Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna
in cotutela con Università di Granada

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN

DESE - *Doctorat d'Études Supérieures Européennes*
Les Littératures de l'Europe Unie / European Literatures /
Letterature dell'Europa Unita

Ciclo XXXII

Settore Concorsuale: 10/L1 Lingue, Letterature e Culture Inglese e Anglo-Americana

Settore Scientifico Disciplinare: L-LIN/10 Letteratura Inglese

Women's Tragedy in the Romantic Age: Questioning English, Italian and Spanish Theatre and Drama from a Feminist Perspective

Presentata da: Valentina Pramaggiore

Coordinatore Dottorato

Prof.ssa Bruna Conconi

Supervisore

Prof.ssa Lilla Maria Crisafulli

Supervisore

Prof.ssa María-José de la Torre Moreno

Esame finale anno 2020

To my family

"Never, never more, my Lords,
Let us admit female timidity
A bar to any hazardous enterprize.
Woman, however weak, her will assisting,
she'd scale the Alps, yea, ride o'er Mount Atlas
T'accomplish it."

Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots*, 1792, Act II, Scene i.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deep and sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Lilla Maria Crisafulli, for her constant support and guidance throughout these years. She gave me the opportunity to learn from her great experience and vast knowledge and to work with her on many occasions, helping me expand my horizons and grow both on a personal and a professional level. I am extremely thankful to her for all the time she dedicated to me throughout the years, to revise my papers and talks, discuss my projects and improve my critical approach. Her endless passion for English Romantic women's literature has been a veritable source of inspiration for me, and a strong motivation to do my best to honour the works of our foremothers in this thesis.

Likewise, I would like to sincerely thank my supervisor at the University of Granada, Professor María-José de la Torre Moreno, for the help and support she granted me since my first arrival in Spain. I have found in her not only a great expert and a passionate Professor, but also a person I could depend on under many points of view. I am very grateful to her for her kind and welcoming attitude, her thorough and accurate corrections to my work, and her tireless efforts to aid me through the convoluted maze of University bureaucracy, despite the difficulties of our geographical distance.

In this regard, I also want to express my gratitude to my tutor at the University of Granada, Professor Adelina Sánchez Espinosa, who played a fundamental role throughout my stay in Spain. She has been of great help and assistance whenever I needed guidance and explanations in the various complex aspects linked to my cotutelle agreement. Her kind support and directions made my mobility journey much easier and helped me through the whole process of thesis submission in Granada.

I would also like to deeply thank the Professors I have worked with at the Interuniversitary Centre for the Study of Romanticism in the course of my PhD: Professors Serena Baiesi, Gilberta Golinelli and Carlotta Farese. Their kindness, continuous help, support and assistance have been precious for me both on a personal and a professional level, and fundamental for the development of my research. I am very grateful to all of them for the time they all have dedicated to me throughout the years to discuss my ideas and improve my various projects.

Moreover, my deep and sincere gratitude also goes to my PhD Coordinator in Bologna, Professor Bruna Conconi, for her kindness and dedication, for always being there for us whenever my colleagues and I needed her opinion, reassurance, clarifications or help. It has

been a great pleasure for me to have the chance to work with her, and to have her by my side in this journey.

Finally, I want to thank the University of Bologna and the University of Granada for giving me this great joint opportunity. The chance to spend three years researching a literary female genealogy, women writers and playwrights of the past, our foremothers, has been an incredible adventure, a journey that taught me more than I can tell. I am so grateful that these two important European universities came together and fostered, throughout the years, such a strong female and feminist network made of so many different women who are always ready to help and support each other to reach a shared goal. That is what feminism should be like, so I deeply thank each one of you for that.

My deepest gratitude and love go to my dear friends and DESE colleagues, Giulia and Nicolò, with whom, more than three years ago, I started this incredible PhD journey. Thank you for being such an incredible source of knowledge and endless affection, for always being there for me no matter the geographical distance between us. Thank you for the laughs, the complaints, the suggestions and bibliographical references, our feminist and theatre discussions, and all the help we gave each other both as colleagues and as friends. This journey would not have been the same without you.

I sincerely thank also all my Edges colleagues who have crossed my path in these last three years; each one of you taught me something I will never forget. In particular, my immense gratitude and love go to my friends Josmary, Wilmarie, Valentina and Luca. Each one of you in her/his own different and unique way has supported me and helped me through this long journey, each one of you has been incredibly important to me and to my growth as a person, a scholar and a feminist.

Of course, a huge thank you also goes to all my friends outside academia; in particular, to all the amazing women who enrich my life every day. To Ilaria, Benedetta and Laura, who have been by my side for the past sixteen years witnessing my many changes and always supporting my choices; to Francesca, who has been a constant and crucial presence in these last ten years, a true friend I could always rely on; and to Fiorella, who has been a beautiful rediscovery and a great source of positivity and moral support in these past months.

A special mention should be made for a person that is not only an amazing woman, a feminist and a friend, but also a great proof-reader and my English language mentor: Tara. Her friendship and support throughout these last nine years, despite our geographical distance, have been an incredible gift for me, and I could never thank her enough for her tireless and constant help with proof-reading my papers and answering my language-related questions.

I am immensely thankful for all the great people I have met in my life who are still by my side today and who have played a fundamental role in giving me affection and food for thought.
In the end, I would like to express my love and deepest gratitude to my whole family.
To my parents-in-law, Elisabetta and Fabrizio, and my sister and brother-in-law, Martina and Mirko, for being the best second family I could ever ask for. Thank you for welcoming me in your loving and caring household since day one; I am extremely proud to be a part of it.
To my cousins, uncles and aunts who represent for me a loving support system I could not live without. In particular, to my uncle Giuseppe, my aunt Luisa, and my cousins Silvia and Elena for always being there for me, for their love and continuous support, for their warm welcome in whatever circumstance and for always sharing with me all my greatest joys and successes.
To my grandparents, Grazia, Mario, Anna and Egidio, who did not have the opportunity to study as much as they wanted to and still taught me the most important lessons I could ever learn. They all hoped I could get the education they were denied, so I am incredibly happy and deeply honoured to be pursuing this PhD degree also on their behalf. Whatever the actual distance, you are always with me.
To my brother Matteo, who is always my safe haven. Thank you for your patience, your advice, your precious support and comfort whenever I freak out. Thank you for our constructive debates, for always keeping me grounded and putting things in the right perspective.
To my parents, Gianluca and Rosanna, to whom I own everything. I would not be here without you, in every possible sense, and I will never be able to thank you enough for what you did and what you are still doing for me. Thank you for giving me strong roots to keep me safe and stable, and big wings to fly all over the world. But most of all, thank you for proving to me every day that nothing is impossible when we overcome our fears, and we do not let them take us down.
And last but not least, to my partner in life Mirko. Thank you for being my love, my friend and my number one fan. For travelling to wherever I am based doing research, or talking at a conference, or participating in a summer school, without any complaint and with a big smile on your face. Thank you for helping me through my ups and downs, for believing in me more than I believe in myself and for always supporting my choices, plans, projects and life changes. You have been my strength in these last nine years, and I could not have made it through this long journey without you by my side.
I am truly grateful to each one of you more than I can tell.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at rediscovering women Romantic playwrights in English, Italian and Spanish literature, and their tragedies, analysed through a feminist critical approach. Starting from a comparative study of the Romantic age and Romantic women's writings in Great Britain, Italy and Spain, an overview of female writers' role and contribution to the development of Romantic literature will be presented. This fundamental examination of the three socio-cultural contexts will be followed by an in-depth analysis of the Romantic theatrical environment in the three different countries, deepening the issue of women's roles as dramatists, actresses, managers, theorists and critics. More specifically, the relationship between women playwrights and the stage will be tackled, investigating how these women managed to appropriate the "high" genre of tragedy. A focus on the changes that tragedy underwent during the Romantic age will be offered, so as to explore in detail in which ways women challenged, coped with or took possession of both the old and the new canons of the genre. The core of the thesis will include an overview of English, Italian and Spanish women dramatists and a brief analysis of some of their most popular tragedies. The tragedies analysed have been chosen according to themes in common in order to demonstrate if and how these women used the pen and the stage to address specific issues and to affirm their own agency and subjectivity, subverting or negotiating the norms imposed by patriarchal society. Among female playwrights' dramatic production, three tragedies were selected, one for each literature, in order to be presented and thoroughly investigated through a close reading which takes into account a variety of aspects. The three dramatists' lives and previous literary production will also be examined in order to contextualise their tragedies and the themes they tackled. By doing so, it will be possible to highlight the reasons that led them to enter the male domain of tragedy, the "high" genre *par excellence*, regarded as strictly masculine. This investigation will help us understand if the choice of writing tragedy was made as a conscious and voluntary act of empowerment aimed at asserting themselves in the public realm, at denouncing their forced submission and at recounting their own stories through their own voices. It will also be underlined how and why these female playwrights who lived approximately in the same historical period and were influenced by the same cultural movement—although in different countries—employed tragedy to address similar or different issues, and which consequences they faced. This analysis will be conducted through a feminist critical methodology that includes historical, literary, philosophical and political theories developed in the last decades, adjusted and contextualised so that they could be a useful critical tool in the Romantic literary context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter I **9**
Inscribing women's presence and literary production into Romanticism.
England, Italy and Spain: three case studies

1. Romanticism and Romanticisms: a comparative approach 11

2. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: England
   - 2.1 British Romanticism: an inclusive overview 14
   - 2.2 "Mothering" texts: English women writers' contribution to Romantic literature 23

3. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: Italy
   - 3.1 The issue of Italian Romanticism: women's presence and impact 32
   - 3.2 Italian Romantic women: between *salons*, *improvvisazione* and patriotic literature 38

4. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: Spain
   - 4.1 Spanish Romanticism: a gendered revolutionary agenda 46
   - 4.2 Spanish women writers and the female Romantic subjectivity 50

Chapter II **57**
Women and Theatre in the Romantic Era: An Overview

1. Theatre and drama in the Romantic age: a masculine environment?
   - 1.1 Romantic theatre and drama: genres, legislation and controversies 59
   - 1.2 Women playwrights in context 66
   - 1.3 Women in theatre: actresses, managers, critics and theorists 73

2. A female perspective on tragedy
   - 2.1 Romantic tragedy and the refusal of classical canons 84
   - 2.2 Romantic female dramatists and the re-appropriation of the "high" genre 90

Chapter III **95**
A Feminist Approach: Intersecting Gender, Tragedy and History

1. Feminist criticism and methodology in literature
   - 1.1 The literary becomes political 97
   - 1.2 The construction of a female subjectivity in the literary discourse 110

2. History and drama: a feminist perspective
   - 2.1 History / *Her*story: a fundamental category of a feminist literary analysis 119
   - 2.2 Feminism in theatre and drama: a focus on the origins of women in tragedy 128

3. Reading women's historical tragedies of the Romantic age
   - 3.1 Women playwrights' historical tragedies: a general analysis 134
   - 3.2 A critical approach to three selected historical tragedies:
     Mary Queen of Scots, Rosmunda in Ravenna, and *Egilona* 152

Chapter IV **157**
Mary Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy.*
Close Reading and Analysis

1. Mary Deverell in the context of English Romanticism
 1.1 Deverell's life and *Sermons*: between modesty and feminism 159
 1.2 *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*: reconstructing a female genealogy 163
 1.3 "On the United Merits of the Pen and Needle":
 Deverell's perspective on gender and literature 168

2. *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*
 2.1 Background and "Prologue" 173
 2.2 "My sister's mind is masculine": gender representation in *Mary Queen of Scots* 177
 2.3 History / *Her*story and language in context 187
 2.4 Constructing *otherness*: the issue of religion 195

Chapter V **199**
Luisa Amalia Paladini's *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti.*
Close Reading and Analysis

1. Luisa Amalia Paladini in the context of 19th century Italy
 1.1 Paladini's life and works between patriotism and education 201
 1.2 *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane* e *L'Orfana di Lancisa*: teaching modesty 206
 1.3 *La Famiglia del Soldato:* Paladini's historical novel 215

2. *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*
 2.1 Plot, origins and cultural influences 222
 2.2 Gender representation and the issue of *otherness* 225
 2.3 Language and horror: the gothic side of *Rosmunda in Ravenna* 231
 2.4 "No l'Italia il tristo esempio di viltade aver non dè":
 History and the rhetoric of patriotism 236

Chapter VI **241**
Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Egilona: drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros.*
Close Reading and Analysis

1. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in Romantic Spain
 1.1 Life and works of a Cuban female writer in 19th century Spain 243
 1.2 *Sab*: recounting the woman and / as the *other* 251
 1.3 De Avellaneda's tragic production: a brief overview 255

2. *Egilona: drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros*
 2.1 Historical context and introduction 262
 2.2 Representation of gender, subjectivity and power in *Egilona* 265
 2.3 *Otherness*, religion and homeland 273
 2.4 Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and the re-writing of history in *Egilona* 278

Conclusions **283**

Bibliography **297**

INTRODUCTION

This doctoral research work, carried out in the course of the last three years, aims at rediscovering and investigating the tragedies written by female dramatists of the Romantic age, exploring at the same time women's contribution to the literary and dramatic context of the 18th and 19th centuries. In order to do so, this thesis will question the canons of tragedy, as well as the rules that governed the theatrical environment of the time, from which women were often excluded. This research has been conducted on three European national contexts: England, Italy and Spain during the Romantic era, which occurred at slightly different times in the three countries. The comparative aspect of this work will give us the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences in the roles played by women in the development of literature, theatre and drama in their own national contexts, as well as to examine the socio-cultural situations they lived in, which influenced the way they approached the profession of playwriting. By doing so, this thesis will focus on the implications of the daring act of writing for the stage, investigating in which ways women appropriated and employed the genre of tragedy, the "high" genre *par excellence* and, thus, traditionally regarded as a strictly male domain. Special attention will be given to tragedy as a means through which women could convey their opinions and affirm their agency in a society that silenced their voices and forced them inside the domestic sphere.

The first chapter is conceived as a wide overview of Romanticism in the literary contexts of England, Italy and Spain, from an inclusive perspective that considers women's contribution. More specifically, the chapter will address the role played by female writers and dramatists in the development of Romantic literature, underlining women's fundamental presence in the cultural environment of the time. The chapter opens with a focus on the notions of Romanticism and *Romanticisms*, from both a national and cultural standpoint. It is then divided into three main subchapters, each dedicated to a national context, which will explore the characteristics of the Romantic literary scene of each country. In order to re-inscribe women into the three Romantic ages, it was necessary to conduct an archival research that could provide a consistent number of names and works of female writers and intellectuals who had not been passed on by official literary historiography.

The second chapter focuses on theatre and drama in England, Italy and Spain during the Romantic age, and analyses in detail the importance that women had in the theatrical environment as well as the various roles they took up. The chapter is divided into two main subchapters in order to thoroughly investigate both the theatrical environment and the genre

of Romantic tragedy. The first subchapter will give an overview of theatre during the Romantic era, a masculine domain belonging to the public sphere and, thus, generally forbidden to women. The chapter will argue to what extent, despite social restrictions and impositions, some women managed to get access to the theatrical environment and to start a career linked to the stage. Indeed, the various fundamental roles played by women will be presented and explored, since they worked not only as playwrights but also as actresses, theatre managers, critics and theorists. In order to do so, a thorough archival research was carried out, allowing us to rediscover many female figures whose existence, especially in Italy, was often erased by official recounts. The second subchapter investigates the genre of tragedy and the changes it underwent in the three national contexts during Romanticism. Just like many other literary genres, tragedy was contaminated by Romantic ideals which introduced innovative variations to the classical canons. In particular, it will be displayed to what extent women appropriated tragedy and overcame the canons, both old and new, to revisit the genre from a female—but often even feminist—perspective.

The third chapter addresses the methodology and intersectional critical approach employed in the thesis. It opens with a focus on the political relevance of women's literature and on the fundamental construction of a female subjectivity in women's works. The second part of the chapter moves on interconnecting gender issues with an innovative historical analysis that includes marginalized and silenced voices. The subchapter continues intersecting gender and history with the genre of tragedy, in order to give a comprehensive overview of the critical elements and theories at the core of the methodology employed in this research work to reread women's tragedies. The theoretical framework of this thesis—presented in this third chapter—relies on the feminist theories and criticism developed since the 1970s, particularly focused on the relation between political agency and literature thanks to the works of Elaine Showalter,[1] Kate Millett,[2] Judith Fetterley,[3] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar,[4] to name a few. Our methodology also draws from other previous fundamental texts, such as Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*,[5] which laid the basis of gender analysis by bringing to the front the difficulties women had in becoming professional writers and the disparities between male and

---

[1] Among her wide critical production, this thesis will mainly employ: *A Literature of Their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977; "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference, (Winter, 1981), pp. 179–205; and "Toward a Feminist Poetics", in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* [1986] London: Virago Press, 1989.

[2] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, 1969. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

[3] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: a Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, 1878, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

[4] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, 1979. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000.

[5] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929. Roma: New York Compton Editori, 2013.

female conditions in society. The methodology employed also adopts feminist theories about the construction of female subjectivity, especially those developed by the French feminist philosophers Monique Wittig,[6] Hélène Cixous,[7] Luce Irigaray[8] and Julia Kristeva,[9] as well as the groundbreaking concept of gender performativity postulated by Judith Butler[10] in 1990. Furthermore, in order to provide a more in-depth understanding of the construction of female individuality, our methodology will take into account the notion of *intersectionality*, according to which identity is not uniform and invariable but rather composed of a wide range of different, combined elements—a notion first theorized by Kimberle Crenshaw[11] in 1989. The work of feminist scholars will also be used in the context of revision and recovery of history from a feminist perspective. Our methodology will employ, as first suggested by Joan Scott,[12] gender as a category of historical analysis, examining the importance of *her*story both to investigate female texts and to shape a more inclusive historical vision. In the end, our critical approach will investigate the origins of feminism in theatre and drama in order to better understand the relationship between gender and genre, and to reread women's tragedies from a more comprehensive perspective. The last part of the third chapter moves towards a more practical use of the methodology previously discussed; it presents a general analysis of the tragedies written by female dramatists during the Romantic age in the three countries, taking into account themes in common, similarities and differences. This last part will try to display to what extent, despite the different socio-cultural contexts, women's tragic production tackled analogous topics, often related to issues of *otherness* and women's conditions in patriarchal societies. The comparative approach employed to investigate women's compositions in the three countries permitted the surfacing of a series of shared feminist concerns and interests that transcended national borders. Even though the female literary production of the time was rooted in, and differently influenced by, the historical, political and socio-cultural situation of each nation, the female points of view about women's

---

[6] In particular, Wittig's theories included in *Les Guérillères*, 1969. Ubu editions, 2007.

[7] In particular, Cixous's theories included in "Le Rire de la Méduse", 1975. In *Signs*, Vol.1, No. 4, 1976, University of Chicago Press.

[8] Among Luce Irigaray's wide literary production, this thesis will refer to: *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1977. New York: Cornell University Press, 1985; and *Parler n'est jamais Neutre,* 1985. New York: Routledge, 2002.

[9] Among Julia Kristeva's various philosophical theories and texts, this thesis will particularly refer to: *Materia e Senso: Pratiche Significanti e Teoria del Linguaggio*. Torino: Einaudi, 1980; and *Desire in Language. A semiotic approach to literature and art.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.

[10] The theory of gender performativity was first published in: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990.

[11] The theory of intersectionality was first published in: Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.

[12] Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

roles, lack of freedom and rights in patriarchal societies appear as a sort of transnational common ground. This research will thus consider the similarities and differences among the various female dramatists' works as equally important, following a transnational[13] feminist approach which endorses "connections between the lives and cultures of women in different places, without reducing all women's experiences into a 'common culture.'"[14] Indeed, as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan suggest, "the world in which we live is not simply bounded by the borders of one community or nation. We will better understand feminist futures if we acknowledge the ways in which we are part of a complex and connected world, a world that is undoubtedly transnational."[15] In the end, the final general analysis will be followed by a brief overview of the tragedies selected for the close reading, of the reasons why they were chosen and of the way such a detailed examination will be conducted.

Chapters four, five and six are focused on the close readings of the three tragedies selected, one for each country: *Mary Queen of Scots* by Mary Deverell (1792) in England, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* by Luisa Amalia Paladini (1837) in Italy and *Egilona* (1845) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in Spain. These chapters will explore in detail the biography of the three dramatists—Deverell, Paladini and de Avellaneda—in order to contextualize their work within their lives and literary production. Furthermore, each chapter will also examine other compositions of the same author, either belonging to the category of drama or to other literary genres, so that they could help to shed light on the writer's thought and literary discourse. The themes featured in their dramas will be retraced as well, where possible, in their literary production, so as to investigate how these women tackled the same issues in different genres. It should be underlined that the tragedies presented in this research work, both in the general analysis and in the close readings, will be investigated as literary (or dramatic) texts rather than theatrical (or performance) texts[16] for a series of reasons which will be explored in the following pages.

---

[13] *Transnational* is here employed as suggested by Grewal and Kaplan, that is, as a definition which refers to "new forms of international alliances and networks across national boundaries" while it stresses that "these new international communities and identities do not simply create an ideal world where women are all the same and equal. Rather, a transnational approach pays attention to the inequalities and differences" among women, and "emphasizes the world of connections of all kinds that do not necessarily create similarities." Source: Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan, *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, 2nd edition, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002, 2006, p. xxii.

[14] Ibid. p. xxi.

[15] Ibid. p. xxvi.

[16] The distinction between "dramatic text" and "performance text" is suggested by Keir Elam who identifies the former as the text "composed *for* theatre" and the latter as the text "produced *in* theatre", that is, performed on stage. Source: Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and New York: Routledge, 1980, 1987, p. 2.

The Romantic period, especially in England and Italy, was indeed characterized by a strong contrast between page and stage—dramatic text and performance text—which resulted in a supposed anti-theatricality of many Romantic dramas that, for this reason, were not performed at the time of their composition. The issue of anti-theatricality, as well as the controversy stage/page, will be discussed in the second chapter of the thesis. Nevertheless, in this regard, it is important to briefly address drama as a genre in between the stage and the page—written literature and oral performance—in order to clarify the critical and analytical perspective adopted in this research work. As pinpointed by scholar Alessandro Serpieri, drama is "multidimensional, pluricodified, and it does not end on the written page, but *it needs to fulfil its aim through the performance*."[17] Therefore, since drama belongs both inside and outside the category of traditional literary genres,[18] it was necessary to choose a standpoint from which to evaluate and set the direction this analysis should take. The theatrical text,[19] as Alain Badiou refers to it, is "incomplete, suspended" until one or more performances "revive it and perfect it."[20] From this perspective, there is no real opposition between the page and the stage, but rather a continuum that brings the dramatic text to a further level; from being a literary composition in strict terms, to fulfilling its intrinsic performative nature. Such a continuum does not exclude either antithetical poles, but connects them instead, enhancing the multifaceted essence of drama. The dramatic text is characterized by a specific type of language, which Alessandro Serpieri defines as "*dramatic language*,"[21] that differs from the "*narrative language*"[22] employed in texts belonging to the other literary genres. Indeed, while the narrative language is self-sufficient in its textuality, favours written statements and does not need a pragmatic context of reference, the language used in theatre is strictly related to the theatrical mimesis, as well as to the process of enunciation and its pragmatic context.[23] That is to say, dramatic texts cannot be separated from their *mise-en-scène*, whether this actually takes place on a stage, or it is just imagined by the author (and, later, by the readers) but never really performed. The dramatic language itself makes explicit references to the pragmatic context through the use of deixis which is defined by John Lyons

[17] My translation of Alessandro Serpieri's original quote: "il teatro è multidimensionale, pluricodificato, e non si esaurisce sulla pagina scritta, ma *ha bisogno di realizzarsi nella messainscena*." Source: Alessandro Serpieri, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale". In Canziani, Elam et al., *Come Comunica il teatro: dal testo alla scena*. Milano: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1978, p. 11.
[18] Ibid. p. 11.
[19] "Testo teatrale" in Alain Badiou, *Rapsodia per il Teatro: arte, politica, evento*, a cura di Francesco Ceraolo. Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 2015, p. xliv.
[20] Ibid. p. xliv.
[21] "*linguaggio drammaturgico*" in Alessandro Serpieri, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale", op. cit., p. 15.
[22] "*linguaggio narrativo*" Ibid. p. 15.
[23] Alessandro Serpieri, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale", op. cit., p. 15.

as "the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee."[24] Therefore, the playwright, through the language he employs in his dramatic text, intrinsically defines and sets up an ideal *mise-en-scène* for the readers to imagine and refer to. Indeed, as Keir Elam argues in his *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama,* "the written text constrains the performance in obvious ways—not only linguistically in determining what the actors say and proairetically in establishing the structure of the action, but also in varying degrees, across the range of theatrical codes by indicating movement, settings, music and the rest."[25] In particular, the role of defining what is not included in dialogues and monologues is taken on by stage directions (also stage productions or *didascalia*),[26] regarded as a sort of "secondary text"[27] which provides crucial information to the readers.

If the dramatic text is usually completed, in Alain Badiou's terms, by one or more subsequent performances, it was not the case for the so called "closet dramas"; plays written in the Romantic period in England which for various reasons, that will be explained in detail in the second chapter, never reached the stage. In the specific case of closet drama, the dramatic text used to denote and delineate a pragmatic context—by means of deixis and stage directions—that was never physically brought to life by an actual staging (at least, not at the time). However, such a context could still come alive in the readers' minds, where a mental representation of the drama would inevitably take place. In this regard, both Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt talked about "a mental theatre"[28] or "theatre of the mind,"[29] that is, a dramatic composition whose performance occurred directly in the readers' mind, on "a stage of his own in the reader's fancy."[30] While this peculiar matter will be further addressed in chapter two, it is worth highlighting here to what extent the performative potential of a dramatic text

---

[24] John Lyons, *Semantics 2*, London, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979, p. 637.
[25] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. London and New York: Routledge, 1980, 1987, p. 87.
[26] Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*. Translated by Frank Collins. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, pp. 8-9. Italics in the original.
[27] Fernando de Toro, *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre.* Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995, p. 43.
[28] The term "mental theatre" can be found in Lord Byron's letter to John Murray (August 23rd 1821) included in Peter Cochran (ed.), *Byron's Correspondence and Journals 13: from Ravenna, January - October 1821.* Retrieved from: https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/13-ravenna-18216.pdf [Accessed 17/01/2020]. It is often used as a synonym of "closet drama" as suggested by Elisabetta Marino, *La Metamorfosi nella Mente. I drammi a carattere mitologico di Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley.* Napoli: Paolo Loffredo iniziative editoriali, 2016, p. 11.
[29] The term "a theatre of the mind" is employed by Leigh Hunt in *Liberty*, Iiii, cited in Jeffrey N. Cox, "Re-Viewing Romantic Drama." In *Literary Compass* 1 (2004), RO 096 1-27. Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 6.
[30] Leigh Hunt in *Liberty*, Iiii, cited in Jeffrey N. Cox, "Re-Viewing Romantic Drama." In *Literary Compass* 1 (2004), op. cit., p. 6.

can be varied and not limited to a theatre stage. In this regard, Keir Elam pinpoints that "The 'incompleteness' factor [of the dramatic text] . . . —that is the constant pointing within the dialogue to a non-described context—suggests that the dramatic text is radically conditioned by its performability."[31] The dramatic text itself inherently contains and expresses its potential performability through its linguistic and formal elements, which allow the readers to interpret the content and imagine the context of a personal ideal representation.

Mary Queen of Scots by Mary Deverell was unfortunately one of those plays that were never performed and, even though *Rosmunda in Ravenna* by Luisa Amalia Paladini and *Egilona* by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda were staged and interpreted by famous actors and actresses of the time, it was not possible to find any detailed documentation of their *mise-en-scène*. Similarly, the tragedies briefly analysed in chapter three were neither all represented in theatres,[32] nor widely reported. For this reason, as well as for a matter of breadth of the research, this thesis will only focus on the dramatic text, its content and language from a literary perspective and in relation to gender theories. Of course, as previously discussed, it was important to deal with the fact that the dramatic text cannot be completely separated from a hypothetical performance. Therefore, this work will take into account the intrinsic performative nature of the text—examining in the course of the close reading the dramatic language employed and the content of the stage directions inserted by the author—, while it will not investigate the stage practice and performance in itself as a subject. Using scholar Fernando de Toro's words, the dramatic text will be "treated as an object of *literary* study" whose "objective is to explain the historical aspects, to interpret the texts in different ways, including the identification of its structures and various formal elements."[33] A similar type of analysis is proposed by scholar Vittorio Caratozzolo who distinguishes between *dramatic* text and *theatrical* work; he remarks that the first is to be read and examined from a critical perspective, like any other literary composition, while the second is the representation on stage of such *dramatic* text, and is to be investigated according to the parameters of performative theory.[34] For this reason, issues related to the staging and performance of the above-mentioned tragedies will not be explored, and theories concerning the performative aspects of theatre will not be employed. However, when possible, the thesis will feature a short overview of the first theatrical representations of the dramas in question. The

[31] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, op. cit., p. 129.
[32] Besides Mary Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots* (1792), even *Orra* (1806) by Joanna Baillie, Elizabeth Inchbald's *The Massacre* (1792) and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Catilina* (1867) were never performed on stage and thus could be included in the category of closet drama.
[33] Fernando de Toro, *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre,* op. cit., p. 35.
[34] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Bologna: Il Capitello del Sole, 2002.

conclusions will briefly recap the main points this thesis developed and will present a comparative overview of the various topics discussed in the tragedies examined, in the light of feminist methodology and theories. This final part will thus highlight in which ways female dramatists from different countries, approximately around the same period, approached the writing of tragedy and how they employed the “high” genre to subvert, or negotiate, the norms of both patriarchal society and theatrical environment.

CHAPTER I

Inscribing women's presence and literary production into Romanticism. England, Italy and Spain: three case studies

1. Romanticism and Romanticisms: a comparative approach

Romanticism is a generic and broad term, which is often misused, to indicate a cultural and artistic movement that developed across Europe between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. It is necessary, therefore, to start from the premise that there is no such thing as only one Romanticism but rather different cultural expressions of it, born in different moments in various countries, which influenced each other to a certain extent and hence could present a number of similarities. This thesis will, thus, address a plurality of Romanticisms, differentiating between the Romantic movement that developed in Great Britain—referring to it as British or English Romanticism—the Italian Romantic movement and Spanish Romanticism.

Although each Romanticism had its peculiar characteristics, was born and developed differently in each country, depending on the cultural and historical situation of its society, there were some elements in common. Such shared characteristics were mainly due to intellectuals travelling all over Europe and bringing along texts and ideas, as well as to the various translations of literary works to different target languages which allowed the spreading of Romantic ideals. Each country then interpreted these ideals in its own way, according to the cultural or literary environment where writers were composing and discussing their ideas, adapting the revolutionary or modern factors embedded in new Romantic texts to their local necessities of renewal. That is why the three different national Romanticisms that will be addressed in this thesis appear to be extremely distant from one another at times, but inherently similar in many aspects. It would not be possible to conduct a comparison between them without taking into consideration that there is no such thing as a standard notion of Romanticism to which they should adhere or conform. Judging Italian or Spanish Romantic movements on the basis of German or British Romanticisms—just to mention the two countries where Romantic ideals developed first—would mean to adopt a set of arbitrary criterions that do not have a correspondence to such socio-cultural and historical contexts. Feminist criticism elected as one of its central points the impossibility of making a real comparison between male and female texts on the basis of canons established by men according to their own standards. Such premises allowed to reconsider women's works—often misjudged as inferior or not good enough—in relation to the actual possibilities and opportunities that women had in specific periods of time, thus taking into account intersectional axes as gender, class, race, on which essential factors such as education and economic independence strongly relied. The same criterion could be adopted when trying to make a comparison between countries with different

historical backgrounds, that underwent different historical events and, therefore, reacted differently to the Romantic wind of change that was blowing all over Europe. Indeed, as highlighted by Italian Romantic scholar Alfredo De Paz,

> Ogni tempo, ogni popolo, ogni disciplina incarna alla propria maniera l'ispirazione romantica; questa si allea, in materia d'arte o di scienza, con degli elementi di differente provenienza. Fra le culture europee, e all'interno di ognuna di esse, delle differenze cronologiche e delle divergenze di senso richiedono di essere precisate. Non si può parlare di romanticismo in un solo paese; una delle scoperte romantiche è precisamente la messa in luce di una tradizione solidale dell'Occidente, distinta dalla tradizione classica degli studi umanistici. A questa epoca risalgono l'idea e la pratica di confronto delle culture che prepara la via di una cultura del confronto.[1]

Although some scholars suggested it was not possible to talk about Romanticism in Italy—as Gina Martegiani, who "proclaimed in 1908 . . . 'Italian Romanticism does not exist'"[2]—it should be remarked that the Italian peninsula experienced and interpreted, according to the various local situations, the "Romantic inspiration" De Paz refers to in his book. Therefore, even though Italian Romanticism may have been less prolific as far as a specific Romantic literary production is concerned, and still very much influenced by neoclassical precepts, it certainly existed and had its own peculiar development in the realm of literature, which is worthy of being explored. The controversial nature of Romanticism is highlighted also by scholar David Gies when he affirms that academics often agree on the fact that "there exists no single Spanish Romanticism"[3] because of the heterogeneity of voices, interpretations and points of view that animated such period in Spain and that do not appear to be easily regrouped under the same terminology. Nonetheless, Gies argues that, instead of focusing the attention on the creation of a rigid category of "Romanticism" with distinctive characteristics—which would erase all the differences among various writers and compositions, as well as all those artists regarded as "not Romantic enough" according to pre-established standards—it "would be better to look at the movement through the prism of images it presents, and to think . . . of a multiplicity of phenomena—not of a Romanticism but of Spanish *Romanticisms*."[4] A similar notion has

---

[1] Alfredo De Paz. *Europa Romantica. Fondamenti e paradigmi della sensibilità moderna.* Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1994, 2000, p. 13.
English Translation: "Every epoch, every population, every field embodies, in its own way, the Romantic inspiration; this inspiration allies, in subjects such as art or science, with elements of different origins. Among European cultures, and inside each one of them, chronological differences and discrepancies of significance need to be clarified. We cannot talk about Romanticism in only one country: one of the Romantic discoveries is precisely a joint tradition of Western societies, different from the classical tradition of humanistic studies. The theory and the practice of comparison between cultures, which lead to a culture of comparison, date back to this age."

[2] Giovanni Carsaniga, "The of Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)", in Peter Brand, Lino Pertile, *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997, p. 402.

[3] David Thatcher Gies, "The Plurality of Spanish Romanticisms: Review-Article", in *Hispanic Review,* Vol. 49, n. 4 (Autumn, 1981), University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 427-442, p. 427. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/472747 [Accessed 9/01/2019].

[4] Ibid. p. 428.

been quite recently proposed by scholars of English Romanticism, such as Joel Faflak and Julia Wright,[5] as well as by David Higgins and Sharon Ruston,[6] in the introductions to their edited volumes. Faflak and Wright argue that a monolithic concept of Romanticism in England has been redefined by new theories belonging to "feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism and post-Marxism . . . then postcolonial theory, New Historicism, gender theory, cultural studies and even a revised editorial theory."[7] In particular, they highlight how, with feminist studies, post-colonial theory and New Historicism,

> came a concomitant turn to the details that round out the larger picture of culture—urban life, entertainment, learning, the thousands of printed works that never saw a second edition—and a sense of Romantic literature not as a collection of authors' major works but as a cultural moment in which myriad texts were produced, many anonymous, pseudonymous, or bearing the names of authors about whom we know little or nothing. In other words, as Romanticism studies turned its gaze toward marginalised populations—women, the colonised, the Celtic periphery, the lower classes—the field's sense of the literature of the period broadened as well.[8]

Analogously, Higgins and Ruston suggest that "earlier scholarly constructions of Romanticism have been subject to sustained critique, principally for valorizing the masculine sublime at the expense of other forms of consciousness and writing."[9] Therefore, they propose a new interpretation of the English Romantic period as constituted by a variety of Romanticisms, which include all those authors, genres and compositions that were previously marginalised. Both these lines of thinking appear to be extremely interesting, not solely regarding their main focus, that is Spanish and English Romanticism, but also because they could be employed as a fundamental premise to analyse the variety of European Romanticisms, recognising the principles they shared in common as well as identifying and appreciating their differences. Following this path, this chapter aims at investigating the three different historical, cultural and socio-political contexts that favoured the development of Romanticism in England, Italy and Spain, from a comprehensive and inclusive perspective. Such an investigation will be carried out in relation to the development of theatre and drama in the three countries during the Romantic age, underlining similarities and differences in the ways female and male intellectuals, writers and dramatists approached and appropriated Romantic ideals.

---

[5] Joel Faflak, Julia M. Wright, "Introduction". In Joel Faflak, Julia M. Wright (eds.), *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies,* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 1-16.
[6] David Higgins, Sharon Ruston, "Introduction". In David Higgins, Sharon Ruston (eds.), *Teaching Romanticism*, Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 1-10.
[7] Joel Faflak, Julia M. Wright, "Introduction", op. cit., pp. 4-5.
[8] Ibid, pp. 2-3.
[9] David Higgins, Sharon Ruston, "Introduction", op. cit., p. 1.

2. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: England

2.1 British Romanticism: an inclusive overview

British Romanticism is probably one of the most representative European Romanticisms since it has been a crucial moment in the history of English literature, which saw the birth and rise to fame of some of the most celebrated English writers, whose production spanned from poetry and novel to drama. Interestingly, according to canonical literary historiography, Romantic writers were mostly men—such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, P.B. Shelley, Keats and Lord Byron—with only a few famous female exceptions, namely Jane Austen, Mary Shelley and the Brontë sisters. Traditionally, British Romanticism started in the second half of the 18th century, between Enlightenment and the Victorian Era, even though, of course, such temporal limits are far from being categorical, since the socio-cultural processes that cause transformations in literary production are gradual and permeable. In any case, the actual dates are quite controversial and, although conventionally, Romanticism was considered to start with the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, recent British criticism prefers to include the decades that were previously defined as Pre-Romantic.[10] Therefore, in line with the thought of such scholars, this dissertation will take into account a broader time frame, identifying the beginning of British Romanticism in the years of the American Revolution (1776-1783) and its ending in 1837, with the coronation of Queen Victoria.

It is important to highlight that the British Romantic Era was a complex and multifaceted period, characterised by revolutions, wars and internal conflicts that strongly influenced the literary production of the time, whatever the genre involved. The second half of the 18th century saw, within a few years, the war for the independence of the American colonies and the revolution in France. The latter, in particular, was firmly supported by a considerable number of English intellectuals and radical writers who wrote numberless works in support of civil rights and freedom. Among the many texts published to exalt the revolutionary principles, such as liberty and equality, it is important to mention those penned by female writers. Women, in fact, saw in the subversion of the *Ancien Régime* a unique opportunity to fight for their own rights and, also, to reclaim their legitimate role inside the social order by openly discussing political matters. Since women were neither allowed to vote, nor to be part of British political life, their opinions about social and political situations, usually expressed through their writing, were held up to public derision. Therefore, any text composed by female writers which dealt—

---

[10] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Keir Elam, *Manuale di Letteratura e Cultura Inglese.* Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2009.

explicitly or implicitly—with the socio-political issues of the time, acquires a greater value of resistance and agency, and testifies to what extent women were defying the rules imposed on them.

Among the many works written in support of the ideals that guided the French revolution, those written by women are particularly interesting and significant to comprehend the role played by female writers in the political debate. Anna Seward, in her sonnet "To France on Her Present Exertions" (1789), invites France to share with England its achievements and glorifies Liberty as if it were a real warrior. Mary Robinson, in her poem *Ainsi va le Monde* (1790), strongly opposes social inequalities, and the corruption of the French monarchy and the Church, and wishes for a political and cultural reform. By doing so, she remarkably anticipates the fundamental connection between culture and politics that will be later widely discussed by Percy Bysshe Shelley in his *A Defence of Poetry* (1821). Helen Maria Williams, with her "The Bastille: A Vision" (1790), denounces the injustice of the *Ancien Régime*, represented by the imprisonment of an innocent man inside the Bastille, whose destruction symbolises the triumph of freedom. In her following composition, *Letters from France* (1796), written during her stay in Paris, Williams narrates in detail what was taking place during those tumultuous years and displays her support to the revolutionary cause. Interestingly, also Mary Wollstonecraft, who lived in France between 1792 and 1795, gave her own account of the events occurring in Paris in her *Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* (1794). In her text, she often criticises the extent to which the revolutionary government used violence, but praises the moral principles at the foundation of the uprising. Of course, on Tory's side, there was strong opposition to the rebellion and fear that such a subversive feeling could cross the Channel and cause the same revolt in England. Edmund Burke, since then a recognized speaker for the American colonies' freedom, with his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), probably represents the most famous example of an intellectual who turned to more conservative positions. Indeed, in his *Reflections,* he condemns the French Revolution and declares it doomed because of its abstract and unrealizable ideals. In his text, Burke also defends aristocracy and its privileges, together with British institutions such as Monarchy and the Church of England, provoking harsh criticism from radical writers who soon published their response, supporting the necessity of inalienable civil rights. Two of the most important answers to Burke's *Reflections* were Thomas Pain's *Rights of Man* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790).

Radical intellectuals as well as Dissenters,[11] played a fundamental role in British Romanticism. While supporting the independence of American colonies and the revolution in France, they tried to provoke a social and political change in England as well, not only through their writings but also with parliamentary actions. Indeed, the second half of the 18th century was marked by the struggle to reclaim the civil rights denied to Dissenters, the long campaign to abolish the slave trade (and later on, slavery) and the first attempts to publicly denounce the inequalities between the sexes.[12] If we consider, as some critics do, British Romantic writers as divided into two generations, we can undoubtedly affirm that the first generation (1776-1800) was engaged with politics and their commitment was often explicit and displayed in their literary production—although in their mature years they turned to opinions that were less radical. It should be highlighted that the situation for women writers of the so-called "first generation" was very much the same as their male colleagues' in terms of political commitment, but unlike them, female intellectuals had to pay more attention to the way they were conveying messages through their own verses.[13] Therefore, it should not be surprising that the literary production of Romantic women writers in England was more metaphorical and cautious compared to that of male writers and, even when discussing the same themes, the tones and the contexts could be very different. Generally speaking, women writers were not supposed to talk about public issues, since the public sphere was considered to be a strictly male domain, and thus, dangerous for the female sex and their femininity.[14] Precisely to tackle this issue, in 1798 Richard Polwhele wrote the poem "The Unsex'd Female", where he mentioned one by one all the women writers who meddled in masculine matters and, because of that, became "unsexed." Such a long list of names included, of course, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, Ann Seward and Helen Maria Williams, but it also addressed many other distinguished intellectuals of the time as, for instance, the dissenter Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825).

Barbauld is certainly one of the main protagonists of the literary scene of the second half of the 18th century, and she wrote extensively about a number of topics, including discrimination, slavery, abolitionism and war. Similarly to her female colleagues, she often had to conceal her criticism towards society employing a series of strategies, as in her beautiful poem "The Mouse's Petition" (1773), in which she denounces the oppression towards the vulnerable and

---

[11] British people who were not followers of the Church of England and were, therefore, deprived of any civil right.
[12] Deidre Shauna Lynch, "Introduction to the Romantic Period 1785-1832", in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Tenth Edition, Vol. D "The Romantic Period", New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, pp. 5-10.
[13] Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli, "Introduzione. Le Poetesse del Romanticismo". In L.M. Crisafulli, C. Pietropoli (eds.), *Le Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi: tra Identità e Genere*, Roma: Carocci, 2002, pp. 11-16.
[14] Deidre Shauna Lynch, "Introduction to the Romantic Period 1785-1832", op. cit., p. 9.

weak perpetrated by those in power. In the poem, the oppressed is a mouse constrained in a cage by a scientist who is about to use him as a guinea pig. The mouse tries to convince him not to kill him uttering an amazing speech on the equality among living beings, who are born free—hence the necessity to deal with every single creature with kindness and respect.

> O hear a pensive prisoner's prayer,
> For Liberty that sighs;
> And never let thine heart be shut
> Against the wretch's cries!
> . . . .
> If ever thy breast with freedom glowed,
> And spurned a tyrant's chain,
> Let not thy strong oppressive force
> A free-born mouse detain!
> . . . .
> So when destruction lurks unseen,
> Which men, like mice, may share,
> May some kind angel clear thy path,
> And break the hidden snare.[15]

The mouse is a metaphor and represents all the oppressed minorities and social groups who were deprived of their freedom, civil rights and human dignity: dissenters, women and, especially, slaves. Choosing a theme, apparently far from any references to the current political situation, and making it an allegory to address public issues was one of the most common stratagems employed by women writers to speak their mind without being too daring. In this way they could avoid harsh criticism, which was usually based more on their "inappropriate" behaviour as women than on their actual work as writers. This is what happened to Barbauld when she published the poem *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812), in which she strongly condemns British political warfare and social decay. Her verses were heavily contested by fellow writers and critics because they were considered unpatriotic, so much so that she never published anything again until her death in 1825. What strikes the most is that she was attacked because of her gender, not for her writing skills. Exemplary is the review of her poem written by John Wilson Crocker on the prominent magazine *Quarterly Review*:

> We had hoped, indeed, that the empire might have been saved without the intervention of a ladyauthor: we even flattered ourselves that the interests of Europe and of humanity would in some degree have swayed our public councils, without the descent of (dea ex machina) Mrs. Anna Laetitia Barbauld in a quarto, upon the theatre where the great European tragedy is now performing. Not such, however, is her opinion; an irresistible impulse of public duty — a confident sense of commanding talents — have induced her to dash down her shagreen spectacles and her knitting needles, and to sally forth, hand in hand with her renowned compatriot, in the magnanimous resolution of saving a sinking state, by the instrumentality of a pamphlet in prose and a pamphlet in verse.[16]

---

[15] Anna Laetitia Barbauld. 1773. "The Mouse's Petition", in *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi,* edited by Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Vol. 1, Roma: Carocci, 2003, lines 1-4, 9-12, 45-48.

[16] John Wilson Crocker. 1812. *Quarterly Review*. Quoted in Duncan Wu (ed.), *Romantic Women Poets: an Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 8.

Among the political matters of the time that women should not explicitly mention in their texts, an interesting exception was abolitionism. The number of women participating in the campaign against the slave trade was significant; they did not only compose pamphlets and poems to denounce the conditions of the slaves, but a multitude of women took part in the cause helping in many different ways, such as organising fundraisings and petitions. As Crisafulli underlines, "it might be noted that 10 per cent of the financial support to abolitionist societies of the time came from women, and in areas such as Manchester women contributed up to half the total amount."[17] The English abolitionist movement was born around the end of the 18th century thanks to a number of figures who dedicated their whole life to the fight for the abolition of the slave trade.[18] In particular, William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson's tireless attempts to present a long series of bills to the Parliament in order to get them approved and turned into law, made abolitionism one of the most discussed topics of the end of the 18th century and inevitably raised a certain degree of awareness in the public opinion. Among the writers who took a stance on the matter through their compositions, there were: William Blake with his poem "The Little Black Boy" (1789); William Wordsworth with "To Thomas Clarkson. On the Final Passing of the Bill for the Abolition of the Slave Trade" (1807); William Cowper's "On Slavery" included in the long poem *The Task* (1785); Robert Burns' "The Slave's Lament" (1792); Edward Rushton's "West-Indian Eclogues" (1787); Ann Yearsley's "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade" (1788); Amelia Opie's "The Negro Boy's Tale, Ballad in quatrain" (1802); Hannah More's two poems "Slavery, A Poem" (1788) and "The Sorrows of Yamba; or the Negro Woman's Lamentation. To the Tune of Hosier's Ghost", included in the

---

[17] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More and Ann Yearsley's Poetry of Freedom". In *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*, edited by C. Kaplan and J. Oldfield. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2010, p. 110.

[18] A first abolitionist movement can be found in America already at the end of the 17th century thanks to the moral and social engagement of the Quakers who in 1688 in Germantown (Pennsylvania) signed the first petition against slavery, also known as the "Germantown Resolution." England responded to the issues regarding slavery raised overseas only after the end of the war for independence of the American colonies. Indeed, Robin Blackburn reminds us that in 1782 the "English Quakers helped to lay the basis for the first modern social movement" (Blackburn, p.512). It is worth mentioning briefly "those who had already identified colonial slavery and the Atlantic slave trade as evidence that Britain and its Empire were in urgent need of reform," that is, "Sir Christopher Middleton, Controller of the Admiralty, James Ramsay, his aide, Thomas Robinson (Baron Grantham), president of the Board of Trade, Peter Packard, vice chancellor of the University of Cambridge, several bishops and the philanthropist Hannah More, already a respected authority on questions of morality. Also highly significant was the cautious interest taken by William Pitt and his friend William Wilberforce" (Blackburn, p.514). An Abolitionist Society was subsequently founded, and its Committee immediately "recruited Thomas Clarkson, a Cambridge student who . . . embarked on travels round the country, holding meetings and helping to establish local branches" (Blackburn, p.516). Source: Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible. Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights.* London, New York: Verso, 2011, 2013. About the birth of the abolitionist movement see also: Brycchan Carey, "Inventing a Culture of Anti-Slavery: Pennsylvanian Quakers and the Germantown Protest of 1688". In Cora Kaplan and John Oldfield (eds.), *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery,* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 17-32.

collection *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795-98), and many others. After a long campaign, Wilberforce and Clarkson's Bill for the abolition of the slave trade in Great Britain passed in 1807, but only in 1833 with the "Slavery Abolition Act" slavery was finally abolished in the entire British Empire.

The debate on civil rights that started with the revolt in the American colonies and their subsequent declaration of independence inflamed the second half of the 18th century and slowly shaped a new consciousness, bringing political and social issues to the attention of a more significant number of intellectuals and to the first pages of magazines and journals. Politics was no longer merely a matter to be discussed inside the English Parliament, but became a fundamental part of any writer and philosopher's thought, especially of those who belonged to minority groups and were thus deprived of fundamental civil rights. In this perspective, of course, the act of writing acquired a further value, that of sharing opinions with whomever could read, bestowing a special power on the hands of authors.[19] During the Romantic age in Great Britain, the number of people who could get access to printed texts increased thanks to the development of technological tools which facilitated the process of printing, but also by virtue of the circulating libraries, from which people could borrow books by paying a membership fee. The considerable development of magazines and journals contributed as well to raise the number of readers, but also, and most importantly, to shape a more informed and cultivated public opinion.[20] Of course, not everybody had easy access to education, especially girls of the lower classes and those living in the rural areas. Therefore, such an increase in the number of readers was limited to the upper class and the 19th century emerging bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, access to printed culture was an essential factor that played a crucial role in the growth of a more politically engaged generation, of which women were a substantial part.[21]

Although a number of Romantic scholars do not support the division of Romanticism into two distinct generations of poets and poetics, with the 19th century as the watershed between the two, it should be underlined to what extent writers who were born and started writing in the second half of the 18th century—as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Blake but also women as Barbauld, More and Robinson—had a different vision and approach to politics compared to

[19] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Diego Saglia, "Introduzione a Il Romanticismo". In Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Keir Elam (eds.), *Manuale di Letteratura e Cultura Inglese*, op. cit., pp. 181-184. On the same issues see also: Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "La Poesia del Romanticismo", In Lilla Maria Crisafulli, Keir Elam (eds.), *Manuale di Letteratura e Cultura Inglese*, op. cit., pp. 185-218.

[20] Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen. Women writers in the eighteenth century*. London, New York: Routledge, 1992, 1994, pp. 13-15.

[21] The issue of women readers and their political engagement is widely discussed by Mark Towsey, "Women as readers and writers." In Catherine Ingrassia (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain 1660-1789,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 21-36, p. 22.

those who were born close to the turn of the century and started writing in the first decades of 1800—Shelley, Byron, Keats, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Mary Shelley and many others. The so-called "first generation" saw the American and French revolutions, but also the Anglo-French wars which involved England, France and other European countries between 1778 and 1802, only to lead to the Napoleonic wars in 1803. It is no surprise, then, that the turmoil that hit Europe at the end of the XVIII century, together with a series of internal fights and vindications of civil rights, strongly influenced the literary production of the time. If the first generation, as suggested by Dawson[22] was initially supportive of the French revolution and defended its main principles, hoping that it would subvert the pre-established social order and help constructing a more equal society all over Europe, they subsequently lived the disillusionment of the revolutionist failure and the beginning of another war, without perceiving any positive change. On the contrary, the second generation, who did not witness the age of revolutions, had a more progressive attitude towards society and more radical ideas about what their role implied.[23] The poet, a "man speaking to men"[24] in Wordsworth's terms, became "the unacknowledged legislator of the world,"[25] as depicted by P.B. Shelley, the intellectual avant-gardist who could guide a country towards the formation of an equal society and a fairer political system, reached through the blooming of culture and beauty. In this context, the long process of development of mass-production that started around 1760, known as the industrial revolution, together with an increasing urbanisation which overpopulated cities and left rural areas deserted, created an even greater inequality among social classes and, in particular, between dominant and minority groups. The dark atmosphere of industrial cities was, in fact, a recurrent theme during the Victorian age. However, the issue was already present in poems of the Romantic period such as "London" by Blake (1794) and "The Factory" by Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1835). Both poets employed their voice and pen to denounce the terrible conditions of the lower classes—especially of children, forced to work at a very young age—in the new English capitalist society, as well as its moral decay. A new significant battle for the recognition of basic rights began in the first decades of the 19th century and saw the involvement of many women intellectuals who campaigned to improve the working condition of children in factories. Besides Letitia Elizabeth Landon, it is worth mentioning the works by Caroline Bowles and

[22] P.M.S. Dawson, "Poetry in the Age of Revolution". In Stuart Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd Edition, New York: Cambridge U.P., 2010, pp. 56-81.
[23] As widely discussed by P.M.S. Dawson, "Poetry in an Age of Revolution", op. cit., pp. 56-81.
[24] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems*", 1802, in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Tenth Edition, Vol. D "The Romantic Period" edited by Deidre Shauna Lynch, New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 310.
[25] Percy Bhysse Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry", (1821) 1840, in in Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, op. cit., p. 883.

Caroline Norton, who wrote respectively *Tales of the Factories* (1833) and *A Voice from the Factories* (1836) in the aftermath of the "Factory Act" issued in 1833.[26] The Act forbade children who were less than nine years old from working in factories, but continued to allow children aged from nine to fourteen to work eight hours a day, and from fourteen to eighteen even twelve hours a day.[27] It took more than fifty years to see the raising of the minimum working age at 12 years old with the "Factory and Workshop Act" issued in 1901.[28]

Although continuously contested and banished from the public sphere, women writers were an essential part of the civil society of the time and were actively participating in social life. The doctrine of the separate spheres that for centuries had insisted on assigning men to the public sphere and women to the private one, led to the creation of a "counter" or "alternative"[29] public sphere to justify women's engagement in political issues. As highlighted by Anne Mellor, "such theoretical formulations of competing 'counter-publics' have resulted in the erasure of the historical fact of women's full participation in the very public sphere."[30] Indeed, it is fundamental to remark that "women writers participated in the *same* discursive public sphere and in the *same* formation of public opinion as did their male peers,"[31] influencing and contributing to the society of the time. Thanks to feminist literary criticism, the doctrine of the separate spheres and the notion of a "counter public sphere" have been overcome in the course of the last decades, in favor of a more truthful notion of continuity and permeability between the two realms. Women were writing, publishing and discussing their ideas in the same arena men were. At the same time, men were the ones in power both inside and outside the house—both as head of the family and as a represented citizen. Therefore, it should be adopted what Tracy Davis calls "a continuum of sociability"[32] to better depict the complex dynamic relationship between two gendered domains that were supposed to be divided at the time, but

---

[26] Diego Saglia, "Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.)" in Lilla Maria Crisafulli (ed.), *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi,* Roma: Carocci, 2003, p. 981.
[27] Ibid. p. 981.
[28] https://archive.org/details/b22416365.
[29] The idea of a "counter public sphere" was suggested by Rita Felski, while the "competing or alternative public sphere" was proposed by Bruce Robbins, Geoff Eley and others, as cited in Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation. Women's Political Writing in England 1780-1830.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 2002, p. 3.
[30] Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation. Women's Political Writing in England 1780-1830,* op. cit., p. 3.
[31] Ibid. p. 3.
[32] Tracy Davis draws from Jeff Weintraub's discourse on the relationship between the "intimate domain of family, friendship, and the primary group" and the "instrumental domain of the market and formal institutions" in order to explain to what extent private and public spheres are not antithetical domains. Indeed, according to Davis, we should regard the private and public spheres as unbounded realms which always apply to the same succession of social activities, to the point that, at times, they even overlap. Tracy C. Davis, "The sociable playwright and the representative citizen", in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (eds.), *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999, p. 18.
See also: Jeff Weintraub, "The Theory and Politics of the Private/Public Distinction". In Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (eds.), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice. Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 1-42.

were really mingling with each other more than one could imagine. Anne Mellor's words correctly sum up the actual situation of female authors between 1780 and 1830:

> We need to account for the fact that between 1780 and 1830 women dominated not only the production of the novel—of the dozen most popular novelists in the period, ten were women . . . —but also the production of poetry and drama. Stuart Curran has identified 339 women poets publishing in England between 1760 and 1830 in addition to 82 anonymous female poets. The leading playwright of the day was a woman, Joanna Baillie.[33]

Hence, women writers' personal and professional condition during English Romanticism was not easy, and it should be underlined that, given the wide time range defined as the Romantic Era, there are solid differences at play according to specific periods. The second half of the 18th century was characterised by a complicated social and political situation, both in England and in Europe in general. The wind of change brought by the American revolution, and then by the French uprisings, was blowing throughout the old continent, giving hope to all those female intellectuals who believed that the inequalities that were oppressing them and other minorities could be overcome. If the French revolution, right from the beginning, failed to claim the same rights for men and women—despite the fact that women actively participated in the revolts—female writers did not give up their advocacy efforts and continued using their pen to raise awareness about their conditions and to reclaim their freedom. The most brilliant example in France is undoubtedly the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* published in 1791 and written by Olympe de Gouges in order to criticise the 1789 *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyenne* which completely omitted female citizens' rights. Analogously to playwright Olympe de Gouges, Mary Wollstonecraft—who was well aware of what was happening in the French territory, since she was there at the beginning of the turmoil and managed to come back to England thanks to a fake marriage to Robert Imlay—published in 1792 her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. The text, a fundamental proto-feminist work, clearly illustrated the conditions of subjection and inferiority women were living in, in a society that denied them basic civil rights as suffrage, political representation, divorce and ownership. Although post-colonial criticism would rightfully object the extent to which such an analogy is inherently disproportionate and incorrect, the similitude between women and slaves was a recurrent topic in women's texts. Contextualised in the 18th century, such parallelism exactly described how women perceived themselves when married to a man they often did not choose, who legally "owned" them and all their possessions. In the same way, the similitude woman/slave rightfully portrayed how women felt when denied the right to vote or to be elected

[33] Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 7.

in the English parliament. For such reasons, women writers, especially those belonging to the Dissenters minority, actively participated in the abolitionist campaign and composed pamphlets, poetry and texts where they denounced the unbearable atrocities slaves were subjected to, reclaiming at the same time a voice of their own and turning their pen into a tool to affirm themselves and their perspective. As noted by Crisafulli,

> women's participation in the anti-slavery trade movement was in part a moral and emotional duty but also a daring political act . . . that . . . constituted a remarkable step towards that process of self-awareness that eventually led women to appeal for full social, economic and legal rights of their own[34].

The process of self-awareness mentioned by Crisafulli is a fundamental standpoint when studying romantic women's literature, since the difficulties women met along their way for equal representation and education were not merely linked to a hostile society which wanted the feminine marginalised into a domestic space, but also to the lack of a female genealogy women writers could look up to and take inspiration from. Such an absence was a crucial element in the belated construction of a female consciousness which, in the following years and centuries, urged women writers to use their pen to condemn the wrongs of the patriarchal society.

2.2 "Mothering" texts: English women writers' contribution to Romantic literature

Before the Romantic Era, the number of renowned women writers was very meagre. On the one hand, because women had limited access to education and were to be married at a very young age; on the other hand, because writing has always been regarded as a male domain and thus literary historiography has mostly favoured and passed on male writers' names and works. Furthermore, the patriarchal notion of the pen as an inherently masculine instrument—the tool through which a male writer "*fathers* his text"[35], hence "in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis"[36]—led to the biased misconception that women writers were not equal to their male colleagues. Biology was often exploited by men to justify women's inferiority, linking it to their "fragile" body—"believed to be more vulnerable to insanity"[37] as underlined by Showalter—as well as to their irrational mind, inapt to higher reasoning. Gilbert and Gubar's reflection on the relation between the body and the act of writing perfectly describes the 18th and 19th centuries common opinion on a supposed feminine inadequacy to produce literature;

---

[34] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More and Ann Yearsley's Poetry of Freedom", op. cit., p. 111.
[35] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, p. 4.
[36] Ibid. p. 4.
[37] Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture. 1830-1980.* London: Virago, 1987, p. 7.

"If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?"[38] Such question further highlights to what extent being a woman was regarded as a defective condition, a deviation from the norm that should be restrained and controlled. The "female eunuch", theorised by Germaine Greer in 1970, rightfully represents women's role in the patriarchal society and it acquires an even greater meaning when applied to female writers, who were considered to be lacking the biological features to compose literary works worthy of being passed on. Nevertheless, despite the obstacles along the way, the second half of the 18th century saw an increasing number of women "of undoubted genius"[39]—as Samuel T. Coleridge defined Mary Robinson—who affirmed themselves as professionals, and whose literary production was very much celebrated and acclaimed. The price to pay for such a career, though, was high and women writers were often the targets of harsh criticism and public attacks on their personal lives, their lack of moral virtue and even their femininity. As explained by Gilbert and Gubar, female writers were believed not to be as good as their male colleagues, so those women who were recognised to have "generative literary power", were regarded as in possession of male features. Thus, they were labelled as "anomalous, freakish" and "essentially unfeminine"[40] as if, in the act of writing, they somehow lost their feminine characteristics. Interestingly, we will come across the same idea when discussing the most famous Spanish writer of the Romantic era, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, similarly accused of being too talented to be a real woman.[41] Of course, a crucial factor in this de-feminisation was the range of topics discussed in women's compositions. It was acceptable for female poets to write about domestic life and ordinary things, as they belonged to their "private sphere", but it was seen as totally improper to deal with politics and social issues, which were part of a masculine domain women were not allowed to enter but at a great risk for their career and reputation. The most famous example of such a gendered opinion is certainly the above-mentioned poem *The Unsex'd Females* (1798) by Richard Polwhele, in which he mocks and condemns writers as Robinson, Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, Hays, Smith, Williams and Yearsley for defending women's rights and meddling in men's issues. Their political engagement was regarded as a subversion of gender roles, supposedly established by nature—"Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw / A female

---

[38] Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* op. cit., p. 7.
[39] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Collected* Letters, ed. by E. L. Griggs, 6 voll. Clarendon Press, Oxford 1956–71, vol. I, p.562. Cited in Lilla Maria Crisafulli (ed.), *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi*, Roma: Carocci, 2003, p. 329.
[40] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, op. cit., p. 10.
[41] José Zorrilla about Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, cited in Maria Prado Mas (ed.), *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2000, p. 13.

band despising NATURE's law."[42] Although in different forms, women writers responded to Polwhele's provocation. In particular, it is worth mentioning Robinson's *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), where Mary cleverly underlines that biological sex has nothing to do with gender roles, which are a mere cultural construction. She also wittily highlights to what extent the stereotypical characteristics attributed to the female gender were a consequence of the biased patriarchal society which prevented girls from getting an education and from following their natural inclinations. At the end of the letter, Robinson tackles the issue of female schooling with an extremely modern attitude; she suggests the creation of a "University for Women" where women could learn accordingly to their desires and abilities. Indeed, she reports:

> Had fortune enabled me, I would build a University for women; where they should be politely and, at the same time, classically educated; the depth of their studies, should be proportioned to their mental powers.[43]

What strikes in these lines is the author's interest in cultivating both girls' domestic and literary skills, deconstructing the common idea that a woman could not be a good writer and a wife or a mother, at the same time. Such a conception was not a British prerogative; on the contrary, it was widespread in Europe and, as we will see further on, strongly affected women writers in Spain and Italy as well. Some British female writers rightfully agreed on the impossibility to conciliate domestic and literary work, as for example Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Lamb, who wrote in 1815 "Needle-work and intellectual improvement are naturally in a state of warfare."[44] Indeed, it was extremely difficult for a woman who had to take care of her family to find the time, or space, to write—both in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, as Virginia Woolf argued in her 1929 *A Room of One's Own*. Nevertheless, Robinson's ideal education program disrupts the biased notion according to which a woman needed to be and act like a man in order to become a writer. She seems to visualise a continuity between the two types of education, between domesticity and public life, between the needle and the pen, instead of reiterating the divisive conception of the separate spheres and gendered perception of activities. Although a few years earlier, the same biased concept was tackled by Mary Deverell, who in 1781 published the poem "An epistle to a divine, on the united merits of the pen and the needle" in the second volume of her *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds*. Deverell—whose literary and dramatic production will be analysed in detail in the fourth

---

[42] Richard Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females,* 1798, vv. 10-12.

[43] Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, 1799, p. 92.

[44] Reported on the "British Ladies' Magazine", cited in Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner (eds.), *Re-visioning Romanticism. British Women Writers 1776-1837*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994, p. 167.

chapter of this thesis—strongly criticises, through a witty use of irony, the social misconception according to which "pen and petticoat such jarring opposites denote."[45] Robinson was undoubtedly very explicit and direct in her compositions—nowadays she would be regarded as a true activist as well as a writer—but her positions about gender inequality were shared by a high number of female colleagues, who addressed the same issues in different, and often subtler, ways in order not to damage their reputation.

Career and reputation were two inseparable elements in Romantic women writers' life, since their chances to publish, and thus to make a living out of their texts, were strictly connected to their behaviour and respectability; even personal choices as being married or not could change a woman's career. Elizabeth Inchbald, who started as an actress and then became a respected writer, playwright and theatre theorist, was very young when she agreed to marry an actor who was much older than her in order to secure her reputation from external attacks. On the contrary, Mary Robinson, one of the most famous actresses of the second half of the 18th century—but also a writer, poet, activist and playwright—was subjected to the most cruel and trivial criticism for most of her life because of her sexual conduct, which according to the canons of the time was regarded as disreputable. Other than by Polwhele, Robinson was harshly attacked by magazines because of her relationship with the Prince of Wales (the future King George IV) and other supposed love affairs with wealthy and renowned men, so much so that she appeared in a number of satirical—almost pornographic—vignettes where she was depicted as a breast-naked prostitute. Two famous examples are James Gillray's print "The Thunderer" (1782) and the anonymous caricature "Florizel and Perdita" (1783). In Gillray's "The Thunderer", Mary is portrayed breast-naked and with her legs spread, sitting on a whirligig, a "commonly used punishment for *army* prostitutes"[46] while her lover, Banastre Tarleton is fighting against the Prince of Wales, his rival. In the anonymous vignette "Florizel and Perdita" Robinson is represented as Perdita—the role which made her famous—but again displaying her naked breast, while her lover, the Prince of Wales, is portrayed as Florizel. The drawing also features king George III, on the left, who yells at his heir, "Oh! My Son My Son," and Robinson's husband, who is captioned as the *King of Cuckolds* and "supports her other putative lovers

[45] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject", in *Miscellanies in prose and verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds*. Vol. II. Printed for the author by J. Rivington, Jun. St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1781, pp. 91-95.

[46] Anne K. Mellor, "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary "Perdita" Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality", in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 22:3, 271-304, Routledge, 2000, p. 274. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08905490008583514 [Accessed 21/04/2016].

(Lords North and Fox and Tarleton) on his horns."[47] Generally speaking, in order to be respected, women were supposed to lead a spotless life, but such a pretension was much more intensified in the case of female public figures, as artists, actresses and, of course, writers. Sexuality and political interests were to be carefully concealed in their everyday life as well as in their texts, but also their talent was something it was not appropriate to show off. Not by chance, actresses such as Sarah Siddons or, even Elizabeth Inchbald, who later became a famous playwright and novelist, took the greatest care in protecting their private lives. In order not to be constantly criticized, as well as to have more chances to be published, female writers often decided to omit their names from their manuscripts, or to use a pseudonym in order to protect their privacy and their works—which could be easily dismissed or badly reviewed just because they were penned by a woman. Furthermore, women writers cleverly developed a series of literary stratagems to cover up any "inappropriate" reference, hint or message they wanted to convey through their words. The use of metaphors, irony and the technique of displacement—setting a plot in an exotic place or a past epoch—were the most successfully strategies employed. Another device that was often used in order to preserve their reputation and not to appear too daring to their public was the "rhetoric of modesty"[48], which also served the purpose of disguising their talent under a shroud of humility and reticence about the value of their compositions. As rightfully pinpointed by Gibson Cima, they "had to be invisibly talented, and in a God-given natural manner,"[49] they had to conceal their creativity, their genius, which did not conform to social standards and, therefore, could make them appear as "freaks of nature."[50] Moreover, with the turn of the century, the virtue of "propriety" began to appear

---

[47] Anne K. Mellor, "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary "Perdita" Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality", p. 273.

