

Shall I compare thee to modern day feminism?

**A comparison between Shakespeare's original plays and modern screen adaptations
regarding feminist characteristics.**

Taming of the Shrew, Macbeth and King Lear



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BA Thesis

English Language and Culture

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3. Preface

In high school I turned out to possess a natural talent for languages and therefore I decided to attend the University of Utrecht in 2010 to study the English language and culture. During my studies I quickly discovered I was mostly interested in English literature. Within a large-scale variety of literature that was offered at this university, William Shakespeare has been one of the greatest writers of all time. There has been much speculation about his identity and the authenticity of his works. It seems hard to believe that one single man could be the author of so many extraordinary plays and poems.

During the course “Academic Reading” I fell in love with the rich and ornate use of language in Shakespeare’s work. In my second year, throughout the courses “Shakespeare’s World” and “Appropriating Shakespeare” I have discovered the immense range of his influence on the world. Real Author or not, this man has inspired hundreds of people throughout history in numerous ways. His work has been adapted, appropriated, adjusted and used in plays, films, and opera’s, but also in books, paintings, statues and so much more. To me personally, Shakespeare has been one of the greatest influences. His works inspired my studies, my writings and even sometimes my behaviour. I chose to write this paper with the intention to combine these three stimulated aspects of my life.

4. Introduction

4.1 Content

The content of this paper consists of an analysis of to what extent the feminine roles in three of Shakespeare's plays can be considered feminist, An analysis of to what extent the feminine roles in modern film adaptations of these plays can be considered feminist and a comparison between the results of these analyses.

4.2 Motivation

It has often been said that Shakespeare was ahead of his own time. Ben Jonson already said in 1623 "*He was not of an age, but for all time!*" (*The Author*, l.43) and he was right, because to this day people read his plays and adapt and appropriate his works. In the Introduction to *King Lear* it is stated that "What perhaps most distinguishes Shakespeare's language from everyday modern usage is its richness, density and flexibility; the cumulative effect is to open up resonances and implications in such a way that the possibilities for interpretation seem inexhaustible" (Foakes, 8). This statement is proved true by the very fact that there are hundreds of Shakespeare adaptations from all over the world.

It is interesting to see the differences between Shakespeare's original plays and some modern screen adaptations. Some directors stay very close to the original play in period, costumes and speech but others take only the concept of the story and place it in a completely different setting. *The Taming of the Shrew* becomes a high school love story in *10 Things I Hate about You*. *King Lear* is transformed into a mobster in *My Kingdom* and the tragedy of *Macbeth* suddenly takes place in Pennsylvania in *Scotland, PA*.

The Renaissance is known for the rise of Humanist ideas. These ideas focus on humans and their values, capacities and worth. However, this was generally only applicable to men. Hilda L. Smith believes that "While women were a part of the intellectual and social

changes tied to the spread of humanist ideas, they were always on the periphery. In theory, humanism was an education that had as much to offer women as men, but in practice it was situated in universities, from which women were excluded, and applied to the governance of families and to public office, positions outside their responsibility” (Women and Literature, 10).

Can contemporary feminist characteristics be found in Shakespeare? Does feminism have anything to do with the fact that Shakespeare’s works are still a success? Was Shakespeare ahead of his time with regard to feminism? Hopefully this paper will allow us one step closer to answering these questions.

4.3 Sub-questions

Before this research can be conducted, a number of sub-questions need to be considered. For instance which plays will be treated in this paper and why (4.4.1). The same question has to be answered with regard to the modern film adaptations that will be discussed (4.4.1). Furthermore it has to be clear what is meant by feminism and what the generic characteristics of feminism are. Also the status of women in the Renaissance is important (4.4.2). Lastly it is necessary to know what has already been written on this subject and how this research could be a contribution to further research (4.4.3).

4.4.1 Plays and Modern Adaptations

The first play that will be discussed in this research paper is *The Taming of the Shrew*. This play is about courtship and marriage and the role of both participating genders, which makes this particular play relevant to my investigation. *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play-within-a-play, beginning with the story of Christopher Sly. Within this story it already becomes clear that Shakespeare is playing with gender issues when the page dresses in women's clothes and pretends to be Sly's wife. In the Introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, the connection between the two story lines and the playfulness of the gender issues is made clear. "*The Shrew's* first model of marriage – that of Sly and his Bartholomew-wife – sets up the terms of what, in Shakespeare's theatre, is an all-male mating game which juxtaposes images of how three other couples – Katherina and Petruccio, Bianca and Lucentio, Hortensio and his Widow – negotiate, and perform, marriage." (Hodgdon, 5) The second story's protagonist is the shrewd woman called Katherine, often shortened to Kate. This woman seems to be quite fierce in her behaviour by Renaissance standards (see Introduction 4.4.1). The other feminine roles that will be discussed are those of Bianca (Kate's sister) and the Widow.

One modern film adaptation, *10 Things I Hate About You*, places Shakespeare's story in a modern high school setting. Numerous differences can be found merely in the course of both plots, but what is most important is what these differences mean with regard to the feminine roles. There are, for instance, no marriages in this film and Petruccio, called Patrick Verona, is paid to take Katherine, called Kat, out on a date, instead of planning on finding a wealthy girl himself like the Petruccio in the play. Some other modern film appropriations are *Deliver Us From Eva* by Gary Hardwick from 2003 and *Isi life mein* by Vidhi Kasliwal from 2010. Every single one of these adaptations places Shakespeare's story into a different context.

The second play that will be used is *King Lear*. This play is of course, other than the

previous play, about a man who loses his sanity. However, many interesting aspects can be found regarding the role of women. First of all, the play starts with a scene in which one of Lear's daughters seems to defy him. Secondly, it could be argued that Lear's daughters are the reason of his insanity. Furthermore, the daughters become more powerful than their father, which could certainly be linked with feminism. The role of the Fool might also be interesting, because it can sometimes be seen as feminine.

