

WOMEN AND TYRANNY: DEFYING PATRIARCHY IN 'FEMALE' COMPLAINT LITERATURE AND JACOBAN TYRANT TRAGEDY

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Abstract

In the current piece, Female Complaint Literature and Female Complaint Literature discusses the portrayal of women as victims and/or agents of resistance. Comparisons are made and developed as the study observes the course of female characters in Thomas Heywood's *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* and Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden Tragedy* throughout the work of these characters: Jane Shore, Aspatia, Evadne and the unnamed Lady. Whereas Jane Shore is an outcast who accepts her lot and pays a price of being a tragic victim of the virtues of obedience, the Jacobean heroines demand acknowledgement of their resistance via verbal opposition, moral uprightness, and, eventually, sacrifice. In the essay, the author states that female suffering serves as a channel to the resistant male-dominated tyranny and patriarchal ideals. Based on feminist and historicist line of criticism, this paper brings out the disruption of these women on the systems that are meant to silence or oppress them. The discussion also suggests the way passivity versus active resistance identifies undergoing ideas about female agency in early modern playwriting. The paper is able to highlight the delicacy of how women responded to oppressive power structures through adopting timely approaches in addressing these situations when they place these female characters in their appropriate contexts in both history and literature. Therefore, the study implies that even amid the realization of tragedy, these characters make their spaces of subversion re-appropriating narrative control in their pain and their decisions.

Keywords : Tyranny – Female Complaint – Jacobean Tragedy –Resistance – Gender Politics.

Introduction

Women have been depicted many times in the history of the literature as inactive objects of patriarchal repression. In the early modern English drama, especially in Female Complaint Literature and Jacobean Tyrant Tragedy, female characters live in the spheres of tyrannical male authority, and their independence is put to the test, being rejected most of time. However, although these women are exploited, the way they respond to the exploitation, with the different strategies displayed, denotes diverse means of resistance.

This paper examines the way in which women respond to the tyranny as shown in the following three plays: Thomas Heywood's *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, and Thomas Middleton's *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*. Jane Shore, the pivoting character in Heywood's work, is a tragic, faithful wife forced into the position of royal concubine. In contrast, these women of the Jacobean tragedies--Aspatia, Evadne, and the unidentified Lady--do not want to be subjugated and try to avoid it by any means; they sometimes prefer death to dishonor.

It should be added that the paper explores how women writers challenge gendered expectations but also conform to the norms by comparing how resistance or victimization of the women characters in the novels are expressed. The plays do not only dramatize female suffering, but also reveal consequences of uncontrolled male desire and political power.

Women have over the course of history been faced with misery and unfair treatment and this fact has been captured through literature during different times. The status of women has been the subject of various writings by many authors and their depictions portray varied realities on the struggles they underwent. This was one of the earliest literary traditions to deal with this when the female complaint literature would usually portray women as victims of

lustful and oppressive forces. The Jacobean tragedies also were marked by fancied sexy women who were being attacked and used by tyrants whose only intention was to satisfy his feelings. Although various authors have focused and brought out female characters in their unique styles, in essence, their stories keep on leading the women to a severe one common fate, the enslavement and passivity.

The women in the plays of choice resemble the one of Jane Shore tremendously because they are similarly tempted by the deadly acts of tyrants. These, however, are no longer the same as she is a different person in one major way: they are the ones who choose to control their destiny. As a historical and literary personality, Jane Shore had a lasting appeal that sparked many portrayals in plays, poems, historical works and ballads. She is introduced as a beautiful and young wife of a goldsmith who gets embarrassed with King Edward IV when he ruins the lady. Jane is subjected to his wish out of duty and obedience mostly as he was the king. Authors have painted different images of Jane Shore. To give an example, in *Richard III* (1593) by Shakespeare, she does not even appear on stage: she is only mentioned by other characters. In this adaptation, Richard III himself hates her and eventually, he sentences her to a public penance, which is a degrading performance that aims at discrediting her in the society. In *The First and Second Part of monarch Edward IV*, Thomas Heywood expresses sympathy for her due to her role as a pawn of the monarch. She was a victim of the untamed libido she symbolized via Edward, yet his patronage afforded her a life of money and luxury, enabling her to wield significant influence at court (Pratt 1970: 1293).