[48] The "rhetoric of modesty" was not a prerogative of Romantic women writers' texts. Indeed, it is possible to find rhetorical expressions of modesty already in medieval female writings. For example, in the late 8th century Anglo-Saxon writer and nun Hugeburc—possibly "the only woman of her time to write biographies of male saints" (Head, p.32)—refers to herself, at the beginning of her work *Hodoeporicon of St. Willibald* (also known as *Vita Willibaldi*), as an "unworthy Saxon woman" ("indigna Saxonica" Watt, p.92). She then continues underlining that she is "aware that she lacks the authority and experience required for writing the life and miracles of her subject," (Watt, p.93) mainly in response to the Church and its position against female authors, as pinpointed by Diane Watt (p.93). As Hugeburc and her medieval fellow female writers prove, the misogynistic ideas promoted by the Church in the Middle-Ages—as well as by patriarchal societies—played a pivotal role in the creation and development of the "rhetoric of modesty." Information retrieved from: Diane Watt, *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond 650-1100*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, pp. 91-103.
See also: Pauline Head, "Who is the nun from Heidenheim? A Study of Hugeburc's *Vita Willibaldi*". In *Medium Aevum*, Vol.71, n.1 (2002), pp. 29-46. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43630387 [Accessed 10/01/2020].

[49] Gay Gibson Cima, "'To be public as a genius and private as a woman'. The critical framing of nineteenth-century British women playwrights", in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999, p. 51.

[50] Ibid. p. 51.

as a fundamental characteristic of respectable women, and thus, every aspect of their life should be measured and proper to an external (male) gaze.

As a matter of fact, during the 19th century, with the middle-class increasing its power and affirming its own values as the norm, the conditions of women writers got even worse, as it is noticeable in the decrease of their social and political activism, as well as in the topics of their literary productions. Once revolts and uprisings all over Europe ceased, British society had to face the Napoleonic wars, and thus, a strong patriotic feeling started to spread all over the country. Such a feeling was also nourished by the development of the British Empire which, according to Timothy H. Parsons, moved from being "informal", mostly based on commerce agreements between England and its colonies, to a "formal empire"[51] where political concerns acquired a greater importance than trade issues. The conflicts fostered a devotional attachment to the country that reached its highest moment during the reign of Queen Victoria, but which already at the beginning of the 19th century influenced the way people perceived their homeland, and consequently, women. The link between the two is due to the fact that England—as well as other countries, like France and Russia—was imagined and depicted as a mother, the iconic Britannia, who needed to be protected by her sons, all the British men recruited to fight at the front. This identification, in such a delicate moment, led to recognize in every woman the image of Britannia, and in every girl a potential mother; thus, the embodiment of the motherland. In this context, women's social role as procreators and caregivers acquired fundamental importance in the economy of the nation's patriotic discourse, but it ended up exacerbating women's marginalization in the domestic sphere and increasing the distance to the fulfilment of an equal society. Indeed, as women were to personify the image of the "lovely nation"[52] they had to represent all the most positive virtues, hence scrupulously following the strict rules of decorum and propriety. Of course, those who paid the highest price for such a setback were women writers themselves, who progressively lost the freedom of speech and action they had conquered with great difficulty during the previous century through their relentless activism and political engagement. Therefore, if the literary production of Romantic male poets from the "second generation" was more radical, explicit and politically sided compared to that of their colleagues who had written mainly before 1800, the situation with women writers was the exact opposite. The closer to the Victorian Era women got, the more aligned they were "with the

---

[51] Timothy H. Parsons, *The British Imperial Century 1815-1914: A World History Perspective.* Lanhan: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, 2019, p. 9.
[52] Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage: theatre and politics in Britain 1780-1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 71.

passive role of national symbol"[53] and, thus, they were supposed to be politically neutral, devoting their writings to domestic and sentimental issues. Since women's economic independence relied very much on their publications, female writers had to adapt to such biased changes in society and officially adhere to the norms imposed on their gender. Notwithstanding a superficial conformism, female writers started to develop an even wider range of subtle literary stratagems and devices that allowed them to carefully include in their texts subversive elements through which they could implicitly speak their mind. It is indeed thanks to the feminist criticism developed in the last decades that it has been possible to unveil the true meaning under the sharp irony used by Jane Austen or the allegories used by Charlotte Brontë and Letitia Elizabeth Landon.

It is evident, thus, that women played a fundamental and central role in the social and political events that characterised the Romantic Era, as well as in the development of the literary production of the time. For centuries, literary historiography has depicted a completely different scenario, where men were the only protagonists—with the exceptions of few iconic female names that were believed to be the only ones who ever attempted writing. Nevertheless, women's presence was not at all marginal to the Romantic social and literary scene; on the contrary, it had a fundamental role in the development of the most appreciated literary genres of the time. As a matter of fact, in a number of literary domains female presence was significant and appreciated, as in the case of the genres of gothic fiction and the so-called *novel of manners*, both born in the Romantic period. Although the first gothic romance considered as such was published in 1765 by Horace Walpole and titled *The Castle of Otranto*, the most famous writers of gothic novels of the time were undoubtedly Mary Shelley, who penned the most iconic gothic novel of all times, *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) at the beginning of the 19th century, and Ann Radcliffe at the end of the 18th century. Radcliffe wrote—among others—the very popular text *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), whose fame was so well-established that it later became the core of Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (completed in 1803, but published posthumously in 1818). If Jane Austen is certainly the most famous female writer of the first half of the 19th century and the leading authority as far as the *novel of manners* is concerned, she was neither the first nor the only woman to engage with the genre. Together with celebrated novelists of the 18th century as Richardson and Fielding, a number of female writers opened the path to and influenced Austen's production, such as Frances Burney with her *Cecilia* (1782)

[53] Marlon Ross, "Romancing the Nation-State: the Poetics of Romantic Nationalism", cited in Betsy Bolton, *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage: theatre and politics in Britain 1780-1800*, p. 47.

and *Camilla* (1796), and *Belinda* (1801) by Maria Edgeworth—who were cited by Austen herself in *Northanger Abbey* (1818)[54].

> "It is only Cecilia, or Camilla, or Belinda;" or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.[55]

It is true that, among the many literary genres that were born and developed during the Romantic age, the novel was regarded as the most suitable for the female gender. It was the perfect genre to be read inside the house, its relevance to everyday life made it more adequate to female interests, and its prose—far from the virtuosity of the poetical verses or dramatic scenes—was regarded as more discreet and thus appropriate for honourable women. Although, as it has been proved, women participated in the public life of the time and did write texts belonging to the most various genres—with great success and appreciation from their male colleagues—it was still common opinion that women should lead a more reserved life without stepping out of the domestic sphere, and maintain an unspotted reputation. In particular, the novel of manners was considered to guide young girls in the right direction in life, using the plot to display examples of how a girl should act in order to be eligible on the marriage market and which kind of behaviour could, on the contrary, cost them their respectability. It is worth underlining again that female writers' novels were much more complicated than that, thanks to the many literary stratagems and devices brought to light by recent feminist criticism, which showed to what extent female novelists were much more subversive and ironic than previously thought.

Nevertheless, since women were considered intellectually inferior to men,[56] they were judged unfit for taking part in, or even discussing, political matters, as well as for composing "high literature"—that is, poetry and drama—which, despite the great number of female poets and playwrights, was still perceived as an exclusively male realm. The gap between the actual publishing situation of the time, with a significant number of female authors making a living out of their works, and what society regarded as ideal and "proper" was so substantial that it ended up creating an untruthful picture of women's importance in the economy of English Romantic literature. As highlighted by Crisafulli in her anthology of English Romantic women poets, the poem *Psyche; or the Legend of Love* by Mary Tighe had a strong influence on a

---

[54] As reported by Beatrice Battaglia, "La narrativa nell'età delle rivoluzioni (1780-1830)", in Crisafulli, Elam *Manuale di Lettartura e Cultura Inglese*. Bologna: Bononia U.P. 2009.

[55] Austen, Jane. 1818. *Northanger Abbey.* Vol I, Chapter 5. Retrieved from: http://www.jausten.it/jarcna05.html [Accessed 30/12/2018].

[56] As widely discussed by Mary Robinson in *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, 1799.

young John Keats, as did Helena Maria Williams and Charlotte Smith on William Wordsworth, at the beginning of his career. Furthermore, it should not be overlooked to what extent the "Introductory Discourse" to the *Plays on the Passions* by Joanna Baillie had an impact on William Wordsworth's writing of the "Preface", and the appeal that Mary Robinson's *Lyrical Tales* had on Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his poetic production.[57] If women poets were as productive as their male counterparts, the same could be said for the other "high" genre of English literature: drama. As a matter of fact, as pinpointed by Stuart Curran,[58] in 1780 and 1790 theatre was dominated by two women playwrights, Hannah Cowley and Elizabeth Inchbald, and as highlighted by Anne K. Mellor, the "leading dramatist of the Romantic age"[59] was certainly Joanna Baillie, defined by coeval writer and poet Walter Scott as "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger."[60] Being the focus of this thesis, the situation of women playwrights will be addressed in detail in the following chapters, but it is essential to put the spotlight on women's presence inside supposedly masculine domains, as well as on their great contribution to the "high" genres that for centuries have been labelled as male territory. Indeed, when Robert Southey wrote in a letter to Charlotte Brontë that "Literature is not the business of a woman's life, and it cannot be,"[61] he was expressing his opinion as well as a common thought about women and masculine professions, as that of the writer. Indeed, in 18th and 19th centuries patriarchal society, that regarded the female as unsuitable for literary endeavours and inferior to their male colleagues, women's works were not considered worthy of being passed on—which is probably why all these incredibly talented women writers had been ignored for so many years.

---

[57] Crisafulli, *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi*, op. cit., p. 14.

[58] Stuart Curran, "Women readers, women writers", in Curran (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 2010, p. 174.

[59] Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere", in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol.33, N.4 (Winter 1994), pp. 559-567.

[60] Walter Scott, Letter to Miss Smith, March 4, 1808, in *Familiar etters of Sir Walter Scott*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1894) I:99. Cited in Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere", 1994.

[61] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* op. cit., p. 8.

3. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: Italy

3.1 The issue of Italian Romanticism: women's presence and impact

Romanticism had already gained popularity in Germany and England when, in the second decade of the 19th century, landed in the Italian peninsula. Italy was not yet a unified country, it was divided into several states, under different dominations, among which was the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy that ruled over the north. It is indeed in the north of Italy, specifically in Milan, where Italian Romanticism was born and started to develop. As highlighted by Giuseppe Farinelli, every European Romanticism was somehow different from the others and had its own peculiar characteristics.[62] What characterised the Italian Romantic Era was mainly the fact that it had its roots in the city, Milan, where notions of social utility and literary renewal were flourishing—renewal from the strict canons imposed by the classical tradition that limited the writers' freedom of expression. Interestingly enough, the text that marked the beginning of the classical-romantic controversy in Italy was written by a woman—a famous Swiss essayist who was becoming a cultural authority in Europe—Madame Germaine de Staël. The text was published in 1816, in a translation by Pietro Giordani, in the literary magazine *Biblioteca Italiana* with the title "Sulla maniera e utilità delle traduzioni."[63] In the essay, de Staël supported the idea that Italian literature needed to open its doors to foreign literary productions in order to modernise itself and, in particular, she pinpointed the necessity of translating drama, so that the feelings conveyed in theatrical texts could have a direct impact on the audience, similarly to what Schlegel had done with Shakespeare's production.[64] Of course, many Italian intellectuals felt the need to defend classical tradition and thus employed the most prominent magazines of the time to respond to Madame de Staël's essay, making the debate become a pivotal moment in the development of 19th century Italian literature, and Italian Romanticism. De Staël also received satirical attacks and insults from Italian periodicals[65] because of her public position as a female writer who expressed her theoretical point of view in a field, literature, that was still considered masculine—as it happened to many of her English colleagues.

Although, according to Italian literary historiography, the leading intellectuals who participated in the debate and supported de Staël's opinions—writing, in turn, essays that

[62] Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento*, Roma: Carocci, 2002, p. 70.
[63] Ibid. p. 72.
[64] Ibid. p. 72.
[65] Ibid. p. 73.

constituted the theoretical corpus of Romanticism in Italy—were all men,[66] some recent anthologies briefly mention the name of female poet Diodata Saluzzo di Roero. Indeed, her poem "Le Rovine" (or "Ode sulle rovine del castello di Saluzzo", 1809) was brought as an example of the perfect Romantic lyrical poem[67] by writer and essayist Ludovico di Breme—a regular contributor to the first Italian Romantic magazine, *Il Conciliatore*, founded in 1818. The works of Rinaldina Russell and Natalia Costa-Zalessow—who published two of the very few collections of biographies and works of Italian women writers—highlight that Diodata's first literary production, written when she was just twenty-two years old, was very well received by critics, but "few people took notice of Diodata Saluzzo during the nineteenth century."[68] Indeed, she was neither remembered nor passed on in Italian literary historiography, despite the fact that she actually wrote a great number of various poetical compositions, an epic-lyrical long poem in two volumes titled *Ipazia* (1827), some short stories and novels—following the Romantic trend of the time—and four tragedies, of which only two have survived. These two tragedies, *Erminia* and *Tullia*, were published in 1817 and performed for several nights, in Rome and Turin respectively, where, according to Count Coriolano di Bagnolo—who published a historical eulogy for Diodata in 1843—, both of them were very well received by the audience.[69] In addition to "her enormous popularity at the end of the eighteenth century,"[70] in 1795 Diodata was accepted as a member of the Arcadia[71] with the name of Glaucilla Eurotea. When in 1976 she published her first collection of verses, she was acclaimed as the "Italian Sappho" by some of the major intellectuals of the time, such as Foscolo, Manzoni, Parini and Alfieri.[72] Furthermore, in 1802 Saluzzo was the first female member of the Academy of Science in Turin, since "she even decided to apply her mind to public law and resented the fact that

---

[66] Pietro Borsieri, Ludovico di Breme and Giovanni Berchet were the first writers to participate in the debate and to theorise Romanticism, but were later joined by popular authors as Alessandro Manzoni, Giacomo Leopardi and Ugo Foscolo.

[67] "Perfetta *lirica romantica*" is the direct quote of di Breme as reported by Alberto Cadioli, *Romanticismo Italiano*, Milano: editrice Bibliografica, 1995, p. 19. Citation also found in the translation "example of a perfect romantic poem" by Antonio Franceschetti and Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)", in Rinaldina Russell (ed.), *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, pp. 375-385.

[68] Antonio Franceschetti, Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)", in Rinaldina Russell (ed.), *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 383.

[69] Coriolano di Bagnolo, "Elogio Storico di Diodata Saluzzo Contessa Roero di Revello scritto dal Conte Coriolano di Bagnolo", in *Poesie Postume di Diodata Saluzzo Contessa Roero di Revello, aggiunte alcune lettere di illustri scrittori a lei dirette.* Torino: Tipografia Chirio e Mina, 1843, p. 32.

[70] Ibid. p. 375.

[71] The Arcadia was a literary Academy founded in Rome in 1690 by G.V. Gravina and G.M. Crescimbeni and other intellectuals with the aim to resist and oppose the Baroque style and promote an ideal of Classicism and rationality (http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arcadia/)

[72] Albert Sbragia, "Romanticism", in Rinaldina Russell (ed.), *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997, pp. 299-300.

women were not allowed to help their country in foreign missions"—as written by her friend Count Coriolano di Bagnolo and reported in Russell's volume.[73]

The controversy between those supporting the classical tradition and those promoting a new conception of literature in line with the Romantic ideals spreading in Europe went on for a short period, but it was, in fact, a superficial contention.[74] As underlined by Giovanni Carsaniga,

> On the surface there appeared to be two opposing parties, the classicist, upholding the values of tradition, and the Romantic, opting for experimentation and innovation, which included embracing some of the ideas and techniques found in contemporary foreign literatures (including the term *romantic*). . . . Of course, the debate was substantially about how to break the cultural monopoly of the ruling classes in a pre-industrial age when middle- and working-class education was becoming increasingly important. . . . There was a political dimension to the debate, not only because all cultural questions have such a dimension, but also because in an age of rampant censorship and repression literature was the only forum where political questions could be cautiously aired in disguise.[75]

Romanticism thus acquired the significance of "liberal", "revolutionary" and most of all "patriotic", especially in the north, where the majority of intellectuals were strongly opposing the foreign domination. The patriotic sentiment that characterised Italian Romanticism was certainly a consequence of the complex historical period Italy was going through. It was first conquered by Napoleon in 1796—from the north to the south, only three states resisted and managed to maintain their independence—and, when the Napoleonic Empire definitively fell in 1814, it mostly returned to its previous geo-political situation, except for the Lombardo-Veneto region, which was invaded by the Austrian Empire and annexed to its reign. It is not by chance that the Romantic age in Italy coincided with the historical period known as Risorgimento, that is the political and social process which, through battles and revolts, led to the unification of Italy in 1861. Patriotism seems to be a communal element of the Romantic age of various countries. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, even England moved towards more patriotic positions in the 19th century—and that was certainly due to the great political and social changes that were occurring all over Europe, especially during and after the Napoleonic wars that hit both England and Italy differently. If it is true that Italian Romanticism developed in its own peculiar way and later in time, the themes tackled by both male and female writers were inspired by the same mixture of sentimental and melancholic feelings that characterized the cultural movement in Britain and Germany. Death, sepulchers, ruins, a wild and hostile nature, strong passions together with the mystery evoked by medieval settings, are

---

[73] Count Coriolano di Bagnolo, *Poesie Postume*, 1843, p.13. In Antonio Franceschetti, Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)", in Rinaldina Russell, *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 376.

[74] Giovanni Carsaniga, "The of Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)", in Peter Brand, Lino Pertile, *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1997, p. 402.

[75] Ibid. p. 402.

some of the recurrent topics in the compositions of the period. This trend characterized the most famous poets of the period, Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi, as well as the forgotten Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva[76]—with poems *L'Italia sulla Tomba di Vincenzo Gioberti* (1853) and *Patria e Amore* (1861)—and Maria Giuseppa Guacci's "Il dolore" and "L'ultima ora di Saffo."[77] Thanks to the translations of foreign texts, a field in which women excelled, the subjects of the main Romantic works managed to be incorporated into Italian culture and mixed with traditional elements. It is the case of Saluzzo di Roero, whose poetry displays "a strong pre-romantic Ossianic strain of death, ruins, moon and the evocation of distant times past"[78] despite a more classical poetical structure. In this regard, Costa-Zalessow underlines that

> il classicismo e l'arcadismo settecentesco della Saluzzo sono pura esteriorità: essa fu una vera preromantica. Il contenuto delle sue poesie (la morte, le rovine, la luna, la rievocazione del Medioevo e del mondo cristiano) è di derivazione ossianesca. Vi si nota una perfetta fusione tra paesaggio e storia umana.[79]

Such a combination of traditional forms and modern consciousness is less contradictory than it might appear at first, and it can be regarded as a very peculiar characteristic of Romanticism in Italy, as well as one of the reasons why critics have discussed for more than a century whether Italian Romanticism really existed or not. Without going into the debate, it should be underlined that "Romanticism" was not a label given retrospectively, but it was adopted by writers themselves, who theorised what it meant for their generation and in that specific period, in the Italian peninsula at large. One particularly interesting is the theory proposed by writer Ermes Visconti in his text "Idee elementari sulla poesia romantica", published on the magazine *Il Conciliatore* in 1818, where he ideally divides the subjects of poetry into three categories—"classical", "Romantic", "mixed"—and declares that it is the content of a work, and not its formal style, that determines to which category it belongs.[80] Such a consideration can be extremely useful to read both male and female compositions of the time, avoiding the risk of

---

[76] Laura Beatrice Mancini Oliva was a writer, poet and playwright born in Naples in 1821, and acclaimed by many intellectuals as the "muse of Italian Risorgimento"; she died in 1869 in Florence. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/laura-beatrice-fortunata-oliva_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/

[77] Maria Giuseppa Guacci Nobile, also known as Giuseppina Guacci, was a writer and poet born in Naples in 1807. She actively participated in the Italian Risorgimento and died in 1848 in Naples, where she was raising funds to support exiled people and political prisoners. The two poems mentioned are part of her miscellaneous composition *Rime* published in 1832, 1839 and 1847, in three volumes. http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/maria-giuseppa-guacci_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[78] Albert Sbragia, "Romanticism", op. cit., pp. 299-300.

[79] Natalia Costa-Zalessow, *Scrittrici Italiane dal XVIII al XIX Secolo. Testi e critica.* Ravenna: Longo, 1982, p. 199. English translation: "Saluzzo's classicism and arcadianism, typical of the XVIII century, are merely an outward appearance: she was a true preromantic. The content of her poems (death, ruins, the moon, evocation of the Middle Ages and the Christian world) has its origins in the Ossianic poetical discourse. It is possible to notice a perfect mixture of landscape and human history."

[80] Alberto Cadioli, *Romanticismo Italiano.* Milano: editrice bibliografica, 1995, p. 31.

falling into a sterile controversy or deceitful categorisations. After all, as pinpointed by Carsaniga, even renowned Italian poets as Foscolo and Leopardi "expressed the modern sensibility in impeccably traditional form,"[81] and so it was for another respected writer of the time, Luisa Amalia Paladini, who tackled themes that could undoubtedly be ascribed to Romanticism but employed a more classical expressive structure.[82]

If Romanticism failed to radically change all the literary conventions established by classical traditions, as many intellectuals were wishing for, it certainly favoured the adoption of new subjects and perspectives in a number of genres. Indeed, while poetry remained the "highest genre" of Italian literature and very much attached to canonical forms, drama—tragedy in particular—went through a profound structural transformation and, similarly to what happened in England, the novel rapidly developed from being an underrated genre to one of the most prominent. Following a trend that became popular thanks to Walter Scott, theorist Giuseppe Visconti encouraged the use of historical subjects for tragedies and poems, as he believed Italian Romanticism to be a historical and Christian "literary system."[83] In order to achieve a truthful adherence to history, writer and theorist Ludovico di Breme suggested a rejection of the classical norms and language of the past, in favour of a new perspective shaped by real life and aimed at fulfilling a specific goal, different—yet intrinsic—in every text.[84] Following such suggestions, Alessandro Manzoni—the major representative of Italian Romanticism—wrote his first tragedy, *Il Conte di Carmagnola*, published in 1820, based on real historical happenings, as he explained in the introduction to the text. It is in the very preface to the tragedy that Manzoni theorised for the first time his point of view on drama, or "dramatic poetry"[85] as he refers to it, since the composition was written in verses. The author points out his rejection of the three Aristotelian unities—time, place and action, in line with August Wilhelm Schlegel's thought—as they constituted an obstacle to the achievement of tragedy's final goal: being truthful and useful. Manzoni's further theoretical reflections are included in a letter to Marquis Cesare D'Azeglio, emblematically titled "Sul Romanticismo", where the author supports the exclusion of mythology and a servile imitation of the classics from modern works, as well as of the three Aristotelian unities as far as modern tragedies were concerned.[86] In this letter, Manzoni also clarifies the main points of his poetical discourse and the characteristics every

---

[81] Giovanni Carsaniga, "The of Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)", op. cit., p. 402.
[82] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*. *Poetesse patriote nel Risorgimento (1821-1861).* Roma: Carocci, 2011, p.30.
[83] Alberto Cadioli, *Romanticismo Italiano,* op. cit., pp. 31-32.
[84] Ibid. pp. 32.
[85] Alessandro Manzoni, Preface to *Il Conte di Carmagnola*, 1820. In Alessandro Manzoni, *Opere*, a cura di Riccardo Bacchelli, Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1973, p. 2.
[86] Alessandro Manzoni, *Sul Romanticismo: lettera al Marchese Cesare D'Azeglio*, 1823, p. 8. https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/m/manzoni/sul_romanticismo/pdf/manzoni_sul_romanticismo.pdf

literary genre must possess, that is, "the useful as its goal, the truth as its subject and the interesting as its means."[87] If in this brief overview literary theorists appear to be all men that is because, apart from Madame de Staël with her article on translation that sparked the Romantic debate in 1816, no other significant female contributions have been passed on. Indeed, the actual number of women who wrote theoretical essays during the Italian Romantic age is currently unknown, but there is evidence that some female writers did not limit themselves to the composition of literary works. An interesting example is given by *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* which mentions poet Maria Giuseppina Guacci's theoretical point of view. Apparently, Guacci did share Manzoni's propensity for a poetry that could be useful, "between the lyrical and the didactic,"[88] as the poet herself wrote in her piece "Di qual poesia abbisogna il secolo presente", published in the Neapolitan magazine *Foglio settimanale di scienze lettere ed arti* (1839-1840).

The general condition of Italian women was as difficult and controversial as in many other European countries where women lacked civil rights, economic independence, and the recognition of a role in society, apart from that of wife and mother. Notwithstanding the complicated political situation of Italy and the differences among the various Italian reigns, which possibly influenced to a certain degree women's access to culture and their chances to fulfil their goal of becoming published authors, the element that appeared to have affected the most their chances to write was their social class. Diodata Saluzzo di Roero was born in Piedmont, a state ruled by a conservative monarchy, the house of Savoy, which was, as underlined by Franceschetti and Sanguinetti Katz, "tied to the politics of the church, and far from open to new ideas or the pursuit of artistic ideals," while it "spent all its time in war and political manoeuvers designed to maintain the independence of its little kingdom" and "it had scant interest in encouraging literary achievements."[89] Thus, Diodata Saluzzo could get a complete education and fulfil her goal of becoming a respected writer because she was born a Countess and her father, Count Giuseppe Angelo Saluzzo di Montesiglio, was not only "the commander in chief of the royal artillery"[90] but also a man of science who encouraged in every possible way his talented daughter to study, write and improve her literary skills. Of course, not

---

[87] Alessandro Manzoni, *Sul Romanticismo: lettera al Marchese Cesare D'Azeglio*, 1823, quoted in Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento*, Roma: Carocci, 2002, p.103.

[88] M.G. Guacci Nobile, "Di qual poesia abbisogna il secolo presente", *Foglio settimanale di scienza e lettere ed arti*, I, [1839], 11, pp.82-84. Quoted in Silvia Musella, Francesco Augurio, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol.60 (2003). Roma: Treccani. Original quote: "Tra il lirico e il didascalico."

[89] Antonio Franceschetti, Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)", in Rinaldina Russell (ed.), *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 375.

[90] Ibid. p.376.

many women from the Savoy's reign could have the same possibilities, especially those who were born in the lower classes where the illiteracy rates were extremely high even for men. Most of Italian women writers of the Romantic age, indeed, belonged to the aristocracy or the new middle class, as it was more common for wealthy girls to receive an education—which was useful also in the prospect of a good marriage—as well as to get access to books. Maria Teresa Mori explains that the variegated situation of girls' education in Italy was an extremely complex issue, and she underlines to what extent the evidence she studied and collected confirms that, from the North to the South, the majority of girls had to struggle to find the time and the resources to receive a proper education, among the various domestic tasks they were obliged to carry out during the day.[91] According to the first post-unity surveys reported in the volume *Figlie d'Italia*, the percentage of women's illiteracy was over 90% in most of the country, with a peak of 95% in the South and Sicily, and 96,5% in Sardinia.[92] Such numbers prove that even wealthy families were not used to letting girls study, and those women who received an education were a rare exception. In this regard, Soldani underlines that public opinion was decidedly hostile to women's literary activities, which were still stigmatised as masculine and, therefore, "unnatural" for the female gender.[93] Once again, it is striking to what extent in two very different countries as Italy and England, the stereotypes about women and literature that nourished a biased common thought were remarkably alike and produced a similarly unbalanced effect in society.

3.2 Italian Romantic women: between *salons*, *improvvisazione* and patriotic literature

A quite different situation was that of the literary circles of prominent cities as Milan, Florence and Naples, where writers, thinkers and philosophers, both Italian and European, often gathered in the salons of women intellectuals, who played a fundamental role in the circulation of ideas and the development of Italian culture. Although marginalized in the account of Italian 19th century literature, the salons of women intellectuals—such as Cornelia Rossi Martinetti,[94]

---

[91] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 26.
[92] Simonetta Soldani, "Prefazione", in Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 12.
[93] Ibid. p. 12.
[94] Cornelia Rossi Martinetti (1781-1867) was a famous italian *salonnière* of the first half of the 19th century. In her house, both in Bologna and in Rome, gathered illustrious poets and artists of the calibre of Stendhal, Ugo Foscolo, Antonio Canova and Vincenzo Monti, together with politicians and other eminent men of the time. Apparently, she wrote very few pieces, but her library, her salon and witty conversation have been described in many writings of all the men who had the pleasure to be her guests.
Source: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cornelia-rossi-martinetti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

Maria Giuseppa Guacci, Giustina Renier Michiel,[95] Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi[96] and Clara Maffei[97]—created crucial networks for the writers of the time and provided them with a safe place to meet and discuss their ideas.[98] For such reasons, it can be said that women's salons constituted a fundamental tool in the development of Italian literature. Although not all of them were published writers, women's contribution to the Italian cultural environment was nonetheless essential since, through their letters, activities and conversations, they managed to inspire and connect intellectuals, politicians and artists, while attaining for themselves a respected and influential public position. The recovery of Italian female writers of the first 19th century, which has begun in the last decades and is still very much in progress, is fundamental in order to demonstrate in what measure women have been important to literature, even though in different ways from their male counterparts, with whom they could neither share the same level of education nor the same uncomplicated entrance into the literary world. Women's relevance in the economy of the period is highlighted by the fact that a number of 19th century biographers undertook the project of listing the names and collecting the works of their coeval female writers. It is the case of intellectual Ambrogio Levati (1790-1841), who started in 1821 a biographical dictionary reserved to famous women (which remained unfinished); writer and biographer Ginevra Canonici Fachini (1779-1870), who compiled a register of Italian famous women from the 14th century to her own time; the Duchess d'Abrantès (1784-1838), who wrote *Les Vies de femmes célèbres* (1834) which included Italian women; and bibliographer Count Pietro Leopoldi Ferri, who reported in his archives that in 1842 his library included the works of 145 women active in the literary field between 1800 and 1840, and took note of six 19th

[95] Giustina Renier Michiel (1755-1832) was born in Venice and there lived most of her life, establishing a salon that was attended by illustrious Italian and European intellectuals as Ugo Foscolo, Antonio Canova, Madame de Staël, William August Schlegel, Ippolito Pindemonte and Lord Byron. She was also a respected translator of Shakespearean tragedies, and a writer. Among other works, she wrote a historical novel titled *Origine delle Feste Veneziane* (1829), which caused her some issues with Austrian censorship because of its patriotic nature. Source: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giustina-renier-michiel_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[96] Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi (1760-1836) was a Greek intellectual who moved to Venice after her marriage with an Italian nobleman. She was a writer, especially famous for her biographical collection *Ritratti* where she described meticulously a number of famous people she had met in her salon: Ippolito Pindemonte, Ugo Foscolo, Vittorio Alfieri, Melchiorre Cesarotti, Lord Byron and some others. Her house was indeed a gathering place for many poets and artists of the time, including the French politician and writer François-Réné de Chateaubriand, known to be the pioneer of French Romanticism. Source: Natalia Costa-Zalessow, *Scrittrici Italiane dal XVIII al XIX Secolo. Testi e critica,* op. cit., pp. 207-208.

[97] Clara Maffei (1814-1886) was a countess, hostess of a famous salon in Milan, and wife of the poet Andrea Maffei. In her house both literature and politics were animatedly discussed, given the difficult situation of the city under the Austrian domination which imposed a rigid censorship. Prominent figures as Giuseppe Verdi, Alessandro Manzoni, Honoré de Balzac, Massimo d'Azeglio and painter Francesco Hayez were friends with the countess and her habitual guests. Besides her illustrious circle, Clara Maffei was also an activist in Italian Risorgimento, and in particular in the revolts of 1848 in Milan, when she helped taking care of the wounded patriots. Source: Antonio Spinosa, *Italiane. Il lato segreto del Risorgimento.* Milano: Mondadori, 1994, 2005, pp. 189-215.

[98] Albert Sbragia, "Romanticism", op. cit., p. 405.

century editorial initiatives specifically reserved to women writers.[99] After consulting the above-mentioned lists, scholar Albert Sbragia identified a total number of female writers that approximately reaches two hundred names[100], that is, two hundred women who wrote at least a piece of literature, but were not considered valuable enough to be passed on and included in the history of Italian literature of the period. In this regard, Sbragia rightfully notices that,

> the fact that about 200 reputable women are not mentioned in the canon may suggest that, judging them as if they were men, their published work was not of the same standard; but it surely points to the fact that their real importance cannot be judged by that standard. A quick browse through the biographical and bibliographical data shows that they excelled in areas marginal to the literary canon, like translation and letter- writing.[101]

Apart from the realm of *salonnières* and that of translation—where women excelled, since the learning of foreign languages was part of the regular education of noble and wealthy girls—a female domain that has been unfairly neglected for centuries and was only recently brought back to light is that of extemporaneous poetry, also known with the Italian name of *Improvvisazione*, since Italian female improvisers were famous all over Europe. It is not a coincidence that Madame de Staël's *Corinne, ou l'Italie*, published in 1807 and considered the first female novel of the 19th century as well as an iconic work representing the new Romantic aesthetics, was set in Italy and inspired by the life of Corilla Olimpica,[102] probably the most celebrated extemporaneous poet of the time. Extemporaneous poets belonged to an oral tradition that dated back to ancient Greece; they did not write their verses, as they had to improvise a poem on the topics requested from time to time by the audience, following a pre-established metric.[103] The Academy of Arcadia was the institution that during the 18th century promoted the development and fame of extemporaneous poetry in the Italian peninsula, supporting its female members in their career as improvisers and legitimising their role as poets and public figures. Such a cultural network proved to be fundamental in women's approach to literature, giving them the chance to be recognised as professionals who "talked, wrote and acted surrounded by the applause of a public-audience."[104] In 1775 Corilla Olimpica, member of the Academy since 1753, was accepted as part of Roman nobility and was accorded a title because of her prestige in the literary field. She promoted a new idea of the female intellectual

---

[99] Albert Sbragia, "Romanticism", op. cit., p. 404.
[100] Ibid. p. 404.
[101] Ibid. p. 404.
[102] Corilla Olimpica, whose real name was Maria Maddalena Morelli, was born in 1727 in Pistoia, a small town of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, and died in Florence in 1800. Some of her poems were published in important poetical collections of the time. Source: Natalia Costa-Zalessow, *Scrittrici Italiane dal XVIII al XIX Secolo. Testi e critica,* op. cit., pp. 184-186.
[103] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 59.
[104] Elisabetta Graziosi, "Presenze femminili: fuori e dentro l'Arcadia", in M.L. Betri, E. Brambilla (eds.), *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*, Marsilio, Venezia, 2004, p. 85.

who was no longer an aristocratic amateur or a *salonnière*, but rather a professional in the art of improvisation, which was strictly connected with the political and cultural world, especially at the end of the century, when the Napoleonic wars were approaching.[105] Other *improvvisatrici* followed in Corilla Olimpica's footsteps, starting their careers in the salons of aristocratic women or female friends to later reach the theatres of various important cities and, in the end, to achieve the goal of performing in Rome—which Graziosi defines as "il gran teatro, la corte d'Europa e il gran salotto del mondo,"[106] especially for those who wanted to professionalise their literary activity and make it a characteristic element of their identity.[107] Among the names of prominent extemporaneous poets of the time, there were Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici (1755-1824, known in the Arcadia with the name Temide Parasside), Anna Parisotti Beati (Efiria Corilea), Livia Accarigi (Delinda Calcidica), Maria Fortuna (Isidea Egirena) and Maria Luisa Cicci (Erminia Tindaride). It is particularly important to briefly address the figure of Teresa Bandettini Landucci, who was considered to be the direct heir of Corilla Olimpica, because of her extraordinary skills.[108] Interestingly, Bandettini (1763-1837) was an orphan girl who had not received a regular education because of her personal and economic situation and, when she was fifteen, started working as a dancer, while reading whatever she could find in her free time. Helped by the Arcadian Count Ludovico Savioli, she unveiled her literary skills by writing a poem and worked as an improviser in various salons until 1794, when she was accepted as a member of the Academy of Arcadia with the name of Amarilli Etrusca, and became one of the most appreciated *improvvisatrici* of the period.[109] Her story is particularly important because it proves to what extent the profession of improvisers represented a crucial moment for women poets, even for those who were not born in wealthy families, to be considered as an essential and esteemed part of the cultural environment, as well as to be recognised as artists with an actual career in a "public" domain. There is evidence that women improvisers were often addressing social and political matters in their verses, and while it was regarded as improper for girls to discuss such issues publicly, *improvvisatrici* were allowed to do so, provided that they employed the metaphorical language of poetry.[110]

If the Arcadia was for both female and male writers a useful network to meet and work with other intellectuals, for women it also served as a sort of sorority that helped and supported them on many different levels, creating an almost genealogic connection between 18th century and

---

[105] Elisabetta Graziosi, "Presenze femminili: fuori e dentro l'Arcadia", op. cit., p. 85.
[106] Ibid. p. 85. English translation: "The great theatre, the court of Europe and the great salon of the world."
[107] Ibid. p. 86.
[108] Ibid. p. 86.
[109] Natalia Costa-Zalessow, *Scrittrici Italiane dal XVIII al XIX Secolo. Testi e critica.* op. cit., pp. 187-192.
[110] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 71.

19th century female writers. It is the case of famous improvisers Rosa Taddei (1799-1869) and Teresa Bandettini, who took under their wing poets Laura Beatrice Oliva and Luisa Amalia Paladini, who continued the work of their foremothers in reclaiming an acknowledged public position for female writers, and promoting female education as well as new roles for women in society. Other famous cases are those of writers and *salonnières* Giuseppina Guacci, Olimpia Rossi[111] and Angelica Palli,[112] who became patrons and supporters of other female poets and improvisers.[113] The creation of this female literary genealogy allowed female writers of the 19th century to feel part of a greater group of talented women who did not refrain from studying, writing and acting, as well as from taking political positions—as long as it all happened inside the golden gates of theatres, palaces and salons. In this regard, Maria Teresa Mori pinpoints that the link between the Academy, improvisation and the salons run by women in the 18th century represented a set of circuits, characterised by both frivolous and academic cultural sociability, that would nourish the development of women's political poetry and activism in the following century.[114]

> È da queste forme di protagonismo femminile che partono i percorsi che, attraverso il Romanticismo, portano alle donne impegnate nella letteratura patriottica, secondo un processo che rielabora e aggiorna contenuti e modalità ereditati dalla tradizione, ma senza distaccarsene del tutto.[115]

The fortune of Italian improvisers continued for the whole first half of the 19th century, and thanks to both Madame de Staël and Hester Lynch Piozzi—who described the profession in her 1789 text *Observations and Reflections Made in the Course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany*—it reached other European countries. In England, for example, improvisers became quite popular, so much so that in 1821 and 1824 Romantic writer Letitia Elizabeth Landon wrote two poems dedicated to the image of female extemporaneous poets: *Corinna* (1821) and *The Improvisatrice* (1824), both set in Italy. Unfortunately, the season of Arcadian improvisers ended with Giannina Milli, considered to be the last *improvvisatrice.* Between 1858

---

[111] Olimpia Rossi Savio was born in Turin in 1815 in a noble family. She was a writer and a patron; her salon was the most celebre in Turin, and she collected in a diary a depiction of all the people she met in her house, including famous actresses of the time Adelaide Ristori and Carlotta Marchionni. Olimpia Rossi actively supported Italian Risorgimento and collaborated with various magazines until she died in 1869, in Turin. Source: Antonio Spinosa, *Italiane: il Lato Segreto del Risorgimento.* Milano: Mondadori, 1994, 2005, pp. 219-234.

[112] Angelica Palli Bartolomei was born in Livorno in 1798 and began her career as an improviser, but she later become a respected poet, playwright and a *salonnière*. She was a fervent patriotic and in 1858 founded a weekly magazine, *Il Romito*, that addressed topics as art, literature and science but which also had a very clear political direction: the unification of Italy. Angelica Palli died in Livorno in 1875.
Source: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/angelica-palli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[113] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., pp. 60, 68.

[114] Ibid. p. 62.

[115] Ibid. p. 59. English translation: "It is precisely from these new forms of female protagonism that, through Romanticism, women engaged with patriotic literature took inspiration, following a process that elaborates and revises traditional contents and modalities, without completely breaking away from the canons."

and 1861 Milli was acclaimed as the poet of Risorgimento *par excellence*, as she embodied both the Romantic myth of Corinne and the domestic and bourgeois values of the new Italian society.[116]

Around the mid-19th century, the majority of women writers embraced the cause of Risorgimento. Therefore, their poetry was mainly identified by patriotic themes, tackled more or less explicitly, according to the specific state they were living in and the years in which they wrote their compositions. Topics connected to the love for the country, exhortations to revolt against the foreign domination, celebration of illustrious revolutionary figures who gave their life for the cause and so on, characterised the last years of Italian Romantic age and its literary production, and substituted the subjects which triumphed at the beginning of the 18th century—those inspired by Ossianic poetry and German and British Romanticism. It is particularly interesting to notice that, as the patriotic sentiment grew stronger at the approaching of mid-century, women and their bodies started to be increasingly identified with the Italian nation, and were thus portrayed as a territory to be loved and protected in any possible way, similarly to what happened in England. A further identification was that between the country and the iconic figure of the "mother", which stood both for the motherland and the nurturing woman who had ideally given birth to the young men who were fighting the foreign armies. Women's Romantic sensibility completely adhered to such a symbolic figuration of femininity, so much so that it is precisely in female compositions that it is possible to find explicit references to the role of woman as a beloved wife and, metaphorically, as a motherland to be defended in case of foreign invasions. The conquest of Italy was compared to the rape of the female body; thus preventing or avenging such a violence and dishonour was considered a valorous act for Italian men, even at the cost of their lives. According to Mori, the genealogy of female poetry collections dedicated to Risorgimento and its patriotic ideals started with *Poesie* by Angelica Palli Bartolomei. The collection was published in 1824 and addressed issues such as love for the country—defined as romantic and sentimental—but also, and inevitably, exile, grief and melancholy. Palli Bartolomei's poems were so intensely emotional and full of *pathos* to the point of adopting the typical themes and features of melodrama, the most performed and appreciated form of dramatic literature of the Italian 19th century.[117] Focused on the subject of contaminations and violations perpetrated by foreign powers are the texts written by Giuseppina Guacci, *Alle donne napoletane* (1832), Isabella Rossi,[118] *Lucrezia Mazzanti* (1841), Assunta

[116] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 63.
[117] Ibid. pp. 80-81.
[118] Isabella Rossi Gabardi Brocchi was born in Florence, main city of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, in 1808, the daughter of a lawyer and a female poet. She was a writer, a poet and a famous *salonnière*; her house in Florence

Pieralli,[119] *Giulia Aldobrandini* (1864), and Concettina Ramondetta,[120] *Le Nozze* (1850). Women's patriotic activism was also very much present in their everyday life and activities, since it was thanks to the practical help and financial support of wealthy female intellectuals that Italian Risorgimento ended victoriously. Indeed, women collected money and wrote pamphlets to promote the cause, maintained long correspondences with activists and politicians in order to serve as a connection between them, and sometimes they even physically participated in the upheavals or helped with the wounded. Of course, female participation was not generally approved by society. Women's desire of a unified country was often mixed with the hope of being fully recognised as fellow citizens and, therefore, their active involvement in the political destiny of Italy was seen as a fundamental condition for their access to citizenship. It is the case of writer and activist Laura Solera, who, in her article *Alle donne Italiane* (1858) aimed at promoting fundraisings endeavours among women, stated: "Facciamolo perché gli uomini la smettano di relegarci in cucina, casalinghe e modeste, e capiscano che possiamo essere loro compagne."[121] Nevertheless, Mori highlights how the notion of "citizenship" was perceived by women more as an acknowledged and celebrated sentiment of belonging to the country than in a strictly political meaning; they were so involved in promoting a re-evaluation of the female social role that only a few of them raised the issue of their civil rights for their sex.[122] Among the few women who made a solid effort towards a female political involvement, it is important to remember the name of Alinda Bonacci, the author of a manifesto subscribed by 275 women who declared that they wanted to vote, and if the annexation to the Savoy's reign could not guarantee them such a right, they would cease to support it.[123] During that period, women writers were also collaborating with many journals and periodicals, especially those addressing a female audience as *La Donna Italiana* (1848), with both articles and poems on the Italian political situation and with essays linked to the female role in society. In

was visited by illustrious Tuscan men and women intellectuals, as well as writers and politicians from other states. She actively participated in Italian Risorgimento and died in Florence in 1893.
Source: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/rossi-gabardi-brocchi-isabella_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[119] Assunta Pieralli was born in 1807 in a wealthy family who lived in the surroundings of Arezzo, which was part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Assunta was an intellectual and a poet, she was accepted in the Arcadia in 1828 with the name of *Partenia Idèa*, and died in Perugia in 1865. Source: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/assunta-pieralli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[120] Concettina Ramondetta Fileti was born in 1829 in Palermo, part of the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, in an aristocratic family. She was an illustrious poet both before and after the unification of Italy, and a revolutionary woman who strongly supported the revolts against the Bourbons. She died in 1900.
Source: http://www.enciclopediadelledonne.it/biografie/concettina-ramondetta-fileti/

[121] Laura Mantegazza, "Alle Donne Italiane", 1858, in S. Redaelli, R. Terruzzi, *Laura Mantegazza, la garibaldina senza fucile*, Verbania: Alberti, 1992, p. 98. Cited in Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p.131.
English translation: "Let's do this so that men stop relegating us into the kitchen, domestic and humble, and understand we can be their companions."

[122] Ibid. p. 130.

[123] Ibid. p. 130.

particular, didactic pieces on how women should behave in society and articles on girls' education were extremely popular since pedagogy was considered a suitable issue to be tackled by a female pen. Although women were often adhering to the patriarchal moral codes of the time, there were a number of female writers that carefully exposed ideas that could be regarded as revolutionary for the 19th century. Poet and pedagogist Luisa Amalia Paladini, who will be analysed in detail in one of the following chapters, wrote in her *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane* (1857) that culture and intelligence are the virtues that make a woman free, a partner and not a slave of the man: "La bellezza materialmente stupida è il pregio della odalisca, la bellezza congiunta alla cultura dell'ingegno, alla virtù dell'animo, alla purità del cuore, è il pregio della donna libera, compagna e non schiava dell'uomo."[124]

While all the female writers, artists and intellectuals mentioned in this paragraph were appreciated women of culture by their fellow colleagues, it should be underlined that the majority of them belonged to aristocratic families and, thus, their literary endeavours were carried out more on vocational premises than on the need to earn money to support themselves. Although in the 19th century a renewal in female customs and manners was beginning to take place, and between the 18th and the first decades of the 19th century some women did manage to impose themselves as professionals thanks to academies as that of the Arcadia, the actual number of female writers and artists was relatively small. As far as the common opinion was concerned, it was still unforgivable for a woman to affirm herself in a public space, to be capable of reasoning or even to step out of the house.[125] In particular, Mori argues that women writers' self-identification with the notion of "mother of the nation" contributed to their own imprisonment into stereotypes of domesticity and female virtuosity, limiting their role to a familial and educational domain that they celebrated and promoted as "inherently female" in the first place.[126]

---

[124] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane,* Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1857. In Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: vita e opere di una donna del Risorgimento.* Lucca: Fazzi Editore, 2012.
English translation: "A superficial and stupid beauty is the virtue of the odalisque, while beauty combined with the culture of intelligence, the goodness of the soul, the pureness of the heart, is the quality of a free woman, man's partner and not slave."
[125] Maria Teresa Mori, *Figlie d'Italia*, op. cit., p. 124.
[126] Ibid. pp. 129-130

4. Women writers in the Romantic socio-cultural context: Spain

4.1 Spanish Romanticism: a gendered revolutionary agenda

The spreading of Romantic ideals all over Europe between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century hit the Iberian Peninsula around the second decade of 1800 and raised a controversy in the country between the new theories exposed by Schlegel and a more classical approach to literature. Such polemics resembled very much what happened in Italy after Madame de Staël's article but developed differently in the following years, lingering on a pure theoretical level—made of debates among intellectuals on literary magazines—until 1834. As highlighted by Derek W. Flitter,

> Romantic theory as professed in Spain in the period prior to 1834 was both coherent and consistent; it was also, as we immediately detect, limited and incomplete, lacking any serious apprehension of literary Romanticism as a contemporary phenomenon: for this reason Shaw elects Alcalá Galiano's prologue to Rivas' *El moro expósito* ("The Foundling Moor") of 1834 as the first genuine Romantic manifesto.[127]

In his "La critica del Romanticismo Spagnolo e la sua evoluzione" (1982), Donald L. Shaw argues that there was no Romantic literature in Spain when the controversy began. Therefore, the theories postulated by critics as Böhl von Faber, López Soler and Durán were not based on the analysis of Spanish literary works, but rather on European thesis and texts, since it was after 1834 that Spain saw the publication of the first Romantic compositions.[128] The reasons why Romanticism arrived so late in Spain, compared to Germany, England, France or even Italy, are due to the historical and political situation of the country, which after the turn of the century experienced a series of internal upheavals that called into question its monarchical system. Spain was invaded by Napoleon in 1808 and, as Kirkpatrick underlines, such a moment both highlighted the weakness of the Spanish royal structure and gave a start to a mechanism of revolts—against the French, but also against the monarchy—that speeded up the process of independence of Spanish overseas colonies. After Napoleon left the peninsula in 1815, Spanish King Ferdinando VII came back on the throne and dismissed the Constitution of Cádiz drafted in 1812 by the liberal parliament and based on neo-classical cultural models of rationality and measure.[129] Neo-classicism, in opposition to the baroque style adopted by aristocrats and thus

[127] Derek W. Flitter, "Romanticism in Spain", In David T. Gies, *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 349.

[128] Donald L. Shaw, "La critica al Romanticismo spagnolo e la sua evoluzione", in *Romanticismo 1: atti del II congresso sul Romanticismo Spagnolo e Ispanoamericano. Aspetti e problemi del teatro Romantico.* Genova, Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Genova, Istituto di Lingue e Letterature Straniere, Centro di Studi sul Romanticismo Iberico, 1982, pp. 127-135.

[129] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: California, 1989, p. 38.

symbolic of the *ancien régime*, was still prominent in all the literary genres and could not be easily substituted by Romantic ideals. With the death of Ferdinando VII in 1833, a series of internal conflicts began to split the country in two. On the one side, those who supported Isabel II—legal heir to the throne as the first-born daughter of Ferdinando VII—together with her regent-mother María Cristina; on the other side, those who believed Carlos María, younger brother of Ferdinand, was in his right to be crowned. Carlos, who defended the absolutist monarchical system, was never sustained by the people, who remained loyal to the regent and later to Isabel II, a supporter of the liberal Constitution and of social policies. Therefore, when in 1839 "Carlists ended their armed rebellion . . . there remained no viable alternative to the transformation of the state and the modernization of the economy upon which the central government had cautiously embarked."[130] It is in this historical context that Romantic ideals made their debut in Spanish literary compositions, especially in the genres of poetry and dramatic production. Romanticism in Spain was seen, from the 1830s on, as a fundamental part of the liberal political agenda of the time, a cultural renovation that could bring a significant transformation on multiple levels, from the arts to society itself. In this sense, Spanish writers as Mariano José de Larra—according to Kirkpatrick, "the most self-conscious of the Spanish Romantics"[131]—perceived the role of culture similarly to the Romantic intellectuals based in Milan, who hoped for Romantic ideals to renovate literature and society, and to P.B. Shelley, who was probably the first to theorise the role of the poet as that of the "legislator of the world" in his *Defence of Poetry* (1819). Larra's hopes were conveyed through his words "Esperemos que dentro de poco podamos echar los cimientos de una literatura *nueva*, expresión de la sociedad *nueva* que componemos, toda de *verdad* como de *verdad* es nuestra sociedad,"[132] where particular emphasis was put on the words in italics "new" and "truth", which later recurred in his work, associated both with politics and literature. According to the critics of the time, the notion of "truth" had to be at the basis of politics and, therefore, also had to be the main focus of literature; if interests and rights were truths, then so were human passions and imagination.[133] Spanish literary Romanticism acquired with Larra a particular connection with the liberal political agenda of the time; he wished for a Romantic revolution that would eradicate literary canons and conventions in order to free itself from restrictions and be able to represent society at its best, in all its different and new connotations. Such premises recall Manzoni's theory according to which literature needed to have the truth as its subject and indeed, Manzoni,

[130] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p.39.
[131] Ibid. p. 40.
[132] Mariano José de Larra, *Obras de Mariano José de Larra*. Ed. C. Seco Serrano. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 127-130. 4 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960. In Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 41.
[133] Ibid. p. 41.

as well as Scott, strongly influenced the perception of history and the genre of the novel in the Spanish Romantic renewal.[134] Although we are addressing two countries with very different historical backgrounds, Italy and Spain had in common a rising bourgeoisie who, almost in the same years, wanted to be represented as a subject and longed for its subjectivity to be the centre of literary discourses. Indeed, "the liberation of the autonomous individual was in some sense—and with varying degrees of radicalism—the common denominator of the liberal revolution and the Romantic movement in Spain,"[135] and it was supported by the main Romantic writers of the time, as Larra, José de Espronceda, the Duke of Rivas, José Zorrilla, as well as women writers as Carolina Coronado and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. As a matter of fact, women played a fundamental part in Spanish Romanticism, although they were not taken into account in the revolution of society that male intellectuals were planning to carry out.

According to Kirkpatrick, the culture of separation of the sexes in the Iberian peninsula was spread and respected, so much so that both in public places as churches and theatres and in the house women could not wander freely but had reserved sections divided from those destined to men, especially in aristocratic or wealthy households.[136] With the liberal revolution that started in the first decades of the 19th century, such a strong physical separation of the sexes began to loosen, but only to be substituted by a more subtle segregation imposed by the rising bourgeois culture: a moral subjugation made of a stereotypical depiction of the feminine, social constraints and ethical codes which obliged women to act according to the rules of propriety in order to preserve their honour and reputation. Since they were neither perceived as individuals, nor as juridical subjects—they had no access to vote, could not make contracts or take legal actions[137]—women were completely excluded from the reformation of society and culture that male writers supported throughout the first half of the 19th century. Such a reformation left unaltered both gender and hierarchical class structures, since it also completely ignored the lower classes.[138] If the investigation and representation of the new Romantic (male) individualism found in the genres of poetry and drama their major tools of expression, the paradigms through which Romantic male writers tackled subjectivity in their plays and poems were extremely gendered as a result of the strong patriarchal system that ruled over Spanish society. History acquired a fundamental role in literature, which was supposed to celebrate the Spanish glorious historical past, especially the Middle Ages and its main protagonists. Consequently, historical dramas as *La conjuración de Venecia* by Martínez de Rosa, published

---

[134] E. Allison Peers, *Historia del Movimiento Romántico Español,* Madrid: Gredos, 1973, pp.155-156.
[135] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas,* op. cit., p. 48.
[136] Ibid. p. 59.
[137] Ibid. p. 49.
[138] Ibid. p. 60.

in 1830 in Paris but performed in Madrid for the first time in 1834, Larra's *Macías* (1834) and Duke of Rivas' *Don Álvaro, o la fuerza del sino* (1835) were so successful and became so popular that they established a new trend for Romantic theatre. What they all had in common was the depiction of a hero who follows his heart, explores his sentiments and his whole identity through a process of self-consciousness which occurs in parallel with the regular action of the plot, as well as the total rejection of the traditional Aristotelian unities and classical canons. Therefore, the Spanish Romantic hero can be considered an innovative character in relation to gender cultural presumptions, a man in search of himself and torn between his desires and a reality that no longer sees him as invulnerable and invincible. On the contrary, Romantic male writers' representation of female protagonists is not different from previous traditions. As Kirkpatrick underlines, using both Larra and Rivas as examples, female characters are described according to stereotypes, regarded as "incapable of corresponding to male passion and imagination" or "as repository of male honour."[139] Therefore, they were not seen as subjects with feelings and a complex interiority of their own to be explored, but rather as the objects of man's desire, whose identity "was constructed entirely in terms of social opinion."[140] Such a depiction of female characters very much corresponded to the common opinion about women in society, where their reputation and their honour defined them. Similarly to England and Italy, a woman considered disreputable lost her social value and, thus, was no longer eligible as a wife or accepted as a writer.[141] The same notion of the woman as the object of male gaze could be found in the poetry of José de Espronceda, "the most powerful poet of his generation" who "created the paradigmatic model of the Romantic lyrical self for Spanish poetry."[142] Espronceda focused his poetic discourse on a male subjectivity who wanted to free himself from constraints in order to fulfil all his dreams and passions. By doing so, he relegated the female into the

---

[139] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas,* op. cit., pp. 97-121.
[140] Ibid. pp. 97-121.
[141] The issues of honour, respectability and propriety are certainly characterized by a strong religious component, as both Catholicism in Italy and Spain, and Anglicanism in England, required women to be modest, chaste and humble, as well as to respect the authority of their parents, brothers and husbands, just like they were supposed to obey the diktats imposed by the Church itself. Chastity, in particular, was a crucial element to secure their honorability, and even the slightest doubt (no matter how irrational) about transgression could cost women their reputation and, at times, even their life. As Virginia Woolf reminds us in *A Room of One's Own*: "Chastity had then, and it has even now, a religious importance in a woman's life, and has so wrapped itself round with nerves and instincts that to cut it free and bring it to the light of day demands courage to the rarest. To have lived a free life in London in the 16th century would have meant for a woman who was poet and playwright a nervous stress and dilemma which might well have killed her." The situation in the 18th and 19th centuries was not different and it is for this reason that women were so preoccupied with defending their reputation from slander and ridicule that they sometimes opted for anonymous publications or pseudonyms. Again, as Woolf pinpoints, "publicity in women is detestable. Anonymity runs in their blood. The desire to be veiled still possess them." Once more it is possible to notice in these few lines the connection with religion, which imposed the veil on women for centuries as a symbol of their modesty and purity. See: Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. F, op. cit., p. 397.
[142] Ibid. p. 121.

antithetical category of object, *other* than the subject, and deprived women of their individualism and any form of authority over themselves. Female representation acquired a new connotation in 1842 with poet Pedro Sabater, who delineated a female image which would define the role of women in society until the end of the century and, interestingly, very much resembled the cultural gendered category that caged women at the end of English Romanticism and in the Victorian era: "el ángel del hogar", the angel in the house. In his article "La mujer", Sabater identifies the woman as "una especie de ángel descendido del cielo"[143] who is sent to earth in order to personify love; all the other passions that could be found in her heart, as pride or vanity, were however subordinated to love, that was her all.[144] To such domestication of the feminine also contributed the fact that women were considered to be irrational and, thus, intellectually inferior to men, not apt to a literary career but rather to caregiving activities for their families.

4.2 Spanish women writers and the female Romantic subjectivity

Nevertheless, as reported in Marina Mayoral's volume, around 1840 the Spanish press saw an unprecedented increase in the number of female writers, and in the publication of novels, poems and articles penned by women.[145] The first to publish a poetry collection was Josefa Massanés[146] in 1841 with her *Poesías*, followed by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who also saw her novel *Sab* coming out in the same year; Amalia Fenollosa,[147] whose poems appeared in various journals both in 1841 and in 1845, and Carolina Coronado,[148] who gathered all her poems in a book that was printed in 1843.[149] Many other women throughout the peninsula started writing and publishing on different magazines, but they rarely focused on one genre, and thus, together with journal essays, Spanish women writers challenged themselves with

---

[143] Pedro Sabater, "La mujer", in *El Semanario Pintoresco Español*, 2d ser. 4 (1842): 115-116.

[144] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 57.

[145] Susan Kirkpatrick, "La 'Hermandad Lírica' de la década de 1840", in Marina Mayoral (ed.), *Escritoras Románticas Españolas*, Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, pp. 25-41.

[146] Josefa Massanés Dalmau was a poet and dramatist born in 1811. She collaborated with various magazines, and was appointed honorary member of the Academia de Buenas Letras in 1838 and of the Círculo Científico-Literario de Almería in 1858. She died in 1887, after winning an award from the Academia Bibliográfica de Lérida in 1878. Source: Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*. Vol.I. Madrid: Publicación de la Asociación de directores de la escena de España, p. 863.

[147] Amalia Juana María Fenollosa Peris was a novelist, poet and dramatist born in 1825, daughter of a doctor. She collaborated with many periodicals and was a member of the Academia Literaria de Santiago. She died in 1869. Source: María del Carmer Simón Palmer, *Escritoras Españolas del Siglo XIX: manual bio-bibliográfico.* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1991.

[148] Carolina Coronado was a dramatist and a poet born in 1820. She received a Catholic education at home and literature classes from a professor in her hometown, despite her family being against it. She was famous mainly as a poet and, in 1847, she received an honorary tribute at the Liceo de Madrid, where she was celebrated by the queen and prominent intellectuals of the time. She died in 1911 in Lisbon. Source: Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 703-704.

[149] Susan Kirkpatrick, "La 'Hermandad Lírica' de la década de 1840", op. cit., p. 25.

drama, novels, poetry and prose. In a society that did not see them, female writers managed to exploit the affirmation of liberal and Romantic ideals of subjectivity to find room for themselves to express their individuality. Of course, such a rising in women's writings was limited to the upper and upper-middle classes of society. Just like in Italy, the majority of female writers belonged to aristocratic and wealthy families or enlightened households that believed in girls' schooling—as in the case of liberals who considered education essential to become good wives and mothers. A research conducted on literacy in Spain in 1841, and reported by Kirkpatrick, showed that only ten percent of the population could read and write and, of such a group, no more than the two and a half percent were women—including the lower classes, which were probably the smallest part. As in other European countries, girls were often educated at home, as it happened to Carolina Coronado and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, or in female schools, where nonetheless the subjects they studied were not the same taught in male colleges. Indeed, the subjects studied by girls were more oriented to "properly female" activities[150]—such as sewing, as in the case recounted by Concepción Arenal.[151] Despite the difficulties encountered by women in approaching education and, later, the literary world, Spanish Romanticism saw a great concentration of female writers, who were very much aware of the changes that were happening both in society and in the cultural environment, and managed to seize the moment to affirm themselves and their poetical discourse. The focus on subjectivity that characterised the Romantic poetry of male authors was featured, of course, also in the female production, where it acquired a further connotation which delineated the construction of a new female identity.

The models of femininity proposed by male writers in their texts had in common a series of elements that justified the social subordination and subjugation of women; whether they were seen as irrational, too sentimental or incapable of deep feelings, shallow and immature, they were depicted as inferior and thus not worthy of being men's equals in society. The only exception, as we have seen, was the stereotype—spread in other countries as well—of the "angel of the house"; perfect, proper, lovable and valuable as long as she remained in her domestic sphere and acted according to the social rules imposed on her role. Such a binarism implied that for women there was no chance of being something in between an inferior irrational creature and a superior celestial soul, and thus, no opportunity of expressing their individuality with all the nuances employed by their male colleagues in describing the new Romantic subject.

---

[150] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas,* op. cit., pp. 66-67.

[151] Concepción Arenal was an essayist, poet and journalist born 1820. She was a feminist and an activist, she founded a magazine in 1865, *La voz de la Caridad*, and wrote extensively in many different genres, including essays on women's education. She died in 1893. Source: María del Carmer Simon Palmer, *Escritoras Españolas del Siglo XIX: manual bio-bibliográfico,* op cit.

For this reason, when women writers started to write following the so-called "Romantic renewal,"[152] they appropriated male models and elaborated them in order to question and challenge the contradictory and stereotypical female images that were appearing in magazines, poems and dramas of the time. The act of writing in itself, extremely powerful because of its generative dimension, represented for women a strong statement on their position in the social system as individuals with a body and a mind of their own, with a subjectivity that could not be assimilated or reduced to an empty simulacrum. In this regard, Kirkpatrick underlines that

> in assuming the position of writing subject, a position that had been marked out primarily by and for men, writers like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Carolina Coronado, and Cecilia Boehl were forced to deal with the relation of gender to subjectivity as an issue to be resolved in some way by the act of writing.[153]

The *genius* women writers were looking up to was embodied by figures as Sappho and Madame de Staël's Corinne, who symbolised an inherently female Romantic sensibility and the tragic destiny of literary women, torn between their aspirations and social acceptance, and thus doomed to a miserable life. While both Carolina Coronado and Getrudis Gómez de Avellaneda included imitations of Sappho in their poetry collections, it was the latter who identified the most with the Italian *improvvisatrice*, employing de Staël's heroine as a model to construct her own identity as well as to delineate the female characters of her texts.[154] Besides Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Carolina Coronado—certainly two of the most prolific female writers of the Spanish Romantic age, in various genres—the 1840s saw the birth and development of what Kirkpatrick defines the "Hermandad Lírica", a sort of lyrical sisterhood that included a great number of female writers who inspired and aided each other throughout the whole country.[155] Together with the names already mentioned above, talented writers as Robustiana Armiños,[156] Dolores Cabrera y Heredia,[157] Rogelia León,[158] Victoria Peña, Manuela

[152] E. Allison Peers, *Historia del Movimiento Romántico Español*, op. cit., pp. 155-156.
[153] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 132.
[154] Ibid. p. 81.
[155] Susan Kirkpatrick, "La 'Hermandad Lírica' de la década 1840", op. cit., pp. 25-41.
[156] Robustiana Armiño de Cuesta was born in Gijón in 1821 in a wealthy family. She wrote poems, essays and collaborated with various magazines. She died in Madrid in 1890.
Source: http://escritoras.com/escritoras/Robustiana-Armino
[157] Dolores Cabrera y Heredia was born in 1828, the daughter of a soldier. She studied in a monastery and, from an early age, showed an inclination towards poetry; her poems were indeed very much celebrated, so much so that she was appointed Academic and Professor at the Academia de Ciencias y Letras del Liceo Artístico y Literario de Granada in 1860. After receiving many honors from different academies, she died in 1899. Source: Simón Palmer, María del Carmen, *Escritoras españolas del siglo XIX. Manual bio-bibliográfico*, op cit., p. 834.
[158] Rogelia Léon Nieto was born in Granada in 1828, and was a poet, dramatist, novelist and essayist. Her drama, *Fanni la escoscesa*, was written and 1857 and performed in Granada, but it was never published. She died in 1870, after collaborating with many cultural and literary institutions.
Source: http://www.academiadebuenasletrasdegranada.org/leonnietorogelia.pdf

Cambronero,[159] Vicenta García Miranda and Angela Grassi[160] corresponded regularly, wrote and dedicated poems to one another, and even helped each other publish their works.[161] García Miranda, for instance, was a widow with very little education, living in a small village, when she read Coronado's poetry and decided to write poems herself. Her texts were later sent to Coronado, who managed to get them published on a periodical, introduced by her own words. Such a début convinced García Miranda to keep up her writing and, in a short time, she began collaborating with magazines all over the country.[162] These poets employed the new Romantic ideals and literary principles to reclaim their right to write and to exist in the public sphere, tackling themes as women's unhappy fate, female oppression and slavery in a patriarchal society, while building an unprecedented female literary network. Although their vindications could not be considered as explicit activism, their poems openly described all the difficulties and torments of being a woman and a writer in a masculine cultural environment, underlining the importance of the female subject; the "I" speaking for herself, talking about herself and her experiences as a human being belonging to the discriminated gender. Poet Encarnación Calero de los Ríos, for example, wrote about a tender feeling that made her sigh about female fate and raise to the stars her lamentation and torment:

> En armónico acento
> Una voz escuché, que en dulce lira,
> Con tierno sentimiento,
> Sobre el destino femenil suspira,
> Y eleva al firmamento
> Su queja, su canción y su tormento.[163]

Even more explicit about the different socio-cultural conditions that female and male writers faced ordinarily in Spanish society was Coronado's poem "A la señorita doña Encarnación Calero de los Ríos", published in 1846:

> Al fin, de las hembras es el llanto,
> Y cantar sin gemir, cantar placeres

[159] Manuela Cambronero de la Peña was born in Spain but it is unknown the exact date and place, although some scholars believed it was around 1820 in Galicia. She wrote poems and dramas, and collaborated with various periodicals. The date of her death is unknown but certainly after 1852, the year she corresponded with Amalia Fenollosa and published her poetry collection dedicated to her husband. Source: Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit. pp. 678-679.

[160] Angela Grassi y Techi was a playwright, poet and essayist born in Italy in 1823, the daughter of a musician. She moved to Spain with her parents in 1829, where she studied to become a teacher. She managed to have her dramas performed and she ran the journal *El Correo de la Moda* of Madrid from 1867 to 1883, when she died. Source: María del Carmer Simon Palmer, *Escritoras Españolas del Siglo XIX: manual bio-bibliográfico,* op cit., pp. 335-347.

[161] Susan Kirkpatrick, "La 'Hermandad Lírica' de la década 1840", op. cit., p. 26.

[162] Ibid. p. 28.

[163] Encarnación Calero de los Ríos, "A la señorita doña Carolina Coronado", in *El Pensil del Bello Sexo* 8 (11 Jan. 1846): 66-67. In S. Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 84.

> Es proprio de varón, no de mujeres.
> . . . .
> Canta la vida triste, amiga mía,
> Que ellos han de cantar la placentera;
> Y pues que suyos son placeres y risa,
> Que dejen el llanto a la poetisa.[164]

Interestingly, the similitude between the conditions of women and slaves was a topic that Spain and England had in common. Both of them were, in different periods, colonial Empires whose economy very much relied on slaves' labour and, although such a comparison did not take into account the real differences between women and slaves—as postcolonial criticism has rightly pinpointed—the marginalization and oppression women often experienced in both countries led them to feel as if they were physically deprived of their freedom. A poignant example is García Miranda's poem "A las españolas" (1851):

> ¡Oh, mujeres! luchar a vida o muerte,
> Sin que el ánimo fuerte
> Desmaye en la pelea a que briosas
> Algunas se han lanzado
> Del sexo esclavizado
> Por romper las cadenas ominosas.[165]

Susan Kirkpatrick translates the passage as "Oh, women! Fight for life or death without letting your strong purpose faint in the struggle into which some of you have boldly thrown yourselves to break the hateful chains of the enslaved sex."[166] The theme of slavery also recurred in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's novel *Sab*, set in her motherland, Cuba—a Spanish colony at the time—and featuring a young slave boy as the protagonist and two girls whose destiny is strictly linked to that of their slave/friend Sab, and equally doomed.