There are several screen adaptations of this play. *A Thousand Acres* (USA, 1997) is a film from the perspective of Ginny, the Goneril character. *My Kingdom* changes the setting of the story to modern day Liverpool. *King of Texas* (USA, 2002) is made into a Western and *Ran* (Japan, 1985) alters the story of King Lear to a Japanese setting.

The third play will be the tragedy of *Macbeth*. The play seems to be about the power struggle of a man called Macbeth, but it could be argued that it is actually his wife, the Lady Macbeth, who is in charge. When looking at the feminine roles in this play, the three witches cannot be skipped. These perhaps manipulative women could be seen as the cause of all tragic events that take place in this story. It could also be said that Lady Macbeth is contributing to the job that the witches. Two more feminine roles are those of lady Macduff and a gentlewoman.

Modern screen adaptations of this play are *Scotland, PA* (USA, 2001), *Maqbool* (India, 2004) and *ShakespeaRe-Told, Macbeth* (UK, TV, 2005).

4.4.2 Characteristics of Feminism

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Feminism as: “Advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex; the movement associated with this (see note below).” The note below then says:

“The issue of rights for women first became prominent during the French and American revolutions in the late 18th cent., with regard especially to property rights, the marriage relationship, and the right to vote. In Britain it was not until the emergence of the suffragette movement in the late 19th cent. that there was significant political change. A ‘second wave’ of feminism arose in the 1960s, concerned especially with economic and social discrimination, with an emphasis on unity and sisterhood. A more diverse ‘third wave’ is sometimes considered to have arisen in the 1980s and 1990s, as a reaction against the perceived lack of focus on class and race issues in earlier movements.”

During the Renaissance it seems that women rights diminished more than they developed. In feudal times it was, for instance, normal for women to own land. In the Renaissance, women were seen as property of their fathers and later of their husbands. Differences can be found in the rights of lower class and upper class women. Lower class women could sometimes own some property and often took part in helping their husbands with their estate or work, but lower class women were also often raped or abused without this causing uproar. Some upper class women were fortunate enough to receive some education, but usually had to give this up after marriage. The feelings of women were considered unimportant, they were supposed to remain virgins until marriage and after that they had to be faithful to their husbands always, even when their husbands were not. (Status of Women During Renaissance)

Feminist movements have led to rights of property, rights in marriage (for instance to

sue for divorce) and the right to vote. In addition, more women are taking on jobs in politics or managing functions.

The generic characteristics that will be used in this paper for the analysis of the plays and adaptations are those of the social, political and economic rights of women. With regard to social equality between men and women, the focus will lie on marital and property rights, concerning the political equality, the focus will be on the right to vote or to lead a group and lastly, in relation to the economic equality, the emphasis will be on education and self-sufficiency.

4.4.3 Critics and Contribution

In the Preface of *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* it is stated that students and teachers became curious with regard to Feminism and Shakespeare in the early seventies. They started to wonder if Shakespeare could have been an early feminist and they asked questions like "Is Kate actually tamed?", but only few findings were actually published (ix).

To Paula S. Bergen the answer to the question 'Why is Shakespeare still successful?' is clear. In *The woman's Part: Female Sexuality as Power in Shakespeare's Plays* she argues why Shakespeare's female characters cause his popularity. "Despite all the ink spilled on inventing fanciful histories for Falstaff with Mowbray, Hamlet at Wittenberg, and the like, it is Shakespeare's women, rather than his men, who have most consistently moved his readers to a peculiarly cloying, gossipy condescension" (17). Even though Shakespeare's women can certainly be seen as complex and interesting characters, the way she dismisses all his male characters is too simplistic.

Germaine Greer also argues that Shakespeare had feminist ideas. Andrew Cowie quotes her in his blog "So what does she make of *The Taming of the Shrew*? Surprisingly, she likes it. As she says in *Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*, '*The Taming Of The Shrew is not a knockabout farce of wife-battering but the cunning adaptation of a folk-motif to show the forging of a partnership between equals*'" (BloggingShakespeare).

Maria del Rosario Arias Doblás mentions in her *Gender Ambiguity and Desire in Twelfth Night* that Feminist scholars have mainly studied Shakespeare's comedies. Furthermore she mentions feminist critic Juliet Dusinberre who defends that Shakespeare portrays his women as heroines. In addition, she refers to feminist Clara Claiborne Park, who supports an opposite view, saying that Shakespeare had just as limited a view on women as the Renaissance society generally had.

The goal of this research is to give an elaborate analysis of probable feminist characteristics present in the three selected plays. To show on the one hand why these *are* present, but on the other hand why they are not, so that the readers can decide whether or not they lean towards Shakespeare as a feminist, or towards the opposite. The paper focusses on the comparison more than the conclusion. This leads to the following research question; to what extent can the feminine roles in three of Shakespeare's plays be considered feminist and how does this compare to the modern screen adaptations of these plays?

