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Desdemona and Penthea: The Legacy of Sophocles’s *Antigone*
and the Empowerment of the Female Victim in William
Shakespeare’s *Othello* and John Ford’s *The Broken Heart*

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ABSTRACT

From ancient Greek to early modern English tragedies the torment and downfall of the male protagonist was always of great interest to the audience/readers. However, several female characters have been concealed behind the shadow of their male counterparts. As the fierce patriarchal system was intensely dominant both in ancient Greece and early modern England, women were submissive to the male members of their family such as their father or brother, and after their marriage their lives were under the control of the husband. Women who dared to speak up and raise their voice were considered unnatural, promiscuous and unable to conform to the social conventions of the era. Women were often victimized since they could not express their views freely and get family property even if they were the rightful heirs. In tragedies heroines meet their tragic downfall mostly because of being wronged by a man. The purpose of this dissertation is to empower and unmute Desdemona in William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603) and Penthea in John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633) in correlation with the powerful figure of Antigone in Sophocles's tragedy. Emphasis will be laid on the echo of Antigone in the two early modern plays and the way in which the Sophoclean heroine has been received in a different cultural and historical background. In the first chapter I discuss the politics of lamentation and the way in which the heroines express their grief. I will attempt to liberate them from their passive state and show that they regain their agency against patriarchy even though they meet their tragic end and they eventually lose their lives. The main point of the second chapter is the reversal of gender roles that takes place in the three plays. Last but not least, I will draw a parallel between the issue of food rejection and anorexia in the context of controlling the female body.

INTRODUCTION

Receptions of *Antigone* in Early Modern England

Ancient Greek tragedies have been a source of inspiration for literature for centuries. In particular, Sophocles's *Antigone* has been of great influence for various authors, poets and playwrights. The plot and the characters of this tragedy have inspired many authors to revisit the Sophoclean tragedy and express their own views on the social and political exigencies of their time. As Robert Miola argues, "playwrights variously reimagined Thebes and Sophocles' *Antigone* to serve various poetic, political and moral purposes" (230). What makes *Antigone* so inviting is "the struggle between those mighty opposites, Creon and Antigone, the ethnical ambivalences, the paradoxical character of Antigone herself, fierce and pathetic, defiant and obedient, uncompromising protagonist and innocent victim, heroic even unto death" (ibid., 222). The tragedy of *Antigone* was also widely known in early modern England and she became a muse for several English poets of the time. More specifically, George Gascoigne and Francis Kinwelmersh in their play *Jocasta* narrate the tragedy of the house of the Labdacids through the mouth of Antigone's mother, Jocasta.¹ The play, performed at Gray's Inn² in London in 1566, a performance which was the first of a "regular" tragedy in English. *Jocasta* was a tragedy in blank verse which is said to have derived from Euripides's *Phoenissae*. It was the first performance of Greek tragedy in English where Antigone was presented as a conventional pious girl and not as transgressive woman who resists the law of the sovereign. As Francesca Schironi mentions, "the last act describes the fatal duel between Eteocles and Polynices, Jocasta's suicide, and Antigone's lament for her brother's death, closing with the arrival of Oedipus on stage" (141). Even though Antigone was not the main character of the play, Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh were the first to present the Sophoclean heroine to the audience of Elizabethan England.

Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's play was not the only reception of *Antigone* in early modern England. The English poet, historian and dramatist Thomas May wrote *The Tragedy of Antigone, the Theban Princess* which was published in 1631. In this play May replays the Sophoclean paradigm to Caroline audiences for new political,

poetic and moral ends. He focused on the political message that underlies the play so as to comment on the reign of Charles I of England. According to Miola, “May’s *Antigone* articulates the political concerns of the late 1620s and 1630s, especially the fear of foreign invasion along with the duty of foreign aid, the problem of unheard speech, and the necessity of good counsel” (237). Similar to *Jocasta*, May’s play presents a quite altered version of the story. The playwright “transforms Haemon and Antigone into courtly, pastoral lovers who meet in the woods” (ibid.). Their love affair culminates in a tomb scene which resembles the emblematic scene in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Furthermore, another play that was influenced by Sophocles’s tragedy is Phineas Fletcher’s *The Purple Island* or *The Isle of Man* which was published in 1633. Just like the aforementioned plays, *Antigone* appears to be an exemplar of virtue. Fletcher “recalls Antigone as the culminating example of the last corporal work of mercy, burial of the dead” (ibid., 232). These playwrights were interested in Antigone’s story since it “expresses all the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man,” which according to George Steiner, “are fivefold: the confrontation of men and of women; of age and of youth; of society and of the individual; or the living and the dead; of men and of gods” (231). Consequently, these three plays were not faithful adaptations of *Antigone* but they were influenced by the Sophoclean heroine and the Labdacids in general. Their focal point is not her refusal to conform to the laws of the state but her virtue, piety and loyalty to the gods. Based on these receptions of *Antigone*, it is evident that people in early modern England were well aware of Sophocles’s *Antigone* and her decision to disrupt any norms and bury her brother’s body.

The spirit of *Antigone* is discerned in William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603) and John Ford’s *The Broken Heart* (1633) in two other characters who meet their tragic end because of male intervention, Desdemona and Penthea. They are presented as victims of patriarchy and the strictly male-dominated society of seventeenth-century England, which is suggested in the setting of the plays in Venice and ancient Sparta respectively. Undoubtedly, *Othello* and *The Broken Heart* are not adaptations or receptions of *Antigone* in early modern England. However, the three heroines share a lot of similarities as women whose lives are determined by the male figures of their family. At the end of each play *Antigone*, Desdemona and Penthea lose their lives in their attempt to subvert the gender and social norms of their time. These three heroines

are the embodiment of women living under the oppressive gender norms of classical Athens and early modern England. Although the plays are set in a different time and place from England, they reflect the playwright's own society. The female characters of the plays represent women in classical Athens and early modern England and their role in the public and domestic sphere.

Women in Classical Greece

Many scholars such as Nicole Loraux and Sarah Pomeroy have examined the social position and subjugation of women in classical Greece and particularly in Periclean Athens. The specific era which is also known as the Golden Age of Athens was a period of Athenian political hegemony, financial growth and cultural flourishing. However, patriarchy was intensely dominant in classical Greece and, thus, women were considered to be inferior to men. In contrast to men, women were completely disenfranchised and trapped in their forced inferiority to the male figures of their family. Their political and social position was significantly limited as they were prevented from participating in the polis and expressing their views on crucial issues. Moreover, women were forbidden from getting involved in the finances of the family as it was a male obligation. A woman had no legal authority to handle transactions in property worth more than a small amount of money.³

In classical Athens women were not allowed to have access to education for it was only a male privilege. Young girls were not formally educated. Mothers used to teach their daughters several skills so as to learn how to run their household and become typical housewives. Women of that time used to get married to older men from a really young age; according to Mark Golden, "girls marry young (between 11 and 14), most men marry at around 40, and some younger men marry widows" ("Demography and the Exposure of Girls at Athens" 321). After their marriage the role of women was considerably limited. Their main concern was to bear their children, obey their husband and run their household. In Athens, among aristocratic families the seclusion of women was quite common. Wealthy women in particular were not supposed to socialize with unrelated men and, thus, they were segregated in special rooms in the house. Golden claims that "larger houses at any rate had a room or suite of rooms in which women

worked and otherwise spent much of their day, the women's apartment, the *gynaikonitis*" which was on the upper floors (*Children and Childhood in Classical Athens* 122). Nonetheless, the seclusion of women was not always practical, especially for the families of the lower classes since women had to get out of the house and carry out several tasks. In this case, their interaction with other men was inevitable. The remote rooms of the house where women used to stay were far from windows and doors. Respectable women were expected to remain out of the public eye in order to uphold social propriety and purity. This idea was so entrenched in classical Athens that even calling a citizen "woman" was shameful. As Nicole Loraux underlines, women in Periclean Athens were "the opposite of citizen" (8). They were not considered proper citizens like men and they had significant disadvantages for the law compared to their male counterparts. In other words, Athenian women were denied political rights and freedom, being treated almost like slaves and metics.⁴

Moreover, women in Periclean Athens in the fifth century BC were inextricably linked with domesticity. According to Sarah Pomeroy "as a logical consequence of the woman's duty to Athens, marriage and motherhood were considered the primary goals of every female citizen" (62). The main concern of a married couple was to have children and perpetuate the family. An Athenian girl typically "married young, perhaps at fourteen (and perhaps to a man twenty years or more her senior)" and she "exchanged confinement in her father's house for confinement in her husband's" (Dover 61). Before getting married young girls were under the protection and control of the closest male relative, her *kyrios*⁵, in the family who was responsible for choosing their husband. Another significant criterion for a man to choose his wife was the dowry of the bride. As Lin Foxhall states "a dowry is the property which goes with a woman when she is married" and "it is the basis of her maintenance and livelihood" (32). Dowries could also be defined as a patrimonial inheritance which was given to a woman with her marriage. Even the dissolution of a marriage was a decision which had to be made by a man. According to Sarah Pomeroy, "upon marriage a woman passed into the guardianship of her husband in most matters, with the important limitation that her father, or whoever else had given her in marriage, retained the right to dissolve the marriage" (62). If the couple had children at the time of the divorce, they were supposed to live at their father's house and, thus, their father was responsible for their upbringing. Furthermore, if a woman committed adultery, her husband had the legal right to divorce

her. Thus, a married *epikleros* would be divorced and she could be able to marry her nearest male relative. The notion of *epikleros* was considerably present in Periclean Athens and it also reinforced female submission and inferiority to men. According to Kirk Ormand, “the *epikleros* was a woman whose father died without male heirs. According to Athenian law, such a woman was required to marry her nearest male relative beginning with her father’s side, to whom she would then transfer her father’s property” (17). Women were almost considered as an object, a possession which should be protected, controlled and restricted by a male figure. If a woman was independent and expressed her own views, she was stigmatized and her moral values were questioned by the normative society of the time. For instance, Aspasia of Miletus, namely Pericles’s partner, was a powerful female figure in classical Athens. According to Cheryl Glenn “when other women were systematically relegated to the domestic sphere, Aspasia seems to have been the only woman in classical Greece to have distinguished herself in the public domain” and she “represented the intelligentsia of Periclean Athens” (183). Aspasia had a really active role in the society since she “opened an academy for young women of good families [...] that soon became a popular salon for the most influential men of the day: Socrates, Plato, Anaxagoras, Sophocles, Phidias, and Pericles” (ibid., 184). However, she was accused of corrupting women and leading an immoral life. Specifically, William Courtney mentions that the Athenian suspicion and misunderstanding of such a powerful, political, non-Athenian, unmarried woman living with their controversial leader, Pericles, led automatically to the sexualized and undeserved label of hetaera (488-95). As a result, a woman who had an opinion of her own was debased and morally questioned by the male-dominated society.

