

Andrea Puskás: *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare*. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó 2014, p. 134 ISBN 978 615 5219 74 0

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Literary criticism enfolds plenty of untouched and rarely discussed themes. When encountering the expression feminism or female identity, it is generally interrelated with social, cultural or political issues linked to our personal subjective observation, knowledge and mentality. But how does feminism and female identity evolve in English literature? How do the reader and the author make sense of the interpretation of these subject matters? This exceptional topic is also elaborated and highlighted in the book of Andrea Puskás, titled *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare*, which investigates the subject matter of feminism and female identity, appearing in William Shakespeare's selected tragedies as well as their 20th century feminist adaptations.

The book consists of 7 chapters, analysing and exploring feminism from different points of view, introducing female identity embedded in Shakespeare's well-known plays and the adaptations of feminist dramatists. In chapter 1, *Adaptations of Shakespeare* we learn about sources and adaptations, which allow the reader and the audience to be able to interpret and approach these masterpieces from a new angle. An adaptation is like a revival of the original work, which is altered in several ways. This is also related to intertextuality, where adaptations are linked with a pre-existing text, rebuilding the textual structures of the original work, placed in a new angular concept and perception. However, a new adaption sometimes does not retrieve the same literary value, intention and message represented by the original author. The adaptor uses his or her own individual ideas to create something new from an existing play, which may become controversial and not always approved positively by the audience.

Chapter 2, *Frightening Feminism*, investigates the circumstances of female identity and its cultural background, referring to the subjective conclusions of the term 'feminism'. Even nowadays, there are existing cultures and religious values that still treat women as second class citizens and bind them to restrictions, secluding them from their human rights. Nevertheless, the revolutionary endeavour to fight for women's rights had already emerged in the 18th and 19th century, known under the term 'The Suffrage Movement', which was a long journey for women to gain their voting rights and other privileges in society.

Chapter 3, *What is a Woman? – Feminist Views on Identity* unravels the perspective of a woman in comprehending the shaping circumstances and core of her identity. Female authors often recalled past generations, being conscious about exerting changes that determine their new social positions. This meant the rejection of old patriarchal society, which was based and centred on male hegemony and included new ideas about women's position. Additionally, Chapter 3 also provides references to Afro-American literature, where female

authors significantly thermalized slavery and the inferiority of women. The analysis of female identity has also been observed from a biological point of view by female critics, stating that women are the creatures of natural grace, the representatives of feelings, intimacy and privacy. The Chapter also exposes that language is closely connected with the author's identity. Female writers were often characterized by longing for their desires and wishes, to extend their personal space and ambitions. Female communication is mentioned in literature as a tool for self-expression and self-realization. Since female writers could not raise their voice in political matters, they chose to write and incorporated their thoughts and feelings into their literary works.

Female identity is also mirrored through the nature of characters, respectively in their acts and speech. Their attitude, comments or even reactions in certain situations can easily unveil the typical nature of female characters. Chapter 4, *Shakespeare and Feminism – Feminist Approaches to Shakespeare* is dedicated to outline the variety of feminist interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. It also introduces certain critical approaches which suggest that Shakespeare already had a genuine approach to female responses. It is also described that certain feminist approaches claim that Shakespeare had an exceptional sense to treat his female characters allowing them to express their emotions and projecting their thoughts. Many female writers of the 18th century even considered Shakespeare as the supporter and developer of female identities. With the help of Shakespeare's cultural heritage, female writers got chances to express their attitude and thoughts to writing, manifesting their own identity.

The following part of the book, Chapter 5 *Female Identity in Hamlet and Ophelia* is concerned with female identity and its occurrence in social hierarchy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Bryony Lavery's play *Ophelia*. There are thoughts about the position of women in society, which is specifically pointed out in *Hamlet*, suggesting that female characters are limited, determined and judged by social standards. Nonetheless, in general sense, we may conclude through the Chapter that Shakespeare uses his female characters as representatives of virtue, but also tones the malicious manipulative ability to affect other characters and shape the outcome of personal relationships and the circumstances that evolve from them. Hence, a one-sided approach of analysing female characters in Shakespearean plays and adaptations cannot be taken for granted.