5. Research Analyses

5.1 Analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew* and modern screen adaptations

In the Introduction (4.4.1) it has already been mentioned that *The Taming of the Shrew* is a play within a play. The framework story is about Christopher Sly, a tinker from London, who passes out from drinking and is found by a Lord who decides to play a prank on him. The Lord instructs his men to take Sly to his house, put him to bed, tell him that he is a Lord who has been mad for years and introduce him to his wife, who is actually a male servant dressed in women's clothes. When they have convinced Sly that he is a Lord, they tell him a company of actors has come to perform a play for him. The play they perform is the story of 'The Taming of the Shrew'. This story begins with Lucentio who has come to Padua to study, when he falls in love with Bianca. He finds out that Bianca has more suitors and that they cannot marry her because her father decided that his eldest daughter, Katherina, should marry first. Bianca's suitors decide they need someone to marry Katherina, but they do not know who would be brave enough to marry her. That is when Petruccio comes to town to find a wealthy bride. He says he does not care what kind of woman he marries and accepts his friend's (suitor to Bianca) suggestion to marry Katherina. He immediately proposes to Katherina and even though she refuses the proposal, he tells Balthasar (Katherina and Bianca's father) he will marry her. The wedding is arranged and they marry. Meanwhile Lucentio disguises himself as a schoolteacher to secretly court Bianca. Petruccio takes Katherina home and 'tames' her. When they go back to Padua for the wedding of her sister, she seems to be made into an obedient and loving wife that even proves herself a more loyal wife than Bianca. The main theme in this play is marriage and is therefore mostly interesting with regard to the amount of social equality between husbands and wives. In this analysis I will focus on the role of Katherina, Bianca and the Widow (later Hortentio's wife, a former suitor to Bianca). A comparison will be made between the roles these characters fulfil in Shakespeare's original

plays and the roles they fulfil in the modern screen adaptations of this play, starting with *10 Things I Hate about You*, followed by *Deliver us from Eva* and lastly *Isi Life Mein*.

Katherina's character appears to change throughout the play from a "curst and shrewd" (1.1.179) woman to an obedient and virtuous wife (5.2.124). Before her marriage to Petruccio she acts harsh and independent, especially against men. For instance, she says to Hortensio about marriage: "I'faith, sir, you shall never need to fear. Iwis it is not half-way to her heart: But if it were, doubt not her care should be to comb your noddle with a three-legged stool and paint your face and use you like a fool" (1.1.61-65). Therefore, it is not strange that she refuses Petruccio's proposal, however, she is married to him anyway. The reason for this probably lies in the way she is seen by other people; her independent attitude is unusual in a time where marriage is one of the most important goals for women, which results in that she is not being taken seriously. Even though she dislikes marriage, it seems that she dislikes her social position even more. This becomes clear, for instance, when she talks to her father, comparing herself to her sister. "What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see she is your treasure, she must have a husband, I must dance barefoot on her wedding day and, for your love to her, lead apes in hell. Talk not to me, I will go sit and weep till I can find occasion of revenge" (2.1.31-36). It seems that she is envious of her sister's social position and the revenge she seeks is found in her final monologue where she lectures her sister on being an obedient wife (5.2.142-85). This is strengthened when Jean E. Howard says: "This wilful outsider, by working in partnership with Petruccio, successfully makes the transition from maid to wife and in doing so wins a position of cultural centrality from which she can even lecture other women about their improper behaviour" (417, *Oxford Guide*). Here, finally, people take Katherina seriously and listen to her, even though it was never her ideal way to achieve this. Helen Wilcox describes her as: "The docile Kate whom Shakespeare represents at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is in truth not silent but eloquent" (155). It can be said

then, that she has never been tamed, but is just playing along with Petruccio to achieve her individual goal. This theory is strengthened in a few lines from her final monologue where she implies that a wife repays her husband's hard labour to provide for her with obedience (5.2.152-60), because Petruccio supports them with her dowry instead of working. A second theory that supports feminist ideas is that, because of the play-within-a-play framework, the story within should be read as fiction, implying that a world where wives are truly obedient to their husbands is impossible in real life. Leas S. Marcus writes about this in *Unediting the Renaissance*, "There is a strong illusion of reality surrounding her speech at the end of the play: we are invited to forget that the taming of Katherine by Petruchio started out as a mere play within a play performed for the delectation of one Christopher Sly, drunken tinker turned temporary aristocrat" (104).

Katherina's sister, Bianca, can be described as her opposite. She is mild-tempered, kind and sweet, which results in her being liked and adored. This becomes apparent, for instance, in Lucentio's description of her. "I saw her coral lips to move, and with her breath she did perfume the air; sacred and sweet was all I saw in her" (1.1.173-75). Bianca is receiving education, but this is not so much of her own desire for knowledge as it is to please her father. She tells her father: "Sir, to your pleasure humbly I subscribe: my books and instruments shall be my company, on them to look and practise by myself" (1.1.81-83). She loses her obedience only after her marriage, when three husbands make a wager on whose wife is the most obedient, Bianca and the widow do not come when they are summoned, unlike Katherine.

The part of the Widow is small and therefore does not contribute much to the plot. One of Bianca's suitors (Hortensio) decides to marry the wealthy Widow when Bianca's love for Lucentio becomes clear. Katherine's revenge, in the form of her final monologue, is strengthened because it is directed at both the Widow and Bianca, instead of only at Bianca.

Furthermore, in fairy tales the number three is a reoccurring aspect. The three marriages in the play (Katherina & Petruccio, Bianca & Lucentio, the Widow & Hortensio) can therefore be linked to fairy tales, strengthening the fictional nature of the story.

In *10 Things I Hate About You*, the framework of Christopher Sly is deleted and only the story of the shrew remains. The setting of the story has been switched to a modern American high school attended by Kat and Bianca Stratford. Petruccio becomes Patrick Verona and Lucentio is now Cameron James. Early on in the film it becomes clear that Kat is an unpopular, but smart and independent girl. During an English lesson she expresses sharp opinions about Hemingway, a male writer, and makes suggestions about reading Charlotte Brontë, Sylvia Plath or Simone de Beauvoir (06:00), female writers, suggesting a feminist character. Bianca, however, is quickly depicted as a flat character who loves her Prada bag (05:21). A huge difference with the play is the way she is viewed by other characters. While Cameron immediately falls in love with her at first sight, his friend warns him by describing her as “A snotty little princess wearing a strategically planned sun dress” (10:15). The sisters are not allowed to date by their father, so when Bianca’s desire to date starts, they agree that she can only date when Kat dates. Their father is sure this will not happen soon, because of Kat’s anti-male attitude. However, Cameron decides to start paying Patrick to take Kat out, so Cameron can date Bianca. Nevertheless, Bianca only used Cameron to go out with a popular male model. The play and the film coincide again when Kat resists Patrick at first but then does decide to go out with him. A difference is that they actually fall in love, because they both turn out to be intelligent and fun people. Bianca’s character changes when she realises that Cameron is the one who really cares about her and she decides to be with him. Kat’s final monologue is a poem in which she expresses her love for Patrick; in no way is this poem an attempt of revenge or does it say anything about how to be a good wife/girlfriend. It can therefore be said that in the feminine roles in *10 Thing I Hate about You* more feminist