Women in Early Modern England

The English Renaissance was an era when various fields such as humanism, exploration, architecture, fine arts, literature, philosophy and science flourished and gave an end to the scientific and cultural stagnation of the Middle Ages. It represented the enthusiasm for classical literature and the rebirth of classical Greek and Roman texts. However, it is plausible to ask if women had their own Renaissance as well. Similar to women in classical Athens, women in early modern England had extremely

limited social and political options. Chastity was exclusively a female feature and as Joan Kelly notes, “the relations of the sexes were structured to one of female dependency and male domination” (20). Even though England was ruled by Queens for over half a century women were the underlying sex and men used to rule over everything. Susanne Hull describes vividly the role of women of that time, mentioning that early modern England is the era,

When England was ruled for half a century by Queens but women had almost no legal power; When marriage, a woman’s main vacation, cost them their personal property rights; when the ideal women were rarely seen and never heard in public; when the clothes a woman wore were legally dictated by her social class; when almost all schoolteachers were men; when medicine was prepared and purified at home; when corsets were constructed of wood and cosmetics made of bacon and eggs; when only half of all babies survived to adulthood (15).

Women in the Renaissance did not have a definite role in the social sphere of the time. According to the conventions of the time an ideal woman was to prim and take care of her physical appearance to become a so-called fair lady. Women were not expected to express themselves freely as their views were mostly shaped by men. Women were controlled by their parents from the day they were born until the day they were married. After the marriage the husband had the full responsibility and control of his wife. Female disobedience was considered to be a crime according to the strict religious norms of the time. As the Scottish protestant leader John Knox mentioned in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet* written in 1558, “woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him” (15). Moreover, the purpose of conduct books, a distinct literary genre, was to teach women how to behave properly. They adhered to promoting women’s traditional position as “one of the self-evident laws of nature [was] that men were superior to women – mentally, physically and morally” (Strachey 16).

The main similarity among women who belonged to a different social class was their submission to the male figures of their family. However, women of different classes had also different roles in their family and society. The women of the lower classes were expected to be typical housewives and take care of everything concerning

their household. As regards their education, it was often poor as they were solely prepared to become proper housewives and learn how to govern a household. The role of working-class women was slightly different from those coming from the lower classes. These women worked for their husbands and helped them run their business. After long hours of work they used to go home and fulfill their domestic obligations. If an Elizabethan woman was not married, she was inevitably looked upon with suspicion. These women, “regardless of their social standing they were expected to marry” and, thus, “single women [...] were thought to be witches by their neighbours” (“Elizabethan Wedding Customs”). Consequently, it was unimaginable for a woman to stay unmarried and live on her own without a man as her guardian.

In contrast to working and lower class women, upper class women were the only women who were allowed to express their own views and yet not sufficiently. A proper lady was not supposed to be seen or heard in public. She was supposed to be a fragile and dainty female who should be silent and respectful towards her master. Even though her servants were always at her disposal, an upper class lady was still expected to take care and have the control of her household. Sometimes women from wealthy families had the privilege to gain education. They were taught by tutors at home as they were not allowed to go to the university. After their marriage their role shifted to typical housewives and devoted mothers. The main purpose of a woman was to give birth to many children since the rate of infant mortality was considerably high. Because of the crude gynecology of the time Elizabethan women were at risk during labor, hence they used to arrange the care of their children in case they lost their lives during childbirth. As Sarah Bryson mentions “young mothers, older mothers, poor or rich mothers, all could die not only in childbirth but also due to complications afterwards” and “more than one in three women died during their child-bearing years” (“The Tudor Society”). Consequently, the life of a woman in early modern England was extremely challenging as she often had to endure her entrapment in a loveless marriage, her forced subjection to men and short life expectancy because of incessant child-bearing.

Women in classical Athens and early modern England had a secondary role in their society and they were associated with the domestic sphere. Female inferiority was unquestionable and their passivity was also reflected in several plays of the time. In Sophocles’s tragedy, Antigone is buried alive for defying Creon’s decree and acting independently. In a similar vein, Shakespeare’s Desdemona and Ford’s Penthea are

oppressed by their male guardians and lose their life unjustly. The aim of this dissertation is to unvictimize and unmute Desdemona in William Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603) and Penthea in John Ford's *The Broken Heart* (1633) in correlation with the powerful figure of Antigone in Sophocles's tragedy. I will focus on the echo of Antigone in the two early modern plays. Despite their different historical and cultural background, women in ancient Athens and early modern England share many similarities concerning their role in their society. The legacy of Antigone is evident in the characters of Desdemona and Penthea; yet no parallels have been drawn in the many analyses of the plays. In the first chapter emphasis will be laid on the politics of lamentation and the way in which the heroines express their grief. I will refer to Antigone's dirge and the ban of lamentation in Periclean Athens. Similarly, I will present the politics of lamentation in early modern England and read Desdemona and Penthea's mourning as an act of empowerment and expression of female voice. In the second chapter, I will present the gender reversal which occurs in all three tragedies. I will discuss the emotional excess as it is expressed by the male characters of the play, namely Creon, Othello, Orgilus and Ithocles, which they fiercely condemned as an immoral, female practice. Moreover, in the third and last chapter of my thesis, I will draw a parallel between the issue of food rejection and anorexia in the context of controlling the female body, reading the image of food in the three tragedies as a symbol of female victimization but also resistance against patriarchy. Last but not least, I will attempt to liberate the tragic heroines from their passive state and show that they regain their agency even though they meet their tragic end and eventually lose their lives.

Notes

¹ For more information on the play, see Miola 232.

² It was the most aristocratic of the Renaissance London Inns of Court. During the Elizabethan reign, the Inn became noted for the masques and revels that it threw, and William Shakespeare is believed to have first performed *The Comedy of Errors* in this venue.

³ See Sealey 37.

⁴ In ancient Greece, the term metic (Greek: *métōikos*: from *metá*, indicating change, and *oîkos* “dwelling”) referred to a foreign resident of Athens, one who did not have citizen rights in their Greek city-state (*polis*) of residence.

⁵ *Kyrios* is a Greek word which could be translated as “lord” or “master”. In classical Athens when a woman got married, her husband became her new *kyrios*. He was the head of the household and he was responsible for all the women in his family, namely his wife, children and female relatives.

1. LAMENTATION AND EXPRESSION OF GRIEF

1.1 Politics and Practices of Mourning in Periclean Athens and Sophocles's *Antigone*

The politics of lamentation was one of the most controversial issues in ancient Athens. After the emergence of democracy and the ban of lamentation in fifth century Athens, the issue of excessive mourning generated various opposing views regarding the effect of this practice on the democratic Athenian society since it often initiated a vicious circle of vengeance for the loss of a family member and it was also a way of contesting the expansion of the empire that required an extensive sacrifice of its young men. According to Bonnie Honig's *Antigone, Interrupted*, the practice of lamentation in ancient Athens was divided into two different strategies represented in drama through the characters of Antigone and Creon. Antigone represents the Homeric honor and the irreplaceability of the dead, whereas Creon embodies a sovereign whose main concern is the obedience to law and the protection of the emergent democracy for his own interests. One of the most fundamental ideas of the Periclean law was the replaceability of the dead. Men, and specifically soldiers, were substitutable for one another. Their death was supposed to be celebrated as a sacrifice for the city and not mourned as a tragic loss. As Tyrrell and Bennett mention "[P]arents do not have children solely for their own benefit; from the viewpoint of the *polis* and its orator, they have them for the city's salvation. The *polis* needs warriors for its defense; in this respect, individuals are interchangeable, replaceable" (114).

In Sophocles' tragedy, Antigone's dirge symbolizes the excessive grief for the loss of a family member which used to be practiced in ancient Greece. In her dirge Antigone addresses her deceased parents and mentions with pride that she proved her nobility through performing all the traditional burial rites for them. As Honig argues, the excessive lamentation was accompanied with "practices of loud wailing and self-laceration (*goos*)" which were officially banned in Periclean Athens as they were considered "conventional", "gendered feminine and cast as excessive" (101). For instance, when the guard informs Creon that Antigone was the one who transgressed his decree and buried Polynices, he mentions that they "saw the girl; she cried out bitterly, with a sound like the piercing note of a bird [...] just so did she cry out,

weeping, when she saw the corpse laid bare and called down curses on those who had done the deed”¹ (423-429). Honig characterizes this kind of lamentation “Homeric” and she suggests that the focus of the Homeric mourning is “on the hero’s beautiful body, embodied pain, and survivor’s bereavement” (102). This kind of mourning promoted the idea of the irreplaceability of the dead since the loss had a devastating effect on the family. On the contrary, Creon represents another strategy of lamentation, namely the democratic mourning. Since excessive lamentation was considered a threat for the democratic polis, “the emergent city aimed to reorient mourning away from its focus on the lost, irreplaceable life and toward that life’s honorable dedication to the good of the polis” (ibid., 100). Similarly, Olga Taxidou argues that “the dead bodies mourned were more often than not the bodies of young men who died at war” not just defending the polis, but rather expanding the Athenian empire (30). Consequently, Creon represents the state that engages totalitarian practices to suppress and eventually exclude the dangerous other, namely Antigone. As a representative of the democratic state Creon struggles to protect the empire and, by extension, his own interests.

According to Katherine Goodland, “lamentation is an artistic channeling of the fear, anger, anguish, and moral bewilderment that result from the death of a loved one” (8). More specifically, the practices of mourning are usually performed for a lost child, husband and parent. In Sophocles’s tragedy Antigone delivers her own lament as she is about to cross the threshold of the cave where she will lose her life. She complains about her untimely death “without marriage, without bridal, having to share in wedlock or in the rearing of children” (917-918). As her mother Jocasta is dead and cannot weep for the imminent death of her daughter, Antigone functions as a mother and mourns for the loss of a child embodied in herself. As Tina Chanter argues:

She is both the daughter and granddaughter of Jocasta, since Jocasta is not only her mother, but also (as mother of Oedipus) her grandmother. She grieves then for a lost opportunity, for a child that will never be, for a generation that cannot be generated, for a generation that has been generated already. She grieves, one might say, for the child that she herself is, as mother and child rolled into one (99).

As a result, Antigone laments for herself not only as an “unwept, friendless, unwedded” woman being led to her death, but also as a mother who loses her own child (876).

1.2 Politics and Practices of Mourning in Early Modern England

Female lament in early modern England was considerably different from the female mourning in classical Athens before the ban of lamentation was imposed by the Periclean law. The excessive expression of grief and self-laceration was not a common phenomenon in the Renaissance since mourning used to be performed in moderation. As William Shakespeare states through his character Lafeu in his *All's Well That Ends Well* “moderate lamentation is the right of the dead, excessive grief the enemy of the living” (1.1.51-52).