The matrimonial allegiance of Jane to the goldsmith has been construed by several scholars as a very unfortunate and harmful step in her life as the move fostered in their judgments, directly led her to take the next step to becoming the mistress of the king. In this light, the marriage is not only seen as a case of bad judgement but a dire experience that acted as a detonant to her involvement with the ruler. Such critical readings are however very different in the character description that Thomas Heywood gives of Jane, a staunch loyal and loving wife to her husband, Mathew Shore, whom she genuinely loves and shows deep feelings of love and devotion. This compassionate depiction is reflected in the study of Pratt who had shed light on how Lizzie audiences viewed Jane. As Pratt mentions, the Elizabethan Englishmen used to treat her with some sense of pity especially given the poor and miserable conditions that she had to face after the death of King Edward IV. Pratt says this sympathy was due not only to her misadventures, but also to the admiration of her ability to affect the affections of a knightly and gallant king (Pratt, 1970, p. 1306). But other meanings are not to be excluded. Jane can actually be viewed as a cynical and self-seeking character who left her husband because of economic prosperity, social status and financial stability. In the same way, she can be perceived as a strong survivor who was forced to do it out of necessity, in order to protect her own welfare and the welfare of the husband, amidst the hardship. Irrespective of the contradictions of character, as well as uncertainties in her motivational directions, the dramatic portrayal of Heywood is clarity itself: Jane has proven to be throughout the play the faithful and virtue wife.

"Were I by thousand storms of fortune tost",
"And should endure the poorest wretched life",
"Yet Jane will be thy honest loyal wife".
"The greatest prince the sun did ever see",
"Shall never make me prove untrue to thee". (*1 EIV*, 2.1)

She adores him and does not complain of getting married to him. At the end of the scene, she speaks of parting with thee, my heart bleeds (*1 EIV*, 2.1). Her attitude toward Shore is what is obscure but, construed variously by the Elizabethan Englishmen.

In contrast to the attitude of Jane, the heroines of Jacobean drama were not listless and avenged on the Tyrant their honour and their families. The king was attracted to Jane by her beauty as this is the first thing to be noticed by him. King Edward even begins to flirt her before her husband:

You spake the word well, very well, i' faith:
But Mistress Shore her tongue hath glided it.
Tell me, Cousin Howard, and Tom Sellinger,
Had ever citizen so fair a wife? (*I EIV*, 4.2).

Shore shows no responsibility in hearing the speech uttered by the King. Shore was passive which Richard Helgerson justifies:

Heywood's Jane and Matthew Shore- he gets a first name too- are bound one another by an intense love, a love that survives her infidelity and his jealous anger. This love makes Heywood's *Edward IV* a "domestic" tragedy in a way that no other version of the story could have been (Helgerson 1999: 463).

Shore is even willing to believe that his wife could never leave him, but the reality turns out to be much more powerful than he thinks. Jane ends up being a victim of not only King Edward IV but also King Richard III who is his successor.

Heywood attempts to highlight this part of her tale in his characterization to get the sympathy of the audience. Here Edward IV is relentless in his pursuit of Jane, he moves deliberately and sometimes Edward IV goes to the extent of visiting Shore at her shop disguised with the aim of furthering his flirtation and win her over to his seduction.

"King : The earth brings forth those stones we hold of price,
Her radiant eyes, dejected to the ground,
Would turn each pebble to a diamond".
"Gaze, greedy eyes; and be not satisfied
Till you find rest where heart's desire doth bide"

Jane: "What would you buy, sir, that you look on there?"

King: "your fairest jewel, be it not too dear (*IEIV*, 4.3)".

Edward seeks to acquire Jane's humility and purity. In the beginning, she declines his attractions especially when he comes disguised. But after knowing the truth about him being the king, it is fear and not seduction that she portrays. According to Helgerson, the house destroyed by the lechery of King Edward is highly valued by Heywood as something immensely significant and as momentous as an object of the bourgeois ideal as he can find on the Elizabethan stage (Helgerson 1999, p. 463). Heywood, in his work, adds much emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the marriage is viewed as a sentimental and moral platform that should be kept clear of the contaminating influences of power and desire.