characteristics can be found than in Shakespeare's play. Jennifer Clement, however, claims that "10 Things [...] should be read as [a] postfeminist movie that advance[s] a conservative view of gender and identity" and that the film "associates feminism with unproductive anger, absent or threatening older women, and the inability to form or maintain close relationships"(Postfeminist Mystique). Even though Kat's feminist character is caused by one sexual experience with the wrong guy and she sometimes comes across as angry and harsh, her character develops into a feminist who is capable of loving a man as well as herself.

Deliver us from Eva almost seems an adaptation of *10 Things I Hate About You*, because here too the Petruccio type (Ray) is paid to date the Katherina type (Eva). This film is set in urban America, portraying especially the independence of women in this film. Eva is first shown as an unpleasant character. The screenplay writer of the film, Gary Hardwick, even says about her in an interview: "Calling a woman 'a shrew' would be like calling a woman a 'bitch' these days. And Eva is the modern equivalent of that; she is a turbo-feminist. She believes that women are superior to men, not equal but superior. Eva says 'its women who bear the burdens in life and men who create them'" (Blackfilm). Eva has three sisters, who are all married, and she often meddles in their business. The husbands become tired of this and decide to distract her by finding a date for her. Ray and Eva fall in love. Eva declines a job offer which implied moving, so she can stay with Ray, which shows that her feminist side is reduced by her love for Ray. When the husbands of her sisters hear that she is not moving, their plan seems to have taken a wrong turn. They kidnap Ray and simulate his death. Grief struck, Eva decides to move anyway, but during the funeral Ray walks in. He explains everything and eventually this film has a happy Hollywood ending when he quits his job and moves to the town where her new job is to be with her. The three husbands are ashamed of what they have done and ask their wives for forgiveness. Therefore, it is more the men who were tamed in this version instead of the shrew, who turned out not to be a shrew, but a really

kind, independent and strong woman who just had the best interests of her sisters in mind.

Isi Life Mein is an Indian Bollywood film that shows modern western India versus a conservative religious India. The use of a framework reoccurs in this adaptation, starting with the conservative setting, followed by the modern setting and finally ending in the conservative setting, where the two coincide. When linking this framework to that of the play it could be said that the modern setting is like a dream world and the conservative setting is the reality. The film seems to show a desire for equal women rights within the Indian culture. The story is about the life of R.J. who lives with her family in the conservative part of India, where she must listen to her superiors and live according to their etiquette. Her mother helps her deceive her father so she can stay with her aunt to study at the local college there. At first she is frightened by the modern western ways in this part of her country, but with help of her new friends she discovers a whole new part of herself. She likes to dance, act and create choreography. When her father finds out where she has been, he takes her back home and tells her he has found someone for her to marry. The wedding is being arranged when her friends from college come by. They ask her if she could still perform in the school play that she left behind (*The Taming of the Shrew*). Her father refuses and tells them they have to go as soon as the wedding is over. R.J.'s friends then prove to her father that they are not the 'scum' he believes they are and they make him realise that the arranged wedding is a mistake. He cancels the wedding so R.J. can perform, marry whoever she wants and go to college in New York. The director of the film really used the play to show the cultural differences in India and a desire for equal women rights.

5.2 Analysis of *Macbeth* and Adaptations

Macbeth is about the struggle of a thane and his wife to become more powerful by murdering the king. Macbeth and his friend Banquo ride home after a battle when they meet three witches who predict their futures. Macbeth will become thane of Cawdor and eventually king. When Macbeth receives the title of thane of Cawdor he believes the witches and, together with his wife, starts to plan a murder on the king. After the murder Macbeth becomes obsessed with obtaining and securing royal power and starts to slaughter everything that threatens his position. Banquo has to die because the witches told them that his sons would be king. Macduff's family is murdered because the witches told Macbeth to fear him. The witches also said that nothing of a woman born could kill Macbeth. Eventually, Lady Macbeth dies off stage and Macbeth is murdered by Macduff, who is born through a caesarean section. Even though this play has a male protagonist, the role of his wife is significant as well. She urges her husband to kill King Duncan, but she is not the only factor that persuades Macbeth to do it. Macbeth is ambitious and it seems he had already thought of the murder before the time when the play starts. However, he only starts to plan it after he has met the three fortune telling witches. These witches could be said to be the trigger to Macbeth's plans. A third female part is that of Lady Macduff. Her part is small but can be seen as the cause for Macbeth's death. To what extent these feminine roles can be considered feminist, in Shakespeare's play and in the modern adaptations, will become clear from this analysis. First, the focus will be on Shakespeare's original play, continuing with a comparison between the play and *BBC's ShakespeaRe-Told: Macbeth*, subsequently with *Scotland, PA* and lastly with *Macbool*.