As in England and Italy, poetry was regarded as the Romantic genre *par excellence*, that which could better convey modern and revolutionary themes, as well as an innovative perception of the self. It was particularly true for women writers, who were slowly acquiring a new self-consciousness and through their verses—which were often published in periodicals or poetry collections—could assert their right to speak their mind and impose their presence in the public sphere, in the cultural environment and among the intellectuals of the time. Nevertheless, Spanish writers, like their English colleagues, experimented both the genre of drama and fiction with great fortune, as demonstrated by the success gained by Cecilia Boehl with her novels and by Getrudis Gómez de Avellaneda with her plays. As we will see in the next paragraph, theatre

---

[164] Carolina Coronado, "A la señorita doña Encarnación Calero de los Ríos" in *El Pensil del Bello Sexo* 25 Jan. 1846: 85-86. In S. Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 84.
[165] Vicenta García Miranda, "A las españolas", in *Gaceta del Bello Sexo* 15 Dec. 1851: 10-11. In S. Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., pp. 84-85.
[166] Ibid. p. 85.

was a fundamental institution in Spain and underwent a series of important changes during the 19th century, playing a crucial role in the economy of Spanish Romanticism. Such changes allowed many more women to pursue a career as playwrights, with both positive outcomes and inevitable criticism on the impossible coexistence of a reputable woman and a dramatist in the same person. The reception of female writers was indeed very mixed and controversial; attacks to female writers about why they should not engage with literature were coming both from men and women themselves. In 1835, writer Cecilia Boehl—also known by her pseudonym Fernán Caballero—wrote a letter to the editors of the Romantic periodical *El Artista*, which had published her text "La madre, o el combate de Trafalgar", in order to dissuade them from issuing again her work because it was her "deep conviction that the narrower the circle that forms a woman's sphere, the better suited to her happiness and that of those around her," claiming that she would "never attempt to widen it."[167] She continued affirming that "not only have I never intended to write for the public, but further it is my system, as much as in theory as in practice, that the fragile hand of a lady is better adorned by the needle than by the pen,"[168] and yet she was one the most successful novelists of the Spanish 19th century. The idea that women should remain inside the house and dedicate their time to domestic activities was prominent all over Europe, and it is exactly on such a premise that Spanish journals based their criticism on female writers. In 1836 *El Jorobado* published a series of satirical attacks against women poets, the vindications of women's rights and women's magazines in order to demonstrate the absurdity of female emancipation. Indeed, in 1841—the year Gómez de Avellaneda and Massanés' poetry collections came out—a satirical vignette titled "El mundo al revés" was issued by the magazine, depicting a woman in the act of writing poetry at her desk while her miserable husband was sewing behind her.[169] As it happened in England to Mary Robinson, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Barbauld and many others, the harsh criticism that hit Spanish female writers was not connected to their poetical skills and did not raise questions on their ability to produce good literature. Such criticism was rather centred on slandering their private life and pinpointing the fact that since they were women, they should not write, no matter their actual prowess in the field. A famous attack "*ad feminam*", as Kirkpatrick defined it, was directed against George Sand in 1842 in the course of a debate on the *Revista de Madrid* with journalist José María Quadrado, who affirmed that "George Sand is the most immoral of writers and Madame de Dudevant the most indecent of women."[170] In saying so, Quadrado not only

---

[167] Diego de Valencina (ed.), *Fernán Caballero: Cartas*. Madrid: Sucesores de Hernando, 1919, p. 45. In Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., pp. 244-245.
[168] Ibid. p. 45.
[169] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., pp. 87-88.
[170] Ibid. p. 88.

attacked the writer and her reputation but implied that a woman who chose to go public with her literary production was all the more shameful and unworthy, "contaminated"[171] by an act—that of writing—which was not at all feminine. Of course, there were writers and editors that approved women's literary endeavours and promoted them publishing their works, as well as Academies and institutions which favourably accepted female intellectuals among its members but such a support did not come unconditionally, and the condition was often the same: women should preserve their reputation and act according to their gender.

[171] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas*, op. cit., p. 88.

CHAPTER II

Women and Theatre in the Romantic Era: An Overview

1. Theatre and drama in the Romantic age: a masculine environment?

1.1 Romantic theatre and drama: genres, legislation and controversies

Theatre has always played a fundamental role in British culture. The first public representations in English date back to the Middle Ages, although it can be said that English theatre as we know it was born between the 16th and 17th centuries with the construction of actual theatre buildings and the establishment of permanent acting companies, comprising exclusively men and boys. Indeed, although acting as a real profession was born around 1500, in England it was only with the Restoration in 1660 that women were allowed on stage. Towards the turn of the 18th century, drama slowly became more related to domestic issues and everyday life, often dealing with social and political matters of the time in a satirical form. Such a tendency was perceived as a threat by the government who, in 1737, issued a *Licensing Act* that deeply affected the theatrical environment for the following century. The act was aimed at tightening the control over plays and performances by declaring that only those theatres which were granted a royal license could stage spoken dramas—that is tragedies and comedies—and that every play written in England needed to be submitted to and officially approved by the Lord Chamberlain's office before it could reach the stage.[1] As underlined by Ellen Donkin, "this manoeuvre by the Crown was initially rationalised as an economic contingency"[2] as licensed theatres were to pay a fee to the Crown, but "more recent scholarship has suggested that limiting dramatic representation in London facilitated political surveillance and control."[3] Indeed, an Examiner of Plays designated by the Lord Chamberlain himself had the task to read such texts and verify they did not contain subversive ideas or inappropriate depictions of the country and its ruling class and, in case they did, he had the power to apply censure, banning them from the stage in patented theatres. During the whole English Romantic period, dramatists had to cope with the fact that the licensed theatres in London were just two, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and their works could only be performed if they pleased the current managers and passed censorship. Moreover, such a regulation favoured the development of a significant number of unlicensed theatres where unspoken dramas were performed; it is in fact in the 18th century that new dramatic genres as farce, burletta, pantomime and melodrama reached their highest peak of popularity. Of course, censorship also had a substantial impact on the literary scene of the time, since both male and female playwrights did not devote their careers only to theatrical texts, but were writers in a

---

[1] Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act. Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 1-30.
[2] Ibid. p. 3.
[3] Ibid. p. 3.

broader sense of the term, competing with many different genres.[4] Interestingly, as highlighted by Worrall in the introduction to his *Theatrical Revolution*, drama was the only literary genre subjected to such strict supervision:

> in the age of Blake, Byron, the Shelleys, Keats, and Wordsworth, during a period notable for the way in which its poetry and novels reflected with exceeding complexity the period's considerable political controversies resulting from the French Revolution, a long and divisive war, an unprecedented industrial revolution coupled to sporadic social unrest, stage drama was the only literary form continuously under Government regulation.[5]

Therefore, it is fundamental to pinpoint that the number of dramas that reached the stage during the Romantic age in English licensed theatres were a small part of the totality of plays that were written in the period. Those dramas that did not pass censorship could find their way to an audience thanks to private performances, usually in salons or clubs, or to printed versions of the texts, which were sold and thus read as any other literary work. Critics have coined the term *closet drama* specifically to designate those plays which, for some reason, were not staged but had, in any case, their own circulation. If frequently closet dramas were plays not accepted by the Lord Chamberlain's office, there was a number of plays that were published and not performed because of a refusal from theatre managers, who did not want to invest in those representations.[6] Hence, if censorship was hitting male and female dramatists in the very same way, theatre directors were much more hostile towards women's texts than with men's, as that of the playwright was still not regarded as a suitable job for a woman and, as a consequence, women were not judged according to the same criteria as men.[7] Julie Carlson suggests that Romantic theatre was culturally associated with the feminine, and as the feminine, required male surveillance and control.[8] Therefore, plays written by women were not only supposed to be "appropriate" for the stage but also to discuss "appropriate" issues for their gender. In order to meet the requirements imposed on them, there is evidence that female playwrights used to practice self-censorship even before submitting a text to the Examiner of Plays so that they could avoid adverse criticism and personal attacks. For such reasons, women playwrights became extremely skilful at hiding their criticism towards social and political issues in their

---

[4] David Worrall, *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 33-68.
[5] Ibid. p. 2.
[6] Catherine Burroughs, "The Persistence of Closet Drama: Theory, History, Form". In Tracy C. Davis, Peter Holland, *The Performing Century. Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 215-235.
[7] Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act. Women Playwrights in London 1776-1829*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 1-30.
[8] Julie Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2007.

texts, employing literary stratagems, metaphors, hints and allegories that masked the messages they wanted to convey.[9]

In this regard, as suggested by Bennett, closet drama could also serve the purpose of publicizing a play, and thus be considered as a "marketing tool—one that might urge enough individual enthusiastic readers to want to be a collective theatre audience and might persuade theatre managers of the presence of a predetermined popularity (generated by and through her readership)."[10] For instance, Joanna Baillie, the most prominent playwright of the time, published three texts of her *Miscellaneous Plays* "in a printed form, that is, closet drama,"[11] after they were repeatedly refused for representation by different theatres, with the hope to gain the readers' favor and, thus, convince managers that it would have been a good economic operation to put them on stage.

> So strong is my attachment to the drama of my native country . . . that a distant and uncertain hope of having even but a very few of the pieces I offer to the public represented to it with approbation, when some partiality for them as plays that have been frequently read shall have put into the power of future managers to bring them upon the stage with less risk of loss that would be at present incurred, is sufficient to animate me to every exertion that I am capable of making.[12]

What should be highlighted about closet drama is that its prominence and development between the 18th and the 19th century had a crucial role in the creation of an erroneous perception of English Romantic drama as anti-theatrical. For more than a century, the British Romantic age was regarded as a period dominated by a strong opposition between page and stage, with the plays of many prominent writers of the time printed on paper and a void of solid original dramas to be performed in theatres. Indeed, stages were often monopolized by spectacular performances full of special effects and lacking in contents, but nonetheless appreciated by a public "more intent upon talking, eating, and flirting than in watching great plays."[13] Some scholars blamed such an apparent separation between "theatrical performance and poetic drama"[14] on the authors, who seemed to prefer writing their plays for a *theatre of the mind*, whose "performance" took place directly in the minds of the public while reading the text, by means of their intellectual and imaginative skills—"so that the reader can create 'a stage of his

---

[9] Katherine Newey, "Women and History on the Romantic stage: More, Yearsley, Burney, and Mitford". In Burroughs, Catherine, *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 79-97.
[10] Susan Bennett, "Outing Joanna Baillie", in Catherine Burroughs (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance and Society 1790-1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000, p. 167.
[11] Ibid. p. 167.
[12] Joanna Baillie, "Preface to Miscellaneous Plays", viii-ix, cited in Bennett, p. 167.
[13] Jeffrey N. Cox, "Reviewing Romantic Drama", in *Literary Compass* 1 (2004), RO 096 1-27. Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 2.
[14] Ibid. p. 2.

own in the reader's fancy.'"[15] Therefore, for a very long time, the term "closet drama" also included all those plays that were regarded by the critics as unfit for the stage, "un-performable" or simply written to be published instead of interpreted in theatres. Nevertheless, what critics as Jeffrey Cox and Catherine Burroughs have quite recently argued in their works is the necessity to rethink the category of the "closet", deconstructing its supposed anti-theatricality and opposition to the stage, and regarding it as a different, more experimental way of perceiving theatre, drama and performance. The "closet" could then indicate both a metaphorical and a real space, often within the house, where "a variety of theatrical activities—many particular to women—took place;"[16] a private area where writers, especially female, had the freedom to practice their dramatic skills. To reinforce this idea, Burroughs refers to Joanna Baillie's theatre theories, according to which, "closet spaces were sources of passionate, valuable, and instructive drama—the literal site where one can trace the progress of 'the soul' as it etches its passions on the countenances of men and women during their most private moments."[17] Overall, it can be said that closet drama strongly characterised the English Romantic theatrical scene, but it did so without the pretension of substituting the *mise-en-scène* or the will to raise itself above the conventional stage representations. Whether the plays regarded as "closet dramas" were labelled as such because they did not pass censorship or were not accepted by theatre managers, whether they were "closeted" and thus written to be performed in a private space or to be printed and read—and thus staged "mentally"—it is fundamental to underline that dramatists almost certainly thought of them in relation to the theatre of the time and gave them the conformation of actual plays. Indeed, as Jeffrey N. Cox pinpoints, "the contents of the 'closet' changed as the relation between writers' imaginations and various practical limitations of the stage shift."[18] Therefore, "when we read the drama of the period, even so-called closet plays, we must always read with an eye to the theatre."[19] The division between patented and unpatented theatres in Britain, in place until 1843, allowed the representation of tragedies and comedies in only two theatres but could not forbid other types of plays to be performed on all the other stages, as well as it could not prevent a certain degree of influence between the traditional genres and the newborn ones. The success of Romantic melodrama,[20] a mixture of

---

[15] Leigh Hunt, *Liberty*, Iiii, cited in Jeffrey N. Cox, "Re-Viewing Romantic Drama", op. cit., p. 6.
[16] Catherine B. Burroughs, *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1997, p. 8.
[17] Ibid. p. 12.
[18] Jeffrey N. Cox, "Reviewing Romantic Drama", op. cit., p. 7.
[19] Ibid. p. 7.
[20] The first melodrama labeled as such in its *libretto* was "A Tale of Mystery" by Thomas Holcroft, performed for the first time in Covent Garden Theatre, in 1802. Nevertheless, a number of dramas featuring many elements typical of melodrama already appeared in the late 18th century.

tragedy and music free from any canonical constrictions, was so great that during the 19th century it started to be performed in legitimate theatres to meet the desires of a new and more heterogeneous audience. In Italy, there was no strict legislation regulating theatres and drama, even though a certain degree of censorship was in place when plays dealt directly with political issues, according to the governments of each Italian State, but especially enforced by the Austrian Empire.[21] Nevertheless, a similar situation to England could be found in the peninsula, which saw a decline in the popularity of the canonical genres of tragedy and comedy in favor of musical representations as opera and melodrama.[22]

The 18th century in Italy saw the rise and reformation of melodrama and comedy with Pietro Metastasio and Carlo Goldoni, both hugely appreciated internationally, and, in its second half, the great fortune of classical tragedy with Vittorio Alfieri—considered by some critics as proto-romantic in his themes but extremely loyal to the canons of the genre in his style. Italian melodrama lived a new life in the 18th century thanks to a reformation of the genre enacted by Metastasio, who turned the *libretto*, and thus the content of the play, into the core of the representation, giving new balance to the elements that constituted the performance: dramatic text, music and singing.[23] Comedy as well was reformed in the same century and, after the decline of the popular *Commedia dell'Arte*, reached great fortune thanks to Carlo Goldoni. Goldoni's reform managed to introduce a script to be followed and interpreted, instead of a performance mainly based on improvisation, and changed the audience's relationship with the stage employing a witty experimentation of various settings, tropes and themes.[24] With Alfieri and his popular tragedies as *Mirra* and *Saul*, Italian theatre of the 18th century acquired the prominence, both at a national and international level, that it had not enjoyed in the past centuries when European playwrights dominating Italian stages had often shadowed it. Such fortune, though, did not last for long and, in the first half of the 19th century—while plays by Goldoni, Alfieri and other famous dramatists of the past were still staged with success—there was no significant production of new dramatic works. Indeed, scholar Giovanni Antonucci reports that Romantic theatre in Italy was limited to very few texts—which were not even excellent—but it was nonetheless characterised by a flourishing of lyrical dramas and melodramas, thanks to composers as Verdi, Bellini and Donizetti, who can be regarded as the

---

[21] Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, Roma: Newton, 1995, pp. 43-68.
[22] Jeffrey N. Cox, "The Death of Tragedy; or the Birth of Melodrama." In Tracy C. Davis, Peter Holland, *The Performing Century. Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 161-181.
[23] Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, Roma: Newton, 1995, pp. 43-44.
[24] Ibid. pp. 49-50.

veritable dramatists of the Romantic age.[25] Even Alessandro Manzoni—who reformed the canons of the tragedy in Italy, theorised Italian Romanticism and wrote the two main tragedies of the time, *Il Conte di Carmagnola* (1820) and *Adelchi* (1822)—was not as successful as a dramatist as he was as a novelist with his masterpiece *I Promessi Sposi*. Interestingly, the two Italian Romantic tragedies *par excellence* were published many years before they were staged for the first time—*Il Conte di Carmagnola* in 1828 and *Adelchi* in 1843—since they were regarded as more suitable to be read than performed because of the complexity of their plots and structures. As a matter of facts, the actual "theatricality" of Manzoni's tragedies has been reclaimed only recently by some Italian scholars who questioned the criterions that led to the dismissal of such plays as non—or hardly—performable, similarly to what happened in England with Shelley or Byron's "closet dramas." Claudio Meldolesi e Ferdinando Taviani underline that even though Manzoni's tragedies did not contribute to the way drama was staged, they deeply innovated the way "drama was *thought*:" that is, the approach to the script, the interchange of lyrical and more dynamic passages, as well as the alternation between dialogues, monologues and choral acting.[26] Indeed, what Romantic writers wanted to achieve was a new concept of dramatic production, far from the classical established canons, not modelled on rigid aesthetic rules, but rather based on a modern notion of history whose representation on stage could display veritable "shreds of life" ("brandelli di vita") in the natural order of everyday life.[27] Despite the efforts enacted to bestow on this innovative concept of drama the same dignity and prominence as the classics, it was generally not very much appreciated—neither in the theatrical environment of the time nor by the audience, who preferred more spectacular, and musical, forms of entertainment.[28] The tragedy that gained the greatest success during the first half of the 19th century was certainly the Romantic *Francesca da Rimini* by Silvio Pellico, while dramas by other famous writers as Foscolo or Diodata Roero di Saluzzo, were not celebrated, or even staged.[29]

The reformation of theatre and drama occurred in Spain around the 1820s, when Romantic ideas started to spread among intellectuals before reaching the practice of literature in the 1830s. After the Napoleonic wars and the restoration of Fernando VII on the Spanish throne in 1814, censorship was strongly reinforced throughout the country for every literary and dramatic genre. In the same period, theatres often went bankrupt because of the bad relationship between managers, actors and the government, which was supposed to regulate the stages. In this

[25] Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, Roma: Newton, 1995, p. 62.
[26] C. Meldolesi e F. Taviani, *Teatro e Spettacolo nel primo Ottocento.* Bari: Laterza, 1991, 1998, p. 98.
[27] Ibid. pp. 70-90.
[28] Ibid. pp. 70-90. See also: Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, op. cit., pp. 62-63.
[29] Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, op. cit., p.63.

complicated situation, Juan de Grimaldi, a Frenchman living in Spain, asked Madrid's municipal administration to appoint him director of the two main theatres in the capital, since he was convinced he could bring them back to their former glory. As a matter of fact, in a few years Grimaldi managed to revolutionize the theatrical environment of the time by bringing a series of innovations already present in the rest of Europe. Under his management, the conditions of theatre buildings, acting companies and theatre managers improved. Furthermore, he promoted Spanish translations of French plays and rewritings of Spanish Golden Age dramas, which were staged with great success. His renovated theatres were so popular that even people from the lower classes, and from outside Madrid, started to attend performances.[30] Nonetheless, Grimaldi's theatre reformation was often slowed down by the censorship and strict legislation imposed by King Fernando VII, who aimed at controlling that everything recited on stage did not harm the government public image. Only after 1834, when the king died and his wife María Cristina became the regent, the cultural environment had the chance to free itself a little from the previous rules and constrictions; it could then experiment and follow the innovative ideas that were already ongoing all over Europe.[31] In Spain, as well as in the other contexts analysed, theatre was the realm that needed to be controlled the most because it "was viewed as a school for morals, a pulpit from which to preach and teach ethics as well as politics, and a mirror in which society viewed its achievements and aspirations."[32] Thanks to the enlightened regency of María Cristina, supported by a more liberal government, and the advent of Romanticism, Spanish theatre was deeply revolutionised during the 1830s and 1840s, and it saw a great number of new playwrights put on stage their original works. Among the dramatists who monopolised the scene there was a significant number of women who, despite the many prejudices on playwriting being an unsuitable profession for females, gained extraordinary success, both on minor stages and in the main theatres of the country.[33] During the same years, there was also a solid development of private theatres where it was possible to stage more experimental plays,[34] whose nature interestingly resembles that of minor unpatented theatres in England and private salons in Italy. If the former were similarly apt to produce innovative kind of performances that did not need to pass the Lord Chamberlain's approval,[35] the latter,

---

[30] David T. Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth Century Spain,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 9-11.
[31] Ibid. p. 11.
[32] Ibid. p. 12.
[33] Ibid. pp. 191-193.
[34] Ibid. pp. 15-16.
[35] Gillian Russell, "Private Theatricals." In Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn, *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 191-203.

although inherently different in their structure, had a very similar goal; that of promoting new forms of entertainment that could be easily labelled as improper, or even censored, if staged in actual theatres.[36] Indeed, it is precisely in this context of reform and experimentation—which corresponded to the Romantic era in England, Italy and Spain—that women managed to reclaim a place for themselves and their works as part of that literary, cultural and theatrical environment which was trying to distance itself from ancient canons and traditional impositions.

1.2 Women playwrights in context

Although in 1660 women could start acting on the English stage, theatre remained a strictly masculine environment for a very long time—and, with the due differences, still is. All the more, the society of the time continued to perceive it as an ambiguous and disreputable place, where women's reputation was highly at risk. Therefore, all those women who were somehow connected to the stage—actresses, playwrights, managers—were subjected to further supervision and judgements. Ellen Donkin rightfully notes that even if

> in 1660 Charles II issued permission for actresses to join the legitimate theatre . . . it has been a common error in theatre history to assume by extrapolation that women were thereby also welcomed into other areas of theatre practice, particularly playwriting. They were not. Cultural and economic resistance to women *creating* meaning by becoming playwrights continued long after it became acceptable for women to *carry* meaning onstage as performers.[37]

What made theatre so inherently wrong for women was the fact that it was the epitome of the public space and gaze. The 18th and 19th century society was based on a dichotomical view of the genders and division of spheres into private and public, and although women tried to trespass such borders, they were deeply rooted into people's mentality, and hence difficult to erase. As women were supposed to stay within the domestic sphere, those of them who grabbed a pen and started writing were notionally stepping out of their natural realm; to ratify such an "improper" act with public recognition was perceived as a subversive encroachment into men's domain. The "public sphere" basically included every realm that was not the domestic one: politics and the large majority of professions but, of course, among the various fields that were regarded as "public", theatre was probably one of the most prominent and problematic, because of a series of enduring prejudices about its equivocal display of physicality. When thinking

[36] The importance of women's salons in Italian 19th century society was widely discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. In particular, their role as almost subversive artistic and theatrical location is addressed by Adriana Chemello, "Fuori dai repertori. Donne sulla scena letteraria ottocentesca." In *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica,* n.1 (2010), Roma: Carocci, pp. 45-60 and Maria Luisa Betri, Elena Brambilla (eds.), *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2004.
[37] Ellen Donkin, *Getting into the Act*, op. cit., p.1.

about the difficulties that women had to face in pursuing a career linked to the stage, what immediately comes to mind is the story of William Shakespeare's hypothetical sister Judith, narrated by Virginia Woolf in her essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929). The fate of Judith, who chose to elope from an arranged marriage and follow her dream to become an actress and a playwright, was doomed from the beginning. Even though her story was set in a Renaissance England, her unfortunate destiny could be shared by a great number of talented girls who wanted to have the same opportunities as boys but were not taken seriously and were often abused, as a sort of punishment for daring not to conform to the pre-established patterns of behavior for their gender. Although women started to perform in Spanish and Italian theatre long before they were allowed on the English stage, prejudices about women working in the theatrical environment were at play in all the three countries. Indeed, it was a common assumption all across Europe—probably due to a legacy of the Roman Empire[38]—that actresses, and by extension all the other women who meddled with the stage, were basically the same as prostitutes, and it is for such reason that reputable women were forbidden to attend plays if unaccompanied. As argued by Marjean Purinton, "women of the theatre had indelible historic connections with prostitution, associations with women of the night. Women's public/theatrical presence was, therefore, sexualized and illegitimate."[39] Women were regarded as irrational beings, vulnerable to temptations and easy to corrupt, so much so that their engagement with an environment that was seen as lascivious and lacking in morality—other than a place where male and female members of acting companies were living and working closely—would quickly turn them into fallen women. The necessity of being accompanied to theatres by a male chaperon and the rigid curfew imposed on women were just some of the practical issues that made it hard for female playwrights to have the same chances, and work on the same terms, as their male counterparts. Indeed, women could not be out until late at night as it was not "proper" for their gender and were required by society to behave following a strict moral code, that was not equally imposed on their male colleagues.[40] In this regard, Katherine Newey rightfully underlines that women had to pay a higher cost to enter a legitimate theatre, they had to compromise their privacy and professionalization since their works were also

---

[38] Cfr. "Actors, gladiators and prostitutes in ancient Rome were symbols of the shameful" in Catharine Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome", in Judith P. Hallet, Marilyn B. Skinner (eds.), *Roman Sexualities*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1997, pp. 66-98, p. 66.

[39] Marjean D. Purinton, "Revising Romanticism by Inscripting Women Playwrights", in Thomas Crochunis (ed.) *British Women Playwrights around 1800: New Paradigms and Recoveries*, n.12, November 1998, Université de Montreal, p. 11.

[40] Katherine Newey, "'From a female pen' The proper lady as playwright in the West End theatre, 1823-1844", in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1999, pp. 193-212.

judged on the basis of their socially appropriate behaviour—a criterion that was not applied to men.[41]

Despite the many obstacles along the way, many women writers during the 18th and 19th centuries decided to challenge themselves, as well as an environment that was not used to a significant female presence, with writing for the stage. In all the countries here examined, those women who penned theatrical texts, of whatever genre, were already writing and publishing other kinds of literary works, as poetry, novels or articles for journals, therefore one could wonder why such an interest in drama, considering the prejudices surrounding theatre. The reasons could be many; first, theatre was in all the three contexts the most appreciated and popular form of entertainment. Second, drama was a quite profitable genre, especially after the first regulations on authorship and copyright were introduced. Indeed, copyright laws regarding drama were issued in Italy during the first half of the 19th century, in different years according to the governments of the various States;[42] in Spain during the reformation of theatre enacted by Grimaldi in the 1840s[43] and in England in the first decades of 1800—although a previous general, yet incomplete, copyright legislation was promulgated in 1709 under the name of the "Statute of Anne."[44] Moreover, gaining success on the stage could lead to a certain degree of fame and, thus, to more plays commissioned by theatre managers and to a consequent increase in the publication of other literary genres. A further reason to engage with theatre, though, could be retraced in women's will to be valued and recognized as authors in a broader and more comprehensive sense of the term, as good as male writers, who usually dedicated themselves to different genres, frequently including drama. It should also be underlined that, while female writers were "socially allowed" to write certain genres, considered "more suitable" for their gender, and to discuss issues usually related to sentiments and domesticity, they were ostracised whenever they stepped out of such imposed limitations. Therefore, engaging with drama during a historical period of revolution and liberal ideals could be seen as an attempt to break the rules imposed on their writings, widen their field of action and affirm themselves and their authority into a generally inaccessible domain. Of course, this does not mean that all female playwrights chose to pen their texts for the stage in order to question the patriarchal values that prevented

[41] Katherine Newey, "'From a female pen' The proper lady as playwright in the West End theatre, 1823-1844", op. cit., pp. 193-212.
[42] Maurizio Borghi, *La manifattura del pensiero. Diritti d'autore e mercato delle lettere in Italia (1801-1865)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2003.
[43] David T. Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth Century Spain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
[44] "A Brief History of Copyright Law in thw UK", in *Guidelines on Copyright and Academic Research*. A Supplement to the British Academy's Review of Copyright and Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. September 2006.
Retrieved from: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Copyright-guidelines.pdf [accessed 28/03/2019].

women from entering the theatrical domain freely. Nevertheless, in a society that excluded women from its public sphere and its most celebrated form of public entertainment, a female desire to challenge the conventions and prejudices that hindered their path should not be overlooked. Moreover, at the time, considered the high rates of illiteracy in the three countries, the stage was the best means through which it was possible to reach a wider audience. Even though theatre was highly controlled and censored, it represented the ideal channel for women to publicly convey their opinions and, if the case, their criticism towards society, politics and their marginalised condition.

The number of women who wrote for the English stage during the Romantic age appears to be much higher than that of Spanish or Italian female dramatists—which is the lowest.[45] Nonetheless, it should be underlined that, in the last decades, many Romantic and feminist scholars have dedicated their research to the recovery of English Romantic women writers, while the same has not happened in Italy, where the issue has not been adequately tackled yet and thus, there is much more to investigate. In Spain, on the contrary, the interest in female writers of the 19th century is quite recent and not widely spread, but it is certainly an interesting work in progress which is bringing back to light a solid amount of women and literary works to be studied.[46] When it comes to English female dramatists, the first name to be mentioned is undoubtedly that of Joanna Baillie, considered by scholar Anne Mellor "the leading playwright of the Romantic era; she was hailed by her peers as the most original and successful of all contemporary dramatists,"[47] and defined by coeval writer and poet Walter Scott "the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger."[48] Joanna Baillie wrote twenty-six plays, collected in her volumes *Plays on the Passions*,[49] which were carefully thought out in order for each one of them to tackle a different passion and how

---

[45] The data collected in the course of this research work proved that the number of female playwrights in Italy in the Romantic age was lower than in England and Spain in the corresponding Romantic period.

[46] Research works such as those carried out by Juan Antonio Hormigón, Susan Kirkpatrick, María del Carmen Simón Palmer, Marina Mayoral and Beth Miller allowed the publication of detailed anthologies and volumes focused on the rediscovery of women writers and their literary production. In this regard, this thesis drew fundamental information particularly from: María Del Carmen Simón Palmer, *Escritoras españolas del siglo XIX. Manual bio-bibliografico*, Madrid: Castalia, 1991; Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.) *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español (1500-1994).*, Vol. I (siglos XVII, XVII, XIX). Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de directores de escena de España, 1996; Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Romanticas: women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1989; Susan Kirkpatrick, *Antología Poética de Escritoras del siglo XIX.* Madrid: Castalia, 1992; Marina Mayoral (ed.), *Escritoras románticas españolas.* Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, 1990; Beth Miller (ed.). *Women in Hispanic Literature. Icons and Fallen Idols.* Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.

[47] Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere", in *Studies in Romanticism,* Vol. 33 No. 4, Winter 1994, pp. 559-567. Boston University, p. 559.

[48] Sir Walter Scott, letter to Miss Smith, March 4, 1808, in *Familiar letters of Sir Walter Scott*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1894) I:99, in Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere", 1994, p. 559.

[49] The first volume, titled *A Series of Plays in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind: each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy* was published in 1798.

it may affect people's mind and life. She wrote mainly, but not only, tragedies among which *De Monfort* (1798), *Orra* (1812) and *The Family Legend* (1810) were very much appreciated. Besides Baillie, according to Stuart Curran, "the dominant voices writing for the stage, during these decades, are in the 1780s Hannah Cowley and, in the 1790s, Elizabeth Inchbald."[50] Indeed, Cowley penned numerous comedies, among which a significant amount was staged and received a great public consensus, as for example, *The Runaway* (1776), *The Belle's Stratagem* (1780), *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* (1783), and *A Day in Turkey; or the Russian Slave* (1792). Elizabeth Inchbald's production also enjoyed considerable fortune, thanks to her many comedies and farces performed in the main theatres of the time, as *The Mogul Tale* (1784), *Such Things Are* (1787), *Everyone has his Fault* (1793) and *Lovers' Vows* (1798), translated and adapted from August Von Kotzebue's original version *Kind Der Liebe* (1780). Interestingly, the only tragedy Inchbald wrote, *The Massacre* (1792), was never performed because it was considered too politically explicit. Although these three dramatists were the most prolific and successful, the list of coeval women who wrote at least one play is much longer than that, and includes famous poets as Hannah More, who penned the tragedy *Percy* in 1777 (which was extremely appreciated by the audience), Ann Yearsley's *Earl Godwin*: *an historical play* (1789), Frances Burney's *Edwy and Elgiva* (1790), Felicia Hemans with *The Siege of Valencia* (1823) and *The Vespers of Palermo* (1823), Mary Russell Mitford with her *Rienzi: a tragedy* (1828), *Foscari, a Tragedy* (1826), *Julian: a Tragedy* (1828) and *Charles the First: an historical tragedy* (1834) and Laetitia Elizabeth Landon's *Castruccio Castrucani: or the Triumph of Lucca* (1837), just to name a few. Jeffrey Cox sums up the situation in his "Re-viewing Romantic Drama":

> From Baillie to Hemans, women are in fact central to the drama of the period. Baillie . . . was the key tragedian of the day, and Hannah Cowley and Elizabeth Inchbald had similarly dominated comedy in the 1780s and 1790s. The list of women penning dramas is impressive: . . . Maria Edgeworth, Ann Yearsley, Sydney Owenson (later Lady Morgan), Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Fanny Burney, Mary Russell Mitford, Sophia Lee, and Jane Scott all wrote one or more plays — and with Baillie writing twenty-six plays and Scott around fifty, there was clearly a large body of dramatic work by women. About one third of these reached the stage; some were publishing successes.[51]

Spain also saw a significant number of women playwrights, starting from the most prolific and celebrated female Romantic figure, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, who wrote twenty plays, all performed in the main theatres of the time all over the country. Her first drama, *Leoncia*, was staged in 1840 in Sevilla, while other much-appreciated tragedies as *Alfonso Munio* (1842),

[50] Stuart Curran, "Women Readers, Women Writers", in S. Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd Edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 169-186.
[51] Jeffrey N. Cox, "Reviewing Romantic Drama", op. cit., pp. 4-5.

El Príncipe de Viana (1844), *Egilona* (1846), and her most famous ones, *Saúl* (1849) and *Baltasar* (1858) were performed in Madrid. She also penned a number of successful comedies as *Errores del corazón* (1852), *La hija de las flores, o todos están locos* (1852), *La hija del Rey René* (1855) and her last work, *El milionario y la maleta*, staged in 1877, after her death.[52] As Juan Antonio Hormigón reports, another important female playwright of the Romantic era was Rosario Acuña de la Iglesia, who wrote mainly tragic dramas, as *Rienzi el Tribuno* (1876), *Amor a la patria* (1878)—under the pseudonym of Remigio Andrés Delafón—and the controversial *El padre Juan* (1891). This latter composition was staged only once by a small company financed by de Acuña herself and it was censored by the government the day after its first and last performance, because of its strong criticism against certain aspects of religion. Nevertheless, it was immediately published and gained a wide success and support among the population.[53] Furthermore, it should also be mentioned famous Romantic poet Carolina Coronado, who wrote at least four dramas that went lost, Enriqueta Lozano de Vílchez, who wrote six plays that we currently know of, both tragedies and comedies, and Angela Grassi y Techi, who penned six dramas, of which only two survived in their integrity, *Lealtad a un juramento o Crimen y expiación* (1842) and the lyrical drama written in Italian, *Il proscritto d'Altemburgo*, performed in Barcelona in 1843.[54] It is important to underline that there was also a significant number of women who wrote only one or two plays but contributed nonetheless to the development of Romantic theatre in Spain and affirmed themselves and their female subjectivity through their writings and their presence in the public sphere of the time. The anthology *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español* collected most of them, together with their biography and works—when retraceable—to identify important underrated figures as María Martínez Abelló, Angelina Martínez de la Fuente, Joaquina Vera, Victorina Saéz de Tejada, Faustina Sáez de Melgar, Josefa Massanés Dalmau and many others. Such a collection demonstrates the extent of women's dramatic production during the course of the centuries.[55]

Similarly to Spain and England, female playwrights in Italy were dedicating themselves to many literary genres but, if in the other countries we can identify a group of women—no matter how small—who gained success with their dramas, in Italy such thing is not possible. All the female writers who wrote for the stage seemed to have done so as a marginal activity of their literary careers as poets, pedagogues and essayists. Celebrated Romantic poet Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, for example, wrote only two tragedies in 1817, *Due Tragedie Inedite: Erminia e*

---

[52] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, *(1500-1994),* op. cit., pp. 765-793.
[53] Ibid. pp. 621-630.
[54] Ibid. pp. 796-798.
[55] Ibid. p. 29.

Tullia, which were staged and published, but not critically acclaimed.[56] Famous *salonnière* Giustina Renier translated three tragedies by Shakespeare in her volume *Opere drammatiche di Shakespeare volgarizzate da una Dama Veneta. Ottello o sia il Moro di Venezia, Coriolano, Macbeth* (1798-1800), but they were probably intended for publication or private performances in her salon, because there is no evidence of a theatrical representation.[57] Another writer and *salonnière*, Angelica Palli Bartolomei, wrote at least seven dramatic texts—*Tieste* (1820), *Saffo* (1823), *Buondelmonte Buondelmonti* (1828) and four others—inspired to Vittorio Alfieri's classical style, but also in this case there is no evidence of a public performance in a regular theatre, while it is known that they were all published in various Italian towns as Livorno and Turin.[58] The large majority of the plays written by intellectual and *salonnière* Laura Beatrice Oliva Mancini were never performed and, unfortunately, got lost during the course of the centuries. Beatrice Oliva's only surviving play is the tragedy *Ines de Castro*, which was published in Florence in 1845, staged in 1849 in Teatro de' Fiorentini in Naples and, after great reviews, performed again in Teatro Carignano in Turin in 1856 with one of the most famous actresses of the time, Adelaide Ristori, as the protagonist.[59] The same fortune happened to pedagogue Luisa Amalia Paladini, who penned a historical lyrical tragedy, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837) and a melodrama, *L'Orfana di Lancisa* (1838), both put to music by Italian composers and performed respectively in Teatro La Fenice in Venice and Teatro Re in Milan.[60] Of course, it is possible that other female writers wrote for the stage or private theatricals during the Romantic age but, unfortunately, either their texts were not published or did not survive, or they are still hidden in some libraries or private collections, waiting to be brought back to light.

---

[56] Paola Triverio "In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo", in Marziano Guglielminetti and Paola Triverio (eds.), *Il Romanticismo in Piemonte: Diodata Saluzzo.* Atti del Convegno di Studi, Saluzzo, 29 settembre 1990. Università di Torino, Centro di Studi di Letteratura Italiana in Piemonte «Guido Gozzano». Vol. 12 - Saggi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki. See also: Antonio Franceschetti, Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)", in Rinaldina Russell (ed.), *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

[57] Information about Giustina Renier was retrieved from: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giustina-renier-michiel_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[58] Information about Angelica Palli Bartolomei was retrieved from: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/angelica-palli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/

[59] Information about Laura Beatrice Oliva was retrieved from: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/laura-beatrice-fortunata-oliva_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/

[60] Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: vita e opere di una donna del Risorgimento.* Lucca: Fazzi Editore, 2012. See also: Luisa Amalia Paladini, *L'Orfana di Lancisa,* Milano: Stamperia Dova, 1838; Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, Venezia: Tipografia Molinari Edit., 1837.

1.3 Women in theatre: actresses, managers, critics and theorists

Despite the difficulties encountered, women actively participated in the theatrical environment of the time in the three countries examined, not only as playwrights, but also as actresses, managers, theatre critics and theorists. Such categories were frequently mixed together and it is not uncommon to find an actress who, after a few years on the stage, decided to dedicate herself to composing dramas. It is the case of Elizabeth Inchbald, who started her career as a performer when she was young, but reached a greater success some years later as a playwright, almost monopolizing the English stage in the 1790s. Another interesting case is that of one of the most famous actresses and writers of the second half of the 18th century: Mary Robinson. Robinson began acting as a young girl in order to economically support herself and her indebted family and gained an extraordinary success with the role of Perdita, so much so that she was identified her whole life with that character. According to Anne Janowitz, she can be regarded as the very first celebrity of the modern age.[61] Indeed, because of her supposed love affairs with some illustrious and wealthy men—including the Prince of Wales, with whom there is evidence she was romantically involved for over a year—she was often strongly criticised and attacked on her "scandalous" love life by the main journals of the time. Nevertheless, her acting career soon coincided with a successful literary activity, since her poetry, characterised by a typical Romantic taste, was highly appreciated, so much so that she was defined as "a woman of undoubted genius"[62] by her colleague S.T. Coleridge. Despite her fame as a poet and an actress, she did not have the same favourable outcome as a dramatist; her only play, *The Sicilian Lover: A Tragedy in Five Acts* was published in 1796 but was neither performed nor critically acclaimed. The difficult public position Robinson found herself into for most of her life was a result of her literary career and her profession as an actress, which exacerbated her bad reputation as a "fallen woman."[63] Indeed, if the idea of women receiving money for whatever service or job was considered indecorous, being paid to show themselves on stage put them on a frail edge that could quickly turn them into prostitutes to the public eye. Since whoever was on stage was physically and directly exposed to an audience—who was there specifically to watch—and men were certainly among the audience, such prolonged display to a male gaze

[61] Anne Janowitz, *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson*, Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2004, p. 9.
[62] S.T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. by E.L. Griggs, 6 voll., Clarendon Press, Oxford 1956-71, vol. I, p. 562. In Lilla Maria Crisafulli (ed.), *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi*, Vol. 1, Roma, Carocci, 2003, p. 329.
[63] Anne K. Mellor, "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary "Perdita" Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality". In *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 22:3, Routledge, 2000, pp. 271-304.

was regarded as absolutely disgraceful for a "proper" woman.[64] Besides, Mary Robinson, as well as other celebrated performers as Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, was used to interpret the so-called *breech roles*, that is roles *en travesti* where actresses were embodying male characters and, therefore, were dressed up as men.[65] The typical men's clothes of the time were much tighter—especially on the lower part of the body—than women's dresses, which, on the contrary, were designed in order to cover as much body as possible. For such reason, actresses in male garments were not only crossing gender roles by interpreting a male character, but their bodies were also more physically exposed to the public, transgressing the moral code. The actress' body, "on display" for the whole time she was performing, did no longer belong to her but rather became a public domain that needed to be controlled and subjected to the rules of "propriety" in order not to lead men into temptation. The fact that Robinson never adhered to the moral codes of behaviour imposed on women, and even questioned them by discussing politics and women's rights in her letters and compositions, made her a target of the most vulgar and obscene attacks.[66] Hence, she probably represents the worst-case scenario of what female actresses in England had to endure when choosing such a career. Nevertheless, as argued by Rosenthal, "the exposure of female bodies to the male gaze tended to associate actresses with prostitution, regardless of their behavior off stage" since the reasons for such an association "were not confined to, or even necessarily dominated by, prurience and moral scandal," inasmuch as "the 18th century stage found its home in the broad spectrum of commercial entertainment in London's urban culture, which commodified 'vice' and 'virtue' in the same marketplace."[67]

Other examples of female performers on the Romantic stage include the iconic Sarah Siddons, who is considered the most famous performer of the 18th century, Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, Fanny Kemble, Frances Abington, Elizabeth O'Neill, Ellen Tree Kean, Elizabeth Wright Macauley and Elizabeth Farren—just to name a few since the list of actresses between the 18th and 19th centuries is much longer. Not all of them suffered harsh criticism and prejudices but, in order not to be the target of satirical attacks or pillories, many actresses had to be extremely careful about leading a spotless life, constantly proving to be good mothers and wives, no matter how famous they were or to what extent they were venerated by the audience.

---

[64] Laura J. Rosenthal, "Entertaining women: the actress in eighteenth century theatre and culture", in Moody, Jane and O'Quinn, Daniel. *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 159-161.

[65] Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 4.

[66] Anne K. Mellor, "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary "Perdita" Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality", op. cit., pp. 271-304.

[67] Laura J. Rosenthal, "Entertaining women: the actress in eighteenth century theatre and culture", in Moody, Jane and O'Quinn, Daniel. *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre*, op. cit., p. 160.

Exemplary is the case of Sarah Siddons, "the only divinity of the English stage"[68] who, despite her fame as an actress outside her house, had to submit to her husband's will and decisions inside her home. Within the domestic walls, she was not different from any other woman and, as well as many of her colleagues, could not stand up for her rights but at the risk of jeopardising her respectability. Indeed, as highlighted by Michael Booth,

> She may have been the queen or goddess of tragedy, but in her own home she was Mrs William Siddons. The contrast between her stage career and her domestic situation could not have been more extreme. On the one hand she was at the head of her profession, earning large sums of money, famous, and almost everywhere honoured and exalted. On the other she was legally inferior to her husband, who had the right to her income, the disposition of her children, and the ordering of material affairs. . . . She turned over her large income to him and received in return a quarterly allowance. . . . Most obviously her image off-stage as the good wife and mother won her audience respect and was transferred to the tragic roles like Isabella, Constance, and Lady Randolph, in which she depicted strong maternal feelings.[69]

Siddons was admired for her intense interpretation of tragic roles, which, according to Booth, represented for her a perfect outlet to express the grief and frustration she suffered in her private life:

> Here she was, a great star by any definition of the word, famous throughout the length and breadth of the theatrical land, treated with respect and awe by managers and her fellow players and with idolatry by the public, courted by the nobility and the cultural elite, earning entirely on her own account very substantial sums of money year after year, the sole support of her large family — and yet severely constricted in the home, unable to be independent, and subordinate to the dictates of a petty, small-minded, often cantankerous husband. . . . The theatre, then, and the opportunities offered by the public expression of tragic woe, was the only satisfactory compensation available.[70]

Although the most famous women in theatre were actresses and playwrights, it should not be forgotten that during the Romantic age England also saw a rising number of women engaged with theatre in unprecedented roles as those of theatre manager and critic. The different activities carried out by women in the theatrical environment were very much interconnected to one another and, in fact, it is not uncommon to find actresses who were also good playwrights and managers. Similarly, we often come across dramatists who also dedicated themselves to the study of theatre and performance from a critical point of view. The most famous female theatre manager of the period was certainly Jane Scott, who was also an actress and a successful playwright; from 1806 to 1819 she wrote about fifty plays, "the whole range of 'illegitimate' drama, comic and serious,"[71] that is melodrama, burletta, farce, comic operetta and so on. She built her own theatre (thanks to financial support from her father), which was first named "Sans

---

[68] Michael R. Booth, "Sarah Siddons", in Michael R. Booth, John Stokes, Susan Bassnett, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996, p. 63.
[69] Michael R. Booth, "Sarah Siddons", op. cit., p. 63.
[70] Ibid. p. 64.
[71] J.S. Bratton, "Miss Scott and Miss Macauley: 'Genius come in all disguises'", in *Theatre Survey* 37:1 (May 1996), p. 60.

Pareil" and later "Adelphi", and opened in 1806, while in 1808 she hired a professional theatrical company who could perform the successful plays she wrote. Her theatre was extremely popular at the time and "politically significant" since, as underlined by Jackie Bratton,

> it challenged the long-standing duopoly of the stage in London with new providers of entertainment. Jane Scott and her father, coming from outside the established theatrical networks, thus became participants in the battle for a 'free' stage. Jane Scott's theatre is also embedded in the artistic developments of her time, mediating Gothic and Romantic sensibility to pleasure-seekers in the nascent West End. She had her finger on the pulse of a new world of entertainment for all, and her management of the theatre she created is important for its responsive and intelligent reading of the new audiences and the provision of exciting work for them to enjoy.[72]

Another famous female manager was Lucia Elizabeth Vestris, who started her career as an actress and a singer, and in 1831 became the manager of the Olympic theatre, with great fortune. As an illegitimate theatre, it could only perform musical plays, but Madame Vestris, as she was called, "remodelled her theatre as a modern, feminine, and enjoyable alternative; well decorated, intimate, and tasteful, like a fashionable drawing-room, it attracted an enthusiastic audience."[73] It is reported that the theatre became fashionable and made her earn a very good profit, while Vestris, inspired by the practices enacted in the most famous French theatres, improved scenery, rehearsals, good working conditions and contracts for her employees, winning the actors' respect and loyalty. After some economic difficulties in 1839, Vestris became manager of the Covent Garden theatre, and later, of the Lyceum, from 1847 to 1853.[74] Moving towards the beginning of the Victorian age, we can find Ellen Tree, a successful actress both in England and in America, who soon married her famous colleague Charles Kean and, together with him she managed the Princess's Theatre from 1850 to 1859.[75]

As far as theatre critics, the number of women who engaged with this discipline is apparently lower than that of playwrights and actresses, but it is not possible to indicate an exact amount. Indeed, as highlighted by Marvin Carlson, those women who gave their contribution to the male-dominated realm of theatre criticism collaborating with various journals were often doing it anonymously or only signing with their initials, in order not to be directly under public

[72] Jackie Bratton, "Scott [married name Middleton], Jane Margaret", in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/59171 [accessed 22/02/2019].

[73] Jackie Bratton, "Vestris [née Bartolozzi, other married name Mathews] Lucia Elizabeth, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, 2008. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18331 [accessed 22/02/2019].

[74] Ibid.

[75] M. Glen Wilson, "Kean [née Tree], Eleanora [Ellen]", in in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, 2008. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/15205 [accessed 22/02/2019].

scrutiny.[76] It is known that, for example, writer and actress Eliza Haywood shared her critical outlook on drama on the magazine *The Tea-Table* in 1724 and later on *The Female Spectator* while in the course of the 1780s Hannah Cowley regularly gave her contribution on theatre criticism to the journal *The World.*[77] Nevertheless, the most prominent female critic of the time was probably Elizabeth Inchbald who, as we stated earlier, began her career as an actress and soon moved to playwriting with great success, dominating the stage for the whole 1790s. Her series of "remarks" for the anthology *The British Theatre*[78] was a fundamental work of theatre criticism which employed an original approach and perspective. Inchbald should thus be considered "a pioneer woman drama critic, indeed a drama critic *tout court,*"[79] since her text had a greater circulation than any other critical articles, including those penned by Leigh Hunt, in the same period, for *The News*. The great innovation of Inchbald's prefaces resided in the fact that she included a critical commentary of the text in the preface of each play she collected in her work, and such plays were written by various late and living authors, both male and female. While it was customary to incorporate a critical perspective in the prefaces of collected plays, it usually happened with the writer's own literary production or with Shakespeare's works. Inchbald was "not only the first British woman to present a series of critical prefaces for a wide range of dramatists, current and classic, but she was in fact the first British critic to do so."[80] Although Inchbald could count on her great experience in the theatrical environment, first as an actress and then as a dramatist, it should be underlined that she did not have models to look up to in the writing of her critical compositions. Furthermore, she had to face a strong resistance both from male critics, for entering a realm that was not "feminine", and from those playwrights whose texts were included in her collection, who did not appreciate being criticized by a woman; "there is something unfeminine in a lady's placing herself in the seat of judgement"[81], Boaden reported in his biography of Elizabeth Inchbald.

Among the dramatists who wrote critical essays about their own plays, often encompassed in the introduction or preface to their own work or collection, the name of Joanna Baillie certainly stands out since, besides being the leading tragedian of the Romantic era, a theatre

---

[76] Marvin Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: a woman critic in her theatrical culture", in Catherine Burroughs, *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, Society 1790-1840*, op. cit., p. 207-222.
[77] Ibid. p. 209.
[78] *The British Theatre* including Inchbald's critical remarks in the plays' prefaces was published by Longman in serial form in 1806, and then collected in twenty-five volumes in 1808. Source: Thomas C. Crochunis, "Authorial performaces in the criticism and theory of Romantic women playwrights", in Catherine Burroughs, *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, Society 1790-1840*, op. cit., p. 223.
[79] Marvin Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: a woman critic in her theatrical culture", op. cit., p. 209.
[80] Ibid. p. 210.
[81] James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 2 vols., London: Richard Bentley, 1833, II:84, in Marvin Carlson, "Elizabeth Inchbald: a woman critic in her theatrical culture", in Catherine Burroughs, *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, Society 1790-1840*, op. cit., p. 208.

critic and a poet, she was the most important female theatre theorist of the time. In her "Introductory Discourse", which opened her first collection of plays, *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind, each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy*, published anonymously in 1798, she theorised fundamental aspects of Romantic dramaturgy and performance that she would expand years later in the preface to her *Miscellaneous Plays* (1804). Baillie's theory of theatre was, of course, influenced by the Licensing Act and closely related to the issue of closet drama, which, she argued, was not to be regarded as opposed to, or incompatible with, stage performance. As a matter of fact, Baillie suggested that closet spaces were "sources of passionate, valuable, and instructive drama—the literal site where one can trace the progress of 'the soul' as it etches its passions on the countenances of men and women during their most private moments"[82], and thus, an alternative stage—though equally important—where performances of passions and events developed. In particular, with her three-volume collection, *Plays on the Passions,* Baillie wanted to investigate and expose the passions and inner feelings that occupied and reigned over people's mind, exploring to what extent such emotions influenced human actions and made the audience, or readers, empathise with the protagonists through what she defined as "sympathetic curiosity."[83] As she writes in her "Introductory discourse":

> It is for her [Tragedy] to show the tender, gentle, and unassuming mind, animated with the fire which, by the provocation of circumstances, will give to the kindest heart the ferocity and keenness of a tiger. . . . But above all, to her, and to her only it belongs, to unveil to us the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which, seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances, will, from small beginnings, brood with the breast, till all the better dispositions, all the fair gifts of nature are borne down before them; those passions which conceal themselves from observation of men; which cannot unbosom themselves even to the dearest friend; and can, oftentimes, only give their fullness vent in the lonely desert, or in the darkness of midnight.[84]

By doing so, Baillie bestowed on the interiority of every character the same importance given to their endeavours, enacting a subversion of the power relation between the domesticity of the private life and the public domain of happenings and enterprises.

The Italian Romantic age also saw an important number of women engaged with theatre, mainly as actresses, some of whom were so talented they became international celebrities. What differentiated England from Italy was undoubtedly the commixture of roles—actresses who turned into dramatists, dramatists who managed theatres and so on—which often characterised female presence in the British theatrical environment but appears to be almost completely

---

[82] Catherine B. Barroughs, *Closet Stages,* op. cit., p. 12.

[83] Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourse", in *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind, each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy*, 1798. Retrieved from: https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=3-oVAQAAMAAJ&hl=it&pg=GBS.PA29 [accessed 24/02/2019].

[84] Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourse", op. cit., pp. 29-30.

absent in the Italian peninsula. Indeed, the number of Italian actresses in the first half of the 19th century was significant, while that of playwrights, or even librettists, was certainly lower. Interestingly, it seems that writing for the stage and performing were seen as two very distinct categories; as far as my investigation is concerned, it appears that Italian actresses did not engage with the penning of plays or librettos. The role of performers changed radically since the first decades of the 19th century, when actors became the core of the representation. Since the texts interpreted were often drawn from the repertory and, thus, were already well-known by the audience, what really made the difference was the cast and the way actors were able to bring to life the main characters.[85] As highlighted by Claudio Meldolesi and Ferdinando Taviani, actors essentially took on the responsibility of the whole performance and, in order to do so, had to retake possession of all those elements that in the previous centuries had dominated the stage and marginalised the acting, such as space, music and dramaturgy; at the same time, actors needed to establish new boundaries between drama and melodrama, entertainment and literature.[86] In this context the role of actresses was fundamental, as they not only represented extraordinary female characters on stage but also the incarnation of the muse, the ideal woman, wife and mother to whom Italian women had to look up to. For such reason, similarly to what happened in England, actresses had to be extremely careful with their private life and the way they were behaving off stage. The most famous female performer of the period was certainly Adelaide Ristori who, as underlined by Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, was not merely a woman and an actress: she was mostly the embodiment of a model, the perfect product of the desires and taste of the time.[87] "Maintaining the respectability of her public image was important to Ristori throughout her life"[88] and, indeed, once her fame as an actress was consolidated, she began refusing roles that were regarded as disreputable or that were censured by the Vatican, in order not to compromise her spotless public figure. For example, when she was working for the Reale Sarda Company she imposed a clause in her contract that "allowed her to refuse any role she considered immoral,"[89] as well as any role *en travesti* or imposed by the theatre manager.[90] It is probably for such reason that she played the character of Mirra in Alfieri's *Mirra* only after the Papal censor declared it was no longer forbidden by the Church, and she never took on the role of Marguerite Gautier from Dumas' play *La Dame aux camélias*.[91]

[85] C. Meldolesi e F. Taviani, *Teatro e Spettacolo nel primo Ottocento.* Bari: Laterza, 1991, 1998, pp. 228-229.
[86] Ibid. p. 229.
[87] Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento Italiano.* Milano: Mursia, 1978, p. 51.
[88] Susan Bassnett, "Adelaide Ristori", in Michael R. Booth, John Stokes, Susan Bassnett, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1996, p. 138.
[89] Ibid. p. 138.
[90] Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento Italiano*, op. cit., p. 57.
[91] Susan Bassnett, "Adelaide Ristori", op. cit., p. 138.

Nevertheless, it seems she did not pay much attention to the censorship imposed by the Austrian Empire; as a fervent patriot and supporter of Italian Risorgimento, in 1858 she played the role of Judith—banned years before by Vienna—and was consequently asked to leave Venice because of such an objectionable interpretation.[92] Ristori's reputation was never questioned during her long career. She perfectly embodied the ideal woman, "the angel in the house" Italy needed in that moment, an honourable wife and a loving mother—both to her kids and, symbolically, to the nation—also thanks to her marriage with an Italian aristocrat who agreed to follow her in her international tours, together with their children. In fact, Ristori performed on the main European stages, in Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, but also in Poland and Portugal, as well as in London, where she played Lady Macbeth at Drury Lane theatre with enormous success—"the effect on the audience was electrical" said a review published on *The Atheneum*.[93]

Of course, although the most iconic, Ristori was not the only celebrated and respected actress in the Italian theatre of the Romantic period. Carlotta Marchionni, for instance, became famous with the interpretation of Francesca in Pellico's *Francesca da Rimini* in 1815 and continued her career with the Reale Sarda Company. Critics defined her as an "angel" and the "perfect ideal of Italian female", categories to which she remained faithful throughout her life, maintaining a spotless reputation despite the fact that she never married.[94] Other names worthy of being mentioned are certainly those of Carolina Internari Tafani, Maddalena Pelzet Signorini and Amalia Bettini, who besides their professional skills were acclaimed and remembered for their virtuosity, "good female qualities", purity and "candour."[95] As Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto pinpoints, in Italy as well as in England the same middle-class people who were setting the rules in society and promoting a specific set of values based on morality and propriety, especially for women, mainly constituted the audience during the 19th century. Therefore, what such an audience wanted to see on stage were actors who embodied the virtues they supported so obstinately.[96] A different case was that of actresses Clementina Cazzola and Fanny Sadowsky who started acting at the end of the Romantic era, close to the unification of the country and both refused to embody the reassuring image of the good wife and lovely mother, although in different ways. Cazzola, in particular, became popular as the interpreter of a new Romantic way of performing.[97] Around mid-century a new interest in the artistic skills of actors

---

[92] Susan Bassnett, "Adelaide Ristori", op. cit., p. 129.
[93] Ibid. p. 164.
[94] Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento Italiano*, op. cit., p. 29.
[95] Ibid. pp. 38-50.
[96] Ibid. p. 34.
[97] Ibid. p. 86.

was born, also due to the importance that performers were slowly acquiring in a theatrical environment where original plays were few compared to translations and adaptations. Consequently, less attention was paid to their private life, which slightly loosened the pressure on women's behaviour off stage. Both Sadowsky and Cazzola were much-appreciated actresses who distanced themselves from the previous formal acting style, enriching their performances with lively passions and exuberance, as demonstrated by the real kiss that Fanny Sadowsky gave to her co-protagonist during the staging of *Francesca da Rimini,* which cost her a fine from the censor.[98] Sadowsky had, in fact, a sensuality that was regarded as scandalous for the time.[99] She was able to bestow a new erotic nuance to the women she was portraying, women who had always been depicted as passive, pure and innocent by actresses of the calibre of Ristori or Marchionni. Similarly, Cazzola's performances are remembered to portray feelings in a more exuberant way compared to her colleagues, and indeed what she was actually trying to achieve was a greater adherence to reality, interpreting the real emotions of real people, and not mere literary characters.[100] Costetti identifies her innovative style as the first step towards a new way of performing on stage, almost a reform in the acting technique.[101] Although apparently she did not leave anything written about it, it would not be erroneous to define Clementina Cazzola as a theatre theorist, other than an actress and a company manager—she indeed founded her own acting company together with the famous actor Tommaso Salvini, for whom she left her husband.[102] There is no evidence of documents or texts which could lead us to identify other theatre theorists in Italy at the time, nor a corpus of theatre criticism written by women has been recognised. Nevertheless, there were a few magazines dealing with theatre and drama—such as *Corriere delle Dame* and *I Teatri: giornale drammatico musicale e coreografico*—to which women could have possibly contributed their critical opinions anonymously. Even the domain of theatre management in Italy seemed to be all in men's hands, except for Fanny Sadowsky, who managed Teatro Fondo from 1870 and, later, Teatro Nazionale in Naples. However, if we consider the private theatrical productions that were taking place quite regularly in the salons managed by famous women as Giuseppina Guacci, Angelica Palli and Olimpia Rossi—and had a fundamental role in the development of women's *improvisation*, acting and drama—it could be said that the number of female managers was much higher than one can expect.

---

[98] Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento Italiano*, op. cit., p. 81.
[99] Ibid. p. 81.
[100] Ibid. p. 86.
[101] Giovanni Costetti, *Il Teatro Italiano nel 1800 (indagini e ricordi) con elenco di autori e le loro opere.* Rocca San Casciano: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1901, p. 212.
[102] Giovanna Ciotti Cavalletto, *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento Italiano*, op. cit., p. 85.

Interestingly, two elements were common to the female presence in the theatrical environment in England, Italy and Spain during the Romantic age: the disreputability of the acting profession and the role played by family networks in easing women's access to the stage. As underlined by Katherine Newey, "writers without a close connection with the theatre as an entertainment business . . . were exceptions in the early nineteenth century."[103] The same could be said for performers, since many English actresses of the time came from a familial environment that was already engaged with theatre and which, therefore, did not forbid or judge a potentially controversial choice, such as in the cases of Fanny Kemble, Ellen Tree and Sarah Siddons. Similarly, in Italy, most women who dedicated their lives to the stage were related to comedians and entertainers; exemplary is the case of Adelaide Ristori, Carlotta Marchionni, Clementina Cazzola and Amalia Bettini, whose parents were all actors. In Spain, an analogous situation was even favoured by the law. Indeed, when in 1587 the Spanish government finally authorised female presence on stage, it did so on two conditions: women could participate in theatrical activities only if married and accompanied by their husbands, and solely if performing in women's clothes. In 1600, a new act was issued to reinforce the previous decree, stating that women could go to theatres, rehearsal and performances only when escorted by their husbands or parents, and in no other way.[104] Although such regulation did not manage to completely prevent the "intrusion" of unmarried women, it did favour girls whose husbands or families were already involved with the theatre. The reasons for such limitation in female presence on stage were probably due to the fact that in Spain, as well as in Italy and England, actors were regarded by society in a quite ambiguous way. If, on the one hand, performers were real celebrities—especially in the case of women, who were sometimes venerated as veritable goddesses—on the other hand, they were still considered as dishonourable people. José Díez Borque summarises actors' conditions underlining to what extent they enjoyed great popularity and, at the same time, were not considered respectable: "Los actores, es bien sabido, gozaban de mucha popularidad, pero al mismo tiempo no se los consideraba como personas respetables."[105] Such social ostracism went as far as denying them the treatment as "Don" and "Doña" which indicated courtesy and public esteem in Spanish society.

---

[103] Katherine Newey, "'From a female pen': the proper lady as playwright in the West End Theatre 1823-1844", op. cit., p. 199.

[104] Lola González Martínez, "María de Navas. Actríz y empresaria teatral", in *Mujeres Emprendedoras entre los siglos XVI y XIX.* Catálogo de publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado. Madrid: Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad), 2017, pp. 36-38.

[105] José María Díez Borque, "Pórtico Sencillo al Teatro (Del texto a la representación)", in José María Díez Borque, *Historia del Teatro en España*, Madrid: Taurus, 1988, p. 580.

According to David Gies, the "leading lady of the Romantic stage"[106] was Concepción Rodríguez (1802–1880), wife of theatre reformer and impresario Juan de Grimaldi. Other sources identify the stage as dominated by Matilde Díez (1818–1883), who married the renowned Romantic actor Julián Romea. Well known were also Teodora Lamadrid (1820–1896) and her sister Barbara Lamadrid (1812–1893), who participated in the staging of several plays written by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, with whom they were close friends. Indeed, de Avellaneda was so appreciated as a dramatist that her texts were interpreted by the most famous actors of the time. For example, *Alfonso Munio* (Teatro de la Cruz, 1844) saw the participation of Carlos Latorre and both Teodora and Bárbara Lamadrid; *El Príncipe de Viana* (Teatro de la Cruz, 1844) was staged with Julián Romea, Matilde Díez and Bárbara Lamadrid; *Egilona* (Teatro de la Cruz, 1846) was interpreted again by Bárbara Lamadrid and even *Saúl* (1846), the most acclaimed tragedy by de Avellaneda, was performed by Bárbara Lamadrid, her sister Teodora and José Valero.[107] Other famous women who performed on the Spanish stage during the Romantic era were Teresa Baus, Catalina Bravo, Antera Baus, Agustina Torres and Gertrudis Torre. In order to find a leading actress who subsequently turned into a successful *empresaria teatral* we need to wait until the end of the 19th century with María Guerrero—even though a similar case had already appeared in the Spanish theatrical environment in the 17th century with María de Navas, a well-known comedian born in a family of actors, who later dedicated her career to managing acting companies.[108] Of course, it is necessary to underline that there were other women who worked as theatre managers together with their husbands and, therefore, were not always regarded as such, but rather as "wives" of much more celebrated men. In the same way, there could have been other female managers who were forgotten and, thus, may be still waiting to be rediscovered. An analogous situation can be found in the realm of theatre theories and criticism, since there are no reports of Spanish women writing specifically about, or devoting entire works to, such subjects. However, as it happened in England and Italy, many female writers collaborated with journals and magazines. Therefore, they might have conveyed their theoretical or critical perspective anonymously, or under male pseudonyms, through their articles.

[106] David T. Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth Century Spain*, op. cit., p. 63.
[107] Concha Fernández Soto: "Entre sedas y telones. La invisibilidad de la mujer dramaturga en el siglo XIX español", in Mercedes Arriaga et al. (eds.), *Escritoras y Pensadoras Europeas*, Arcibel, Sevilla, 2007, p. 280.
[108] Lola González Martínez, "María de Navas. Actríz y empresaria teatral", op. cit., pp. 33-50.

2. A Female perspective on tragedy

2.1 Romantic tragedy and the refusal of classical canons

During the Romantic age, Europe saw a series of political revolutions and ideological turmoil which strongly influenced its socio-cultural situation and, as a direct consequence, its literary and theatrical environment. All over the continent, Romanticism brought a wind of change and innovation which pushed intellectuals to question and deconstruct the classical canons and conventions that had regulated for centuries the main literary genres; tragedy, in particular, was the realm that needed to be reformed the most. August William Schlegel in Germany and Alessandro Manzoni in Italy theorised the necessity to abandon the Aristotelian unities of time, space and action in order to achieve greater adherence to the reality of the events narrated, as it would be impossible to recount historical happenings and apply such rules at the same time. Indeed, history and the narration of history acquired fundamental importance all over Europe, and especially for tragedy, which more and more often was based on real historical episodes of the past.

In England, Romantic tragedy distanced itself from pre-established conventions such as the Aristotelian unities and poetic diction—the typical versification of French neoclassical tragedy—and wished to interpret a new "tragic vision"[109]; as suggested by Jeffrey Cox, the significance of tragedy as a category was transformed and widened during the Romantic age.[110] Tragedy was no longer defined as a dramatic text corresponding to certain canonical characteristics but rather a play that conveyed a tragic "tone of mind"[111]—a "sense of tragic" that was drawn by reality, which was seen as tragic in itself. Furthermore, the concept of purity of the genre was no longer applicable to Romantic tragedy. Tragedy was, in fact, in some cases named "tragic drama" by the authors themselves in order to underline its hybrid nature and separation from "tragedy" in the classical sense of the term, while underlining its affinity with a modern and comprehensive notion of drama, freed from the traditional dichotomy "tragedy/comedy". Indeed, Romantic tragedy became a mixture of different elements that allowed greater freedom for playwrights as far as themes, style and structures were concerned—as exemplified by tragedies such as *Orra* (1812) and *The Family Legend* (1810) by Joanna Baillie, which incorporated respectively gothic and historical elements. What Romantic

---

[109] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", in *La Questione Romantica*, n.14, Primavera 2003, Napoli: Liguori, p. 18.

[110] Jeffrey Cox, *In the Shadow of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany*, pp. 155-156, quoted in Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", in *La Questione Romantica*, n.14, Primavera 2003, Napoli: Liguori, p. 18.