Upon his introduction, the King may openly convey his passion for Jane. Only your affection, radiant angel! Edward is pursuing the subject I have fortuitously begun to address with you. When Shore is certain that the king will pursue his wife as prey and that he will be unable to save her, Shore lamented:

"Oh, traitor beauty, oh deceitful good!"
"That dost conspire against thyself and love!"
"No sooner got, but wished again of others!"
"In thin own self injurious to thy self!"
"Oh, rich, poor portion thou good evil thing!"
"How many joyful woes still dost thou bring!" (*I EIV*, 4.3)

He is unable to assist his wife since now he is going to face the King who they are expected to obey "The King exercises his prerogative to seduce the wife of Shore, and he interprets this

event as a sense of rebellion against the natural social order” (Hawkes 2010: 40). "King Edward was so captivated by Jane's beauty that he visited Shore's shop to purchase her instead of gold". Hawkes carries on stating that the sexual appeal of Edward to a woman who does not belong to noble origins is symbolized as a shift between natural and supernatural assessment tactics (Hawkes 2010: 40). Edward IV accuses her with putting a price on her to gain over her sexually. Jane and her husband still express their complaints relating to oppression that they experience and the breaching of the home-a sacred place. King Edward IV never gives up and he keeps on sending Jane letters in effort to woo her. Fear, moral upbringing and temptation pull her in opposite directions when it comes to accepting his invitation. Being unsure of what to do, she consults Mrs. Blague. Instead of preventing this, Mrs. Blague tempts Jane with thoughts of richness and comfort and cleverly leads Jane into giving in to the sexual desires of the king.

"You know, his greatness can dispense with ill",

"Making the sin seem lesser by his worth";

"And you yourself, your children, and your friends",

"Be all advanced to worldly dignity" ; (*IEIV*, 5.1).

Subsequently, the king enters to seduce her, and she is unable to resist; she expresses her grievances and laments that if compelled, she can only wish she had not lived to witness such a day (*IEIV*, 5.1). The situation goes against Jane that the wealth and status are tempting. She fails to gain her husband and her social status in her society due to the tainted life of the royal family. She closes the scene asserting "I will in; and ere the time begin" (*IEIV*, 5.1). There is a negative attitude of Shore. According to John Kerrigan, Shore left her bed following the time the king had taken her as his Concubine (Kerrigan 1991: 205). Shore is no exception to Jane; his house that is meant to be a sacred place to him was violated by the king. Shore demonstrates resistance in the second section of the play in order to get his wife back.

Jane ends up bagging the title of the mistress of the king until his demise in 1483. That of Shore himself is not so clear; Heywood indicates that he goes out of England a temporary abort; whereabouts he came back. Upon receiving the news of his wife being taken along by the king, Shore is accepting the fact that such is the case, and why he can not stop it, he will in the name of God accept it and send her off (*IEIV*, 5.2). It has been defined as complaint literature:

With women as complainants, some of the restrictions of the *Mirror* form, for example the passive situation, the narrow perspective and the apologetic tone, are employed to more plausible effects. Usually the women speaking in these complaints present themselves as victims overruled by tyrannical circumstances (Schmitz 2011: 3).

The women in Jacobean Drama oppose and challenge the Tyrant, although at the expense of their lives. Jane is not a dissenter; instead, she is a malcontent. Nevertheless, her moans push Shore, Ayer, and her servant, Jocky, to withstand.

Some time later in disguise, Shore visits Jane and upon her recognizing him, she pleads to accompany him. And he denies and responds:

Thou go with me, Jane? Oh, God forbid

That I should be a traitor to my king!

Shall I become a felon to his pleasures,

And fly away as guilty of the theft?

No, my dear Jane, I say it may not be (*IEIV*, 5.4).

Shore, however, is faithful to the king, because, as a ruler anointed by God, the monarch is to be served without any compromises, which means even at the expense of own sacrifice. In The Second Part of Edward IV, Shore meets Jane once again but this time disguised, and itching on how dismal it is that they have been forced apart by fate. King Edward, in this extension, passes on and Richard III takes the throne. Soon after that, Richard orders Jane to do a penance in

public with a proclamation. Being submissive to her fate, Jane says, “God so wills it: well I know I am a great sinner” (2EIV, 4.1). Whereas certain members of the crowd sympathize with her, any attempt at showing compassion toward her ends up in harsh retribution. Ayre tries to help her even when it is strictly prohibited, with him being condemned and hung. Similarly, Jocky, her little manservant presents her with some food in good will, which makes him a traitor and he gets hanged by the guards.