Lady Macbeth can certainly be seen as a feminist avant la lettre. Alison Findlay says that "the spirit of revenge is invoked by and mobilizes a feminist consciousness" (69). This consciousness becomes clear when regarding her efforts to purge herself from feminine

qualities and the equality between her and Macbeth. When she receives a letter from Macbeth telling her of a prophecy that he will be king she says to the spirits “Unsex me here and fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty!” (1.5.41-43). This indicates her desire to transcend gender distinctions. The social equality between Macbeth and his wife becomes apparent throughout the play. For instance when they are talking about the murder (which Macbeth will commit) Macbeth asks “If we should fail?” (1.7.58) indicating that they are in the scheme together. Lady Macbeth places herself above her husband sometimes when she calls him weak or a coward but perhaps she just tries to compensate for her ‘weak’ feminine qualities. For example when Macbeth has just murdered Duncan she says “your constancy hath left you unattended” (2.2.67), but then she is immediately startled by a knock, indicating she has lost her firmness as well. On the other hand, they are only equal when they are together. Furthermore, it is Macbeth who gains the political power, not Lady Macbeth, so they are not each other’s equal in this. Findlay says about this: “Lady Macbeth cannot transcend the limits of the domestic sphere; the transformation of her household to a site of violence destroys its mistress” (167). There is also no indication that Lady Macbeth has an occupation other than lady of the house, and it is Macbeth who owns the property.

It is hard to see the three witches as feminists. It is true that their prophecy sets certain events in motion and this gives them a certain power, but it is hard to see this supernatural power as something like political power. Furthermore they appear to have male characteristics when Banquo describes them as “you should be women, and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so” (1.3.45-47). The question arises if Shakespeare meant that they are physically unattractive or that he meant to make them more like men to perhaps equalise them symbolically. Either way, they should more likely be viewed as supernatural beings than as feminist women *avant la lettre*. They are, for instance, often called “weird sisters” in the play, meaning “Old English *wyrd*: ‘fate, destiny,’ literally ‘that which comes,’ from Proto-

Germanic *wurthis (cf. Old Saxon wurd, Old High German wurt 'fate,' Old Norse urðr 'fate, one of the three Norns'), from PIE *wert-. The modern sense of weird developed from Middle English use of weird sisters for the three fates or Norns (in Germanic mythology), the goddesses who controlled human destiny. They were portrayed as odd or frightening in appearance, as in 'Macbeth,' which led to the adjectival meaning "odd-looking, uncanny," first recorded 1815." (OnlineEtymologyDictionary). This indicates they should not be seen as human characters.

It is hard to tell what kind of character Lady Macduff is because of her small role in the play. In *Staging Sexual Difference: The Cultural Appropriation of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth in Eighteenth-century England and Germany* Lady Macduff's role is described as "an entirely maternal and domestic role, which she lives out in a traditional portrait of a mother caring for her child" (Fielitz). This description is true to the extent that this is the only information we receive about her. Lady Macduff demands to know why her husband has left her and his children. She thinks he does not love them, even though Rosse (a nobleman of Scotland) argues she should trust his judgement (4.2.1-30). However, this demand is not enough to tell us if she strives for equality or if she feels equal to men. After Rosse leaves she tells her son his father is dead and asks him how he will live now. He answers with "as birds do mother. [...] With what I get, I mean; and so do they" (4.2.32-34). This remark could mean that Lady Macduff's son is aware that she could probably not take care of him as well as his father could. This shows unequal economic property and political power between Lady Macduff and her husband. The significance of the role of Lady Macduff becomes clear in Janet Adelman's statement that "the play will finally reimagine autonomous male identity, but only through the ruthless excision of all female presence, its own peculiar satisfaction of the witches' prophecy" (91).

BBC's ShakespeaRe-told: Macbeth is set in modern Scotland and shows the story of a young cook (Joe Macbeth) who desperately wants to own the restaurant he is working at. The hostess of the restaurant is his wife (Ella Macbeth). The first difference between Ella and Lady Macbeth is that Ella has an occupation and is therefore self-sufficient and not economically dependent on her husband. The motive for the murder is also different. Macbeth does all the work but it is Duncan who receives the honour because he pretends to be the chef. Ella convinces Joe that this is unfair and that he should do something about it (17:26), which softens her personality a little. During her suicide however, which is in the play unclear because it happens offstage, she stands on the edge of the roof calling for her husband (01:19:23), which shows both how far they have drifted apart because he is not there and some kind of dependence on him. The three witches in this film are replaced by three male garbage collectors. These men serve more as comic relief in this film than as serious prophetic creatures like the witches. It is not clear though why they should be men instead of women. Lady Macduff's part in the film has been reduced even further because she is shot in her sleep (01:16:40). The only scene with her in it is when Macduff leaves and they get into a small fight. She says he's never really there, with his family (01:12:53), which gives her the same domestic character as in the play except that she demands an explanation of her husband instead of someone below his rank. This perhaps makes her a little more equal to her husband in the film than in the play.

The second modern screen adaptation *Scotland, PA* is set in 1970's suburban Pennsylvania. This film adapts the story of Macbeth into a comedy about a hamburger stand. Lady Macbeth (Pat McBeth) is a waitress and her husband (Joe 'Mac' McBeth) is a hamburger flipper at this small enterprise called "Duncan's". Because this film is a comedy, it is probably inaccurate to take certain choices and changes in the plot literally. Therefore, the film could be seen as a parody on Shakespeare's play, showing criticism in over-exaggerated

or ironic parts of the film. In terms of feminism though, there is not much to be found. Pat seems to have no conscience while she persuades her husband to murder and scheme. Her neurotic hand washing after the murder in the play is exchanged for an obsession with a burn she accidentally incurred during Duncan's murder, even after the wound is gone. The fact that she experiences this madness is strange because she seems to feel absolutely no guilt, therefore it can perhaps be assumed that she is mad during the whole film. She is, however, the only character in the film who does not seem to be stupid or naïve, which makes her more evil. The three witches are changed into three teenagers, 2 boys and one girl, who are always stoned. These characters are only encountered by Mac when he has consumed alcohol, suggesting they are figments of his imagination. Out of these three characters, it is the girl who always tells Mac what will happen. She also sometimes speaks with a male voice. However, this should probably not be interpreted as anything like the beards of the weird sisters in the play because the voice is strangely similar to Mac's own voice. This then strengthens the belief that the three teenagers are in fact Mac's imagination. There is no equivalent of Lady Macduff in the film, perhaps because her fate in the play would be too dark in a comedy.

