically by Iago".[184] However, the otherness which divides Othello from culture also links him with the play's other marginalised quality, which is femininity. The union of Desdemona and Othello represents a sympathetic identification of femininity with the monstrous, an identification that can offer subversion of conventions in the recognition of sexual and racial differences. Newman explains that the link between femininity and the monstrous is represented by the handkerchief, which Othello inherits from his mother and then gives to Desdemona. In the Renaissance, strawberries symbolised virtue and goodness; thus, when Othello first gives the handkerchief to Desdemona, it symbolised her virtue and the chastity and desire of their love. Later, it becomes the sign and proof of her unfaithfulness and begins to represent her unchaste desire, the monstrous. Here we can see the direct link between femininity and the monstrous which Othello's and Desdemona's union represents in the play.

The fate Desdemona suffers, Newman argues, is the conventional fate assigned to the desirous woman in the Renaissance. She is punished for her desire for Othello because it threatens a white male hegemony in which women cannot be desiring objects. However, her presentation as virtuous and desirous at the same time alters the social conventions about the discourse of female desire. Furthermore, her love towards Othello and her independent choice of love transfers her society's norms of women and

[182] Newman, 1987, p.142
[183] Ibid., p.142
[184] Ibid., p.155

illuminates the black Othello from a different point of view: he becomes a hero, a loveable man. Ironically, it is Othello himself who becomes the tool for punishment, confirming cultural prejudice in his murder of Desdemona and thus punishing her desire, which changes the norms of the Elizabethan sex/race system.

6.2. Vogel: Desdemona Speaking from the Margins

Paula Vogel, winner of various fellowships and academic awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1998, writes from a deeply rooted sense of politics and power dynamics in society. Vogel's feminism can be characterized as a series of contradictions, which critics typically account for as stemming from her mixed religious background (her father was a Jew, her mother a Roman Catholic), and the experience of the death of her homosexual brother from AIDS placed alongside her own lesbianism, which came out when she was seventeen. Whether religious background and sexual orientation have an important impact on literary production is frequently discussed by Vogel herself. In several interviews, she refuses to be defined firstly as a lesbian and secondarily, as a playwright. She would rather be known as a playwright who is lesbian. She claims:

> "What the relation is between my gayness and my work is obscure to me in the same way that I feel drama works by indirection. I've been gay so long that it feels straight to me. I think that it has been an asset because it has been one more way that I've had to think through the marginalisation of women, so it's been useful in terms of empathy but in terms of having a direct impact, I think maybe being short is as important."[185]

Based on this experience of being a lesbian, one can conclude that in Vogel's world, a writer's sexual orientation is a piece, a constituent of a whole, an element which helps in looking at concepts and conventions from a different light, one which is as important and valid as other constituents may be, such as body type, religion, race or personal experience. This philosophy highlights the wide and one of the most crucial debates in feminism, which is whether the category of sex entitles a writer or any other person to see the world differently, or understand and accept a scientific fact differently, and whether being a woman writer has an impact on the final product of the writing process. The basic

[185] Vogel, quoted in Bigsby, 2000, p.291

feminist definition holds that women suffer from unfair treatment in society and have been socially, politically and sexually oppressed, an outlook which results in the conclusion that this sense of exclusion, social 'injustice' and discrimination definitely does contribute to giving women a different place to stand, a particular and distinct perspective on mainstream values and facts. The difference between feminists is the extent to which they treat sex as a determining factor, and the ways in which they treat or react to the roles and places of women in literature, culture and society – both the state of female writers and the representation of women in literature. Vogel belongs to that group of feminists who refuse to respond to injustice and discrimination by prioritising women and depicting them as saints, civil rights activists, or victims of male domination and control. Even more, she refuses to depict women as a group, a universal mass, and concentrates rather on exploring the manner in which gender assumptions are constructed and how art responds to these constructions, if at all. In *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*, female identity is depicted as a construct, a colourful whole made up of several elements, including social status, class and language. Vogel does not believe that "there's any such thing as the universal in theatre any more beyond the fact of sharing the theatrical moment".[186] For her, there is no such thing as a universal category of woman, though gender, as a constituent of identity, provides a sense of community and belonging together. She finds it possible to attack hierarchies and commonplaces from the position of an outsider, from the margins, a position that gender and sexual orientation might be said to provide.

The contribution of sex and gender to literary production gains some political significance in Vogel's plays. Though she explains that her aim is not merely political, and that being a woman and a lesbian has not driven her to serve as a spokeswoman for feminism and lesbianism, nor the advancement of women's rights,[187] *Desdemona* evidently does echo the most basic, central, social and political concerns of feminism, such as domestic violence, the equal pay for equal work debate, women's societal roles, male dominance and the limitations of female freedom. On the other hand, she admits that theatre has an enormous power and capacity to make people aware of subjects which may have particular political implications. She concludes:

[186] Vogel, quoted in Bigsby, 2000, p.296
[187] Bigsby, 2000, p.296

> "Is theatre political? Highly political. Is it dangerous? Highly dangerous ... At 8 o'clock we go in as disparate, individual people. Two hours later we come out as a community that took a journey together. You get elected by dividing and conquering people. Theatre does just the opposite – it forges a community where there wasn't one before"[188]

Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief is highly dependent on the story of Shakespeare's *Othello*, relying heavily on the audience's foreknowledge of the Shakespearean plot. Simultaneously, it requires the audience to forget about certain parts of *Othello,* the critical tradition and interpretation of its characters, and to be open to absorbing a new Desdemona, a new Emilia and a new Bianca with characteristic features that might contradict the qualities of their Shakespearean counterparts.

Desdemona takes place in a dirt-floored back laundry room of the Cypriot castle where Othello has taken up residence and, apart from the Prologue, which takes place one week before, the whole play is enacted on Desdemona's last day on Cyprus. The final image of the play shows Emilia sorrowfully brushing her mistress' hair before Desdemona retires to her marriage bed, relying on the reader's/audience's knowledge of Othello's fatal deed and the final bedroom scene of Desdemona. Vogel's play is crafted as a series of cinematic takes simulating the process of filming, which enables directors to use frozen images, various spotlights changing invisible camera angles, as well as supporting a mosaic-like imagery. Though there are no blackouts between scenes, the flow of the play is constantly interrupted by cuts, repetitions and frozen images, which results in the impression of a set of small fragments combined together.

The three characters of the play are all women. One of them is Desdemona, a bored, promiscuous aristocrat, who substitutes for Bianca, the local prostitute, once a week. Desdemona seems to have slept with all the men in her husband's garrison except for Cassio, the object of Othello's jealousy. The second female character is Emilia, Desdemona's servant with a broad Irish accent, who scrubs blood-stained wedding sheets and peels potatoes, waiting to become a wealthy widow. Finally, we have Bianca, speaking stage-cockney, the owner of a brothel and Cassio's lover, who represents Desdemona's ideal of an independent woman.

Though it heavily depends on Shakespeare's characters and critical interpretation of their roles, Vogel's rewrite of Shakespeare's characterization creates a very different

[188] Vogel, quoted in Bigsby, 2000, p.290

stage dynamic from that of *Othello*. Rather than being a symbol of purity and innocence, Vogel's Desdemona is a worldly, playful, immoral mistress, joking about buying some chicken blood to stain the sheets and fake her virginity on her wedding night. She plays with a phallic hoof pick and discusses issues considered to be taboo, such as sexuality, the size of male sexual organs, having love affairs when she was in the convent and regarding her sexual hunger as a natural human phenomenon. This image stands in sharp juxtaposition to Shakespeare's innocent and extremely naive Desdemona, whose purity and chastity sanctify her final death and put her in the position of victimhood. In contrast to Vogel's immoral Desdemona, the more traditional character of Emilia, with her thick Irish brogue, is presented as a religious prude. She scolds her employer every time Desdemona jokes about sleeping with other men and compares their sizes. Though Emilia hates her sexually inadequate and emotionally inept husband, she does not intend to leave him and insists on remaining faithful. Bianca, the local prostitute, is depicted as an immoral woman of instincts, though is often presented as childish and naive, with dreams about 'proper' family life, a loving husband and a son.

Vogel's reaction to Shakespeare and her politically motivated response to the critical tradition of *Othello* and interpretation of female characters in *Othello* is evident. In her characterisations of Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca, she ignores the stereotypes of women as submissive, obedient and saintly innocent. She juxtaposes the exaggerated image of an innocent, angelic Desdemona in *Othello* with a promiscuous, intricate and selfish Desdemona in her own play. She caricatures the loyalty and dependence of Emilia on her husband depicted in *Othello* and mocks her faithfulness to a vicious and unloving husband. She contradicts the image of the Cyprian prostitute in *Othello* with a Bianca who dreams about a harmonious family and longs for friendship and order. She uses Shakespeare's women and their critical reputations, physically isolates them from their men, and imbues them with qualities previously associated with male characters. They become less abstract female characters, women with whom a 20th or 21st century reader/spectator can more easily identify.

The exaggeration of Desdemona's libido and Emilia's prudishness may produce a comic effect; however, at the end it is a little bit difficult to steer the play back to its tragic nature and the tragic dimensions of Desdemona's final scene – probably deliberately – are missing. It turns out that Iago was one of the men Desdemona slept with on a Tuesday night when she was substituting for Bianca; this revelation shocks Emilia and provokes her to confess that she was the one who took the handkerchief and gave it to Iago. Both of

them realise the possibly tragic consequences of their games and jokes and they are left to rely on their hopes and good fortune.