[111] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", op. cit., p. 18.

tragedies had in common, in spite of their various differences, was certainly their refusal of one essential feature of classical tragedy, that is, *catharsis*—the final moment when, after the unwinding of the events, the audience rationalises all the feelings and negative emotions the drama has aroused, and is able to overcome them, reaching an ultimate status of emotional release and purification.[112] Catharsis was not present in Romantic tragedies, because there was no final rationalisation nor solution to the dramatic circumstances that led to the dreadful ending. The adversities that characterised tragedy mirrored the negativity that was taking over society, from which there was no escape for the hero, just as there was no way out for the audience (or the readers), who were left overwhelmed by irresolvable chaos. The difficult historical moment Britain was going through strongly influenced the British literary production of the time and found a perfect outlet in the genre of tragedy, through which writers could express—in a metaphorical way—all the negative and dramatic situations they were experiencing, giving vent to their recriminations, conveying important messages or criticising aspects of society and politics. Indeed, in Romantic tragedy the tragic hero was no longer a spotless character whose life and actions were torn between free will and a fate planned by a supernatural order, precisely because the same categories of "hero" and "supernatural order" were questioned and challenged; they no longer belonged to the irrational modern world.

Although Romanticism developed later in Spain, the process of deconstruction of classical tragedy and formation of Romantic drama very much resembled what happened in Britain. The 19th century saw the enduring success of French neoclassical tragedies, performed on the Spanish stages throughout the Romantic period especially in the form of *refundiciones* (rewritings), but also the development of Spanish romantic drama[113] in its various and different shapes, whose labels and definitions are still very much argued by scholars. Indeed, such plays, which did not adhere to the canons of the classical genres, were identified by the authors themselves as "drama romántico", "drama trágico", "drama histórico", "drama histórico Romántico" and "tragedia Romántica", raising questions about their belonging to pre-

---

[112] The notion of *catharsis*, theorised by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, is still a controversial concept often debated by scholars in relation to its ambiguous significance. Among the many different interpretations of *catharsis* that have been developed throughout the centuries by eminent academics—moralistic or didactic, intellectual, dramatic or structural, and so on—the definition given above relies on the explanation provided by German philologist Jacob Bernays (1824-1881). Stephen Halliwell sums up Bernays' interpretation, pinpointing that "the dominant modern trend has been to take *katharsis* as a process of emotional release or OUTLET—a harmlessly pleasurable means of expanding pent-up or excessive emotions. The patron-saint (though not quite founder) of this view is Bernays, who interprets the process as a *pathological* phenomenon: Aristotle's position in the *Politics 8* passage is 'ein pathologischer Gesichtspunkt.'" Source: Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, London: Duckworth, 1986, 2009, p. 353.

[113] "Drama romántico español", using the terminology employed by Ana Isabel Ballesteros Dorado, *Espacios del Drama Romántico español*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de la Lengua Española, 2003, p. 41.

established categories. For instance, while Picoche suggests that historical dramas are not necessarily "Romantic", and thus makes a clear distinction between "drama histórico" and "drama Romántico", Navas Ruiz locates historical dramas inside the realm of Romantic drama, since Romantic theatre in Spain was always, somehow, related to history and the past.[114] Following the same path, González Subías identifies a general category of "drama histórico Romántico" and retraces its connection with French neoclassical tragedy, especially with the historical tragedy of the late 18th century, demonstrating that Romantic historical drama was the progenitor of a further category that developed around mid-19th century: *tragédia romántica*, or Romantic tragedy, whose leading figure was Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.[115] In an attempt to clarify the complicated, and even controversial, development of dramatic production in Spain during the Romantic age, González Subías identifies the following process as starting in the last decades of the 18th century and terminating in the first half of the 19th century: "*tragedia neoclásica–tragedia histórica (prerromántica)–drama histórico (prerromántico)–drama histórico romántico–tragedia romántica.*"[116] Therefore, he argues that the definition of "Romantic tragedy" does neither imply a step backwards nor an attempt to combine classicism and Romanticism, but rather represents the logic conclusion Romantic historical drama leads to, when charged with pathetic elements and essentially tragic.[117] Furthermore, González Subías underlines how the terms "tragedy," "drama" or "tragic drama" were often employed interchangeably to identify most of the texts written by Romantic dramatists, and underscores to what extent even many historical dramas could often be regarded as tragedies, given the substantial tragic elements they feature.[118]

Despite the different terminologies employed—which will be reported in this work faithfully to the original labels imposed by the authors—, it appears that all the dramas written during the Romantic age shared a number of elements in common, which could be regarded as typical of such an intense cultural and historical period. During the Romantic age, Spanish dramatic production often refused the regulations imposed by neoclassical tragedy, such as the unity of time, space and place, the traditional setting in Ancient Greece and the compulsory poetic diction in favour of a free choice between rhymes and blank verse. The Spanish historical past—especially the Middle Ages—became the ideal setting of Spanish drama, following a new

---

[114] Ana Isabel Ballesteros Dorado, *Espacios del Drama Romántico español*, op. cit., p. 36.
[115] José Luis Gonzalez Subías, *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tragedia romántica española*, Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2007. Retrieved from: http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/gertrudis-gmez-de-avellaneda-y-la-tragedia-romntica-espaola-0/html/ [Accessed 12/01/2019].
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.

interest in history and historical events that characterised Romantic movements across Europe. Furthermore, Spanish Romantic dramas shared a precise vision of the world and society, a fragmented sense of history and historical happenings, and expressed "las esperanzas frustradas"[119] that pervaded writers' and intellectuals' consciousness. In addition, the choice of the term "drama", in Spain as well as in England, could be ascribed to the dramatists' desire to further distance themselves from the rigid traditional labels of canonical theatrical compositions they found no longer applicable to the dynamic reality they lived in. As Ballesteros rightfully pinpoints,

> La expresión "drama romántico", denota pero, sobre todo, connota una obra dramática que admite la inserción tanto de elementos cómicos como trágicos, costumbristas e históricos—conforme a una concepción de la realidad subyacente—, con un desenlace que supone un choque de las aspiraciones con la realidad, un final donde se manifiesta la imposibilidad de alcanzar lo deseado, el desmantelamiento de las esperanzas o los ideales del héroe.[120]

The hero of Spanish Romantic drama is, again, a doomed figure who fights against tyranny or a biased society that oppressed and marginalised certain categories of people for whom the protagonist acts both as leader and spokesperson. Such a modern hero was characterised by strong passions and deep sentiments, but was also extremely human in his nature and, thus, flawed and imperfect, destined to die tragically, no matter how valorous he was and which glorious battles he carried out. Indeed, fate seemed a prominent theme in Spanish Romantic dramas, together with freedom from any form of subjugation and a distressing perception of time as swiftly passing.[121] Interestingly, Caldera also underlines to what extent the classical *topos* of *anagnorisis*[122] was present in Spanish Romantic dramas such as the famous *La Conjuración de Venecia* (1830) by Martínez de la Rosa, but with a subverted role in the economy of the tragedy. Instead of being a tool which helped to unravel the plot and lead to a happy ending, *anagnorisis* constituted a further element of torment and grief in the tragic conclusion of the play.[123] Besides Francisco Martínez de la Rosa, with his *La Conjuración de Venecia*—regarded as the first Spanish Romantic play[124]—, many Romantic dramatists consolidated their fame during the same years thanks to this new reinterpretation of the tragic genre. Famous playwrights such as Mariano José Larra with *Macías* (1834), José Zorrilla with *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844), Duque de Rivas with *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835), Juan

---

[119] Ana Isabel Ballesteros Dorado, *Espacios del Drama Romántico español*, op. cit., p. 41.
[120] Ibid. p. 41.
[121] Ermanno Caldera, *El Teatro Español en la Época Romántica,* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 2001.
[122] Caldera defines *anagnorisis* as the final and unexpected recognition of one of the protagonists, whose identity was hidden or unknown during the whole story. Source: Ibid. p. 56.
[123] Ibid. p. 56.
[124] Ibid. p. 49.

Eugenio Hartzenbusch with *Los Amantes de Teruel* (1837) and, of course, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, with her many successful *tragedias románticas* that will be examined in detail in the next chapters of this thesis.

As far as Italy is concerned, the situation appears more complicated, given that during the Romantic age tragedy was not the most successful genre, since it was surpassed by plays where music was the real protagonist—melodramas, lyrical dramas and operas. As already established, Alessandro Manzoni was the leading dramatist of the time and the theorist of Italian Romanticism and Romantic tragedy, which—as he explained in his *Lettre à Monsieur Chauvet sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie* (1823)—was supposed to refuse the rules established by the Greeks and to free itself from the dramatic unities of place and time. Again, in his *Lettera sul Romanticismo al marchese d'Azeglio* (1823), Manzoni argues that it is necessary for dramatists to cease imitating the classics, employing Greek mythology and following rules that were based on the authority of rhetoricians instead of applying logic and reasoning.[125] He claimed that it was not possible to identify strict norms for Romantic production, except for some extremely general principles unanimously agreed upon by Romantic writers. Such principles defined that every literary genre must have "the useful as its goal, the truth as its subject and the interesting as its means"[126] and thus, in the context of tragedy, they implied that tragedy had to reject all conventions to reach its main aims: being useful and conveying a moral message, while depicting reality. It was indeed from everyday life and the real world that writers, poets and playwrights had to draw their inspiration, which could not be limited by constraints and regulations established in the past, and outdated in modern culture. In Italian dramatic production, such an essential adherence to the concept of "truth" resulted in a predominance of historical plays, in line with the dominant trend in Europe.[127]

The dramatic genre in the Romantic age, according to eminent scholar Ezio Raimondi, required both a realistic investigation of individuality and the exploration of its exact historical context.[128] The narration of history became central in Manzoni's dramatic theory, according to which the task of the dramatic poet was to investigate the stories, emotions, sentiments, passions and griefs behind the bare facts reported by historians. Indeed, as he wrote to Monsieur Chauvet,

---

[125] Alessandro Manzoni, *Lettera sul Romanticismo al marchese d'Azeglio*, 1823, Electronic edition by Liber Liber, 2013, p. 8. Retrieved from: https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/m/manzoni/sul_romanticismo/pdf/manzoni_sul_romanticismo.pdf

[126] Alessandro Manzoni, *Sul Romanticismo: lettera al Marchese Cesare D'Azeglio*, 1823, quoted in Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento*, Roma: Carocci, 2002, p.103.

[127] Farinelli, et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento*, op. cit., p. 103.

[128] Ezio Raimondi, *Romanticismo Italiano e Romanticismo Europeo*, Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1997, 2000, p.105.

all that men and women thought, the feelings that accompanied their projects, their successes and failures, the words they used to express their anger or happiness—which were never described in official historical accounts—constituted the poet's domain.[129]

> Perché in sostanza cosa ci dà la storia? avvenimenti noti, per così dire, solo esteriormente; ciò che gli uomini hanno fatto; ma ciò che hanno pensato, i sentimenti che hanno accompagnato le loro deliberazioni e i loro progetti, i loro successi e insuccessi, i discorsi con i quali hanno cercato di far prevalere le loro passioni e le loro volontà su altre passioni e altre volontà, . . . con i quali in una parola, hanno manifestato la loro individualità, tutto ciò, tranne pochissimo, è passato sotto il silenzio della storia, e tutto ciò forma il dominio della poesia.[130]

Following a recurrent pattern in Romantic Europe, his tragedies *Il Conte di Carmagnola* (1820) and *Adelchi* (1822) were both set in a medieval Italy and based on historical events which hinted to the current Italian socio-political situation, in order to highlight its controversies and condemn it. Although both texts are divided into five acts and written in verse—as typical of neoclassical tragedies—Manzoni distances himself from tradition employing a modern perception of history, Romantic *pathos* and themes that allow the exploration of the characters' inner selves, and a revolutionized usage of the Greek *chorus*—an emblematic feature of classical tragedy. The *chorus* was originally made of a group of characters that represented the general population and commented on the happenings that were taking place on stage, embodying a collective thought.[131] However, in his tragedies, Manzoni employs such element to convey the author's opinion, his own point of view, sentiments and ideas on the actions carried out by the protagonists; he transforms the *chorus* into a space for the dramatist to participate in the play—without actually performing on stage.[132]

---

[129] Alessandro Manzoni, *Lettre à Monsieur Chauvet sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie*, 1823.

[130] Ibid. English translation: "What does history give us? Events renowned, so to speak, only outwardly; what men have done; but what they have thought, the feelings that accompanied their decisions and plans, their achievements and failures, the speeches with which they tried to make their passions and will prevail over other passions and will, … (the speeches) with which, in one word, they displayed their individuality, all that, with very few exceptions, was silenced by history, and it is precisely that which constitutes the domain of poetry."

[131] The role of the *chorus* in Greek tragedy is still debated among scholars. The definition given above follows the interpretation of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, according to which the chorus is "an anonymous and collective being whose role is to express, through its fear, hopes and judgements, the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community". Source: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy*, New York: Zone Books, 1990, p. 24.

[132] Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento,* Roma: Carocci, 2002, p. 97.

2.2 Romantic female dramatists and the re-appropriation of the "high" genre

In this perspective, the tragedies written by female Romantic playwrights, as pinpointed by Lilla Maria Crisafulli, fall into the tragic vision suggested by Jeffrey Cox, since women's texts do not adhere to the classic normativity but shift towards a more modern idea of tragic.[133] The lack of catharsis, its overcoming of the *status quo* and final solution also characterize women's historical dramas, in which female characters always suffer, die or lose their minds because of a dramatic social context from which there is no escape. Women, thus, shared with male playwrights the same refusal of catharsis, classical unities and notions of hero and supernatural order, but add to such elements a modern re-interpretation of "tragedy," a gender perspective which brings along a series of social and political implications that bestowed on the text further levels of analysis, as it will be demonstrated in the next chapters. Indeed, from a female perspective, the Romantic age was not only characterised by wars and upheavals but also by significant gender discriminations, such as women's deprival of civil rights—suffrage, ownership, political representation—and lack of schooling. Women could not vote, they were not usually allowed to receive a higher education, or to aspire to a profession, because they were considered inferior to men, biologically—too much driven by their irrational minds and passions—and, thus, intellectually and socially subordinate. Their role in society was regarded as marginal, relegated as they were into the domestic space, and it is exactly such a position of marginality that makes women's voices even more relevant. As argued by Deleuze and Guattari, the literature of a minor group "is always political"[134] because their point of view was necessarily excluded from political and social decision-making, their conditions were not taken into account, and their voices were silenced and erased from official historical chronicles. Therefore, the mere act of making their voices heard through literature, was *per se* a fundamental stance. Furthermore, by appropriating drama, a genre seen as "inappropriate/disreputable" for women, and tragedy in particular, regarded as the ultimate expression of genius, they also reclaimed their belonging to a category society thought they could not fit into because of their supposed inferiority—that of the *Romantic Genius*. Of course, both in the 18th and 19th centuries there were many women who could perfectly fit into it, and some of them were publicly defined as "women of genius" by their coeval male counterparts, as was the case of Joanna Baillie and Mary Robinson. The use of history in drama, extremely popular in the Romantic age all over Europe, acquired a completely new significance and

---

[133] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", p. 18, in *La Questione Romantica*, n.14, Primavera 2003, Napoli: Liguori.

[134] Réda Bensmaïa, "Foreword", in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature.* Translation to English by Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. xviii.

perspective in women's tragedies and it is not by coincidence that the majority of women's Romantic tragedies were precisely historical tragedies. History, as well as drama, was considered to be a masculine domain since men were the protagonists of historical events, heroic endeavours, politics and basically every aspect of public life. Indeed, as Katherine Newey suggests, women employed historical drama to reclaim their existence in history as well as their right to be individual subjects, with a voice and political opinions, and thus citizens of a nation that always denied their presence.

> In using history as the high cultural form of tragedy, Romantic women playwrights were appropriating the 'traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge'. In this way, the authority of genre could be used to overcome the disabilities of gender.[135]

Historical tragedies will be analysed more in detail in the next chapter, as they represented a political instrument and a fundamental outlet for Romantic female dramatists. Despite the various typologies of tragic dramas written by women, a further element in common to all of them that cannot be overlooked—which also underlines an essential difference from men's compositions—is the doomed life of female protagonists characterized by difficulties, violence, traumas and, in the end, death. A sad destiny that could be avoided in a different society, with different rules and behavioral norms imposed on women; a death that could either be physical or symbolical, as in the case of Orra, who in the end completely loses her mind. Nevertheless, the brutality experienced by female protagonists was destined to remain unpunished. If in male tragedies violence was always counterbalanced with revenge—and thus other violence—in what Kerrigan calls "violent equality,"[136] so that the victim and the perpetrator were even in the end, in women's tragedies such an equality was not possible because society did not allow women to get revenge, since revenge and violence were not "appropriate" for their gender. Therefore, there was no solution to women's conditions in a society that obliged them to be disposable commodities, instead of subjects with authority over themselves and their bodies, as English Romantic women's tragedies often demonstrate.

The death or madness of Romantic female protagonists appears to be a typical element also in women's Spanish tragedies, as argued by Fátima Coca Ramírez, who underlines to what extent even strong female characters, who fight for social justice and a greater good throughout the text, share the same tragic destiny in the end.[137] The dramatic production of both Gertrudis

---

[135] Katherine Newey, "Women and History on the Romantic Stage" in Catherine Burroughs, *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, Cambridge U.P., 2000, p. 79.

[136] J. Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy. Aeschylus to Armageddon.* Cited in Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", op. cit., p. 24.

[137] Fátima Coca Ramírez, "Discurso Femenino en el Teatro de Gómez de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", Edición digital a partir de Rafael Alemany Ferrer, Francisco Chico Rico, (eds.), *XVIII Simposio de la SELGYC (Alicante*

Gómez de Avellaneda and Rosario de Acuña—the two leading Spanish tragedians of the time, although the latter was very much ostracised because of the subversive content of her works, and soon forgotten—had in common a representation of female characters which appears extremely different from that featured in men's compositions. Indeed, if on the one hand Romantic female authors participated in the development of Romanticism in Spain and employed the main elements that constituted Spanish Romantic tragedy—thus refusing the constraints of classical and neoclassical drama—, on the other hand they attempted a further subversion in order to impose their female perspective. For instance, the typical Romantic heroine featured in male texts—generally shy, living in the shadow of the men who surround her, and exploited by them (or by God) as an instrument to achieve a goal[138]—is often portrayed in female works as a bold woman who is not afraid to affirm her authority and opinions. Exemplary is the case of Elda, the protagonist of *Baltasar* (1858) by Gómez de Avellaneda who refuses to obey the King's orders and vindicates her freedom. Indeed, when called "esclava" and urged to restrain her pride, she answers that there are no chains in the world which can make her determination succumb ("¡No hay en el mundo cadenas / que rindan la voluntad!").[139] In a significant number of texts, such female protagonists are often depicted as not conforming to the stereotypes imposed on women at the time and not always adhering to the behavioural norms that used to regulate women's life, transgressing the rules whenever freedom, justice or love are at stake. Furthermore, a strong critique of society is often conveyed through the words of female characters, who frequently embody the authors' point of view. This is the case of María de Noriega in de Acuña's tragedy *El Padre Juan* (1891), who speaks for the dramatist when she attacks the Church, defining crosses, bells and churches as symbols of torture, superstition and mistakes.[140] Nevertheless, it should be noted that the tragic destiny of all female characters, despite their courage, significantly mirrors what usually occurred to women in 19th century Spanish society: female voices were always brutally silenced, physically or metaphorically, by patriarchal power.[141] Similarly to female tragedians in England, Spanish women playwrights employed history and the narration of historical events from an innovative female perspective which, as we will see in the next chapter, seems to be aimed at rewriting

---

9-11 de septiembre 2010) = XVIII Simposi de la SELGYC (Alacant 9-11 setembre de 2010). Literatura i espectacle = Literatura y espectáculo, Alacant, Universitat d'Alacant, SELGYC [Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada], 2012, pp.139-154. Retrieved from: http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/discurso-femenino-en-el-teatro-de-gomez-de-avellaneda-y-rosario-de-acuna/ [Accessed 8/11/2018].

[138] Fátima Coca Ramírez, "Discurso Femenino en el Teatro de Gómez de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 146.

[139] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Baltasar*, II, IV. Edition of María Prado Mas, 2000.

[140] Fátima Coca Ramírez, "Discurso Femenino en el Teatro de Gómez de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 150.

[141] Ibid. p. 152.

history inscribing women's presence in it—not as mere appendages subjected to men's power, but as subjects with authority over themselves. Interestingly, in addition to a lively enthusiasm for history and the refusal of the classical normativity and dramatic unities, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda employed essentially Romantic themes, characters and settings often mixed with a hendecasyllabic versification, division into acts, and solemn tone and language that easily recall classical tragedy. Therefore, her dramatic production represents, according to Subías, a unique case of proper *tragedia romántica*, rather than tragic drama—as she labelled most of her works following the trend of the period, which saw in the term "drama" a more accurate portrayal of the authors' intentions. Such a definition derives from the fact that in her texts she manages to combine the typical features of Romantic drama with some emblematic elements of Greek tragedy, in order to overcome and renovate both of them, giving life to a new subgenre, released from any kind of constraints and free to encompass different dramatic categories.[142]

When it comes to the Italian context, the situation becomes more complicated as far as delineating a possible tendency in a female re-appropriation of Romantic tragedy (or tragic drama) is concerned. The reason is a shortage of female dramatic production—compared to England and Spain—and a lack of investigation and criticism on the dramatic compositions penned by women writers in the first half of the 19th century, which have been completely erased from literary historiography. However, it is possible to identify a strong interest in history and the narration of events from a female point of view, as demonstrated by the significant number of female protagonists—Ines, Tullia, Erminia, Rosmunda—who embody the perspective through which the story is recounted. Interestingly, the names of the female protagonists were stated in the titles of the plays, whereas in Spanish and English productions it is more difficult to encounter dramas that feature a female appellative in the heading. Not to mention plays such as *Percy* (1777) by Hannah More and *Rienzi el Tribuno* (1876) by Rosario de Acuña, whose titles are dedicated to male characters when the leading roles are really those of Elwina, the woman Percy loves, and María, Rienzi's wife. Of course, such a choice by Italian female playwrights could be due to the great success actresses were having on Italian stages and, thus, to a well-thought marketing strategy to convince both famous actresses to perform the main character and theatre managers to stage their tragedies. Nevertheless, the role that female protagonists played in the economy of the texts, and their relation to historical events, could also lead us to think that the decision to put their names in the title could correspond to a statement of intentions; refusing to allow the erasure of historical women and heroines from

[142] José Luis Gonzalez Subías, "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tragedia romántica española", op. cit.

collective memory. History is employed by Italian female dramatists also to criticise the political situation in Italy and promote ideals of freedom and independence from foreign domination, as in the case of Rosmunda, who rebels against the man who conquered the land of which her father was the King. However, history is also used to attack any form of oppression against marginalised categories, as the cruelties endured by all female characters and their tragic destiny clearly show. While female tragedies appear to adopt neither the same structures nor the same versification, they all seem to feature Romantic characteristics drawn from the gothic tradition, as well as a typical Romantic sensibility mixed with elements charged with strong *pathos*. Interestingly, the *chorus*, very prominent in Manzoni's tragedies, is not always present in women's texts and, when it is there, as in the case of *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837), it adheres to the classical canons. Indeed, in Paladini's tragedy, the *chorus* expresses the collective thought of the population instead of the author's opinions, which are conveyed directly by the protagonist herself. Whether this choice represents a conscious act designed to empower the female protagonist or a tribute to the classical tradition will be examined in the close reading of the text. However, we cannot overlook the fact that Italian female dramatists portrayed female characters with strong will and opinions, made them and their experiences the core of their dramas, and allowed them to speak their minds through their written words, before an inescapable tragic ending. Such a pattern, that cannot be found in men's tragedies, could lead us to consider a possible attempt by female playwrights to give relevance to women's struggles in society. These possible implications will be further analysed through the close reading of tragedies in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

A Feminist Approach:
Intersecting Gender, Tragedy and History

1. Feminist criticism and methodology in literature

1.1 The literary becomes political

The birth of a feminist literary criticism traditionally dates back to the late 1970s,[1] although already in the 1960s it was possible to read a number of texts influenced by the principles of Second Wave Feminism. The social and political turmoil that characterised the 60s and 70s had a strong impact on the production of female critical texts to which writers, essayists and philosophers entrusted their analysis of the social, cultural and literary contexts they were living in. It was in the same period that women's relentless fight for their civil rights started to give some tangible results. A famous motto of Second Wave feminist movements was "the personal is political," and it is indeed with a similar intention that female writers decided to burst into the public sphere asserting their femininity and subjectivity, while researching a genealogy of their own. Transforming their personal condition into a political act allowed female writers to publicly declare that a woman should have the same social, cultural and political weight as a man, and to fight for such right to be openly acknowledged. The battle for equality and the revaluation of the female category, thus, pushed women writers to investigate their foremothers, all those poets, novelists and essayists whose production was erased from literary historiography and whose identities were forgotten—when not hidden under pseudonyms or "anonymous" tags. Moreover, women started questioning the whole notion according to which women's texts were neither worthy of being studied nor passed on because they were inferior to men's. At the same time, women began promoting a re-reading of female compositions from new critical perspectives, freed from biased preconceptions. This act of revision was also conducted on male texts, especially on those considered "canonical", and the result of such an examination brought to light significant and generalised misconceptions about women, as well as stereotypical images of the female gender conveyed through male writers' words. Therefore, the first fundamental steps undertook by the then newborn feminist literary criticism regarded a whole universe of women whose names, lives, feelings, desires and literary production had been either misrepresented or completely passed into oblivion. The long process of rediscovery that began in the 1970s, and that mainly focused on English and American writers, was later criticised and enriched by postmodern, postcolonial and poststructuralist theories, as well as by a fruitful dialogue with Afro-American feminist movements and the philosophical thought

[1] A comprehensive and detailed investigation of the birth and development of feminist literary criticism is included in Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (eds.), *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

developed by Third Wave Feminism, especially the ground-breaking *queer theory*.[2] Although such process is still very much in progress, given the vastness of female writers who have been undervalued and ignored since the dawn of time, a large number of texts have been brought back to light in the last decades and reinterpreted according to new, more suitable, paradigms. Indeed, the "problem" with women's texts has always been their relationship with the canons, established by men and, thus based on male tastes, experiences and perception of the world. The pre-established personal and professional paths women were obliged to follow in the previous centuries, when they were generally denied the right to an education, political representation and access to most professions, undoubtedly had an impact on their writings. Whether women's texts did or did not adhere to the canons imposed by literary traditions, they often mirrored a contrasting perspective on society, literature, and many other aspects of everyday life. Furthermore, the absence of a literary genealogy of female writers whose texts could serve as models to the next generations not only prevented women from readily approaching the act of writing—making them feel as if they were usurping a role not destined to them—but also greatly contributed to their falling into oblivion. Indeed, from the beginning, the absolute disregard for women's literary production led future generations to think that writing was "an unsuitable job for a woman"[3]—to use female crime novelist P.D. James's iconic words—and thus, to consider that every text penned by a woman was not worthy of being studied and passed on.

The lack of a female genealogy was first addressed by Virginia Woolf in her 1929 masterpiece *A Room of One's Own*, decades before the birth and development of a solid feminist literary criticism. In her essay, Woolf describes a visit to the British Museum, where she went to find some material to write a paper on the relationship between women and fiction. Once there, she immediately realises the vast number of texts written by men about women, "perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe"[4] and the complete absence of books written by women about men. Furthermore, while reading Professor Trevelyan's *History of England,* Woolf highlights to what extent Elizabethan women's portrayal in literature appears quite different from the way the feminine was depicted in history books. As she pinpoints, if female characters in dramas and poetry were "vary various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater," in reality they were obliged to comply with the decisions taken by their fathers or

[2] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* 1990.
[3] *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* is a crime novel written by Phyllis Dorothy James (known as P.D. James) and published in 1972.
[4] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929, Roma: Newton Compton Editori, 2013, p. 30.

husbands and often "locked up, beaten and flung about the room", as the law did allow.[5] Women's role in society was so marginal that there were no female figures in historical accounts of the past, except for some rare Queens, and there were no reports about how women were educated, how they spent their time, if they wrote poems or what age they usually had children.

> Occasionally an individual woman is mentioned, an Elizabeth, or a Mary; a queen or a great lady. But by no possible means could middle-class women with nothing but brains and character at their command have taken part in one of the great movements which, brought together, constitute the historian's view of the past. Nor shall we find her in collection of anecdotes. . . . She never writes her own life and scarcely keeps a diary; there are only a handful of her letters in existence. She left no plays or poems by which we can judge her. . . . The life of the average Elizabethan woman must be scattered about somewhere, could one collect it and make a book of it.[6]

What men wrote about women in their texts, Woolf realises, is nothing more than the idea they had of women, a stereotypical image they created in their mind which did not correspond to reality—which was made of abuse and oppression. Indeed, Virginia Woolf introduces two unprecedented and fundamental principles that were later developed by the first feminist literary critics: the necessity to retrace a female genealogy which could not only fill the gaps of women in literature, but also their absence in history, and the concept of the looking-glass to describe the perception and representation of the female. For centuries, women served as looking-glasses where men could see themselves much greater than they were in real life; denigrating and marginalising the feminine, they could feel superior and entitled to prove their authority over society. Women had, thus, the only task of allowing this process of recognition of the male self and, in order to do so, they were compelled to embody the *other*, the inferior, opposite and antithetical to the man inside the binary system male-female that regulated society. If the power of man and the legitimation of his superiority depended on his claim of female inferiority, it is not surprising that female figures have always been ignored and erased from official accounts, history and literary historiography. The two issues are, therefore, strictly connected. As Woolf underlines,

> For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgement, civilizing natives, making laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast and dinner at least twice the size he really is?[7]

---

[5] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, op. cit., p. 49.
[6] Ibid. pp. 50-51.
[7] Ibid. p. 41.

The notion of the looking-glass is essential to analyse the relationship between women and subjectivity, which is at the core of the investigation of female representation in male dramas, and which necessarily shaped both society's and women's perception of themselves. Consequently, the issue of subjectivity, as well as the creation and representation of the feminine, acquires an even greater importance in texts—in this specific case, dramatic texts—penned by women, raising multiple questions about gender identity in the context of theatrical performance, as it will be shown in the following paragraphs.

Moreover, in *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf tackles a third issue crucial to feminist criticism and the revaluation of female compositions, that is the conditions under which women were producing literature during the previous centuries. In her work, Woolf discusses women living before the 18th century, in particular during the Elizabethan age, but her point of view could be easily extended to all the women who have written and published in England until the mid-20th century or even later than that, especially in the lowest classes. Indeed, the core of the argument is women's economic independence and stability which could grant them the opportunity to spend their time writing, and in a place reserved for them to do so—the iconic "room of one's own." The majority of women who were lucky enough to receive an education, in the 18th as in the 19th century, generally could not live out of the money they earned with their publications. Except for a few cases, women either did other kinds of job regarded as suitable for their gender—teacher, governess, seamstress, translator and so on—or married someone who could economically support them; but even then, family duties as wives and mothers usually took over their time and left no space for writing. Such conditions often pushed female authors to dedicate part of their careers to genres that, at the time, were considered inferior but which sold very well, allowing them to publish regularly and earn good amounts of money. This tendency was despised by male critics, who regarded female writers' approach to "minor genres" as due to their inability to write "high" literature, when, of course, it was a mere matter of economic stability. The Annuals, for example, were a type of literary publication that gained great fortune in 19th century England and were very much appreciated especially among the middle-class, because of their fine poetry, beautiful bindings and moderate price.[8] Such works were highly requested by editors because they were extremely sellable and, thus, printed frequently. Many female writers contributed to the Annuals, but were often attacked by critics and labelled as mediocre authors; the same fate occurred to other kinds of publication, previously regarded as "secondary", which have been only recently re-evaluated and studied as

[8] Serena Baiesi, "Fashionable poetry in annuals and gift-books." In Serena Baiesi, *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance. The Adventures of a 'Literary Genius'.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 97-136.

a veritable literary phenomenon. For these reasons, it is fundamental to take into consideration not only the access women had to education, but also which kind of difficulties women had to face in order to be part of the literary world. First of all, that of making a living out of their own printed words, which was not as easy as for men since, as we have already argued, publishers were less inclined to invest in women's production. Well aware of women's situation, Woolf exemplifies how differently they were treated in various contexts considered as men's realms, from the library of the University of Cambridge—they could not enter without a male accompaniment—to the theatre, where Judith, Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, could not pursue her dream of becoming a dramatist because of her gender, despite being as talented as her famous brother. Although many feminist critics have later developed, examined and deepened the issues presented in 1929 by Woolf, her contribution to the cultural movement that led to the rediscovery and re-evaluation of female production should not be overlooked, as it forged the fundamental principles of feminist literary criticism as well as the critical perspective adopted to conduct this doctoral research.

The construction of a female literary genealogy to fill the deplorable lack of women on the library bookshelves depicted by Woolf—"But what I find deplorable … is that nothing is known about women before the eighteenth century. I have no model in my mind to turn about this way and that"[9]—was at the core of one of the first and most important Second Wave feminist critical works, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own.* The volume, published in 1977 and whose title clearly pays homage to Woolf's essay, aims at retracing, for the very first time, a tradition of female novelists and their texts, analysed through the innovative feminist criticism, born in those same years. Showalter states, right from the beginning, her intention to bring back to light authors and works too long forgotten in order to give to the world a truthful overview of the amount of women who actually dedicated themselves to novel writing, besides the canonical names usually passed on and thus believed to be the only women who ever grabbed a pen and wrote something valuable.

> In the Atlas of the English novel, women's territory is usually depicted as desert bounded by mountains of four sides: the Austen peaks, the Brontë cliffs, the Eliot range, and the Woolf's hills. This book is an attempt to fill in the terrain between these literary landmarks and to construct a more reliable map from which to explore the achievements of English women novelists.[10]

Showalter's contribution was fundamental not only because it was a first attempt to retrace a female genealogy, rediscovering authors that had fallen into oblivion, but also because it

---

[9] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 2013, op. cit., p. 52.
[10] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. vii.

represented one of the first approaches to textual analysis from a female critical perspective founded on canons established exclusively by women. Indeed, Showalter meant to construct a new theoretical framework aimed at examining women's literature and developing "new models based on the study of female experience," instead of employing a combination of male canons and theories readapted.[11] In order to do so, in the same work Showalter identifies the three main phases that professional female writers went through when producing literature meant to be published. She names such stages as *Feminine*, *Feminist* and *Female*,[12] but specifies that they should not be seen as rigid categories but rather as overlapping groups of elements that can be found at the same time, and in the same text, of each female writer. The first phase, *Feminine*, is that of "*imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on social roles."[13] Of course, in the context of Romantic women writers, it is a prominent stage, considering the strong hold that tradition had on society and the absence of alternative models. Indeed, Showalter identifies such phase as "the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840s to the death of George Eliot in 1880."[14] The *Feminist* phase is that of "*protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy," and she temporally locates it between 1880 and 1920, while the *Female* stage is focused on a "self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" and occurs from 1920 to the present.[15] Although such phases are ideally located decades after the end of the Romantic period, they represent useful categories to classify which types of processes female writers went through even in the 18th and 19th centuries. Interestingly, both *feminist* and *feminine* elements could be found in the dramas written by our Romantic writers in the three literatures examined, as the next chapters will show.

The critical approach theorised and employed by Showalter to study literature produced by women was labelled by the author herself *gynocritics* (or *gynocriticism*) in her 1979 "Towards a Feminist Poetics", and differentiated from the other variety of feminist criticism, named *feminist critique*. Feminist criticism is indeed divided into two distinct types: the first, the *feminist critique,* focuses on the "*woman as reader*", and "the way in which the hypothesis of a female reader changes our apprehension of a given text, awakening us to the significance of

[11] Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, 1986, London, Virago Press, 1989, p. 131.
[12] All the words in italics are not my emphasis, they were indeed italicised by Elaine Showalter in her texts.
[13] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, 1977, London: Virago Press, 1982, p. 13.
[14] Ibid. p. 13.
[15] Ibid. p. 13.

its textual codes."[16] Therefore, it aims attention at "the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions of and misconception about women in criticism, the fissures in male-constructed literary history," as well as "the exploitation and manipulation of the female audience" and "the analysis of woman-as-sign in semiotic systems."[17] *Gynocritics*, on the contrary, is centred on the "*woman as writer*", and therefore, it is a critical approach that includes all the subjects tackled in women's texts from a female perspective. It is strictly connected to "feminist research in history, anthropology, psychology, all of which have developed hypotheses of a female subculture including not only the ascribed status, and the internalised constructs of femininity, but also the occupations, interactions, and consciousness of women."[18] Although the idea of a female subculture would be later deconstructed in favour of a comprehensive notion of literature that included both male and female traditions completing each other, the intent of Showalter was crucial to the creation of a field of studies that focused exclusively on the repressed female culture, freed from "the linear absolutes of male literary history."[19] Such an innovative approach allowed to start rethinking the criterions applied to the analysis of female texts and setting up new parameters that took into account the difficult conditions of women in society that clearly influenced their experiences, lives and literary production, as well as the cultural and socio-economic situation women were living and writing in—undoubtedly different from that enjoyed by their male counterparts. Indeed, in her 1981 essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", Showalter identified the cultural model as the most accurate to "provide . . . a more complete and satisfying way to talk about the specificity and difference of women's writing" compared to other "theories based in biology, linguistics or psychoanalysis."[20] The "four models of difference"[21] suggested by Showalter (biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic and cultural)—overlapping, yet "roughly sequential in that each incorporates the one before"[22]—represent different paths to the analysis of female texts, each based on a different methodology used to define women's writing. Although they all have their peculiar elements useful to a *gynocritical* examination, the cultural model proves to encompass them all and to acknowledge a broader range of distinctive characteristics which are essential to the analysis of female literary production, especially in the comparative context of this research work. As Showalter underlines:

---

[16] Elaine Showalter, "Towards a Feminist Poetics", op. cit., p. 128.
[17] Ibid. p. 128.
[18] Ibid. p. 131.
[19] Ibid. p. 131.
[20] Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference, (Winter, 1981), pp. 179–205, p. 197.
[21] Ibid. p. 186.
[22] Ibid. p. 187.

> Indeed, a theory of culture incorporates ideas about women's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. The ways in which women conceptualize their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are intricately linked to their cultural environments. The female psyche can be studied as the product or construction of cultural forces. Language, too, comes back into the picture, as we consider the social dimensions and determinants of language use, the shaping of linguistic behaviour by cultural ideas. A cultural theory acknowledges that there are important differences between women as writers: class, race, nationality, and history are literary determinants as significant as gender.[23]

Both the notions of *gynocritics* and *feminist critique* played a fundamental role in the development of feminist criticism, acknowledging that a new approach was necessary in order to study women and literature from a double perspective: the representation of women in literature and the literature produced by women.

If women's stereotyped portrayal in male texts surely influenced the construction of a female subjectivity and identity, which will be addressed in detail in the following paragraph, it also strongly affected the perception of the feminine in society and contributed to the creation of a distorted idea of the relationship between women and writing. For this reason, although this thesis is focused on the rediscovery and analysis of women's texts, it will also take advantage of the feminist theories that investigated male works from a feminist point of view, thus helping in the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices often interiorised by female writers themselves. The act of re-reading canonical texts employing a "*feminist critique*" was not Showalter's prerogative; indeed, in 1972 and 1978 other two fundamental feminist works were published and gave a decisive input to the field.[24] The role of woman as reader is at the centre of 1978 Judith Fetterley's masterpiece *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction.* In the text, Fetterley highlights the importance of reading as a critical act for women to reclaim their subjectivity and acquire a stronger self-consciousness and, thus, a deeper understanding of the ways in which society, through literature, oppresses women and turns them into parodies of themselves, empty simulacra of what men thought women should be. Indeed, she pinpoints that the aim of her work is to "give voice to a different reality and a different vision, to bring a different subjectivity to bear on the old 'universality'" since in society "only one reality is encouraged, legitimised and transmitted" and "that limited vision endlessly insists on his comprehensiveness."[25] As a matter of fact, literature is male but it has the pretence to speak universally, to encompass any differences—gender, age, class, race, sexual orientation—

---

[23] Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", op. cit., p. 197.

[24] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in *College English*, Vol. 34, No.1, *Women, Writing and Teaching*, 1972 and Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: a Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, 1978.

[25] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* 1978, Bloomington: Indiana U.P. 1981, p. xi.

when it really conveys the angle of a single category: male, white, and heterosexual. Acknowledging its biased nature means recognising that "literature is political"[26] and, thus, ruled by those systems of power first theorised by Kate Millett in her 1969 *Sexual Politics.* Millett believed literature to be the *lieu* of creation and perpetration of the sexual politics of oppression women were subjected to, and for this reason, she regarded literary criticism as an essential tool to deconstruct the (male) texts and, consequently, the power structures it expressed and legitimised. Fetterley suggests making the act of reading a political tool to critically analyse the messages conveyed in books and resisting them by bringing to light the hidden stereotypes and biased misconceptions about the feminine put into words. The distorted reality depicted in canonical texts reiterates a notion of society as divided into male and female realms, private and public spheres, where everything that is political and, thus, charged with power—the power that derives from being regarded as an active member of the social order, able to vote and being voted—and identified as a subject is male. Female, consequently, appears as nothing but the *other* from the subject, the object, the passive member of society and thus, subjected and oppressed in the binary power structure. The notion of woman as the *other* was introduced by Simone de Beauvoir in one of the first revolutionary works of feminist literature, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949). Feminist philosopher and essayist de Beauvoir theorised that the supposed inferiority attributed to women really depended on the binary system "male-female" that regulated society, where man corresponded to subject and norm, while woman necessarily fell into the opposed category of object and deviant (from the norm): "He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other."[27] The woman, therefore, as a secondary member of society, deprived of civil rights and of the status of subject, does not have any power over herself, her identity—which is constructed merely in relation and opposition to man's identity—and her image. Hence, her subordinate position in literature, just as in society, is governed by the same binary power structure.

> Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one's identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness—not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one's experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless division of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male—to be universal, to be American—is to be *not female*.[28]

[26] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* 1978, op. cit., p. xi.
[27] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949, translated in English by C. Borde and S. Malovany-Chevallier, New York, Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2011, p. 330.
[28] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* op. cit., p. xiii.

Such an exclusion, together with the absence of female models, generally compelled women to regard male authors and their texts as the paradigm to follow in order to be accepted as writers, often conforming themselves and their style to the established (male) canons, while overlooking their personal experiences and desires as women. Fetterley defines this process as *immasculation* of the feminine, who metaphorically needs to "become men" in order not to be left out of society, literature, history and any other public domain. Indeed, she underlines that "as readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, to identify with a male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values, whose central principle is misogyny."[29] For this reason, the implications of the act of reading, of the *woman as reader* postulated by Showalter, are essential to understand women's writing, especially in relation to their approach to the canons. The internalization of men's perspective, rules and values can be retraced in women's texts, especially in the literature produced by women before the end of the 19th century. That is why the procedure adopted by Fetterley to resist the female stereotypes expressed in male works appears essential as well in the re-reading of female Romantic production, written during the phase that Showalter defined as *feminine* and, thus, possibly imbued with those male preconceptions that were at the basis of the society of the time. The importance of the act of re-reading was theorised in 1972 by feminist philosopher and writer Adrienne Rich who, in her ground-breaking essay "When we Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision"[30], urges women to take advantage of the social turmoil that characterised those years, to reclaim their identities and subjectivity and to refuse the impositions of male-dominated society. In order to do so, Rich argues, it is necessary to have a deep knowledge of the literature of the past but "to know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition, but to break its hold over us."[31] Hence, it is necessary to have all the tools to read literature and analyse it from a critical perspective, deconstructing the issues that made such tradition problematic for women. Indeed, re-vision—"the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction"[32]—is seen by the author as a fundamental move to regain possession of a female collective consciousness, "more than a chapter in cultural history: an act of survival."[33] In the context of this research work, rereading the dramas written by female playwrights of the Romantic age means acknowledging the characteristics of the period and setting up a range of criterions to analyse their texts based both on what society and

---

[29] Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction,* op. cit., p. xx.
[30] Rich's essay was named after Henrik Ibsen's last play, titled "When We Dead Awaken" (1899).
[31] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revision", in *College English*, Vol. 34, No. 1, Women, Writing and Teaching (Oct. 1972), pp. 18-30, National Council of Teachers of English, p. 19.
[32] Ibid. p. 18.
[33] Ibid. p. 18.

literature expected women to be. Their desire to distance themselves from, or adhere to, the literary canons of the time, should be regarded in relation to a series of intersectional factors that go from class, nationality, age, and religion to economic conditions and levels of education, or even race in some peculiar cases—as that of Getrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, born in Cuba from a Spanish father and a Cuban creole mother, during Spanish domination. That is why the subversive nature of women's literature can either be very explicit, slightly hinted at or well hidden, as well as not present at all. Nevertheless, even such an absence represents a fascinating element to be deepened and studied as it could correspond to an unconscious negotiation between a female desire to write and the interiorised misogynistic norms according to which writing was not suitable for a proper woman.

Women's literature, even when not explicitly revolutionary or politically situated, can still be identified with the definition of "minor literature" given by Deleuze and Guattari; thus, starting from this crucial premise, this research work will consider women's literary production as "political" regardless of its apparent goal. The two philosophers postulated in their *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) the three characteristics that a minor literature should have in order to be defined as such. The first is that a "minor literature should not come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language"[34]; the second is that in minor literature everything is political since "its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics"[35], while the third characteristic suggests that "in it everything takes on a collective value."[36] Although Deleuze and Guattari did not specifically refer to women's writings when theorising minor literature, it cannot be denied that the female literary corpus identified through the rediscovery of women's texts and reconstruction of a female genealogy—which is still very much in progress—shares the same characteristics proposed by the two philosophers and psychoanalysts. Indeed, women do not necessarily have a minor language, nor can be defined as a "minority" in the quantitative sense of term but rather a minor, marginalised group who constructed, with time and much effort, its own literary space inside a major language and literature, the male one. Everything in women's literature is political, every individual text, for the mere reason that women's voices—just as that of any other minor group—were silenced and their approach to writing generally hindered and ridiculed. Therefore, every page written, even the most canonical and adherent to the rules imposed by society, even when penned to state that women's realm was the house, was really an encroachment on a male domain and thus, a political act. The collective value of female

---

[34] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 1975, Minnesota U.P. 1986, p. 16.
[35] Ibid. p. 17.
[36] Ibid. p. 17.

writings results all the more evident when considering texts from the 18th and 19th centuries, a time when women did not receive the same education as their male colleagues and, thus, the voice of those who were lucky enough to be able to speak for themselves, inevitably spoke for—and made public the experiences, struggles and desires of—a wider group of women. Of course, not for all women because, even in the same nation, many differences were at play depending on other factors as social class, religion or race. Indeed, when addressing women's writings, it should be specified that it is of a pluralism of women's literatures we are talking about, which necessarily requires a pluralism of critical approaches.

The biggest critique received by Showalter's first *gynocritics* theorisation was indeed its reference to a sole community of women, that is white, heterosexual and middle-class. Although Second Wave Feminism has always been considered as a white middle-class movement struggling against patriarchal society, during the 1970s and especially in the United States, new feminist movements, grouped according to their specific ethnicities or sexual orientations, began to make their voices heard through the act of writing, leading in the 1980s to the formation of the so-called Third Wave Feminism. These multiracial movements started to fight for issues that were more relevant for them and against a society that was discriminating them not only on a gender basis, but also on other different levels, raising awareness among white feminists about the whole concept of *sisterhood* they had created.[37] It was a very limited concept, since it implied that all women were alike, suffering for the same reasons and struggling to achieve the same aims. In this context, Adrienne Rich published a fundamental text that implicitly criticised the biased nature of white feminist movements while recognising the importance of differences among women. "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" was published in 1984 by Rich, a white, Jew, middle-class lesbian poet, who argued the necessity for feminist women to affirm themselves as intersectional beings, characterised by a variety of elements that assume a different significance in specific historical moments or geographical locations. Rich underlined how, in the course of history, not only men but also women have oppressed other women by silencing them, erasing their differences and disregarding their various needs and experiences.

> To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognising this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go.[38]

---

[37] Becky Thompson, *Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism.* Feminist Studies, Inc., 2002. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178747 [Accessed 16/11/2015].

[38] Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location", in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1986, pp. 215-216.

The issue of discrimination in the feminist movement, and consequently implied in the feminist literary criticism produced before the 1980s, was first tackled by Afro-American movements; writers of the calibre of Audre Lorde, Hortense J. Spiller, Alice Walker and Bell Hooks took a position against the biased attitude of feminism. Audre Lorde, as a feminist poet and a lesbian woman of colour, gave a fundamental speech in 1980 entitled "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", later published in 1984. In the text, Lorde points out that the central issue of the whole idea of *sisterhood* is the "pretence to a homogeneity of experiences that does not in fact exist"[39] which leads to defining women merely according to the experiences of white women, thus regarding as "*others*" all those who did not fit into the "norm." Furthermore, Lorde argues that it is not the differences among women that actually divide them, but rather the incapacity of relating with those differences—"it is rather our refusal to recognise those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behaviour and expectation."[40] Therefore, thanks to Black Feminism it was possible to identify the limits of, and wrongs committed by, the first white feminist movements, as well as to start retracing and constructing a female genealogy of women from different ethnic backgrounds whose works were ignored both by literary historiography and the majority of Second Wave Feminist critics, Showalter included. Indeed, as Mary Eagleton reminds us with her accurate analysis, *gynocriticism* "critiqued literary history and canonical thinking but wanted to be part of it; it looked for a commonality among women but was wary of imposing uniformity; it doubted traditional aesthetic values but used them to valorise women writers; it wanted to speak for all women yet invested in a particular raced and classed group, at a particular historical moment."[41] Besides the various limits of its first theorization, *gynocritics* brought to the table a new way of doing literature, a focus on women writers that never existed before, an interest in questioning the values and canons that had been imposed on women for centuries as well as in creating new models to read women's texts. Indeed, we should never forget the contribution that Showalter gave to the cause of women's literature,

> in insisting on "women writers" as a category, however problematic, in radically re-assessing the accepted view of literary history, in showing there was a whole other way—in fact, lots of other ways—to tell our literary history, in insisting on a link between aesthetics and politics, gynocriticism set an agenda that is still productive.[42]

---

[39] Audre Lorde, *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference.* Crossing Press, 1984. Retrieved from: www.clc.wvu.edu/r/download/29781 [Accessed 16/11/2015].
[40] Ibid.
[41] Mary Eagleton, "Literary Representations of Women", in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988, pp. 110-111.
[42] Ibid. p. 111.

In the end, it is crucial to underline that the term *women's literature* employed by Second Wave Feminism, and often present in this research work, refers merely to the context of analysis and rediscovery of female writers of the past and their literary production. Nowadays the goal of feminist criticism is to be able to dismiss binary labels and stop relegating female texts to a separate category, promoting instead a notion of literature that is inclusive, where men and women writers can coexist and complement each other in order to create a more comprehensive literary historiography.

1.2 The construction of a female subjectivity in the literary discourse

Black feminism significantly contributed to the theorisations on the construction of a female identity as made up of a combined series of elements, each bringing along specific characteristics and backgrounds. As hinted at in the previous paragraph, during the 1980s several scholars belonging to multiracial feminist movements started developing theories related to intersectionality, pushed by the necessity of developing a critical approach to investigate the complex and multi-layered female subjectivities. After the publication of important essays as those penned by Rich and Lorde, it was at the end of the decade that *intersectionality* definitively became a theory, developed by American scholar Kimberle Crenshaw in her text *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Anti-Discrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*, published in 1989. In her text, Crenshaw argues that "Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender,"[43] and in order to take their experiences into account it is necessary to rethink the entire framework of feminist theory from an intersectional perspective. Intersectionality managed to give the same level of importance to all the different axes of difference, without raising some categories to the status of "norm" while relegating the others to the margins, as it had happened in the past. Identity became, thus, an intersectional entity which could incorporate as many different elements as necessary, each of which brought along specific connotations that, combined together, constructed a unique subjectivity. The notion of *intersectionality* as postulated by

---

[43] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.
Retrieved from: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf [Accessed 20/11/2015].

Crenshaw in 1989 may not appear relevant to the study of Romantic playwrights in England, Spain and Italy, where—except for de Avellaneda who was born in a Spanish colony from a creole mother—race was not an issue at play in defining the authors' identities. Nevertheless, this theory proves to be extremely useful in the context of this research because it allows us to take into account the various elements that construct women's individualities—gender, age, class, religion, history, culture, race when applicable—without necessarily letting one category prevail over the other. Furthermore, it will help to investigate to what extent women from different nationalities shared aspects in common, while mapping which constitutive factors had a greater impact on a specific culture and why. Interestingly, such an intersectional process of analysis can be conducted both on the writers themselves, exploring how they perceived and conveyed their identity in their texts, and on the fictional female protagonists of their dramas, who embody the construction of a female subjectivity.

As Showalter's *feminist critique* demonstrated, the image of women portrayed in male texts was often based on a stereotypical representation of the female gender, which derived from a specific idea of women men had in their mind. As we have already seen, this concept was first addressed by Woolf in her *A Room of One's Own*, when she defined the representation of the feminine as a looking-glass whose only purpose was to magnify men's virtues, and was later adopted by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their ground-breaking volume *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* published in 1979. Gilbert and Gubar's contribution to feminist criticism consisted in a thorough analysis of women as writers in the 19th century—"the first era in which female authorship was no longer in some sense anomalous"[44]—considering both their struggles with the "anxiety of authorship" and the female images conveyed in their writings. Indeed, as they pinpoint, according to the observation that "literary texts are coercive,"[45] men's texts have portrayed women and defined the canons of writing for so long that they somehow compelled female writers to react by "acting out male metaphors in their own texts."[46] In the volume, they make explicit reference to the work previously started by Elaine Showalter and Ellen Moers in retracing a female literary subculture, and take it further through a close reading of some selected texts, which could help them define and explore a set of textual characteristics shared by female writers, while establishing new paradigms to interpret women's writings. Gilbert and Gubar opened their investigation with a sentence that became iconic and represented a fundamental stance in

[44] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* 2nd Edition, [1979] 2000, New Haven and London, Yale Nota Bene, Yale University Press, p. xi.
[45] Ibid. p. xii.
[46] Ibid. p. xii.

the examination of female authorship: "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?"[47] Literary historiography implicitly replied to such a question by erasing the majority of female writers from collective memory and, thus, reinforced the idea that in order to be legitimately using the pen, one needed to be a man. The close relation between biological sex and authorship had a strong impact on the construction of a female *authoriality*, which lacked validation from society—on the basis of a "defected body"—and, thus, a widely-recognised *authority.* Gilbert and Gubar underline how, following the same biased line of thought, a man can *father* a text through his generative organ while, in a woman, such generative power is aimed at giving birth—hence, the different spheres for men and women and the impossibility for women to have a literary progeny.

> In patriarchal Western culture . . . the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis' power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim.[48]

As the two theorists point out, in Western culture the notions of fatherhood and paternity are strictly connected and related to the concept of ownership, which gives male writers authority over their literary production—in the sense of both texts and subjects, characters and stories represented in their books. Therefore, every male writer, when giving life to fictional personages or happenings, acquires authority over his creations, becoming "the spiritual type of a patriarch,"[49] a legitimate ruler. Of course, such a "patriarchal theory of literature" not only erases any valid and recognisable female authoritative power, but also fails to give an explanation about literary women who are able to procreate both physically and metaphorically, as history has thoroughly demonstrated. That is why Gilbert and Gubar explicitly ask where are situated all the women left out of the picture: "*Where does such an implicit or explicit patriarchal theory of literature leave literary women? If the pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organs can females generate texts?*"[50]

It could be argued that the answer to such a fundamental question was already given by French philosopher Hélène Cixous in her iconic essay "Le Rire de la Méduse", published in 1975 and translated into English the following year. Indeed, as in a sort of trans-temporal debate with Gilbert and Gubar, Cixous affirms that "women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations

[47] Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and The Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination,* op. cit., p. 3.
[48] Ibid. p. 6.
[49] Ibid. p. 7.
[50] Ibid. p. 7.

and codes."[51] Cixous draws a fundamental parallelism between the female body and the act of writing, both intrinsically connected with the issue of identity, explaining how women have always been taught to neglect themselves, to repress their desires and sexuality as well as their will and ambitions, in order to conform to what society expected them to be. Through writing, women will be able to assert themselves and their subjectivity while reclaiming their physicality, their bodies—the essential tool to express themselves. For such reason, right at the beginning of her essay, Cixous urges women to write, to write about themselves, "write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal."[52] The philosopher belonged to the French tradition of feminist literary criticism, which was more concerned with the issue of construction of a female subjectivity through the dismantling of the rules, canons, impositions, and the literary discourse that prevented women from truly asserting themselves in their wholeness. Unlike the Anglo-American tradition—to which Showalter, Fetterley, Kolodny, Gilbert and Gubar belonged—, which focused more on the representation of women in literature, their literary production and the identification of a space for women inside the male canons, French feminist critics were strongly influenced by structuralist, post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories developed by philosophers, linguists and sociologists as Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and Derrida. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that feminist philosophers as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva centred their literary criticism on deconstructing the borders that caged women in various realms, dedicating special attention to the linguistic field. Indeed, Cixous was the first to theorise the possibility of an *écriture feminine*, a feminine way of writing that would break the hold that language has always had on women, a language that was created by men and, thus, only mirrored a male perspective on reality, lacking the terms to define women's experiences—"I say that we must, for, with a few very rare exceptions, there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity."[53] For such reason, Cixous believes it is essential for women to write themselves, speak their mind and construct a literary and linguistic world that represents them, their subjectivities and their bodies. It is through their physicality, through that body that can literally generate life, that women can, and must, put themselves "into the text—as into the world and into history,"[54] reclaiming their rightful place in society.

[51] Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse", op. cit., p. 886.
[52] Ibid. p. 875.
[53] Ibid. p. 877.
[54] Ibid. p. 875.

> She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history.[55]

The act of writing and constructing one's subjectivity through words acquires thus a fundamental political, as well as historical, significance. History, as it will be addressed in the following paragraph, in the 1970s started to be regarded as a crucial category to be taken into account when analysing women's texts because of its essentially male nature. Indeed, by means of writing, women managed to look critically to the misogynistic narration of history throughout the previous centuries, and to inscribe themselves into the historical discourse, reclaiming their rights to be a part of it. In this perspective, language appears to be the only viable tool to change the biased perception of genders, by shaping human minds differently. As Nelly Furman explained in her 1978 essay, "it is through the medium of language that we can define and categorise areas of difference and similarity, which in turn allow us to comprehend the world around us."[56] Therefore, it is precisely the medium of language that feminist criticism needed to address, criticise and deconstruct in order to have the instruments to talk about themselves. Indeed, in her essay "Report from Paris" (1978), scholar Carolyn Burke defines language as "the place to begin" where "a *prise de conscience* must be followed by a *prise de la parole*,"[57] which was precisely the path followed by women in the 1960s when, after becoming aware of their rights, they began voicing their oppression. Nevertheless, women had to cope with a language created by men, "possession of a small well-educated male elite,"[58] which mirrored the same situation women had to face when writing in the 18th and 19th centuries: a language that was not their own, and that was taught in schools they did not have access to. As brilliantly put by Carolyn Burke,

> In this view, the very forms of the dominant mode of discourse show the mark of the dominant—masculine—ideology. Hence, when a woman writes or speaks herself into existence, she is forced to speak in something like a foreign tongue, a language with which she may be personally uncomfortable.[59]

The same point was first discussed by French feminist essayist Monique Wittig in her iconic novel *Les Guérillères* (1969), in which she describes the language spoken by women as made up of words that are killing them and "signs that rightly speaking designate what men have

---

[55] Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse", op. cit., p. 880.
[56] Nelly Furman, "The Study of Women and Language: Comment on Vol. 3, No. 3", *Signs* 4 (Autumn 1978), p. 182 cited in Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness", p. 190.
[57] Carolyn Greenstein Burke, "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement", *Signs* Vol. 3 No. 4 (Summer, 1978), University of Chicago Press, pp. 843-855, p. 844 Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173118 [Accessed 9/05/2019].
[58] Ibid. p. 845.
[59] Ibid. p. 845.

appropriated."[60] French feminist philosophers Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray contributed to the debate about language and gender introducing psychoanalysis as a tool for linguistic examination which allowed the development of a further perspective on the relationship between language and the construction of identity. Kristeva, in her volume *La Révolution du Language Poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (1974), connected the stages of human development to the phases of language development through which a person builds and affirms his/her personality, firmly dividing the symbolic discourse, where the patriarchal order is created, from the semiotic discourse, which she identifies as the maternal, pre-Oedipal, linguistic stage. Thus, she defines semiotic as the dimension inside the symbolic order where the subversion of patriarchal law is possible[61] since it corresponds to the "infant's bodily rhythms and instinctual drives"[62] that patriarchal institutionalized language refuses in the formation of identity. By studying language "as a discourse enunciated by a speaking subject,"[63] semiotics fully comprehends the heterogeneous nature of both language and the subject, which holds a privileged position inside the linguistic discourse. Such a speaking subject, which becomes "the principal object of linguistic analysis,"[64] is postulated by Kristeva as a subject-in-process, continuously shifting positions, questioning its nature, constructing and deconstructing itself while challenging the symbolic order it was born into. The subject assumed a crucial position also in the theories of linguist and philosopher Luce Irigaray, who, in her volume *Parler n'est jamais Neutre* (1985), analyses language in combination with psychoanalysis, sex and science in order to demonstrate to what extent the language women used was biased and unsuitable to portray themselves and their different perspective on the world around them.

> Up until now the form-giving subject has always been male. And this structure has, unbeknownst to himself, clearly given form to culture, and to the history of ideas. They are not neuter. We end up with this paradox: scientific studies prove the sexuality of the cortex, while science maintains that discourse is neuter. Such is the naivety of a subject that never interrogates itself, never looks back toward its constitution, never questions its contradictions. We learn that the left and right sides of the brain are not the same in men as in women, but that, nevertheless, the two sexes speak the same language, and that no other language could possibly exist.[65]

---

[60] Monique Wittig, *Les Guérillères*, 1969, translated from the French by David Le Vay, Ubu editions, 2007, p. 69
[61] Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva", *Hypatia,* Vol. 3, No. 3, French Feminist Philosophy (Winter, 1989), Wiley on behalf of Hypatia Inc., p. 105. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3809790 [Accessed 10/03/2016].
[62] Kari Weil, "French feminism's *écriture féminine*", in Ellen Rooney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory,* Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006, p. 164.
[63] Toril Moi (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 24.
[64] Ibid. p. 34.
[65] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre.* 1985. Translated from French by Continuum, 2002. New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 4.

The concept of woman as a subject endowed with a voice that could depict and give form to what surrounds her is at the basis of the feminist theories of language, and it can certainly be said that language itself assumed a crucial position in preventing women from acquiring a full comprehension of their creative power and bodily subjectivity. Women's bodies and bodily impulses were so repressed and oppressed by society that they were not even identifiable by means of everyday linguistic terminology, but instead relegated to a more sophisticated and obscure jargon that easily turned such natural elements into unspeakable and incorporeal—almost scary—entities. The process of self-awareness women went through in the course of the centuries made feminist theorists realise that a place for the feminine in society was not possible without a massive change in the way their subjectivity was first constructed and then perceived by others. If women were always regarded as the *other*, a *sex which is not one*[66] since it only existed as alterity to a norm always "conceptualised by masculine parameters,"[67] it was because of a society that categorised in binary terms and employed language to create and emphasize such a dichotomy. Indeed, with the masculine being the marking subject of most known languages, the active participant in linguistic discourses, the feminine necessarily assumes the role of the passive object languages act upon. Although it has been argued that the "I" or "we" as a subject is not always masculine, but it can have a neutral meaning encompassing multiple experiences, it is precisely such a mind-set that contributes to obscure the female and its struggle to be recognised as an authoritative and unique individual. As Irigaray points out,

> In becoming, in accepting that it becomes, the subject must take into account its form and its sex. It cannot claim to be universal without form. It has, and is, an incarnate form. It creates morphology, and is one.[68]

In the construction of a female identity, declined in its infinite possibilities according to the specific speaking-subject, a deconstruction of the binary system that regulated society and assimilated the multiple existing variations that construct a person's personality into two homogeneous categories appeared essential.

The ultimate deconstruction of sexual binarism was proposed by feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her groundbreaking volume *Gender Trouble* (1990), where the author draws from the previous fundamental theories postulated by her predecessors, such as Irigaray, Kristeva and Wittig, in order to go beyond them and free the notion of subjectivity from gender impositions.

---

[66] *This Sex Which Is Not One* is the title of a famous volume by Luce Irigaray published in 1977, where she continues the criticism against the theories of Foucault and Lacan about women and psychoanalysis that she started in her first ground-breaking text *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1975).

[67] Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1977. Translated from French by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 23.

[68] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre.* 1985, op. cit., p. 4.

If it is true that identity is constituted by a series of different elements, which could be both innate and deriving from a person's specific background, gender is certainly the factor that affects the most the construction of subjectivity as analysed in this research work. Until the 70s, gender and sex were considered two different terms that indicated the same aspect, that is a person's belonging to the "male" or "female" category, which was seen as static and immutable in time. With Second Wave Feminism, it became clear that gender and sex were two very distinct entities; while sex corresponded to the biological nature of one person, "male" or "female" according to his/her genitalia, gender was postulated as "the cultural meaning that the sexed body assumes."[69] The advent of Third Wave Feminism—which developed and widened the previous structuralist, post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories of the French feminist philosophical tradition and probably saw in Butler its principal author—changed the perspective on gender as a binary structure and its relation to sex. Gender became thus a culturally determined label that did not necessarily depend on the sex but rather on how a person perceived him or herself in a broad spectrum that included the "male" and "female" categories without being limited to, and by, them.

> When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one.[70]

Gender, as fluid and mutable as it is, is not directly linked to sex or sexuality but rather connected to the way the subject acts out, or performs, her/his identity in a given time frame, according to her/his temporary understanding of her/himself. Such "performance" contributes to the construction of a subjectivity that is not fixed and invariable, but assumes multiple positions and is thus able to look at itself and society from different perspectives.

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts flow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.[71]

Butler's theory of performativity of gender demonstrates to what extent identity is never immanent but rather constructed through various acts, deeds or even words; what she defines the "various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural significations" that "are performative."[72] In literature, the way a female author projects herself into the texts can help us understand which multiple elements and cultural connotations constitute her subjectivity, that

[69] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* op. cit., p. 9.
[70] Ibid. p. 9.
[71] Ibid. p. 191.
[72] Ibid. p. 192.

she is asserting through her words. For such reason, the *écriture feminine,* whether it exists or not—and although it is still debated, it certainly did not exist in such terms in the 18th and 19th centuries—, should be seen as a practice inside the symbolic order which allows women to define themselves, while challenging and questioning the order itself, by means of their voices. Asserting a female subjectivity through words constitutes an implicit deconstruction of the canonised language, established by a masculine domination that employs it to legitimise itself, and thus, represents the passage into the realm of a feminine way of writing.

> It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorised, enclosed, coded—which does not mean that it does not exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.[73]

[73] Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse", op. cit., p. 883.

2. History and drama: a feminist perspective

2.1 History / *Her*story: a fundamental category of a feminist literary analysis

> Her speech, even when 'theoretical' or political, is never simple or linear or 'objectified', generalised: she draws her story into history.[74]

History—as the narration of the most significant political and social events that characterised the development of humanity—was always considered a masculine domain where women generally held a marginal position. That was why the most relevant public roles—as rulers, kings, writers, scientists, religious leaders and so forth—were always fulfilled by men, with a few exceptions of some queens or particularly important social or religious figures, as in the peculiar case of Joan of Arc. Even though some women wrote about history before the 20th century, it was not until the 1970s that the issue of women's participation in, and reclamation of, historical events took place, leading to a consistent corpus of feminist historical research that will be addressed in detail in the course of the following pages. Interestingly, Romanticism aroused a renewed passion for history and the narration of historical episodes all over Europe. Many writers, both male and female, incorporated historical issues in their literary production, bringing new subgenres to the fore; namely, historical novel, historical drama (or tragedy) and historical poetry. At the same time, the work of historians acquired new importance on a literary level, so much so that, inspired by the volumes of male colleagues, two celebrated English writers of the time decided to approach historical research: Catharine Macaulay and Jane Austen. Catharine Macaulay penned, from 1763 to 1783, an eight-volume collection titled *History of England,* which covered the main historical events that occurred on English soil from the coming to power of King James I to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Although she later fell into oblivion, Macaulay was a real celebrity at the time according to Devoney Looser who considers her to be "the first English woman historian,"[75] even though other female writers before her chose history as the subject of their compositions.[76] Interestingly, after Macaulay, who actually started writing some years before the beginning of English Romanticism, we need to wait for the Victorian Era to find other female "historians" recognised as such. Looser explains the lack of female historians in the Romantic age by highlighting that

---

[74] Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse", op. cit., p. 881.

[75] Fiona Robertson (ed.), *Women's Writing 1778-1838: An Anthology*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2001, p. 21. Cited in Devoney Looser, "Catharine Macaulay: The 'Female Historian' in Context", in *Revue de littérature et de civilization (XVIe – XVIIIe siècle),* 17: 2010 Comment les femmes écrivent l'histoire. Association Études Épistémè. Retrieved from: https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/666.

[76] Devoney Looser mentions Mary Astell, Margaret Cavendish, Sarah Scott and so forth, but does not regard them as proper "historians." In: Devoney Looser, "Catharine Macaulay: The 'Female Historian' in Context", op. cit.