By defying Richard III's instruction, they exhibit defiance and provide assistance to her. Shore then acquiesces to his wife's pardon after sacrificing their life for her, to which she replies that it is delightful to perish in matrimony, deeming it a pleasant wedded death (2EIV, 5.2). He is charged with treason, and sentenced to death. Their death is sweet as they are reunited together though they live a miserable life. As Wendy Wall points out, the play ends with a kiss between the couple in such a moment when the aspects of reunion as well as death collide, still betrayed in the end by both a true king and an illegitimate one (Wall 1998, p. 123). Here Heywood intentionally creates such a final dramatic scene to have the audience more sympathetic to the tragedy, as royal abuse of power is the direct cause.

In this scene, Jane is killed by Shore, who blames the Tyrants for the destruction of the idyllic existence he and his wife had enjoyed, stating, “A king had all my joy, That her enjoy'd / And by a king again she was destroy'd” (2EIV, 5.2). They were subjected to injustice. Wendy Wall will elucidate:

Separated by King Edward IV, Jane and Matthew Shore reunite as victims of the villainous Richard III, and die huddled around a martyr's grave, exiled from the community of London. Saturated with hyperbolic affect and laced with political protest, their death is promoted by Matthew's revelation of himself to his estranged wife, whose heart immediately breaks (Wall 1998: 123).

And yet their death is triumphant although they lived a tragic life. And although the Tyrants wish to separate them, they die in tandem.

The portrayal of women in vengeance literature and Jacobean tragedy of tyrants is constructed within a realm of male chaos and sexist oppression, whereby the narrative of women is essential to its framework. Building upon the tragic motif of Jane Shore, playwrights Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher composed *The Maid's Tragedy*, which debuted in 1611. The drama centers on a lascivious tyrant who derives gratification from dominating and indulging his desires through the female characters. Two women are presented in the first act, Aspatia and Evadne, who also have a specific symbolic sense. Aspatia is a good girl who has to give up the man she is betrothed to, Amintor. In contrast, Evadne is the mistress of the king and she is forced into marrying Amintor because the king wants to cover up his shameful actions. According to Eastwood, Jacobean audience would have been able to view Aspatia as an example of female chastity, specifically given the level of interaction that she shares with Evadne the self-proclaimed paramour of the king (Eastwood 2004, p. 12). Based on these opposite characters, the playwrights create the old dichotomy of the virgin and the whore: the caricature black or white typical or evil stereotype of women in the Jacobean play.

The *Second Maiden Tragedy*, another Jacobean drama, was also composed in 1611. The primary narrative of the theater is around the legitimate king, a usurper, and a lovely lady engaged to Govianus. The Tyrant seeks to obtain the affection of the woman whose name is absent from both her own and the king's in the play. The woman rejects the Tyrant despite all attempts to persuade her, since she is devoted to her fiancé, Govianus. Female Jacobean characters maintain their honor till death, however they ultimately perish. They resist and oppose it to maintain virginity. Anne Lancashire asserts that the play

provides us with a chaste and a beautiful lady, a lustful tyrant courtiers and ordinary messengers sent from the tyrant to the lady, a husband of high political and social position 'dead' with fear and unable to help his wife, after a brief prayer to God, she suicides with a sword (Lancashire 1974: 271).

Unlike Jane Shore, who yields to despair, Jacobean women die for the sake of honor. In *The Maid's Tragedy*, Amintor is startled when the king decides to marry him to Evadne, so forsaking Aspatia. "She held my confidence, yet the king did not allow it" (MT, 1.1.140). Amintor is unaware that Evadne is the king's paramour. Eastwood notes that

While Evadne would unquestionably have been considered a whore (sexually active and sexually provocative) and therefore worthy of censure, Beaumont and Fletcher depict her as beautiful, honest and with a power and assertiveness unmatched by any other character in the play (Eastwood 2004: 13).

Evadne is a manipulative person; nonetheless, she is paradoxically dominated by men.

Aspatia manifests on the wedding day of Amintor and Evadne, expressing her profound sorrow for her loss.