EMILIA	Well, what are we to be doin' now?
DESDEMONA	We have to make it to the morning.
	(...)
DESDEMONA	Surely he'll...not harm a sleeping woman.
	(*Desdemona*, Scene 27, p.253)

6.2.1. Collective Female Identity Reconsidered: The Successes and Failures of Sisterhood

The total exclusion of male characters from Vogel's *Desdemona* has several consequences and interpretations. Firstly, the work can be criticized for depicting the female world as incomplete and isolated, without a male presence, making it difficult to accept its validity and authenticity. It seems to concentrate on expressing and exploring female identity without male associations and systems, as if trying to avoid defining female identity in male terms. However, the play incorporates the powerful and striking presence of the individual and very basic human necessity to express one's identity through the other – another person – by linking separate and independent identities together in order to avoid isolation and solitude.

Tish Dace claims that "Vogel shows us we must blame the social system, implicitly responsible for denying the women sisterhood in a common cause, forcing them instead to depend on destructive men who exercise over them the power of life and death".[189] The play definitely stages the difficulties of female solidarity as well as the need for female companionship. The tendency to depend on "destructive men" is represented by the cruelty and aggression of Othello. When Othello comes home, Desdemona runs out of the room to welcome her husband with a pretend cheerful smile and in return, receives a warm welcome in the form of a very loud slap. Though this happens backstage and thereby out of view, it still effectively serves to emphasise the emptiness and cruelty of their marriage, which further mystifies the man-woman relationship and prioritises analysis of the relationship between women.

[189] Dace, 1994, p.253

Women's need for female friendship is a central issue of the play. However, unlike certain feminist critics (e.g. Elaine Showalter), Vogel does not overestimate the power and the nature of 'female sisterhood'; on the contrary, apart from underlining its necessity, she also presents its weaknesses while questioning the validity and rightness of the term of 'common female experience'. By depicting the three women with different social backgrounds, different religious views and perspectives on the world, *Desdemona* highlights the colourful nature of the female world and suggest that being a woman is only one element of female identity, neither more nor less important than other elements such as race, religion or class. Differences in social status and language can as readily bring women together as divide them, just as the category of being a woman does. The relationship of Desdemona and Emilia in the play is a constant game of approaching–distancing. At the time of some intimate moments of honest manifestations, the master–servant relationship appears and begins to rule the atmosphere. Desdemona's self-conscious role-playing and moodiness determine the nature of their relationship and against her dominant position as ruler, i.e. mistress of the house, Emilia can only take a subordinate place.

DESDEMONA (Harshly) I can leave you rotting on
Cyprus all together, you know. Do as you're
told. Peel the potatoes, and then look sharp and
have that wash on the line by the time I return.
Do I make myself clear?
EMILIA Yes, m'lady.
DESDEMONA (Sweetly) And Emilia, dear, if Bianca
comes when I'm gone, let me know immediately
– I'll be in my chamber.
EMILIA Very good, Miss Desdemona.
(*Desdemona*, Scene 12, p.243)

Emilia's frustration and bitter reply are rooted in her being treated as inferior and secondary. Though there are moments when she honestly believes they can be friends and allies, that Desdemona can help her change her life, she is turned down by her mistress superiority and selfishness. She realises that master and servant can never be best friends, that women of different social backgrounds can never be confidants or equal mates; her

'female experience' is very much different from Desdemona's 'female experience', and similarly, Bianca's 'female experience' is also different from Desdemona's. She bitterly concludes:

> **EMILIA** There's no
> such creature, two-, three- or four-legged, as
> 'friend' betwixt ladies of leisure and ladies of the
> night. And so long as there be men with one
> member but two minds, there's no such thin' as
> friendship between women.
> (*Desdemona*, Scene 13, p.245)

6.2.2. The Private and the Public

Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier argue that *Desdemona* provides us with everything that Shakespeare denies us: full portraits of the three women.[190] It is more precise to extend their claim to full portraits of the three women's quests for identity and struggle to make sense of a world that seems to deny them what they dream about the most. The eager search for identity takes place within a social framework, which emphasises the social structure of female identity. Though the need for exploration of identity is a personal matter, its formation is a much wider, public phenomenon that includes both public and private experience.

Vogel's depiction of identity crisis and her focus on identity creation draws certain parallels with the absurdists, in the sense that it puts three women into a room and traces their games, conversations and existential problems in the centre. It grabs the exterior, the outside world and takes it into a small room, fragmenting it into little pieces and analysing each element in order to understand and reabsorb it. However, Vogel's play combines the absurd with the social and political, since it tries to get at the elements of female identity and female experience through social analysis checking the notions of authority, status, power and opportunity.

The play sharpens the contrast between interior and exterior by presenting the closed atmosphere of the back room, with characters discussing the 'here and now' and

[190] Fischlin-Fortier, 2000, p.234

events outside the castle. They also mix past with present. Recollection of Desdemona's childhood and the stories told by Emilia point out how childhood and family life determine the formation of an individual – a more psychoanalytical perspective on identity. Emilia's stories about Desdemona's rich family, her father, the Senator, the time she was sent to the convent to be raised and educated by nuns, the servants she was surrounded by incessantly obeying her commands – all these stories explain and demonstrate how such social circumstances influence the creation of identity, such that a lady's understanding of the world is different from her servant's.

The servants in *Desdemona* are more clearly defined by class than they are in Shakespeare. Their language and socially distinct English accents are both signs of their social rank and determining factors in their social positions. Desdemona's upper-class, sophisticated language, Emilia's Irish brogue and Bianca's Cockney form a sociological triangle that emphasizes how each character is a prisoner of her class and how each character is determined by language. This direct link between language and class emphasises the capacity of language to determine an individual's social position and makes languages an integral element of identity, as well as stressing the importance of language acquisition in the socialisation process. Language also entitles each character to take certain positions of power; for example, the position of a superior subject forces other characters into the position of inferior object. Desdemona criticises Emilia's language, promulgating the idea that her language is socially more accepted and ensures her a more stable, more respectable social position.

Desdemona to Emilia:

> **DESDEMONA** You
> must shrink your vowels and enlarge your
> vocabulary
> (*Desdemona*, Scene 9, p.241)

On the other hand, Emilia criticises Bianca's language, a woman of lower social rank, repeating the words of Desdemona:

> **EMILIA** Lux-i-o-ri-us!! If I was you, I'd large my vocabulary, an' shrink me vowels.
> (*Desdemona*, Scene 13, p.244)

In *Desdemona*, Vogel notably omits the element of race and instead concentrates on class and female sexuality. Othello's blackness is referred to only once, when Emilia comments on his character: "(...) he is as jealous as he's black."[191] This definitely signals Vogel's lack of interest in mapping all the constituent elements of female identity. She does not seem to be interested in the number and nature of factors that constitute female identity, but prefers to focus on the nature of its construction, the very basic idea that different factors contribute to the formation of female identity in different ways, which results in the fact that each (female) identity becomes a separate, independent entity with her own dreams, ambitions and limitations. Of course, the staging of *Desdemona* does not exclude the possibility of introducing the discourse of race into the production by choosing a black actress, since stage directions and the play's text are open to further interpretation and may take on new forms and frameworks.

The social construction of identity and the link between the private and the public is represented by the issue of marriage, the exploration and the characterisation of a social institution and the way individuals find their places in this institution. *Desdemona* depicts marriage as a prison: an institution that only limits women, excluding and imprisoning them from the outside world, depriving them of free choices and opportunities. She longs for freedom. When marrying Othello, her primary motivation and hope was to become free and unlimited, by being rescued from the conventional practices and old institutions of Venice by somebody, who, with his dark skin, represents another world, beyond Venice, and can provide Desdemona with new opportunities. However, she later became deeply disappointed by the marriage, which turned out to be just as hypocritical, narrow-minded and binding as the "whispering piazzas", limitations and bonds of Venetian marriages.

Desdemona's dreams of absorbing the world and reaching new, further possibilities via marriage – through a man – renders her a victim of biological determinism. Being born as a woman, she can only experience the world through men and not by herself. She decides to sleep with various men of different types, from several parts of the world, to take in their "seeds" and absorb their experiences of the world. She uses her body to gain experience and to lift herself up to the social level of men. This moral degradation and devaluation of the body in order to achieve equality indicates the continuous effort of women to change the frustrating and unfair social circumstances they were born into, and suggests that their methods are not always well-chosen.

[191] *Desdemona*, Scene 13, p.245

EMILIA I'd
like to rise a bit in the world, and women can
Only do that through their mates.

(*Desdemona*, Scene 6, p.240)

Emilia's words suggest pessimism and disappointment about social restriction. Desdemona does not provide answers about how social structures can be changed or even whether they can be changed at all. It only introduces burning questions, questions of the public realm, where each individual has to find his/her place on his/her own.

6.2.3. 'The New Woman'

Vogel's play lacks the linguistic challenges and philosophical playfulness of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Instead, it presents a wide range of political issues. First it takes the reader/audience into the world of the bizarre: the claustrophobic atmosphere of a locked room, where it plays with language, moods, movements and lightning. Finally it reduces the more general subject matter of race, sexual difference, adultery, jealousy and marriage to a more individual level, to the level of personal (female) need, the experience of loss and the at once liberating and frustrating potential of individual (female) dreams and desire. It defines female identity on a social and political level, in terms of what a woman should be able to become in a fair and equal society, though this remains at the level of dreams and wishes, presented as a future yet-to-come.

Ironically, the 'new woman' in *Desdemona* is embodied by a prostitute, Bianca, the owner of a brothel who makes her living by selling her body. She seems to be happy with her profession and its perceived independence, though her confession about longing for a proper family and her dreams about a husband and sons indicate a serious, somewhat schizophrenic identity crisis. The successful businesswoman does not seem to be satisfied with her independence, though she earns enough money to make a living and thereby is able to afford ignoring other's judgements, establishing her identity independent of social norms and expectations. Her dreams validate that she longs to be part of that normative social order and is in need of a partner to do so. Social structure therefore seems to be justified by personal need and desire.

DESDEMONA *(Crestfallen)* Oh, Bianca – oh, surely you're ... you're not the type that wants to get married?