> By publishing poems, plays, novels, conduct books, and works for children, many women writers distanced themselves from the kind of single-genre branding that Macaulay could claim. . . . Many of the period's historians, male and female, were also novelists. We might think of Tobias Smollett, Oliver Goldsmith, and Sarah Scott among them. Though Macaulay herself also ultimately wrote outside the genre of history – in political treatises and a conduct book – she did so with shorter works later in her career. As a result, Macaulay was highly successful in maintaining the singular label of « female historian », rather than relegating herself to the more widely used labels available to so-called scribbling women.[77]

Nevertheless, Looser also underlines how "her career did not necessarily prepare for *other* women writers of history to be celebrated,"[78] and that it was probably due to the fact that she was perceived by society as "one of a kind"; the exceptional and unique case—which *unique* should remain—of a woman who excelled at writing about history. Indeed, Looser reports a fragment of a letter supposedly written by Lord Lyttelton, who clearly sums up the general mindset about "female historians":

> I would have [Macaulay] taste the exalted pleasure of universal applause. I would have statues erected to her memory; and once in every age I would wish such a woman to appear, as to proof that genius is not confined to sex . . . but . . . at the same time . . . you'll pardon me, we want no more than one Mrs. Macaulay.[79]

The reason why, despite her popularity, she was erased from collective memory in the decades after her death could be retraced in the portrayal of her work given by Greg Kucich, who defines it "the most theoretically sophisticated example of feminist historiography in its time."[80] The Romantic scholar suggests that, although Macaulay exerted herself to be assimilated into the masculine realm of acknowledged historians, she resisted what she identified as "solemn history"[81] by inserting in her meticulous accounts of facts and episodes an investigation of the human mind.[82] In particular, she was interested in those subjects who suffered the consequences of historical events and political matters they did not have a voice in—that is, women and marginalised groups. Macaulay's approach, defined by Kucich as "sympathetic historicism,"[83] somehow brilliantly anticipated both the use of history that female Romantic playwrights introduced in their dramas—as it will be later analysed—and a feminist methodology that

---

[77] Devoney Looser, "Catharine Macaulay: The 'Female Historian' in Context", op. cit., p. 8.
[78] Ibid. p. 8.
[79] Cited in Devoney Looser, "Catharine Macaulay: The 'Female Historian' in Context", p. 8. Looser reports that this quotation appeared for the first time in the novel *The Correspondents: An Original Novel; in a Series of Letters*, London, 1775, p. 114. On the authenticity of the letters, she references M. Davis, "The Correspondents", *PMLA*, 51.1, 1936, p. 207-220.
[80] Greg Kucich, "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", in Mathew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.), *Memory and Memorials 1789–1914. Literary and Cultural Perspective.* London and New York: Routledge, 2000. p. 22.
[81] Catharine Macaulay, *History of England*, cited in Greg Kucich, "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", op. cit., footnote 25, p. 22.
[82] Greg Kucich, "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", op. cit., p. 22.
[83] Ibid. p. 22.

would be widely theorised by feminist scholars as Joan Scott and Ann-Louise Shapiro in the 1970s. In a society that was extremely quick to erase female writers—even the most popular—from collective memory and to reduce the fundamental importance they had in the development of literary genres, Macaulay was probably the first woman to propose "alternative constructions of historical memory [that] could help them imagine new social communities liberated from traditional hierarchies of gender and power."[84] Such a focus on the sorrows of marginal figures, usually left out of historical narrations, is also evident in the works of other female writers, who, as underlined by Looser, were not considered as proper historians because they mainly dedicated themselves to other literary genres. We can reckon as belonging to this group of historians also the many English female authors who incorporated in their production the narration of historical events and a special attention to the fate and fortunes of marginalised people. Among the names mentioned by Kucich in his thorough essay "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", it is worthy to remember Maria Edgeworth and her historical novel *Castle Rackrent* (1800)*,* Joanna Baillie with the "Introductory discourse" to her *A Series of Plays* (1798)—which will be analysed in detail in the next paragraph—, Mary Wollstonecraft, Helen Maria Williams, Mary Hays, Charlotte Smith and Lucy Aikin.[85] A similar analysis of women who wrote about history between the late 17th and early 19th century can be found in Devoney Looser's *British Women Writers and the Writing of History 1670-1820,* whose last chapter is centred on the historical issues (but it would be more accurate to say "*her*storical" issues) in Jane Austen's production.[86] Even Jane Austen, probably the most famous novelist of the 19th century, began her writing career with a historical work, *History of England from the reign of Henry the 4th to the death of Charles I, by a partial, prejudiced and ignorant historian* (1791). This composition was never regarded as one of her major works and, only in recent decades it was recovered and studied by feminist scholars for its historical importance. The celebrated novelist, at the time not yet famous, penned a volume that clearly parodied Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England,* published in 1764, but also satirised a certain masculine approach to recounting history. Indeed, Austen employed her renowned witty irony to discuss the main English political events, which are not described through a didactic exposition on dates, places and motives, but complemented by satirical comments and the author's explicit opinions and personal interpretations. Austen's focus seems to shift from canonical history to how historical figures behaved and, particularly, to the way the masculine

[84] Greg Kucich, "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", op. cit., p. 22.
[85] Ibid. pp. 22-29.
[86] Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History 1670-1820,* Baltimore: The John Jopkins University Press, 2000.

power that shaped history imposed itself on women. In particular, as Mary Spongberg remarks in her essay, Austen was interested in the character of Mary Stuart, "the monarch who is most frequently mentioned in her *History*,"[87] who epitomises the struggles that the feminine endured in a society regulated by men who systematically dispossessed women of their rights, including those due by birth.

> Mary Stuart's claims to succession and her brutal treatment at the hands of Elizabeth forms the dramatic centrepiece of Austen's narrative. Beginning the account of Mary Stuart's fate with a delightful summation of Henry VIII, "whose only merit was his not being quite as bad as his daughter Elizabeth," Austen happily subverts the conventions of masculinist historiography here, privileging the significance of the daughter over the father and centring her *History of England* on the dynastic struggle between these two women. . . . Austen rendered Mary Stuart's fate central to the history of England by mentioning her in the reign of every single Tudor monarch. In fact, all that Austen holds great about English history relates specifically to the Queen of Scots. Austen's focus on Mary Queen of Scots, her depiction of the treatment of Mary and indeed of all women in the text except Elizabeth, allows a particular critique of chivalric masculinity.[88]

The approach to the narration of history displayed in the texts of English Romantic (and pre-romantic) female authors prove to what extent they felt the need to recount an alternative version of traditional history, a version that included them and portrayed what effects politics, policies and the main historical events had on their lives. These women between the 18th and 19th centuries reclaimed their right to exist as historical subjects and imposed their presence into history employing whatever means were available to them—in most cases, their voice and pen. For such reason, it is possible to identify many different texts, belonging to a number of different literary genres, that share a similar perception of history and approach to the reintegration of female presences into historical events. The study here exemplified has been conducted only on English women's literature because the process of recovery of Romantic women's historical writings in Spain and Italy started only recently and it is still very much in progress. Nevertheless, the next chapters will prove, through a detailed analysis of historical dramas belonging to the three different countries, to what extent women's perspectives on history shared interesting issues in common. As this brief overview demonstrated, the issue of history as a masculine realm that excluded primarily women, but also people belonging to the lower classes or different religions, ethnicities and cultures, was certainly something female writers were aware of centuries before the advent of second wave feminism and feminist historical research. However, without the contribution of feminist historians from the 1970s onwards, it would not have been possible to fully understand the prominence of historical

---

[87] Mary Spongberg, "Jane Austen and the *History of England*", in *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 23, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 56-80, John Hopkins University Press, p. 70.
Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2011.0012 [Accessed 20/05/2019].
[88] Ibid. p. 70.

works—or texts with significant historical elements—written by women during the Romantic age.

During the early development of second wave feminism, the first feminist theorists who included a historical analysis in their researches coined the term *Her*story in order to refer to an alternative narration of events that was more focused on the role of women, neglected in the traditional recounts of canonical history.[89] Therefore, at the very beginning, the *her*story of women was regarded as something separated, even independent, from traditional historiography—an additional narration that did not have an impact on the perception of historical events. Therefore, the study of *her*story was regarded as marginal and uninteresting by all the non-feminist historians, since it was focused on more domestic and private issues, considered irrelevant in the economy of the narration of great historical endeavours. The same dichotomy that had been ruling society for centuries—male/female, public/private—was also predominant in historical research, in which it prevented the development of a new conception of history, that included the newborn *her*storical perspective. Indeed, what feminist historians from the 1980s onwards wished for was a renovated and inclusive notion of history that embraced both public and private spheres, conceiving them as intrinsically interconnected realms that could not exist separately. Feminist historian Ann-Louise Shapiro underlines how "'permeability' and 'overlap' describe more accurately than does 'separation' the complex and ambiguous relations between the world prescribed for men and the designated realm of women."[90] Shapiro continues pinpointing that

> feminist scholars have explored such themes as the connections between middle-class domestic ideology and the development of industrial capitalism, women's hidden contribution to the family economy, and the ways in which women manipulated the attributes of domesticity to gain a foothold in more public arenas, that is, women as historical actors, making their own history albeit not in circumstances of their choosing.[91]

The underrated contribution of women to history began to be studied as a crucial element that could not be overlooked in order to have a clear understanding of past events. In the same way, the relationship between men and women, and their respective realms, acquired a fundamental importance in the investigation of the constitutive factors of historical and political matters. The ideology of the separate spheres impeded the investigation of the same power dynamics that it was promoting and reiterating, precluding an accurate political examination of the "private

---

[89] Robin Morgan (ed.), *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movements*. New York: Random House, 1970. See also: Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women*, 1976. San José, Lincoln, New York: iUniversity.com, Inc., 2000.

[90] Ann-Louise Shapiro, "Introduction: History and Feminist Theory, or Talking Back to the Beadle", in *History and Theory*, Vol.31, No.4, Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1992, p.5.
Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505412 [Accessed: 12/05/2016].

[91] Ibid. p. 5.

domain" and, thus, of the relationship between the male and the female.[92] The same point of view was postulated and shared by other illustrious feminist historians who, between the end of the 1970s and the 1980s, were already writing about a "new history" that integrated a female perspective into the traditional (male) accounts. Ann Gordon, Mary Jo Buhle and Nancy Shrom Dye suggest that,

> the writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal subjective experiences as well as public and political activities. It is not much to suggest that however hesitant the actual beginnings, such methodology implies not only a new history of women, but also a new history.[93]

A similar position was adopted by Joan Scott who, in 1986, published the groundbreaking essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", where she officially introduced the use of gender as a determining factor in historical research. Scott believed that the addition of women's *her*story to traditional narrations would not only bring a new "subject matter but would also force a critical re-examination of the premises and standards of existing scholarly work,"[94] starting from the biased opinion that the core of the historical discourse was limited to the economic and political affairs. With Scott, gender acquired the crucial role it deserved in the analysis and evaluation of history, allowing a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the social and cultural agents that shaped the past centuries. Indeed, as the constitutive element of the sexual-political dynamics, gender "interacts with other axes of power,"[95] such as class, race or age, reversing the pre-established interpretations that did not take into account the different experiences women lived throughout history. The historical discourse is, thus, regarded as constituted by the merging of *macro*history and *micro*history which, as theoretical notions, mirror and translate in historical terms the binarism public/private. The appearance of such theories dates back to 1959, when the term was first used by American scholar George R. Stewart, but their true development started some years later with Luis González, Carlo Ginzburg, Simona Cerutti and Giovanni Levi, to name a few. Luis González, in particular, proposed the term *matria history* as a synonym of *micro*history in order to better evoke the "small, weak, feminine, sentimental world of the mother which

---

[92] Ibid. p. 5.
[93] Ann D. Gordon, Mary Jo Buhle and Nancy Shrom Dye, "The Problem of Women's History", in Berenice Carroll (ed.), *Liberating Women's History*, Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1976, p. 89.
[94] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *The American Historical Review*, Vol.91, No.5, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 1054. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1864376 [Accessed: 12/05/2016].
[95] Ann-Louise Shapiro, "Introduction: History and Feminist Theory, or Talking Back to the Beadle", op. cit., p. 5.

revolves around the family and the village."[96] Despite the various controversies among different ideas of what *micro*history meant—and whether its various declinations as *microstoria* and *petite histoire*[97] shared the same significance—it has a fundamental role in introducing everyday life and minor contexts as central topics in the study of history. Indeed, although some historians perceived *micro*history negatively, and regarded it as small and insignificant in the economy of traditional history, Ginzburg highlighted how, by favouring qualitative perspective over quantitative[98], *micro*historical research allowed a much deeper analysis of historical phenomena. This new conception of history consented to valorise from a feminist perspective the role that minor groups had in the construction and development of *macro*history, that is, the history of wars, nations, revolutions, legislation, politics, dominant ideologies, religion, philosophy and science[99]—the predominant realms of social life, usually precluded to women. Everyday life, human relationships and sentiments, power dynamics and struggles of various types that never appeared as crucial elements in historical accounts—but were very much present in the historical narratives proposed by women writers in their texts—acquired fundamental importance in the analysis of historical periods and specific events. Consequently, women's works, in which *micro*history and *macro*history merged to create a more complete and inclusive notion of historical narration, gave the opportunity to rediscover realities and contexts too long overlooked and forgotten, as well as to study the implications that the public domain had on the private sphere; on women, children, families and ordinary lives. Indeed, if politics and wars had a specific development, very well documented in historical reports and passed on by history books, the consequences of such episodes had not been researched and studied in detail, just as the years of struggles that marginalised people suffered during conflicts and revolts were usually left out from historical debates. In this regard, it comes in our help the literary-historical concept postulated by Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s with the name of "new historicism."[100] New historicism is a "practice"—and not a "doctrine" as he specifies in his essay "Towards a Poetics of Culture"[101]—that links history and literary theory as two

---

[96] Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It", in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol.20, No.1, (Autumn, 1993), pp.10-35, The University of Chicago Press, p. 12. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343946 [Accessed 27/05/2019].
[97] *Microstoria* and *Petite Histoire* are the terms used by Italian and French scholars to refer to *Micro*history.
[98] Carlo Ginzburg, John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It", op. cit., p. 12.
[99] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma storico e drammaturgia femminile in epoca romantica", in *La Questione Romantica*, No.14, Primavera 2003, Napoli: Liguori, p. 19.
[100] The term "New Historicism" appears for the first time in Stephen Greenblatt's Introduction to the volume *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* that he edited in 1982.
[101] Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture", in Michael Payne (ed.), Stephen Greenblatt, *The Greenblatt Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp.18-29. The essay was first published by Stephen Greenblatt in his volume *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*, Routledge, 1990, pp. 146-160.

intertwined and inseparable entities. Such practice, also known as "poetics of culture", considers literary texts as fundamental historical sources that recount the socio-cultural context in which they were created and, in turn, history as an essential part of literary processes. Although, in his first volume, Greenblatt made explicit references to the Renaissance period and Shakespearian literature, his practice proves to be applicable and useful in many different socio-historical contexts. As he affirms in his Introduction to his volume *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982):

> The new historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature. . . . It has been less concerned to establish the organic unity of literary works and more open to such works as fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses. . . . Renaissance literary works are no longer regarded either as a fixed set of texts that are set apart from all other forms of expression and that contain their own determinate meanings or as a set of reflections of historical facts that lie beyond them. The critical practice represented in this volume challenges the assumptions that guarantee a secure distinction between "literary foreground" and "political background" or, more generally, between artistic production and other kinds of social production. Such distinctions do in fact exist, but they are not intrinsic to the texts; rather they are made up and constantly redrawn by artists, audiences, and readers. These collective social constructions on the one hand define the range of aesthetic possibilities within a given representational mode and, on the other, link that mode to the complex network of institutions, practices, and beliefs that constitute the culture as a whole.[102]

The practice proposed by Greenblatt will be employed in the course of our investigation to connect the historical sources to the literary works of female dramatists, contextualising the aesthetics and analysing the socio-cultural environment as a whole.

Since women were excluded from any political decision and were neither allowed to vote nor to be elected everywhere in Europe until the first half of the 19th century, they were living extremely different lives compared to their male counterparts. Even the fortunate wealthy girls who led a privileged existence were often left behind from the progress of society, as if they were relegated in a completely different historical period. Such a theory was cleverly proposed by feminist scholar Joan Kelly in her iconic essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", published in 1977. Kelly highlights how the Renaissance, an historical period that has always been perceived as a turning point in the history of humanity, when new scientific discoveries and a renewed love for art and literature allowed men and society to advance and improve, had not the same impact on women's lives. Indeed, while male artists, writers and scientists contributed to the cultural phenomenon which laid the foundations for the birth of modern states, women had to face a forced regression, due to a society that looked at the control over women's bodies and lives as a tool to maintain order inside the nation. Hence, women remained

---

[102] Stephen Greenblatt, "Introduction", in Stephen Greeblatt (ed.), *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture,* Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982. Cited in Michael Payne (ed.), Stephen Greenblatt, *The Greenblatt Reader,* op. cit., p.2.

confined into a backward-looking context "so much so that there was no 'renaissance' for women, at least not during the Renaissance."[103] Such a perspective can be useful when dealing with the representation of history in female drama, since the perception of historical events could be different depending on a series of intersecting factors—among which "class" certainly holds a prominent position—and might not necessarily correspond to the traditional history passed on by male historians. Interestingly, the beginning of the 19th century in England had different outcomes for women and men. On the one hand, it brought along the industrial revolution and the development of a new and modern society, but on the other hand, it created a sort of watershed as far as women's independence was concerned. During the 18th century, the various social uprisings and revolts played a fundamental role in a partial emancipation of female writers, who actively participated in public protests and often explicitly criticised society and politics. Nonetheless, the first decades of the 19th century and the approaching of the Victorian era led to an involution in women's freedom of speech and action, strongly regulated by the new bourgeois moral code. Similarly, the years of the Italian *Risorgimento* saw women involved in politics and in the struggle for the liberation of the Italic peninsula from the foreign domination. However, women were later repressed and oppressed again in the newborn Italian society, which was founded on middle-class values and the sacred institution of the family which brought back women inside the domestic sphere. The study of history from a gender perspective works, thus, on the intersection of various elements which includes the merging of *micro*history and *macro*history—and a possible prevalence of one over the other—as well as an original insight on traditional history, which depends on the personal background of the writer in question. As the close reading of the selected plays will show, the historical dramas written by female playwrights often deal with historical matters which happened in a remote past in order to avoid explicit connections to the social and political situation of their respective homelands, which could put at risk their careers. Nevertheless, significant references to the events they personally experienced in their countries are frequently retraceable. It could be argued that when dealing with historical tragedies penned by female dramatists, history should not be merely addressed as a temporal setting but also as a means through which women could open a fruitful dialogue between past and present, underlining and/or rewriting specific issues, usually related to women's conditions or social inequalities. For this reason, it is fundamental to approach history, from a feminist perspective, as a category of analysis that implies a double investigation. On the one hand, an analysis of the historical background of the author and the

---

[103] Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in Renate Bridenthai and Clandia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977.

socio-cultural environment in which she lived. On the other hand, an examination of the historical context in the play itself, the background circumstances in which the actions take place. Both historical frameworks are necessary in order to thoroughly investigate and better understand the implications of, and the relation between, the historical choices put in place (and on stage).

2.2 Feminism in theatre and drama: a focus on the origins of women in tragedy

Theatre was born in ancient Greece and it is noteworthy that, right from its origins, it was regulated by gendered rules. As Sue Ellen Case reminds us in her book *Feminism and Theatre*, there are no records of women playwrights in Greece, no actresses—since female roles were played by men—and, probably (even though proofs in this matter are controversial) no women allowed among the audience.[104] The whole theatrical domain was exclusively male and, indeed, as Case points out, "from a feminist perspective, initial observation about the history of theatre noted the absence of women within the tradition."[105] As far as female dramatists are concerned, scholars affirm that there was no significant amount of plays written by women before the 17th century and, therefore, an investigation on previous periods was possible only questioning how women were represented in men's plays.[106] This kind of examination appears even more interesting if we consider that, in the classical period as well as in Elizabethan theatre, women were not allowed to perform on stage and, therefore, female roles were interpreted by male actors in *drag*. As highlighted by Case, "this practice reveals the fictionality of the patriarchy's representation of the gender,"[107] constructed according to stereotypes which easily became the norm in an all-male context from which real women were banned. The stereotypes, biases and behavioural norms that affected women's lives were constructed and reiterated by male dramatists through the creation of female images that were not adhering to reality but representing a notion of "woman" created by patriarchal society. Therefore, female characters in the first tragedies and comedies were nothing but a projection of the male gaze, both created and performed by men according to their perception of women. Male playwrights and actors did not merely imitate real women, but rather parodied them, emphasizing those aspects that, from their point of view, made a woman more believably feminine. As Case argues, the suppression of real women from public domains and historical accounts led culture to invent its own portrayal of the feminine, so what mainly appeared on stage was a fictional woman

---

[104] Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, op cit., p. 5.
[105] Ibid. p. 5.
[106] Ibid. pp. 5-7.
[107] Ibid. p. 7.

"representing the patriarchal values attached to the gender while suppressing the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women."[108] Since such stereotypical women's portrayal has been reiterated in the dramatic production of the following centuries, it is fundamental to examine if and to what extent women have deconstructed the traditional dramatic representation of the female, and which new feminine models they proposed in their tragedies. In this perspective, a rediscovery and re-reading of female dramatists' plays would bring out the real women who actually inhabited the public sphere and grabbed the pen to write, creating plots and characters through which they could express their own voices, real experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies. By doing so, women playwrights took possession of something that was exclusively male and made it theirs, inscribing themselves into a public space, literature and history, and reclaiming a female subjectivity, in a double sense of authority and body.

Interestingly, Case explains how in the first Athenians festivals of Dionysos in the 6th and 7th centuries BC—the festivals from which our modern notion of theatre derives—women used to regularly participate alongside men. Nonetheless, when such ceremonies turned into more specific theatrical practices, women quickly disappeared, although "no record has been found of any law forbidding women to participate in the songs and dances, nor is there any evidence for the precise date of the change."[109] According to some scholars, the exclusion of women from theatre was probably linked to a change in the moral codes of the society of the time, that started to look at the feminine differently—as inferior or inapt to lead the same life as men.[110] Indeed, such change happened as well in other social and political spheres—as, for example, that of marriage and civil rights—, in which women gradually lost their freedom and the right to choose for themselves. At the same time, in Greek society the notion of "family" acquired a fundamental relevance, which significantly contributed to the marginalisation of women in the public domain as well as to their exile into the private realm. In this regard, Case highlights how "ironically, the important role women began to assume within the family unit was the cause of their removal from public life."[111] It is probably in this historical moment that the dichotomy public/private—associated with the biased binary perception of male/female—was born and established its roots in society, irremediably affecting the development of western societies for the following centuries. Since theatre was an essential public institution in Greece, it was strongly affected by the change that occurred in Greek society. Indeed, according to Case, it was precisely through theatre that the category of "woman" was created in opposition to

---

[108] Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, op cit., p. 7.
[109] Ibid. p. 7.
[110] Ibid. p. 7.
[111] Ibid. p. 7.

"man", in order to reiterate the binarism regulating society and to make the male stand out.[112] The depiction of female characters in Athenian dramas accurately echoed women's eradication from the public sphere, as well as the gendered division of society. All the more, since women were no longer allowed to be part of such festivals, it was boys who played female roles, enacting a sexual power dynamics where the feminine was, on the one hand, entirely suppressed by the masculine, and on the other hand, substituted by a female simulacrum completely conceived and produced by men.

Since the beginning, the male gaze has been shaping the world and defining genders according to its own perspective, which in theatre corresponded to a biased portrayal of what "feminine" meant. Indeed, the absence of women from the Greek stage, from dramatic writing and from the audience, led scholars to a fundamental question: "how does a man depict a woman? How does the male actor signal to the audience that he is playing a female character?"[113] Case suggests that—apart from the obvious female clothes and a mask with long hair and female features—they probably acted imitating, while emphasising, women's voices, moves and gestures, giving rise to an involuntary parody of the feminine that established a standardized female model which lasted for centuries.[114] The whole notion of "female" was born to embody everything that "male" was not, in a patriarchal society that needed such differentiation in order to legitimise itself and the repression of women. In order to do so and to affirm its position of power, Greek society, as those which came later in time, used the most popular and displayable form of entertainment: theatre.

> In considering this portrayal, it is important to remember that the notion of the female derived from the male point of view, which remained alien to female experience and reflected the perspective of the gendered opposite. This vocabulary of gestures initiated the image of 'Woman' as she is on the stage – institutionalised through patriarchal culture and represented by male-originated signs of her appropriate gender behaviour. The Athenian theatre practice created a political aesthetic arena for ritualised and codified gender behaviour, linking it to civic privileges and restrictions.[115]

In the course of the years, this pattern became a constitutive part the "classical canon", from which women were evidently excluded, even when female characters were featured in dramatic works. The massive distance between the representation of the feminine on stage and women's real life largely contributed to the spreading of huge misconceptions about the female gender, as well as to a greater discrimination for all those women who did not comply with the female behaviours widely praised in, and through, theatre performances.

---

112 Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre*, op. cit., p. 9.
113 Ibid. p.11.
114 Ibid. p. 11.
115 Ibid. p. 11.

Nevertheless, it should also be underlined that in ancient tragedy in particular, the portrayal of the feminine was far from being clear and definite, raising numerous doubts in feminist scholars' research into Greek theatre. Indeed, Victoria Wohl underlines how, while in real life men were busy ruling the public sphere and women were instead caged inside the domestic walls, tragedies of the time often featured strong women who publicly spoke their minds, challenged men and even took part in political endeavours and decisions.[116] It is not rare to find Athenian tragedies in which independent female figures act in total disagreement with the social code imposed on their gender, and they do so in a misogynistic context that—just like the Greek society of the time—exalts and promotes that same gendered behavioural code they challenge. This odd contradiction—which can be also found in the writings of other historical periods as, for example, in Shakespearian plays—can be explained, according to Wohl, by means of the anthropological approach employed by Helene Foley in her essay "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama" (1981). Foley does not consider the representation of the feminine in drama as a reflection of women in real life, but rather regards female characters as the embodiment of "woman" as a cultural notion.[117] In both the dramatic text and Athenian reality, "woman" is indeed a "shifting sign" within what Foley defines as "fundamental cultural oppositions"—that is, "nature vs culture, public vs private"—but it is also a "generator of signs", as theorised by Lévi-Strauss.[118] The implications of this duplicity are, nevertheless, filtered by the symbolic order which created the culturally determined concept of "woman" as both the object and the subject of the tragic discourse, only to later confine and bind its subjectivity to the male existence.

> Tragedy does, indeed, stage women as "generators of signs", as subjects of language, desire and action. At the same time, these characters are constrained by the symbolic systems within which they are constructed: as characters within male-authored texts, they are signs even when they are subjects. This paradox generates much tension, as heroines try to assert themselves as subjects in a poetic and social universe that treats them as symbols of male heroism, virility, or honour.[119]

According to scholars such as Wohl and Zeitlin, female characters in Greek tragedies should be interpreted as the *looking-glass* introduced by Woolf; a mirror where men can look at and see themselves much greater than they truly are. Already in Athenian drama, "woman" appeared to be nothing more than a cultural paradigm necessary to define and exalt, by contrast,

---

[116] Victoria Wohl, "Tragedy and Feminism", in Rebecca Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 146.
[117] Helene P. Foley, "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama", in Helene P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* New York: Gordon & Breach, 1981, pp. 127-68.
London and New York: Routledge, 1981, 1992. Cited by Victoria Wohl, "Tragedy and Feminism", cit., p. 149
[118] Victoria Wohl, "Tragedy and Feminism", op. cit., pp. 149-150.
[119] Ibid. p. 150.

the male category. Therefore, if it can be affirmed that the feminine can produce meaning inside the dramatic text, it is equally true that such meaning is not free from constrictions but rather bound to a specific aim, that of fulfilling a discourse conceived by men according to their perception of the world. Following such premises, Wohl clarifies the role of "woman" in Greek tragedy underlining how

> through transaction with the idea of the feminine, tragedy addresses its most fundamental concerns: the nature of the male self and society, the mystery of desire and reproduction, man's relation to the cosmos and the gods. Women are prominent in tragedy, then, not for their own sake (not because the tragedian or the tragedy is either "misogynist" or "feminist"), but because their presence as "other" illuminates the male world and self.[120]

A similar position is expressed by Zeitlin, who reveals similarities between Athenian and Shakespearean drama as far as the role of the female gender is concerned; the *other* from the norm, which always corresponds to the male.

> From the outset, it is essential to understand that in the Greek theatre, as in Shakespearean theatre, the self that is really at stake is to be identified with the male, while the woman is assigned the role of the radical other. . . . Even when female characters struggle with the conflicts generated by the particularities of their subordinate social position, their demands for identity and self-esteem are still designed primarily for exploring the male project of selfhood in the larger world as these impinge upon men's claims to knowledge, power, freedom, and self-sufficiency—not, as some have thought, for woman's gaining some greater entitlement or privilege for herself and not even for revising notions of what femininity might be or mean. Women as individuals or chorus may give her name as titles to plays; female characters may occupy the centre stage and leave a far more indelible emotional impression on their spectators than their male counterparts (as Antigone, for example, over Creon). But *functionally* women are never an end in themselves, and nothing changes for them once they have lived out their drama on stage. Rather, they play the roles of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviours for the male characters. When elaborately represented, they may serve as anti-models as well as hidden models for that masculine self . . . and, concomitantly, their experience of suffering or their acts that lead to disaster regularly occur before and precipitate those of men.[121]

A further approach employed by feminist scholars to study the relationship between woman and tragedy is that of psychology, which proves to be extremely useful to understand the issues of female subjectivity and identity at play in dramatic texts and performances. Zeitlin defines the woman as the "mimetic creature par excellence" in Greek society, which considered the feminine as dishonest and hypocritical, capable of hiding the most dreadful secrets and of appearing completely different from what it actually was; indeed, she quotes Hippolytus who defined the female gender as "Counterfeit evil."[122]

Nevertheless, the perspective that is probably more useful in our context is the historical approach illustrated by Wohl, a "return to history" which implies "situating tragedy

---

[120] Victoria Wohl, "Tragedy and Feminism", op. cit., p. 151.
[121] Froma I. Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama", in *Representations*, No. 11 (Summer, 1985), pp. 63-94. University of California Press, pp. 66-67. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928427 [Accessed 13/06/2019].
[122] Ibid. p. 79.

historically."[123] The aim of the historical approach is to investigate women in tragedy beyond their metaphorical representations, observing them rather "in relation to contemporary social institutions or broader ideological structures."[124] Such a methodology, "often anthropological or sociological in orientation and intersecting productively with cultural and post-colonial studies," postulated the necessity of studying the relationship between tragedy and "its socio-cultural environment," as well as of exploring the many ways in which tragedy mirrors, "supports, shapes, and sometimes subverts, cultural norms."[125]

> If Pomeroy asks what tragedy can tell us about women, and Zeitlin asks what women can tell us about tragedy, these studies ask what tragic women can tell us about the society that gave them dramatic existence.[126]

The analysis of Greek drama from a feminist perspective is, thus, useful to understand a great number of different issues that were at play when such tragedies were written. These issues include the way women were imagined and performed on stage by men, as well as the way society perceived the feminine, influencing the dramatic production of the time and possibly the perception women had of themselves. Such a perspective on tragedy could also give a further explanation on the reasons why this genre was used by women to subvert social impositions, given that it could have been tragedy itself which legitimised and reiterated the cultural conditions that forced women inside the domestic sphere. Therefore, if tragedy shapes—and does "not merely reflect"[127]—reality, it does not come as a surprise that Greek society had a very rigid, yet ambiguous and controversial, attitude towards the female sex. If women were venerated on the one side and completely mistreated on the other, they were anyway perceived through stereotypical categorizations that survived for the following centuries. Indeed, all the tragedies written successively in Europe did come from the same classical tradition, from which derive also many prejudices that women encountered to be on stage or to enter the theatrical environment. For this reason, a critical approach that takes into account the origins of tragedy, and its complicated relation to women, appears to be extremely useful to rethink tragedies written in different historical periods, especially during the Romantic age, when female dramatists tried to distance themselves from the canons and to reimagine a new idea of tragedy. In particular, the historical and socio-cultural approach proposed by Victoria Wohl will prove very helpful in rereading and analysing the tragedies selected for both the brief overview in the following paragraph and the close readings in the following chapters.

---

[123] Victoria Wohl, "Tragedy and Feminism", op. cit., pp. 152-153.
[124] Ibid. pp. 152-153.
[125] Ibid. p. 153.
[126] Ibid. p. 153.
[127] Ibid. p. 152.

3. Reading women's historical tragedies of the Romantic age

3.1 Women playwrights' historical tragedies: a general analysis

This paragraph will present an overview of historical tragedies written by female playwrights in England, Italy and Spain in the Romantic era, which will be briefly analysed and compared, identifying—when possible—a series of elements and themes in common and the way female dramatists chose to tackle them. Despite the fact that they were composed in different periods and in different countries, specific topics such as religion, politics, love/death dichotomy, patriotism and women's social conditions, often inscribed into a gothic atmosphere, seem to emerge in many Romantic women's tragedies. In the following pages, such themes will be thus pinpointed and examined in connection to the socio-cultural context in which the tragedies were written. By doing so, it will be possible to outline women's concerns and interests, and to investigate how they influenced, or found expression through, their dramatic production. Such a brief analysis will be conducted in relation to the methodology presented in the course of this chapter—thus, taking into account the intersection of the main themes with issues of gender, otherness, subjectivity, *her*story and so on. This identification of recurrent subjects in female tragedies will be extremely useful in the detailed analysis included in the next chapters. Indeed, as this research work will later display, the three tragedies selected for the close reading share, to different extents, the same issues addressed in many other women's dramatic compositions.

The Romantic Age in England has certainly been a very prolific period as far as the female production of drama is concerned. Spain and, in particular, Italy did not witness the same development in female playwriting, but they saw nonetheless a distinctive feminine interest in drama which should not be overlooked since it contributed to the theatrical scene of the time, as well as, possibly, to the evolution of the dramatic genre in the country. While in Italy it is not possible to identify a woman who, more than her colleagues, dominated the stage and the page—writing plays that were both performed and published—, England and Spain had two recognised leading dramatists; namely, Joanna Baillie and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Joanna Baillie, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was regarded as the leading playwright of the time—compared to Shakespeare by her colleague Walter Scott[128]—and a great *connoisseur* of the human mind, so much so that all her dramas were focused on the investigation of the passions that drive people towards their destiny. Among her numerous dramatic works, Baillie also penned a series of historical tragedies which certainly reflected the European trend of the

[128] Walter Scott, Letter to Miss Smith, March 4, 1808, in *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1894) I:99. Cited in Anne K. Mellor, "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-Public Sphere", 1994.

period but also accurately displayed the essential relation between women, history and drama, and how such combination was cleverly negotiating—when not subverting—the rules imposed by society. A similar role in Spain was played by de Avellaneda, who managed to be accepted and celebrated by the Spanish intellectuals of the time, despite her gender and Cuban origins. A woman from Cuba became indeed a successful dramatist in Spain, with her plays performed in the main cities of the country, included Madrid. Her dramatic production was not solely centred on historical tragedies, but a good number of her dramas can undoubtedly be ascribed to such category, highlighting how Spain—although later than England—was hit by the same interest in recounting historical events in a dramatic form. The dramatic texts written by Italian women playwrights[129] demonstrate that history was a main theme also in Italian theatre. Italian women's dramas, indeed, often narrated the major happenings that struck the peninsula: from the Roman Empire to the crusades, passing through the Barbarian invasion. If many historical tragedies of the period focused on the principal historical events of the playwrights' homeland, it is otherwise true that in female compositions it is possible to notice a general taste for historical episodes occurred in different locations. Such a choice could either depend on a personal preference or on the desire to recount a specific event that struck the imagination of the writer, but it could also be attributed to a peculiar stratagem, known as "displacement", often employed by women writers to address the burning political issues of the time, avoiding explicit references to the current situation of their countries. Nevertheless, the "pervasive engagement with history"[130] that characterised female writers of the Romantic era also had the effect of re-imagining a national past that included them, re-writing a history where women were active participants. In particular, Katherine Newey regarded historical tragedies which deal with the English nation-state as a means through which female playwrights could "claim the citizenship largely denied them through other political and social institutions,"[131] inscribing women into a collective historiography that always effaced their presence. A similar discourse could apply to the historical dramas dealing with Italian and Spanish national history, where it is not infrequent to find historical settings and protagonists mixed with fictional characters—who were indeed women more often than men. The choice of inserting invented protagonists into historical episodes was certainly a popular literary device at the time, employed mainly in

[129] Including those which got lost or only survived in small fragments, as in the case of Diodata Saluzzo di Roero and Laura Beatrice Oliva. According to the report given by her friend Coriolano di Bagnolo, Diodata Saluzzo asked her heirs to burn her six comedies and her tragedy *Sicheo* right after her death. Unfortunately, also the manuscripts of the tragedies *Girolamo Olgiati, Cola di Rienzo, Pausania* and *Cristoforo Colombo* composed by Laura Beatrice Oliva went lost.
[130] Stuart Curran, "Women Readers, Women Writers", in Stuart Curran (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 191.
[131] Katherine Newey, "Women and history on the Romantic Stage", op. cit., p. 79

the newborn genre of the historical novel. The most famous example is probably Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, as well as his many other works which later inspired Alessandro Manzoni's novel *I Promessi Sposi*, based on the same mixture of history and fiction. However, in women's texts, both drama and novels, such a strategy should not only be considered as a form of adhesion to a celebrated European trend—which was the case, as they intended to earn money from their writings—but also as a deliberate political act carrying meaning and intentions, as we will see later on. In this regard, in her book *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Nancy Armstrong argues that fiction is both the "document and the agency of cultural history,"[132] but it also plays a fundamental part in remarking the division between male and female, public and domestic. As highlighted by Newey, fiction can provide a "forum for women's voices and the opportunity for exercising agency"[133] while it represents "an instrument in the division of experience into that series of binary oppositions with which we still struggle: masculine and feminine, public and private, history and domesticity."[134] Therefore,

> in writing tragedies from the source material of English history, Romantic women playwrights carefully and cautiously attempted to dissolve the limits of those binaries by forcing a confrontation between the spheres of public, masculine, political action and feminine domesticity and feeling. Through the plotlines of tragedy and its generic convention of the fall of the great man, these writers dramatized a feminist challenge to the exercise of extreme power and the actions of tyranny.[135]

Again, such an insight on English female playwrights could easily be applied to their Spanish and Italian colleagues, who shared the same interested in history and, frequently, the same themes.

For example, religion appears to be an issue frequently discussed in women's plays, intersecting with history as well as with questions of gender and *otherness*. In particular, it represents a central theme in *Percy* (1777) by Hannah More, *Baltasar* (1858) and *Saúl* (1849) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and *Erminia* (1817) by Diodata Saluzzo di Roero. If *Percy* and *Erminia* are set during the Crusades and both deal with love and war in such a controversial and religion-connoted context, Avellaneda narrates biblical events in her acclaimed tragedies *Saúl* and *Baltasar*. Avellaneda also tackles religion in the opposition between Islam and Christianity while narrating the Arabic invasion of Spain in *Egilona*, which will be analysed in detail in the following chapters. Religion constituted a crucial element in the lives of 18th and 19th century people. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that they chose to include this subject in dramatic productions, especially in the three countries examined, where religion held,

---

[132] Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*. *A Political History of the Novel*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 23.
[133] Katherine Newey, "Women and history on the Romantic Stage", op. cit., p. 80.
[134] Ibid. p. 80.
[135] Ibid. p. 80.

although for different reasons, a prominent role in society. After a past of civil wars between Protestantism and Catholicism, England was inhabited by a consistent number of Catholics as well as intellectuals and writers who chose not to conform to the norms of the Church of England and were, thus, recognised as *dissenters,* consequently being deprived of all their civil rights. Similarly, Spain saw its citizens divided between Christianity and Islam during the Middle Ages, with part of its territory governed by a Muslim king.[136] Once Catholicism was reinstated in the country, a long period of terror caused by the Spanish Inquisition hit the population, especially those devoted to the Jewish and Muslim religions, who were banished from Spain with a royal edict in 1492. In both countries, religion was thus perceived as a political matter, a fundamental issue on which the unity and power of monarchies depended. Indeed, the implications of the political nature of religion not only strongly impacted people's life but also legitimised the very existence of kings and queens. Religion was also employed to create a sense of belonging to the nation—hence, the need to identify the state with only one specific belief—, a common ground on which to build a cohesive and morally exemplary community, as it happened in Italy during its unification process. Indeed, the Italian peninsula, although divided in many different nation-states, was held together by a fervent Catholic faith, fostered by the geographical proximity to Rome and the Vatican, as well as by the subservience of the various Italian sovereigns to the Pope. As a result, whoever did not conform to the rules of the institutional religion of the country was excluded from society, becoming a marginalised subject. For such reason, the institutionalisation of religion and its power to create *otherness* acquire a further perspective when discussed by female figures, who already belonged to the social category of the "other" and were, hence, discriminated. An extraordinary insight into the close relationship between religion and politics is given by Hannah More in her successful tragedy *Percy*, in which she depicts how a distorted idea of the values of Christianity could lead to an endless conflict against an enemy who is really not so. The play begins with the return to England of the male characters, who were away fighting in the Crusades. The female protagonist is Elwina, who was obliged by her father Raby to marry a man she did not love instead of Percy, the one she was previously engaged to and in love with. While Raby glorifies the men who were on the battlefield, and wished he was younger to join them, Elwina subversively attacks the whole principles behind the Holy Wars.

[136] The Muslim invasion of Spain occurred between 711 and 718 A.D. but lasted until 726 A.D. It was mainly guided by the Muslim general Musa (or Muza), who later left in charge of ruling over the conquered territories his son Abdalasis. Indeed, Abdalasis is the protagonist of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's tragedy *Egilona*, set in Sevilla in 715, after he was appointed Emir.

RABY:
. . . It is religion's cause, the cause of heaven!

ELWINA:
When policy assumes religion's name,
And wears the sanctimonious garb of faith
Only to colour fraud, and license murder,
War then is tenfold guilt.

RABY:
Blaspheming girl!

ELWINA:
Tis not the crosier, nor the pontiff's robe,
The saintly look, nor the elevated eye,
Nor Palestine destroy'd, nor Jordan banks
Deluged with blood of slaughter'd infidels;
No, nor the extinction of the eastern world,
Nor all the mad, pernicious bigot rage
Of your crusades, can bribe the Power who sees
The motive with the act. O blind, to think
That cruel war can please the Prince of Peace!
He, who erects his altar in the heart,
Abhors the sacrifice of human blood,
And all the false devotion of that zeal
Which massacres the world he died to save.[137]

Elwina unmasks the political interests which hide behind "religion's name" and employ faith to legitimize the assassination of their foes, when God and Jesus—never explicitly mentioned but hinted at through the capitalized epithets "Power" and "Prince of Peace"—repudiated violence and professed universal love. Of course, it is impossible not to see Hannah More's personal opinion in such a heartfelt passage, especially considering her endless commitment against social inequalities and the slave trade. The pure love for Percy that Elwina deeply feels, despite her unhappy marriage with her tyrannical husband Douglas, strongly characterizes the whole play and is, in the end, the reason for her death. Similarly, the protagonist of Diodata Saluzzo's *Erminia* is destined to a tragic ending because of her love for Tancredi, a Christian prince who is participating in the Crusades and fighting against the Sultan Donimano, who wants Erminia to be his wife at all costs. Indeed, Donimano accepts to liberate Tancredi's uncle from imprisonment on the sole condition that Erminia—his former fiancé then converted to Christianity—converts back to Islam and marries him. Thus, religion plays a fundamental part in the development of the plot, with two different and very much characterized parties, and the only female character of the drama, Erminia, in between the two—although she never really questions her new Christian faith. Indeed, she sacrifices her life in order to save both Tancredi and his uncle from death, as well as herself from the marriage to an "infidel." Although

---

[137] Hannah More, *Percy: A Tragedy*, 1777, Act II, Scene i.

Donimano is defined by Diodata as a brave warrior ("prode guerriero"[138]) in the "Introduction" to her tragedy, he is represented in the text as a tyrant, a foe who is even more evil because of his Muslim religion. Furthermore, he is also portrayed as a man who does not take into consideration women's right to their own choices—unlike Tancredi, who never acts against Erminia's will. This difference in the way the two deal with women and love is implicitly attributed to their different beliefs, so as to remark the distance between Christianity and Islam, as well as their being symbolical representations of the abstract and dichotomical categories of "good" and "bad".

> TANCREDI:
> Io sento in cuore
> l'aspra sorte d'Erminia. Io la mia fede
> impegno a te:
> . . . .
> s'ella acconsente, è tua.
>
> DONIMANO:
> S'ella acconsente! Ella! Ed in sua balía
> Fora mia sorte?
>
> TANCREDI:
> Ah! Se tu l'ami…
>
> DONIMANO:
> Amore,
> fatto giogo in Europa al forte sesso,
> qui non serve e non prega. A te la chiedo.
> Molto offerisco; ed a voi giova.[139]

Erminia explicitly refuses to marry Donimano because of his faith. Indeed, she says to him that she cannot be his wife because they have different beliefs—"Avversa io sono / a te di culto; ed esser tua non posso"[140]—and she admits to her friend Pietro that since her conversion to Christianity she has despised Islam.

---

[138] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, "Erminia", in *Versi di Diodata Saluzzo di Roero. Quarta Edizione, corretta ed accresciuta.* Volume IV. Torino: Vedova Pomba e figli, 1817.

[139] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, "Erminia", op. cit., Act I, Scene i. English translation: Tancredi "I feel in my heart Erminia's cruel fate. I trust you . . . if she accepts your proposal, she is yours" / Donimano "If she accepts! She! And should my fate depend on her decision?" Tancredi "if you love her…" / Donimano "Love, which in Europe subjugated the stronger sex, does not serve and does not pray here. I ask you, and I have a lot to offer, which can please you."

[140] Ibid. Act II, Scene iii. English translation: "Your faith is hostile to mine; and I cannot be yours"

> ERMINIA:
> . . . Tu il sai; tu sai che io l'empio culto aborro
> e l'empio amante. M'abbandona! Teco
> Non mi rivegga il mio nemico! e credi,
> ben tu 'l dicesti, pria di nozze indegne,
> io scerrei morte.[141]

Although the characters and the background story narrated by the author are inspired by the popular heroic poem *Gerusalemme Liberata,* written by Torquato Tasso in 1581, Diodata chooses to give new importance to the figure of Erminia, who in Tasso's poem simply disappears in the hectic development of events. It is interesting, indeed, how Erminia represents all the positive values of integrity, loyalty and sacrifice, choosing death over an arranged interfaith marriage and a forced conversion to another religion. Her tragic ending, which saves the life of Tancredi and gives freedom to Boemondo, is almost depicted as both a martyrdom and a great act of love, combining the two main—and intrinsically Romantic—themes of the drama. The Italic peninsula at the time was divided by politics yet united by faith, therefore, if Christianity represents the Italian population, the hatred against a different religion portrayed in the tragedy could implicitly stand for the general feeling that Italic people had towards the foreign dominations that were ruling over the country. The fact that Diodata Saluzzo was a fervent supporter of the unification of Italy and had to stop writing when the French conquered Piedmont and Turin—her hometown—could corroborate such a thesis.

If Diodata Saluzzo conceived her tragedies as a mixture of traditional structures taken from the classical canons—five acts and unity of time—and "coeval models,"[142] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda did the exact opposite. She explicitly affirms, in the prologue to the printed edition of her *Saúl*, that she voluntarily distanced herself from a rigorous adherence to the classical canons, as well as from the model introduced by Alfieri with his own version of the *Saúl*.[143] Interestingly, she justifies her decision by her intent to be as truthful as possible to history. Indeed, she explicitly contests the use of the unities in Alfieri's play because, by being so respectful of tradition, he could only put on stage the last hours of Saul's life, neglecting some other very interesting situations history had to offer.

---

[141] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, "Erminia", op. cit., Act II, Scene iii. English translation: "You know, you know I abhor the evil faith, and the evil lover. He leaves! My enemy should not see me again with you. And believe me, you said the right thing, I would rather die than marrying an infidel"

[142] Paola Triverio "In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo", in Marziano Guglielminetti and Paola Triverio (eds.), *Il Romanticismo in Piemonte: Diodata Saluzzo.* Atti del Convegno di Studi, Saluzzo, 29 settembre 1990. Università di Torino, Centro di Studi di Letteratura Italiana in Piemonte «Guido Gozzano». Vol. 12 - Saggi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki.

[143] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Saúl: tragedia bíblica en cuatro actos.* Madrid: Imprenta de José María Repulles, 1849, p. 8.

> Mi Saúl no es una creación: es un drama real, severo, religioso . . . es un drama, en fin, *sin alteración considerable de la verdad histórica*. No sé si con acierto ó sin él, me he apartado de la sencillez del plan adoptado por Alfieri, y de su rigorosa sujeción de las reglas clásicas. . . . Alfieri emplea los cincos actos de su bella tragedia solo en poner en acción á Saul durante las últimas horas de su vida; privándose de este modo, por su excesivo respeto á la unidad de tiempo y de lugar, de algunas situaciones muy bellas que le brindaba la historia de su protagonista.[144]

The same can be said about *Baltasar*, which is again divided in four acts and does not present the canonical unities of time and place, although according to María Prado Mas it does adhere to the unity of action.[145] Both tragedies are centred on the conflict between spiritual and temporal power, represented by the two sovereigns themselves: Saúl and Baltasar. Such a battle, at the end of both texts, is ideally won by God—not necessarily the Christian god, as the dramas are set in Israel and Babylon and thus it is probably more accurate to identify him with the Jewish god—, who punishes those monarchs who do not reign according to his principles. Besides such a religious component, what strikes the most about Avellaneda's tragedies is that she employs faith as a fundamental element of the characters' freedom from oppression. In this regard, the female character of Elda, a Jewish slave Baltasar wants to marry and keep in his harem, seems to portray all the virtues and strength of a devoted person who is not afraid of the consequences of her actions when fighting for liberty. Elda, despite being a slave, replies to Baltasar in various situations remarking her right to freedom—"my life is yours, but my soul is mine"[146]—, and refuses the authority of a monarch over her life—"the people who share my belief do not kneel before anyone but God."[147] It can be argued that, as in the tragedy by Diodata, there is a clear opposition between a "good" faith and a "bad" one, even though Avellaneda set this dichotomy in a foreign land and does not use it to celebrate the institutional Spanish religion. Nevertheless, she attributes to Judaism—from which Christianity derives—the power to destroy borders, social classes and slaves' chains, further remarking that freedom and equality are any people's divine rights.

> JOAQUÍN:
> (*Con energía*.)
> ¡Pero te engañas,
> rey Baltasar! ¡No es error

---

[144] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Saúl: tragedia bíblica en cuatro actos,* op. cit., pp. 8-9.
English translation: "My Saúl is not a creation: it is an authentic drama, severe, religious . . . it is a drama, in short, *without any significant alteration of the historical truth*. I have detached myself from the simplicity of Alfieri's plot and from his rigorous attachment to the classical canons. . . . Alfieri employs the five acts of his beautiful tragedy only to put into action the last hours of Saúl's life; depriving himself, in this way, for his excessive respect for the unities of time and place, of some very nice situations that the history of his protagonist had to offer."

[145] María Prado Mas, "Introducción", in María Prado Mas (ed.), *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* cit., p. 51.

[146] María Prado Mas (ed.), *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* op. cit., Act II, Scene v, p. 169. Original quote: "¡Mi vida es tuya, pero mi alma es mía!".

[147] Ibid. Act II, Scene iv, p. 164. Original quote: "Las gentes de mi creencia / sólo de Dios a presencia / deben doblar las rodillas".

> la esperanza de los pueblos,
> de alma la aspiración!
> ¡Hay ese Dios, que tú niegas,
> de los señores Señor,
> ante el cual el rey y el siervo
> iguales, hermanos son,
> y a su justicia suprema
> contra ti se alza mi voz![148]

As in the case of Hannah More, the bold words pronounced by Elda could be regarded as an insight into the author's mind, being Avellaneda an independent woman who had her freedom at heart and hardly conformed to the rules imposed by society. It is not by chance that the religious dichotomy body/soul is introduced by a female character when talking to a man who considers her his own property. Avellaneda seems to switch the meaning of the body/soul dichotomy from its religious significance of physical death against eternal life for the soul, to a strong assertion of the female subjectivity and authority over herself. Indeed, the protagonist seems to remark that while a body can be taken by force, as it often happened to women as Elda, a soul cannot be conquered, violated or imprisoned. Interestingly, a similar concept also appears in More's *Percy*, in a conversation between Elwina and her husband, when he accuses her of "adultery of the mind,"[149] because while he can control her life and body, he does not have power over her mind, which is devoted to her true love, Percy.

> DOUGLAS:
> Turn, madam, and address those vows to me,
> To spare the precious life of him you love.
> Even now you triumph in the death of Douglas;
> Now your loose fancy kindles at the thought,
> And, wildly rioting in lawless hope,
> Indulges the adultery of the mind.
> But I'll defeat that wish.—Guards, bear her in.
> Nay, do not struggle.
> *[She is borne in.]*[150]

As it will be shown in the next chapters, religion appears as a theme also in the tragedies selected for the close reading, merged with typical Romantic subjects as politics and the close and conflicted relationship between love and death.

The dichotomy love and death is indeed an issue that is constantly at play in the historical tragedies written by women during the Romantic age, often mixed with gothic elements or

[148] María Prado Mas (ed.), *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* op. cit., Act IV, Scene viii, p. 239. English translation: "*(energetically)* you are wrong King Baltazar! People's hope is not a mistake, nor the dreams of the soul. There is a god that you refuse to acknowledge, Lord of the Lords, before whom the servant and the king are the same, are brothers, and supported by his supreme justice, I raise my voice against you."
[149] Hannah More, *Percy: A Tragedy*, op. cit., Act IV, Scene ii.
[150] Ibid. Act IV, Scene ii.

family matters that impede a love story from having a happy ending. A perfect example of a drama featuring a historical setting and situations of terror that have a strong impact on the development of the plot is certainly *Orra* by Joanna Baillie, a play where the author explicitly intends to explore the human feelings of fear and madness. *Orra* is set in Switzerland in the 14th century, but the modern perspective introduced in the drama makes its main topics relevant and connected to the age Baillie was living in. Orra is a young lady and an orphan who cannot make use of her consistent inheritance because, as a woman, she is not allowed to own properties and manage money without a male guardian. Unfortunately, her guardian Count Hughobert, a friend of her late father, wants to convince her to marry his son Glottenbal so that they can improve their social position and take her fortune. Together with the cruel knight Rudigere, who secretly wants to marry Orra, Hughobert decides to send her to a castle of his property. The castle is known to be haunted and frightful, therefore they hope to scare her so as to give Glottenbal the opportunity to falsely "save" her and, consequently, convince her to become his wife. However, Orra is in love with another man, Theobald, from whom they want her to stay away because he is an impoverished nobleman. The theme of the contrasted—or even doomed—love is often present in women's tragedies, as *Percy*, *Orra*, *Ines* and *Egilona* demonstrates. The protagonists of such dramas cannot freely choose their spouses and either end up in loveless marriages or risk their life together with their illegitimate lovers. This situation depicted in dramas, as well as in other literary works, was not that far from the reality in which women were living in the 18th and 19th centuries. Indeed, since women had no legal authority over themselves, they were mostly obliged to respect their family's decisions, even concerning their love life. Furthermore, young ladies were often regarded by their parents as commodities and instruments to build political alliances,[151] thus, their husbands were chosen according to the more convenient social and political circumstances, as in the case of Elwina in *Percy*, and Orra.

Most of the tragedy *Orra* develops inside the scary castle, mixing stories of "ghosts and spirits" with "things unearthly, that on Michael's eve rise from the yawning tombs,"[152] all planned to terrify her. Horror and shock are indeed the effects that her persecutors will obtain, since, at the end of the drama, not even the rescue enacted by her lover can save her from the madness that constant fear has generated in her mind. Interestingly, it is one of the few tragedies written by women where the female protagonist does not die in the end, but is instead driven mad by the course of events. Such a choice is evidently in line with the gothic atmosphere of

---

[151] Cfr. Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market", in *This Sex Which is Not One*, 1977. Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, 1949. Translated into English by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, Rodney Needham, Boston, 1969.

[152] Joanna Baillie, *Orra: A Tragedy in Five Acts,* 1806, Act II, Scene ii.

the play, but it could also be a chance to display the consequences of the lack of freedom and opportunities in women's lives. A young woman, without a family to protect her, no matter her social class, was completely left at the mercy of a society that was ready to take advantage of her until she was no longer able to recognize herself and the world around her. Such is the fate of Orra, who at the end of the play, on her last dreadful night at the castle, is incapable of distinguishing reality from fantasy, as demonstrated by her final speech—"the damn'd and holy, the living and the dead, together are in horrid neighbourship"[153]—, tinged again with gothic tones. Baillie's critique of society is also present, more explicitly, in other parts of the texts. She appears to employ Orra's words to convey a very accurate portrayal of women's legal conditions, as well as to propose—through Orra's conversation with Hartman—the kind of society she would dream of, a sort of utopian reign ruled by a woman.

> ORRA:
> *[talking to Hart, as she enters]*
> And so, since fate has made me, woe the day!
> That poor and good-for-nothing, helpless being,
> woman yclept, I must consign myself with all my lands and rights
> into the hands of some proud man, and say, "Take all, I pray,
> And do me in return the grace and favour to be my master."
>
> HARTMAN*:*
> Nay, gentle lady, you constrain my words.
> And load them with a meaning:
> harsh and foreign to what they truly bear.
> —A master! No; a valiant, gentle mate,
> who in the field or in the council will maintain your right:
> a noble, equal partner.
>
> ORRA*:*
> *[shaking her head]*
> Well I know. In such a partnership, the share of power allotted to the wife.
> . . . .
> Right well I see thy head approves my plan.
> And by and by so will thy gen'rous heart.
> In short, I would, without another's leave, improve the low condition of my peasants.
> And cherish them in peace.
> Ev'n now methinks each little cottage of my native vale swells out its earthen sides, up-heaves its roof.
> Like to a hillock mov'd by laboring mole.
> And with green trail-weeds clamb'ring up its walls, roses and ev'ry gay and fragrant plant
> before my fancy stands, a fairy bower: aye, and within it too do fairies dwell.[154]

It seems that politics, even when the themes of English women's dramas seem to be far from it, is often present in various forms as if they implicitly insisted on remarking that, when the social conditions of a minor group are characterized by inequality, politics becomes intrinsically involved in any other personal activity or subject. Less politically engaged seem to be, instead,

[153] Joanna Baillie, *Orra: A Tragedy in Five Acts,* op. cit., Act V, Scene ii.
[154] Ibid. Act II, Scene i.

Italian women dramatists, or least, they appear less preoccupied with female conditions and more interested in the cause of Italian Risorgimento, as *Tullia* and, as we will see, *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, appear to be hinting at.

A tragedy that certainly mixes together political issues, gothic elements and the dichotomy love and death, is *Tullia* by Diodata Saluzzo di Roero. Published in 1817 with *Erminia* but written and performed years before, *Tullia* is an historical tragedy set in Ancient Rome and divided into the canonical five acts. The tragedy is defined by Paola Triverio as a combination of the typical 16th century "tragedy of horror" and "pre-romantic paradigms,"[155] characterized by themes as murder, conspiracy, betrayal and madness, as well as natural elements that seem to perfectly mirror the dark mood of the protagonists. The plot develops inside a family, that of Servio, the king of Rome, whom his son-in-law Lucio wants to overthrow to take his place. In his attempt to usurp Servio's power, Lucio is helped by his wife Tullia, and mother-in-law Tarquinia, Servio's wife. Lucio's goal is clearly stated right from the beginning, but what the readers (or audience) do not expect is to what extent the mad love Tullia feels for Lucio will transform her into a murderess. As Triverio underlines, it is unexpected precisely because it does not adhere to the historical reports of the time, which, according to the version of Tito Livio, describe Tullia pushing Lucio to assassinate her father.[156] If the "necessary yet ferocious love that lacerates"[157] Tullia is the reason why she decides to follow her husband's cruel scheme, the motives that lay behind Lucio's success with Tarquinia and the Roman population is the supposed tyrannical nature of Servio and his reign. Lucio seems to employ the *topoi* of tyranny, justice and freedom in order to convince the people around him that the murder of a king, under the right circumstances, is a legitimate act.[158] It is indeed through Lucio and Ostilio's words that the most political core of the play comes to the surface. Ostilio interestingly highlights how the population, which is now supporting Lucio, can easily change its mind and obey a different ruler, as long as he proves stronger than the previous ones.

> OSTILIO:
> … Fervon ne' petti
> Amor per te, sdegno per lui; ma plebe
> È labil cosa. …
> Se vacilli, se colui, che in vita
> lasciotti a danno suo, la vigoria

---

[155] Paola Triverio "In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo", op. cit., p. 119.
Original quote: "Se da un lato potrebbe rimandare a quella cinquecentesca tragedia dell'orrore, tanto invisa ai raffinati teorici del teatro settecentesco, dall'altro si aggiorna grazie a moduli decisamente preromantici"
[156] Ibid. p. 109.
[157] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, *Tullia*, op. cit., Act II, Scene iii, p. 136.
Original quote: "Forza divenne / l'amarti sempre / ed il pentirmi sempre / del necessario e pur feroce amore, / che mi strazia per te."
[158] Such concept is developed by Paola Triverio "In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo", op. cit., p. 111.

> di securo imperar che ‘l terror desti
> riprende; allor spento sei tu …
> E la mutabil plebe,
> che a riporti sul trono oggi s’appresta,
> te spento, te rimirerà tremando.
> . . . .
> Il diss’io già: chi dona vita e morte,
> inesorabil re; chi di pietate
> voci non sente, e nessun fren conosce
> in terra, sempre la tremante plebe
> lega al giogo di ferro. Il popol svena
> Debole re, re tiranno mai.[159]

As Triverio suggests, the drama was first drafted during the Jacobin triennium (1796-1799), and it is probably in reference to this historical moment of French occupation of the North of Italy that the relationship between population and monarchy was elaborated and developed in the text.[160] A further political hint that could identify *Tullia* also as a political tragedy supporting—although implicitly—the unification of Italy can be retraced in Servio’s initial speech about Rome and the Italic peninsula: “Ed è patria nostra Italia e Roma, / Itali tutti; onde in miglior etate / Siavi patria sol una.”[161] Besides the gothic elements, what certainly connects *Orra* and *Tullia* is the tragic destiny of their protagonists, whose final madness is in both cases caused by the men who lead their lives, who push them towards confusion and self-doubt. Nevertheless, unlike Orra, Tullia tragically dies in the end; after her desperate love for Lucio made her lose her mind and kill her father, Lucio rejects her and her “delirium,”[162] which leads her to immediate death.

The themes of the homeland and freedom from foreign dominations are also at the centre of Rosario de Acuña’s tragedy in one act, *Amor á la Patria*, performed in Zaragoza in 1877. Interestingly, despite the fact that Rosario de Acuña wrote other dramas using her own name, this tragedy was first written under the penname of Remigio Andrés Delafón.[163] The choice of using a male pseudonym could be due to the fact that she deals with a historical episode not too distant in time—the war of independence against the French, that occurred in the first decades of the 19th century. Therefore, she might have been afraid of being recognized as the writer of a subversive piece, and harshly attacked for meddling in political issues. The episode narrated is about the battle carried out by the people of Zaragoza to defend the town from the French army. The story features two female protagonists, Inés and María, who courageously and

---

[159] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, *Tullia*, op. cit., Act III, Scene i, pp. 144-145. English translation: “In their hearts, they love you and despise him, but the population is volatile. . . . They will kill a weak king, but never a tyrant.”
[160] Paola Triverio “In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo”, op. cit. p. 111.
[161] Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, *Tullia*, op. cit., Act I, Scene i, pp. 101. English translation: “Italy and Rome are our homeland / Italian people, all of you; let there be one and only country.”
[162] Ibid. Act V, Last Scene, pp. 195. Original quote: “Or basta! udito / Hommi abbastanza i tuoi deliri.”
[163] Rosario Acuña de la Iglesia, *Amor á la Patria*, Madrid: Imprenta de José Rodriguez, 1877.

tirelessly fight for their patriotic ideals while, on the contrary, the male characters are depicted as traitors, "willing to sell their honor in exchange for fame and social fortune."[164] The issue of gender is, in this drama, strictly linked to the cause of independence; Inés and María are aware that their sex prevents them from being heard, as well as from joining the war and actively defending their hometown. Nevertheless, Inés affirms right from the first scene her intention to take part in the fight at all costs. Indeed, in the following passage she explicitly states that she does not care about her gender, since the blood in her vein runs with enthusiasm at the thought of freeing her homeland from the foreign domination and, in order to conquer "holy liberty", she is ready to lose her life and soul: "la vida, es poco, el alma perdería."[165]

> MARÍA:
> ¡¡Tu voz, como mi voz, no puede nada!!
> ¡¡Mujeres somos!!
>
> INÉS:
> *(Con calor.)*
> ¡¡Por la patria mia,
> aunque mujer, la sangre de mis venas
> late con entusiasmo; y por su dicha,
> por verla libre de extranjero yugo,
> por conquistar su libertad bendita
> y mirarla temible y poderosa,
> la vida, es poco, el alma perdería!![166]

In *Amor á la patria*, politics and patriotism are, thus, more explicitly addressed than in *Tullia*, also because of a more identifiable historical background that people could easily recognize. If de Acuña employs the strategy of a fictional name to avoid criticism, Diodata, as well as many of her English colleagues, uses more subtle strategies to convey political opinions, in order not to be accused of being a subversive figure. Such stratagems, as already mentioned, often consisted in narrating events from the past that had the same implications as the recent episodes that these female dramatists meant to criticize, so that the connection was still there but harder to spot. If this strategy often worked, not only in tragedy but in comedies and farces as well, there were cases when it did not prove effective. A well-known example is the beautiful historical drama by Elizabeth Inchbald *The Massacre* (1792), the only tragedy she ever wrote—besides her many successful plays—, and the only one that was neither staged nor published, because it was regarded as too politically engaged. *The Massacre* is a peculiar historical

[164] Fátima Coco Ramírez, "El discurso femenino en el teatro de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 152
[165] Rosario Acuña de la Iglesia, *Amor á la Patria*, Act I, Scene i, p. 8.
[166] Ibid. p. 8. English translation: María "Your voice, just like mine, has no power! We are women!" / Inés "For my homeland, even if I am a woman, the blood runs in my veins enthusiastically; and to see it free from foreign dominations, to conquer its holy freedom and look at it fearsome and powerful, I am ready to sacrifice not only my life, which is nothing, but even my soul."

tragedy, in the sense that neither the historical period nor the location where it is set are explicitly defined. Nevertheless, from the context and from her short introduction to the play, it can be deduced that the narration of the reported episode is "taken from the French" and, thus, it takes place in France, probably during the French revolution.[167] Indeed, the event narrated is a violent revolt carried out by an aggressive mob who aims at murdering the representatives of the aristocratic class. No reasons and no explanations are given for the revolt, which is depicted as an escalation of violence and fear for the protagonists, the aristocratic family of Eusèbe and Madame Tricastin. From the beginning, the nobleman, Eusèbe Tricastin, risks his life because he represents for the mob a sort of scapegoat against whom they can vent their anger. Therefore he is chased, arrested and put on trial. Nevertheless, at the end of the play, the situation is completely reversed. Indeed, the only victims—slaughtered off stage and brought before the audience inside their coffins—are the sole female character, Madame Tricastin, and her children. *The Massacre* by Inchbald represents a perfect example of how *micro*history—the life and death of the weak; in this case, the woman and the children—was often considered a secondary effect of the public endeavours carried out by men. But, while men were busy fighting away and discussing politics at home, it was the marginalised, the unheard and unrepresented citizens who paid the highest price of *macro*history.

Remarkably, a similar situation can be found in an Italian tragedy, *Ines* (1845), written by Laura Beatrice Oliva, about the real events occurred inside the Portuguese royal family in the 14th century. The protagonist of the drama, Ines de Castro, is deeply in love with Piero, the heir to the Portuguese throne, who is destined to marry a Spanish princess in order to secure an alliance for his father Alfonso, king of Portugal. After coming back from the crusades—which bring back the religious theme often present in English, Spanish and Italian dramas—Piero is obliged to refuse again the arranged marriage proposed by his father and to confess that he is already secretly married to Ines, from whom he had two children. The "reason of state,"[168] as suggested by Salvatore Statello, blends with the Romantic subjects of passion and love, that are intrinsically connected with death—as the popular opposition *Eros/Thanatos* exemplifies—, which is unfortunately what awaits Ines at the end of the play. The murder of the woman, initially ordered by king Alfonso but carried out by the cruel and double-faced servant Paceco, is not only a political matter but also a question of social class. Indeed, Ines is not from an aristocratic family, and it is for such reason that her endless love for Piero, which he

[167] Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 172.
[168] Salvatore Statello, *Ines de Castro. Eroina del Teatro Italiano tra Settecento e Ottocento*. Riposto: Circolo Socio-Culturale "Il Faro", 2004, p. 61.

passionately corresponds, is even more inacceptable. What Ines and Madame Tricastin share, besides a tragic death due to political issues that were very much distant from their own lives, is a peculiar situation that sees their gender preventing them from the possibility of defending themselves. Both Madame and Ines, for different reasons and in different moments, ask for a weapon to protect their life and that of their beloved ones but, in both cases, they are denied the use of a dagger because they are women. After the suggestion of a friend of theirs, Madame Tricastin asks her husband for a poniard, but he refuses because he "would not have her feminine virtues violated by the act" since "so sacred" he holds "the delicacy of her sex."[169] Similarly, Ines asks her servant Gonzales for a sword[170] but he firmly declines her demand, and when she angrily tells Paceco that if she had a dagger, she would use it to kill him or kill herself—so that she would be free from him—he answers that "such fury does not fit her angelical face."[171]

> INES:
> . . . oh avessi
> in tempo un ferro per sottrarmi a questo
> scellerato!
> . . . .
> Poiché non posso nel tuo petto un ferro
> immerger, com'io bramo; almeno me stessa
> io trafigger potessi!
>
> PACECO:
> . . . Oh come a un volto
> angelico innocente al par del tuo
> mal si addice il furor! . . . [172]

The issue of gender and politics appears to concern female dramatists whatever their country, age or social class, and it is presented in different ways in many of the tragedies here mentioned and briefly analysed. Politics and gender, together with the other topics highlighted in this short overview—such as religion, love and death—are also at the core of the three tragedies selected for the close reading, which will allow this thesis to analyse more in detail to what extent such an intersection of subjects was employed by Romantic female dramatists. Indeed, as this overview already seems to prove, there was a certain commonality of concerns, although

---

[169] Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Massacre*, 1972, Thomas C. Crochunis and Michael Eberle-Sinatra (eds.), *British Women Playwrights around 1800*. 15 April 1999, p. 8.
Retrieved from: http://www.etang.umontreal.ca/bwp1800/plays/inchbald_massacre/index.html [Accessed 5/07/2019].