"With sacrifice, than now, This should have been
 My night and all your hands have been employed
 In giving me spotless offering".

"To young Amintor's bed, as we are now".

"For you. Pardon Evadne; would my worth

Were great as yours, or that the king, or he,

Or both, though so! Perhaps he found me worthless (MT, 2.1.44-50)".

Aspatia is bitter because Amintor has left her and claims that she is redemptive like Evadne (Eastwood 2004: 14). Aspatia also has qualities that disturb the cultural stereotypes of femininity and taints her purity. She brings out the unseen wish of physical love when she speaks of a wish to have the marital pleasures "May all the marriage joys/ That longing maids imagine in their beds" (MT, 2. 1. 90 -91). Aspatia is a chaste woman who has no right to feel this way because of her circumstances, yet she keeps on complaining.

In *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, it is shown that Govianus was the legitimate sovereign who was violently expelled from his realm. The Tyrant reveres the Lady and beseeches Helvetius, her progenitor, to serve as an intermediary for his daughter. The Lady confronts the Tyrant, unequivocally expressing her rejection and resistance towards him.

"I come not hither

To please the eye of glory, but of goodness,

And that concerns not you, sir; you're for goodness,

I dare not deal with you". "I have found my match,

And I will never loose him". (SMT, 1.1.127-131).

She harbors no fear of the Tyrant, yet she detests him. Richard Levin posits that the plot is designed to evaluate the heroine's virtue, presenting her with the dilemma of either submitting to the tyrant who desires her or remaining loyal to the man to whom she is inherently bound, both legally and morally. The woman triumphs in the examination as she declines to associate with the Tyrant, and the ramifications of her decision elevate her via successive spiritual victories (Levin 1963: 221). The demise of her father alters his circumstances and fosters resilience, resulting in a triumph.

The Lady in *The Second Maiden Tragedy* serves as the counterpoint to Aspatia, who is devoid of an escape and finally forfeits her love. The Lady on the other hand upholds her honour to the extent of committing suicide instead of letting the tyrant enjoy her body. Instead, Evadne

prefers death as she feels rejected entirely and everything that she used to identify herself with is gone. The main characteristic of Jacobean drama, as noted by Vaska Tumir, is indeed the fact that there are the unbelievable abundance of pathetic, often chaste and always victimized heroines and all the rest of the accouterments of the form typically accruing to affective and she-tragedy (Tumir 1990, p. 415). This characterization is ascribed to most of the women in the genre but Evadne is quite unusual, being an egocentric, social climber, she readily accepts to be the lover of the king to be gets the favor in the social order. At the point when she feels that the king has betrayed her, she decides to change her behaviour. In the meantime Aspatia continues to express her sorrow, and she meets Amintor as he is going to his chamber.

Go, and be happy in your lady's love
May all the wrongs that you have done to me
Be utterly forgotten in my death! (*MT*, 2.1.112-114)

Aspatia does not want to give up Amintor but there is nothing she can do since the will of the king must be followed. In grief and mourning, she starts behaving because of anger. Aspatia, as Haselkorn notes, is the embodiment of the conscience, purity or religious orthodoxy (Haselkorn 1990, p. 120) significantly so that the man at times, can find a cause to turn her down based on her self effacing and silent criticisms. Finally, Aspatia is left in the mercy of the tyrant leaving her to become one of the victims of the vicious cycle of women oppression and exploitation in Jacobean drama.

In the bridal chamber, Evadne emerges unscathed with Amintor, who is astonished yet unable to act. Haselkorn asserts that Evadne not only falls victim to the fallacy of a masculinity complex but also that her egocentrism challenges traditional morals and ethics; Evadne articulates a deeply personal protest in her quest for fulfillment (Haselkorn 1990, p. 121). She remains faithful to her pledge to the king and so refrains from consummating her marriage with Amintor, not due to chastity, but rather to pursue power via the monarch she aspires to attain. Upon the King's arrival the next morning to verify her adherence to the pledge, Evadne candidly reveals her pursuit of power and status.

I swore indeed that I would never love
A man of lower place, but if your fortune
Should throw you from this height, I bade you trust
I would forsake you and would bend to him
That won your throne. I love with my ambition,
Not with my eyes. (*MT*, 3.1.170-175).