(Depressed. DESDEMONA *goes and pours herself another mug of wine.)*

BIANCA Wot's wrong wif that? Aw'm still young, an' Aw've got a tidy sum all saved up fer a dowry. An' m'lord Cassio's only got t'arsk fer a transfer to th' garrison 'ere. We'd make a bleedin' jolly life of it, Aw c'n tell you. Aw'd get us a cottage by th' sea, wif winder boxes an'all them kinds of fings, an' 'e could go to th' tipple'ouse as much as 'e likes, wifout me sayin' nay. An' then ... then Aw'd be bearin' im sons so's to make 'im proud –

EMILIA *(Triumphantly)* There! There's your new woman, m'lady! Free! Does for herself!

BIANCA Why, that 'new woman' kind o'fing's all hogwash!

*(*EMILIA *nods her head in agreement.)*

All women want t'get a smug it's wot we're made for, ain't it? We may pretend different, but inside ev'ry born one o' us want smugs an' babies, smug swot are man enow t' keep us in our place.

(*Desdemona*, Scene 23, p.250)

"It's wot we're made for, ain't it?" asks Bianca, presenting and challenging the provocative discourses of biological determinism and the question of whether being born a woman carries certain elements or features that all women share, or are they just 'compulsory' needs, imposed on individuals by society and social structures? Does Bianca dream about a husband and family because that is what a woman should dream about to fit into society, or is it her truest inner motivation and desire, after experiencing so many empty relationships, loneliness, so much coldness and distance with so many

men in the brothel? Marriage, having children and a family while being financially independent with a successful career and professional satisfaction at the same time, are among to the most crucial questions and dilemmas of womanhood. Vogel's play unlocks a conflict which foreshadows a more complex matter: the relationship between the private and the public, the importance of self-knowledge, the exploration and awareness of one's identity. Instead of providing clear answers, she presents discourses on female identity and offers questions about the 'new woman' that have to be answered individually rather than with a sweeping framework for fully understanding female identity.

CHAPTER 7

FEMALE IDENTITY IN *KING LEAR* AND *LEAR'S DAUGHTERS*

7.1. *King Lear* and the Feminists

At the first sight, it might seem difficult to relate the concept of feminism with the tragedy of *King Lear*. Shakespeare surrounds Lear with three daughters but no sons, and by doing so – though perhaps unconsciously – he introduces some crucial female issues into the play and insinuates the connection between women and power. Interestingly, taking into consideration the evil natures of Goneril and Regan, their wicked destructiveness and the final image of Lear carrying the body of his beloved Cordelia, it is almost impossible to take the side of the women in the play. The whole tragedy seems to be caused by the lust and wickedness of the two evil sisters. Lear and Cordelia are contrasted with the wicked sisters and their tragedy is almost presented as the manifestation of the evil souls of Goneril and Regan.

In her essay, "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: King Lear and Measure for Measure", Kathleen McLuskie argues that feminism cannot simply take the woman's part "when the part has been so morally loaded and theatrically circumscribed."[192] This means that feminist criticism is not about trying to prove that all women characters are saints and have excuses for any evil they inflict. A more fruitful direction for feminism is looking at the play from a different point of view, a new angle. McLuskie calls this process the play's "reproduction". She argues that the process of reproduction is based on the idea that every text contains possibilities, and the meanings attached to them are not fixed but always dependent upon the reproduction engaged in by the audience.[193] It is necessary to examine the elements of the play from a different critical standpoint to highlight and update both frequently discussed and previously neglected sections. The feminist point of view diverges from the traditional canon and subverts certain conventions regarding sexual (in)subordination, social roles, family structure, power and many others. Furthermore, the aim of feminist criticism, derived

[192] McLuskie, 2001, p.40
[193] Ibid., p.40

from feminism's more general aim, is to understand the natures of women and female identity in the play, both their constituent elements as well as omissions or potential failures.

Looking at *King Lear* through 'feminist glasses' gives us a totally new and updated picture. The result of this angle of vision is different from the traditional one in which Lear stands at the centre of attention. The feminist approach focuses less on Lear himself and more on the confusion he has created, a confusion of values. It also emphasizes the characters' motives and the conventions that limited or motivated them. Again, it should be highlighted that feminist interpretation of *King Lear* is very different from the feminist 'rewriting', the adaptation of *King Lear*, though the latter could not have been realised without the former. Writing a feminist adaptation of *King Lear* is not just simply showing the Shakespearean play in a new light, but offering viewers a new play with new challenges, and of course relying on the audience's or reader's acquaintance with the original Shakespearean play.

Investigating female identity in *King Lear* provides feminist criticism with a lot of opportunities to grab. First of all, though there is only a limited number of female characters, the characters and the behaviour of the three daughters are essential to both the plot and the interpretation of the nature of women, in general. However, when examining feminist interpretations of *King Lear* and more specifically, of female identity in *King Lear*, it is possible to assert that feminist conclusions are not about what a woman is, but rather, what she is not. By mostly presenting the images of women characters in *King Lear* as false, or defining them in relation to certain deficiencies or inabilities, feminist criticism demonstrates its commitment to offering something new, which is directly or indirectly a negation of the Shakespearean image.

In almost all feminist interpretations of *King Lear*, a political motivation is inevitable, since their main focus is directed against patriarchy, patriarchal structures presented by the centrality of Lear, and women's inability to choose and maintain power. Almost all feminist approaches concentrate on the limitations of female identity as a result of male domination. Of course, it must be admitted that there is some disagreement among feminists on whether the women in *King Lear* are represented in a positive and liberal way, or just serve as examples of women's subjugation and restricted female identities. McLuskie's essay has become a classic among feminist approaches to *King Lear*. She is one of the feminists who see the play as a defence of patriarchy and states that female identity in the play is linked to negative images of women and is presented as

the source of chaos and even tragedy. On the other hand, there are some voices in the field of feminist work on *King Lear* that claim the relationship of Lear and Cordelia, and the way the play ends – Lear carrying the dead body of Cordelia and realising that if he had seen more clearly and had been more open to Cordelia's innocence, he would have avoided catastrophe – are in fact a tribute to women. Koppélia Kahn represents this second school of thought. In her essay, "The Absent Mother in King Lear", she uses the tools of psychoanalytic criticism to prove that the play depicts the failure of a father and failure of male power to command love in a patriarchal world.

7.1.1. Female Power and Chaos

The feminist approach to *King Lear* that emphasises the play's false representation of women or even 'misogyny', tends to highlight male domination in the play and 'human nature' being equated to male power. Consequently, this approach seems to discuss and define female identity in *King Lear* in relation to notions of subordination, lack of power, oppression and silence.

Kathleen McLuskie notes that *King Lear* is very much about the balance of power within a family structure: it is about economic autonomy and power. She emphasises that the context of there being chaos in the country, at its highest peak at the end of the play, is strongly connected with the fact that power has shifted into the hands of the two evil daughters, though it is suggested that the chaos is very much connected with putting power into the hands of female rulers. She claims:

> "(…) The folk-tale of the love test provides an underlying pattern in which harmony is broken by the honest daughter and restored by her display of forgiveness. The organisation of the Shakespearean text intensifies and then denies those expectations so as once more to insist on the connection between evil women and a chaotic world."[194]

The economic or material factor plays an important part in the play. Lear himself wants to measure the love of his daughters at the beginning and convert it into something material, measurable, i.e. one third of his kingdom. No wonder the daughters' reactions to

[194] McLuskie, 2001, p.39

this opportunity are lust and greed. It is only Cordelia who refuses to express the abstract in terms of the concrete and doing so, she appears in the role of an angel representing harmony, who embodies love and pureness.

Lear is an authoritative figure who concentrates very much on the material, the balance of power in the country, and wants to reassure its future regarding financial security and wellness. He acts like a god: he is judging his daughters' answers and making decisions about the country's future without ever questioning whether what he is doing is right or wrong. In his Introduction to *King Lear* in the Arden edition, R.A. Foakes emphasizes that this kind of authority was typical for Shakespeare's age, and to prove this he quotes the words of King James:

> "Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner of resemblance of Divine power upon earth."[195]

Lear definitely acts like a god at the beginning. He initiates the love-test, and expects his daughters to perform well, just the way he wants them to. He represents a traditional model, in that he believes daughters owe a certain duty towards their father, that there is a certain obligation within the family and daughters are not supposed to be in want of royal power, it should be put into the hands of their husbands. Lear distributes his power among his daughters and by doing so, he is gradually stripped of his authority. He gradually changes from a royal authority into a man, a neglected father; he becomes more aware of his personality, more aware of himself, more 'human', though politically, he becomes a 'nobody'. It is his daughters who make decisions about the number of servants, political issues or other important questions. At the point when he faces his daughters' disappointing deeds, which were not ones that he expected from them, he realises that they are his flesh and blood, their lust or financially-oriented deeds and greed are the same as his own were at the beginning of the play.

> "But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter,
> Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
> Which I must needs call mine."
>
> (*King Lear,* 2.2.410-412)

[195] Foakes, 1997, p.14

It seems that Lear might have understood his responsibility for all the confusion that ensued, but as one reads on, it is evident that he did not take responsibility for his mistake. He blames female hypocrisy and lust, and announces these the cause of all tragedy.

> "And let not women's weapons, water-drops,
> Stain my man's cheeks."
>
> (*King Lear,* 2.2.467-468)

In this, the play suggests that the only alternative to a patriarchal family is chaos. If the authority, the male centre of the family, wants to distribute his power into female hands, it will be misused by "women's weapons" and "water-drops".

7.1.2. A Tribute to Women

The second type of feminist work on *King Lear* interprets the play not as a vehicle for emphasising patriarchal domination, but rather as a manifestation of the criticism of patriarchal society. It emphasises women's contribution to the subversion of male dominance and their role in Lear's discovery of his own vulnerability and dependency upon love.