The shift from the Catholic to the Protestant dogma in early modern England had a significant impact on the practices of mourning and the memorialization of the dead. In Catholicism, the believer was able to communicate with God only through a priest because he/she was supposed to be too sinful to have a direct communication with the divine element. Given that the Virgin Mary was considered to be an emblematic figure in Catholicism, the excessive and communal expression of grief paralleled Mary's mourning for Jesus under the cross. The Protestants, except for the Calvinists, did not believe that each individual's salvation is predestined. According to the Protestants, each person should try hard throughout his/her life and live with piety in order to be saved. Furthermore, the believer was able to communicate with God directly without the intervention of a priest. The expression of emotional excess was not widely accepted under the dogma of Protestantism and, thus, the practice of mourning was performed in moderation. As Katherine Goodland states in *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama*, after the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism “the belief in purgatory and consequently the efficacy of intercessory prayers for the dead were supplanted by a conviction that the good soul was immediately assumed into heaven” (4). Therefore, if the deceased person had lived a pious and noble life and managed to save his/her soul, then grieving and praying for the dead is unnecessary since the soul has gained eternal salvation and has been unified with the divine element. The Protestant church did not consider death as a tragic and irreplaceable loss but as the ultimate destination of a soul. According to Marion Wynne-Davies, the Protestants “attempted to curtail what it circumscribed an excessive expression of grief, such as wailing and tearing of hair; instead they pointed out that death should be interpreted as a joyous occasion when the soul of the beloved was given

its rightful place in heaven” (2). Consequently, the immoderate lamentation and the image of a weeping woman were considered to be inappropriate as they represented the ruins of England’s recent Catholic past.

The practice of lamentation and mourning was considered to be a female feature as it was mostly performed by women. Emotional excess was more appropriate for women since female nature was burdened with the transhistorical stereotype of female hysteria, promiscuousness and absence of self-control. Goodland argues that “women’s grief might be justified by the burden society placed upon women, a burden authorized by God’s admonition of Eve after the fall” (111). However, the communal expression of emotion and male manifestations of grief were not widely accepted. Men in early modern England were expected to act in moderation, self-control and propriety. The excessive expression of grief by a man was quite unimaginable and also disturbing to the normative society of the time. More specifically, the “Protestant commemoration of a brief, contemplative, internalized and rational sorrow was identified as masculine, whereas feminine grief was considered excessive, communal and immoderate, thereby linking it to the old faith” (ibid.). Yet, given that women in early modern England played a considerably restricted role in their society, female mourning could be identified as a form of expression for women. In other words, the communal expression of grief was an opportunity for women to make their voice be heard in a society where the male voice was dominant and superior to that of women. Patricia Phillippy in *Women, Death and Literature in Post-Reformation England* interestingly notes that in a culture in which “feminine grief is condemned as immoderately emotional”, “excessive outpourings could also be used as a means of authorizing and empowering women’s speech... [which] licenses women’s writing and publishing of textual works of mourning” (9). Thus, mourning made the female voice be heard in a society where only men were able to express themselves and women were supposed to be silenced and almost absent. Given that the excessive expression of grief was unacceptable and even destabilizing, Roger Just emphasizes the “disruption caused by women’s lamentations, the threat they pose to the good order – indeed to the very survival – of society by their introduction of the unrestrained, the emotional, the illogical” (198). Women’s emotional expression was completely juxtaposed with the restrained and normative role of men. Therefore, female mourning in the Renaissance could be considered not only as a residue of the Catholic and medieval traditions of lament but

also as a threat for the male domination and, thus, it had to be muted. As Carol Lansing points out, “the rational self-control needed for an orderly political community was equated with male nature, opposed to emotional display, considered to be female” (106). Similarly, in classical Athens “the emergence of the democratic polis necessitated the displacement of the female lamenter whose mourning could incite tensions between competing aristocratic clans over which, the state wishes to exert political control” (Goodland 6). Consequently, a weeping woman by expressing her grief becomes a threat to the political and social order of her time.

1.2.1 The Weeping Willow: Desdemona’s Lament in *Othello*

The figure of Desdemona in William Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603) has drawn wide critical attention and received various interpretations. Given that women in the early seventeenth-century England were completely submissive to their husband, it could be argued that Desdemona is the embodiment of a typical Elizabethan woman who is blindly loyal to her husband and accepts her inferiority to him. One of her most moving and powerful scenes is her Willow song in the fourth act of the play. Eamon Grennan refers to the “willow scene” as “one of the most dramatically compelling scenes in Shakespeare,” praises its “unhurried simplicity” and notes that it “composes both a ‘theatrical’ and a ‘dramatic’ interlude suggesting peace and freedom, within the clamorous procession of violent acts and urgent voices” (277). It could also be characterized as an ode to love which narrates the desperation of an unfortunate lover and the emotional pain an unrequited love causes. It is a complaint of a woman whose love and devotion to a man are not appreciated and her emotions are not reciprocal. However, the willow scene can also be interpreted as Desdemona’s chance to regain her agency and break the shackles of female submission to patriarchy. Similar to Antigone, Desdemona gets unmuted and sings her own lament song before losing her life by the hands of her husband.

The image of the willow functions as a symbol of mourning. The weeping willow, as it has been named, resembles a woman crying and, thus, represents grief and mourning. In the fourth act of the play Desdemona is in her room with her loyal maid Emilia waiting for Othello as he had demanded. At this point Desdemona is well aware

of the fact that her imminent death is approaching and asks from Emilia to wrap her body with her wedding sheets after her death. Specifically, she mentions that “if I do die before thee, prithee, shroud me in one of these same sheets” (4.3.24-25). This association of death with marriage is notably similar to Antigone’s dirge where she refers to the cave as a tomb which is a “bridal chamber” (891). For both women marriage, which was the only purpose in a woman’s life, has become their deathbed where they will lose their life. As the conversation of the two women proceeds, Desdemona recalls a story of one of her mother’s maids, Barbary, who was singing the willow song as she was dying of unrequited love. Desdemona mentions that “that song tonight will not go from my mind” and starts singing the willow song (4.3.29-30). According to Rochelle Smith, “her singing [...] becomes an expression of her love for Othello, the fullest expression of her chaste and mature sexuality” (320). Moreover, Ernest Brennecke claims that the willow song is of great importance for Desdemona because she is not able to express herself freely and, thus, “what she cannot say, she sings” (37). He also adds that “the last couplet of her song tells us what she is inwardly and explicitly aware of the cause of Othello’s passion” and that “Desdemona invents and sings it as if in a dream or a deep reverie, thereby revealing more of her subconscious awareness than any spoken words could indicate” (ibid.). At this point Desdemona knows that she will lose her life and she delivers her own lament. Towards the end of the song she sings “let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve – Nay, that’s not next” claiming that she forgot the words of the song; however, this abrupt pause of the song may have various interpretations (4.3.38). This line could also indicate Desdemona’s view that men, and Othello in particular, are to blame for women’s misfortunes. Desdemona’s phrase “Nay, that’s not next” could indicate that she refutes the last phrase of the song which is “his scorn I approve” in order to claim the exact opposite. It may be her attempt to condemn even if indirectly Othello for his unreasonable behavior and her imminent unfair death. As a typical woman of her time, she is supposed to obey her husband and justify all of his actions. On the contrary, she accuses Othello of being unfair since she is not willing to “approve” “his scorn”. She transforms the willow song from a complaint of a sorrowful woman for her unrequited love into her own lament song. Consequently, Desdemona emerges from her passive state of a helpless woman weeping for her lost lover and makes a statement against the male authority which has been the main cause of women’s downfall.

Female mourning was not supposed to be heard publicly as it was considered to be inappropriate. In Sophocles's tragedy, Antigone delivers her lament publicly; she mourns for her approaching death not only in front of the men of Thebes but also her greatest enemy, Creon, whose decree to leave Polynices unburied forced her to transgress the law and eventually meet her untimely death. Considering that communal mourning was disturbing to the citizens, and especially to men, Creon and the guards who constitute the chorus interrupt Antigone's dirge and strive to mute her. At the end of her dirge the guards mention that "the same blasts of the same winds of the spirit still possess her" and Creon in his attempt to suppress the expression of her emotions warns that "there shall be trouble for those conducting her on account of their slowness" (929-932). Similarly, there is an interruption of Desdemona's willow song in *Othello*. As Desdemona starts singing, she is well aware that she is delivering her lament song. Specifically, she realizes that her "eyes do itch" and wonders if "doth that bode weeping" (42-43). In contrast to *Antigone*, the interruption of mourning is not caused by a man or another character of the play but the wind. In fact, the wind that interrupted Desdemona's mourning could also represent her own conscience. In other words, Desdemona wishes to protect her private and vulnerable moment of self-revelation. As Grennan suggests, this scene is "a protected enclosure where women may, for a few minutes free of a world that puts checks upon their voices, speak (or sing) their minds and hearts" (282). Her mourning would be condemned by the male listeners and, thus, she intends to protect her private moment from any male intervention. Even after the interruption of the "wind" Desdemona continues with her mourning and completes her ritual.

This scene is one of the rare moments of the play in which the readers/audience have access to Desdemona's inner self. This is a decisive moment for the Shakespearean heroine since her thoughts and conscience are revealed even though she compares herself to a willow tree. As Martha Ronk notes "Desdemona comes closest to a representation of subjectivity by means of an objectified picture" (64). Moreover, it is vital to underscore the context of the scene where the willow song is delivered. Desdemona expresses her inner conflict through this song while she is being undressed. This scene represents the utmost exposition of Desdemona as she presents her true self during the intimate moment of undressing and, is extremely feminine since it takes place in her room; the only person who is present is her maid Emilia and there is no

male interference to disrupt this quintessential moment of female expression. The unpinning scene displaces the focus from the masculine element of the rest of the play and “underlines again the reassuring reciprocity of speech between these two women, as well as creating a tangible sense of the enclosed, protected, and at the same time potentially vulnerable world of the scene” (Grennan 280).

Similar to Sophocles’s *Antigone*, the maternal element is evident in Desdemona’s mourning. In this scene Desdemona narrates the story of her mother’s maid Barbary who experienced a traumatic love story which eventually led to her death. Given that her mother and Barbary had a mother-daughter relationship, it could be argued that Barbary is a parallel to Desdemona as a girl under her mother’s protection and care. In fact, in these lines there is “a faint evocation of maternity” and “when it is over, both of its temporarily liberated speakers are under sentence of death, condemned to a world of final silence” (ibid.). Actually, this is the only time in the play when Desdemona mentions her mother who is assumed to be dead. As her mother is absent from the last moments of her daughter, Desdemona has no one to mourn for her imminent death. Therefore, she becomes a mother to herself and weeps for her own loss which is similar to Antigone’s decision to fill the gap left by her mother and sing her own lament.