The final adaptation, *Maqbool*, is a modern Bollywood representation of the play, including the common song and dance numbers and the preparations for a traditional wedding. Nimmi is the equivalent of Lady Macbeth, but instead of being Macbeth's (Maqbool) wife she is now Duncan's (Abbaji) wife and Maqbool's mistress. Abbaji does not have a son in the film but a daughter (Sameera). Abbaji runs Mumbai like a mobster don and his successor will be the man who marries his daughter. Sameera is in love with Guddu (Fleance, Banquo's son) and when this comes to light a wedding is being prepared. Nimmi and Maqbool decide to murder Abbaji before the wedding so that Maqbool can take control of Mumbai. However, their motive for the murder is mainly love, softening the characters of

Maqbool and Nimmi greatly, almost justifying the murder. Nimmi is very unhappy with her marriage to Abbaji because he is so much older than her and she does not love him. This suggests that their marriage was arranged, which is not uncommon in India. The women in the film cook and serve the men their food and seem to be subordinate to the men. Nevertheless Nimmi likes to be in control. For instance in one scene she steals Maqbool's gun and forces him to tell her he loves her. On the other hand, Maqbool strikes her the moment he has his gun back (52:32). How little she has a say in anything becomes really clear in one scene where Abbaji has to approve of the model of his new house. He introduces the men to his wife and says that she is the real boss and no decisions are made without her, he then orders her to tell them what she thinks of the model. She is tense and only replies with "good". Then Abbaji asks her "Just good, or very good?" and she replies with "Wonderful" (44:28). This scene is full of underlying meanings. Abbaji is actually in control and puts his wife on the spot by calling her the boss, everyone in the room is aware of this and therefore a tension is created. This tension creates three effects. The first is that Nimmi is warned to speak out less. The second is that the murder on Abbaji is justified a little more. The final is that the viewers of the film are allowed to see how badly women are sometimes treated in hierarchies like this. The three witches are again represented by men, this time depicted as two policemen who work for Abbaji. Because the men work for Abbaji and are often present during work related meetings, these roles could not be performed by women in this film. Women are never present during business deliberations. The role of Lady Macduff is present but so small that she never speaks, she is only scared for her life and that of her son (01:50:40). Unlike in the play, they are not murdered in the film. In this film, the focus is not on women rights, but the issue is certainly present. The fact that Nimmi is trying to break loose from this oppression could be seen as feminist. It is clear that feminism is not as developed in modern India as it is in the western world.

5.3 Analysis of *King Lear* and Adaptations

As mentioned earlier, Shakespeare's *King Lear* is about a king who goes mad after (or slightly before) he divides his land between his two daughters and banishes the third. These daughters, Goneril (the eldest), Regan and Cordelia (the youngest), greatly influence the plot. In this analysis it will become clear to what extent these feminine roles can be considered feminist. First, the focus will be on Shakespeare's original play. I will continue with a comparison between the play and *A Thousand Acres*, then with *My Kingdom*, subsequently with *The King of Texas* and lastly with *Ran*.

Cordelia's character is contrasted with the characters of her sisters. She is depicted as kind, beautiful and devoted to her father, where Goneril and Regan are liars and manipulators. Regardless of their personality, all three women are very outspoken, and do not behave as the property of their father or their husbands. As mentioned before, Lear wants his daughters to tell him who loves him the most in the opening act of the play, because he intends to divide his lands between them. Carol Hansen points out a difference between Goneril and Regan in her *Women as Individual in English Renaissance Drama* when she analyses this scene. She states that Regan's speech fulfils the wishes of Lear better than the speech of Goneril (20). This means that Regan is the greater liar and that she desires power even more than Goneril. Cordelia, however, cannot play along with her father's game. She replies to her father "You have begot me, bred me, loved me. I return those duties back as are right fit, obey you, love you and most honour you. Why have my sisters husbands, if they say they love you all?" (1.1.96-100). Not only does she express her displeasure about her father's 'game', but she also points out the lies of her sisters. In the Introduction of *The Tragedy of King Lear* it is stated that "Cordelia's refusal is thus a refusal to participate not only in a show trial, but in the unreasonable behaviour that Lear demands, insists upon. Although his daughter, tied to him by filial devotion [...] she is no partner to his foolishness here. Or if she is, she shows it by

also being insistent, demanding. Her logic nevertheless is irrefutable” (Halió). This refusal then proves her independence in her ability to make her own choices, no matter the consequences. It is clear that, to be truthful is one of Cordelia’s goals in life, or in any case more important to her than property or social status. It could then be that Shakespeare meant to say that, no matter what methods are used, achieving goals as a woman is difficult, despite their personality and despite the goal. After Cordelia’s father disowns her, he asks her suitors (the king of France and the Duke of Burgundy) if they would still have her even though they won’t receive a dowry. Burgundy declines and Cordelia replies with “Peace be with Burgundy. Since that respect and fortunes are his love, I shall not be his wife.” (1.1.249-251), which means she would not marry for esteem or wealth anyway, again expressing strong personal principles not common in the Renaissance. Furthermore, by marrying the king of France she becomes the queen of France, giving her a high social position. Even though it is not her own ambition for power or equality that drives her towards this position (because she is aware she will probably not receive any land from her father by not participating in his ‘game’ which shows her lack of interest to own property and gain a higher social position), it could be said that she uses it to her advantage later on in the play. Kent receives a letter from her that says that she will find a way to help the conditions in Britain out of her newly gained position in France (2.2.166-171). When the French army is in Britain, the king of France suddenly has to return, leaving Queen Cordelia, together with the Marshall of France, in charge of the army (4.3.1-33). Cordelia has much responsibility bestowed upon her through her husband, and while this shows that he respects his wife, the actual power remains the king's. The example of the letter proves that Cordelia wanted to gain political power to help Britain; however this power could only be achieved through her husband. She also depends on the king to sustain her economically. This is made clear when Lear addresses Cordelia’s suitors that they will not receive a dowry (1.1.197-267), indicating she has nothing to

contribute to their property or wealth.