[170] Ines uses a figure of speech, the synecdoche, to indicate the weapon she needs. Indeed, she uses the word "ferro" / "iron", the material a sword is made of, in order to refer to the object.

[171] Laura Beatrice Oliva, *Ines*, Firenze: per la società tipografica, 1945. Act V, Scene iv, p. 97.
Original quote: "Oh come a un volto / angelico innocente al par del tuo / mal si addice il furor!"

[172] Ibid. Act V, Scene iv, pp. 96-97. English translation: Ines "If only I had a sword to get rid of this evil man! … Since I cannot stab you, as I desire, I could at least stab myself!" / Paceco "Oh, such fury does not fit your innocent and angelical face."

possibly involuntary and unplanned, in the works of these extraordinary women from England, Italy and Spain.

Finally, as far as themes in common are concerned, it is worth mentioning an interesting example that not only includes the three countries examined but also many of the issues shared by the tragedies previously investigated: the "Rienzi" case. The events concerning the Roman Tribune Cola di Rienzo were indeed narrated in a dramatic form by female playwrights in England, Spain and Italy, respectively by: Mary Mitford (*Rienzi: a tragedy,* 1828), Rosario de Acuña de la Iglesia (*Rienzi el tribuno,* 1876), and Laura Beatrice Oliva (*Cola di Rienzo*, n.d.). Unfortunately, the text of this last tragedy is lost, and we only know by its title that Oliva dealt with this matter. As far the other two tragedies are concerned, *Rienzi* and *Rienzi el tribuno*, they were respectively written and first performed in 1828 at Drury Lane Theatre in London and in 1876 at Teatro del Circo, in Madrid. Both Mitford and de Acuña took the historical episodes around the figure of Cola di Rienzo from historical reports and added to it fictional characters and situations, resulting in two very diverse approaches to the same topic. Mary Russell Mitford produced an historical tragedy that, according to Katherine Newey, describes in "solidly Aristotelian terms" the "fall of great men,"[173] and it is indeed divided into the canonical five acts. On the contrary, Rosario de Acuña, just like her colleague de Avellaneda, had a more innovative vision of tragic compositions and split her *drama trágico* into two acts, plus a final epilogue. The two dramatists also drew the theme from different sources. Mitford explicitly affirms in the preface to the 1828 printed version that "the materials"[174] of her tragedy "are taken partly from the splendid narrative of Gibbon; partly from the still more graphical and interesting account of Rienzi's eventful career, contained in the second volume of *L'Abbé de Sade's Memoirs pour servir à la Vie de Petrarque*"[175]—while the female characters are "entirely from invention."[176] Conversely, Rosario de Acuña derived her inspiration from another Spanish tragedy, *Nicolás Rienzi*, written by Carlos Rubios in 1872, which was loosely based on the novel *Rienzi: the last of the Roman Tribunes* by Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton, which appeared on the Spanish magazine *La Revista de Teatro* in 1844.[177] Despite the differences, in both cases the dramatists decided to create fictional female characters and to insert them into the narration, combining historical and political issues with the topic of love and death. Mitford

---

[173] Katherine Newey, "Women and History on the Romantic stage: More, Yearsley, Burney, and Mitford", in Catherine Burroughs (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: drama, performance and society 1790-1840,* Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 2000, p. 94.

[174] Mary Russell Mitford, *Rienzi: A Tragedy, in five acts.* Fourth Edition, London: John Cumberland 19, Ludgate Hill, 1828.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Fátima Coco Ramírez, "El discurso femenino en el teatro de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 147.

gives Rienzi a daughter—though we do not know the fate of her mother—, Claudia, who is madly in love with Angelo Colonna, the son of Rienzi's archenemy and political opponent, Stephen Colonna. De Acuña imagines, instead, a Rienzi who is deeply in love with, and married to, María, an orphan who is the natural daughter—although she is not aware of that—of a member of the Colonna family, here again opposed to Rienzi. The real identity of María was kept a secret for decades following her mother's will, thanks to her maid—who is really her aunt—Juana, the other invented female character of the play. Both tragedies feature the death of Rienzi in the end, as well as strong political elements connected to Rienzi's real life and actions. The Tribune was, in fact, a controversial figure who achieved power with the aim of subverting the unfair aristocratic hegemony, only to become more similar to a tyrant, hated by the Roman population. While Mitford portrays this double perspective in the character of Rienzi, who appears both as a reasonable and loving man, and, at times, as a ruthless political strategist, de Acuña presents him as a hero who fought for the weak and their freedom. Indeed, the English playwright focuses her text both on the conflict between Rienzi and the families of noblemen who were against him—Colonna, Ursini, Savelli, Frangipani and so on—, and on the desperate love of Claudia and Angelo, which is constantly challenged by political intrigues and conspiracies. Their love, as well as the fatherly love Rienzi has for his daughter, is what allows the story to continue and develop since it is thanks to them and their continuous prayers and pledges that their parents show mercy towards their enemies. The only two female characters, Claudia and Lady Colonna, are depicted as complete opposites; Claudia is the "embodiment of sensibility and domesticity," while Lady Colonna is a "hard and inflexible woman"[178] who despises her daughter-in-law and pushes Angelo towards battle. Ironically, and differently from most of the historical tragedies written by English playwrights as Hannah More and Elizabeth Inchbald, the two women will be the only two surviving characters. The Spanish dramatist, instead, appears to be more explicitly political, employing her female characters to represent positive social values. Juana is the voice of the people, able to stand up against Colonna and to defend the freedom of the lower classes, while María, "the protagonist of the play,"[179] embodies strength and dignity. She firmly refuses the blackmailing advances of Colonna and actively participates in the unmasking of the cruel schemes against her husband. Furthermore, besides explicitly taking a position against social inequalities, de Acuña's drama implicitly conveys a crucial political message: warning Spain about the possible, devastating consequences of a civil

[178] Diego Saglia, "'Womanhood summoned unto conflicts' in the Historical Tragedies of Felicia Hemans and Mary Russell Mitford", in *La Questione Romantica*, No.14, Spring 2003, Napoli: Liguori, p. 105.
[179] Fátima Coco Ramírez, "El discurso femenino en el teatro de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 148. Original quote: "El personaje central de la obra."

war, as Coca Ramírez suggests.[180] The scholar highlights that the ideals behind the conflict in Rome between the aristocracy and the lower classes that Rienzi and María try to avoid resemble the reasons that led to the second Carlist war in 1873-74.[181] Less openly political—yet political nevertheless—is certainly *Rienzi* by Mitford, since the development of Rienzi's reign, which started with the aim of creating a fair government freed from the oligarchy of the aristocratic families and ended in tyranny, seems to hint very much both to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic dominion. Although the famous theme of Cola di Rienzo was tackled by many writers and dramatists in the course of the centuries, it is interesting to notice how two important representatives of Romantic theatre in England and Spain—who dealt differently with the subject and with issues of gender and politics—employed the genre of historical tragedy to discuss current political situations and express political opinions they could not openly expose. Indeed, as Katherine Newey affirms, "discussions of freedom and tyranny are never neutral in tragedy, no matter how distanced in the setting of time or place . . . and are even more loaded, not to say over-determined, in works produced by a female pen."[182]

3.2 A critical approach to three selected historical tragedies: *Mary Queen of Scots, Rosmunda in Ravenna,* and *Egilona*

Among the many historical tragedies written by women during the Romantic age which shared themes in common, it appeared necessary to identify a tragic text that could represent each literature. Ideally, the three selected dramas not only had to tackle similar issues, but also to present a number of analogies in their general structure which could demonstrate, through a close examination of the texts, to what extent female playwrights from very different national contexts had conceived and elaborated similar historical tragedies. As the previous overview has displayed, the themes that appear prominent in English, Italian and Spanish women's texts are often related and, not infrequently, such themes seem to be addressed in similar ways or with similar intentions. In order to choose three tragedies written by Romantic women playwrights of the three countries, it has been carried out a selection of the main topics tackled in the tragedies, which were divided according to their plots and characters, so that it was possible to roughly define the relationship between the narrative structures and the issues discussed. At the end of the process, three dramas were identified as sharing similar themes and

[180] Fátima Coco Ramírez, "El discurso femenino en el teatro de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña", op. cit., p. 149.
[181] Ibid. p. 149.
[182] Katherine Newey, "Women and History on the Romantic stage: More, Yearsley, Burney, and Mitford", op. cit., p. 96.

similar literary discourses: *Mary Queen of Scots* written by Mary Deverell in 1792, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837) by Luisa Amalia Paladini, and *Egilona* (1845) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. These selected plays are all historical tragedies featuring real historical women as protagonists—which is not always the case with historical dramas penned by female playwrights—and, more remarkably, in all the three cases, the protagonists are queens. The fact that the main characters are female monarchs who ruled over a country give us the chance to investigate not only strong female protagonists created by women, but also female figures from a double perspective: domestic and political. Indeed, the role of the queen compels the merging of the "public" monarch and the "private" woman, allowing the two separate spheres of politics and domesticity to coincide inside a female character. Therefore, it is possible to analyze and compare how these three playwrights employed and combined categories and elements related to culture, politics, gender, love, death, religion, history, and their own personal stance with the canonical genre of tragedy. In order to do so, the investigation of the three texts will be conducted employing the critical approach that has been discussed in the course of this chapter. The perspective that will be employed to conduct the close readings is indeed rooted in feminist criticism, starting from the pioneering work of the 70s to the latest theories developed since the rise of Third Wave Feminism, and adapted to the context of the 18th and 19th centuries. Such feminist methodology, which has been thought to back up this work in all the three literatures considered, and to be generally applied to women playwrights' dramatic production, is constituted of different levels of analyses, namely: socio-cultural, gender, historical, linguistic and intersectional. These categories, that are not hierarchically structured but rather organised in horizontal sequences that continuously overlap, will help the investigation of the texts in all their main constitutive parts, highlighting also the elements that differentiate female dramatic works.

The socio-cultural context, for example, plays a fundamental part in the analysis of the texts—especially considering that they belong to different literatures—since it defines the environment in which women playwrights were writing, under which social and cultural circumstances, and it helps identifying the similarities and differences between the three countries, which similarly or differently influenced women's texts. The whole concept of Romanticism will be considered, since it developed in different historical moments and different ways in the three countries, with diverse outcomes. We will also analyse the circumstances under which the three authors were writing in the society of the Romantic age, examining their access to education, their social class, familiar relations and environment, as well as the perception of gender in that specific period and the behavioural rules that were

imposed on women. The way the female gender was perceived in society certainly influenced the way it was represented on paper and stage, and that is the reason why a detailed analysis of the way gender is portrayed in the text is fundamental. The feminist critical and theoretical framework employed to conduct this investigation is rooted in (but not limited to) the literary corpus developed by prominent critics belonging both to second and third wave feminism, as Judith Fetterley, Kate Millett, Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Judith Butler. Through this theoretical approach, it has been possible to determine the essential elements to be identified and questioned, outlining a quite comprehensive idea of how gender is portrayed and performed in each individual text. Issues regarding female presence, how genders are performed and why, how genders are represented and perceived, but also what kind of stereotypes and prejudices are conveyed or deconstructed in the text will be addressed specifically. Furthermore, the main characters will be analysed in their adherence to, and / or rejection of, the gender norms imposed by society, as well as in the way their identities as subjects are created—if monolithically or performatively—and how are their subjectivities affirmed or denied from a gender perspective. In addition, special attention will be given to biased messages in order to highlight whether they are normalised or resisted inside the dramatic narration, but also to the power structures and the way they are represented in the text, if they are gender-related and how power is exercised by those in charge. Of course, issues of power also bring questions of marginalisation, therefore, the portrayal of minorities and the way they are elaborated as a category will be tackled, together with the relationship between society and minor groups. In this regard, history acquires an essential role in examining the connection between culture and gender, other than constituting the whole background of the development of events. Of course, giving that the three selected tragedies feature real female historical characters—and not just an historical setting with fictional protagonists—it is fundamental to explore the three historical frameworks, and critically analyse them from a gender perspective. History should thus be investigated both in its adherence to real facts and as a physical-geographical space on stage (or on paper) where women are either situated as active protagonists or mere passive presences. As we have seen, from the very beginning, history has been at the core of feminist concerns as it was written by men all along, since men were the centre of the political, social and cultural life and, therefore, were the only recounted protagonists of historical episodes. Feminist historians have thus created the term *her*story to tell the other version of the story, that of women who were not in parliament or on the battlefield—because they were not allowed to—but were there anyway, acting and being the protagonists of events and facts that needed to be narrated. Therefore, an analysis of the historical scene inside the three tragic dramas intends to bring out the different

interpretations and rewritings of history as well as a possible elaboration of a *her*story in such dramatic works. Furthermore, a potential combination of *micro*history (the ordinary life and the private) and *macro*history (public life and politics) will be explored, together with a possible predominance of one over the other. Eventually, it will be investigated whether the roles of female characters are constructed to be the protagonists of a *her*story*,* or passive secondary figures useful for the development of the plot.

Another element that is certainly worth analysing in women's texts is the language used to narrate events, describe situations and characters, and conveying possible hidden messages. As highlighted by French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, language is "jamais neutre"[183], especially in theatre where it is essential to capture the audience attention or interest of the readers. Moreover, women playwrights had to be extremely careful in selecting the topics to discuss, and in the way they were addressing them, especially when it came to social criticism and political opinions. Indeed, women had to deal not only with institutional censorship—that was more or less rigid, depending on the country—but also with an audience that may not be supportive of female production and of women's encroachment into the theatrical field. Therefore, the analysis of language and literary devices, in a feminist perspective, can help unveil and better understand subtexts, hints and references used by the writers to speak their minds without being too explicitly daring. Furthermore, a linguistic analysis could determine if elements of an *écriture feminine* can be retraced in women's tragedies, and help define a possible feminine way of writing drama. In the end, the close reading will take into account all the elements that could provide a wider critical angle, considering the intersection between them, and what impact it has on the narrative discourse. Questions of *otherness* are usually featured, in different ways, in women's plays; whether the *other* is the woman, or a person belonging to a different culture, religion, or class, as the previous overview of historical tragedies has displayed. The following chapters are, therefore, dedicated to the close readings of *Mary Queen of Scots*, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* and *Egilona* which constitute the core of this thesis and will exemplify this research and the feminist critical methodology I carried out and explained in these first chapters.

[183] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais Neutre.* 1985. Translated from French by Continuum, 2002. New York: Routledge, 2002.

CHAPTER IV

Mary Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy.*
Close Reading and Analysis

1. Mary Deverell in the context of English Romanticism

1.1 Deverell's life and *Sermons*: between modesty and feminism

Mary Deverell was an interesting figure in the context of English Romanticism. She was probably born at Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, around 1730 or 1740, and died around 1805.[1] There is little information about her personal life, but it seems that she lived near Bristol and did not come from a wealthy background since she was probably the daughter of a clothier.[2] We can assume that she could afford to receive an education more advanced than the female average of the time, since she became a quite renowned essayist and a poet. Her literary production was neither particularly wide nor exceptionally acclaimed, but it should be underlined that some famous intellectuals of the time did subscribe to her *Miscellanies* (1781) and *Sermons* (1774). Indeed, as mentioned by Anne Stott, among her subscribers appear the names of Samuel Johnson and Dr William Adams, master of Pembroke College, Oxford, as well as those of many women and men belonging to the aristocracy and the clergy, including Mrs. More, who was possibly the mother of writer Hannah More.[3] Interestingly, Deverell and More "were both protégées of the Bristol heiress Ann Lovell Gwatkin and both went to London around the same time (1774) to further their literary careers."[4] Besides her first compositions, namely *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* and *Sermons on the following subjects*, Deverell penned a heroic poem in 1784 titled *Theodora and Didymus, or, The exemplification of pure love and vital religion. An heroic poem, in three cantos*, and a tragedy in 1792, *Mary, Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy, or, dramatic poem*, which will be the subject of the forthcoming close reading. Although she did not write an extensive number of texts, it is remarkable that Deverell challenged herself with many different genres, from poetry to sermons, from epistles to tragedy. She also employed a variety of styles, both rhymed and blank verse, as well as prose, sometimes even mixing the two in the letters included in the *Miscellanies*. As far as we know, critics were never particularly kind to her, on the contrary, her works were often underestimated

---

[1] Such information was retrieved from Anne Stott, "Deverell, Mary (d. 1805)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. While the date of her death seems to be certain, the Oxford Dictionary does not mention a date of birth, therefore, the approximate date of birth was found in the digitalized version of *Notes and Queries: a medium of inter-communication for literary men, general readers etc.*, Vol. 5, 3rd S., No. 123, Saturday May 7 1864, p. 379, retrieved from: https://archive.org/details/s3notesqueries05londuoft/page/n457 [Accessed 16/11/2017]. The *Notes and Queries* mentions that in the *European Magazine* it was stated that "this lady (in 1782) is unmarried, and is between forty and fifty years of age."

[2] Anne Stott, "Deverell, Mary (d. 1805)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Retrieved from www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45845 [Accessed 16/11/2017], *Notes and Queries: a medium of inter-communication for literary men, general readers etc.*, Vol. 5, 3rd S., No. 123, Saturday May 7 1864, p. 379. Retrieved from: https://archive.org/details/s3notesqueries05londuoft/page/n457 [Accessed 16/11/2017].

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

and her style regarded as inferior because it did not conform to the "rules of composition."[5] In particular, according to a review of her *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse,* "the reader will easily perceive that Mrs. Deverell's verse is much inferior to her prose" so much so that the volume, without the poetry, "would certainly have been more entertaining."[6] Whether Deverell's versification was a deliberate attempt to defy the canons imposed by literary tradition, or a consequence of a limited education that did not provide her with the adequate tools to compose stylistically perfect poetry, it is important to remember and highlight under which social circumstances women were writing at the time. Indeed, we do not know where and to what extent she could study or if she was an autodidact,[7] as well as we do not know whether she was economically supporting herself by means of her writing or she used to write in her spare time—even though the small number of publications under her name could suggest she needed a further income. What we do know is that reviewers were usually much harsher towards women, because they often started from the assumption that women should not write since they were biologically and intellectually inferior to men and, thus, incapable of producing good literature.[8] Furthermore, it should be noticed that although Deverell is mainly remembered for her religious essays, "her repeated claims to humility mask a combative feminism"[9] that was quite explicit at times and, therefore, possibly frowned upon by her male colleagues and literary critics.

Deverell's works deal with issues that are apparently distant from politics and social matters, but a closer look proves that she was very much concerned with women's unfair conditions in society—especially with the mistreatment of female writers—, inequality between the sexes and even abolitionism. The second edition of her first collection, *Sermons on various subjects* (1776), features a "Dedication" and "An Apology to the Public" where Deverell makes an interesting use of the "rhetoric of modesty", often employed by female writers to justify their choice of writing about a particular subject that would be regarded as unsuitable for a female pen. As argued by Crisafulli and Pietropoli, the rhetoric of modesty that apparently highlights

[5] *The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature, Extended and Improved by a Society of Gentlemen. A New Arrangement*, Vol. 9th, London: printed for A. Hamilton, Falcon-Court, Fleet-Street, 1794, p.416.

[6] *The Critical Review; or Annals of Literature, Extended and Improved by a Society of Gentlemen.* Vol. the fifty-third. London: printed for A. Hamilton, Falcon-Court, Fleet-Street, 1782, p. 287.

[7] As previously mentioned, her biography does not give any indication about her studies. From the fact that was able to write and compose, and published a number of works, we can assume she somehow received an education, which was not always the case for girls, but we cannot know the extent of her learning.

[8] As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Mary Robinson addresses the issue of women's biological and intellectual inferiority in her text *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799).

[9] Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy (eds.). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English.* London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1990, p. 287.

the vulnerability of women's intellect is but a clever strategy aimed at affirming women's subjectivity and literary value, while avoiding critical attacks because of their sex.[10]

> Questo significato mascherato domina di fatto un insieme di opere in cui una retorica che serve apparentemente a rappresentare la vulnerabilità della donna nei confronti dell'uomo, e della donna-poeta verso il lettore, in cui la vulnerabilità femminile da condizione sociale diventa stile poetico, può tuttavia condurre verso una visione in cui lo stato di vittima diviene affermazione di sé e del proprio valore personale ed artistico.[11]

In the "Dedication", Deverell addresses the Royal Princess to whom the *Sermons* are dedicated and openly states that she is well-aware of her own social class—which she defines as "obscure and undistinguished"[12]—and of the fact that literature is not among the acceptable occupations for women of her rank. Indeed, she affirms that she has not yet "relinquished the duties of her station for the sake of literary pursuits."[13]

> The discourses now humbly offered to your Royal Highness, were composed by a person of obscure and undistinguished rank, who yet hath not relinquished the proper duties of her station for the sake of literary pursuits. — they are not fruits of learning or genius: They are not so much effusions of the head, as of the heart. In order to have rendered them a more worthy offering to the Princess Royal, and more worthy of the subjects on which they are formed, I wish the Author could have equaled the many ladies who have proved by their immortal writings, that though the Salique Law in some countries prevails with regard to political government, it no where extends to intellectual endowments.[14]

However, in these few lines, Deverell not only manages to justify her intention to dedicate her volume to a Princess despite her humble origins, but also to defend her right to write by inserting herself in a genealogy of talented female writers who penned celebrated texts. As we will see in the course of this chapter, Deverell was very interested in the idea of a female genealogy so much so that she often mentions in her works other famous female writers who, before her, devoted their lives to literature with great success. Furthermore, she uses the very notion of "female literary genealogy" to critique a law—the Salique law mentioned above—that reiterated women's inferiority by preventing them from inheriting lands and succeeding the throne in most European countries. Although men promulgated legislation that discriminated women on a mere gender basis, Deverell cleverly underlines how there was nothing they could do to impede women from being their equals, since talent and intellectual faculties defy any

---

[10] Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli "Introduzione. Le poetesse del Romanticismo", in Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (eds.), *Le Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi: tra identità e genere.* Roma: Carocci, 2002, p.15.

[11] Ibid. p. 15. English translation: "This hidden meaning dominates, in fact, an ensemble of works in which a rhetoric that apparently represents the woman's vulnerability towards the man, and female poet's vulnerability towards the reader, in which female vulnerability moves from social condition to poetic style, can nonetheless lead to a subverted perspective where the status of "victim" becomes a strategy for the affirmation of the self and of a woman's personal and artistic value."

[12] Mary Deverell, *Sermons on various subjects*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged by the author, London: printed for the author by W. Strahan, 1776, p. iv.

[13] Ibid. p. iv.

[14] Ibid. p. iv-v.

regulations imposed by human laws as well as any gender distinction. The idea of intellectual endowment as a gift from above that knows no boundaries is a recurrent topic in Deverell's compositions, as we will see in her *Miscellanies*. In the following "Apology", she immediately starts with an explanation of the reasons why she—a woman—decided to write about religion, a subject that was generally regarded as an exclusively male domain. Indeed, she uses words such as "obtrude" and "usurpation" that openly remark her conscious intrusion into a male sphere. She justifies her work by stating that, when she started writing the text, it was not meant to be published—it was, in fact, "the production of her leisure hours,"[15] as if she wanted to further highlight she was not a professional writer, but rather an amateur. When she later gave her manuscript to some "respectable characters among the clergy" for a reading, she was willing to change the daring title of *Sermons* to something more humble and adequate for a female pen, such as "Essays" or "Reflections."[16] Nevertheless, she cleverly adds that she could not modify the title of her collection because she did not want to disappoint her illustrious subscribers who supported her publication under the denomination of *Sermons,* and not any other.

> When a female writer presumes to obtrude upon the world the production of her leisure hours, under the title of *Sermons*, it may possibly be expected that some excuse should be made for so daring an usurpation of the sacred province. It is therefore with the strictest truth asserted, that a strange occurrence of circumstances has, on this occasion, ushered into the world those manuscripts, which, like many others that make their appearance in print, were not designed, at the time they were penned, for the inspection of the Public. . . . In compliment, however, to the opinion of some respectable characters among the clergy, I would both readily and gladly have altered the title of *Sermons* to that of *Essays*, *Reflections*, or any other which might have been deemed more proper . . . than the present. But as those gentlemen could not, from the form and nature of the compositions, allow the equal propriety of any other title; and as my first subscribers would not relinquish their claim to the publication under the identical denomination, for which they had given in their names, I have, *for their satisfaction*, retained it.[17]

It seems that Deverell was very well aware of the criticism she could receive because of the subjects she chose to tackle in her work—God and Religion—which were too complex and sophisticated to be discussed by a woman. Indeed, in her "Apology", she also mentions censorship, and the fact that with her collection she might have been censured for the mere fact that she was penning something "in the form of a serious and religious discourse."[18] Interestingly, here again, Deverell justifies her writings by introducing the idea of a female genealogy of writers and, thus, proving that she was not the first woman to address religious issues. In this regard, she also shrewdly affirms that she regrets not being as good as her female predecessors—hence, she completely changes the subject, moving the attention from censure to female talent, while overlooking any possible "regret" towards the selected topic.

[15] Mary Deverell, *Sermons on various subjects*, op. cit., p. xi.
[16] Ibid. p. xi-xii.
[17] Ibid. p. xii.
[18] Ibid. p. xii.

> But it is not barely for the title of these sheets, nor yet for their appearance in print, that I shall very possibly have the misfortune to incur censure, but even for writing any thing in the form of a serious and religious discourse. In this, however, I have the consolation to think that I am by no means singular, and I have only to regret that I am so very unequal to those distinguished patterns of every female excellence, who have ventured so submit their productions, in this way, to the perusal of the Public.[19]

Deverell's employ of the "rhetoric of modesty" is quite similar to that of her colleagues, who felt likewise the need to downsize the importance of their production in order not to appear presumptuous, as well as to remark their inadequacy in relation to the subjects chosen, their male colleagues and the readers. Nevertheless, what strikes the most about the introductive discourse to her work is her attention to her female predecessors. In her texts, Deverell frequently mentions female writers of the past in order to underscore the existence of a female literary tradition—mostly ignored by society—and to insert herself into such a genealogy.

1.2 *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse:* reconstructing a female genealogy

Interestingly, Deverell developed her concern for the reconstruction of a female literary genealogy also in her second work, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1781), conceived as an epistolary collection to various recipients on several different subjects. In particular, the first two letters,[20] addressed to a man named Candidus, are entirely dedicated to the analysis and critique of the condition of women writers in English society. Deverell, while explaining the reasons why female writers should be considered equal to their male colleagues, accurately retraces the names and endeavors of literary and historical women worthy of being remembered and celebrated, who were instead erased from collective memory. Letter one starts with a series of statements that can be ascribed again to the "rhetoric of modesty" mentioned earlier, but, as in the *Sermons*, she links the comments about herself and her supposed inadequacy directly to the exaltation of other literary ladies who, conversely, were great intellectuals.

> I have felt my native inferiority in a thousand instances, since I have been honoured with your correspondence: But though, as an individual, I feel myself so very weak in intellectual endowments, that I have but little right to any part of the noble compliments you make my sex, yet I am very glad there are many ladies now living who have; and being a link of the same chain, it is sufficient for me to enjoy their just praises.[21]

---

[19] Mary Deverell, *Sermons on various subjects*, op. cit., pp. xii-xiii.

[20] Mary Deverell, "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies", in *Miscellanies in prose and verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds.* Vol. II. Printed for the author by J. Rivington, Jun. St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1781, pp. 47-90.

[21] Ibid. Letter I, p. 48.

A similar reference to her humbleness, in contrast to the importance of her female colleagues, is also present at the end of the first letter, when she implicitly introduces her intent to discuss a female genealogy that includes women from the past to the present.

> But, however, I can still amuse myself in an humble sphere, with contemplating the mental perfections, and exemplary conduct of those ladies, in ancient and modern times, whose names will reflect honour to our sex.[22]

Her interest in the subject can be explained through her own words. Indeed, she openly mentions that the literature produced by female writers should be considered as part of the general literary knowledge, since both sexes could enjoy and take advantage of women's talent and literary outputs. Deverell wishes for a realm of knowledge that is equally dominated by men and women, who are alike capable of reasoning and writing.

> It must be acknowledged, that from the rich fountain of female learning, many useful and noble streams have slowed to posterity; . . . a liberal knowledge of letters may be of great advantage to women as well as men. . . . It is noble in you, CANDIDUS, to declare, that you don't wish *the tree of knowledge* to be monopolized *by your sex only;* nor do I wish it to be by ours.[23]

Deverell's account of great women writers starts in letter one with a reference to Elizabeth Montague, leader of the *Bluestockings,* "the first in the present class of female literati."[24] She particularly praises Montague for her essay[25] on Shakespeare written in response to the attacks issued by Voltaire against the Bard of Avon. Besides applauding her investigation of Voltaire's plays, carried out "with amazing penetration, and coolness of judgement,"[26] Deverell presents Montague as an example of a female writer who owns qualities that are usually attributed to both sexes. Since they met on several occasions, Deverell knew Montague quite well, thus she knowledgeably can affirm that she is endowed both of "the refined tenderness, softness and feminine qualities that are characteristic of *woman,*" and of "so great a share of the wisdom of *man.*"[27] Afterwards she remarks that such combination of features "proves, beyond contradiction, that is not always the *wig*, nor the *cap*, that distinguishes the learning of the head it encircles."[28] Interestingly, the author employs two distinctive items of the 18th century, generally ascribed to the two sexes, as well as to different social classes—the *cap* was worn by

---

[22] Mary Deverell, "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies", Letter I, op. cit., p. 56.
[23] Ibid. pp. 52-53.
[24] Ibid. p. 49.
[25] The essay in question is Elizabeth Montague, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets, with some remarks on the misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire.* 1770.
[26] Mary Deverell, "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies", Letter I, op. cit., p. 50.
[27] Ibid. p. 49.
[28] Ibid. p. 49.

humble women, while the *wig* by illustrious men—to subvert biased prejudices related to the binary system male/female. Indeed, she highlights how the intellectual faculties of a person, "the learning of the head,"[29] do not depend neither on the gender, nor on the social status—exemplified precisely by the female *cap* and the male *wig*. Therefore, she concludes, whatever preconception about female writers based on the dichotomy "man/woman - rational/irrational" was completely unjustified. The notion of female inferiority and irrationality is tackled by Deverell in the course of the letter, and consequently deconstructed through a series of evidence that demonstrate its inconsistency. The author underlines how the case of the "amiable and learned Mrs. *Montagu*" is just one of the many examples that can "confute the Mahometan doctrine, and prove that women have souls."[30] Indeed, the many female writers who have skillfully addressed a variety of subjects—"serious, abstruse and entertaining"[31]—in their compositions are regarded by Deverell as the irrefutable proof that women's minds are not inferior to men's. She employs God as the ultimate justification to her thesis; "Do we not owe every faculty of the mind to a Divine Being? Let that be considered, and who will dare to prescribe limits to Omnipotent power?"[32] Although most of the letter aims at demonstrating the unfair treatment of female writers in society through real examples, her discourse acquires more practical connotations when she discusses what could be done in order to change women's conditions. Indeed, Deverell hopes for a society that gives to boys and girls the same opportunities, as well as for a system of education that provides girls with the same knowledge as boys.

> All I wish is that the daughters of the land (on whom much depends) might enjoy similar privileges with the sons. . . . I am certain, numbers of us are more obliged to nature and application for instruction, in many parts of laudable improvement, than to all we learn at school. I speak from experience: We are forced to struggle for the little knowledge we attain.[33]

In this regard, it could be argued that Deverell's epistle resembles the *Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* written in 1799 by Mary Robinson, who similarly addressed—although more passionately—the issue of female education and discrimination in society because of their supposed mental inferiority. Although there are no proofs of that, Robinson may have read the *Miscellanies* by Mary Deverell, published eighteen years before, and taken inspiration from it.

---

[29] Mary Deverell, "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies", Letter I, op. cit., p. 49.
[30] Ibid. p. 51.
[31] Ibid. p. 51.
[32] Ibid. p 51.
[33] Ibid. pp. 53, 55-56.

The second letter addressed to Candidus completes the first one and allows the author to continue with her reconstruction of a female genealogy, which is voluntarily short because otherwise "the glorious list would swell my letter to a book."[34] The names that Deverell mentions to Candidus "in support of female attainments"[35] are those of Cornelia Gracchi, Aspasia, The Marchioness du Lambert, Madame Savigne, Tullia (daughter of Cicero), Lady Burleigh, Lady Anna Bacon, as well as the great poet Sappho. Among the many illustrious women and writers, she also introduces some female figures who distinguished themselves for their knowledge of theological subjects and for teaching to eminent men. It is the case of Macrina, the sister of St. Gregory, bishop of Nice, and St. Bridget who "wrote so well of mystic theology, that her doctrine gained the admiration of the most profound scholars among men."[36] This epistle is, therefore, extremely significant not only because it proves that Deverell was one of the first female writers interested in retracing a female literary tradition, but also because it displays the extent of the data collected by the author, who probably researched and studied more than a woman of her social rank was expected to. Indeed, she demonstrates to know very well classical antiquity as well as more recent history, but in particular, she gives special attention to episodes and characters that would never be introduced in historical reports. She manages to collect and connect a wide range of different women from various epochs who had a significant impact on their peers and on society, so much so that they can epitomize women's abilities at their best, whatever the age, social class and cultural background. After a long and varied list of less renowned names, she mentions a series of queens, from Queen Matilda of Denmark to the Empress Catherine of Russia, including Mary Stuart and Queen Elizabeth I—who will later be the protagonists of her tragedy. Her interest in *micro*history, combined with her desire to recover a female historical and literary genealogy, are possibly what inspired her the subject of her historical drama *Mary Queen of Scots*, that will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

Although not explicitly engaged with politics, Deverell seems to consider the female issue a rather political concern that she investigates and addresses through literature. It was probably because of her humble background that she included in her research women from the most various social contexts, as if she intended to demonstrate with tangible examples that talent cannot be limited in any way. Of course, as she often mentions in her compositions, her fondness for religion plays a fundamental part in the way she perceives society and people

[34] Mary Deverell, "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies" Letter II, op. cit., p. 59.
[35] Ibid. p. 60.
[36] Ibid. p. 62.

around her. In fact, it is precisely through God that she justifies social equality and, in his name, she demands equal respect for the marginalized categories. As Moira Ferguson[37] reminds us, Mary Deverell included in her *Miscellanies* (1781) a poem dedicated to the Afro-American poet—and former slave—Phillis Wheatley, titled "On Reading the Poems of Phillis Wheatley."[38] Deverell recognizes the poet's extraordinary qualities, exemplified by adjectives as "genius" and "native worth,"[39] which are completely intrinsic in her nature, "though no high birth nor titles grace her line."[40] The author, who certainly read and appreciated Wheatley's compositions, attributed to Britain the merit of discovering Wheatley's value since her poems were first published in London, but remarks many times how the poet was innately talented, despite her background and her lack of conventional education.

> To shame the formal circle of the school,
> That chain their pupils down by pedant rules,
> Curbing the insolence of learned lore,
> There lately came from India's swarthy shore,
> In nature's sable charms, a lowly maid,
> By fortune doom'd to languish in the shade;
> Till Britain call'd the seeds of genius forth,
> Maturing, like the sun, her native worth.
> Though no high birth nor titles grace her line,
> Yet humble Phillis boasts a race divine;
> Like marble that in quarries lies conceal'd,
> Till all its veins, by polish, stand reveal'd;
> From whence such groups of images arise,
> We praise the artist, and the sculpture prize.[41]

It could be argued that, from a post-colonial perspective, Deverell's words are quite problematic. Not only she mistakes India for Africa—which could be due to her limited geographical knowledge—but also ascribes to Britain all the good fortune and positive attributes that, on the contrary, do not characterize Wheatley's motherland.[42] Nevertheless, it should be considered the historical moment in which Deverell wrote the poem; right after the American war for independence and before the French revolution, when a growing patriotism was starting to spread all over England, to reach its peak with the expansion of British Imperialism during the Victorian Era. Furthermore, despite the controversies, it should be highlighted that the perception that Deverell has of the *other*, in this case of an Afro-American woman writer, is rather modern under many aspects. First of all, she attributes to Wheatley the

---

[37] Moira Ferguson, *Subjects to Others. British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834.* New York: Routledge, 1992.
[38] Mary Deverell, "On Reading the Poems of Phillis Wheatley", in *Miscellanies in prose and verse,* op. cit., p. 268.
[39] Ibid. p. 268, vv. 7-8.
[40] Ibid. p. 268, v. 9.
[41] Ibid. p. 268, vv. 1-14.
[42] Moira Ferguson, *Subjects to Others. British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834,* op. cit.

same qualities of British female writers, and includes her in the ideal female literary genealogy she is reconstructing. Secondly, it can be noticed that Deverell, probably because of her Christian faith, does not make distinctions of race. She regards the romantic category of *genius* as something that goes beyond ethnicity and national borders, as well as "worth" something that can be innate in anybody—even in an Afro-American former slave. Indeed, by acclaiming Wheatley's poems and inserting her into a female tradition, Deverell contemporaneously deconstructs two popular prejudices rooted in society. That is, the biased idea according to which women were intellectually inferior to men, and the stereotype that regarded people from different ethnicities as less intelligent than the European Caucasians. As Ferguson remarks,

> Deverell elevates the talents of marginalized men and women and implicitly allies Phillis Wheatley with such eighteenth century "natural" geniuses as Robert Burns and Ann Yearsley. . . . With no sense of irony, the speaker argues that not even slavery can suppress the powerful combination of the "untaught mind" and the "towering soul." This panegyric to Wheatley's creative powers . . . demythologizes time-worn propaganda about innate black intellectual inferiority.[43]

Although Deverell never took an explicit political position regarding slavery—that we currently know of—it could be deduced, by the issues tackled in her *Miscellanies*, that she supported the idea of a society where everybody was treated fairly and equally, whatever the gender, class or ethnicity. Compared to some of her female colleagues belonging to the first generation of Romantic writers, such as Barbauld, Opie and Yearsley, she was maybe less explicit in her support of the slave abolition, as well as in affirming her perspective on strictly political matters. However, we cannot forget that she was from humble origins and she was publishing her works through subscriptions, therefore she probably had to be extremely careful in the way she presented her texts and themes in order not to see her reputation irremediably ruined.

1.3 "On the United Merits of the Pen and Needle": Deverell's perspective on gender and literature

In the context of Deverell's poetical production, special attention should be given to her "An Epistle to a Divine on the United Merits of the Pen and Needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject", published in 1781 in her *Miscellanies in prose and verse.* Right from the first verses, the letter presents much more vehement and sarcastic tones than the others previously examined. For this reason, it can help us have a more complete and comprehensive understanding of Mary Deverell and her point of view before we approach her dramatic production—constituted of only one tragedy. As stated in the title, the epistle was written in response to a clergyman who criticized her religious compositions and interest in religion

[43] Moira Ferguson, *Subjects to Others. British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834,* op. cit.

because she was a woman and, thus, was supposed to spend her time sewing instead of writing. Deverell begins her poem addressing directly the divine who attacked her, referring to him as to "my rev'rend friend,"[44] and immediately states that she does not intend to compete with him in penning compositions about religion, because she knows very well where she belongs, that is, in the domestic sphere. She continues, for the first three stanzas, explaining that she is aware that the most "high" subjects are man's dominion, while proper women should only be concerned with housework. Nonetheless, the way she introduces the readers to the reasons why men should write and women sew, reveals her wit and irony—which will be more explicit at the end of the poem.

> To me, no maxim is so clear,
> As *acting in my proper sphere*:
> Nor would I wish a spring of fame,
> Beyond a worthy woman's name.
> . . . .
> It suits not with an humble mind,
> T'assume those wreaths for you assign'd.
> Science, you hint, was meant for man;
> Domestic duties, woman's plan:
> The lower cares, her noblest place;
> To follow those, her highest grace.
> Agreed,—for I shall never dispute
> The duties that a woman suit.
> . . . .
> 'Tis true, I can't compose a sonnet,
> Yet I've been known to make a bonnet;
> And many vouchers I can bring,
> To prove I better *sew* than *sing*.[45]

This ironic—yet quite irritated—discourse on the rightfulness of the doctrine of the separate spheres was probably intended to display her respect for the opinions previously expressed by the clergyman, as well as to prove her modesty and propriety, before truthfully speaking her mind. Indeed, Deverell immediately changes her attitude and starts to clarify her real thoughts about women and literature, displaying once more a wide knowledge of history, religion and politics. Furthermore, she affirms again that the biological sex of a person does not constitute a limit for his or her intellectual faculties, which are innate and not submitted to any restrictions and human control. Interestingly, in the last stanzas of the poem, she not only mentions women who had qualities usually attributed to men, but also men who enjoyed carrying out domestic duties, such as cooking and baking. By doing so, she intends to prove that personal inclinations, desires and talent are genderless and should neither be socially imposed nor criticized. As a

[44] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject", in *Miscellanies in prose and verse,* op. cit., pp. 91-95, p. 91, v. 1.
[45] Ibid. pp. 91-92, vv. 5-28. Italics in the original by Mary Deverell.

matter of fact, she often talks about "soul" instead of man or woman, as if she wants to reinforce her idea that people's mind and consciousness are not subjected to social or cultural categorizations and impositions.

> Too well you know the active soul,
> Is subject to no priest's control;
> No force its liberty can bind,
> Nor will it be to sex confin'd,
> But flies at will from king to queen,
> As hath in former days be seen.[46]

Quite surprisingly, Deverell explicitly states that not even the Church—"priest"—can have, in fact, any authoritative power over the soul, which in this context is probably meant in a broader sense of inner self and intellect, and is thus absolutely free. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the author refers to "king" and "queen" when exemplifying the idea that the soul cannot be confined to gender categories. Indeed, she later explains that queens, in history, proved to be as good rulers as kings, and in some cases, they were even better than their male counterparts. For our research, such statement acquires a further significance since in her only tragedy she chose to narrate the story of two queens, Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart. The examples mentioned in the poem are "King *John*"[47] and "Queen *Bess*"[48]—Elizabeth I, also known as "good queen Bess"—who is depicted as a great monarch, superior to the other European kings in knowledge and wisdom, so much so that under her reign Britain improved and flourished.

> What ne'er inspir'd King *John*, you know,
> Did in Queen Bess with *vigor* glow;
> And Europe's learned sons confess,
> No prince did ever yet possess
> A better stock of useful knowledge,
> Relating both to court and college;
> Politically just and wise,
> She gave to learning—learning's prize.
> This maiden ruler of our Isle,
> On arts did so benignly smile.[49]

Deverell exalts the positive qualities of Queen Elizabeth, remarking how she had abilities in many different realms, including politics, a domain women were not supposed to encroach on. Once again, Deverell intends to subvert the prejudice according to which women are mentally inferior to men by presenting examples of female figures who excellently carried out men's tasks. Moreover, she also reminds her readers how difficult it was for the female sex to be

---

[46] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject", op. cit., p. 93, vv. 59-64.
[47] Ibid. p. 93, v. 69.
[48] Ibid. p. 93, v. 70.
[49] Ibid. pp. 93-94, vv. 69-82. Italics in the original by Mary Deverell.

rightfully recognized worthy and accepted by male peers. In fact, she pushes women not to write unless they are "bold as Spartan dames, / or can endure the martyr's flame."[50] Nevertheless, the author is aware that despite the attacks received, it is not truly possible to stop women from producing literature and conveying their own opinions, since even when denied the "use of pen and ink, / women will still presume to think."[51] As she remarked before, the mind is subject to no regulation or control; thus, whatever the behavioral norms imposed on the female sex, there is no way to prevent women from reasoning. Such a powerful assertion could maybe be taken for granted nowadays, but it was not in the 18th century, a time when women's supposed biological and intellectual inferiority to men was debated.

At the end of the composition, Deverell insists on the absurd presumption according to which male and female spheres should be regarded as irremediably opposite, when they are actually inextricably connected to each other. In fact, she introduces the readers to examples that highlight how the contrast between "feminine" behaviors and "masculine" activities does not have a valid explanation. More specifically, she wonders why women are not allowed to display their qualities—when such qualities cross the borders of their gender category—while men can, at times, demonstrate to have abilities belonging to the supposed female domain. Interestingly, such reflections are presented in the form of questions, to which she does not give an answer. We can assume she expected a reply from the divine, but it is more likely that she actually raised rhetorical questions to which she knew there was no real answer.

> In us, why meet not cap and pen,
> As well as muff and sword in men?
> Why must the pen and petticoat
> Such jarring opposites denote,
> That lamb and wolf as well might drink
> Together, at one fountain's brink,
> As books and samplers jointly raise,
> For one poor female!— two fold praise?
> . . . .
> Some maids in writing *sermons* shine,
> While clerics take another line,
> And gave to cheesecakes taste divine!
> And some are known with *Gill* to vie
> In *gravy's* or a *codling* pie.
> It is not hard, these classic cooks,
> Derive our taste for moral books?[52]

It is probably in these sentences that Deverell's irony reaches its peak. She depicts clerics and theologians challenging renowned cooks of the time in food competitions, diminishing the authority of their criticism against educated women. In fact, *Gill* was "a late eminent man-cook

---

[50] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle", op. cit., p. 94, vv. 85-86.
[51] Ibid. p. 94, vv. 91-92.
[52] Ibid. pp. 94-95, vv. 95-115. Italics in the original by Mary Deverell.

at Bath" as specified by the author in a footnote to the poem. Her critique to the clergy continues with more heated accusations about the political interest of some priests who did not choose to be ordained out of their faith, but rather for the prestige of such a social position. Indeed, she refers to the "doctrine of the gown"[53] preached by the good vicar of Bray, a popular—yet almost legendary—clergyman who changed his faith according to the legislation and political necessities of the period, managing to keep his parish and role in society, together with his clerical gown.[54]

> While 'tis doctrine of the gown,
> From Bray's good vicar handed down,
> (Too much adopted in these climes)
> To *shift* our notions with the times,
> Let such pursuits your sex engage,
> And our's peruse the letter'd page.[55]

Although Deverell appears extremely careful and moderate in most of her compositions, the satirical remarks she makes in this poem reveal her more truthful—and feminist—opinion about society and the way female writers were ill-treated in the literary field. Her perspective on gender issues, religion and literature are part of the methodology that will be employed to conduct the close reading of her drama. Indeed, it is fundamental to contextualise a writer and his/her thought before examining his/her compositions, and it is particularly important when it comes to female authors, who often struggled to be published and felt compelled to hide their opinions behind clever literary devices. It would have been ideal, of course, to read and investigate especially her dramatic production, but since she only penned one tragedy, we had to retrace and explore her figure, beliefs and ideas through her prose and poetical works. As the close reading will display, many of the themes she addressed in her *Miscellanies* will also recur in her tragedy. Therefore, it will be particularly interesting to see in which ways she employed the tragic genre to discuss the subjects she tackled in her poetry and prose, and how she developed her literary discourse in a dramatic text.

---

[53] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle", op. cit., p. 95, v. 118.

[54] According to the volume *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley*, Vol. 18: "The Vicar of Bray, in Berkshire [commemorated in a popular song], was a papist under the reign of Henry the Eight, and a protestant under Edward the Sixth; he was a papist again under Queen Mary, and at length became a protestant under the reign of Queen Elizabeth. When this scandal to the gown was reproached for his versatility of religious creed, he made answer, 'I cannot help that, but if I changed my religion, I am sure I kept true to my principle; which is to live and die Vicar of Bray!" in *Curiosities of Literature*, 1791, pp. 392-393. Quoted in: *The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley,* Vol. 18, 1831, p. 496.
Retrieved from: https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=BkY9AAAAYAAJ&hl=it&pg=GBS.PP1 [Accessed 29/11/2018].

[55] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle", op. cit., p. 95, vv. 118-123. Italics in the original by Mary Deverell.

2. *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*

2.1 Background and "Prologue"

Mary Queen of Scots was penned by Mary Deverell in 1792 and there is no evidence that it was ever performed. The play is defined as *historical tragedy* by the author herself, it is written in blank verse and canonically divided into five acts, but it does not respect the Aristotelian unities of time, space and action, as typical of Romantic dramas. Mary Deverell was very specific with the stage directions, not only on what was supposed to happen but also on the facial expressions the actors were supposed to keep and which feelings they were supposed to arise. Therefore, we could argue that the text was probably meant to be staged and she wrote it with an actual theatrical performance in mind. For example, in Act I Scene iii, when Queen Mary enters the stage, Deverell specifies "*The QUEEN of SCOTS Prisoner, very meanly dressed; and MURRAY Regent*"[56] while in Act III, Scene iii, after an argument with the Duke of Norfolk, the author imagines Mary leaving as follows: "*[Exit Mary, with tender solemn aspect / on NORFOLK, and sighing deeply.]*"[57] The fifth Act sees the last moments of Mary's life, in which she is depicted as ready to face her destiny, as the following passage of Scene iii shows: "*[QUEEN MARY attends to the reading of the / Warrant, with a careless air, as if her / thoughts were otherwise engaged.]*"[58] Furthermore, the last Act opens with a very accurate description of the court in charge of condemning Mary, in which it is specified that Queen Elizabeth is not present.

> *Fotheringay Castle*
> *The high court of Commissioners held in the Great Hall, consisting of forty English Peers and Barons; with five Judges, and the Clerk of the Crown; two Doctors of the Civil law, and two Notaries. A chair of state at the top for ELIZABETH, Queen of England, who doth not appear; another at the bottom for MARY, Queen of Scotland, prisoner. Commission opened by Queen ELIZABETH's Attorney and Solicitor.*
>
> *LORD CHANCELLOR BROMLEY, turning to the prisoner MARY, daughter and heir of JAMES the FIFTH, late King of Scots, commonly called Queen of Scots, and Dowager of France.*[59]

Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances behind the composition of *Mary Queen of Scots* and its relation to the stage. However, whether it was refused by theatre managers or did not pass the scrutiny of the Examiner of Plays, Deverell's tragedy should certainly be ascribed to the subgenre of *closet drama*. The reason why Deverell decided to turn to the dramatic genre is unknown, since we do not have much information about her life. However, we can presume that her passion for writing led her to challenge herself and her skills with a genre that was

---

[56] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, printed for the author and sold by her at No.7 at New Bond Street, 1972, Act I, Scene iii, p. 11.
[57] Ibid. Act III, Scene iii, p. 60.
[58] Ibid. Act V, Scene iii, p. 103.
[59] Ibid. Act V, Scene i, p. 85.

strictly regulated and generally perceived as masculine. Indeed, a further motive could have been precisely the gendered nature of tragedy. In her *Miscellanies*, Deverell proves to be utterly against the doctrine of the separate spheres and to support female writers who crossed boundaries, penning compositions and tackling subjects considered unsuitable for the feminine sex. Therefore, it can be assumed that she chose to deal with tragedy also to prove her ability in a field from which women were generally excluded, showing that pen and needle can be held by the same hand. Of course, we cannot overlook the fact that she was probably not fully supporting herself by means of her literary production and, thus, the prospect of having a drama staged for many nights was certainly very appealing. Unfortunately, it did not happen, but whatever the reasons why her tragedy was not performed, we know she decided to have it published, and paid to print it.

The story of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I, which is at the core of Deverell's tragedy, was certainly a renowned subject, both in Britain and all over Europe. It is quite common to find other dramas centred on the same theme. For example, in Spain, we can find *María Estuardo* by Elisa Casas, *Estuarda* by María Martínez Abelló and *Isabel de Angleterra* by Eloísa Rico, all written around the end of the 19th century and, unfortunately, lost. In Germany, Friedrich Schiller wrote the tragedy *Maria Stuart*, first performed in 1800, while a few years later, in Italy, Gaetano Donizetti composed the opera *Maria Stuarda* (1835). What is particularly interesting for our research, nonetheless, is the literary production that was issued before Deverell's tragedy, and which could have inspired her or influenced her perspective on the matter. For instance, we should mention the works of two very popular dramatists, Lope de Vega in Spain and Vittorio Alfieri in Italy, who dedicated one of their compositions to this British historical event. Indeed, Lope de Vega wrote a poem titled *Corona Trágica: vida y muerte de la Serenísima Reina de Escocia María Estuarda* (1627), while Alfieri penned the tragedy *Maria Stuarda* in 1778. It is unknown if Deverell read translations of de Vega or Alfieri's texts, but she certainly knew very well the acclaimed compositions about Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I produced in England before 1792. For example, Edmund Spencer's famous poem *Faerie Queene* (1596), dedicated to Elizabeth I—who is represented by the protagonist Gloriana—allegorically depicts also the character of Mary Queen of Scots.[60] Historical texts she may have read, which could have had an impact on her tragedy, are certainly Oliver's Goldsmith *The History of England from the Earliest Times to the Death of George II,* published in four volumes from 1771, and David Hume's *The History of England*, published in six

[60] Stephen Greenblatt, "The Faerie Queene", in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, Eight Edition, New York: Norton & Company, 2006, pp. 714-716.

volumes from 1754 to 1761. The same can be supposed for the poem *Lament of Mary, Queen of Scots, on the Approach of Spring* (1791) penned by Robert Burns, but probably not for Jane Austen's satirical *The History of England* which was completed in 1791 but published many decades later. It is also worth mentioning John St. John's tragedy, titled *Mary, Queen of Scots: a tragedy; as performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane* (1789), interpreted by Sarah Siddons, in the role of Mary, and John Philippe Kemble, in the role of the Duke of Norfolk. We do not know if Deverell read the manuscript or saw the performance but, given the fame of the actors involved, we can assume she, at least, heard about it. Of course, we cannot overlook the fact that the historical episodes regarding Elizabeth and Mary, what happened before their first confrontation and the subsequent incarceration of the Queen of Scots, were part of England's history and collective memory. Therefore, Deverell's point of view on the events could also derive from a general knowledge of the English past, from accounts heard from family and friends, as well as from other less renowned texts that tackled the subject. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that among the above-mentioned works, the most historically accurate are probably Goldsmith and Hume's volumes *The History of England,* which narrate in details the story of Mary after she came back from France, and her rivalry with the Queen of England.[61]

Deverell's tragedy is preceded by a "Prologue" in verses in which Deverell reiterates women's right to write and openly speak their minds employing a comparison between the sword—used by women amazons in ancient and mythical times—and the pen.

> The time has been, and may perhaps agen,
> When women us'd *the sword*; *—Why not the pen?*[62]

As we have previously seen in her compositions, the issue of the *pen*—symbolizing women's approach to literature—is a sort of *leitmotiv* in Deverell's production, as well as it is the celebration of female figures. Indeed, the choice to narrate the events that saw Mary and Elizabeth as protagonists could be ascribed to Deverell's ideal project of commemorating female writers and historical characters who were not treated fairly by society, so much so that their memory was ruined and their legacy forgotten. The brief prologue, instead of explaining the reasons for her composition or a background story to the events recounted, attacks the prejudices and calumnies against the two queens. Even though she recognizes the positive

---

[61] Other fascinating historical sources that narrate the story of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I, but published after Deverell's tragedy, are certainly Mary Hays's *Female Biography; Or, memoirs of illustrious and celebrated women of all ages and countries*, published in six volumes in 1803, and *Memoirs of Queens; illustrious and celebrated* (1821). It also worth mentioning Catharine Macaulay's *The History of England from the Accession of James I to the Revolution* whose first volume opens with the recount of the coming to power of King James I, son of Mary Stuart and chosen heir of Elizabeth I.

[62] Mary Deverell, "Prologue" to *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit.

qualities of Elizabeth and acknowledges the possible faults of Mary, Deverell strongly condemns the way the Queen of Scots was treated and subsequently murdered. She invokes Christian virtues—thus equally shared by Protestants and Catholics—such as “pity” and “mercy” to be bestowed on Mary Stuart. At the end of the prologue, she encourages the readers to shed a tear for Queen Mary who, despite her mistakes, was still a human being who deserved a better fate.

> Faulty although in some degree she prove,
> Yet Pity prompts commiserating Love;
> Let Mercy, darling attribute of Heav’n,
> Be to the contrite Royal *Suff’rer* giv’n.
> Ye Fair, forget her errors—drop a tear;
> *Hallow by this, the Queen of Scotland’s bier.*[63]

Deverell’s opinion on Elizabeth is instead more controversial. In the prologue, Elizabeth is depicted as the monarch who for “forty years and four, / Defied each foreign threat”[64] but also as the responsible for Mary’s death: “ELZA blame!”[65] Nevertheless, it seems that Deverell also holds accountable for Mary’s tragic ending the figure of Murray, regent of Scotland, who betrayed his Queen and caused her imprisonment.

> . . . —When female woes
> By treach’ry caus’d, shall banish calm repose;
> When ranc’rous Calumny, by MURRAY’s art,
> Winged the barb’d shaft through injur’d MARY’s heart.[66]

As a matter of facts, as we will see in the play itself, Deverell does not entirely condemn Elizabeth for her behavior towards her cousin. On the contrary, she somehow understands the reasons underlying such a difficult decision and portrays Elizabeth’s choice with great delicacy and sensibility. After all, we know from her previous production that she held Queen Elizabeth in high esteem, and considered her a knowledgeable woman, “politically just and wise.”[67] A last fundamental remark on the prologue concerns Deverell’s assertion of her subjectivity, carried out by emphasizing her femininity. Interestingly, she “dares” to speak her mind about matters connected to English politics and she highlights that it is her own opinion she conveys.

> Say, who dare?—an inconsiderate elf
> Follows superior wits—*ergo*, Myself:
> A bold assertion—from a female too—
> Alas! Full oft, they’ve made “A much ado.”[68]

---

[63] Mary Deverell, “Prologue” to *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Mary Deverell, “An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle”, op. cit., v. 75.
[68] Mary Deverell, “Prologue” to *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit.

The emphasis on the first person, "Myself", denotes the author's intention to assert her subjectivity without compromising her identity, that of a "female too."[69] She is aware of her daring position, that a "bold assertion" on political issues made by a woman could be dangerous but, in this case, she does not provide any justification. Differently from her previous texts, Deverell's tragedy is not preceded by any "rhetoric of modesty" to mitigate her choice to encroach onto a masculine genre, as well as onto the public sphere.

2.2 "My sister's mind is masculine": gender representation in *Mary Queen of Scots*

The way the female gender was perceived in society necessarily influenced the way it was represented on paper and stage. The representation of female characters should be thus examined in the light of the socio-cultural context in which the author lived and wrote, that was broadly discussed in the first chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the feminine should also be considered in relation to issues of gaze, subjectivity, power relations and agency, that is, in its association with the male sex. Interestingly, the tragedy *Mary Queen of Scots* includes a significant number of male leading characters but only two women, who are in fact the two protagonists. Of course, this choice was based on a truthful reconstruction of the Elizabethan court, where, except for servants and ladies-in-waiting, noblemen and politicians were the only prominent figures surrounding the queens. However, given the political tones of the play, which starts in *medias res* when Mary is already a target and a threat for the stability of the English throne, the disparity in number between male and female characters could also mirror the English political realm. Women could neither vote nor be elected in Parliament at the time the tragedy was written. Furthermore, their succession to the throne was often regulated by the Salic Law—mentioned by Deverell in many of her previous compositions—which did not allow women to become monarchs unless there was no other close male relative alive. It is precisely the case of both Elizabeth and Mary, both the only heirs of their own dynasties. Moreover, even when women had the chance to wear a crown, they were still surrounded and controlled by male counsellors—a role that was forbidden to women.

The two queens are not introduced at the same time in the tragedy. They are presented to the readers in the course of the acts, as the story goes on. Indeed, the first two acts are set in Scotland and focused on Mary, and even though Elizabeth is often mentioned and discussed by the Scottish Queen and her courtesans, she is physically absent until the third act. The way the English Queen is portrayed in the first acts is, thus, filtered and channeled through the words

[69] Mary Deverell, "Prologue" to *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit.

expressed by the other characters, who mainly look at her as an enemy. Hence, the issue of *gaze* proves to be fundamental in order to understand other crucial elements that concur to the construction of Elizabeth's identity, such as power and otherness. The *gaze* in the first two acts is entirely held by the Scottish faction, which is constituted by Mary, Murray, some ladies-in-waiting and Lords, such as Argyle, Morton, and Lennox. The result is, inevitably, a biased perception of the English Queen, who is continually compared to Mary in femininity and beauty. In the first two acts, the two queens are, in fact, characterised by opposite attributes, belonging to the stereotypical female and male sphere as they were conceived in the traditional binary conception of the time. Queen Mary is depicted as a sentimental, maternal, feminine and sensual figure, while Queen Elizabeth is explicitly described as "masculine." She is cold, determined and powerful, neither interested in marriage nor in any familial affections.

> QUEEN MARY:
> 'Twas so with some, who fought t'avenge Love's ill-
> Requited cause. My sister's mind is masculine;—
> Her aim, conquests more renowned than those of
> *hearts*:
> While Fame's loud trump resounds through distant
> climes,
> The matchless glory of the virgin Queen![70]

The difference between the two is also highlighted by maternity. Mary has a son and is thus fertile and able to procreate, a condition which implicitly reiterates her femininity. On the contrary, Elizabeth is unmarried, childless and destined to die without an heir; therefore, she represents the male biological inability to give life. Such contrast between the two is evident in Act II, scene ii, when Elizabeth is compared to a "barren stock" envious of her cousin's maternal joy, while Mary is depicted as a "fruitful tree, extending royal branches over the world".

> ARGYLE:
> Elizabeth not only envies your
> Superior charms, but e'en your joy maternal.
> For when each foreign Court sent gratulations
> Warm on your son's birth, the poor virgin Queen,
> At your parental honours inly pin'd!
> Herself comparing "to a barren stock;
> And you unto a fruitful tree, extending
> Royal branches o'er the world."[71]

Maternity, as a fundamental element to estimate the value of a woman, was typical in the patriarchal society of both the Elizabethan period and the 18th century, in which women's only task, whatever their social class, was to procreate and give heirs to their husbands. This

[70] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act II, Scene ii, p.28.
[71] Ibid. Act II, Scene ii, p.27.

perspective placed women in a further subordinate position to the male gaze. Indeed, women's worth was valued merely on the extent to which they were useful to men, so that they could pass their legacy and hand down their family names. For such reason, women's possible inability to get pregnant turned them into useless hybrid creatures that could not be considered fully feminine. Hence, maternity played a crucial role in women's lives whether they had children or not, and it acquired a greater prominence for a queen, whose reign also depended on her fertility. Of course, at the time, Britain was still shaken by the long and bloody process that, after the death of Henry VIII, ended up with the coronation of Elizabeth I. Therefore, the issue of succession to the throne was particularly relevant in order to keep peace in a country that, in a few years, was ruled by three different monarchs and endured uprisings and persecutions. Maternity was thus seen, from a male point of view, as a necessary condition to identify whom, between Mary and Elizabeth, was more fit for the crown. In this perspective, the differences at play between the two queens acquire the connotation of a battle between the two genders. Mary represents the feminine, as corresponding to her biological sex, while Elizabeth embodies the masculine, crossing the normative boundaries of her sex by acting like a stereotypical male figure. If we consider gender as it was theorized by Judith Butler,[72] as a fluid identity that is not related to biological sex but depends on the acts that the subject is repeatedly executing, we can affirm that Elizabeth seems to be willingly performing a masculine archetype in order to be perceived as a man by those around her. Furthermore, Elizabeth appears to be refusing the idea of sisterhood with her cousin Mary, who is, conversely, continuously calling her "sister" so to appeal to their familial connection.

QUEEN MARY:
She is my cousin, sister, near in blood,
And in alliance with my crown; as such
I deem her friend.

ARGYLE:
England's Queen, I've heard, hath
Profound judgement nervous sense; but more than
proud,
She is imperious, and brooks no rival.
O'er all the mighty Potentates in Europe,
She holds herself the greatest; nor is her
Jealousy confin'd to regal power,
But e'en in beauty's empire fain would triumph.[73]

---

[72] "Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. op. cit., p. 191.
[73] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act II, Scene ii, pp. 26-27.

Remarkably, the "sisterhood" that Mary affectionately reclaims between her and Elizabeth is continuously questioned and challenged by her counsellors and courtesans who, instead, perceive Elizabeth as evil and incapable of any fondness towards her cousin, but only jealousy. Once more, Elizabeth exemplifies stereotypical male attributes, such as pride, ambition and a cold temperament, while she also embodies conventional negative feminine qualities, such as vanity and jealousy. This mixture of male and female characteristics proves once again to what extent the author intended to make her appear as a hybrid personality who crossed gender borders and acted in a controversial way for a woman of her time and social rank.

Elizabeth physically enters the scene for the first time in Act III and, in that moment, the *gaze* immediately shifts, as well as the audience's perception of the protagonists. Indeed, the binarism represented by the two queens in the first two acts is completely overcome by the author who let both her female characters define themselves and finally affirm their subjectivity. Queen Elizabeth delineates herself through her own words as a resolute woman absolutely capable of love and affection. Nevertheless, she is torn between her duty and her feelings, constantly asking herself and her counsellors if she should listen to her heart or behave how the country expects her to. In fact, she is a "despotic tyrant"[74] who, however, would like to console her cousin from her grief and embrace her "with sisterly affection."

> QUEEN ELIZABETH:
> Arise, Norfolk! this exile
> Shall find I'm not dead to pity; she feels not
> More than me; torn with conflicting passions!
> True, I've sought peace, sanctimonious peace,
> Throughout my realm, at vast expence! thwarted oft
> By Mary's secret measures.—Yet she makes me
> Sole arbitress in the quarrel 'twixt her
> And th' invidious Scots! therefore at York,
> Soon, *thou*, Norfolk, my faithful delegate,
> Shalt sit supreme, to hear and judge what the
> Warm Caledonians bring 'gainst their
> Dethron'd Sovereign; whose presum'd black stains,
> Much I wish may be expung'd: then I'd meet
> Mary in a soul's embrace! cheering my heart
> That secretly yearns to soothe and heal her grief,
> With sisterly affection. But till *then*
> My rectitude, and regal dignity,
> Admit no interview with the sweet mourner.
> Howe'er, thou mayst console the fugitive,
> With full assurance of my tender love.[75]

Deverell presents a Queen Elizabeth who is conscious of both her position and her feelings; a woman who asserts herself as well as her desires in a very straightforward way. It is interesting

---

[74] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act III, Scene iii, p. 59.
[75] Ibid. Act III, Scene i, pp. 49-50.

how Elizabeth resents the fact that she is known to be cold and emotionless, and strongly affirms "I am not dead to pity; she feels not / more than me; torn with conflicting passions!"[76] as to vindicate the fact that having feelings and emotions is not something to be ashamed of. She clearly asserts her subjectivity by means of the first person, that she explicitly employs in her verses to remark that the decisions she took were her own. With the same purpose, she employs the possessive adjective "my" which, in this case, specifies a fundamental passage: "my rectitude, and regal dignity." This selection of words perfectly mirrors the complexity of Elizabeth's personality. Elizabeth is indeed both a monarch, who must defend the "regal dignity" of her political role, and a woman who would follow her own "rectitude", whatever her social rank. The subjectivity of the Queen of England is, thus, slowly constructed by an intersection of different elements that she delineates through her speeches, introducing herself to the reader as the story develops. Elizabeth reclaims her femininity and her right to feel and show her emotions, which was considered at the time a weak and feminine way of behaving. Nevertheless, she also implicitly defends her choice to act following her rationality and her sense of justice, refusing to let affections come between her and the safety of her reign. By embodying both masculine and feminine traditional characteristics and performing both as a man and a woman, Elizabeth remarkably represents a third-wave feminist notion of fluid identity. The rigid gender categories of the time are thus subverted, since Deverell's character mixes together male and female realms, the public sovereign and the private woman, overcoming the notion of separate spheres. In this perspective, it is interesting how Elizabeth seems compelled to act as a man and to be perceived as such in order to be accepted and respected as a monarch. She cannot show her feelings towards her cousin Mary; if she fails to do that, European Kings would reckon her weak and attack England to depose her from the throne.

> QUEEN ELIZABETH:
> Must I then exile all sweet reflections,
> Complacency of soul, and tender feelings,
> For my people's safety?[77]

In order not to be subdued by foreign Kings she is compelled to subjugate and assassin a Queen, demonstrating to what extent, because of her sex, a Queen's value is never the same as a King's.

> QUEEN ELIZABETH:
> But how,
> Consistent with my regal dignity,
> And rights of nations, can I shun these bold

[76] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act III, Scene i, pp. 49-50.
[77] Ibid. Act V, Scene iii, p. 99.