This approach relies on the fact that female identity depends on a complex system of subject positions and that, as represented in the play, it is also shaped by relationships, a whole network of human factors. It also underscores that identifying the images of women in *King Lear* as positive or negative is a matter of focus: whether one concentrates on Goneril and Regan, or on Cordelia, or simply just on Lear himself. Any kind of generalisation about female identity in the play presupposes the belief in a collective female identity, one having characteristic features shared by all the women characters. It would be misleading to state that Goneril, Regan and Cordelia all possess this common female identity, since their reactions and deeds are so different in the play. It would also support the biologically deterministic view that by virtue of being women, they all share the same psychological, spiritual features. Instead, concentrating on each female character's identity as the combination of individual consciousness, the body, the implication of social structure and the space she is provided in the play to express her

thoughts leads to the assumption that female characters in the play represent a colourful, though limited, variety.

Putting the focus on Lear's character is no more the method of conventional criticism, but it has become a challenging way for feminists to treat the play as a tribute to women and evidence of the failures of a system which excludes women and tries to maintain itself on the basis of male dominance and power. It is the depiction of patriarchal dominance, together with the absolute void of maternal roles, which exposes the families of Lear and Gloucester to tragic circumstances. However, it takes them time to realise that their deeds and authority, as well as the false mechanisms of patriarchy, have led them into dead ends. Lear has to go through enormous suffering and to gain knowledge, learn a lesson that Cordelia has already learned.

The story of *King Lear* takes place in a mythological time: King Lear among the prehistoric Britons. Lear's Fool plays with the notion of time and in one of his chants he offers a prophecy that talks about a future yet-to-come:

> "This prophecy Merlin shall make, for I live before / his time"
>
> (*King Lear,* 3.2.95-96)

This confusion of the ages deepens the re–ader's/audience's uncertainty about time. The setting of *King Lear* is a rather mythical, mysterious place, espcially if we keep in mind Lear's wandering in the storm. The place is defined and specified through the interplay of the basic elements – wind, thunder, lightning, fire – which are all mentioned by Lear:

> "Spit fire, spout rain!/Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire are my daughters;"
>
> (*King Lear,* 3.2.14-15)

His kingdom is not a geographical place, but the reign of the basic elements, a fact of which he is fully aware. The image of this non-place, or no man's land, also includes the possibility of every man's land, and recalls the ideas of the Theatre of the Absurd. In his Introduction to the Arden edition of *King Lear*, R. A. Foakes claims that the imaginative power and emotional intensity of the play anticipates the 20th century Theatre of the Absurd, and he draws a parallel between *King Lear* and *Waiting for Godot*. He points out

"a progression towards despair or mere nothingness"[196]. The protagonist marches towards a state of absolute nakedness, accompanied by placelessness and timelessness, a state where one can see a man stripped down, completely alone and desperate. The only thing we can hear is a violent howl. This image is very similar to Sartre's ideas of anxiety, fear and God's disappearance. Furthermore, if we compare Vladimir's and Estragon's 'nothingness' with King Lear, we also find certain similarities. All are people stripped down into somebody who owns nothing and, in a certain sense, is nothing. Foakes argues that *King Lear* is open to a nihilistic interpretation, typical for the Theatre of the Absurd, which suggests a purposeless lonely fight, during which the gods are silent and passive. On the other hand, loneliness, nothingness, the absence of the outside world, provide the protagonist with an opportunity to learn a lesson without the disturbance of any social, political or other, outside factor.

At the beginning, he is the one who plays with his daughters and judges Cordelia's feelings on the basis of external appearances. The tragedy of *King Lear* is very much about a father acting like God, who makes decisions about human beings, judging them on the basis of external appearances and utterances. The test of love in *King Lear* is not initiated by a loving father who wants his child to grow personally, but by a father who wants to measure the immeasurable and encourage flattery. It is Lear's blindness and vanity that initiate the action.

The motif of blindness embraces the whole play. It is intensified by the suffering of Lear and his discovery of 'wisdom'. In fact, this is a metaphor of the blindness of his soul, his shallow judgment and superficial expectations. His 'blindness' is pointed out by Kent right at the beginning:

> "See better, Lear, and let me still remain
> The true blank of thine eye"
> (*King Lear,* 1.1.161-162)

Later, as Lear realises his mistake and learns the cruel lesson of loss, he himself talks about blindness and his eyes several times: "Old, fond eyes" (1.4.293) or

> "All weary and o'erwetched,
> Take vantage, heavy eyes, nor to behold

[196] Foakes, 1997, p.2

This shameful lodging"

(*King Lear*, 2.2.168-170)

In the case of Lear, there is an important shift from impatience toward patience. The beginning of the play is marked with Lear's impatience. He expects his daughters to express what they feel, and when he does not get the kind of answer he expects from Cordelia, he becomes so furious within such a short period of time that the reader/audience can hardly keep pace with the rapid change of emotions. He moves from love towards cruelty; first he calls his Cordelia "our joy" (1.1.82) then just a few lines afterwards he says:

"Here I disclaim all my paternal care
Propinquity and property of blood,
And as a stranger to my heart and me
Hold thee from this for ever."

(*King Lear,* 1.1.114-117)

This sudden change and shocking judgment questions the originality of Lear's previous feelings. When he faces the consequences of his impatience, he realises that he cannot cope with them. He is humiliated by his daughters; he loses his kingdom, servants, home – even his sanity. He comes onto stage as a lonely madman, crowned with wild flowers, recalling the image of the mad Ophelia. This scene contradicts Elaine Showalter's theory of the tendency to represent women in literature as madness. Madness is not a female attribute, but rather more generally, a feature of human anxiety and loss. Lear loses hope and is afraid of loving anybody. Can one lose more than this? He is praying for patience: "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!"[197], because it is only patience that can prevent him from doing another hasty deed, such as revenge or any kind of cruelty. He is a quick-tempered man; he even considers revenge:

"I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall – I will do such things –
What they are yet I know not, nut they shall be
The terrors of the earth!"

[197] *King Lear*, 2, 2, 460

(*King Lear*, 2.2.468-471)

This helpless rage arouses pity in the reader/audience, since it signifies acceptance of his own responsibility for how his daughters behave at the very moment he faces the consequences of his deed. However, throughout the play, Lear is learning to be patient and thus he is ready to gain knowledge.

Cordelia is a crucial tool in the process of Lear's long journey to gain knowledge. She proves to be wise and patient in a situation where her future and security are endangered, and her relationship with her father is at stake. Right at the beginning, just after she is rejected and chased away by her father, she proves to be humble and patient.

"Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides,
Who covert faults at last with shame derides."
(*King Lear,* 1.1.282-283)

She is wise enough to know that time will reveal the truth. Of course, the focus is not on her. We cannot see her agony or potential inner changes throughout the story. She vanishes, to return only at the end to find out that her father has learned his lesson, the lesson of humbleness and patience. Nevertheless, her absence in the meantime does not represent passivity; despite being silent, just as she was in the love test, she initiates action and, throughout the play, represents undisguised moral standard and real, unconditional love. In his monograph *Shakespeare and the Bible*, Steven Marx notes that Cordelia is several times identified with Christ and that she echoes Jesus' words in Luke 2:49 – "I must go about my father's business" – when she states:

"O dear father,
It is thy business that I go about"
(*King Lear,* 4.3.23-24)[198]

Her moral greatness is emphasised even at the beginning, when Lear insists on listening to his daughters expressing their love. Cordelia's reply of "nothing" might seem cold and unemotional at the beginning, since her answer consists of only one word, as if she was not in possession of language. Her silence determines her fate. Lear becomes extremely

[198] Marx, 2000, p.76

enraged and disappointed. He refuses to accept what Cordelia already knows quite well, that true love cannot be transformed into words. His emphasis is on words; he believes that everything that exists can be expressed verbally. In the end, his nothingness and loss culminates in him losing his language. The more he suffers, the more onomatopoeic his verbalisations become. In the end, he even loses his ability to speak – at the moment he discovers the death of his beloved daughter. When he appears on stage carrying Cordelia's dead body, all we hear is an animal-like howl. This is the moment when he experiences that deep feelings, especially the loss of a beloved, cannot be expressed in words. He can only gain knowledge through the loss of language. He learns that language fails to express the deepest inner workings of the soul.

Cordelia is represented in different subject-positions. She is a daughter, a sister and a wife, initially the most beloved and then the one rejected. Her relationship with her father determines her future position and life; however, her dependency on Lear is not less than his dependency upon the love of his daughter. The study of family relationships in the play is of central concern in feminist criticism and is often connected with the debate on the father–daughter relationship and the phenomenon of the 'missing mother' in the play. Koppélia Kahn claims that the absence of the mother is a crucial element, in fact pointing at her hidden presence. According to Kahn, Lear in his old age regresses to an infantile disposition, and now seeks a love that is normally satisfied by a mothering woman. Lear is represented as an old child longing to be mothered, but without a real mother. He greatly depends on the "kind nursery" of Cordelia, and therefore, Cordelia's refusal to love or at least to express her love in the expected way stands for the image of a rejecting mother.[199] Kahn's theory is based on the psychoanalytical assumption of the mother's primary role and the importance of family relationships in the formation of the individual's identity. She explains that a close look at the first scene of *King Lear* reveals a lot about the father–daughter relationship. The court is gathered to watch Lear's division of the kingdom; however, Kahn points out, this is only of secondary importance as there is another, touchier purpose: to give away his youngest daughter's hand in marriage. While France and Burgundy wait in the wings, Cordelia, for whose hand they compete, has to compete for her dowry, without which she cannot marry. This opening scene is about the bond between the father and the daughter, as well as about the disconnection of that bond.