Another important similarity between Desdemona and Barbary is the meaning that underlies the maid’s name. The name “Barbary” derives from the word barbarian which according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to a foreigner, one whose language and customs differ from the speaker’s (“Barbarian”). This person is estranged, marginalized and lacks cultural and social assimilation. Similarly, Desdemona is accused of marrying an uncivilized foreigner, as he has been called throughout the play. More specifically, Iago in the opening act describes this marriage as that between “an erring barbarian and a super subtle Venetian”; this is an opinion that almost everyone shared and Desdemona was aware of it (1.3.304). Moreover, the notion of estrangement is also embodied in Desdemona’s character. Her choice to marry Othello transformed her into a “stranger” not only to the Venetian society but also to her own father, Brabantio. Her father who did not approve of this marriage was forced to do so when his daughter reassured him that her attraction to Othello was not caused by any kind of witchcraft but by pure love. However, her total estrangement from her father occurs when Brabantio in the first act warns Othello “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to

see, she has deceived her father, and may thee” (1.3.288-289). He lost all his faith in his daughter and, thus, he warns Othello to be suspicious of his wife since she could be unfaithful to her husband as she was to her father. Besides, when Othello is convinced that his wife is unfaithful to him, he recalls Brabantio’s words and questions Desdemona’s fidelity by accusing her of deceiving her own father. Consequently, Desdemona’s estrangement from her society and family could also be paralleled with Antigone’s estrangement from her family members and her society by transgressing Creon’s decree and the laws of the state. They deliver their own lament song and disregard the fact that the practice of mourning was not socially accepted, especially by men. As Barbary’s name suggests, both women are estranged and they become an other, both on the gender and the social level.

1.2.2 Penthea’s Lament in John Ford’s *The Broken Heart*

In his revenge tragedy *The Broken Heart* (1633), John Ford presents the issues of love and marriage in early modern England. His characters are extremely powerful and each of them represents a different aspect of human nature. As the playwright notes from the very beginning of the play, each character represents a human quality which determines his/her actions and development over the course of the story. Through the association of the characters with human emotions and qualities, John Ford evokes the medieval and early Tudor theatrical genre of the morality play. As Hardin Craig mentions “in this type form of the morality play the hero is not an individual but a symbol of humanity as a whole”, thereby “the hero proceeds on the highway of life usually accompanied by certain abstract domestic values” (64). The female protagonist of the play, namely Penthea, is correlated with Complaint as throughout the story she complains about the male figures in her life, and especially her brother Ithocles, for manipulating and destroying her life. Even though Penthea appears to be an accurate depiction of female oppression by fierce patriarchy, she regains her lost agency through her actions and takes her life in her own hands. The practice of mourning is significant in *The Broken Heart* since it offers Penthea an escape from her male-dominated life.

The female expression of grief is prominently evident in John Ford’s tragedy. Penthea is condemned to live a futile life by being forced to marry Bassanes and to

suppress her love for Orgilus with whom she was orally committed before her father's sudden death. Given that her marriage to Bassanes was unlawful to her, she decided to starve herself to death so as to get rid of the disgrace. More specifically, in the second scene of the fourth act Penthea delivers her last words in the play and she laments for her imminent death. She blames directly the male "tyrants" of her life for her predicament and, especially, "a cruel brother and a desperate dotage" (4.2.144-145). She attacks Ithocles and Bassanes for disrespecting her honor and having "no peace left for a ravish'd wife, widow'd by lawless marriage" (4.2.146-147). For an early modern woman honor was one of the most important traits that she should acquire. After her forced marriage to Bassanes, "poor Penthea's name is strumpeted" and she has no other choice than death (4.2.148). In this scene Penthea's speech is really empowering since she gets unmuted and blames the oppressive men in her life for her unfortunate state. As silence and obedience were some of the most common attributes for a woman, it is quite unimaginable for the audience to witness a woman attacking her male relatives so directly and accusing them of destroying her life.

The practice of mourning expressed by Penthea is considered to be disturbing not only to men but also to the society of Sparta which is the setting of the play. John Ford highlights Penthea's empowerment by placing her lament in the austere society of Sparta. The expression of grief was completely inappropriate since the excessive self-control of Sparta was totally juxtaposed with emotional excess. As Sarah Pomeroy mentions "Spartan women were renowned for enthusiastically sacrificing their sons for the welfare of the state. Instead of lamenting at the death of their sons, they took pride in the bravery that had led to that fate" (57). On the contrary, "in Athens, women mourned the dead, lavished grave goods upon them, and visited funerary monuments; but in Sparta, grave goods and mourning were controlled, restricted in some circumstances and mandated in others" (ibid.). Sparta was a society distinguished by its formidable army and austere self-control. Considering that the feelings of love and sorrow are excessive, they cannot get controlled easily and, thus, they should get suppressed. Consequently, Penthea reinforces her individuality as her mourning takes place in Sparta where emotional excess was highly criticized.

Similar to *Antigone* and *Othello*, this play shows that lamentation is a way for women to speak up their minds and defend their individuality even at the ultimate moment of their death. In *The Broken Heart* Penthea is not the one who delivers her

lament song but her maid Philema. The song in the third scene of the fourth act describes the pain that love can cause and its lethal consequences as does Desdemona's Willow song. More specifically, it is said that "Love is dead" and "Love's martyrs must be ever, ever dying" (4.3.148, 153). As Rick Bowers argues "love and death are joined at this point by their equivalent sense of ineffability and refinement. Martyrdom, sanctification, and spiritual purity are celebrated by both states and intensified by their presences together – as experienced by Penthea" (380). In fact, Penthea orchestrated her own mourning before her death; thus, she becomes the director of her mourning. In the fifth scene Penthea's maid Philema describes her lady's instructions for her mourning. The maid mentions that Penthea "call'd for music, and begg'd some gentle voice to tune a farewell to life and griefs: Christalla touched the lute; I wept the funeral song" (4.4.3-6). Furthermore, the moment when the maids enter with the dead body of Penthea is of great importance. In the stage directions of the fourth scene John Ford presents "CHRISTALLA and PHILEMA, *bringing in PENTHEA in a chair; veiled*" (4.4.156-157). According to the directions "*The Maids sit down at her feet; The Servants go out*" (4.4.159-161). Taking the play's setting into account, Ford uses the austere society of Sparta as a reflection of his own society. Therefore, as in the Renaissance "most of the servants in any household are men," here the men refuse to witness the maids' excessive expression of grief and they exit the scene ("Masters and Servants"). Considering that public mourning was extremely inappropriate and disturbing for men, the women's grief makes them uneasy. Orgilus interrupts the maids' mourning and dismisses them immediately. He commands them to "keep a smooth brow" and stop weeping for Penthea's death (4.4.13). Orgilus's reaction is completely justifiable since he is not only a man but also a Spartan. Hence, even though Penthea is not singing the lament song, she is the one who orchestrated exactly the way she wanted to be mourned and managed to cause uneasiness to the men who witnessed her mourning.

In the second scene of the fourth act, Penthea delivers her last words in which the maternal element is vividly presented as in *Antigone* and *Othello*. Penthea in her lament refers to the notion of motherhood and childbearing. She addresses the men who are responsible for her tragic state, namely Bassanes and Ithocles, and complains about her being unable to fulfil her purpose as a woman and have children, according to the prerogatives of the time. Specifically, she mentions that "since I was first a wife, I might

have been mother to many prattling babies” (4.2.87-88). Similarly, in Sophocles’s tragedy *Antigone* in her dirge complains about dying “without marriage, without bridal, having no share in wedlock or in the rearing of children (917-918). Penthea acknowledges that it is “too late for me to marry now; I am past child-bearing” (4.2.93-94). Her words might seem contradictory because she is already married to Bassanes. However, she does not acknowledge this marriage as a legal one, since she had been committed to Orgilus with the blessings of her father before his untimely death. In her last words Penthea transforms herself from a silenced, submissive woman into a daring individual since she accuses directly the men in her life of being the cause of her misfortunes. She breaks the silence that was imposed on her by the patriarchal norms of the time and she opposes Ithocles’s decisions for her life. Moreover, she clearly blames men for her untimely death as she states that it “is not my fault”, thereby she refuses to take any responsibility of this tragic end (4.2.94). This phrase resembles Desdemona’s line in her willow song where she mentions “Nay, that’s not next” (4.3.38). Based on the aforementioned interpretation, Desdemona refuses to take responsibility for the events and justify Othello’s unreasonable reaction. Similarly, Penthea powerfully defends herself and states that her miserable and unfulfilled life is not her fault. She was forced to marry the husband Ithocles chose for her since she was left with no other choice but to obey her male guardian.

Even though the male figures in her life deprived her of having children with the man she loved and becoming a mother, Penthea manages to function in a maternal manner before her death. In the fifth scene of the third act she visits the princess of Sparta, Calantha, and offers her legacy to her by saying “such legacies as I bequeath” (3.5.38). According to Jennifer Heller “mothers’ legacies share a set of interlocking features: they feature a maternal voice, they are written to children, they are cast as deathbed advice, and they provide religious counsel” (2). The legacy was the mothers’ advice to her children. The only thing that they had to offer was their advice and not some kind of object. Women were not allowed to write their own will or testament because they were not considered to be individual entities. Penthea’s main purpose in offering Calantha her legacy is to protect her from wasting her life. Hence, her advice to the princess is to accept Ithocles’s love. As Nancy Gutierrez notes, she “takes the lead in arranging the marriage of her brother and his beloved, not only violating the sex-gender system in place in the world of the play, but also exhibiting a female agency”

(53). The scene of the legacy is really empowering for Penthea since she acts like a mother giving her advice to her child as well as disrupts the social difference between her and Calantha. Even though Penthea is socially beneath the princess of Sparta, she talks to her in equal terms and creates a mother-daughter relationship between the two women. Consequently, in all three plays the female heroines use the practice of mourning as a form of female speech and expression. Even though lamentation was considered to be inappropriate, they grieve for their upcoming death and they express their strong discontent toward the decisions of their male guardians.

Notes

¹ The quotes are taken from Loyd-Jones's translation of *Antigone*.

2. GENDER REVERSAL AND EMOTIONAL EXCESS

2.1 Creon's lament in *Antigone*

In Sophocles's tragedy, Antigone is an unmuted woman who takes the courageous decision not only to oppose the laws of the state, but also her only remaining male relative who is the ruler of Thebes, namely Creon. Her final speech which is delivered before descending in the cave and meeting her imminent end, is one of the most discussed passages in classical literature and it has received various interpretations. Several scholars have argued that in her dirge Antigone reveals herself and expresses her inner feelings of love for her late brothers but also her disappointment on gods' will. According to Richard Claverhouse Jebb, "in her latest words, Antigone expresses her confidence in the love which awaits her beyond the grave; and also the trouble which overclouds her trust in the gods, who know her deed, and yet have permitted her to suffer this doom" (xv). What is more, in her final speech Antigone addresses the men of Thebes so as to underscore her marginalization from the polis. Gerhard Müller argues that her dirge is "a portrayal of Antigone's isolation amongst her fellow-men, amongst whom she can speak only in monologue-form" (196). For Bernard Knox Antigone's speech is a monologue through which she strives to reconsider the purpose of her actions. Specifically, he mentions that her dirge "resembles a soliloquy, a private meditation. It is an attempt to understand the real reasons for the action that has brought her to the brink of the death" (48). He also adds that when Antigone is at the threshold of the cave, she defies the presence of Creon and the chorus and she states her motives for her deed¹. Even though it occurs in the public sphere, the dirge is a private moment when Antigone has the chance to speak up her mind and defend the purpose of her actions even just before facing death.