> Remonstrating daring Ambassadors?
> Honour compels t'admit'em to my presence,
> And return responses to their queries,
> However vexing. I dare not violate
> My faith to Kings, though I have to a Queen.[78]

The typical gender-based political structures described by Kate Millett[79] that perfectly represent the gender power relations of the time are, in this case, more complex. On the one hand, we have Queen Elizabeth who exercises power and represents masculinity while Queen Mary, subjected to that power, is the powerless feminine. On the other hand, we can see how Queen Elizabeth, albeit in charge, is not freely exercising her own power, since she is overpowered by her counsellors, population and other foreign kings. Notwithstanding her role, Elizabeth needs to constantly demonstrate to men that she is as good as they are. Hence, inside the political system, she is subjected to a patriarchal power as much as Queen Mary is subjected to Elizabeth's.

Mary's figure is presented, as we have previously seen, at the beginning of the play through the eyes and words of her collaborators as the epitome of femininity. She is fertile, beautiful, sensual, kind and good-natured, but also rather weak and certainly flawed, which make her character appear even more stereotypically feminine. Nevertheless, Deverell introduces a small scene where Mary is caught off guard by the Duke of Norfolk while reading a book. Since he is surprised to discover her so passionate about such an "unfeminine" activity, she feels the need to justify her interest in literature. On the contrary, while she thinks to be alone, she thanks God for bestowing on her the love for science, and she admits preferring books to jewels.

> QUEEN MARY:
> Thrice bless'd the pow'r that gave me early love
> For science, and pious meditation!
> Howe'er delighted with youthful gaieties,
> Or jewell'd thrones; books still retain'd their charms!
> Nor could the syren pleasure drive 'em from me:
> In this drear prison they're my only comforts;
> Shewing me what I am, and what I should be.
> Now adversity, torrent-like, pours on me
> From all quarters. Each month's a blast of time,
> Stripping hope's tree of her sweet foliage,
> Till is leafless.[80]

In these few lines, Deverell gives Mary the chance to define herself outside of the realm in which the external male gaze caged her, and to express her true personality, that of a learned woman who can, at the same time, be sensual and, yet, appreciate science. The author mixes

[78] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act IV, Scene, p. 62.
[79] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, op. cit.
[80] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act III, Scene iii, p. 51.

together opposite fields of actions and interest as much for Mary as for Elizabeth, demonstrating how women cannot be constrained into a single category but can belong to a range of different realms. Such concept seems extremely important for the author, who indeed supports the idea that the "pen" does not exclude the "needle" and, therefore, science and religion, books and jewels, "feminine" and "masculine" attributes and activities can all coexist inside the same identity. Although far from the 1989 idea of intersectionality produced by Krenshaw, it is interesting to notice to what extent Deverell tries to merge together the different elements that concur in the construction of subjectivity. Mary thanks the "power"[81] that infused her with love for two things which traditionally belonged to opposite domains: science and pious meditation. If her love for science is something that God gave to her, can it be considered "unfeminine"? Once again, Deverell raises an implicit rhetorical question to deconstruct the idea that women, because of their sex, are not able to write and learn as much as their male peers. Furthermore, it should be underlined that Queen Mary remarks how books are able to show her what she is and what she should be, reiterating the idea that education is fundamental for women, just as it is for men, in order to improve themselves and society. The Duke of Norfolk, delegate of Elizabeth but secretly in love with Mary, brings her back to reality. In fact, he tries to dissuade her from reading so not to let "the abstruse sage / wholly engross your pious mind."[82]

Mary appears as a very complex and multifaceted character, more than she is perceived by her counsellors and courtesans. Right from the prologue to the tragedy, Deverell asks her readers not to judge her for her well-known faults, which could not be historically denied but maybe partially excused. Although the drama starts with the Scottish Lords discussing if they should trust Mary, who is accused of the murder of her husband, Deverell inserts in the dialogue some remarkable passages that are probably her own point of view on the matter. Lord Maitland, indeed, demands the other Lords not to be too harsh with her, because she is a human being and, as such, she is allowed to make mistakes. Furthermore, he underlines what a good ruler she was for Scotland. Christian qualities as pity and mercy, summoned by Deverell in the prologue, appear for the first time in these verses and will be often mentioned in the course of the tragedy, in which religion plays a prominent role, as we will later see.

> MAITLAND:
> Most noble Lords, let not a court of justice
> Banish mercy, an attribute divine!
> Which ne'er could tarnish souls of bravest lustre.
> Let us all look on Mary as she was—
> Now with feeling compassion as what she *is*;
> When on the Gallic, or the Scottish throne,

[81] Deverell does not specify but we can assume she refers to God since Mary was a Catholic.
[82] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act III, Scene iii, pp. 51-52.

> Pitying mildness ever rul'd her soul,
> And none e'er sued her clemency in vain.
> She may perhaps have foibles; casual
> Eclipses of the mind. What of those?
> A Queen is but a mortal! Who'll assert
> A mortal is without 'em? If ye will
> Judge so harshly, question your own breasts,
> Make conscience umpire, and let that plead her cause.
> . . . .
> Thanks my worthy Lord, for pleading
> Thus the royal sufferer's cause, whose virtues
> Will her faults o'erbalance.[83]

The issue of *gaze*, as it has been said, is crucial in the definition of the two queens' identities, since in both cases, they are presented by other (male) characters before entering the scene. Indeed, the idea that the readers have of Mary and Elizabeth before seeing them is based on the words expressed by Lords and counsellors, and is thus filtered through their perception of the queens, depending on their political interests. In the same way, the point of view that the two queens have about each other is channelled through letters, as well as through the recounts made by ambassadors and delegates. Therefore, the portrayal the readers get of Mary and Elizabeth is fragmented and extremely varied, positive or negative, depending on the side from which they are viewed. Indeed, the gentle Mary appears through Cecil's words as a clever woman who is playing the victim while she is waiting for the right moment to defeat Elizabeth and steal her crown. On the contrary, according to the Scottish Lords who support her, she is the embodiment of innocence, framed by her enemies in order to avoid a possible *coup d'état* and another religious persecution. Elizabeth's coldness depicted by the Scottish Lords is nothing but her "regal dignity," according to her own words, while Mary's kindness is regarded as a weakness by English noblemen. *Otherness* is, thus, presented to the readers/audience, according to the shifting position between factions, depending on the speaker and the addressee, without any indication from the author on which is the right, or wrong, side—if any. Deverell seems to resist the traditional narrative of good versus evil that usually typifies historical accounts. Indeed, she is capable of understanding and, thus, portraying the various contradictions that characterize history, highlighting which nuances, contrasts and similarities play a role in the construction of each personality. Mary and Elizabeth develop and evolve throughout the tragedy, trusting each other at times, while despising each other the next moment, in a complicated sequence of events that they cannot control. Their sudden changes of heart about their relationship, as well as about their political strategies, should not be regarded as inconsistencies but rather as the result of a complex historical moment which called into question both their private and public life. Although their countries and counsellors want

[83] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act I, Scene ii, pp. 6-8.

them to be one against the other, both of them seem to know very well that the other Queen is the only person who knows exactly what they are going through. For such reason, they often defend each other from the attacks of the rival courtesans, as in the following passage where Elizabeth condemns Mary's behavior as a woman but is sympathetic towards her as a Queen who was strongly criticized for her personal choices in her private life. Indeed, Elizabeth remarks how the private sphere of a Queen should not be questioned by her subjects.

> QUEEN ELIZABETH:
> They are. To meet her, let me think—to meet
> Her host of troubles;—adopt 'em;—fold Mary
> To my heart, and lull her griefs to sleep! My will,
> Nor honour, can bend thus to a fugitive,
> Under imputed crimes too enormous
> E'er for Elizabeth's throne to shelter.
> What!—an exile t'expect my court's homage?
> Shallow woman!—Yet for her, as a fall'n Queen,
> I feel. Subjects have no right to trample
> On Sov'reign's necks, to whom our private conduct
> Was ne'er amenable. Thou, my warder
> Of political secrets, now advise
> What reception 'tis best to give Mary,
> My late dreaded, but now humbled rival.[84]

Such a claim cleverly opposes the common practice of scrutinizing female writers' private lives and evaluating their talent and compositions according to the propriety of their personal conduct. The gendered social norms imposed on women writers, who needed to keep a spotless reputation if they wanted their texts to be published, and harshly criticized by Deverell in many of her compositions, applies as well to Queens, whose public role put them under the inspecting gaze of the whole population. Of course, while Kings were not subjected to intromissions in their private sphere, Queens had to be extremely careful in the way they managed their private life.

Mary Deverell was able to analyze in depth the complex minds of these two incredible women and queens but also to criticize the fact that a different way of doing things, a more feminine way of ruling a country, was not possible, not even with a female monarch. Politics is depicted, throughout the drama, as a masculine domain in which women need to be helped and guided by men. As previously noticed, the choice of portraying the queens surrounded by male counsellors and courtesans probably corresponds to Deverell's intention to be as truthful to reality as possible, but it also highlights to what extent a female ruler was an exception. The political dynamics remains, in fact, unchanged even with a woman in power, and that is why both Mary and Elizabeth have to behave and act carefully—more than a male ruler would have.

[84] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act III, Scene i, p. 43.

Elizabeth, in particular, feels like her position is constantly in danger, but ironically, she seems more worried about Lords and foreign monarchs than she is of Mary, a legitimate heir to the throne. Indeed, in the end, the terrible decision she makes, that of condemning her cousin to death, appears as the result of external pressures. In one of her last monologues, she explicitly affirms that signing the authorization to Mary's beheading was the only way to save herself from her own future death.

> QUEEN ELIZABETH *sola*
> E'en now in bonds I hourly dread invasion
> By European Princes; war threaten'd me
> From all, for Mary's past wrongs. Should I proceed,
> Not all proud Augusta's flowing rivers
> Would wash away the stain of bringing a
> Crown'd head to the block. Yet the Queen of Scots
> I must bring there, or forfeit mine.[85]

Elizabeth is compelled to act as any other pitiless monarch would in order to demonstrate her power and fierceness to her enemies. Violence is, thus, the only way to maintain her leadership and deter any opponent from questioning both her legitimacy and her ability to rule England. A feminine way of dealing with politics appears to be impossible in a patriarchal society that is based on the survival of the strongest, rather than focusing on dialogue, justice and forgiveness. In such a patriarchal context, women are always doomed—as typical of Romantic women playwright's dramas—unless they learn how to play by men's rules. The tragedy's ending perfectly mirrors the duality represented by Mary and Elizabeth in their embodiment of the two opposite genders. Queen Mary's execution at the end of the play symbolizes the impossibility of survival for the feminine and the triumph of male values over a more equal and fair society. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's apparent victory is not perceived as such by the author. As a matter of facts, "Queen Bess" can reign and prosper only because she rejects her femininity and chooses to devote her life and body to please the public gaze and patriarchal ideology. She sacrifices her personal life, her sexuality and femininity in order to comply with England's expectations, and to be loved and respected, not as a woman, but as a genderless ruler. Mary Deverell follows the trend of Romantic tragedy in which there is no *catharsis*, since it is society itself that does not allow women to find a final solution to injustice. Neither Elizabeth nor Mary are heroic figures in the classical sense of the term, but they certainly can be ascribed to the category of the Romantic hero, whose destiny is doomed from the beginning. They both struggle to do the right thing and to deal with the society they live in. They are both torn between their contrasting feelings, they are both flawed and make mistakes for which they would later

---

[85] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act V, Scene ii, p. 96.

pay. Furthermore, as women, they are forced to conceal their subjectivity, to disguise their inner selves and to make compromises in order to be accepted as monarchs in a society that sees them as inferior and inapt.

2.3 History / *Hers*tory and language in context

In her portrayal of Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I, Mary Deverell is able to let the dichotomy private / public emerge, as well as to combine and overcome the two opposite realms. Indeed, the figure of the Queen embodies both the private woman and the institutional role of the monarch. Thus, the two domains are merged together in a female body, which constantly moves from one to the other, implicitly challenging the doctrine of the separate spheres. The topic of the tragedy gave Deverell the chance to investigate both the personal life, the feelings and affections of the two protagonists, and the external political discourse they had to deal with. Indeed, as the above-mentioned passages show, history is addressed by the author from a double perspective; from inside the domestic realm and outside of it, where the reasons of State ruled. Instead of creating fictional female characters and inserting them into a historical context—as many of her colleagues did, from Baillie to Inchbald—Deverell chose to portray memorable women of the past. Such a choice could depend on the author's fondness for the reconstruction of a female genealogy, as her previous works prove, but also on her willingness to give her audience a new insight into such a controversial moment of English history. The new historical perspective introduced by Deverell focuses less on the facts, which are narrated through dialogues and monologues but not developed in detail, and more on the characters' perception of the various situations. On the one hand, we can assume that the plots and accusations that led to the death of Mary Stuart were part of the historical national past of England, and explaining them to the readers would have been redundant. On the other hand, her dramatic perspective could be ascribed to a peculiar interest in bringing to light the *micro*history that lied behind the great events of the period. Although in a dramatic form, Deverell follows the trend of a "personalized historicism"[86] initiated by Romantic historian Catherine Macaulay, who delineated a *History of England* where political episodes and personal sorrows were merged together. As addressed in the previous chapter, Macaulay's "interiorized approach to history specifically focuses on the heartfelt sorrows of those individuals—men and women, famous and little known—who have been victimized by the crush of events beyond their control."[87] Elizabeth and Mary are portrayed in their institutional roles and in relation to the politics of the

[86] Greg Kucich, "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", op. cit., p. 22.
[87] Ibid. p. 23.

time, with references, for example, to the foreign dominations that were threatening England as well as to internal upheavals and religious matters. Nevertheless, the passages in which the Queens are depicted during meetings and debates with their counsellors are often counterbalanced by monologues in which they can express their unfiltered perspective on the events. Especially in the case of Elizabeth I, monologues are frequently used by Deverell to unveil her most intimate thoughts and fears, free from the impositions of her political role. Dialogues with trusted people are also employed by the author to present the protagonists from a closer, and more personal, point of view which allows their emotions to be exposed and explored. In the drama there is a visible alternation of *micro*history and *macro*history, with the former prevailing on the latter. Indeed, what gives Deverell's historical account a more personal connotation is certainly the *pathos* evoked by the Queens' perception of themselves and of their tragic circumstances. As underlined by Greg Kucich,

> With the same intention of personalizing historical drama, Mary Deverell prefaces her 1792 play, *Mary, Queen of Scots*, by promoting the act of women rewriting history, "bold[ly]" using "the pen," in order to elevate affective experience, particularly women's suffering, over the militaristic emphases and political intrigues that still dominate traditional historiography. This alternative history minimizes the political complexities of Queen Mary's situation while giving center stage to her personal sorrows, what Deverell features as "female woes", extensively rendered in sustained evocations of Mary's "tender heart," her "poor suffering," her "poignant grief," her "[p]oignant misery" (10, 17, 48, 77).[88]

History is thus no longer a mere matter of facts and deeds but a more comprehensive narration in which human beings and their stories hold the most prominent position—especially women, forgotten by traditional accounts. The rewriting of history from a female perspective becomes thus a strong political stance against traditional gendered historiography as well as a fundamental step towards a more inclusive historical discourse. Indeed, Kucich notices that in "staging 'female woes' and domestic sorrow recovered from the grand abstractions of 'real history'" *Mary Queen of Scots* offers "vivid stage realizations of the epistemological revisionings and contestatory gender politics central to the period's emerging forms of feminist historiography."[89] The *her*story proposed by Deverell in her tragedy, through her feminist approach, is a not a biased account of historical events in which the female is at the center, but rather a revision of history that includes both private and public, male and female, in order to give a more accurate and comprehensive narration of the past. By mixing *micro* and *macro*history, instead of perceiving them as two separate domains, Deverell—as Macaulay and many of her colleagues—anticipates the feminist theories first postulated by Joan Scott and

[88] Greg Kucich, "Joanna Baillie and the re-staging of history and gender", op. cit., p. 114.
[89] Ibid. p. 115.

Ann-Louise Shapiro. In particular, feminist historians highlight how important it is to "write women into history" rather than focusing on a notion of women's history separated from men's.

> "We are learning," wrote three feminist historians, "that the writing of women into history necessarily involves redefining and enlarging traditional notions of historical significance, to encompass personal, subjective experience as well as public and political activities. It is not too much to suggest that however hesitant the actual beginnings, such a methodology implies not only a new history of women, but also a new history."[90]

Although in an embryonal form, Deverell managed to rewrite Mary and Elizabeth's subjectivities into a traditional historical account that only saw them as Queens in their institutionalized political roles. She let the women below the crowns emerge and present themselves to the readers in the many varied facets of their personalities, proving how complex it is for a woman to be accepted and respected outside of her domestic realm, inside the English patriarchal society. Furthermore, the author was able to employ her dramatic writing, full of *pathos* and emotionality, to express her view on political matters related to women's rights. Indeed, while she creates a historical narrative that includes both personal and general history, she deconstructs the concept of the separate spheres by merging the domestic and the political and demonstrating to what extent one completes and improves the other.

Gender is thus fundamental to investigate and understand history and, in the same way, it is crucial to analyze the language employed by Deverell in her tragedy. Politics, that is addressed from a feminist perspective through the historical discourse, is also implicitly discussed by means of lexical choices and linguistic devices which convey subversive messages. Indeed, in the last decades, close examinations of language and literary devices from a feminist perspective helped to unveil and better understand hidden subtexts, hints and references used by the writers to speak their minds without being too daring. At the same time, such studies showed the ways women employed language to affirm a female subjectivity, agency or authority. Furthermore, even though it was never performed, we should not overlook that fact that the *Mary Queen of Scots* was thought to be staged, and, thus, its language was conceived to be *dramatic*,[91] engaging, and interpreted by the actors by means of their voices and bodies. As Keir Elam suggests in his *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama,* "the written text . . . is determined by its very need for stage contextualization, and indicates throughout its allegiance

---

[90] Ann D. Gordon, Mary Jo Buhle, and Nancy Shrom Dye, "The Problem of Women's History," in Berenice Carroll, ed., *Liberating Women's History* (Urbana, Ill., 1976), 89. Cited in Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis", in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec., 1986), Oxford U.P., pp. 1053-1075. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1864376 [Accessed 12/05/2016].

[91] The difference between *dramatic* and *narrative language* was addressed in the Introduction to this thesis, according to the distinction made by Alessandro Serpieri, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale", op. cit., p. 15.

to the physical conditions of performance, above all to the actor's body and its ability to materialize discourse within the space of the stage."[92] For this reason, it is important to consider the language employed by the author, in both the dialogues and stage directions, also from the angle of its potential performability. Deverell seems to be aware of the power of language since she uses it to skillfully express her feminist agenda and to display her dramatic talent. As a matter of fact, the drama reveals the author's point of view on the importance of women's role and education in society through a series of passages which demonstrate how cultured and skilled Deverell really was. As we saw in the previous paragraphs, Deverell took to heart the issue of female writers and employed her letters and poems to deconstruct the idea of women's intellectual inferiority. She managed to do that by recovering the names and works of literary and historical female figures who gave a prominent contribution to society. In her tragedy, she continues her work by showing to the readers that Elizabeth and Mary were learned and smart women, thus reiterating the idea that the brightness of the mind does not depend on the biological sex. However, she also seems willing to prove her own literary worth by introducing in the plot various elements belonging to many different cultural domains, which demonstrate both her erudition and her ability to combine different subjects. Of course, we need to keep in mind that Deverell was a woman and the daughter of an artisan, therefore she probably did not have easy access to an institutional schooling, which makes her prowess and achievements even more remarkable.

Published in 1792, at the end of Enlightenment and the beginning of the Romantic era, *Mary Queen of Scots* is a fascinating mixture of elements belonging to both movements. Throughout the text, Deverell employs words and images taken from the scientific domain, as typical of works written during Enlightenment. Indeed, in Act I Lords Maitland expresses doubts about Mary's suitability for the throne and, despite her good qualities, he wonders if she would disappoint them in the future. To do so, he employs a metaphor that compares Mary to a "meteor" and a "noxious vapour."

> MAITLAND:
> Could this sov'reign Lady
> At once degenerate; fall from a planet
> To a mere meteor;—a star of glory
> To a noxious vapour?[93]

[92] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama,* op. cit., p. 129.
[93] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act I, Scene ii, p. 9.

The allegory of the meteor also recurs in Act II when Melvil, one of the Scottish Lords, compares Elizabeth to a "meteor of caprice"[94] because she refused to grant Mary an escort when she was travelling back to Scotland. Interestingly, also the similitude with an atomic particle is present twice in the text. In Act V Mary depicts her torments to her "soul's peace" that was torn "into atoms,"[95] and in Act V she compares herself to a "Floating atom"[96] after she knew she had been condemned to death. Another remarkable scientific allegory appears again in Act II, when Mary identifies Elizabeth as her guide and, thus, England to her polar star, employing both a metaphor and a metonymy: "My sister England will be my polar star."[97] As it was previously argued, in Act III science and books are explicitly regarded as a possible female domain.[98] Indeed, the use of scientific elements in women's text is not uncommon in the late 18th century, since many women writers were part of cultural or intellectual circles where the latest discoveries were very much discussed. In the case above mentioned, we can assume that Deverell was probably inspired by the first identification of planet Uranus in 1781 and by the meteor observed in Great Britain on September 1787, as well as by the debate around the atomic theory supported by Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton between the 17th and the 18th century. Nevertheless, this scientific jargon is blended with a more gothic and pathetic atmosphere, that finds its major representation in the scene set in the tower of London where, during Mary's imprisonment, the stage direction reports that she "*[screams and faints]*"[99], as a typical gothic heroine would do. The act of fainting, typical of female characters in gothic dramas, is a prerogative of Queen Mary, who is described to have "fainting cry'd"[100] during her time in jail and, according to stage directions, to be "*[... carried off the stage, fainting, by her Women]*."[101] The portrayal of Mary fainting, presented in many stage directions, give the readers a clear idea of the way Mary was supposed to be interpreted and what kind of character she was—a fragile woman whose femininity is emphasized and reiterated through a series of acts that underline her vulnerability.

The language employed by Deverell obviously presents deictic expressions, but her dialogues appear to contain few references to the pragmatic context, such as demonstrative adverbs. However, she appears extremely detailed in the content of her stage directions, which

[94] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act II, Scene iii, p. 30.
[95] Ibid. Act II, Scene iv, p. 41.
[96] Ibid. Act V, Scene i, p. 94.
[97] Ibid. Act II, Scene iv, p. 41.
[98] "Three bless'd the pow'r that gave me early love For science, and pious meditation! Howe'er delighted with youthful gaieties, Or jewell'd thrones; books still retain'd their Charms!"
[99] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act IV, Scene iv, p. 79.
[100] Ibid. Act I, Scene i, p. 3.
[101] Ibid. Act IV, Scene v, p. 80.

are fundamental to understand what is happening and to imagine a potential scene where the actors' dialogues take place. Each scene is indeed provided with a description of the location where it should be set—as *Dundrenan Abbey, in Galloway*[102] at the beginning of Act I, scene ii—as well as with specific indications about the characters' mental and physical attitude. Act I, scene ii opens in fact with a stage direction that portrays Queen Mary in the middle of a meeting with her trusted women and ladies-in-waiting, on the verge of discussing what to do about the conflict with England. The stage direction reports "*Opens and discovers the QUEEN, Ladies ARGYLE, HERRIES, MELVIL, and attendant Women—the QUEEN sitting in a pensive attitude, leaning on a table*."[103] Mary is thus imagined by the author, and consequently by the readers, at centre stage in an intimate, yet difficult, conversation with other women surrounding and comforting her about her struggles. The dialogue is characterized by a series of exclamation and question points which reinforce the idea of distress and doubt that pervade Mary's mind in that specific moment—as suggested by the initial stage direction with the expression "pensive attitude." Furthermore, the temporal deictic "now" is repeated three times in the course of Mary's speech—"Now, now, implore it" and "now op'd to new distress"[104]—as to underline the protagonist's frantic need to get immediate answers to her questions. Stage directions are particularly fundamental also in the case of scenes that might not be staged because of time restrictions, as in the case of the Battle at Langside. Indeed, in Act I Mary Deverell inserted a *didascalia*[105] that, more than any other, lead us to believe that she actually wrote the play for the stage, hoping it would be performed. The stage direction reports *"[If time permitted, the Battle at Langside might be represented here, with Mary at the head of her troops, fighting with sword and spear; as such short skirmishes have produced good stage effect.]*"[106] This direction is particularly interesting because it provides the readers with a clear idea of what the author had in mind for a potential *mise-en-scène*, but it also highlights the extent to which Mary Deverell knew the dynamics of theatre productions, how much they were constrained by a strict time schedule and what the audience liked—what "produced good stage effect,"[107] as battles, in this case. Furthermore, the way Deverell portrays Queen Mary in this particular didascalia makes her appear—even though for a brief moment—almost like an Amazon, a warrior princess ready to physically fight the enemy. Such an unprecedented depiction bestows a further connotation on the general portrayal of Queen Mary in the play. She is not only the epitome of

---

[102] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., p. 24.
[103] Ibid. p. 24.
[104] Ibid. p. 24.
[105] Also "stage directions" or "stage productions" in Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, op. cit., pp. 8-9
[106] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., p. 24.
[107] Ibid. p. 24.

femininity and a passionate reader; in Deverell's eyes she can also take on the role of a commandant, if it serves the purpose of saving her country and people. Although such scene could never be staged—and thus no audience could actually see Mary in the role of a warrior—it cannot be overlooked that Deverell employed her drama to overcome gender stereotypes in multiple occasions. Once again, in the above-mentioned passage, she provides one of her female characters with the opportunity to perform masculine traditional acts, as that of leading the troops and fighting with weapons, without losing her femininity. In this specific case, the importance of stage directions is even greater. Since the play was never put on stage, the detailed descriptions in italics and/or between square brackets not only enlighten us with the author's intentions about a potential *mise-en-scène*, but also offer a wide range of information that can help the readers imagine the performance in their "theatre of the mind."[108] Nevertheless, we should not forget that other crucial details about the way actors and actresses are supposed to perform on stage in order to interpret a specific character are embedded as well in the dialogues. The language expressions employed by Deverell directly hint at the way she wanted the readers to imagine a scene—as in the case of Act V, scene iv, when Mary talks to Lord Melvil about her approaching execution.

> QUEEN MARY:
> —One request more:
> Give this ring to my cousin Hamilton,
> A family deposit. Oh! Melvil!
> Breathe not a sigh, nor dare to meet my eyes
> With thine impearl'd . . .
> . . . .
> In this scene,
> Surely I'm the chief actress; yet I weep not.[109]

It is directly through Mary's words that the readers get to know that Melvil is crying while talking to his Queen. Indeed, she asks him not to show her his "impearled eyes" as well as not to "sigh," in order not to make that moment even more painful for both of them. Mary herself affirms that she is not crying, although she certainly was in her right to weep about her situation, since her death was imminent. Ironically, in the above monologue, she refers to herself as the "chief actress" of the "scene." The expression might allude to the written scene of the dramatic text (Act V, scene iv) where she is, in fact, the leading character—the metaphorical "chief actress"—, but also to the potential theatrical scene where her role as a protagonist would be performed by a proper actress. Furthermore, in this passage it is interesting to notice how, even though there are no stage directions describing the action, the readers can perfectly picture in

---

[108] The term "a theatre of the mind" is employed by Leigh Hunt in *Liberty*, Iiii, cited in Jeffrey N. Cox, "Re-Viewing Romantic Drama." In *Literary Compass* 1 (2004), RO 096 1-27. Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 6.
[109] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., p. 108.

their head the image of Mary giving to Lord Melvil a specific ring—"this ring"—she is probably wearing on her finger. Indeed, the deictic use of the verb "give" and the demonstrative "this" implies that she is holding the ring close to her, and she is offering it to her addressee as she speaks.

Greek mythology is also cleverly referred to throughout the text and probably employed by Deverell to show her readers that women, given a chance to study, can be as bright and cultivated as men. High cultural references seem to be extremely important for Deverell because through them she resists traditional female stereotypes and manages to affirm her female agency. Language, which is "never neuter"[110], as postulated by Luce Irigaray, serves thus as a vehicle to assert a female subjectivity that is conscious of herself, her rights, her value and her knowledge. Indeed, since knowledge is power, in order to subvert the power structures that rule society, women need to reclaim their right to be recognized as capable and knowledgeable human beings. For example, in the following passage, Deverell uses the figure of the Regent to affirm a strong female agency, together with clear hints to her expertise in 18th century travel literature and Greek mythology.

> REGENT:
> Never, never more, my Lords,
> Let us admit female timidity
> A bar to any hazardous enterprize.
> Woman, however weak, her will assisting,
> she'd scale the Alps, yea, ride o'er Mount Atlas
> T'accomplish it. Yet this fugitive Fair
> May chance to break the sword she'd fain fight with.
> Say, my Lords, what detains this Amazon
> At Hamilton?[111]

The "Alps" mentioned by Deverell, that she probably never saw in person, were indeed described in Esther Lynch Piozzi's *Observations and reflections made on the course of a journey through France, Italy and Germany* published in 1789. "Mount Atlas" was described in detail in *The Present State of the Empire of Morocco* by Louis de Chénier, translated from French and published in England in 1788. Remarkably, both geographical elements will be recurrent *tópoi* in early 19th century Romantic literature. The reference to Greek mythology is evident in the quotation of Mount Atlas, that was where the titans resided, but also in the metaphor that compares Queen Elizabeth to an amazon warrior, which reiterates the notion of hybridity, as well as of strength, that characterized the figure of Queen Elizabeth. This powerful sentence is a fundamental statement made by the author, who let a male character spontaneously acknowledge women's power and boldness, often denied to them in favour of a traditional

---

[110] Luce Irigaray, *Speech is Never Neuter,* 1985. Trans. From French. New York: Routledge, 2002.
[111] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act II, Scene i, pp. 21-22.

narrative of weakness. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the passage is interrupted right in the middle by a typical "rhetoric of modesty" which briefly makes use of the stereotypical female weakness in order to clarify the limits of the female sex and, thus, to mitigate the rest of the speech. Greek mythology and culture are also interestingly combined with Italian literature in a dialogue between the Scottish Lords Athol and Argyle on the qualities of Queen Mary and her suitability for the throne. Lord Athol wonders if it is possible to expect from such a young monarch to have "Solon's steady wisdom, / Blended with Dian's purity?"[112] referring to the Greek politician Solon, who is remembered for his just social policies, and Diana, the goddess of hunting as well as of chastity. Such a hint to the sexual life of the Queen leads the characters to discuss her relationship with the Earl of Bothwell, the future third husband of Mary. Her counsellors regard Bothwell as an ambition man who can ruin Mary's already precarious reign. Indeed, they refer to him as "Machiavel", the Italian politician, writer and philosopher mainly famous for his controversial political text *Il Principe* often identified as a *vademecum* of scheming and plotting to establish an authoritarian power.

2.4 Constructing *otherness*: the issue of religion

In *Mary Queen of Scots* it is useful to notice the role played by religion as a theme and a critical category constructing *otherness*, since it represents one of the main contrast between Mary and Elizabeth, and between Elizabeth and the other European nations. Mary, catholic Queen of Scotland, was supported in her claim to the English throne by all the foreign catholic kings and governments, especially France and Spain, not only because they shared the same faith but also for their own political aims. The restoration of Catholicism in England would have brought back the country under the norms and regulations imposed by the Pope, whose power was placed above all the different European Crowns. Elizabeth, instead, as the Head of the Church of England, was independent from the spiritual and temporal power exercised by the Church of Rome, and as such, she was strongly opposed by all the catholic nations that owned their loyalty to the Pope. She was thus seen as the "non-normative", the *other* to be conquered and normalized. Precisely for such reason, Elizabeth could not run the risk of being deposed by a catholic monarch who would have destroyed England's peace and persecuted the Anglicans, just like her sister Mary Tudor did a few years before. If in the European context, Mary is the norm and Elizabeth the *other*, conversely, when talking about the British Island, the point of view is completely subverted. Indeed, Catholic Scotland is represented as wild, obsolete and dangerous, an *otherness* that needs to be tamed and civilized by the advanced and cultured

[112] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act I, Scene i, p. 9.

protestant England. Contrarily, Elizabeth's protestant England is perceived by Mary's counsellors as deviated because ruled by an illegitimate child, born outside of holy matrimony, who was, thus, unworthy of her sacred crown. The peculiar circumstances of Elizabeth's birth made her immoral to the eyes of catholic Lords and, hence, a danger for the integrity of the country. Furthermore, it should also be underlined that although in the drama Scotland is often associated with the catholic religion—because of her catholic queen—it was not, at the time, entirely catholic but rather torn between the two different faiths. Therefore, Mary represented only a part of the Scottish population, which made her more vulnerable to the attacks of some Scottish Lords who, being protestant, were worried about her possible retaliations towards Anglicans. In the tragedy, religion represents a crucial watershed, not only between two countries but rather between two different subcultures and social positions. Indeed, Catholics were gradually excluded from political roles and deprived of their civil rights for decades, as it still was at the time Deverell composed her tragedy. While religion *per se* does not constitute the reason of Mary's death, it certainly contributed to the creation of a specific image of the Scottish Queen, a distorted perception of the *other* based on stereotypes and prejudices about Catholicism and the propensity for political intrigues and corruption of the Church of Rome. The *other*, although connected by blood, is not to be trusted; but who is really the *other*? Deverell does not give an answer to this question, since she portrays two Queens who continuously judge each other and define themselves in opposition to their rival. The author cleverly presents a relativism of perspective that constantly exchanges the *gaze* between the two protagonists, who are, alternately, the good and the evil, the conqueror and the invaded, the oppressor and the oppressed. This continuous change of perspective is evident in the following dialogue between Lord Burleigh and Queen Mary. Burleigh accuses Mary to have plotted in order to "invade England" and to turn all the Catholics against Elizabeth, while she affirms that she never acted cruelly towards Protestants to save her catholic "oppressed people." While Elizabeth feels threatened by Mary's behavior, Mary regards herself and her people as oppressed by Elizabeth's monarchy.

> BURLEIGH:
> Did conscience
> Prompt you to inflame Catholic bosoms
> Against our sov'reign, and invade her realm?
>
> QUEEN MARY:
> In friendly dread I oft' times caution'd her
> 'Gainst lighting up malignant flames 'mongst us,
> By Protestant example; while I check'd
> My friends warmth, e'en when their groans pierc'd
> My soul.
> Yet one drop of a persecutor's blood,

> I'd not shed, to gain a world! much less kingdom
> Or crown. The diadem I seek ne'er circled
> Human brow, nor won't be wrested from me:
> It drops immortal gems! True, my oppressed people's
> Safety I've sought by Esther's fervent pray'rs,
> Not Judith's sword: but when for them, nor me,
> Pray'rs gain'd nought from your Sov'reign, I implor'd
> Others to liberate me from cruel pow'r![113]

Moreover, in this dialogue, there is a remarkable external reference that displays the author's great erudition and her interest in the study of female genealogies. Indeed, she mentions two strong historical women, worthy of being remembered and inscribed into a female *her*story. "Judith" and "Esther", according to the Old Testament, were two Jewish heroines who saved their people from the invasion of a foreign ruler belonging to a different religion. Therefore, we can assume that the author probably wanted to highlight how the historical oppression of Jewish people was, from Mary's perspective, comparable to that of catholic people in Elizabethan England. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that Mary cleverly defends herself explaining how she tried to save Catholics through her prayers and not by means of violent acts—"Judith's sword"—reiterating once again her gentle femininity, in opposition to the "cruel power" of the masculine Elizabeth.

[113] Mary Deverell, *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy*, op. cit., Act V, Scene i, pp. 92-93.

CHAPTER V

Luisa Amalia Paladini's *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti.* Close Reading and Analysis

1. Luisa Amalia Paladini in the context of 19th century Italy

1.1 Paladini's life and works between patriotism and education

Biographical information about Luisa Amalia Paladini is provided by a monography on the author, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una donna del Risorgimento* (2012) written by Simonetta Simonetti. Although Italian women writers of the 19th century are not very much studied and researched, a few texts have been published in the last decades regarding the women who participated in the Italian Risorgimento, and Paladini certainly belongs to this heterogeneous group. In particular, she has been studied as a pedagogue, because of her many texts on female education and her work as headmistress of various female schools around Italy. Simonetti, indeed, analyses part of her *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane* (1851), and reports some of her letters, odes and poems, but only briefly mentions her historical novel *La Famiglia del Soldato* (1859) and completely overlooks her dramatic compositions.

Luisa Amalia Paladini was born in Milan in 1810, but her parents were from Lucca and moved back there in 1815. At the time, the town still belonged to the Duchy of Lucca—before being annexed to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1847.[1] Since she suffered from precarious health conditions and the place where they lived did not provide good female schools, she was educated at home by her mother. Home-schooling allowed her to learn more than the average of Italian girls, since she could approach and deepen subjects that in female institutes were not regarded as suitable for young women. Her household was indeed favourable to culture and arts, and encouraged her to study history, Italian grammar and literature, Latin, Greek, French and philosophy. Paladini received a very peculiar education compared to most girls of her age and had the chance to explore fields and topics usually reserved for boys. The conditions of female school later turned out to be a priority in Paladini's life, who wrote extensively about pedagogy and female education. As previously mentioned, one of her main pedagogical works is undoubtedly *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane* (1851), but we also have long and detailed reports of her ideas and opinions about girls' schools in her epistles to various recipients, collected by Torello Del Carlo in 1881.[2] Her letters are also very useful to understand the difficulties she had in affirming herself as a writer in a society that did not accept women in the artistic, scientific and literary field. Simonetti underlines that, in 1839, when her first poetry collection was published with the title *Saggi Poetici*, it was very well received by many

---

[1] Information about the author's life has been retrieved from Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2012.

[2] Torello Del Carlo, *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, tip. Giusti, Lucca, 1881 cited by Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2012, p. 27.

intellectuals of the time,[3] but it was not particularly acclaimed in her own hometown—which recognised and celebrated the importance of Paladini only decades later. In 1840, only one year after her *Saggi Poetici* (1839), and three years after penning the lyrical tragedy *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837) and the melodrama *L'Orfana di Lancisa* (1838), she wrote an irritated letter to a friend, lawyer Michele Mariani, in which she vented about the mistreatments she often received because of her compositions. In particular, she blames those critics who misinterpret her words and attack her for reasons that are neither connected to her literary talent nor related to her work. However, at the same time and in a typical female self-dismissing way, she admits to being well disposed towards sensible criticism, since she does not have any pretensions to literature.

> Pur troppo è vero e lo so che la maldicenza e la malignità mi hanno perseguitata, e forse mi perseguitano tuttavia. Io non ho nessuna pretensione in letteratura, e siccome ognuno è padrone di giudicare a suo piacimento le produzioni dell'ingegno, io mi so prendere in santa pace le critiche letterarie; ma non tollerare che mi si faccia pensare a ciò che non ho mai pensato, che mi si faccia dire ciò che non ho detto, e che mi si diano un'indole ed un cuore che non sono, e che non potranno mai essere miei. Questa è la spina che mi sta fitta nell'animo, e che forma il tormento della mia vita.[4]

Paladini was very close to many other female writers and intellectuals of her time, especially to the famous *improvvisatrice* and fellow citizen Teresa Bandettini, also known as Amarilli Etrusca. Her sonnet *In morte di Teresa Bandettini fra gli Arcadi Amarilli Etrusca* (1837) written to pay homage to her friend after her death displays the love and connection between the two, but also the difficulties they both faced together as female artists. The lines, "L'ire lasciasti, le menzogne e il gelo, e / l'invidia e la rabbia del corrotto mondo"[5] recall, indeed, the tones of the letter she wrote three years later to Michele Mariani. Thanks to the epistles collected in 1881 by Del Carlo, we know that Paladini and Bandettini used to discuss their role as female poets and the unfair way society perceived and treated them. In a letter addressed to Paladini, Bandettini writes that she knows Paladini to be talented and is sure that she would fulfil her

---

[3] Among the intellectuals who appreciated Paladini's poetry collection, Simonetti mentions Raffaele Lambrushini, Giuseppe La Farina, Giovanni Battista Piccolini and Pietro Pacini. In Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento,* op. cit., p. 22.

[4] An extract from Luisa Amalia Paladini's letter to Michele Mariani, 4 June 1840, retrieved from Torello Del Carlo, *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, tip. Giusti, Lucca, 1881 and cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 22.
English translation: "Unfortunately, it is true that I have been persecuted by malice and slanders, and maybe they still torment me. I have no pretension whatsoever to literature, and since everyone can individually judge literary productions as he sees fit, I can peacefully receive any literary criticism; but I will not tolerate lies about what I supposedly think and say, and to be attributed a mind and a heart that I don't, and will never, have. This is like a thorn in my soul, which torments my whole life."

[5] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *In morte di Teresa Bandettini fra gli Arcadi Amarilli Etrusca,* Lucca, Tipografia Rocchi, 1837, cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 24. English translation: "You left the anger, the lies and the cold, and / the envy and the rage of the corrupted world."

dreams, but she admonishes her not to hope in any kind of fair recognition, because women, however brilliant, are always ignored and soon forgotten.

> Tu hai ingegno; hai cuore; hai mente poetica; studia e toccherai la meta: non sperare però che ti sia fatta giustizia. Guarda me! Che son'io in Lucca? L'invidia m'ha perseguitata, e muoio quasi dimenticata.[6]

After the Duchy of Lucca's annexation to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, Paladini moved to Florence and started to develop a profound patriotic spirit, which led her to undertake solid activism, nurtured by her close connections with other liberals and patriots, such as Ferrucci, Lambruschini and Tommaseo.[7] Unfortunately, her political involvement had harsh consequences on her professional life. Indeed, because of her political opinions, she was no longer allowed to teach in schools, which was her main source of income, and she was forbidden to open her own female institute. Paladini, as many other of her colleagues, was not able to support herself by means of her literary production. As a matter of fact, she worked her whole life mainly as an educator, while writing in her spare time. If she had married, she maybe would have had the chance to entirely dedicate her career to literature, but after the tragic death of her fiancé she refused to accept any other proposals she received during her lifetime. She devoted her existence to Italian freedom and education, especially for girls, since it was often inadequate—when not completely denied. In the course of her career, she published a journal for young boys and girls in 1834, and from 1844 to 1849 she was appointed Superintendent Headmistress of the female Kindergartens in Lucca—which hosted young girls and children belonging to the lower classes. A few years later, in 1853, she published a journal of lectures and teachings for the whole household, titled *Polimazia per la Famiglia.* After years of illness that obliged her to withdraw from her professional duties, in 1859 Paladini was appointed Headmistress of a prestigious female institute named "Scuola Superiore Normale e Sperimentale per le femmine", for which role she was awarded a medal of honour from the Pedagogic Society of Milan. Contemporaneously, in 1860 Paladini took the position of General Inspector of all the schools in Tuscany, a role which implied accurate reports of the schools' conditions all across the Grand Duchy. Her reports to the General Inspector, Raffaello Lambrushini, survived thanks to the State Archive of Lucca where they are currently kept. The reports depict, with very few exceptions, the terrible situations in which girls were living and

---

[6] An extract from a letter written by Teresa Bandettini and addressed to Luisa Amalia Paladini, retrieved from Torello Del Carlo, *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, 1881, op. cit., p.8 and cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 21. English translation: "You have talent; you have heart; you have a poetical mind; study and you will reach your goal: don't hope, though, for a just recognition. Look at me! What am I in Lucca? Envy persecuted me and I die almost forgotten."

[7] Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 25.

studying, which increased her interest and fondness for the issue of female schooling.[8] Her offices as Headmistress and Inspector, though, both ended in 1862 when the new legislation banned those positions to women because their gender was considered incompatible with such professional activities. Her frustration for the unfair treatment reserved to women by society in many professional fields is a recurrent topic in her epistles. In particular, in a letter addressed to her friend, poet and emancipationist Olimpia Saccati, she laments her difficult circumstances as an unmarried middle-class woman who lost both her parents and was, thus, alone and unprotected. In the Italian patriarchal society of the 19th century it was fundamental for an unmarried woman to have at least a familial network who could economically support her and protect her reputation, especially if the woman in question was a writer and, therefore, more exposed to the public gaze and opinion. Indeed, she wrote that

> delle terribili persecuzioni sofferte non ho forza di parlare: bisogna che non ci pensi, altrimenti impazzirei; ma verrà il giorno, lo spero, . . . che potrò far conoscere agli amici, e forse a tutti, a quali iniquità dovette sottostare una debole donna che non aveva nessuno per sé al mondo. Quando leggevo dei romanzi di certe persecuzioni di consorterie e di partiti le credevo esagerazioni, ma purtroppo sono storiche ed implacabili.[9]

As Simonetti suggests, women like Paladini lived on the same soil of their male fellow citizens but did not share their same civil rights. Women suffered because of a society based on misogynistic ideologies that harshly attacked and condemned those women who fought to be recognised as a juridical part of the social order.[10] Only in 1872, Paladini was appointed again Headmistress of a female institute, the "Convitto femminile Vittorio Emanuele II" in Lecce, where she moved and died of a tragic illness that same year.

It should be underlined that, despite the difficulties she encountered in being generally acknowledged as a talented writer because of her gender, Paladini was appreciated by many Italian intellectuals. Indeed, in 1843 she was invited to the V Congress of Italian Scientists in Lucca, where she read an Ode[11] she had specifically written for the occasion. Her composition was praised to the point that Antonio Mezzanotte—illustrious intellectual, writer and Professor of Greek at the University of Perugia—wrote her a letter of sincere admiration. In his epistle,

---

[8] Extracts of her reports are included in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit.

[9] An extract from a letter addressed to poet Olimpia Saccali and retrieved from Renata Pescanti Botti, *Donne del Risorgimento*, Milano: Ceschina, 1966 cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 36. English translation: "I don't have the strength to talk about the terrible persecutions I have endured: I must not think about it, otherwise I could go mad; but the day will come, I hope, … when I will be able to tell my friends, and maybe everyone, which kind of injustice had to endure a weak woman who was alone in the world. When I used to read about the persecutions perpetrated by aristocratic families and political factions I thought them to be an exaggeration, but unfortunately such maltreatments are real, historical and relentless."

[10] Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 36.

[11] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Pel Congresso degli Scienziati italiani in Lucca, Ode*, Tip. Rocchi, Lucca 1843, p.8 cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 39.

he defines her text as “a true ode that he read multiple times with a growing feeling of admiration towards her.”[12] He then continues praising her and her work:

> L’ode vostra sta tra Saffo e Pindaro: saffica nel metro, pindarica nella forza delle immagini, e nella grandezza dei concetti nobilissimi: ottima nella condotta, piena di filosofia, splendida di bei lirici lampi, e di accorte allusioni, che piacciono ai sapienti. Mi congratulo assai: voi fate grande onore al vostro sesso, ma pochi vi imitano: almeno, se non nel poetico valore, v’imitassero nell’amore caldissimo di patria![13]

Indeed, her most patriotic compositions were extremely appreciated by the Italian liberal intellectuals who were supporting the upheavals against foreign dominations and, later, promoted the ideals of the Italian Risorgimento. Many of Paladini’s texts were written to foster patriotic feelings. Even in her works dealing with education and school issues, it is possible to identify political hints and teachings on how to be an exemplary citizen and serve the homeland. The same can be said about her dramatic production, which only consists of a tragedy, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837) and a melodrama, *L’Orfana di Lancisa* (1838). In her tragedy, as we will see in the paragraph dedicated to the close reading, are present many references to the Italian political situation, and it is possible to notice her political and social opinion about women’s role in society and the unequal treatment reserved to them by the law. If in *Rosmunda in Ravenna* she employs events of the past in order to convey her socio-political messages, she becomes much more explicit in her subsequent historical novel, *La Famiglia del Soldato* (1859), set during the invasion of Piedmont—then part of the Kingdom of Savoy—carried out by the French armies, guided by Napoleon Bonaparte. As we will later see, her novel is an interesting combination of issues regarding women’s rights and duties in society and passionate patriotism. Nonetheless, *La Famiglia del Soldato* also proves itself to be a fascinating example of a historical novel written by an Italian woman who expertly merges together *micro* and *macro*history. No doubt, Luisa Amalia Paladini appears as a complex figure in Italian literature. She was a professional who taught in schools, was a member of Academies[14] and wrote extensively about education. She was acclaimed for her talent but, at the same time, was often

---

[12] An extract of Antonio Mezzanotte’s letter to Amalia Paladini is included in Torello Del Carlo, *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, 1881, op. cit., p.28-29 cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 40.
Original quote: “Leggendo la vostra poesia pel Congresso degli scienziati, ho letto una vera ode!”.

[13] An extract of Antonio Mezzanotte’s letter to Amalia Paladini is included in Torello Del Carlo, *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, 1881, op. cit., p. 28-29 cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 40. English translation: “Your ode is in between Sappho and Pindar: it is Sapphic in its metre, Pindaric in the strength of its images, and in the great and noble concepts it conveys: excellent in the way it is developed, full of philosophy, wonderfully lyrical, and of wise references that intellectuals truly appreciate. I congratulate you very much: you honour your sex, but only a few imitate you: at least, if not your poetical value, I wish they’d imitate your passionate patriotic love for your homeland.”

[14] In 1844, she was accepted as a member of the “Accademia de’ Filomati” and of the “Reale Accademia Lucchese”; the following year she wrote a text on her opinion about Academies. Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 83.

ostracized both in her literary career and profession because of her gender. Her intense and difficult life is fundamental to better understand her works and her political thought, which contributed to shaping the way she perceived herself and the world around her. It cannot be overlooked that while she was a popular pedagogue and writer, she was also an activist and a patriot who strongly supported Italian Risorgimento. As Simonetti underlines,

> Pur non potendo definirla un'emancipazionista vera e propria, si riconoscono in lei, nei suoi scritti, le idee e le aspirazioni che animarono molte donne del suo tempo che si battevano per il riconoscimento dei diritti civili negati al loro genere.[15]

1.2 *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane* and *L'Orfana di Lancisa*: teaching modesty

Paladini's interest in education started when she was a girl, probably because she could not attend a real school and studied at home. Nevertheless, the education she received not only allowed her to look at the society she lived in with an inquisitive mind but also gave her the chance to start writing at a young age. The peculiar socio-political circumstances of the Italian peninsula at the time also influenced the way she approached her work as an educator and a literate. In all her compositions, it is possible to notice a mixture of patriotic feelings and pedagogical intentions especially directed at, but not limited to, the female sex. Like many of her colleagues, such as Massimina Fantastici Rossellini to whom her *Manuale* is dedicated, Paladini was convinced that girls should receive a better education than that reserved to them, and should be considered intellectually equal to boys. Interestingly, prejudices about women's mental inferiority were very much rooted in Italian society as much as in England and Spain. That is why, women writers were persuaded that if given the chance to learn as much as boys, girls would prove their innate intellectual abilities and talent. Of course, what they all wished for was a radical change in the way female authors were generally perceived, and the more talented women were in the public arena showing their genius, the more chances there were for society to appreciate and accept them. The *normalization* of women writers would lead to a *professionalization* of their writing endeavours, frequently considered a pastime rather than an activity women could carry out professionally to support themselves. Therefore, education was regarded as an indispensable tool for women to improve themselves and their skills, as well as to become economically and socially independent. Nevertheless, it should be noted that, for Paladini, female education was of the greatest importance to the patriotic cause. Indeed, she regarded women as the pivotal figure inside the family because they ran the house and raised

---

[15] Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 34. English translation: "Even though she cannot be defined a true emancipationist, we do recognize in her and in her writings the same ideas and aspirations that inflamed many women of her time who were fighting for the civil rights denied to their gender."

and educated their children, who were to be, one day, those governing the country. A well-educated woman was, for Paladini, a better wife and a better mother, capable of supporting her husband in the struggle for Italian independence, and of instilling in her children a relentless love for their homeland. She implicitly associated, indeed, the woman with the motherland, whose task was to nurture and protect her progeny, so that they could fight for her when necessary. Such an approach could hardly be defined as feminist or emancipationist, nonetheless, as Simonetti suggests, Paladini should not only be examined through her writings but also in her life choices. Despite her inclination towards the notion of the ideal woman who is the pillar of the household, a modest wife and patriotic mother, she chose for herself a completely different path. Indeed, she preferred not to marry and to spend her life writing and working to support herself—often in professions that were regarded as mainly "masculine." This contrast should not, though, be perceived as hypocrisy or incoherence on Paladini's side, but rather as the result of a complex and conflicted female mentality, frequently present in women of her time. During the Italian Risorgimento, many women participated in the patriotic movement convinced that their strength and value would be recognised and rewarded once Italy was a unified and independent country. Therefore, a strong emancipationist feeling started to grow among Italian women, who wished to be granted more freedom and civil rights, together with the long-longed for Italian citizenship. Paladini, who supported Italian Risorgimento, although she never explicitly talked about civil rights, must have shared the same hopes as her female colleagues. As we know, she did wish for a society where women could freely dedicate themselves to science and literature, as well as undertake public roles and activities generally denied to them. At the same time, Paladini was probably still attached to a certain type of female education based on propriety and modesty; virtues that patriarchal society required from all women, but especially from those who held public positions. Hence, as we have seen in the course of the first chapter, it is not uncommon to find female writers who, on the one hand, promoted a renovation of society and of its strict moral code and behavioural norms, while, on the other hand, reiterated the same old biased and misogynistic social structures.

The *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*[16] (1851), written by Paladini to give educational advice to girls on a series of different topics, opens with a dedication to Massimina Fantastici Rossellini,[17] pedagogue, writer, and close friend of the author. Such dedication appears even

---

[16] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, Firenze: tipografia di T. Baracchi, 1851. English translation: *Manual for Italian Young Ladies.*

[17] Massimina Fantastici Rossellini was born in Florence in 1789 and was the daughter of the famous 18th century *improvvisatrice* Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici. She was passionate about literature and started writing at a really young age, penning many poems and a drama, which are now unfortunately lost. She also dedicated herself to pedagogy and education, while actively supported Italian Risorgimento through her texts. She died in Lucca in

more interesting if we consider that Massimina Fantastici Rossellini is defined by Renata Pescanti Botti as,

> una del lungo esercito senza armi che contribuì a diffondere gli ideali patrii e mise, per questo, a rischio la propria vita. Attraverso una continua propaganda letteraria parlava della gioventù italiana e la spingeva a ribellarsi all'oppressione straniera.[18]

Therefore, since the very first pages of the text, Paladini displays her intention to combine education and patriotism by paying homage to an illustrious friend and pedagogue, who also shared her political views. The text is divided into various chapters, each of which discusses a particular subject linked to women's everyday life: from beauty to dressing, occupations, entertainments, schooling, friendship, and so on. The *Manuale* particularly stresses the importance of modesty for young women, in many different contexts, and the importance of studying over the many different activities women usually carry out during the day. For example, the first chapter starts highlighting to what extent beauty is ephemeral and should not be cultivated more than intellectual faculties;

> Lo splendore della bellezza in picciol tempo muore, ed è fugace al pari dei fiori che appaiono a primavera. La vera istruzione dura l'intera vita: perché dunque, o fanciulle, trascurare di acquistare la seconda per coltivare la prima?[19]

As far as instruction is concerned, she attacks those people who think that education could be a "source of vanity"[20] for girls. On the contrary, she affirms that "arrogance is ignorance's daughter,"[21] while learning helps young women maintaining her modesty and abhorring vanity, since "through the act of studying they get acquainted with their own ignorance."[22] She also criticizes those parents who want their girls to receive an education so that they can be publicly adulated, thus condemning their daughters to a life of shallowness. The author concludes her chapter titled "Idee generali sugli studi della donna"[23] with an innovative statement that resembles very much Mary Robinson's thoughts on education, included in her *Letters to the*

1859. Biography retrieved from: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/rosellini-massimina-nata-fantastici_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29/ [Accessed 30/08/2019].

[18] Renata Pescanti Botti, *Donne del Risorgimento Italiano*, Milano: Ceschina, 1966, pp. 145-153 cited in Simonetta Simonetti, *Luisa Amalia Paladini: Vita e Opere di una Donna del Risorgimento*, op cit., p. 59.
English translation: "a member of the great army with no weapons which contributed to spread patriotic ideals and, for such reason, put her own life at risk. By means of a relentless literary propaganda, she talked to the Italian youth and inspired young people to rebel against the foreign oppression.".

[19] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, Firenze: tipografia di T. Baracchi, 1851, p. 7.
English translation: "The splendor of beauty dies with the passing of time, and it is as ephemeral as the flowers that blossom in spring. True education lasts instead a lifetime: thus, how can you, young women, neglect to acquire the second to cultivate the first?"

[20] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane,* op. cit., p. 124. Original quote: "sorgente di vanità"

[21] Ibid. p. 124. Original quote: "La presunzione è figlia dell'ignoranza".

[22] Ibid. p. 125. Original quote: "studiando si impara a conoscere la propria ignoranza".

[23] English translation: "General ideas about women's education."

Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination (1799), briefly discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.[24] Paladini cleverly suggests, "male, adunque, io potrei partitamente indicarvi la via da tenersi, poiché gli studi femminili debbono essere conformi al grado, all'indole e alle naturali disposizioni."[25] In the following chapters, she makes an interesting distinction between the education of girls belonging to the lower classes[26] and that destined to the girls of middle-to-upper class.[27] Lowborn girls, according to Paladini, deserve and need an education more than wealthy girls do, because they are more often abandoned by their families and left out of society; they are usually compelled to rely on themselves and their capacities alone. Hence, an education would help them discern right from wrong and give them the tools to face the perils that frequently threaten young girls' lives. Thanks to her work as Inspector of female schools, Paladini got in touch with many institutes that also accepted poor children and girls. Thus, she probably knew very well to what extent good instruction might have improved their existences. Besides reading and learning arithmetic, the author is persuaded that even lowborn girls should be introduced to fine arts, especially drawing, and to the study of history. Similar subjects are suggested for wealthy girls, who should also deepen their knowledge in geography, astronomy and mythology, without forgetting to read poetry every day. She attributes a great importance to poetical works in shaping young minds, and for such reason she suggests Dante's *Divina Commedia,* Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata,* but also Aesop's *Fables* translated by Angelo Maria Ricci, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* translated by Pindemonte and Monti, Pindar's *Odes* translated by Borghi and Virgil's Aeneid translated by Annibal Caro.[28] Finally, she mentions the moral poem *Amerigo* written by her close friend Massimina Fantastici Rossellini.[29] Paladini further addresses the issue of Latin, fundamental in order to study science and literature more thoroughly. Nevertheless, she also confesses that it would be better to learn it in secret, since a woman who can read and speak Latin can easily become object of ridicule and public derision, because of biased and unfair prejudices.

> Il latino sulle nostre labbra eccita un sorriso di scherno in coloro che ci ascoltano; ed è ancor vero (poiché io sono prefissa di dirvi al tutto la verità) che una donna che sappia il latino è dal comune degli uomini più

---

[24] Mary Robinson argued that "Had fortune enabled me, I would build a University for women; where they should be politely and, at the same time, classically educated; the depth of their studies, should be proportioned to their mental powers" in *Letters to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination,* op. cit., p. 92.
[25] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, Firenze: tipografia di T. Baracchi, 1851, p. 132. English translation: "I am not able to tell you exactly what kind of education girls should generally receive, since female instruction should be adapted to the level desired, the character of the girl and her natural dispositions."
[26] Chapter XIII "Degli studi delle giovani popolane", Ibid., p. 133.
[27] Chapter XIV "Degli studi delle fanciulle di civil condizione", Ibid., p. 143.
[28] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, op. cit., p. 151.
[29] Ibid. p. 151.

> biasimata che lodata, in forza di rancidi pregiudizi che le parole dei filosofi e dei propugnatori della istruzione femminile non giunsero, in questa parte, neppure ad attenuare.[30]

Although Paladini's distinction between the education for poor and wealthy girls could nowadays appear as classist and unfair, it should be contextualised within 19th century Italy, whose society was extremely unequal. Paladini, on the basis of her work as an educator and school headmistress, knowing very well the reality of female institutes, was promoting a feasible and necessary change. She acknowledged the fact that in that specific historical moment, with such a high level of illiteracy among women,[31] it would not be realistic to suggest the same type of education to girls from different social classes. If wealthy young ladies could write and read since they were children, most girls from the lower classes did not have this chance, therefore, it is remarkable that Paladini set achievable educational targets for both categories, depending on their opportunities. She was aware, of course, that working-class or peasant girls did not have much time to dedicate to books, since they were often working since childhood to help their families. Hence, it was more important for them to spend their spare time learning something useful for their everyday life—that is, reading, writing, drawing and arithmetic—as she suggests in her *Manuale*.

At the end of the chapter dedicated to the education of upper-middle class girls, Paladini makes a further distinction, and specifies that all the suggestions she gave in the previous pages do not apply to the young ladies of "extraordinary genius who want to devote their life and career to literature."[32] She continues affirming that talented girls should not be limited in any way in their studies. Their education should, indeed, combine both "feminine" and "masculine"[33] subjects, so that they can embody both the greatest female virtues and the knowledge of the most erudite men. Although they never met, and lived in different countries at different times, it seems that Luisa Amalia Paladini and Mary Deverell had very similar ideas about the possible coexistence of male and female qualities. Deverell's allegory of the pen and the needle that can be held by the same female hand certainly matches the type of education Paladini wished for literary women. That is, a comprehensive and inclusive knowledge that goes beyond stereotypes and gender categorizations. Furthermore, it is interesting how Paladini

---

[30] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, op. cit., p. 156.
English translation: "Latin, uttered by our lips, is object of ridicule for those who listen to us; and it is true (since I want to tell you all the truth) that a woman who knows Latin is more blamed than praised by most men, because of old and absurd prejudices that not even the words of philosophers and intellectuals promoting female education could weaken."

[31] A more detailed insight on female illiteracy in the 19th century in Italy is included in the first chapter of this dissertation, paragraph 3.1.

[32] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, op. cit., p. 157. Original quote: "S'intende qui che io non parlo alle giovinette di straordinario ingegno, le quali vogliono far professione di lettere."

[33] Ibid. p. 157.

underlines that the mixture of male knowledge and female virtues is present in many living Italian women writers, implicitly praising all her female colleagues. Even though she does not mention any specific name, her intention to acclaim and elevate a genealogy of Italian female intellectuals—herself included—seems evident. Paladini, nevertheless, goes on arguing about the inevitable difficulties encountered by women writers and intellectuals and invite her readers to reflect before deciding to pursue a literary career because, sooner or later, they would be harshly criticised and ridiculed for such a choice.

> S'intende qui che io non parlo alle giovinette di straordinario ingegno, le quali vogliono far professione di lettere; chè a queste non si possono segnar limiti. La donna letterata deve unire alle virtù femminili la sapienza degli uomini dotti; e molti viventi esempi ci provano che questo bell'accordo non è impossibile fra le italiane. Badiamo però che gli ingegni straordinari sono rarissimi fra le donne quanto fra gli uomini. . . . Ma la carriera letteraria è per noi donne cosparsa di spine più che per gli uomini: avanti d'intraprenderla, bisogna pensarci bene; e una volta intrapresa, bisogna andare innanzi, o soggiacere al ridicolo del quale ci coprono gl'inutili tentativi.[34]

A last special mention must be addressed to the chapter of Paladini's *Manuale* centred on entertainment.[35] The author argues that girls should not live a completely retired life but, from time to time, enjoy some modest entertainments and recreational activities. Among the different events they may attend, Paladini finds that theatre is the most suitable, if it has a didactic nature. According to her, theatre should be a "school of morality, noble feelings and virtuous actions,"[36] but she reckons that the coeval dramatic production is not the ideal form of entertainment she wishes for. Indeed, she hopes for a renewal in Italian theatre that implies the ban of "immoral dramas badly translated from French" which hide a mortal, yet extremely seductive, poison.[37] Until the Italian stage undergoes such honourable restoration, she suggests girls to be careful and choose only to attend the performances of good Italian comedies or tragedies from which they can learn something useful. Moreover, in a further passage of her text, she briefly mentions her view about the acting profession for a woman, which she defines a career "any modest and educated girl should abhor more than death itself."[38] Paladini's harsh opinions about drama and

---

[34] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane*, op. cit., p. 157.
English translation: "Until now I was not addressing girls gifted with extraordinary genius, who want to devote their life and career to literature; because to them should not be imposed any limitations. Women writers should embody both female virtues and the knowledge of erudite men; and many living examples prove that this beautiful mixture is not impossible among Italian women. We should be aware, though, that extraordinary genius is very rare, both among women and men. . . . However, literary career is, for women, much more covered with obstacles than for men: before choosing to pursue a career in literature, women should think it twice; and once they embark on it, they must be perseverant, or they will succumb to ridicule and criticism."

[35] Ibid. p. 35-44. Chapter V, "Divertimenti e Spettacoli."

[36] Ibid. p. 38. Original quote: "una scuola di morale, di nobili sensi e di virtuose azioni."

[37] Ibid. p. 38. Original quote: "… venissero bandite dal teatro italiano quelle immorali produzioni malamente tradotte dal francese, che ascondono un veleno tanto più mortifero in quanto che viene presentato nell'aspetto il più seducente."

[38] Ibid. p. 160. Original quote: ". . . fuorché a quelle donne che calcano le scene teatrali: cosa che una modesta e civile fanciulla deve più che morte aborrire."

actresses appear somehow contradictory if we consider that she was a close friend and admirer of many *improvvisatrici,* such as Teresa Bandettini and Fortunata Sulgher Fantastici, and that she penned two dramas which were later staged. We do not know the reasons of such a conflictual relationship with theatre, but we can guess that, as an educator, Paladini felt compelled to warn young ladies from the dangers of being associated with the stage, in order to help them preserve their reputation and social image. Furthermore, it is likely that she did not really regard theatre as an immoral environment *tout court*, but she despised a certain type of drama, namely foreign productions which contained morally ambiguous situations that hinted at impudent sexual behaviours.

As a matter of fact, her two dramas correspond to the ideal performances a girl should go and see in theatres. In particular, her melodrama *L'Orfana di Lancisa* (1838)[39] features a female protagonist, Nina—interpreted by the popular Italian actress Adelaide Mazza—who is the embodiment of modesty and all the virtues that a young lady is supposed to have and cultivate. Paladini's drama is divided into two acts and written in verses which do not follow a regular scheme but are mostly structured in alternate rhymes (ABAB) and chain rhymes (ABA CBC). Her verses are mainly constituted by eight syllables—even though also nine-syllabic lines and hendecasyllables are present. The plot is simple but charged with *pathos* and sentimentality, as typical of melodramatic compositions, and after a series of dramatic misunderstandings, it culminates in a happy ending for all the protagonists. Nina is a young lady who, as a toddler, was found alone after a fire and adopted by a humble family, who raised her according to the Christian values of modesty and propriety. A noble young man, Lucio, falls in love with her and is loved back, but his fellow noblemen contrast their love because of her humble origins. One of Lucio's noble friends, Orazio, is convinced that she does not really love him but only shows interest in him because of his social status and wealth. For such reason, Lucio is persuaded by Orazio to test her love and loyalty. He tells the girl he needs to leave and, after his departure, Orazio tries to seduce her so as to verify if she really is trustworthy. Nina demonstrates to be fondly in love with Lucio and, just when Orazio is doing his best to trick her into accepting his courtship, she recognizes a picture of her mother in Orazio's mansion. As in the traditional dramatic device of the *anagnorisis*,[40] Nina has no idea of the identity of

[39] The melodrama was staged in Milan, at Teatro Re, in 1838. As stated in the frontispiece of the first publication, the text of the drama (defined as poetry because written in verse) was penned by Luisa Amalia Paladini, while the music was composed by Giuseppe Mazza. The printed edition of the text was published by Stamperia Dova, Contrada dell'Agnello, Milano, in 1838.

[40] Caldera defines *anagnorisis* as the final and unexpected recognition of one of the protagonists, whose identity was hidden or unknown during the whole story. In Ermanno Caldera, *El Teatro Español en la Época Romántica,* op. cit., p. 56. The dramatic device of *anagnorisis* is briefly discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, paragraph 2.1.

her parents—she only owns a picture of her mother that was with her in her cradle when she was found—and neither do the other characters. At that point, Orazio recognizes her as the baby sister his parents thought dead in the fire and accepts her as part of his noble household. Lucio is informed of the news, and thanks to Nina's new social status, the two can finally marry.

The figure of Nina appears as the ideal heroine Paladini wished young ladies would look up to. She is shy and aware of her humble social position, she is in love but accepts the fact that her love is doomed because of their different social classes. Nonetheless, she keeps the promise she made to Lucio and refuses every other courtship and proposal. Furthermore, her character seems to be conceived to be as much didactic as possible, showing the right behavior to the girls in the audience. Indeed, she pronounces admonishments such as,

> NINA:
> Ascolto
> Dar non doveva ai lusinghieri accenti
> Del giovine gentil. Fuggir dovea,
> Sempre fuggirne, il seducente aspetto,
> Non riceverlo mai;
> Nol feci! Incauta me! mi amò, l'amai.[41]

She tries to reason with Lucio when he declares his love for her and swears they will be together, despite the fact that their social status does not allow their marriage;

> NINA:
> Di chi son figlia ignoro.
> Orfana, abbandonata, ai genitori
> Bambina toglieva sorte funesta
> Sol questa imago a me di loro resta.
> *(riprende e ripone in seno il ritratto)*
> Lucio, forse di te degno,
> Nacqui io pure in nobil cuna;
> Ma il rigor della fortuna
> Noi per sempre separò.
> . . . .
> Qual son io, qual sei tu rammenta.[42]

Remarkably, the melodrama also features a *chorus* designed similarly to that of classical tragedy, in which it represents the collective opinion of the people and conveys their comments on the actions on stage.[43] Paladini's *chorus* changes its composition in the course of the drama,

---

[41] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *L'Orfana di Lancisa,* Milano: Stamperia Dova, 1838, Act I, Scene iii, p. 9. English translation: "I should not have listened to the flattering words of the gentle young man. I should have run away, always run away from his seductive look, I should have never received him; I did not do that! careless me! he fell in love with me, I fell in love with him."