Many feminist critical approaches rather introduced women during and following the Restoration period as objects of male authority, through the complete subordination and control over women. Female characters were often depicted morally spoilt, evil-spirited, carrying the deliberate power of influence and the intent of dominating the body and the mind of male characters. The failure or fall of the male protagonist was also often connected with female identity, since women were regarded and labelled as the cause and reason of destruction, and were set as targets of enduring the shame and blame. This

basic concept of seeing women was also exemplified in Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* which is found in Chapter 6, titled *Female Identity in Othello and Desdemona: A Play About a Handkerchief*. The play also depicts the general issues about female identity, in which Desdemona represents a typical female stereotype of the Renaissance period, characterized by obedience and passivity, mostly the absolute dependence upon male characters. It is portrayed that Desdemona confronts and completely accepts her role and she exposes herself to male authority, abusive power and dominance. It may be approached as the abnegation of the self and free will due to patriarchal social values. In Vogel's play, we receive a negative image of Othello, who is described with rage and insanity; however Desdemona has no other option than accepting the malicious identity of her husband. We can also notice the relationship between female characters within the play, since Emilia is a trusted person of Desdemona, sharing their privacies and thoughts about the strong patterns of patriarchal structure. The link between female characters is visible, which is stronger, balanced and more trusted than the relationship of a man and woman.

Last but not least, Chapter 7 titled *Female Identity in King Lear and Lear's Daughters* is primarily devoted to female identity appearing in patriarchal structures, in which women are depicted as negative forces as well, leading their acts into tragedy, consequentially causing death of other characters. The play *Lear's Daughters* is about sisterhood and dark intentions related to the relationship of King Lear's daughters. It draws attention to women in a sense that the only act they do is destructiveness represented by evil deeds and manipulation, deception. Feminist critical approaches also try to delineate that female identity is not solemnly connected with innocence and the portrayal of a pure female body and soul, but they also emphasize the evil forces of women that control and lead them to countervail above everything they intend to.

Based on feminist approaches, we receive a new point of view, which is no longer centred on male characters, respectively King Lear's character, but it draws attention to women as human beings questioned by moral values. The audience may easily conclude that the play is against women, trying to label them with a permanent mark of cruelty, and the deliberate depiction of evil cast is suitable to them. Nevertheless, the chapter also outlines that the play actually tries to focus on the qualities that women seemingly do not possess in *King Lear*, and that they should be acclaimed and respected for the real positive qualities they certainly retain.

Currently, there are numerous books and film adaptations with controversial subject matters connected with the social position and status of women, which gained world-wide popularity, even in spite of the depiction of female identity in a very jolting tone. It is apparent that the attitude of the contemporary reader and audience formed a new notion of interpretation, and several

topics have been evolved to raise a new interest both in literature and the film industry. The demands for valuable literature have been recently decreased, due to the emergence of these new critical approaches, which pushed literature of the earlier centuries substantially in the background. I would recommend *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare* to any reader who prefers to immerse into a critical approach which yet has not become exhausted and over-generalized. It is a matter of fact that feminism and human identity is still an argumentative subject matter, rooted in literature for centuries. Therefore, it has left its traces in contemporary literature as well, placing the subject matters and motifs in a new scope of comprehension and interpretation. For this reason, contemporary literature may also generate questions in the reader regarding female identity, though it still remains a broad and widely discussed thematic area depending on the literary period, interwoven with the gender of the reader and the author.

Petercsák Tivadar: *A fertálymesterség. Egy hagyományörző tisztség Egerben* [Tivadar Petercsák: Die Viertelmeister. Ein traditionelles Amt in Eger]. Budapest–Eger: Kossuth Kiadó–Eszterházy Károly Főiskola 2014, 344 p. ISBN 978-963-09-8048-7

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Fertálymester ist eines der deutschen Lehnwörter im Ungarischen, das ein deutscher Leser oder Hörer mit etwas Phantasie identifizieren könnte; was jedoch das aus „Viertel“ (*fertály*) und „Meister“ (*mester*) bestehende Kompositum bedeutet, kann sich heute wohl kaum jemand vorstellen.

Als „Viertelmeister“ bezeichnete man einst einen gewählten Fürsprecher eines Stadtteils oder eines Stadtviertels. Die Viertelmeister wirkten hauptsächlich zwischen dem 16. und dem späten 19. Jahrhundert und hatten wichtige Funktionen inne: Sie verbreiteten Nachrichten in der Bevölkerung, zogen Steuern ein, organisierten die Feuerwehr und andere Gemeinschaftsarbeiten und hüteten die allgemeine Ordnung, einschließlich der für die sittlichen Regeln. Kurz gesagt: sie vermittelten zwischen der Bevölkerung und den Behörden. Die Viertelmeister stammten zwar aus völlig unterschiedlichen sozialen Schichten, waren aber immer angesehene Persönlichkeiten, die das Vertrauen der ganzen Gemeinschaft genossen.

Am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts hatte diese altertümliche Form des allgemeinen Ordnungshütens ausgedient, sodass die Viertelmeister fast überall verschwanden, bis auf einige Orte, wo sie noch bis in der Zwischenkriegszeit wirkten. Dies gilt vor allem für die Kleinstadt Eger im nordöstlichen Mittelgebirge Ungarns, die hauptsächlich durch ihren Rotwein („Das Stierblut von Eger“¹)

1 Ung. *Egri Bikavér* (Bemerkung des Redakteurs).