She is a mercenary lady who pursues power and dominance. Conversely, Aspatia vocally expresses her grievances over injustice, lacking any ulterior reasons. She is resigned to the destiny that separated her from Amintor. This destiny is determined by the monarch and his edicts.

In *The Maid's Tragedy* the character of Aspatia plays the role of virtue and honesty but she is not much involved in the major action within the play. Instead, it is made the subject of a story leading to Evadne, whose character traits are the selfishness and lust. Ronald Hubert describes the role of Aspatia that at first glance seems to support the traditional charge that women lack strength or the ability to handle themselves emotionally. Unlike the rather direct and self-centered attitude demonstrated by Evadne, Aspatia reacts to the demands of male force with all the trepidation of pathos. However, she turns out to be the most honest and ethical being of the play. What is greater than her sincerity and faithfulness is her beautiful rant against the sufferings of women who had to live in the world dominated by males. Emotional and social gravities of the position she occupies in the play are highlighted in this lament as her moral reaction to the ethical dilemmas and oppressive social environment is determined by virtue of her exceptional position of the abandoned woman of the play (Hubert

1977, p. 607). The situation experienced by Aspatia can be related to the historical character of Jane Shore who ended up with nothing after obeying the male father figure. However, contrastingly, the essential character of the Lady of The Second Maiden Tragedy exhibits an even higher level of courage by fighting off the possibility of violation through actions of pure killing and self sacrificial purposes. In these books, the terms and demeanors of women characters are quite different according to the kind of treatment they are accorded by the men who have powers to treat them.

The Lady's courage, loyalty, and moral uprightness are exemplified in The Second Maiden's Tragedy when the Tyrant sends his guards to apprehend her. She starts to lament and weep while engaging in conversation with Govianus as the guards rap at the door.

"Govianus. I cannot loose thee so".

"Lady. Shall I be taken"

"And lost the cruel'st way? Then would'st thou curse"

"That love that sent forth pity to my life".

"Too late thou wouldst (*SMT*, 3.77-81)".

She implores Govianus to end her life, but upon his failure, she resolves to take her own life.

"Th'are but thine enemies that tell thee so"

"His lust may part me from thee, but death, never;"

"Knock Thou canst not lose me there, for, dying thine,"

"Thou dost enjoy me still. Kings cannot rob thee (*SMT*, 3.143-146)".

The Lady commits suicide using the sword of Govianus when the guards start to knock on the door. Once inside, they do nothing but to discover her dead corpse and the celebrating Govianus, who experiences no other emotions than comfort and relief at the woman having evaded the clutches of the Tyrant (Lancashire 1974, p. 267). The Lady manages to find her own kind of triumph in this play: she confronts the tyrant and deprives him of his chance to triumph in possession of her, and thus finds her way to a kind of agency that was all that was left to her in this situation. Although this is a tragedy, it is also presented as a moral and personal victory over despotism by her death.

Besides tyranny over women, the tyrant in these plays oppresses men too as they are made ineffectual in making a difference. The system is corrupt and the order of the day is favouritism, a social system perpetuated by the tyrant through his authoritative misuse of power. Eileen Allman notes that:

In revenge tragedy, some men and some women serve tyranny; some resist serving it; some first opt to serve, then return to abandoned principles. Characters of both sexes struggle, or refuse to struggle, to keep their sense of virtue in the face of pervasive and omnivorous cynicism. Some lament their impotence to correct injustice; some sharpen their tongues to further its cause. The origin of that general disempowerment- the tyrant-is male, but his maleness, an isolated and absolute- claim to mastery, sweeps men and women alike into ignominious postures of subjection (Allman 1999: 18).

Even though in the last moments of the play, Matthew Shore defies, he fails to rescue Jane. In the same way, Amintor is also helpless to change his lot in life. Where the men characters utter their claims, the women utterances have more dramatic and moral value. This is enhanced by Eileen Allman who affirms that the female characters are ideally framed when they are not silenced, but when they speak, when they have discarded the presumed social domination status and taken control (Allman 1999, p. 19). Notably, the audiences can easily be induced to boundaries of sympathizing to the suffering of women more than the male lamentations which

also corresponds to the perceived high vulnerability as well as moral strength of women in these plays.