[199] Kahn, 1993, p.95

7.2. Female Identity in *Lear's Daughters*

Lear's Daughters, a play of co-authors, all women, based on an idea from Elaine Feinstein, was first produced and performed in 1987 by the Women's Theatre Group (WTG). The WTG was one of the first all-women's companies in England and is now the only women's company of its era that is still operating, though under a new name: The Sphinx. The main aims of the WTG in the 1970s were to provide women roles in theatre life as directors, actors, writers, and stage managers, and to promote the struggle for equal rights. When, in 1990, the WTG became the Sphinx Theatre Company, the change reflected a crucial change in the recognition of the necessity to move from the radical struggle of Second Wave feminism to the updated ideas of Third Wave feminism, together with the recognition that women in the theatre should stop emphasizing their outsider positions and start becoming parts of the mainstream.

The project of *Lear's Daughters* was one of several attempts in feminist criticism to bring women to the centre of the Shakespearean stage. Originally, the WTG members decided to work on a play about Shakespeare's *King Lear* but found that the play offers little, or at least not enough, satisfactory opportunities for interpretation of and focus on female characters. Therefore, they set out to write a new play that would display women's choices and their own versions of the plot. In fact, the adapted work is not a re-organisation of the plot of *King Lear*, but a 'pre-story' – a 'prequel' – to the story told in the Shakespearean play. It shows the three daughters as girls and their process of growing up together with their relationships both with each other and with other family members and the way these relationships influenced their personalities and later, their deeds. Depicting the process of growing into womanhood not only provides excuses for the daughters' later behaviour, but also makes available a portrayal of the elements and factors that shape female identity. This psychological positioning and depicting the creation of the self together with the creation of identity and the power of the unconscious, incorporate the theory and methodology of psychoanalytic criticism. On the other hand, the emphasis on importance of the family, the most basic social unit, points to the effects of society and the social structure of identity, referring to identity as a social construct.

When reading *Lear's Daughters*, we understand the motives of Goneril and Regan and see the family and power structures that operate in *King Lear* differently. It is important to point out that though the WTG set out to write a new, independent play, and

though *Lear's Daughters* is a pre-story to *King Lear*, it nonetheless relies heavily on the Shakespearean play, assuming audience/reader acquaintance with the plot and characters of the earlier work. This kind of thematic dependence presumably questions the individuality of *Lear's Daughter*. The only proof of its independence and 'originality' might lie in whether it is able to provide something new, to fill the Shakespearean form with new, updated content, to say something that has not been said before. Inevitably, *Lear's Daughters* brings women to the centre more than Shakespeare did, and its striking way of depicting how familial relationships and positions, as well as social factors, determine the formation of female identity makes the play a radical and innovative manifestation of female and identity-conscious creativity.

There are five leading roles and no supporting one in the play. Initially, the all-woman cast seems to balance the dominance of the all-male cast of the Shakespearean stage. The fact that *Lear's Daughters* removed all the male characters from the frame might lead to the perception that the play depicts and explores collectivity or more concretely, the shared voice of women, the phenomenon that Showalter called 'common female experience'. However, this reading is too simplistic; a close analysis of the play shows that each female character contributes to the play with her own distinctive voice. The idea that women create a group with shared interests and that there is some common female experience is complicated by both the personal experience of the (female) characters of the play and the personal contribution of the (female) authors of the play, the members of the whole project. At the same time, the outcome of this contribution and the tone of the play can hardly be called universal. This is not solely due to the particular personal contributions of some particular women, but also because the play excludes male voices and male experience and, in making these absent and distant, to a certain extent mystifies the 'male' world. Of course, the aim of the authors was to make female characters visible and give them voices; however, their relationships with the male individuals in their lives is made less concrete by omitting male family members and partners ,whose lives were equally influenced by social structures, family relationships and the prevailing value system.

Indeterminacy is one of the central characteristic features of 'Lear's Daughters'. It is strongly present right at the beginning, when the reader is given a narrator who tells the story of the daughters. However, this narrator is a Fool, speaking in rhymes and riddles, playing with numbers, counting his fingers and thinking about the events. The reader starts to doubt the reliability of such a narrator and feels that the play that has already

started is in fact a playful show, where one can never be certain about what is going to happen next and whether the deeds happening right in front of the eyes of the reader are 'real' or just foolish tricks. We do not know much about the Fool's identity. The reader is not even given basic data about this character, the type that usually serves to fix an individual in a social system and determine his/her identity on a social level, such as sex, age, address or gender. The only thing we know about this genderless character is his/her interest in money and Goneril asking him/her: "How can you be so … accommodating?" (Scene 4, p.221) suggests his/her shapelessness and adaptability. As if The Fool was standing above the other characters, s/he is commenting on the play itself, listing the titles of scenes, playing the role of the Queen by putting on a veil and imitating Lear. Who is this Fool whose puns and word plays dominate the tone of the play? Part male, part female, played by a female actor, s/he takes the lead, his/her comic voice balances the intense exchanges between the sisters. This juxtaposition of moods also emphasizes the juxtaposition of different treatments of the daughters by their father, as well as the sharp difference between the daughters themselves and their reactions. The Fool acts like a stage-director, a narrator, a showman: s/he lists the titles of the scenes, comments on the events and moods, constantly talks about wanting more money and no masters, as if s/he was a playwright, a script-writer or a director complaining about the lack of money and freedom in (women's) theatres. On the other hand, the Fool's carelessness about his/her selflessness also suggests that one can be what one chooses to be, that individual identity also depends on various subject-positions and is the product of both social positioning and personal choice.

CORDELIA Are you a man or a woman?
FOOL Depends who's asking.
REGAN Well, which?
FOOL Which would you rather? It's all the same to me.
(*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 4, p.221')

The sizable amount of questions in the play deepens the sense of uncertainty. For instance, in Scene 6, out of the 82 sentences 55 are questions, which is 67 %. Many times questions are answered with questions, or the same question is repeated several times – either by the same character, or by two or three characters. There is a huge amount of playfulness in these questions: the words of a question appear in the following question or

questions, but in a different order or grammatical category, or only one word is replaced by another.

CORDELIA Does he love you?
GONERIL Do you love him?
REGAN Are you sick?
CORDELIA Will you die?
REGAN What will happen to us?
GONERIL If you die?
CORDELIA Are you going to die?
REGAN Who will be Queen?
GONERIL If you die?
(*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 6, p.223')

This frequent and unusual usage of questions creates a deep sense of confusion in the reader, as it becomes difficult to follow the storyline and the reader's expectation to get a fixed story with proper answers is frustrated. However, answers can only be gained if enough questions are asked. Getting to know one's identity is a project, the process of self-discovery, asking the right questions and highlighting each element from a different point of view, even if that point of view is reached by changing the order of just two words in the same question.

The reader is constantly put into a place where s/he feels insecure and where there is nothing and nobody to trust. Even memory has failed and cannot be trusted; thus, we are put into a realm of uncertain time and place.

FOOL There are only three things I can't remember. I can't remember names. I can't remember faces and I've forgotten what the third thing is.
(*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 5, p. 222)

With the loss of memory one loses the ability to differentiate between past and present; moreover, one can lose one's own past.

Another way in which *Lear's Daughters* confuses the reader is its limited and special use of Shakespearean characters. There are five characters altogether, all of them women. Cordelia, Goneril, Regan and the Fool come from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, but the Nurse comes from *Romeo and Juliet*. Furthermore, there is significant gender change, as the Fool in *Lear's Daughters* is also played by a woman, unlike in *King Lear*.

The play can be characterised by fragmentation, suggesting the fragmented nature of identity and that large wholes are built out of small parts, each contributing to unity with its variety and colour. Just as in the play *Ophelia*, both formal and thematic fragmentation attacks the unity of the play. As mentioned earlier, the Nurse comes from a different Shakespearean play and therefore reminds the reader of different discourses. The brief sentences and phrases, the shortness of the scenes, continuously break the flow of the play, as if instead of a linear flow, the reader got a group of flashes. The whole play seems to be a series of short scenes put together and separated from each other by the interplay of light and darkness. The usage of lighting is crucial in the play, as several stage directions referring to lightning techniques have been put between the lines.

> **CORDELIA** And Lear was there.
> (Lights down. Light up on FOOL down right.)
> **FOOL** When she came there was just a note, It said, 'I'm coming soon. Nanny.'
> (*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 2, p. 219)

The storyline, place and time are changed by a change of angle in lighting, or a spotlight, or simply by grabbing a new prop: a veil, a trunk, a hairbrush, any object not present in the previous situation.

I share the observation of Lizbeth Goodman, who claims that *Lear's Daughters* is a feminist play and very much a play of the late 1980s. It was written at a time when the impact of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s had inspired a wave of writing.[200] The presence of political motivation and the political and social aspects of female identity are of central concern in the play. It indicates how many social issues are hidden in the family and the household, and concentrates on the central issues of Second Wave feminism, such as unequal pay, limited and unfair (in)access to power, and gender-based discrimination, as well as exploring the idea of 'sisterhood'. The play is political in

[200] Goodman, 1998, p.38

the sense that it shows women and their positions in relation to their social status, and illustrates how this context effects their identities. There is an implicit suggestion that social status and the frustration it causes directly shapes female identity and is in close relationship with the working of the family, the smallest element of social structure. The failures of society cause destruction in private matters as well; women's exclusion from power and economy are as serious as issue as the absence of the father figure or the presence of a frightening symbolic father-image.

Lear's provocative absence from the play is deliberate. He was never at home, was always away from his family, very often for more than forty days. His physical absence draws the reader's attention to his psychological absence from the lives of his daughters, from the life of the family in general. His silence, or better said, 'conversational absence' in the play, enables the daughters to talk openly about their feelings and gives them the opportunity to express their disappointment freely, without being afraid of losing their inheritance or any kind of royal right, nor their father's love and attention. The play emphasises the conflict between the father and daughters and, by highlighting its centrality, points at the weaknesses of patriarchy and the positions and influence of fathers who fail to live up to the expectations and images of a patriarchal society. Furthermore, the play makes Lear responsible for the sisterly rivalry, suggesting that his unconcealed preference toward Cordelia can be blamed for the other two daughters' frustration and pain.