Because Lear divided his land between Goneril and Regan, they quickly acquired much property of their own. In the Introduction (4.4.3) it is made clear that it was sometimes possible for lower class women to own property during the Renaissance. However Goneril and Regan are of high social class. Goneril and Regan's personalities seem to be evil and this appears to be in unison with their desire for power. Did Shakespeare mean to show us then that women should not be in a powerful position or usually become evil when given the opportunity? Regan and Goneril were in fact already liars before they acquired their power, while Cordelia became powerful too, and her personality is the opposite of those of Goneril and Regan. There are people who have evil personalities and people who have good personalities, regardless of their gender. *King Lear* can then be seen as an example of a display of consequences when people with different personalities become powerful. In all cases, it is the men who grant the women their power. Furthermore, the evil women regard themselves as better than men. This is evident in the way they treat their father and, for example, when Goneril tells her husband he is weak (1.4.337-340). Cordelia however, is still much depending on her husband as described in the previous paragraph.

The role of the fool can also be seen as one of the feminine roles of the play. The fool was of course intended to be played by a man (because only men acted in Shakespeare's time), but many directors have cast women to play the fool after William Macready cast Pricilla Horton for the role in 1838 (Foakes, 52). In the modern screen adaptations studied here, this has not been the case. Therefore the role of the fool will not be discussed further.

The film *A Thousand Acres* (1997) is set in modern Iowa and shows the story of King Lear from Goneril's perspective. The personalities of the women in this film are different from those in the play. First of all, Goneril (Ginny) and Regan (Rose) are given a reason to hate Lear when it becomes clear they have been sexually abused. Ginny is now depicted as a

loyal daughter who only intends to help her father when he slowly turns mad. Rose also tries to help her father, but does hate him for what he has done to her, so her character has an inner dilemma. In a review of the *New York Daily News* both characters are described as flat. “[Shakespeare’s] complex characterizations are reduced to single traits [in the film]. Pfeiffer's Rose is the angry, bitter feminist [and] Lange's Ginny is the loving, naive earth mother” (Kehr). Caroline (Cordelia) does not notice the deterioration of her father and helps him try to take back the farm. It is interesting to see that by making Ginny nicer, she also becomes less of a feminist. She takes care of the men, has not received an education and does not have a job. Rose is the same, but more ambitious. She tells Ginny that “every time I make up my mind to do something, get off this place, leave Pete, get a job, earn some money, *you* stop me” (25:46). Caroline is the only one who does not live on the farm. She became educated and is now a lawyer. Towards the ending of the film Ginny leaves the farm and her husband and only then she becomes fully self-sufficient, living by herself and working at a cafeteria. This film could therefore be seen as criticism, saying that Shakespeare’s Goneril and Regan were perhaps too evil.

My Kingdom (2001) almost does the opposite of *A Thousand Acres* (1997). The story is set in contemporary Liverpool and the character of King Lear is transformed into Sandeman, an old mobster. Joanna (Cordelia) studies psychology and “has become an exemplary citizen” (18:52) after she had apparently been an addict and a prostitute. She does not want any part in her fathers’ business and accepts no money from him. When Sandeman is being hunted down by his other daughters after losing everything, she helps him destroy them. To great differences with the play are that they both survive at the end of the film and that Lear never really loses his mind. Tracy (Regan) and Kathy (Goneril) are two extremely spoiled women. They both detest Sandeman because he never gave them affection. They are both cold-hearted and very materialistic. The way they spend their money also shows a

childish nature, Kathy runs a brothel and Tracy owns a football club. In the end, they kill each other. This film clearly makes the characters of Goneril and Regan more intense in their hate and evil and depicts Cordelia as an independent and strong woman.

The third adaptation *The King of Texas* (2002) is an in character depiction very similar to the play. Claudia (Cordelia) is a devoted, honest and beautiful daughter, Suzannah (Goneril) is a strong but harsh woman who desires power and Rebecca (Regan) follows her, being less strong but desiring the same. Suzannah and Rebecca are only softened a little in the way they send their father away; you can really see they have been hurt by him loving Claudia the most. Their desire for power is also shown in their attraction to Emmett (Edmund). They both have an affair with him and it is made clear that they are attracted to his schemes that increase their power. Rebecca's main desire though, is being loved by a man. Rebecca's evil nature is caused by the lack of love, shown clearly in the scene where Henry is blinded. First Rebecca's husband blinds one eye, then he is shot and Rebecca is so angry that she blinds Henry's other eye while Suzannah holds him down. In the end Suzannah rides off and kills herself, and Rebecca lets herself be taken captive. Suzannah's suicide contributes to softening her character; it shows that her harshness and coldness are just pretence and that she is human after all. The role of Cordelia is rather small; she can no longer really be seen as a feminist because you learn too little of her character.