Women were supposed to play a variety of roles in the domestic realm the most important one being serving the household and submitting to the husband with humility and subordination during this period. The invasion of this residential domain by the tyrant implies the violation of the sanctity of this space and its conversion into the scene of corruption, and humiliation. Evadne is a perfect illustration of this displacement she mocks at her husband, becomes a mistress to the king and is then excommunicated by her brother Melantius who forces Evadne to kill the king. She destroys the shield that has given her the influence and power by killing the king. That Melantius tells her:

Be wise and kill him. Canst thou live and know
What noble minds shall make thee, see thyself
Found out with every finger, made the shame
Of all successions, and in this great ruin
Thy brother and thy noble husband broken?
Thou shalt not live thus (*MT*, 4.1.156-161).

She agrees to destroy the abuser to placate the men in positions of control over her. Barbara J. Baines asserts:

Like the oath sworn by Evadne to the king and renewed before Amintor, this oath is designed to redeem honour with a still greater sin. The moral blindness of Melantius in exacting such an oath indicates that he is as lost as those he would punish. In fact, the guilt of Melantius is as great as that of the king, because Melantius has substituted in his sister a blood lust for the former sexual lust that corrupted her nature (Baines 1979: 166).

Evadne addresses her embarrassment throughout her interaction with Melantius. Evadne may fall prey to the king as a result of his participation in a marriage that would have detrimental consequences for both parties.

Evadne begs forgiveness from Amintor before to assassinating the king. She conveys regret and publicly admits her wrongdoing.

I have done nothing good to win belief,
My life hath been so faithful. All the creatures
Made for heaven's honours have their ends, (*MT*, 4.1.244-246).

She subsequently approaches the king to execute her lethal mission, initially asserting her dominance over him sexually. He believes that she engages in sexual relations with him, however he is erroneous in this assumption. She informs him of her intention to assassinate him, and he implores her not to proceed, asserting his status as king. She alleges that he corrupts her.

"I was once fair,"
"Once I was lovely, not a blowing rose"
"More chastely sweet, till thou, thou, foul canker,"
"(Stir not) didst poison me (*MT*, 5.1.76-79)".

She experienced the loss of her marriage, her brother, and, more importantly, her virginity; therefore, she asserts:

"Thou art a shameless villain,"
"A thing out of the overcharge of nature,"
"Sent like a thick cloud to disperse a plague"
"Upon weak catching women, such a tyrant"
"That for his lust would sell away his subjects, (*MT*, 5.1.91-94)".

Evadne murders the king by stabbing him twice in his bed, a location imbued with metaphorical connotations: the bed as a site of sin and the scene of punishment. Her emancipation, achieved via this deed, is a mere fiction; nonetheless, Huebert asserts that "the freedom Evadne has selected is fictitious, as her moral standpoint is founded on the quicksand of equivocation" (Huebert 1977, p. 606). In a futile effort to win back the forgiveness of Amintor, she pretends to be pure, and in the process, she chooses to forget the crucial part that she has played in the evil deed that has contributed to the tragedy.

Comparatively, the Lady in The Second Maiden Tragedy is like a flagship of virginity as well as moral uprightness. Even after her death, her corpse is used by the tyrant as the means of violation. When the tyrant discovers her dead he is determined to defile her grave and to carry off her body. Govianus goes to her tomb to find that her voice is coming out of there- her ghost. The ghost tells him that the despotic oppressed her body and she cries throughout her unlife about her predicament.

"I am now at court"
 "In his own private chamber". "There he woos me"
 "And piles his suit to me with as serious pains"
 "Where lighted up again in my cold breast;"
 "Folds me with his arms and often sets"
 "A sinful kiss upon my senseless lips; (*SMT*, 4.4.67-72)".

The lascivious tyrant could not suppress the carnal desire despite her being a corpse. Kevin Crawford analyzes an outburst in response to the Tyrant, whose attempt of suicide provokes the Lady's fury, leading her to strike him down and instill feelings of emotional and psychological exploitation in him. The treatment Tyrant administers to her corpse creates a dual climax in the macho rivalry between him and Govianus (Crawford 2003: 105-106). The Tyrant exploits her posthumously, exerting power over her even when her lifeless form is incapable of rejecting or resisting the partner's dominance.