However, it is not only the father–daughter relationship that is brought to the foreground in *Lear's Daughters*, but the mother–daughter relationship is analysed too, as an important element in the creation of identity. The Queen, similarly to Lear being altogether absent, is played by a Fool. The reader is given information about her from the stories of the Nurse. The Fool and the Nurse recreate the missing Queen through storytelling, role-play and throwing their voices. She does not see her children enough, she keeps the accounts and when she finishes, she is too exhausted to play with her children. Her frustration and depression influences her relationship with the daughters. She looks after the financial matters of the kingdom and organises the family budget, and by doing so she works instead of the king, who constantly attends sporting events and tournaments with his court's men. The relationship of the mother and daughters is further criticised by the presence of the Nurse, and by showing "a mother who's paid and the mother who's paying" (p.357). She is depicted as a victim, the victim of her female body, born to be female she cannot make decisions about her life, her daughters' lives, and has

to do the accounts in secret, without recognition, in order not to reveal the king's inadequacy to rule. She is doing her husband's job of and ironically, her job, the mothering of the daughters, is done by the Nurse, a 'paid mother'. Her female body determines her position in society, as her husband forces her to make love with him because he wants a son, which she constantly fails to 'produce'. Due to a series of miscarriages and being physically abused by her husband, she was frequently exhausted, lying in bed, and depicted as useless in the reproduction process, not providing a successor for the kingdom. She is lonely but she is not allowed to make a change, she is a state rather than an action. The Nurse's story recounts that once the Queen attempted to leave her husband, to escape together with the daughters, but she was forced to come back and never allowed to leave again without her husband's permission.

Through the depiction of the marriage of King Lear and his Queen, the play introduces its discourse on sexual relationships, miscarriage, the inner workings of an unhappy marriage and unhappy family life, including domestic violence – elements which influence women's lives and personal identities, as well as limit their choices and restrict the creation of their identities.

> **NURSE** Alright. I used to hear him in the room below, whining on at her to let him fuck her. He wouldn't give up on her having a son. She always gave in, that's why she was always tired.
> **REGAN** A love-match.
> **NURSE** She brought a large dowry. Substantial. She was beautiful.
> **REGAN** And when she died?
> **NURSE** Miscarriage. Her third.
> (*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 10, p. 228)

Irony is a crucial element in *Lear's Daughters*. Regan's comment on her parents' marriage and the Nurse's reply is in fact a bitter realisation of the false and materialistic feature of their relationship.

Lear's Daughters is full of natural images and symbols. There is the image of a volcano, which erupted when Regan was born, and the image of a comet rushing across the sky, leaving a red trail in the blackness when Goneril was born. There is the strong

image of the rain and water: the monotonous fall of the rain and the princesses listening to it when waiting for their father. Every time they wait for him, it is raining.

> **NURSE** It rained for forty days and nights before he came home and when he did, the sun came out. The king walked over the water to meet us.
> **CORDELIA** Over the water?
> **GONERIL** (to Cordelia) Over a bridge.
> **NURSE** Yes. That's better. Over a bridge. We had to build a bridge to get to him.
> (*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 7, p. 223)

The bridge they had to build stands for the emotional distance between the princesses and their father. Other organic symbols present in the play include a hurricane, which came when Cordelia was born, and stones, to which Cordelia compares words. The power of words is as strong as the power and the energy of a hurricane. The language, by which the individual becomes a social being, is a crucial means of socialization and also of self-expression.

At the end of the play, the Fool throws the crown up into the air and the three daughters all reach up and try to catch it. The lights black out when the crown is still in the air with three pairs of hands attempting to grab it. It is up to the audience to decide who catches it, though in fact, this is the moment to realise that the scene in which *Lear's Daughters* ends is the beginning of the Shakespearean play.

7.2.1. The Outside and the Inside

Showing the relationship of binary oppositions such as male and female, the private and the public, the inside and the outside, master and servant, make the reader's perception and understanding of the play more ambiguous and also more conscious of the confusing nature of structures based on these oppositions. The issue of binary oppositions is most evident in Scene 5, where the Fool emphasises the importance of number two, his preference of two to number three. He also lists a few pairs, opposition:

FOOL (...)
If they'd only been the two instead of three,
things might have been different.
'Cos two is nice, it's manageable.
It's more easily understandable.
Two is one – holding hands with another.
First and last,
Bottom and top,
Master and servant,
Mother and child.
Two is what one is, and the other isn't, a
pair.

(*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 5, p. 222)

The list of pairs quoted above recalls the theory of Derrida on binary oppositions. In a Derridean sense,[201] conceptual oppositions depend one upon the other, our understanding of 'first' always depends on what we have experienced or understood about 'last' and vice versa. However, this hidden interdependence of two oppositions 'deconstructs' them. They can be reversed, often to paradoxical effect; for example, winning is always a form of losing, 'bottom' is always a form of 'top', 'master' is always a form of 'servant' and vice versa. The reader of the play or the audience of the performance is given a picture of a Fool, who subverts our understanding of fundamental concepts and relationships and undermines our confidence in logical commonplaces, such as time, place, meaning, language and the basic mathematical, logical elements. The influence and the interpretation of binary oppositions points out the uncertain place of an individual in the realm of these oppositions and shows that the position and nature of individual identity can be subverted by even the smallest change in the balance and understanding of these basic concepts.

Lear's Daughters shows the extraordinary pressure of society on human identity and the way society determines which kind of behaviour and which desires count as normal and acceptable in a given culture. The process of the daughters' growing up and

[201] The theory about Derrida's conceptual oppositions, to which I am referring is taken from Christopher Butler's short introduction to postmodernism; see Bibliography

their psychological development throughout the play show how the outside world is gradually folded into and inside the self.

At the beginning, shown as children, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia reveal much about the nature of their identities. These identities are not characterised through their position in a certain hierarchy or their political situation, neither by a certain concrete characteristic feature, but rather through abstract notions, notions that are typical for their personality. Cordelia is identified with words, Regan with touch and Goneril with colours.

> **CORDELIA** I like words.
> (…)
> **REGAN** I love the feel of wood, (…)
> (…) Sometimes when I touch it, I can almost
> feel the wood breathing still, its breath, my
> breath. (…)
> **GONERIL** When I look the world breaks into
> colours. (…)
> (…)
> Self portrait … on a throne … scarlet, gold,
> black – it's outside.
>
> (*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 1, pp. 217-218)

At the beginning, their unspoilt identity is represented, they are allowed to be what they want and do what they feel they should do. Cordelia plays with words and likes tasting and examining the weight of each of them. For her, silence means neither absence nor emptiness, but rather thinking and creating. Regan carves wood, works on shapes, including her own 'shape', suggesting that it is possible to create one's identity and believe in the possibility of becoming particular. Goneril paints and dreams of painting the variety of colours on a big canvas, harbouring her big dream and ambition to become the king, sitting on the throne and ruling the kingdom. She believes that it is possible and can come true, "And one day, I'll get it right." she says.

As we proceed further in the play, the initial state is changed. The outside is gradually folded into the inside, the daughters are taught 'good manners', to avoid 'boy's manners' or speaking loudly, to avoid all the things the king and the 'kingdom' dislike. They are taught to control their wishes and desires, and that "Wanting doesn't come into

it"[202]. No matter how natural a girl's desire for power appears, even as natural as a boy's in the play, Goneril's dream about sitting on the throne and being the ruler of the country can never come true. Their place in the 'outside' is to get married and to have children, they are forced to enter arranged marriages organised and initiated by their father. Marriage is depicted as an official registering of the master and slave relationship. Regan's experience is also formed by an unwanted pregnancy, which excludes her from the social order of royalty and makes her less adequate for marrying 'properly' and upholding the right image of the upper class.

Experience and the mysterious process of 'telling stories' by the Nurse is gradually built into the daughters' identities, shaping their identities as well as personal experiences such as sister rivalry, jealousy, and the absence of their parents. It is clear that right from the beginning, Lear prefers Cordelia to any other member of the family, which naturally causes jealousy among the daughters. Cordelia is depicted as a naïve, angelic creature, who does not seem to understand the negative workings of the family and the artificiality of social institutions such as marriage and family structure. The two older daughters miss their father and his absence makes them suffer. Goneril longs for her father's presence and attention:

> **GONERIL** I am going to see him again. Touch him again. Smell him. He always smells lovely.
>
> (*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 5, p. 221)

However, the bitter experience of being unwanted – he pushes her away – makes her deeply disappointed and gradually, she becomes toughened, unemotional. After the death of the Queen, the job of organising the budget and doing the accounts is passed onto Goneril, which makes her definitely convinced that she can never be a main character, but only remain a supporting one, just like her mother used to be. Her inner change starts to appear on her face as well. The restrictions and disappointments of the outside are gradually built into the inside and result in inner constraints.

On the other hand, the inside also influences the outside. The inner changes of the daughters become more and more visible and start to operate on the outside level as well. Frustration and disappointment have formed the personality of Goneril to such an extent

[202] *Lear's Daughters*, Scene 12, p. 229

that her behaviour changes, she becomes a cold agent who not only suffers from rigid mechanisms, but starts to support and create such mechanisms herself. She starts to be ruled by hatred and conscious reckoning.

The high extent of playfulness present in *Lear's Daughters* is a wonderful means of demonstrating that all the characters are aware of playing a part. Their experience of the 'outside' world has taught them to hide their 'insides', the only way to survive is by playing a role to please and to subvert their own desires by pretending and diverting attention. The play is full of movements, dancing and singing, as if the characters were on a feast. They mime, love riddles and play games, especially word games. They frequently play the game "Knock, knock. Who's there?", asking each other and expecting an answer, supposing that the other person reveals his/her identity or changes his/her mask after a certain period of time.