Antigone's dirge differs greatly from her other speeches as regards the discourse through which she chooses to express herself. The Sophoclean heroine appropriates the discourse of the sovereign, namely Creon, and delivers a political speech in her dirge; an action which was considered unimaginable for a woman in classical Athens. Similarly, Creon appropriates Antigone's discourse of lamentation and mourns for the loss of his son and wife at the end of the play. When Haemon commits suicide next to

Antigone, Creon enters the stage with his son in his hands and cries “woe for the errors of my mistaken mind, obstinate and fraught with death! You look on kindred that have done and suffered murder! Alas for the disaster caused by my decisions! Ah, my son, young and newly dead, alas, alas, you died, you were cut off, through my folly, not through your own!” (1261-1269). After the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice “Creon seems to partake of the very practice he had forbidden” as he “shrieks loudly and engages in what can only be called excessive public bereavement” (Taxidou, 116). The tragedy of his family forces Creon to reject the values that he was struggling to protect throughout the play and functions in a way that he used to condemn.

Furthermore, in their dirges Antigone and Creon reject their femininity and masculinity respectively. More specifically, Creon constantly accuses Antigone of acting like a man because of her transgressive behavior against his decree. When the guard reveals that it was Antigone who buried Polynices’s body, Creon mentions that “I am no man, she [Antigone] is a man” (484). Her discourse in her dirge resembles a political speech from which women were completely excluded. Antigone disrupts all the constraints and stereotypes surrounding women in fifth century BC Athens and acts in a way which was considered masculine. As Judith Butler argues “in speaking to him, [to Creon], she becomes manly; in being spoken to, he is unmanned, and so neither maintains their position within gender and the disturbance of kinship appears to destabilize gender throughout the play” (10). In fact, Creon’s masculinity is disturbed as he engages in the practice of lamentation which was considered a feminine practice, thus losing his authority as a sovereign. Earlier in the play Creon accused Haemon of being manipulated by a woman. Haemon replied to him: “If you are a woman; because it is you for whom I feel concern” (741). As Bonnie Honig suggests “that reassurance, with its poisoned implication that Creon was something other than manly, is now [in his lament] realized as Creon is unmanned, deprived of his family and power” (119). He even demeans himself by calling him “no more than nothing” and a “useless man” (1325, 1339). As a result, Creon is not only mourning for the loss of his son and wife, but also for the loss of his masculinity and his authority as a sovereign. Similar to Creon, the male protagonists in *Othello* and *The Broken Heart*, Othello, and Orgilus and Ithocles respectively, function in ways which were unacceptable for a man of their time. In this chapter I aim to discuss the issue of gender reversal in both tragedies and analyze

the fact that the victimized women force the male figures of the plays to disrupt the stereotypical masculine norms of their eras.

2.2 Male Disempowerment in *Othello*

The figure of Desdemona has mostly been analyzed as a typical Elizabethan woman who is passive, almost silent and completely submissive to her husband. She is considered to be an object, a property of the dominant male figure of the family who expects to be defined by her husband. In *Women and Gender in Renaissance Tragedy* Dymphna Callaghan argues that

Desdemona is a tabula rasa in a most curious sense. She is pure, white and also blank; existing and not existing, and, since blank, open to any inscription, and therefore, in a sense indecipherable. Othello's judgement of her as whore is the inscription she must bear. She is no longer present or visible; all that remains is the stain emblazoned upon her honour. Condemned to silence, she is to be read and not to speak herself. She has become Othello's text even if the reading of it is not a stable activity" (78).

More recently several scholars have questioned the heroine's total subjection to Othello and analyzed the importance of her actions. According to Patsy Hall, "throughout the play, we are left uncertain whether Desdemona should be read as too passive and acquiescent to her husband's will or recklessly courageous in her belief in her own power and integrity" (9). Desdemona has also been considered as a woman whose loyalty to her husband is not a sign of weakness but of courtesy. More specifically, Judith Cook argues that "gentleness give[s] the prevailing tone to the character, gentleness in its excess, gentleness verging on passiveness, gentleness which not only cannot resent but cannot resist" (95). Cook underscores Desdemona's innocence and disrupts any association with frailty or weakness. She adds that "Desdemona has that quality. It's not weakness, it's very pure innocence. It is always believing the best of a situation which is what she does throughout... goodness does not have to be weak" (ibid., 97).

Desdemona's actions render Othello weaker and almost uncertain of his decision to murder her. In the second scene of the fifth act the tragedy reaches its climax

with the murder of Desdemona, the revelation of Iago's plot and, finally, Othello's suicide. The scene opens with Othello entering Desdemona's room with a candle while she is asleep in bed. What follows is an unexpected soliloquy from Othello confessing that he has already made the decision to suppress his loving feelings for his wife, listen to his inner voice to defend his honor and take Desdemona's life. Yet, even from the first line Othello appears to be uncertain about his imminent deed and tries to prevent himself from regretting his decision. He says that "it is the cause, it is the cause my soul" while he makes an attempt to convince himself to complete his mission (5.2.1). The cause that Othello mentions is Desdemona's alleged adultery which he is unable to overcome. Furthermore, he endeavors to justify his deed by claiming that if he murders Desdemona, he will prevent her from cheating on other men in the future. He notably states that "she must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6). Despite his insurmountable anger for her supposed disloyalty, he wishes not to cause her a painful death as he states that "yet I'll not shed her blood, nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow and smooth than monumental alabaster" (5.2.3-5). He is even concerned that he may change his mind and not proceed with his plan. Specifically, he confesses that "Oh, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade Justice to break her sword!" (5.2.17-18). Othello's identification with Justice who is a woman is disturbing because he has condemned his wife unjustly, without any hard evidence. As Strier and McAdams note "he is, of course, imagining himself as occupying the position of Justice, but again this is bizarrely abstract, since Justice is feminine here, and Othello does not have a sword" (10). He even identifies himself with God in the Old Testament since he has to punish whom he loves, namely Adam and Eve after committing the original sin. He mentions that "I must weep, but they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly, it strikes where it doth love" (5.2.21-23). In this scene, Othello is presented as weak, indecisive and at a loss of self-control. It could be argued that even asleep, the Venetian lady manages to destabilize Othello's unshakeable self-control and make him suffer from remorse and doubts about taking her life. Regarding that indecisiveness was associated with women, witnessing Othello in this vulnerable condition is quite unexpected for the audience/readers. Thus, the image of the emotionally charged Othello is fully juxtaposed with the calm and peaceful image of the sleeping Desdemona.

As Othello's monologue comes to an end, Desdemona wakes up. Afterwards, Othello confronts her with her supposed sin and then strangles her with his very hands.

Various scholars have thoroughly studied this excerpt and highlighted Desdemona's quintessential moment of martyrdom and victimization. According to Jesùs López – Peláez Casellas “we can decompose Desdemona's last apparition in five different stages or moments; her suspicion, her defense [...], the confirmation [...], desperation and, eventually, her forgiveness expressed by her willing attempt to take any responsibility from Othello's head” (187). The sacrificial and heroic aspect of her death has not attracted as much attention as the fact that Desdemona meets her tragic end because of her transgressive and socially unacceptable behavior. Casellas represents this type of interpretation, emphasizing that “Desdemona will die to redeem herself for her transgression of certain rules, for having married a Moor, for dishonouring her father, for being incapable of acquiring a reasonable degree of communication with her husband and, finally, for dismissing reason for the sake of will” (189). In a similar vein, Helena Faucit claims that Desdemona is “a being so bright, so pure, so unselfish, generous, courageous – so devoted in her love, so unconquerable in her allegiance to her ‘kind lord’ even while dying by his hand” (47). Furthermore, Desdemona's last words are of great significance since they have been interpreted as her ultimate and honest expression of her love to Othello. When Emilia asks her “who hath done this deed?” she answers “Nobody. I myself. Farewell. Commend me to my kind lord. Oh, farewell” (5.2.137-139). At this point Casellas poses a plausible question; “is she blindly trying to save Othello? Or is she, at last, half realizing what she has done, realizing her thoughtless behavior, whose consequences are her own death?” (187). Instead of a self-condemnation, this phrase could also be read as Desdemona's final surrender, but also her last chance to take revenge on her unfair and untimely death. Undoubtedly, her denial to reveal her murderer is unexpected of Othello. Through these words Desdemona establishes herself as the agent of her own death and deprives him of the satisfaction of taking revenge and protecting his honor. Othello was convinced to kill his wife not only for his personal reason but also for the common good of men since “she must die, else she'll betray more men” (5.2.6). As she is completely aware of the fact that she is dying, this may possibly be her last attempt to oppose Othello and claim that she herself was the one who decided to put an end to her life and not her husband.

Moreover, Othello's indecisiveness and weakness are also portrayed after he commits the crime and, particularly, after Desdemona utters her last words. Actually,

the revelation of Iago's fatal plan starts unravelling the moment that Emilia draws the curtains of the bed and discovers Desdemona's dead body. Emilia wonders who could have committed this heinous crime and Othello states "you heard her say herself it was not I" (5.2.140). Even though Emilia does not accuse her lord of murdering Desdemona, Othello's emotional distress is extremely evident when he attempts to defend himself from any suspicion that he may have been the murderer. His guilty conscience forces him to lose self-control and act erratically. At this point Othello has lost any kind of emotional balance which leads him to his personal downfall. As the stereotypical masculine norms expect men to appear strong, confident and decisive in contrast to women, in this scene Othello disrupts these norms and reveals his fragile and unstable psychological condition after the murder, even though he had convinced himself that her death was inevitable. As a matter of fact, Othello's mental instability has also been described in the first scene of the fourth act. More specifically, in this scene Iago distorts Cassio's words and informs Othello that his lieutenant had slept with Desdemona. After listening to the slander, Othello experiences an emotional breakdown and as Iago claims, "my lord is fall'n into an epilepsy. This is his second fit. He had one yesterday" (4.1.40-41). His seizure has been interpreted as an event of evil intervention. In particular, Thomas Vozar claims that Othello's trance "recalls the common association, even identification, of epilepsy with demonic possession" (184). His contingent demonic possession has been in a sense implied in the text as before his seizure Othello cries "O devil!" (4.1.34). Furthermore, Othello refers to demonic spirits when he blames Desdemona for infidelity; he claims that "lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves, should fear to seize thee" (4.2.39-40) and when he finally laments before Desdemona's deathbed, he cries "whip me, ye devils, from the possession of this heavenly sight" (5.2.291-292). In addition, Othello's trance could also be interpreted as a hysterical fit. The loss of self-control and the expression of emotional excess have been mostly associated with women and the transhistoric stereotype of female hysteria which used to haunt women throughout the centuries. This stereotype was commonly incorporated in the male discourse in order to underline the promiscuity and inferiority of women. As Elaine Showalter notes,

Feminist understanding of hysteria has been influenced by work in semiotics and discourse theory, seeing hysteria as a specifically feminine protolanguage, communicating through the body messages that cannot be verbalized. For

some writers, hysteria has been claimed as the first step on the road to feminism, a specifically feminine pathology that speaks to and against patriarchy. For others, the famous women hysterics of the nineteenth century have been taken to epitomize a universal female oppression (286).