In Act V, Govianus contemplates applying poison to the lips of the deceased as an act of vengeance against the Tyrant, who subsequently dies after kissing them. The Lady ghost is characterized by a powerful light, portraying her as a Christ-like figure (Lancashire 1974: 277). Her purity and virtue confer upon her the characterization of a sacred person. Following the Tyrant's death, the woman's body is returned to its burial site, accompanied by her spirit for eternal repose. Coronation of Govianus, the legitimate monarch. He crowns the deceased body of the Lady as a queen. He proclaims with exultation:

"Well, he's gone,"
 "And all the kingdom's evils perish with him".
 "And since the body of that virtuous lady"
 "Is taken from her rest, in memory"
 "Of her admired mistress, 'tis our will"
 "It receive honour dead, as it took part"
 "With us in all affliction when it lived".

"Here place her in this throne; crown her our queen, (*SMT*, 5.2.193-200)".

Position her atop this throne and proclaim her as Our queen. (*SMT*, 5.2.193-200).

The Lady guided him to a restoration of the throne. Although she lost her life, this does not imply that she will not endure in the memory of her sorrowful lover.

Evadne makes an effort to atone at the conclusion when she presents herself to Amintor with her bloodied dagger, proclaiming, "joy to Amintor, for the king is dead" (*MT*, 5.3.126). He dismisses and refuses to pardon her. In response to rejection, he experiences profound distress, ultimately leading her to take her own life. She lost the monarch who conferred upon her social rank and lost her spouse who provided her with protection. She seeks retribution not against

herself, but on the men she has harmed. Cristina Alfar asserts that the patrilineal structure defines moral femininity through Evadne's cultivated aspiration to be a coveted object. The tragedy of Evadne is in her entrapment inside the perpetual cycle whereby desire inevitably culminates in self-destruction (Alfar 1995: 315). She was a victim of the king's maltreatment, locked in an arranged marriage, which ultimately led to her demise.

Earlier, Aspatia Had referred to herself as a living symbol; likened to something like the monument of sorrow, (MT, 2.2.74) she reflects herself. She is similarly dehumanized by the violence and unfairness of Amintor, who wed Evadne. (Baines 1979: 163). She settles on her decision to go and be killed by Amintor. She acts as her brother and begins to quarrel with Amintor who kills her eventually. What appears vividly when Baines writes about their love towards one another is because Amintor butchers his rightful bride because of the inadequacy of a concept of honour that does not allow them to understand the human heart. Aspatia spares no words to make sure that she is looking forward to gaining no vengeance on Amintor but a blessing. The sorrow and the affection set Aspatia free of self-pity, as well as suicidal feelings, the first in her life (Baines 1979: 171). Pitifully, Amintor commits suicide. They were unable to dominate their victims whom they could decide how to die as opposed to them who are killed by others.

Conclusion

Women in the three plays have difficulties trying to survive in the world ruled by cruel oppressors who have no mercy. They stand the test of time and in their actions and resistance, they are timeless figures of sacrifice and freedom. In both contexts, the misjudgments by the tyrant, both the realms he creates and the mistreatment of women, is partly cleansed with the voices of the females who rebel either outright or via the actions of men in their lives. Another example is the penance that Jane Shore is forced to go through in the streets, which makes Ayre, Shore, and Jocky disregard the orders of the Richard III. The pervasive cries of Aspatia bring out her level of sadness, which needed others to realise that she is suffering. Evadne executes the king that spoiled her, whereas the Lady in the Second Maiden Tragedy succeeds in having moral triumph over the tyrant that wanted to have her. The grotesque and frequent violent story lines of the plays aim at exposing a fundamental truth: women are sacred as the household and family that they nurture and it should not be desecrated.

It should thus be suggested that this topic that lies at the crossroads of female agency and political resistance in early modern drama should receive additional intellectual attention in particular in the perspective of less researched female characters. Additionally, this kind of research may examine the role of these stories in developing current ideas of womanhood attributes, moral fortitude, and resistance both on the stage and in the rest of the world. Besides, educators should be aware of the pedagogical significance of these plays in explaining the lifelong fight against patriarchal oppression. These works depict the forms of female resistance quite vividly and that resonates today, reminding that the struggle against the systemic gender oppression is as pressing and loudly spoken today as it was in Jacobean period.

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