The final film, *Ran* (1985), has completely changed the story, changing the three daughters of Lear into three sons. The only female roles now present in the film are those of the wives of the first and second son (Lady Kaede & Lady Sué) and that of one servant. It is hard not to see the film as criticism on Shakespeare that his play was too feminist. Especially in one particular scene when Kurogane literally tells the current lord why women should not have any power. Kurogane is the advisor of Jiro, the second son, who is now in charge because his older brother Tiro died. He has also taken Lady Kaede as his lover, disregarding

Lady Sué, his wife. Lady Sué is a kind and religious woman, her role in the film is not very big other than being a contrast to Lady Kaede and perhaps an example of how a woman should behave. Lady Kaede is depicted as a manipulative woman who is only out to seek revenge for her murdered family. She uses sex and tears to accomplish her goal. After she sent Kurogane to kill Lady Sué and bring back her head, Kurogane returns with a fox head made of stone. Then he starts a long monologue addressed to Jiro.

“You must be very careful my lord, Foxes often work their evil in the shape of a woman. In Central Asia a she-fox seduces King Pan Tsu and persuaded him to kill a thousand men. In China, a she-fox became King Yu’s queen and brought down his kingdom. Here in Japan, a white fox with nine tails caused great havoc in court as Princess Tamamo, before reverting back to her true form. They lost track of the white fox after that, but it’s been suggested she may have settled in this area. So beware, my lord, beware” (1:51:20-1:52:00)

This text suggests that women are not suited to gain powerful positions. This statement is strengthened throughout the film; first in the decision to change the roles of the daughters into sons and secondly that for as long as the men are manipulated by Lady Kaede, bad things happen to the domain. This film shows therefore, that feminist ideas are not only different throughout history but are also dependent on diverse cultures. Jean E. Howard says about feminist literary criticism that it “attempt to understand the role literary texts play in helping to construct, to reflect, and sometimes to undermine the gender categories, codes and expectations unique to a given culture” (*Oxford Guide*). It has become clear that this can also be applied to ‘cinematic texts’. Michael Billington supports this claim, saying “Encouraged by a growing critical literature, screen Shakespeare has evolved into a forum where the plays’ shifting meanings and their cultural significance are the subject of deepening debate” (*Oxford Guide*).

6. Conclusion

The three analyses conducted in this paper form an answer to the question to what extent the feminine roles in three of Shakespeare's plays can be considered feminist and how this compares to the modern screen adaptations of these plays. The first play that has been considered is *The Taming of the Shrew*, followed by *Macbeth*, and finally *King Lear*.

In the first analysis it has become clear that the story of *The Taming of the Shrew* is suited to adapt with taking modern day feminism into account. In *Ten Things I Hate about You* the Katherina type (Kat) can be considered a feminist. In *Deliver us from Eva*, Eva too is depicted as a feminist and in *Isi Life Mein*, R.J. is a young woman fighting for her rights to study and make her own decisions. Shakespeare's original feminine roles have more rights than that is usual for the Renaissance period, like a fine education and the way they speak their minds. Furthermore, it has been argued that the Katherina's obedience to her husband can be considered false. However, their father still decides if and with whom they can marry and the women are still economically supported by men. It has become clear that the feminine roles in the screen adaptations have considerably more rights. Therefore, with regard to this play, it can be said that Shakespeare was slightly ahead of his time considering his feminine roles.

The second analysis shows that no direct link to feminism is present in the story of the play or the adaptations. However, the role of Lady Macbeth can be considered a feminist *avant la lettre* considering her efforts to transcend gender distinctions and her equality to her husband. On the other hand is she not economically self-sufficient. In the screen adaptations *ShakespeaRe-told: Macbeth* and *Scotland, Pa*, the role of Lady Macbeth is similar to Shakespeare's, but does have an occupation. In *Maqbool* the Lady Macbeth type (Nimmi) has fewer rights, trying to break loose from the oppression of her husband. This can be considered feminist and makes clear that, like in *Ice Life Mein*, modern feminism in India is not as

developed as it is in the western world. In the play, the witches are not human and Lady Macduff's part is too small, therefore they cannot be considered feminists *avant la lettre*. In the modern screen adaptations, all witches are replaced by men, except for one girl in *Scotland, Pa*. However, in this adaptation the teenage girl is under the influence of drugs and sometimes speaks with a male voice, indicating that she is not to be taken seriously or perhaps even a figment of Macbeth's imagination. The role of Lady Macduff is reduced in *ShakespeareRe-told: Macbeth* and *Maqbool* and disappears from *Scotland, Pa* completely. Regarding *Macbeth*, it could be said that Shakespeare was ahead of time considering his Feminine roles.

In the third analysis it becomes clear that in *King Lear*, all three feminine roles have feminist characteristics. Even though Cordelia does not own property and is economically supported by her husband, she strives to gain more political power to help her father and Britain's position. Goneril and Regan are eager for political power and wealth from the beginning of the play. All three women socially interact with men as equals or superiors. In *A Thousand Acres* these feminist characteristics are reduced regarding the Goneril character, having no employment or education. The Regan type (Rose) can be considered a modern feminist because she is in the same situation but desires to break free. The Cordelia character (Caroline) has had an education and is now a lawyer. She is, however, considered the 'bad guy' in this film. In *My Kingdom* the Cordelia character receives an education in psychology while her sisters own a brothel and a football club. Their rights as women are increased but their roles are over exaggerated and unreal. *The King of Texas* stays really close to Shakespeare's original with regard to characterisation; only the role of Cordelia is reduced, reducing also her feminist characteristics. In *Ran* the roles are replaced by men. The only feminine roles in the film left are those of the wives of these men. Lady Sué is an obedient, kind and silent woman, her part is small. Lady Kaede is an evil woman and the film indicates that women should not be allowed to have political power because this will have negatives

consequences. The reduction of feminine characteristics in the modern adaptations and the anti-feminist nature of *Ran* allow me to believe that Shakespeare can be considered more of a modern day feminist or female-friendly than some modern day filmmakers. Therefore I believe that Shakespeare can be considered ahead of his time with regard to his feminine characters.

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