Consequently, it could be argued that Othello's inability to control his emotions disturbs the masculine norms of the time and reveals an unexpectedly weak and fragile aspect of the general.

In the last scene of the play Othello presents an unusual and rather alarming aspect of his, since he expresses his emotions in an excessive manner. Right after committing the crime, he regrets his deed and cries "My wife! My wife! What wife? I have no wife. Oh, insupportable! Oh, heavy hour! Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse of sun and moon, and that th' affrighted globe, should yawn at alteration" (5.2.110-114). He finds himself in his most vulnerable moment and he tragically realizes that Desdemona is irrevocably gone. What is more, the Shakespearean hero is presented grieving in lines 273-295 in the presence of various noble men. He even declares his upcoming death and states that "Here is my journey's end, here is my butt, and very sea-mark of my utmost sail" (5.2.281-282). It could be claimed that Othello mourns for the loss of his life and, by extension, his own predicament. As mentioned earlier, mourning was a practice mostly associated with women since they were considered to be more prone to emotional excess. Thus, Othello's lament transgresses the social and patriarchal norms of the time.

Additionally, it is indisputable that Othello's emotional excess reaches its peak at the moment of his suicide which signifies the end of the play. In early modern England the act of committing suicide was not considered to be an honorable death but a disgrace. According to Victor Bailey, "in Tudor and early Stuart society, legal thought, religious conviction and popular belief cohered in the view that suicide was a premeditated and diabolical act of self-murder" (387). Therefore, in addition to the aforementioned point of Othello's demonic possession, it could be argued that his suicide may have also been a result of evil intervention. Similarly, Michael Zell mentions that "most agreed with protestant preachers that self-murder was a profaning, bad death, and willingly participated in the desecration rituals, which laid to rest the wandering, sleepless souls of suicides" (795). Concerning the sociopolitical impact of

suicide, Zell adds that “the State and its religious establishment denounced suicide as diabolical, at roughly the same time that it became interested in another form of demonic deviance, witchcraft, and was able to draw on a traditional popular conviction that self-murder was supernaturally evil” (ibid.). By taking his own life, Othello decides to die so as not to suffer from his destructive choices and escape his unbearable remorse. He is well aware that it would be more honorable for him to stay alive and suffer the consequences of his deed. As he mentions after stabbing Iago, “I’d have thee live, for in my sense ‘tis happiness to die” (5.2.303-304). His choice to commit suicide and not to face the consequences of his actions is thus cowardly and dishonorable for a man and especially a man of his social status. As Othello stabs himself, he fails to protect his honor and functions in an unacceptable manner according to the masculine norms of the time.

2.3 The Inversion of Gender Roles in John Ford’s *The Broken Heart*

In John Ford’s play *The Broken Heart* the fate of most of the female figures appears to be completely determined by the actions and decisions of the dominant men of their family. The practices of stout patriarchy and the subjugation of women are dramatically evident in the play. In several scenes the actions of the male characters even exude misogyny and contribute to the debasement of women. Roberta Barker notes that in the play there is “an undercurrent of misogyny expressed in Orgilus’ controlling relationship with his sister, Euphrania; in Bassanes’ jealous rages against Penthea; and even the play’s one playful scene (i.ii.106-148), which involves two returning soldiers who convince themselves that women enjoy being spurned” (70). The patriarchal practices of the time are clearly presented from the very beginning of the play. The play starts with Ithocles forcing Penthea to marry the man he chose for her, namely Bassanes, and ignore not only her feelings but also her legal commitment to Orgilus, since they vowed to get married in the presence of her father before his untimely death. Ithocles’s decision confirms the harsh patriarchal gender prerogatives of the time and introduces “a man’s assertion of power over a woman’s will and body” (ibid.). On the contrary, Penthea and Calantha form their own identity and strive to resist male oppression. Barker adds that “coded by the same dread of female fickleness that disrupts the liberality of the play’s men, these women gain identity from their strict

subjection to the ideals of obedience, constancy and chastity” (ibid.). Regarding Penthea, she refuses to identify herself with other completely submissive women, she strives to form her own female identity and she rejects any “thought of female change” (2.3.55-56). However, there are moments in the play when Orgilus and Ithocles react in an unexpected way, disrupt the masculine norms of the time and become objectified by women. Similarly, Penthea and Calantha manage to regain their subjectivity and protect their female identity.

Undoubtedly, the scene of Ithocles’s murder by Orgilus is one of the most powerful scenes of the play since the latter takes his ultimate revenge on the loss of his beloved whose dead body is present on stage. In this scene Ford presents a “double death” which according to Lisa Hopkins “it forcefully and visually illustrates the way in which Orgilus’s pursuit of vengeance is making evil spread and multiply; for as he places himself on the other side of Penthea” he “shows himself to be doomed and trapped in exactly the same way as Ithocles and Penthea are” (166). Despite being dead, Penthea is one of the most significant factors in the murder scene because she overlooks Ithocles’s murder. It could be claimed that before her death Penthea embodied oppressed woman in early modern England as the only male figure of her family, her brother Ithocles, who was her guardian, chose her husband without taking her loving feelings for another man into consideration. She was treated like a plain object transferred from one male owner to another. However, this transaction did not take place in the case of Penthea’s engagement to Orgilus. As Nancy Gutierrez argues, “Penthea’s agreement to marriage with Orgilus and her subsequent love for him indicates that she was not a passive exchange item in that political alliance and thus stands in contrast to the coercive marriage to Bassanes forced by her brother” (68). Similarly, in the murder scene Penthea regains her agency even if posthumously so. More specifically, in Act 4, Scene 4, Orgilus states that “Penthea’s sacred eyes shall lend new courage” (4.4.56), referring to the eyes and the power of the gaze. In the Renaissance, the male gaze had the power to look at the female object and establish his domination on her. As Gina Miller notes, “the ‘male gaze’ is a term commonly used among feminists arguing the role of a female for a sexual objectification of a male spectator,” adding that “sexual objectification means looking at a person as an object merely for sexual pleasure and as an object for use” (1). In the murder scene the power of the gaze is reversed. Ironically, Penthea’s gaze assumes power only after she is dead.

Orgilus unveils Penthea's face and "allows the blind gaze of Penthea to testify to his revenge upon her brother" and, thus, "it is difficult not to interpret her participation in [...] the murder of her brother as active intervention" (Gutierrez 73-74). According to Richard Madelaine, "the dead Penthea, seated like an onlooker, is, in a figurative sense, a 'witness', but the dramatic emphasis is on bloodletting as 'sacrifice'" (34). Consequently, Penthea's corpse remains on stage, to "witness" the "sacrifice" of the man who led her to starve herself to death. The most shocking turn of events, the total reversal is that the dead Penthea becomes a subject. Ford's choice is really transgressive not only because she is a woman, but she is also dead, a lifeless body. Nonetheless, Orgilus insists on defining Penthea as an object. In lines 18-19 of the scene of the murder he claims that "between us sits the object of our sorrows," continuing the objectification and commodification of Penthea by patriarchal society. However, her overlooking and monitoring of the murder scene suggest a posthumous regaining of agency, making her the real protagonist of the scene.

The significance of Penthea's presence and gaze presents the disruption of the gender norms. Nevertheless, she is not the only character in the play who ruptures gender stereotypes. Penthea's death by starvation propels Orgilus to take extreme measures and kill Ithocles. The scene is orchestrated by Orgilus as he plans to make Ithocles sit on a mechanical chair, get trapped, confront him and stab him to death. The most disturbing aspect of this scene is Ithocles's reaction when he sees Orgilus drawing his dagger and realizes that his death is approaching. Shockingly enough, Ithocles refuses to beg for mercy and instead encourages Orgilus to kill him. In fact, Ithocles gives exact directions to his murderer and tells him how to commit the crime. More specifically, Ithocles commands Orgilus to "strike home! A courage as keen as thy revenge shall give it welcome: But prithee faint not; if the wound close up, tent it with double force, and search it deeply" (4.4.38-51). In this scene Ithocles appears to be passive, the object and Orgilus the agent. However, when Ithocles tells Orgilus how to kill him, he becomes the director of his murder and regains his agency. As Nancy Gutierrez claims, this subversive scene "effectively wrests control and meaning of Ithocles' death away from his murderer and unmistakably undermines that murderer's power in the scene" (74). The most disempowering and detrimental effect of this act is that Ithocles deprives his murderer from the full delight of revenge since the murder becomes a collaboration of both victimizer and victim. Orgilus's most expected

moment of revenge is destroyed by his own enemy. Furthermore, Orgilus is not the typical avenger of a revenge tragedy. When Ithocles gets stabbed and refuses to mourn for his death, Orgilus tells him to “keep up thy spirit: I will be gentle even in blood” (4.4.59-60). As gentleness is not a trait expected by an avenger, Orgilus disrupts the stereotypes of a man who seeks revenge. In fact, both men upset the norm and destabilise the convention of the revenge strategy. Moreover, Orgilus adopts another unexpected stance after the murder. He praises his victim and states “Farewell, fair spring of manhood! Henceforth welcome best expectation of a noble suff’rance” (4.4.71-72). As a result, Ithocles’s status is restored as Orgilus underscores his victim’s nobility; therefore, subverting the stereotypical norms of the avenger.

What is more, Orgilus upsets the norm even after having taken revenge on the death of Penthea by killing Ithocles. In Act 5, Scene 2, Orgilus “pierces the vein with his dagger” and commits suicide (5.2.123). Similar to Othello, he decides to take his own life instead of staying alive and facing the consequences of his actions. Penthea’s death was the event that made Orgilus murder the person who is responsible for his predicament. When Philema and Christalla deliver the tragic news of their lady’s death to Orgilus and Ithocles, the former does not mourn or externalise his grief. Moreover, he does not confront Ithocles immediately, but he meticulously plans the way he is going to take revenge and tricks Ithocles to sit on the mechanical chair and get trapped. As Ira Clark mentions, “Orgilus has committed himself fully to the role of the avenger; but to maintain that role he has had to assume duplicitous guises that are undermining his integrity and will finally betray him into self-execution” (108). The fact that suicide is an act of emotional excess is completely juxtaposed with the restrained society of Sparta. Ford underlines the importance and the impact of these events by placing the story in the austere Spartan society. Interestingly, the Caroline and Spartan society share some characteristics concerning the conduct of their citizens. Lycurgus’s Sparta as well as the court of Charles I considered the needs of the state being a priority in contrast to the needs of the individual. Kevin Sharpe has characterized Charles I as “a monarch who was obsessed with order and decorum and of a strong moral stance” (209). Nancy Gutierrez adds that “Charles believed that concepts of hierarchy and place should govern both political and social behavior” and that “individuals should be both self-disciplined and self-controlled, in command of appetites and emotions” (55). Consequently, it could be argued that Orgilus’s suicide at the end of the play upsets the

expectations that the audience/readers have of a typical Spartan man as he appears to be unable to bridle his rage and, eventually, he is conquered by his emotional excess. In a similar vein, Creon and Othello, overpowered by their emotions, react in an inappropriate way. In his lament for Haemon's death, Creon admits that his unreasonable way of thinking is the cause of his sufferings. In Shakespeare's play, Othello mourns for Desdemona's unjust death and commits suicide.