On the other hand, these games are wonderful ways of discovering new forms and meanings. For example through word games, the association game or the rhyming game, they discover unconscious feelings and help to uncover attitudes about certain commonplaces and social conventions. Playing games helps pass the time, as well. When one has nothing to do or does not want to think about anything, it is a wonderful idea to play some games that divert one's attention.

FOOL Game?
NURSE Out of season.
FOOL No! Word game. Empty.
NURSE Full.
FOOL Stomach.
NURSE Pregnant.
FOOL Queen.
NURSE Princess.
FOOL Goneril.
NURSE (triumphantly) Regan.
(**FOOL** is astonished. Mouth falls open.)
Time's up. You lose.

(*Lear's Daughters*, Scene 9, p. 225)

Though there is not a proper carnival in the play, there is the wedding celebration, the weddings of Goneril and Regan. This is the important event, by which a girl leaves her family behind and enters the social institution of marriage. The wedding in the play includes lots of movement, singing, people, characters saying their lines at the same time or repeating the same line as if they were chanting. They vary their voices from whispers to speaking very loudly. The reader feels as if s/he was a part of a game, the participant in a spring or summer feast.

Kathleen McLuskie claims that chaos can be avoided by new forms of social organisation and affective relationships, whereas she emphasises the importance of family relationships. What *Lear's Daughters* suggests is that chaos and confusion are not connected with female power and calculation, but rather with the emptiness of old conventions, the coldness of a selfish father, reinforcing women into unwanted marriages and the confusion or even loss of basic values such as parental love, tolerance and openness. *Lear's Daughters* displays a variety of female identities and offers a colourful revision of conventions and establishing new interpretations.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The mixture of Shakespeare, feminism and the investigation of identity seems to be a dangerous combination. It certainly is, if we consider that it attacks conventions and demands new concepts, definitions and names, along with a thorough re-examination of older ones. It questions, undermines and even blows up our view of who we are, thereby provoking substantial and substantive thought. We are confronted with the fact that our perception of ourselves and of our little world is a construction, the pieces of which require regular checking, mending and even exchanging. This process of checking involves thinking, provides pleasure and results in finding new hope, a new path, and a new beginning.

When reading Shakespeare's plays, it is possible to find answers for the most basic and most central human questions posed in order to understand the world, reality and human identity better. Female identities in Shakespeare have been updated in the plays of modern feminist adaptations, more particularly in the adaptations of tragedies; these modern works investigate the nature of the female world and fill in the gaps left by their Shakespearean pairs.

Feminism is one of the most influential and provocative social movements, its political, social and cultural implications having influenced both everyday practices, such as the advancement of women's rights, and the attitudes of people. The colourful diversity of different branches and schools of thought within feminisms shows that it is impossible to reach a single definition of feminism. However, all feminist approaches and even historical stages of feminism are connected by the fact that they all share political undertones and motivations, echoed in all spheres and fields of feminism, including feminist literary criticism, though the historical outline of feminism has shown that the intensity of political motivation has changed throughout the decades and the focus of feminism has varied over time.

Feminist literary critics point out that the place of women in literature is determined by such female realities as housework, raising children, working at paid jobs and the long exclusion of women from education and public life in a male-oriented culture. All of these realities hinder finishing a book and narrow down the opportunities available to women. The political, social and cultural status of women has generally

determined the number of female writers and writings, as well as the way women were represented in canonical texts. Feminist critical writings and the goals of feminist literary criticism are strongly politically motivated, given that they analyse the social position of women writers and the oppressive nature of a male-dominated literary universe.

It is possible to declare that a major body of feminist literary criticism moves on a thematic level, inseparable from political ambitions and concerns about the social and cultural positions of women. Even feminist pieces of work reflect the goals and ambitions of feminism in a wider sense. They internalise the claim that at a societal level, further activities need to be carried out in order to ensure true equality for women; for instance, it is important to pass legislation on providing more efficient and available childcare facilities, eliminate sexual violence against women, improve conditions for maternity leave, and ensure equal pay for equal work. Feminist literary criticism and feminist literary works deal with social, political and cultural realities, plus contemporary issues such as abortion and birth control, domestic violence, equal educational opportunities, free choice – all of which determine the formation of female identity – though they admit that politics and social demands are always combined with women's private anxieties and personal experiences such as marriage, childbearing and personal dreams.

In carrying out this investigation, I expected both Shakespeare and feminist criticism to contribute to a deeper comprehension of my own (female) identity, to teach me new ways and modes of understanding. I attempted to uncover what female awareness and consciousness mean, what it simply means to be a woman. Throughout the research, one of the core questions that emerged was whether it is important to investigate female identity at all. Questioning the necessity of analysing and defining female identity presupposes the question of whether it is important to define basic classifications and axioms of feminism. My answer is a definite "yes". In order to formulate adequate goals and aims, it is important to know the identity of the formulator and crucial to set down what one means by female identity, what the factors influencing and forming identity are. It is equally necessary to differentiate between collective and individual identity, in order to avoid misunderstandings and unnecessary, often damaging, generalisations.

Is female identity a norm or does it stem from individual personal experience? Is it something we are taught and given, something we live through and experience, or something that is transcendent over time and space? Is it a bottle that needs to be filled with various additives, such as race, class, age, ethnicity and sexuality, in order to become complete? At the beginning of this investigation there was but one question in my hand;

with several goals and different focal points of comprehension, I have ended up with many more. Defining personal female identity does not engender fixed parameters with permanent characteristics and answers with eternal validity. Quite the contrary, it is a life-long pursuit, a wonderful adventure and challenge.

After the analyses and categorization of several feminist approaches to female identity, the first thing that can be concluded is that the definition of female identity always depends on what extent and how much one emphasises the balance between the private and the public, and which critical stance or perspective one takes. The discussion of female identity and analysis of gender seems inseparable from politics and social implications, since social norms and forms have the power to trap the individual and influence even the most private things, such as language acquisition, the image one has about his/her own body; even biological facts and social positions seem to establish fixed and seemingly inevitable destiny for women. However, continuous efforts to redefine old conventions and attempts to create new definitions have proven the power of the individual over social norms, that the individual has the ability to change and reinterpret public forms and is even capable of changing him/herself. This change depends on individual choice and is a conscious personal project. Because of the possibility of change and personal choice, it is easier to identify which factors have an important role in the *formation* of female identity than which factors actually *comprise* that identity. Race, age, class, sexual orientation, nationality, idiosyncratic personal experience (a wholly unique store of experiences), religion, political views and intellectual abilities are among the central categories that always shape the experience of being one sex or another, always contributing to the creation of personal identity.

In order to define feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, it is crucial to distinguish them from feminist interpretations of Shakespeare; furthermore, it is necessary to distinction between feminist stage productions of Shakespearean plays and feminist textual adaptations: the writings of new, independent plays. Analysis and investigation of the field of feminist (textual) adaptations of Shakespeare has shown that the field is constantly involving, it is built on critical analysis and feminist interpretation of the 'original' Shakespearean play and includes manifestation of certain political beliefs and critical viewpoints.

Female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespeare is based on a feminist reinterpretation of concepts such as sin, sexuality, death, marriage, language, power and family structure. In all three adaptations, *Ophelia, Desdemona: A Play About a*

Handkerchief and *Lear's Daughters*, female identity is given a central focus of attention and, in some cases – especially in *Desdemona* and *Lear's Daughters* – it is highlighted to such an extent that the play excludes male characters and thus mystifies and distances their influence on and contribution to the formation of female identity. All adaptations understanding female identity as a social construct: the target of social influences and the interplay between the interior and the exterior. The nature of this construct also allows diversity, in that the protagonists have to face not only the elements of the construct, but also what happens when these elements fall apart. They are in search of identity and sometimes have to face multiplication of identity: a matrix of elements and several subject positions, out of which they are both encouraged to choose and forced to play a part.

The depiction of female identity in feminist Shakespeare adaptations is motivated by offering women the opportunity to rethink their own Shakespeare with independent, self-conscious and active female protagonists who also reflect the social and political issues of contemporary feminist debates. The mixture of public issues with private female anxieties and motivations reflects the changeability of female identity.

The portrayal of female identity in feminist adaptations of Shakespearean tragedy suggest that it is pointless to imagine women as a uniform group, all having the same interests and needs. Today, the emphasis should instead be placed on a celebration of diversity and individuality, and the individual's ability to choose, reinterpret, construct and reconstruct.

MAGYAR NYELVŰ ÖSSZEFOGLALÁS
(HUNGARIAN SUMMARY)

A shakespeare-i életmű, a különböző irodalomkritikai irányzatok tükrében, sokszínű értelmezést tesz lehetővé. A női identitás, mint olyan, vizsgálata a feminista Shakespeare adaptációkban nemcsak irodalmi, hanem személyes kihívás is volt számomra.

A disszertáció tárgyköre: a női identitás felfedezése és elemzése a feminista Shakespeare adaptációkban. A témaválasztás során azonnal nyilvánvalóvá vált, hogy a központi kérdéskör meghatározásához, a munka tárgykörének, céljainak és hipotéziseinek kijelöléséhez, elkerülhetetlen olyan alapvető fogalmak és szakterminológia tisztázása, mint feminizmus, adaptáció, feminista adaptáció vagy a női identitás. Nyilvánvaló, hogy meg kell határozni, mit jelent nőnek lenni, női szereplőnek lenni egy irodalmi műben, és mit rejt magában a női identitás egy feminista irodalmi műben, továbbá milyen vonatkozásai vannak, ha ez a női identitás egy feminista Shakespeare adaptációban kap szerepet.