Furthermore, another male character in the play who upsets the norm and gets objectified is Ithocles. Especially the last scene of the play, where his marriage to princess Calantha takes place, enacts the ultimate disruption of the masculine conventions of the time as Calantha decides to get married to Ithocles even though he is dead. In this scene, similar to Penthea, Calantha does not function as a typical bride/woman of her time. According to Gutierrez, "when Penthea had physically starved herself, Calantha demonstrates herself as emotionally starved" (75). What is really shocking for the audience/readers is Calantha's decision to marry the corpse of Ithocles and place on his finger a wedding ring which was considered to be a male action. More specifically, she addresses Ithocles as follows: "Forgive me: — now I turn to thee, thou shadow of my contracted lord! Bear witness all, I put my mother's wedding-ring upon his finger; 't was my father's last bequest. Thus I new-marry him whose wife I am; Death shall not separate us" (5.3.62-67). The princess takes control of her life and marries the man she loves transcending the irreversibility of death. Her marriage was her last act since at the end of the play she dies of a broken heart which leads us back to the title of the play. Undoubtedly, Calantha becomes the absolute subject of the scene. She manages to marry her beloved man even after his death and she dies of a broken heart. On the contrary, Ithocles at the end of the play is completely objectified by a woman and he abstains from the stereotypical image of a Spartan male. At the end of the play both characters are obliterated on the physical level, since they both face their death.

Notes

¹ See Knox (1992: 105).

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF FOOD AS RESISTANCE AND VICTIMIZATION IN *ANTIGONE*, *OTHELLO* AND *THE BROKEN HEART*

The consumption and rejection of food in the three tragedies is of great significance since it functions as an empowering factor and a metaphor for the victimization of the social and gendered other. Food has received wide attention as it is presented both in a literal and a metaphorical manner. Various scholars offered several interpretations of food in these tragedies as well as commented on its social dimension. More specifically, in Sophocles's tragedy Creon decides to imprison Antigone in a cave for disobeying his decree and burying Polynices's body, providing her with a very small amount of food which is barely sufficient to keep her alive. In William Shakespeare's *Othello* a speech comparing women to food is not delivered by Desdemona but her maid Emilia. Given that it is one of the most significant and powerful statements of Emilia in the play, she uses the metaphor of food to express her dissent, and dissatisfaction and complaint about women's mistreatment by their domineering husbands. Finally, the rejection of food is a central topic in John Ford's *The Broken Heart* since Penthea decides to starve herself to death and, in this way, escape her tyrannical and sinful marriage to Bassanes. Thus, the notion of food is used in a completely different way in each text and serves a different purpose for each heroine. Yet, in all three tragedies the image of food is part of female expression and identity. Antigone's rejection of food indicates her denial to contribute to Creon's wish to expel the pollution of her murder. In *Othello* Emilia draws a parallel between women and food so as to express her resentment of men's behavior towards women. Lastly, in Ford's play Penthea refuses to consume any food so as to state that she refuses to conform to the patriarchal norms and decides to take full control of her life and body.

In the Sophoclean tragedy Antigone transgresses Creon's decree and buries her brother's body. As a punishment, Creon decides to sentence her to entombment with just enough food to stay alive and not to die of starvation. More specifically, he mentions that he should bury her "still living, in a rocky cavern, putting out enough food to escape pollution" (774-775). Joan O'Brien underlines the importance of the word "φορβή" which Sophocles uses in this line. As O'Brien points out, he chooses the word "φορβή" instead of "τροφή": "animal fodder" or "forage" instead of

“nourishment” or “food” (92). Jutta Gsoels Lorensen further emphasizes the meanings of these terms, adding that “the difference is instructive: *φωββή* keeps you alive, but not much more; it is nourishment to be consumed, eaten so as not to die” (127). Creon’s intention is not Antigone’s nurture and sustenance, even though he is her guardian after the death of her parents and two brothers. He has to punish her for disobeying his decree in order to protect his authority as a sovereign and, therefore, in the cave the “food has to be of the ‘phorbic’ kind” (ibid.). Moreover, Creon completely dehumanizes Antigone and treats her as an inferior being. Antigone’s courage to oppose the only living male figure in her family and the ruler of Thebes urged Creon to consider her as a non-human, even an animal that cannot conform to the laws of the state. Joan O’Brien sees Creon’s sentence as destroying “the balance between man and animal” (116). Furthermore, in line 775 Creon justifies his decision and claims that he offered this inconsiderable amount of food “to escape pollution”. In other words, his only concern is to avoid being charged with murder and protect his sovereignty which is in danger after Antigone’s deed. As Lorensen argues, “it is a carefully calculated strategy to avert the possible charge of being accountable for arbitrary homicide. Differently put, the cave is outfitted with *φωββή* to nourish the well-being of the city, not that of the expellee” (128). However, Antigone does not accept to be subjected to this inferior state of being that Creon wishes. On the contrary, she denies consuming her “phorbic” food and decides to take her life in her own hands and commit suicide. Consequently, even at her very last moment she chooses the way to die instead of following Creon’s cruel and inhuman plan.

In early modern England food was an integral part in drama and the everyday life. The communal consumption of food and drink was a usual phenomenon in people’s social life. According to Joan Fitzpatrick, people in early modern England “ate and drank during performances; jokes about actors mistaking the hiss of ale-bottles being opened for audience disapproval are common” (5). Furthermore, food was not only seen as an important element of nutrition and sustenance, but it was also a kind of discourse. Robert Appelbaum notes that “food in early modern period, it is clear, was not only a biological function, or an economic reality answering to a biological function, but also the object of a discourse. Or, better yet, it was the object of a multitude of discourses: stage plays, religious polemics, mystical tracts, cookbooks, medical texts, herbals, travelogues, novels” (xii). Food was a multidimensional notion which

could be interpreted in various ways, “from an object of delight to an object of contempt, from a symbol of happy sociality to a token of selfish gluttony” (ibid., xvii). As a result, food played a significant role in people’s everyday life in the Renaissance and it represented much more than a biological need.

The image of food was also extensively used in early modern drama. The language and imagery of food in William Shakespeare’s *Othello* is of great importance. In Act 3, Scene 4, Emilia uses food as a metaphor in order to comment on women’s mistreatment by men and also complain about the strict gender norms that enforced female inferiority. In lines 92-95 she claims that “’Tis not a year or two shows us a man. They are all but stomachs, and we all but food. To eat us hungrily, and they are full, they belch up”. This statement expresses her view that men are only interested in fulfilling their carnal desires for a woman and that, according to Del Martin, women are “inescapably slaves to their husbands’ lust” and in this case appetite (27). Moreover, Joan Fitzpatrick notes that “throughout Shakespeare’s plays excessive consumption of alcohol and food promotes sexual excess” (5). Emilia describes men devouring women in a greedy manner and, thus, she fiercely criticizes men’s only purpose to satisfy their carnal desires. In the play Iago debases Emilia and accuses her of cheating on him and having an affair with Othello. Undoubtedly, it is Iago’s disrespectful and derogatory behavior that made Emilia have this impression of men. She claims that according to men, women are nothing more than the fulfilment of a biological need, just as food is a need for our bodies to function. She believes that jealousy, that “profound insecurity” that a woman could betray her husband, is the main cause that triggers men’s abusive behavior towards women (Martin 59). She takes advantage of the fact that men are absent in this scene and she complains about women’s unbearable marital life through expressing herself freely. As a consequence, in *Othello* food is a degrading metaphor that Emilia uses to describe women’s predicament in marriage and to criticize the abusive behavior of men towards women.

Food in Shakespeare’s works could be interpreted in various ways. In his plays there is “both a comedy of food and a tragedy of food, the one celebrative, the other mournful; the one hungry, as it were, the other nauseous; [...] the one devoted to the joy of living, the other resigned to contempt the foulness of the world” (Appelbaum xiv). In *Othello* Emilia creates a rather repulsive image of food as she describes men consuming women in an almost animalistic way. This description is completely

juxtaposed with eating in early modern England. As Appelbaum states, “it was a period when people stopped eating with their hands and started using forks” (xv). He adds that “eating and drinking became more ‘civilized’ in the course of the early modern period to the extent that it came to approximately the laws of sociality of the emerging modern nation-state and its ‘civil society’”(ibid., xvi). In other words, in a period in which manners of eating were extremely important for a person’s status, Emilia presents men as animal-like creatures who hungrily devour their food to fulfil their appetite and, in this case, their sexual needs. Thus, Antigone’s dehumanization by Creon could be paralleled with the animality of men according to Emilia’s statement. In these lines Emilia dares to question men’s human nature as she places them to the debased level of an animal.

In John Ford’s *The Broken Heart* the rejection of food is also a decisive element in the play since it is what led Penthea to her untimely death. The main female character, Penthea, decides to take her life in her own hands and starve herself to death. Penthea refuses to conform to a sinful, loveless and oppressive marriage and, thus, she chooses death over misery. In this case food rejection indicates female empowerment and resistance against patriarchy. Penthea is not able to have control over her life, but she manages to have total control over her body through denying herself food. In fact, food refusal in the Renaissance period used to serve various sociopolitical purposes. Nancy Gutierrez in “*“Shall She Famish Then?”: Female Food Refusal in Early Modern England*”, notes that “linking the symptom of food refusal with issues of gender, human agency, communal social practices, and institutional power, epitomizes the revolutionary anxiety that characterizes seventeenth-century English culture and politics” (2). The starving woman is not only a dreary image but also a political statement against the marital and domestic norms of the time. Penthea’s weak and malnourished body is “a political paradigm of this age’s crisis of authority, for it brings to light explicit and subliminal cultural pressures within family and marital structures” (ibid.). Similarly, Anna Meigs focuses on the food rejection and argues that “to refuse to eat a food is an emotional and mystical as well as an economic, social, and nutritive event: it is to refuse a certain kind of participation between self and other” (104). As a result, a starving woman not only struggles to protect her female identity, but also functions as the unifying voice of all mistreated and abused women in marriage and society.

In addition, Gutierrez draws a parallel between the starvation of a woman in the Middle Ages and the modern manifestation of the eating disorder known as anorexia nervosa. She claims that the image of a starving woman could be associated with “the medieval saintly woman denying herself food out of religious devotion”; the well-known fasting which was accepted as a church practice, and also with “the modern middle-class teenage girl starving herself to attain the cultural ideal of female beauty” (6). Additionally, Joan Fitzpatrick refers to the idea of fasting and claims that “asceticism was also denounced since, [...] excessive fasting was associated with the monastic life and was by some considered as indulgent as gluttony” (3). In each case the anorexic woman believes that she has a complete control of her body and, like Penthea, she decides to malnourish and mistreat her body through denying herself food. Penthea is well aware that her brother and husband are responsible for her decision to put an end to her life and blames them directly as she says: “O, my wrack’d honour! ruin’d by those tyrants, a cruel brother and a desperate dotage!” (4.2.144-145). Women in early modern England were not supposed to speak up their minds and express their views freely. Therefore, a woman could choose to use her body as a means of expression and liberation from the social, political and gender boundaries. Food rejection could function “as a trope in which the female body is a site of political apprehension and cultural change” (Gutierrez 20). Similarly, Penthea regains the control of her body and transforms it into a manifestation of resistance against the authoritative and abusive practices of patriarchy. She is conscious of her decision to starve herself and she is aware that her death is approaching. When she visits Calantha to reveal Ithocles’s love for her, Penthea informs the princess that “My glass of life [...] hath few minutes remaining to run down; the sands are spent; For by an inward messenger I feel the summons of departure short and certain” (3.5.9-12). As a consequence, her rejection of food and her imminent self-starvation constitute a deliberate act which was caused by Ithocles and Bassanes’s tyrannical manipulation of her life.