A disszertáció hét fejezetből áll két alapvető célkitűzéssel. Az egyik legfőbb célom a feminista Shakespeare kritika elméleti hátterének feltárása, az adaptáció, feminizmus, női identitás és feminista Shakespeare kritika fogalmainak behatárolása, valamint ezek elméleti megközelítéseinek feltárása, összehasonlítása volt. A másik cél a feltárt és rendszerbe foglalt elméleti háttér és sokszínű elméleti megközelítés gyakorlati alkalmazása konkrét irodalmi műveken keresztül. A részletes szövegelemzés és értelmezés során három Shakespeare tragédia feminista adaptációját vettem alapul: Bryony Lavery *Ophelia* c. művét, Elaine Feinstein és a „Women's Theatre Group" által közösen megírt *Lear's Daughters*- t (Lear leányai[203]), valamint Paula Vogel *Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief* (Desdemona: Színmű egy zsebkendőről[204]) című drámáját. Mindhárom adaptáció egy olyan új női identitást mutat be, mely merőben különbözik a Shakespeare által közvetített, vagy akár a múlt században dívó, konvencionális nőképtől.

Disszertációm alapköve és kiinduló pontja Shakespeare feminista interpretációja, annak tárgyköre és sokszínű megközelítése, valamint az ehhez aktívan kapcsolódó és

[203] Saját fordítás
[204] Saját fordítás

reagáló feminista szövegadaptáció, azaz új, önálló drámaművek vizsgálata. A disszertáció vázolja a feminista irodalomelmélet és kritika alapvető kérdéseit és módszereit, rámutat az adaptáció fogalmának összetettségére és a fogalomban rejlő intertextuális vonásokra, valamint vizsgálja Shakespeare és az adaptációk kapcsolatát. A modernkori feminista dráma adaptációk egyértelműen szükségszerűvé teszik olyan fogalmak újraértelmezését, mint az adaptáció, szerző, a szöveg felett gyakorolt autoritás és eredetiség. A „gender" fogalma, az új tartalmat nyert „nő" és a társadalmi szerep fogalma újfajta női identitást alkot a feminista drámairodalomban is.

Tagadhatatlan, hogy a feminizmus napjaink társadalmának és kultúrájának szerves részévé vált. Egy olyan társadalmi, politikai és kulturális jelenségről van szó, melyben férfi és nő egyaránt érdekelt.

A feminizmus történelmi és társadalmi fejlődése során mára eljutott arra a pontra, hogy az egyenlőség és egyenjogúság kizárólagos céljai helyett a különbözőség, sokszínűség és a tolerancia értékeiért küzdjön. A sokszínűség a feminizmusnak nem csupán célja, de egyszersmind alapvető jellemzője is. Épp ezért nehéz egy konkrét, minden szempontból hiánytalan, definíciót megfogalmazni a feminizmus leírására, hiszen a történeti változások különböző feminista irányzatok megszületéséhez vezettek. Az egymástól időben jól elkülöníthető történeti korok más-más célokat, tartalmat fogalmaztak meg, s így értelemszerűen, másként definiálták a feminizmus fogalmát is. Az egyes feminista irányzatok változatosan alkalmazzák a pszichoanalízis, dekonstrukció, poszt-strukturalizmus vagy éppen az újhistoricizmus módszereit és téziseit, ezáltal más-más színt, jelleget kölcsönözve a feminizmus általános tartalmának, társadalmi, irodalmi megítélésének.

Disszertációm alapvető állásfoglalása, hogy a feminista irányzatok összekapcsolója a politikai és társadalmi motiváció, mind a feminizmus mint társadalmi jelenség, mind pedig a feminista irodalomkritika területén belül. Habár, a politikai motiváció intenzitása az egyes fejlődési szakaszokban változó volt. A feminista irodalomkritika és irodalom jelentős része politikai, társadalmi és kulturális ambícióval fűszerezett, a politikai és társadalmi téma szintjén mozog, s legfőbb mozgatórugója a nők társadalmi helyzetének, egyenjogúságának, sokrétű szerepének javítása. Mindemellett vitathatatlan, hogy társadalmi aktivitás, az egyenjogúságért folytatott küzdelem és a nők társadalmi helyzetének javítása nélkül, lehetetlen lenne feminista irodalomról és irodalomkritikáról beszélni.

A feminista irodalomkritika magába foglalja azt az állásfoglalást, hogy társadalmi szinten további erőfeszítésekre, konkrét lépésekre van szükség a nők valós egyenjogúságának biztosításához. Például hatékonyabb törvényhozásra van szükség többek között a gyermekvállalás és gyermekgondozási lehetőségek biztosítására, a nők elleni erőszak és családon belüli erőszak kiküszöbölésére.

A feminista irodalom olyan kortárs társadalmi problémákat vet fel, mint például az abortusz, születésszabályozás, egyenlő oktatási lehetőségek, családon belüli erőszak, szabad választás, stb., melyek meghatározzák a női identitás formálódását. A női identitást befolyásoló társadalmi tényezők mellett jelentős szerepet kap a személyes tényező is, a nők alapvető emberi igényei, szükségletei, személyes tapasztalatai és vágyai.

A női identitásról szóló, és az azt vizsgáló feminista irodalomelméleti és irodalomkritikai irányzatok kategorizálása és elemzése, azt a következtetést eredményezi, hogy a női identitás definíciója nagyban függ a személyes - belső és a társadalmi - külső, tényezők közti egyensúlytól, pontosabban ezen tényezők hangsúlyosságától, valamint, hogy milyen állásfoglalást, alapelvet tekintünk viszonyítási pontnak, pl. történelmi hátteret, társadalmi szerepet, biológiai alapot, stb.

A női identitás és a „gender" kérdéskörének elemzése elválaszthatatlan a politika és társadalmi aspektusok kérdéskörétől, mivel a társadalmi formák és normák nagymértékben befolyásolhatják az egyén legintimebb szféráit is, mint például a nyelvi akvizíciót, az egyén testéről alkotott képét, a biológiai faktorok valamint társadalomban betöltött szerepek mind-mind befolyásolhatják és sokszor meghatározzák a női identitás kialakulását, ill. fejlődésének irányát. Ezzel szemben a régi konvenciók, beidegződések, szerepek újrafogalmazását ösztönző, valamint az új formák és definíciók kialakítását szorgalmazó folyamatos kísérletek igazolják, hogy az egyén képes mind a változásra, mind pedig a változtatásra, képes megváltoztatni és újraszerkeszteni a társadalmi formákat, s ez által felülkerekedni rajtuk. Mind a változás, mind pedig a külső tényezők megváltoztatása személyes elhatározás és választás eredménye és egy önállóan megvalósítandó projektum része. Épp ezért, a női identitás *alkotóelemei* helyett érdemesebb a női identitás kialakulását és fejlődését *befolyásoló* tényezőkről beszélni, mint például a nemiség, faj, társadalmi osztály, szexuális beállítottság, nemzetiség, egyedi személyes tapasztalat, vallás, politikai meggyőződés, intellektuális képesség, családi háttér, stb., mind befolyásoló tényezői a személyes identitás, az egyén öntudata kialakulásának.

Disszertációm alapvető tétele továbbá, hogy a feminista Shakespeare adaptációk a feminista Shakespeare interpretáción alapulnak, szervesen kapcsolódnak hozzájuk.

A szövegek elemzéséből kitűnt, hogy a feminista Shakespeare adaptációk nőábrázolása olyan fogalmak feminista újraértelmezésén alapszik, mint például a bűn, szexualitás, halál, házasság, nyelv, hatalom és család. Mindhárom dráma adaptációban központi szerepet kap a női identitás kialakulása és formálódása, a *Desdemona* és *Lear's Daughters* c. darabokban pedig a férfi szereplők elhagyása és a női szereplők nem titkolt preferálása, valamint a külső tényezők misztifikálása segítségével új megvilágításba helyezi a női identitás kialakulását. Mindhárom adaptáció olyan társadalmi konstrukcióként ábrázolja a női identitást, mely a társadalmi hatások célpontja, ugyanakkor a külső – szociális – és belső – önreflexív folyamatok közjátékának eredményeképpen jön létre. A női identitás-konstrukció legfőbb jellemzője a sokrétűség, melynek következtében az egyén nemcsak a konstruktív összetevő elemek széles skálájával kell, hogy szembenézzen, hanem időről-időre azok változásával, bővülésével, esetleges szétesésével, azaz folyamatos transzformációjával is. Az adaptációk nőalakjai lefixált, állandó identitás helyett inkább „énkereső" utat járnak be, sokszor szembesülnek az identitás multiplikálódásával, hiszen a szubjektum-pozíciók végtelen hálójában több olyan szerepet töltenek be, amely olykor személyes választás, olykor pedig társadalmi elvárás, illetve kényszer eredménye.

A feminista Shakespeare adaptációk nőábrázolásának fő motivációja, hogy lehetővé tegye mind a férfi, mind pedig a nő olvasónak, hogy megalkossa, újragondolja saját Shakespeare-ét, a Shakespeare által felkínált kérdéseket, olyan nőalakok létrehozásával, akik önálló, öntudatos és aktív jellemükön keresztül tükrözik a 20. és 21. századi feminista témakörök társadalmi és politikai kérdéseit. Az adaptációkban bemutatott nőalakok ugyanakkor kiválóan bemutatják a női identitásban rejlő lehetőséget a mindenkori változásra, érzékeltetik a társadalmi és személyes motiváció kettősségét.

A feminista Shakespeare adaptációk egyik alapvető üzenete, hogy határozott megkülönböztetésre van szükség kollektív és egyéni női identitás között, továbbá, hogy a kollektív női identitás számos buktatót rejt magában. Értelmetlen vállalkozás egységes, uniformizált női identitásról beszélni, hiszen a női nemiség csupán egyetlen elem az identitás alkotórészei közül, lehetetlen azonos érdekekkel és szükségletekkel rendelkező egységes női társadalomról beszélni. A hangsúly a sokszínűség és individualitás előtérbe helyezésén van, az egyén alapvető képességén választani, gondolkodni, értelmezni, alkotni és újraalkotni.

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