Moreover, food rejection and, by extension, the decision to commit suicide was a practice expressing emotional excess and, thus, it was considered unacceptable in the austere society of Sparta. Penthea denies herself food and also expresses fierce criticism of the sterility of the Spartan spousal practices. However, Penthea takes the Spartan austerity to its extremes and appropriates it in her favor by depriving herself of food.

According to Gutierrez, Penthea's food refusal at the same time "exemplifies the Spartan code of ascetic individualism, however in its extremity, Penthea's self-starvation becomes a kind of rebellion, not against authority, but within it" (61). It is "a passive withholding of a female self from community involvement [...], a kind of self-isolation" (ibid.). Furthermore, Penthea's deed is characterized as "monstrous" and it is condemned by the male authority as it also occurs in *Antigone*. Specifically, when Ithocles is informed about her decision to starve herself he mentions that "Nature will call her daughter monster! What? Not eat? Refuse the only ordinary means which are ordained for life?" (4.2.155-158). Her decision is considered to be extreme and unnatural because it does not conform to the social norms of the era. Through associating herself with a monstrosity, Ithocles dehumanizes his sister and takes her out of the human realm. However, Penthea's only intention is to use her body as a clear symbol of resistance, express her strong opposition to the patriarchal practices of the time and regain her subjectivity. Penthea should not be seen as one more passive victim of her oppressing and male dominated society, but as a subject who struggles to protect her identity. Her suicide through starvation "is her willed response to the coercive social system of Sparta, which allows self-destruction of its subjects in order to maintain illusory social harmony" (Gutierrez 77). As a consequence, in the three plays the notion of food functions as a driving force for women to express themselves and even attempt to protect their female identity. Antigone refuses to consume the "phorbic" food that she is given and she chooses to control her fate and commit suicide. Emilia parallels food with women in order to express her discontent and condemn men's misbehavior in marriage. Finally, Penthea uses food rejection as her only way to save herself from her ruptured honor and a loveless marriage.

CONCLUSION

Sophocles's *Antigone*, one of the most influential tragedies worldwide, raises a lot of questions concerning the political, gender and moral values of classical Athens. The primary purpose of this dissertation was to unvictimize Shakespeare's Desdemona and Ford's Penthea and liberate them from the shackles of patriarchy by revisiting the figure of Antigone. Through this gendered interpretation of *Othello* and *The Broken Heart*, Desdemona and Penthea regain their voice and refuse to succumb to the patriarchal norms of early modern England, which is reflected in the setting of Venice and ancient Sparta respectively. They express their opposition to the gender norms of the time and the superiority of men. The first point of comparison among the plays is the politics of lamentation and the excessive expression of grief. As far as Antigone is concerned, she transgresses the ban of lamentation as she mourns publicly for the loss of her brother and opposes Creon's decree by burying Polynices and performing all the proper burial rites. Similarly, Desdemona delivers her own lament song as she senses that her death is approaching. The expression of grief was not acceptable in early modern England, as it was also considered to be a residue of Catholicism. However, she mourns for her imminent death and associates herself with a weeping willow. Furthermore, Penthea in *The Broken Heart* appears to be a really empowered woman as she does not deliver her own lament song, but she orchestrates her mourning. She asks two of her maids to sing her lament not only publicly but also in the presence of men.

The second similarity between the plays is gender reversal and male mourning. Antigone, Desdemona and Penthea regain their agency through forcing the male figures of the plays to act in a feminine way, according to the masculine norms of the time. Even though the expression of grief was rejected by men as excessive and feminine, in all three plays the male characters transgress their beliefs and react in an immoderate manner. In the Sophoclean tragedy Creon mourns for the loss of his son Haemon and his wife Eurydice. In his last scene with the chorus he also transgresses the ban of lamentation, realizing that he is fully responsible for the death of his relatives and that he was blinded and consumed by power. Similar to Creon, Othello reveals his emotional state in an excessive way. After the revelation of Iago's machinations, he realizes that Desdemona was murdered unfairly and that he was the victim of his ill judgment. What

is more, Othello decides to put an end to his life and commit suicide. Given that self-murder was considered a sinful and even demonic deed, Othello chooses not to suffer of his remorse, but escape reality by committing suicide and, eventually disrupts his image as a strong and respectable general. In John Ford's *The Broken Heart* Orgilus does not mourn for Penthea's death but he murders Ithocles and commits suicide. The murder scene is of great significance since the gender roles are completely reversed. More specifically, Penthea's corpse overlooks Ithocles's murder and, thus, she ironically regains her subjectivity. Orgilus subverts the stereotypical image of the avenger since Ithocles takes away the satisfaction of revenge from Orgilus by giving him instructions on how to murder him. However, Ithocles is fully objectified in the end of the play when Calantha puts a ring on his finger and marries his soulless body.

As a final point, I attempted to lay emphasis on the notion of food and its rejection as an image of empowerment and control of the female body. In Sophocles's *Antigone* Creon imprisons Antigone in a cave with just enough food to stay alive. Creon does not offer Antigone this inadequate amount of food out of compassion, but out of fear of being charged with murder. However, Antigone refuses to accept her degradation and decides to take her life in her own hands, committing suicide. In Shakespeare's *Othello* Emilia refers to the notion of food so as to express her strong discontent with men's abusive behavior towards women. She condemns the mistreatment of women and complains about the strict gender norms of the time. Finally, in *The Broken Heart* the rejection of food plays a fundamental role since Penthea refuses to stay imprisoned in a loveless marriage and starves herself to death. Her self-starvation was caused by Ithocles's decision to dissolve Penthea and Orgilus's betrothal vows and choose Bassanes, a compulsively jealous man, to be her husband. Penthea takes control of her own body and, thus, her starvation functions as a manifestation of female resistance against the oppressive practices of patriarchy.

The ideas of female resistance to victimization and tyranny, underlined in my analysis, are what have made Antigone an inspiration to playwrights from the early modern era to the present. A few 20th century examples suggest that the political aspect of the tragedy is what urged many writers to revisit the figure of Antigone and criticize the political and social exigencies of their era. Specifically, Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* which was first performed in 1944 portrays the act of resistance during Paris's occupation by the Nazis. Moreover, Athol Fugard's, John Kani's and Winston

Ntshona's play *The Island* which was first performed in 1973 deals with the apartheid movement. The play is set in an unnamed prison which is clearly based on South Africa's notorious Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was held for twenty-seven years. Last but not least, the Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan wrote his play *Tegonni: An African Antigone* in 1994. This play is one of the most powerful and highly debated adaptations of the ancient Greek tragedy since it discusses the issues of tyranny and racism in Nigeria generated by western nations and especially the British Empire in the nineteenth century. All three adaptations of *Antigone* underscored the political dimension of the tragedy in order to comment on the contemporary political situation of each play.

The main purpose of this dissertation was to read *Othello* and *The Broken Heart* through a gender perspective which focuses on the legacy of Antigone. I attempted to focus on the empowerment of the characters of Desdemona and Penthea and liberate them from the stereotypes of female victimization, according to traditional critical perspectives. Given that Antigone is one of the most unconventional female characters in ancient Greek dramaturgy, I endeavored to revisit Sophocles's tragedy and review Antigone's echo in Shakespeare's *Othello* and Ford's *The Broken Heart* so as to restore female subjectivity through the characters of Desdemona and Penthea.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Από την αρχαία ελληνική έως και την αναγεννησιακή δραματοουργία της Αγγλίας, τα πάθη και η πτώση του τραγικού ήρωα βρίσκονταν στο επίκεντρο του ενδιαφέροντος του θεατή/αναγνώστη. Οι γυναικείοι χαρακτήρες συνήθως επισκιάζονταν από τον άντρα πρωταγωνιστή. Τόσο στην αρχαία Ελλάδα όσο και στην αναγεννησιακή Αγγλία η πατριαρχία ήταν ιδιαίτερα ισχυρή και επηρέαζε σε σημαντικό βαθμό την καθημερινή ζωή των γυναικών. Οι γυναίκες βρίσκονταν υπό τον απόλυτο έλεγχο του πατέρα και του αδελφού και αργότερα του συζύγου. Η θυματοποίηση των γυναικών ήταν ένα σύννηθες φαινόμενο και οι επιλογές τους ήταν εξαιρετικά περιορισμένες. Σε πολλές τραγωδίες οι άντρες είναι υπεύθυνοι για την πτώση αλλά και τον θάνατο των ηρωίδων. Ο σκοπός της διπλωματικής εργασίας είναι να παρουσιάσει την ισχυρή πλευρά των ηρωίδων Δυσδαιμόνα στην τραγωδία *Οθέλος* (1603) του Ουίλλιαμ Σαίξπηρ και Πενθέα στο έργο του Τζον Φορντ *Η Σπασμένη Καρδιά* (1633) σε συνδυασμό με την Αντιγόνη του Σοφοκλή. Παρόλο που η *Αντιγόνη* και οι δύο αναγεννησιακές τραγωδίες έχουν διαφορετικό ιστορικό και πολιτισμικό υπόβαθρο, υπάρχουν πολλές ομοιότητες όσον αφορά την ταυτότητα και τον ρόλο της γυναίκας. Στο πρώτο κεφάλαιο αναφέρομαι στην πολιτική του θρήνου και τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι ηρωίδες χρησιμοποιούν τον θρήνο για να εκφράσουν την εναντίωσή τους στην πατριαρχική κοινωνία της εποχής τους. Το κεντρικό θέμα του δευτέρου κεφαλαίου είναι η αντιστροφή των ρόλων των δύο φύλων. Στις τρεις αυτές τραγωδίες οι γυναίκες επανακτούν την χαμένη τους δύναμη, ενώ οι άντρες υιοθετούν συμπεριφορές που ήταν συσχετισμένες με την γυναικεία φύση σύμφωνα με τα στερεότυπα της εποχής. Τέλος, στο τρίτο κεφάλαιο αναφέρομαι στην άπορριψη του φαγητού και στον έλεγχο του γυναικείου σώματος. Η Αντιγόνη, η Δυσδαιμόνα και η Πενθέα ερμηνεύονται ως ισχυρές γυναίκες, παρόλο που η ματαιοδοξία και η επιπολαιότητα των ανδρών τις οδηγούν στον άδοξο θάνατό τους.