[42] Ibid. Act I, Scene iv, pp. 10-11. English translation: "I don't know who my parents are. Orphan, abandoned, a cruel fate took me away from my parents when I was a baby, and of them, I only have this portrait *(she takes back the portrait)*. Lucio, maybe I was worthy of you at birth, but fate pulled us forever apart. . . . Remember who I am, who you are."

[43] A more detailed analysis of the *chorus* in classical and Romantic tragedy is present in the second chapter of this dissertation, paragraph 2.1.

but it always embodies the thought of a group of people: alternately peasant men, noblemen and peasant women. Nevertheless, when the *chorus* of peasant women talks to Nina, it is possible to recognize, in their words, a didactic message conveyed by the author—Paladini's point of view on the matter—which recalls the use of the *chorus* made by Manzoni in his Romantic tragedies.[44] The *chorus* of peasant women at the end of Act I shows this peculiar double nature:

> CORO:
> Via non pianger, chè il vero si disse;
> Sei vezzosa, sei cara, sei bella,
> Se ti affliggi per questo, o donzella,
> Sempre immersa sarai nel dolor.[45]

The theme of female modesty that permeates Paladini's literary production and her female characters, as we will later see more in detail, is also noticeable in the prologue of her melodrama, curiously titled "Avvertimento" ("Warning" or "Advertisement"). It is indeed a very short notice, less than a page, in which she justifies her choice to challenge herself with a genre, that of melodrama, she never attempted before. Paladini introduces her composition employing the typical "rhetoric of modesty" we already found in Deverell and other female writers. She diminishes the value of her text, underlines possible mistakes and omissions, but, at the same time, she implicitly reclaims her own work, highlighting its belonging to a relatively new and innovative dramatic genre. At the beginning of the prologue, she also admits that the idea of the *anagnorisis* of an orphan girl was drawn by Scribe's *Yelva ossia L'Orfana Russa*[46], a comedy in two acts first performed in Paris in 1828. While admitting the source of her inspiration, she also remarks that the rest of the plot was completely of her own invention, stressing once again her role as a dramatist and implicitly comparing her work to Eugène Scribe's play. Her "Warning" ends with a request to the readers; she hopes they could accept her apology and enjoy the "simple" work of an "inexperienced young pen."[47] Interestingly, the fact that she is a woman is not mentioned in the prologue, which could lead us to think—given her opinions about the way female writers were treated in society—she did not see her

[44] As explained in paragraph 2.1, Manzoni employs the *chorus* to convey the author's opinion, his own point of view, sentiments and ideas on the actions carried out by the protagonists; he transforms the *chorus* in a space for the dramatist to participate in the play—without actually performing on stage. Source: Giuseppe Farinelli et al., *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento,* op. cit., p. 97.
[45] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *L'Orfana di Lancisa,* op. cit., Act I, Scene viii, p. 17. English translation: "Don't cry, since the truth has been told, you are lovely, you are precious, you are beautiful, if you worry about this, o young lady, you will always live in pain."
[46] Eugène Scribe was a famous French writer, playwright and librettist of the 19th century. His comedy *Yelva ossia L'Orfana Russa* (*Yelva or the Russian Orphan*) is mentioned in Paladini's prologue with the name "Selva"; it is unclear whether it is a typo or one of the Italian translation of the drama changed the name of the protagonist from Yelva to Selva.
[47] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *L'Orfana di Lancisa,* op. cit., p. 3.

inexperience as linked to her sex but as a condition that could affect all young writers indistinctly. She justifies her choice and the modesty of her first melodramatic composition, but she does not apologize for her gender, as if she wanted to subtly underline that women had every right to try to be professional writers.

> Dalla Selva di Scribe tolsi l'idea dell'agnizione dell'Orfana di Lancisa. Del resto il melodramma è di mia invenzione. Si condonerà la semplicità del soggetto alla necessità di essere breve, e si compatiranno i difetti del mio lavoro ove si ponga mente esser questo per me un primo tentativo nel genere né tutto serio, né tutto giocoso, ed ove si rifletta alla inesperienza di una penna giovanile che osa appena spiegare un timido incerto volo.[48]

1.3 *La Famiglia del Soldato*: Paladini's historical novel

In 1859, Luisa Amalia Paladini penned a novel titled *La Famiglia del Soldato*[49], set in Turin at the end of the 18th century, when the city was the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia, ruled by the house of Savoy. In the preface to the novel, Paladini tells her readers that she began writing her texts many years before its publication, only to abandon it for a while and come back at it under the suggestion of some friends. Therefore, we do not know for sure when exactly she commenced the novel, whether before or after her *Manuale* (1851) or her dramatic production (1837-1838). In the preface, she also justifies her choice not to follow the "unity of action," which would not suit a narration that encompasses so many decades, since "il romanzo famigliare deve essere ritratto fedele della vita che noi viviamo."[50] The story narrated starts in 1792, when France declares war to the Kingdom of Sardinia, and the peaceful life of the Molandi family is brutally disrupted because the father, the head of the household Colonel Molandi, is called back in the army to fight the French. The novel is divided into five consecutive main parts, which correspond to the endeavors and struggles of each member of the family. The first part is focused on Marianna (the mother), the second on Eufrosina (the eldest daughter), the third on Matilde (the middle daughter), the fourth on Colonel Molandi and, after a leap forward of sixteen years, the last part mostly recounts the adventures of Vittorio (the youngest son) during Napoleon's Russian campaign in 1812, and his subsequent recovery. The fate of the Molandi family is strictly connected both to that of the Kingdom of Sardinia,

---

[48] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *L'Orfana di Lancisa,* op. cit., p. 3.
English translation: "From Scribe's Selva I got the idea of the agnation of the *Orphan of Lancisa*. The rest of the melodrama is completely invented by me. I hope you will forgive the simplicity of the subject, which had to be short, and I hope you will excuse the flaws of my work when you consider that it is for me a first attempt at this genre, neither totally serious not totally jolly, and that it is a drama written by a young and unexperienced pen, who barely dares to spread her timid and insecure wings to fly."

[49] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1859. English translation: *The Soldier's Family.*

[50] Luisa Amalia Paladini, "Al Cortese Lettore", in *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., p. 2.
English translation: "a novel about the story of a family should accurately describe the life we lead."

which they hope will be freed from the foreign invader, and to that of other main characters: doctor Geronti, his son Carlo Geronti (doctor in the Savoy armed forces and husband of Eufrosina Molandi), Giuliana (a peasant woman and close friend of Marianna) and Adriano Demachy (a French general whose life is saved by Carlo during the war), who marries Matilde Molandi after a long and tormented love story. Although Paladini does not define her novel as "historical," it is evident the importance of history in the development of the plot and the unwinding of the family's personal happenings, strongly affected by the war and the political upheavals in Turin. Indeed, what strikes the most about Paladini's only novel is the way she is capable of combining the *macro*historical events that were taking place in Europe and the *micro*history of an ordinary middle-class family who, just like many other families in Turin, was dealing with everyday issues while facing the possible death of their beloved ones at war. The prevalence of *micro*history over *macro*history is evident already in the title, in which the author intentionally shifts the focus from the Colonel to his family, the actual protagonist of the text. What she is mostly interested in is the life of the people who are never mentioned in historical recounts, those who cannot—or are not allowed to—be on the battlefield and are left behind, living in cities that are strongly affected by the conflict and waiting for their beloved ones to come back home alive. Her intent to focus on *micro*history is also stated in the text itself. In the fourth part, she indeed affirms that her goal is to "porre in luce le virtù credute rare, perché nascoste fra le domestiche pareti, di poche private persone"[51] instead of retelling "le sventure dei potenti della terra a tutti note."[52] Nevertheless, the narration of political matters and alliances—explained in detail so that the readers could easily follow the plot—and of episodes occurred to the male characters in the battlefields, is extremely accurate and vivid. For such reason, we are led to think that Paladini carried out a long and methodical research before penning the novel, a thorough study of history and geography, so that her recount could be as truthful as possible. It is particularly interesting, in this regard, the last part of the novel when the omniscient narrator reports how Vittorio managed to survive during Napoleon's Russian campaign thanks to General Demachy and the brave French soldier Bernard. Paladini describes meticulously the way Vittorio, with a wounded leg, and Bernard could escape a massacre carried out by the Russian army, and how they managed to hide in the woods—dress up as Russians not to freeze and not be recognized and killed—and ride back to Vienna. Their

---

[51] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., p. 304.
English translation: "shed light on the human virtues that are usually regarded as rare because often hidden inside the domestic walls of some private people."
[52] Ibid. p. 304. English translation: "the misfortunes of the world's most powerful people everybody knows all about."

itinerary is depicted in detail, with names of small villages and rivers, so much so that it seems the author was there herself. The chances Paladini visited Russia, or even Siberia—where Demachy is held prisoner at the end of Napoleon's campaign—are extremely low, and the fact that such a long journey is not mentioned in her biography leads us to think she was never there. Therefore, we can only suppose that in order to be as accurate as possible in her recount, she patiently and scrupulously studied all that concerned the historical and geographical aspects of such a massive military endeavor. It must be pointed out that she published her novel almost two decades after Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* (1842), the most popular Italian historical novel of the 19th century, and, thus, she was aware of the theorizations about the use of history—of "the truth as subject"[53]—postulated by many intellectuals of the time. Similarly to Manzoni, Paladini created a group of fictional characters who could perfectly fit into the historical framework she chose for her novel, which extends from the war between the Kingdom of Savoy[54] and post-revolutionary France in 1792, passing through the French domination over Piedmont, to the regained independence of the Savoy's realm in 1814 after the final defeat of Napoleon. The selection of this specific historical period, not very distant in time from the moment Paladini penned her text, is atypical but very significant at the same time. Historical novels are usually set in a faraway past; hence, the peculiar choice of narrating events that happened only sixty to forty years before could be connected to the particular political circumstances under which Paladini was writing. Indeed, her book was published in 1859, at the core of the Italian Risorgimento and only two years before the unification of Italy, which took place in 1861. Her text is charged with references to patriotism, honor, freedom, loyalty to the house of Savoy and to the homeland. The rhetoric of patriotism permeates the whole narration and is promoted and strongly supported also from women's side. Despite the pain of being separated from a husband or a son, all the female characters display their strength and devotion to the cause of independence by encouraging their male relatives to do what was right for their country. Marianna, depicted as an example of modesty, honesty and integrity, explains in various occasions to her daughters how a woman is supposed to act in order to be helpful to her husband and to the homeland—probably conveying the opinion of the author herself on the matter. At the very beginning of the novel, when the news of the war arrives in Turin and

---

[53] In his letter to Marquis D'Azeglio, Alessandro Manzoni wrote that every literary genre must have "the useful as its goal, the truth as its subject and the interesting as its means." Alessandro Manzoni, *Sul Romanticismo: lettera al Marchese Cesare D'Azeglio*, op.cit., p. 8. Such theory supported by many fellow intellectuals of the time, and it is explained more in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation, paragraph 3.1.

[54] The Kingdom of Sardinia was also known as the Kingdom of Savoy since it was governed by the House of Savoy from 1720 to 1861.

Colonel Molandi is called back in the army, his daughters get upset until their mother reminds them:

> Non siete voi figlie di un militare? Non sapevate voi da gran tempo che ogni soldato è in debito di difendere il proprio paese? E non siete voi piemontesi? Non vi ho forse insegnato che tutto sacrificare dobbiamo ai propri doveri e alla patria? Non l'amate voi forse? … Purtroppo noi donne non possiamo sacrificare che i nostri affetti; sacrifizio immenso lo so, ma appunto perché immenso, più degno di lei e di noi.[55]

Marianna's perspective on the role of women in the struggle for independence follows the trend of many Italian women writers of the time who supported *Risorgimento* and conveyed patriotic messages in their texts. As discussed in the first chapter, during the 19th century in Europe, women began to be regarded as the embodiment of the motherland to be cherished and protected. In Italy in particular, women's identification with the notion of the "mother of the nation" was often promoted by female writers themselves, who saw the fulfilment of their roles of wives and mothers—of the men fighting for their country—as their fundamental contribution to the independence cause. Marianna perfectly fits in that narrative, so much so that she refers to the country with a feminine pronoun, "lei" ("her") as to remark the connection between the feminine and the land. Nevertheless, in the narration, Paladini makes Marianna cross the boundaries of her calm and ideal life, as well as the confines of her country. Indeed, when her husband is wounded and caught prisoner by the French army, Marianna decides to leave Turin and goes to the French encampment in order to take care of him and help him recover. Remarkably, her choice to put her life at risk to assist her husband in a foreign territory is described by Paladini as a great demonstration of female strength, because she does that out of her love for him as well as to fulfil her duties as the wife of a soldier. In this passage, Paladini praises Marianna's conduct but she is also very concerned of what the readers could think of such an unusual female behavior, so much so that she promptly justifies the choice of her character in order to keep her reputation intact:

> Ora, io non vorrei che le mie leggitrici, se pure ne avrò, credessero che la Marianna fosse una di quelle ardite donne dai modi risoluti e maschili, romanzesche viragini che credono di potersi fare superiori al loro sesso bevendo sciampagna e fumando sigari dell'Avana. . . . No, la Marianna era donna, e non altro; ma donna amantissima del marito e dei figli, e altamente convinta della santità dei doveri che questi affetti purissimi le imponevano. . . . Sempre lieta e paga della sua sorte, visse sempre coi figli e pei figli, de' quali, come già dissi, fu nutrice, istitutrice ed amica; e se taluno in quel suo riposato e tranquillo vivere le avesse detto: —Verrà giorno che volontariamente tu lascerai la famiglia per andare sola in mezzo a un esercito di soldati nemici, essa ne avrebbe riso . . . tanto era il femminile ritegno e la timidezza di lei. Eppure, ora vi

---

[55] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., p. 7.
English translation: "Aren't you the daughters of a soldier? Haven't you known for a long time that a soldier must defend his own country? Aren't you from Piedmont? Haven't I taught you that we must sacrifice all that we have to our duties and to our homeland? Don't you love your homeland? … Unfortunately, us women can only sacrifice your beloved ones; a great sacrifice, I know, but precisely because it is great, it is worthier of her and of us."

> andava sola, senza timore come senza ostentare coraggio, preoccupata soltanto nel pensare allo stato nel quale avrebbe trovato il marito. . . . Il coraggio della Marianna fu superiore a tutti gli ostacoli.[56]

Paladini's inner conflict about women's behaviour—torn between the propriety imposed on them by society and the desire to be more than housewives—is often noticeable in her novel, as it is in her biography. In this extract as well as in other passages, she depicts her female characters as ideal women, champions of modesty and feminine conduct, only to put them in situations where they can display their boldness and courage. She later justifies their subversive acts through their devotion to the family or the homeland, remarking once again their great feminine virtues.

In the *macro*historical context narrated in the novel, a theme that is often recurrent and treated by Paladini through a very interesting perspective, is that of the enemy, the *other*. At the beginning of the story, the enemy of the Kingdom of Savoy is France, and it is the war against France that keeps Colonel Molandi away from his family and makes him risk his life. When Molandi is held prisoner, he is cured and well-kept—mainly because of his high position in the army—by a French General, who also welcomes Marianna in the camp and treats both of them with humanity and kindness. During a further war with the French army, Carlo—Eufrosina's husband—participates as a doctor of the Italian army and saves the life of a French soldier. This enemy soldier is Adriano Demachy, who is thus sent to Turin as an exiled prisoner. Demachy, a courageous and kind young man from a very wealthy French household, becomes a close friend of the Molandi family. Although their nationalities would not allow any affection between them, Demachy is treated as part of the family, so much so that he falls in love with the middle daughter, Matilde, and he is loved back by her. Their marriage cannot be immediately celebrated precisely because of the war between their two countries, and later because of the French invasion of Piedmont. Matilde, despite her love for him, declares she cannot marry a man whose country conquered her homeland and refused to grant it independence. More than a decade later, during the Russian campaign, it is Demachy who saves

---

[56] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., pp. 24-26.
English translation: "Now, I would not want my female readers, if I have some, to think that Marianna was one of those daring women who behave decisively and in a masculine way, one of those novelistic viragos who believe themselves superior to their own sex because they drink champagne and smoke cigars from Havana. . . . No, Marianna was a woman, and nothing more; but she was a woman who loved her husband and her children very much, and was deeply convinced of the sanctity of her duties towards her beloved ones. . . . She was always glad and satisfied of her life, she always lived with and for her children, to whom she was, as I've already said, both wet-nurse, teacher and friend; and if someone, during one of those tranquil days, had told her: —One day you will voluntarily leave your children to go alone among the enemy's armies, she would have laughed . . . because of her feminine restraint and timidity. And yet, now she was going there alone, without any fear as well as without flaunting her courage, she was only worries about her husband and his medical conditions. . . . Marianna's courage exceeded all the obstacles."

the life of Vittorio Molandi risking his own, and it is a French soldier, Bernard, who helps Vittorio to come back safe and sound to Turin. At the end of the tragic campaign, Demachy is lost in a prison camp in Siberia and Carlo embarks in a difficult trip to Russia to rescue him and bring him back to Turin. There, Demachy can finally marry Matilde Molandi, now that Napoleon is defeated and the Kingdom of Savoy regains its freedom under its legitimate king, Vittorio Emanuele I. Such a complicated relationship with the enemy, who is both foreign and kind, the *other* to be defeated on the battlefield but also someone to respect and even love, puts history and the wars fought in Europe during the 19th century in a different and daring perspective: a sort of fratricide or civil war. Demachy is not too different from Carlo or Vittorio Molandi, is a wealthy man who is risking his life for his country and, when the family gets to know him in Turin, far away from the battlefield, they appreciate his loyalty, honesty and manners. The same happens to him; when Carlo saves his life, he is surprised to meet such a valorous and generous Italian man, since, being his enemies, he obviously had a series of stereotypical opinions about Italian people. The issue of *otherness* appears in the novel from the very beginning, and it is strictly connected with the unwinding of the events. Nevertheless, what makes Paladini's novel particularly interesting is the fact that the *other* is often presented as the same as us, suffering for the same reasons and supported by the same set of values. Moreover, what really impedes Matilde and Demachy's wedding are not their different origins but the political issues that divide their countries, as the narrator specifies in various passages. Matilde, when explaining to Demachy why she cannot marry him, says: "The French are not generous to us,"[57] referring to the fact that, despite the previous promises, France refused to grant freedom to the Kingdom of Savoy and turned it into a French province. Later, the same position is held by Carlo, who swears to his French friend that "if one day France gives independence to Piedmont, I myself will come to find you to take you back to Matilde; you are worthy of each other."[58] Paladini seems willing to remark that the people beyond the borders are not born enemies, they are rather made that way by political leaders, who are often distant from the ordinary life of common citizens. Such a position, expressed by a woman who was supporting Italian unification and independence from a foreign domination, appears very sympathetic and extremely modern for the time. Even in this case, an important lesson comes from the words pronounced by Marianna, when her son Vittorio does not want to greet Demachy, right after his first arrival in Turin. Vittorio, then a young boy, justifies his bad

[57] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., pp. 265. Original quote: "i Francesi non sono generosi con noi."
[58] Ibid. pp. 271. Original quote: "Se un giorno la Francia assicurasse l'indipendenza del Piemonte, verrei io stesso a cercarvi per condurvi a Matilde; voi siete degni l'uno dell'altro."

manners towards the French soldier saying—"You are worse than an ogre, you are French. . . . France declared us war, and French people wounded my father, I will not forget that!"[59] Marianna, expressing again the author's opinion, cleverly responds to her son:

> Vittorio! . . . Fuori del campo di battaglia non ci sono nemici. . . . che colpa ne ha questo signore? La guerra la fa il suo governo al nostro re, ed egli compie il suo dovere combattendo pel proprio paese. Se tuo padre fu ferito dalle armi francesi, quanti soldati francesi non furono feriti da quelle piemontesi? . . . Avvezzati, figlio mio, a giudicare le cose nel loro giusto aspetto. Il soldato che pugna nelle ordinanze nemiche, non è per noi un nemico personale. . . . odiare l'uomo perché nacque in un paese straniero è fanatismo.[60]

The issue of history, representation of the female gender and the question of *otherness* presented in the novel and discussed in this paragraph may help us better understand Paladini's perspective on such themes. The way she inserted issues related to history, gender and *otherness* in her previous compositions and, especially, in her historical novel can also shed light on the way she dealt with the same matters in her lyrical and historical tragedy *Rosmunda in Ravenna,* that will be analysed in the following subchapter.

---

[59] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *La Famiglia del Soldato*, op. cit., p. 144.
Original quote: "Siete peggio dell'orco, siete un Francese. . . . I Francesi ci fanno la guerra, hanno ferito il babbo, e non me lo scordo veh!"

[60] Ibid. pp. 143-144. English translation: "Vittorio! . . . Outside of the battlefield there are no enemies. . . . Why do you blame this man? The war was declared by his government to our king, and he is fulfilling his duty by fighting for his country. Your father was wounded by French weapons, but how many French soldiers were wounded by the weapons of the Savoy armies? . . . Get used, my son, to judge things from the right perspective. The soldier who fights in the enemy armies, is not for us an enemy on a personal level. . . . To hate a man because he was born in a foreign country is to be a fanatic."

2. *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*

2.1 Plot, origins and cultural influences

The lyrical drama *Rosmunda in Ravenna* was penned by Luisa Amalia Paladini in 1837 and staged for the first time on the 26th of December of that same year at Gran Teatro La Fenice in Venice.[61] The text of the tragedy was written by Paladini, while the music that accompanied the performance—being a "lyrical tragedy"—was composed by Giuseppe Lillo, a popular Italian composer and musician of the time. The fact that the tragedy features a musical accompaniment should not come as a surprise, since during the Romantic period the opera was the most acclaimed theatrical genre in Italy. As explained in detail in the second chapter of this dissertation,[62] the Romantic era in Italy was not a prolific moment for theatrical productions. While classical tragedies were still performed, there were only few new dramatic compositions and those that reached the stage were not particularly praised. As suggested by Giovanni Antonucci, Romantic theatre was mainly characterized by a flourishing of lyrical dramas and melodramas,[63] particularly appreciated by the audience precisely because of the music. Indeed, according to Antonucci, composers as Verdi and Donizetti were the most celebrated dramatists of the Romantic period.[64] Paladini's choice of penning a lyrical tragedy, and, immediately after that, a melodrama, might be due to various reasons. If the popularity of the genre and the income that many nights of performance could produce was certainly a strong motivation, it could also have been a personal challenge towards a genre she had never dealt with before. As we have previously discussed, Paladini wrote many different texts belonging to many different genres, proving her ability to move from pedagogical essays to novel writing, from poetry to drama. Therefore, experimenting the composition of an operatic *libretto* might have intrigued the author, who was an admirer of other famous librettists of the time, as hinted at by the preface to her melodrama *L'Orfana di Lancisa.* Unfortunately, it is not clear whether Paladini was the first to conceive the subject, and she later contacted the compositor Giuseppe Lillo, or it was Lillo the one who wrote the music first and then asked her to pen a *libretto*. In both cases, we should consider two important elements that can highlight to what extent Paladini was a respected and appreciated writer, despite the social antagonism against women. First, a popular

---

[61] According to the archive of the Gran Teatro la Fenice, it was first represented on the 26th of December 1837 at 8 pm and it was performed for 17 nights, until the 22nd of February 1838. Information retrieved from: https://web.archive.org/web/20150923173411/http://www.archiviostoricolafenice.org/ArcFenice/ShowFile.ashx?fileType=Show&id=49570 [accessed 4/09/2019].

[62] See Chapter II paragraph 1.1.

[63] Giovanni Antonucci, *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, op. cit., pp. 62.

[64] Ibid. p. 62.

composer of the time decided, or accepted, to collaborate with her in the creation of a lyrical tragedy to be represented on stage. Second, notwithstanding the social misconceptions about women in the theatrical environment, her drama was quite successfully staged in a renowned Italian theatre for many nights, without any harm to her reputation.

The reasons that led Paladini to choose such subject—if it was her choice and not Lillo's—could not be identified since there are no letters or any other biographical information that can shed light on this matter. However, the story of Rosmunda and the Lombardic invasion of Italy were certainly popular historical episodes recounted in history books and many other literary works. Indeed, a number of texts were written about the this topic, which could have easily influenced or inspired Paladini in the writing of her tragedy. The first that is worth mentioning is certainly the tragedy in five acts written by her friend Teresa Bandettini, writer and *improvvisatrice* from Lucca, also known as Amarilli Etrusca, in 1827.[65] Bandettini penned her drama ten years before Paladini, and conceived it as a traditional tragedy, following the classical canons and the Aristotelian unities. Bandettini's tragedy is indeed divided into five acts, written in prose, and does not feature the Romantic and almost gothic elements that, as we will see, characterise Paladini's *Rosmuda*. As a matter of facts, Bandettini was a strong supporter of the classical tradition—"classicissima"[66] according to Carlo Sforza—and did not appreciate the newborn Romantic movement. On the contrary, she criticised the spreading of Romanticism in literature in various occasions. Another tragedy titled *Rosmunda* that could have had an impact on both the works of Paladini and Bandettini was penned by the celebrated Italian playwright Vittorio Alfieri between 1779 and 1780, and published in 1783. Alfieri, who was a friend and a great admirer of Bandettini and her extemporaneous poetry, shaped his tragedy following the classical canons and divided it into the five traditional acts. He centred the whole plot on the hatred between Rosmunda and Romilda, which subsequently led to Rosmunda's revenge plan towards Romilda. In Alfieri's drama, as highlighted by Guido Santato, Rosmunda is cruel and vindictive, driven by a powerful jealousy towards the young and innocent Romilda, loved by Almachilde—with whom Rosmunda is, in turn, desperately in love.[67] Alfieri's *Rosmunda*, his only tragedy set during the Middle-Ages, was very successful at the time, so much so that it

---

[65] Amarilli Etrusca (Teresa Bandettini), *Rosmunda in Ravenna: a tragedy*, Lucca: Dalla Ducal Tipografia Bertini, 1827.

[66] Carlo Sforza, "Amarilli Etrusca e il Romanticismo", in *Giornale Ligustico di Archeologia, Storia e Letteratura*, XIX (1892), p. 395.
Retrieved from: http://www.storiapatriagenova.it/Scheda_vs_info.aspx?Id_Scheda_Bibliografica=2488 [accessed 05/09/2019].

[67] Guido Santato, "Vittorio Alfieri, *Rosmunda.* Edizione critica a cura di Martino Capucci, Asti, Casa D'Alfieri, 1979, pp. xxii-337", in *Lettere Italiane,* Vol. 33 n. 3 (luglio - settembre 1981), pp. 443 - 447. Retrieved from: www.jstor.org/stable/26260805 [Accessed 05/09/2019].

was translated into English and performed in London with the great Adelaide Ristori, the most famous Italian actress of the 19th century, as the protagonist.[68] Therefore, we can easily suppose that an intellectual of the calibre of Paladini read the play, and maybe even saw it performed in some Italian theatres. Nevertheless, although she may have been inspired by the subject, she was surely not influenced by Alfieri's plot, which is very different from that ideated by the Tuscan writer.

In the preface to her lyrical tragedy, Paladini recovers the popular historical events that led to her marriage with Alboin and his subsequent death at the hands of Almachilde. She also briefly summarizes the following circumstances that forced Rosmunda to flee to the city of Ravenna, where the play is set. The historical events narrated in the preface, and later mentioned in the dramatic text itself, were probably retrieved from the renowned *Historia Langobardorum* penned by Paolo Diacono around 789 d.C., later cited by Nicolò Machiavelli in his *Istorie Fiorentine*, published posthumously in 1532.[69] Paladini recounts that Alboin, king of the Lombards, killed Rosmunda's father, Commundo king of the Gepids, and then forced Rosmunda to become his wife in order to take possession of her lands and people. Furthermore, to inflict a further humiliation to his dead enemy and his family, Alboin drank from Commundo's skull and obliged Rosmunda to do the same. As his wife and a war prisoner whose life was constantly in danger, Rosmunda could not refuse to comply with Alboin's order, but she swore she would seek revenge. Indeed, she later convinces Almachilde, a young man who is in love with her, to kill Alboin with the promise of making him her future spouse and king. Almachilde murders Alboin but the Lombards find out, thus Rosmunda and Almachilde have no choice but to flee to Ravenna, where Itulbo, the Exarch[70] of Ravenna, agrees to protect them. Nevertheless, Itulbo falls in love with Rosmunda, and it is precisely "on the consequences of such love"[71] that the tragedy is centred. Romilda and other characters featured in Alfieri and Bandettini's tragedies are not present in the drama penned by Paladini, which develops around a very limited group of *dramatis personae:* Rosmunda, Almachilde, Itulbo, Menete (Itulbo's counsellor), Eugilde (Rosmunda's maid) and Idobaldo (the Lombardic Ambassador in Ravenna).

---

[68] An English translation of Vittorio Alfieri's *Rosmunda* was carried out by Thomas Williams in 1856 and printed by R.S. Francis, Catherine Street, Strand, London. In June 1856, the tragedy was performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre in London by an Italian dramatic company and Adelaide Ristori in the role of Rosmunda. Source: https://books.google.it/books?id=jeYKo0Inz94C&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false [Accessed 05/09/2019].

[69] Guido Santato, "Vittorio Alfieri, *Rosmunda.* Edizione critica a cura di Martino Capucci, Asti, Casa D'Alfieri, 1979, pp. xxii-337", op. cit., p. 443.

[70] Exarch was a title given to the governors of a distant provinces under the Byzantine Empire.

[71] Luisa Amalia Paladini, "Avvertimento", *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, Venezia: Tipografia Molinari Edit., 1837, p. 5. Original quote: "sulle conseguenze di un tale amore."

2.2 Gender representation and the issue of *otherness*

The play opens with Rosmunda and Almachilde as guests at Itulbo's court in Ravenna, despite the doubts expressed by Itulbo's courtesans about the circumstances of their escape. Indeed, in Act I, Scene i, the *chorus*—comprising courtesans and nobleman—questions Menete about the reasons for Itulbo's decision to host Rosmunda, and announces the arrival of the Lombardic ambassador Idobaldo from Pavia. Rosmunda is depicted for the first time by the *chorus*—which, as in Greek tragedy, represents the collective opinion—as a cruel woman and evil wife, a traitor who should immediately be handed over to the Lombards. The first words employed to introduce Rosmunda to the public are all negative adjectives related to the crime she committed: "sposa ria," "cruda donna," "empia consorte," "iniqua" and "traditrice."[72] Nevertheless, the *chorus* does not take into account the reasons for her terrible deed, which are later explained by Menete. Itulbo's counsellor, indeed, defends Rosmunda and justifies the murder of her husband as a legitimate act of revenge against the man who killed her father and stole her realm:

> MENETE:
> Ah! tacete; storia orrenda
> Fece giusti i suoi furori,
> No Rosmunda non si renda,
> Noi saremmo i traditori:
> No l'Italia il tristo esempio
> Di viltade aver non dè.
> D'Alboino il fero scempio
> Fu vendetta, error non è.[73]

Remarkably, in his brief monologue, Menete mentions Italy for the first time in the drama and refers to it as a country, although it was not a unified nation neither in the early Middle Ages nor when Paladini penned her drama. Italy and the notion of homeland will be recurrent themes in the tragedy, as we will see in the next paragraph. Right from the beginning, Rosmunda appears as a complex character whose personality is not univocal. She is perceived in opposite ways, depending on who is looking at her. Since Rosmunda does not enter the stage until Act I Scene iv, it is the gaze of the viewers that shapes the way she is perceived, giving the audience a contradictory idea of who she is. As in the case of Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots*, the readers (or the audience) already know the backstory and are slowly introduced to the female protagonists, whose personalities appear as multifaceted and multilayered. Just like Mary and

---

[72] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, Venezia: Tipografia Molinari Edit., 1837, Act I, Scene i, p. 7. English translation: "evil spouse", "cruel woman", "wicked wife", "malevolent", "traitor".

[73] Ibid. Act I, Scene i, p. 8. English translation: "Ah! Be silent! She acted righteously to get revenge for what happened to her, no we could never betray Rosmunda otherwise we will be the traitors: No, Italy does not need to witness such a sad example of cowardice. The terrible murder of Alboin was not a mistake, it was revenge."

Elizabeth, Rosmunda is perceived as a cruel woman by her enemies, but as a strong female figure by her people and cohorts: a queen who acted in order to vindicate her father and her dignity. A further *gazer* is represented by Itulbo, who regards Rosmunda as the archetype of the damsel in distress. Such perception clashes with the image of the cold and despotic queen created instead by Idobaldo who, as a Lombard, sees her as the merciless murderer of his King Alboin.

Rosmunda does not have many chances in the play to voice her thoughts and emotions. She only has one long monologue, in which she reveals her personality and expresses her feelings regarding the circumstances that led her to Ravenna. The choice of giving the female protagonist fewer dialogues and monologues than the other male characters can hardly be a coincidence. We can assume that this shortage of outlets for her character corresponds to her status as subaltern, whose voice cannot be heard. Being a woman, an orphan and a dethroned queen, Rosmunda embodies vulnerability from many points of view, but she is also depicted as a warrior who fights for herself and her political rights. Indeed, she feels compelled to protect herself and her people against the danger of a foreign domination, and for such reason, she often appears crueler than she really is. Her verses are very much charged with *pathos*, and mainly focused on two subjects: love, for her spouse Almachilde, and revenge, towards those who deprived her of her lands. Similarly to Elizabeth I in Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots*, Rosmunda is trapped into a series of political dynamics that push her to demonstrate her power by acting violently and mercilessly, as a male warrior or a king would do. She feels she is asked to compromise her caring nature in order to be recognized as a fearsome enemy and a respected leader. She seems to be constantly torn between opposite perceptions of herself, without being able to assert her individual voice and to define her own subjectivity. Her identity appears to be always filtered by a looking-glass and to change according to the person looking in that mirror, which constrains her into two stereotypical categories: the weak damsel and the wicked woman. Such categorizations do not appear to have a common ground, since when she acts as a sovereign in a public space, she is regarded as cruel, malevolent and deceitful, but when she thinks as a "private" woman in love, she is demanded to leave aside her feelings and behave like a monarch: "Se Rosmunda ancor tu sei, tacer deve in te l'amor."[74] The rhetoric of the damsel in distress, as previously mentioned, is particularly reiterated by Itulbo, who is in love with her and wishes she would leave Almachilde and marry him instead. Interestingly, Itulbo and the *chorus* are also the only characters who call her "Queen", "Regina", while all the other

[74] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene vii, p.15. English translation: "If you are queen Rosmunda, you need to forget about love."

male protagonists do not use such epithet when addressing her. Her position as a queen seems to be implicitly questioned, especially by Idobaldo and the Lombards who arrive in Ravenna to sentence her to death. Mary Stuart, in Deverell's tragedy, even when imprisoned in the Tower of London, is still recognized by her people and by Elizabeth herself as the Queen of Scots. Differently, Rosmunda seems to have been deprived of her title immediately after her crime.

The sexual power structure that regulates society—described by Millett in 1969[75]—does not allow women to have power unless they conform to a very specific behavioral code. As in the case of Elizabeth I, who had to sacrifice her femininity and personal life in order to be accepted and recognized as a powerful monarch, Rosmunda would have to cope with her fate as Alboin's wife if she wanted to keep her regal status. The transgression of gender norms she enacts when she decides to subvert her social position, moving from victim to tormentor, from oppressed to oppressor, makes her unworthy of her crown as well as of her femininity. Through Idobaldo's words—which represent the opinion of Lombardic people—she is described as a virago, a cruel and savage woman who dared to kill a respected and acclaimed hero. As often remarked by many women writers of the 19th century, it was completely unacceptable for a woman to show any revengeful feelings, since they contrasted with the idea of the innocent and pure female soul created and reiterated by society. Mary Robinson, in her *A Letter to Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination* (1799), explains that women are not allowed to avenge their honor, because revenge is considered by society as an *unfeminine* act. In her epistle, she clearly refers to the rumors and slanders that affected her career, and highlights that whenever a woman "talks of punishing the villain who has destroyed her: he smiles at the menace, and tells her, *she is*, a WOMAN."[76] The situation Rosmunda found herself in is similar to that described by Robinson. She was not supposed to act on the outrages she endured because of her gender and, thus, had to behave according to specific norms. The fact that she decides to plot with Almachilde in order to kill Alboin, performing the male act of revenge, makes her lose her female qualities and, consequently, metaphorically turns her into an evil and almost genderless creature. For the same reason, her betrayal is considered by Idobaldo as unacceptable and punishable only with death, while Almachilde's role in Alboin's murder is regarded as marginal. Although Almachilde is the actual murderer, the one holding the sword and stabbing the king, he is not held responsible for Alboin's death, but is rather seen as another victim of Rosmunda's malevolent schemes. As a matter of fact, Idobaldo is ready to forgive his friend

---

[75] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, op. cit.

[76] Mary Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England, on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, London: printed for T.N. Longman, and O. Rees, No.39, Paternoster Row, 1799, p. 8.
Retrieved from: https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/robinson/mrletterfrst.htm [Accessed 25/05/2017].

Almachilde for what he has done, and he is sure Lombardic people would forgive him as well, since he is a valorous hero. On the contrary, Rosmunda's behavior is unforgivable at Idobaldo's eyes, and even after she explains the motives for her criminal act, he denies her any mitigating circumstances. The reason for this double standard probably resides in the *otherness* represented by Rosmunda, who is both a woman crossing the boundaries of her gender and a foreigner, belonging to a different population. As a woman, she acted outside of the realm of femininity, losing her female qualities and the right to be treated as a queen, while as a foreigner, she dared to rebel against the oppressor. For Idobaldo and the Lombards, she is the *other* on two different levels, therefore doubly inferior. Her revolt against patriarchal society, represented by her invader/husband, results even more intolerable because she was overpowered and subjugated as wife and as war prisoner. Subverting the dichotomy male/female, oppressor/oppressed implies a disruption of the power-political dynamics that regulate society, threatening male dominance and diminishing "his fitness for life."[77] As Woolf underlines in her *A Room of One's Own,* women's inferiority in society is constructed in opposition to male superiority so that men can perceive themselves as more powerful than they really are and, hence, legitimize their status as rulers.[78] Rosmunda's subversion of the social order is also conveyed through her own critics of society, expressed during her passionate speech. In her monologue, the protagonist explains to Idobaldo the reasons that led her to plan Alboin's murder. She implicitly portrays such an act as a revolt against the patriarchal power that subjugated her, but also against a foreign domination that invaded her realm. She openly defends herself against the accusations of killing a hero—her husband—by subverting the male notion of the hero itself. Remarkably, Paladini does not affirm her opinion through the *chorus*—that in the typical Romantic Italian tragedy expresses the author's thoughts—but employs the protagonist's voice to criticize male violence and its consequences on ordinary people's lives.

IDOBALDO:
Trucidato a tradimento
Fu un eroe…

ROSMUNDA:
Eroe dov'è?
L'Alpi varcò l'iniquo
E al padre mio togliea
E regno, e vita, e vittima
Tremante me traea
All'aborrito talamo
Lordo di sangue ancor.
In queste gesta orribili
Dite, l'eroe dov'è?

---

[77] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, op. cit., p. 41.
[78] Ibid. p. 41.

Mostri! Son nomi vani
Per voi pietade, onore;
Ebbri di sangue, insani,
Bello è per voi l'orrore;
Pace alle fredde ceneri
Per voi si toglie ancor.
Quanto è feroce un barbaro
Tutto Alboin mostrava,
Orrida tazza porgermi
Del Padre il teschio osava:
Bevi Rosmunda, disse,
Bevi col genitor.
Ah! Troppo l'empio visse,
Dovea svenarlo allor.[79]

Rosmunda accurately describes the terrible circumstances of her father's death and her subsequent forced wedding, highlighting how all those attributes that make Alboin a hero in Idobaldo's eyes are nothing but the most negative traits a warrior can have. Indeed, she remarks the importance of values as pity and honor, which distinguish men from savages during armed conflicts.

Interestingly, what fades into the background in the various narrations of Rosmunda's story is the rape she endured. The violence she suffered is not seen as a valid motivation to wish for revenge and, at the same time, is not considered important enough to justify Alboin's murder. The reason for such decriminalization of rape is explained, according to Evelyn Picon Garfield, by her status as object, subaltern and dominated.[80] The subject legitimizes itself and its power through its position as "subject of sexuality,"[81] in opposition to the object of sexuality, which is, therefore, powerless and objectified. Sexuality and power, as theorized by Millett in 1969, coincide and are directly proportional to each other inside a hierarchy scale that sees the subject on the top and the object at the bottom of the scale. In this context, those who have the power appear as sexual subjects, and are thus categorized as the dominators, penetrators and superiors. On the contrary, those who are subjected to that same power fall into the opposite group: the dominated, penetrated and inferiors.[82] Rosmunda is not a subject because she is a woman, she

---

[79] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene v, p. 10.
English translation: "Idobaldo: A hero was traitorously slaughtered …" / "Rosmunda: Who is the hero? The evil man crossed the Alps to steal from my father his reign and his life, and he forced me, a scared and trembling victim, to the abhorred marital bed, still soaked with blood. In these terrible endeavors, tell me, can you recognize a hero? Monsters! For you, pity and honor are just empty words; you are drunk with blood, insane, you see horror as something beautiful; you cannot even let the dead rest in peace. Alboin showed me how merciless and ferocious can be a barbarian, he dared offer me the horrid cup made with my father's skull: drink Rosmunda, he said, drink with your father. Ah! Too long that evil man lived, I should have killed him sooner."

[80] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993, p. 97.

[81] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 777-795.
Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197 [Accessed 9/09/2019].

[82] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993, p. 97.

has been conquered and physically violated, thus she embodies all the characteristics of the dominated object. For such reason, the tortures she endures are not considered as a motivation for her revolt; as an object, she is supposed to accept her subaltern condition. The protagonist, as the story develops, proves instead her willingness to subvert her status and, through the murder of her oppressor, manages to reach a position of authority and subjectivity. Nevertheless, she is still regarded as an object of love and desire by both Almachilde and Itulbo, who will later betray her causing the tragic ending of the play. Following Evelyn Picon Garfield's analysis of women's dramas, Rosmunda's suicide can be interpreted as the ultimate attempt to assert her subjectivity and to escape her condition of object, both in society and inside sexual dynamics.

As we have already seen in her previous compositions, Paladini considers mercy, pity, honor and love as fundamental characteristics of any human being and despises the notion of violence for violence's sake, perpetrated by Alboin with the aim of proving his power and superiority. As we have already seen, in her novel war is conceived as a necessary instrument to defend the homeland, and should be conducted in a highly honorable way, respecting the enemies and their families. In Paladini's works it is possible to retrace a special attention towards the victims of conflicts, not merely those on the battlefield but also, and mainly, the women and children who are left behind and, as in Rosmunda's case, must often endure the cruelest sacrifices. A harsh critique of violence is also present at the end, when Rosmunda realizes how her will of revenge, her "barbaro furor,"[83] only caused pain and death. Even though this final awareness appears to lead the audience towards the traditional tragic *catharsis*, the drama ends precisely at that moment, with Rosmunda's suicide. Her decision to take away her life can be regarded from a double perspective. On the one hand, since Almachilde is dead, her suicide is a sacrifice she makes to save her country and herself from the dishonor of falling into Idobaldo's hands. She prefers to voluntarily renounce her life rather than being a prisoner or being killed by her enemies. On the other hand, death represents for women the only way to affirm themselves and their subjectivity in a society that treats them as objects. As in most Romantic women writers' tragedies, the death of the protagonist does not provide a purification or liberation from the negative feelings aroused by the dramatic narration, as typical of Greek *catharsis*, but rather suggests a more hopeless scenario. Indeed, the ending seems to reiterate the idea that there is no solution to women's conditions in a society that obliges them to be mere archetypes that fit

[83] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act II, Last Scene, p. 30. English translation: "barbaric rage."

into patriarchal categorizations, instead of subjects with authority over themselves and their lives.

2.3 Language and horror: the gothic side of *Rosmunda in Ravenna*

Rosmunda in Ravenna presents a traditional versification but an innovative use of the *chorus* and number of acts, which are two instead of the canonical five. As already mentioned, the *chorus* in the play is not used to convey the author's opinion—as Manzoni theorized—but, similarly to the Greek tradition, it represents the collective thought; in this case, that of Lombardic people. The verse employed by Paladini is very rhythmic, thanks to the alternate rhymes (ABABCDCD) and the lines mainly composed by eight syllables—although, as in *L'Orfana di Lancisa*, also hendecasyllables and nine-syllabic lines are included. The language used is comprehensible, without complex metaphors or external references, but also engaging and evocative, sentimental as in the typical melodramas of the time, with large use of terms related to emotions and feelings. When Almachilde confronts Idobaldo and tells him about his contrasted sentiments towards Rosmunda and Alboin's murder, he emphatically cries and reveals that his passionate and insane love for Rosmunda took away everything from him; his virtues, glory and even his country. Although Idobaldo sees in Almachilde's tears a sincere act of repentance, Almachilde underlines how the regrets he may have do not change his fate. He is doomed for what he has done, and since he will never be forgiven by his compatriots—personified as "homeland"—he can as well die.

> IDOBALDO:
> Piangi sì, da questo pianto
> Puro emerge il pentimento,
> Nel tuo cuore appieno spento,
> io, lo vedo, mai non fu.
>
> ALMACHILDE:
> Pentimento! Ah! Troppo il sento
> Per me scampo non vi è più.
> . . . .
> Dalla patria detestato
> Nella tomba scenderò.
> . . . .
> O giorni di vittoria
> Per sempre vi perdei,
> A terra infranti caddero
> Gli antichi miei trofei.
> Il nome della gloria
> Più non mi balza il cor;
> Virtude, fama, e patria
> Tutto mi tolse amor.[84]

[84] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene vi, pp. 12-13. English translation: Idobaldo: "Cry, yes, and from your crying it is possible to see how regretful you are, in your

The language charged with *pathos*, typical of Italian melodrama, is combined, in Paladini's text, with a more gothic taste in the description of blood and violence. Recurrent terms are: "sangue," "orrore," "barbaro," "pugnale"[85] which, together with a range of synonyms, bestow on the drama more horrific nuances. The tendency to include gothic elements in historical tragedies is not uncommon during the Romantic age, both in England and in Italy. As we have previously pointed out, dramas such as Joanna Baillie's *Orra* or Diodata Saluzzo's *Tullia* also feature a gothic atmosphere inside a historical setting. Starting from the image, evoked by Rosmunda herself, of her father's skull used as a drinking cup and of her marital bed soaked with blood—probably of her father's murder or even of her own rape—the drama appears to employ blood as a *leitmotiv* that connects horror, revenge and death. In particular, in Act I, Scene x, the protagonists are engaged in a dialogue that ends with the attempted murder of Rosmunda at the hands of Idobaldo. The Lombardic ambassador hopes, indeed, to convince Almachilde to avenge Alboin by killing Rosmunda with the same weapon; so that his sword can metaphorically "drink her blood."

IDOBALDO:
Prendi; A te si aspetta
D'Alboin la vendetta. Il sangue beva
Dell'empia donna.
. . . .

ROSMUNDA:
(strappa il pugnale a Idobaldo)
A me quel ferro.
. . . .
(Ad Amalchilde) Scellerato! Lo ravvisi?
Te ne armai la destra io stessa,
Ma il delitto che divisi
Questo acciar non compirà:
Trema, trema, l'ora appressa
Che te pure immolerà.

IDOBALDO:
Sì, quel sangue
Che rappreso stavvi ancora,
Del primier consorte esangue
Il secondo tergerà.[86]

---

heart, I can see that you always knew what was right and wrong" / Almachilde: "Repentance! Ah! I know too well there is no hope for me. . . . I will die knowing my country despises me. . . . O glorious days, I lost you forever, my old trophies fell down and got shattered. The word glory does not excite my heart anymore; virtue, fame and homeland, I lost everything because of love."

[85] English translation: "blood," "horror," "barbaric," as well as other synonyms as savage or cruel, and "dagger," but also other synonyms as sword and weapon.

[86] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene x, p.17. English translation: Idobaldo: "Take it! You are expected to vindicate Alboin with this dagger, let it drink the blood of that evil woman. . . . " / Rosmunda: "*(taking the dagger away from Idobaldo's hand)* Give that dagger to me. . . . *(to Almachilde)* I myself gave it to you, but the murder that you planned won't happen." / Idobaldo: "Yes, the blood

In the end, Idobaldo accuses Rosmunda of planning the death of her husband Almachilde, picturing her again as a cruel woman and a cold-blood murderer. Rosmunda, at the beginning of the play, corresponds to the typical heroine of horror stories: alone in the world, persecuted, tortured and violated, as it happened to the protagonists of famous English gothic novels such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole and *The Monk* (1796) by M.G. Lewis. Nevertheless, after the death of Alboin, Rosmunda changes into a fiercer figure who is neither weak nor in need to be rescued and protected by men. Indeed, she becomes strong and determined, capable of affirming her rights and holding a sword to defend herself. Such qualities make her even more unfeminine in the eyes of Lombardic society, and contribute to the creation of a distorted image of the protagonist, a stereotypical notion of the female virago from which Rosmunda cannot escape but through her own death—as we have seen in the previous paragraph.

Act I Scene x is particularly interesting also because of the use Paladini makes of deixis and stage directions in order to delineate a potential performance—that we know took place in 1837. The stage directions inserted by Paladini are very detailed about the sentiments of horror and shock that the actors should convey. She employs specific adjectives in brackets, such as "inorridito", "atterrito", "furente" and "supplichevole,"[87] which indicate both the way actors are supposed to perform—physically and gesturally—such emotions on stage, and the feelings their performance are supposed to arouse in the audience. Clear directions are also embedded in the dialogue itself, in which the protagonists use a series of adjectives, demonstratives and deictic verbs that make explicit references to the pragmatic context of the scene. For example, Idobaldo tells Almachilde that he will not be happy until he comes back to his valorous role as a Lombardic soldier,[88] and he later shows him the dagger that he used to kill his King, provoking horror and shock in his friend:

IDOBALDO:
Questo ferro conosci? *(escono fuori Rosmunda*
e Itulbo, e restano indietro)

ALMACHILDE:
(inorridito) Ah, lo nascondi!

IDOBALDO:
A te il recai…

---

that is still clotted on the dagger is from her first spouse, now bloodless, and it will be wiped off with the blood of her second husband."

[87] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene x, p. 17. English translation: "horrified," "terrified," "furious," "imploring."

[88] Ibid. Act I, scene x, p. 16. Original quote: "Infelice, mi avrai finché ridesta / Non sia la tua virtù."

ALMACHILDE:
Basta!

IDOBALDO:
Nel seno
del tuo re lo vibrasti, ed or non osi
Pur rimirarlo? prendi; a te si aspetta
D'Alboin la vendetta.
. . . .

ROSMUNDA:
(strappa il pugnale a Idobaldo) A me quel ferro.

ALMACHILDE:
(atterrito) Oh Dio![89]

The passage is so detailed that, as we have already seen with *Mary Queen of Scots*, it is able to recreate a veritable performance in the mind of the readers—even if they never saw the actual *mis-en-scène*. Every emotion is described through the use of adjectives in brackets and enhanced by the words uttered by the protagonists themselves, which convey precise actions and gestures. The demonstrative "questo" ("this") before the noun "ferro"[90] ("dagger") implicitly gives the readers the idea that Idobaldo is showing to Almachilde a specific dagger, which Almachilde clearly recognizes—even though he does not explicitly say so—, since he is "horrified" ("inorridito") and asks his friend to put it away. Again, even though stage directions do not recount what is physically going on, we can suppose that Idobaldo does not hide the dagger away, and keeps talking about its importance, since Almachilde tells him to stop. The dialogue continues without indications in brackets, but Idobaldo's use of the deictic verb "prendi" ("take it") informs us that he is still holding the dagger in his hand and is giving it to his addressee, Almachilde, in order for him to use it against Rosmunda. The female protagonist, who entered the scene at its beginning but remained in the background—as specified in the stage directions—moves towards centre stage and violently grabs the dagger out of Idobaldo's hands, saying "give it to me" ("a me quel ferro"). Although her movement is not described, we know she is close enough to take the dagger, therefore, once again, the dialogue itself implicitly conveys crucial information for the readers to understand what is happening, and consequently to imagine a potential *mise-en-scène*. It is interesting to notice that, while Almachilde, the

[89] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene x, pp. 16-17. English translation: Idobaldo: "do you recognise this dagger? *(Rosmunda and Itulbo arrive on stage, but remain in the background)*" / Almachilde: "*(horrified)* Ah, hide it from my sight!" / Idobaldo: "I gave it to you…" / Almachilde: "Stop it!" / Idobaldo: "You plunged it in the breast of your king and now don't you even dare to look at it? Take it, we all expect you to avenge Alboin." / Rosmunda: "*(snatching the dagger from Idobaldo's hands)* give me that dagger" / Almachilde: "*(shocked)* Oh my god!"

[90] "Ferro" is actually the material a dagger is made of, that is "iron," but it is employed in this case by Paladini as a rhetorical device, the synecdoche, to indicate the dagger.

valorous warrior, is first “horrified” and later “petrified” (“atterrito”) at the sight of the dagger, Rosmunda, a woman and the only female protagonist, has a completely opposite attitude. She dares to steal the weapon from Idobaldo’s hands and she is not afraid of using it to defend herself from the Lombardic people, who want her dead. Indeed, she explicitly says so a few verses later when she moves centre stage and ferociously wields the dagger against the Lombardic soldiers who threateningly walk towards her:

> *I Longobardi avanzano minacciosi verso Rosmunda.*
> *Un momento di silenzio. Rosmunda si libera da Almachilde e dalle damigelle che le stanno intorno: viene in mezzo alla scena, e brandendo ferocemente il pugnale.*
>
> ROSMUNDA:
> Me si vuole? Or via venite
> Stolta plebe io non ti temo;
> Pagheran le vostre vite
> Questo vostro ardir estremo,
> Vi appressate, se l’osate
> Vostra preda io qui mi sto.
>
> *I Longobardi retrocedono di qualche passo. Gli altri restano immobili compresi di stupore.*[91]

At the end of the passage, she even challenges her enemies, ironically referring to herself as a “prey” (“preda”) waiting for them to come closer and stab her, if they dare. However, the subsequent stage direction implicitly informs the readers that they do not dare doing so, and are so astonished by such a brave behavior from a woman that they either move backwards or stay still. While fear and a gothic terror characterise the whole drama and, to different extents, many of the characters—as the dialogues and stage directions clearly show—they seem not to affect Paladini’s Rosmunda, who appears determined and aware of her status right from the beginning. Rosmunda’s own words and actions shape a complex yet strong and tenacious character who implicitly presents herself to the audience as the only veritable valorous warrior of the play.

[91] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene x, pp. 18-19. English translation: “*The Lombardic soldiers moves threateningly towards Rosmunda. A moment of silence. Rosmunda frees herself from Almachilde and the maids who surrounds her: she moves to the centre of the stage and ferociously wields the dagger.*” / Rosmunda: “Do you want me? Come on, come here, foolish people, I am not afraid of you, you will pay with your life your ultimate acts of audacity, come closer if you dare, I am here as your prey. *The Lombardic people move backwards. All the rest stay still, in astonishment.*”

2.4 “No l’Italia il tristo esempio di viltade aver non dè”: History and the rhetoric of patriotism

Even though Paladini defines her drama as a lyrical tragedy, the historical connotations of *Rosmunda in Ravenna* are undeniable. The play is set in the early Middle Ages and narrates an episode that was quite renowned thanks to Paolo Diacono’s *Historia Langobardorum*, Nicolò Machiavelli’s *Istorie Fiorentine* and the various dramas and texts centred on the same subject. The tragedy displays a highly *macro*historical background, exemplified by the events that contextualize the dramatic narration—such as the Lombardic victory against the Gepids, the Lombardic descent into Italy and the struggle against the Exarch of Ravenna. Rosmunda and Almachilde’s escape from the Lombards and arrival at Itulbo’s court gives start to the whole plot, but the backstory explained by Paladini in the preface keeps recurring, proving thus to be the real core of the drama. Nevertheless, the *micro*historical content appears to be prominent in the dramatic narration, which focuses very much on the misadventures of the protagonist and her personal life. Rosmunda’s monologue conveys, in a few lines, the perspective of women as victims of historical events, dragged into conflicts that are out of their control and forced to deal with the consequences of men’s choices and actions. Although a queen, Rosmunda also represents the ordinary women left out of any political strategy and decision-making process, especially in time of war. As Marianna and her daughters in Paladini’s *La Famiglia del Soldato*, Rosmunda is left home during the conflict. She is not allowed on the battlefield where her father is killed and does not have any power to contrast Alboin when he reclaims her realm and her hand in marriage. Interestingly, in her play, Paladini shows to what extent the social status of a woman does not necessarily shield her from the difficulties that the female gender faces every day in a patriarchal society. Rosmunda cannot choose her own destiny and her own husband, and she is used by men as a commodity and an instrument to reach their goals. Indeed, Alboin marries her without her consent only because, through her social position, he can legitimately take possession of her father’s territories and appoint himself king. In the drama, the historical recount, mainly centred on the Lombardic invasion of Italy, is alternated with the narration of the protagonists’ struggle, love stories and revengeful plans. Remarkably, the cause of Almachilde and Rosmunda’s death is not an official condemnation or the imprisonment for the crime they committed, but jealousy and false accusations. Itulbo, in love with Rosmunda, hears Almachilde talking with Idobaldo about his regrets and, thus, confesses to Rosmunda that her husband is about to betray her and come back to his people. Rosmunda, shocked and in pain, kills Almachilde only to find out that he has always been loyal to her. Devastated by her own act, she immediately kills herself. Despite the difficult situations Rosmunda finds herself in

since her father's death, the danger she faces as a refugee in Ravenna and the many threats she receives from the Lombards, she loses her life by her own hand over a misunderstanding. Therefore, contrarily to what happens in *Mary Queen of Scots,* in Paladini's *Rosmunda* personal circumstances acquire, in the end, a greater prominence over politics and state affairs.

Finally, the use of history appears to be a well thought-out opportunity to introduce in the text a dark view of Italy's current historical and political situation, and to encourage her audience to take a strong position against foreign rulers. Although written before the unification of Italy and set in a period when the Italic peninsula was a mixture of different populations and dominations, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* features explicit references to the nation "Italia" and the concept of homeland. As previously discussed in the first chapter, in 1837, when Paladini was penning the drama, many intellectuals were promoting Italian independence from foreign dominations. Many women as well were participating in Italian *Risorgimento*, including Paladini who, despite a use of the language that does not reveal too much of her political thought, leaves some unequivocal hints for the audience in her lyrical tragedy. The only time Italy is openly mentioned in the drama is right at the beginning. As we have already seen, in Act I Scene i, Menete defends Rosmunda's decision to kill Alboin and refuses to hand her over to the Lombards, drawing an interesting parallelism between her and Italy:

MENETE:
Ah! Tacete; storia orrenda,
Fece giusti i suoi furori.
No Rosmunda non si renda
Noi saremmo i traditori:
No l'Italia il tristo esempio
Di viltade aver non dè.
D'Alboino il fero scempio
Fu vendetta, error non è.[92]

Menete cannot betray Rosmunda's trust because he feels compelled to show Italy the values of honor and loyalty. As he remarks, Italy does not need to witness acts of cowardice, but rather virtuous examples of patriotism and moral strength. Menete's words implicitly suggest that Rosmunda can be regarded as the ideal patriotic heroine Italy must look at. The murder commissioned by the protagonist, indeed, should not only be analysed in a gender perspective, as a subversion of the patriarchal society, but also as a rebellion against a foreign domination. Of course, the two perspectives are very much connected to each other by virtue of the parallelism between the feminine and the land, as typical of conquest narratives. Indeed, the

---

[92] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene i, p. 8.
English translation: "Ah! Be silent! She acted righteously to vindicate her terrible history, no we could never betray Rosmunda otherwise we will be the traitors: No, Italy does not need to witness such a sad example of cowardice. The terrible murder of Alboin was not a mistake, it was revenge."

close association between patriarchy and colonialism lies in the fact that the acts of dominating, conquering and penetrating a land are essentially a male prerogative. As pinpointed by Susan Bassnett, "for if the image of the colonizer is sexualized as a man bent on raping virgin lands, a woman from the colonizing culture is effectively erased."[93]As a matter of fact, Alboin conquered Rosmunda as if she was a virgin territory to be subjugated and, in the same way, he took possession of her father's realm. For such reason, Menete does not see Rosmunda as guilty of a crime, but rather as a valorous and honorable woman who avenged the outrage she endured and freed herself and her land from the invader.

The concept of homeland recurs several times in the text, and often in relation to the betrayal of Almachilde who moves from being a hero for his country to being the murderer of his king. In this case, "homeland" is a generic term not strictly related to Italy since Almachilde comes from the Lombardic Germany. The contexts in which such notion is employed suggests that Paladini meant to address the issue of treason against the homeland from a more general perspective. Almachilde knows his fellow citizens will never forgive him and, since he is despised by his homeland, he is lost and ready to die. Nevertheless, Idobaldo keeps on trying to convince him to leave Rosmunda to her destiny and go back to his country where he can regain his honor by fighting for his people. The emotional dialogue between the two of them—whose tones sound rather melodramatic—personifies the notion of homeland as if it was a real person; a mother who thinks, feels, and cares about her sons, notwithstanding their faults.

ALMACHILDE:
Dalla patria detestato
Nella tomba scenderò.

IDOBALDO:
Ah! Tu puoi, se ancora invitto,
Serbi in petto il tuo valore,
Espiare il tuo delitto
Detestando un empio amore,
Fu Rosmunda che ammaliato
Alla colpa ti guidò.
Te la patria sventurato
Più che reo certo pensò;
Spezza i vili tuoi legami.

ALMACHILDE:
Virtude, fama, e patria
Tutto mi tolse amor.

[93] Susan Bassnett, "Travel Writing and Gender", in P. Hulme & T. Young (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (pp.225-241). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 231.

IDOBALDO:
Ah! Pensa che alla patria
Fosti, e pur caro sei,
Puoi riedere alla gloria
Pugnando ancor per lei;
Il breve tuo delirio
Emenderà il valor.[94]

Remarkably, Paladini deals with the issue of the homeland as a general concept that has a moral value *per se*, whatever the country in question. In this passage, indeed, there are no references to a specific nation so that she can introduce a universal discourse on the importance of honoring the homeland. As she further develops in her novel *La Famiglia del Soldato*, what identifies a valorous person is not necessarily his/her presence on the battlefield but rather devoting his/her life to the country in as many ways as possible. Leading a virtuous life and helping the fellow citizens, for example, is regarded by Paladini as a form of patriotism. She considers patriotic also supporting the soldiers who fight for their country, and sacrificing a calm and peaceful life to spread ideals of freedom and independence. In her novel, Paladini praises people and soldiers of other countries—as the French Demachy—for their valour in defending their own homeland, proving again how much she reckons patriotism as a fundamental value for every person, in every culture. In particular, she probably hoped that her hints to the importance of protecting Italy and giving the country examples of courage would excite Italian people to actively engage with the Risorgimental movement. Paladini's discourse about valour and honour acquires a further significance if contextualized in the period she penned the tragedy—at the end of the 1830s—when the idea of a unified country was still a distant hope. Intellectuals were trying to raise awareness among the population about the necessity of fighting against the foreign domination but, at the same time, had to be extremely careful with the way they were conveying their revolutionary messages. Censorship was very strict in many Italian states, especially in those ruled by the Austrian Empire, therefore, patriotism was supposed to be accurately concealed. While the men featured in Paladini's drama discuss love, death, homeland and regret, presenting a series of issues that are typical of Romanticism—such as a contrasted and doomed passion that leads to the tomb—the greatest act of courage is carried out by a woman. Remarkably, Paladini depicts a female protagonist who rebels twice, as a woman and as a patriot, and manages to free both herself and her land from a foreign invader. Among all the

---

[94] Luisa Amalia Paladini, *Rosmunda in Ravenna: tragedia lirica in due atti*, op. cit., Act I, Scene vi, pp. 12-13. English translation: Almachilde: "I will die knowing my country despises me" / Idobaldo: "Ah! If your valour still triumphs in your heart, you can expiate your crime by repudiating your sinful love. It was Rosmunda who bewitched you and pushed you to commit a fault. Certainly our homeland thought you were guilty: thus, break your evil ties." / Almachilde: "Love took it all away from me, my virtue, fame and homeland" / Idobaldo: "Ah! Think about your homeland, you were and still are dear to her, so you can regain your lost glory by fighting again for her; your value will make her forget about your short moment of madness."

characters, Rosmunda is the only one who remains loyal to her principles and is capable of sacrificing her life and love for the well-being of her nation, representing thus the example of valour and honour that Menete thinks Italy needs to learn.

CHAPTER VI

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Egilona: drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros.* Close Reading and Analysis

1. Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in Romantic Spain

1.1 Life and works of a Cuban female writer in 19th century Spain

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda is an unusual figure in the context of Spanish Romanticism. She is still regarded as one of the most prominent Spanish Romantic poets, despite her Cuban origins and the difficulties she encountered when she first moved to Spain. She has been mostly remembered and passed on for her extraordinary poetry but, in her career, she addressed many different genres and, for a long period, she devoted herself to dramatic production. The unique circumstances of her early life had a fundamental importance in the development of her literary discourse and, for such reason, are worthy of an accurate examination. María Gertrudis de Los Dolores Gómez de Avellaneda y Betancourt, known as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, was born in Puerto Principe (Cuba) on the 23rd of March 1814, from a Spanish father, Manuel Gómez de Avellaneda, a naval officer belonging to a noble Spanish family, and a creole Cuban mother, Francisca de Arteaga y Betancourt, whose family was very wealthy and of Spanish origins.[1] Her father died when she was still a child and, a year later, her mother got married again to another Spanish man, Gaspar de Escalada, from La Coruña. Together with her mother, her step-father and her only brother, Manuel, she moved to Spain in 1839; first to La Coruña and finally to Sevilla, where she started writing. Indeed, in Sevilla she began collaborating with the magazine *La Aureola* under the pseudonym of "La Peregrina", and penned her first drama, a tragedy titled *Leoncia* (1840) which was successfully staged in June 1840. After the triumph of her drama, she decided to move to Madrid with her brother in order to pursue a literary career and she was immediately accepted as a member of the literary and artistic circle called Liceo de Madrid. In 1841, she published her first novel, *Sab*, and her first poetry collection, while her second novel, *Dos Mujeres*, came out in 1842. Between 1844 and 1858 she wrote for the stage twenty-three plays, which were performed with great success by famous actors of the time in the most prominent Spanish theatres.[2] The tragedies *Alfonso Munio* and *El Principe de Viana* were written and performed in 1844, while the tragic drama *Egilona* was penned in 1845 and first performed in 1846. Her most acclaimed tragedies, *Saúl* and *Baltazar* were respectively

---

[1] Her biographical information is retrieved from the following sources:
Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, Vol. I (siglos XVII, XVII, XIX), Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de directores de escena de España, 1996, pp.765-793.
María del Carmen Simón Palmer, *Escritoras Españolas del Siglo XIX. Manual bio-bibliográfico.* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1991, pp. 311-323.
Hugh A. Harter, "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba)", in Diane E. Marting (ed.), *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990, pp.210-225.

[2] Concha Fernández Soto (ed.), *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Errores del Corazón, 1853.* Madrid: ArCiBel Editores, 2008, p. 19.

written and staged in 1849 and 1858, while her most successful comedies, *Errores del Corazón* and *La Hija de las Flores o Todos están Locos* were penned and performed in the same year, 1852. In 1852 were also composed and staged the dramas *El Donativo del Diablo* and *La Verdad Vence Aparencias,* while in 1851 and 1853 were respectively written and performed the tragedy *Flavio Recaredo* and the drama *La Aventurera.* In 1855, she penned for the stage other three comedies, *Simpatía y Antipatía*, *La Hija del Rey René* and *Oráculos de Talía o Los Duendes en Palacio*, while in 1858 a further comedy was written and performed: *Los Tre Amores*. After *Baltasar* (1858), she composed only other two plays, the drama *Catilina* (1867) and the comedy *El Milionario y la Maleta* (1869), which were published but never performed.[3] In the meantime, de Avellaneda wrote other novels and poetry collections, and collaborated with many Spanish journals from different cities, such as Granada, Sevilla, Madrid, Alicante and even La Habana in Cuba. Among her more fruitful relationships with periodicals can be included that with *La Alhambra* in Granada, for which she penned three translations and six poems between 1840 and 1841, and *El Semanario Pintoresco Español* in Madrid, with thirteen articles—both in verse and prose—between 1845 and 1851. Moreover, in 1845, de Avellaneda founded her own magazine *Ilustración, Álbum de Damas*, which is considered to be the first Spanish publication ever edited by a woman.[4]

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda was an innovator and a precursor of time both in her professional sphere and in her complicated personal life. In 1844, de Avellaneda began a short relationship with the Spanish writer Gabriel García de Tassara, who left her when he discovered she was pregnant with his child. Despite the difficulties and the dishonor of being an unmarried mother, she had a baby girl named María, who died at the age of seven months. Her reputation was highly compromised since in 19th century Catholic Spain—as well as in most European countries—a pregnancy out of the wedlock was regarded as a great disgrace for a woman. Nevertheless, she continued with her poetical and dramatic compositions, which were so appreciated by the audience that she never risked being excluded from the literary and publishing scene of the time. Unfortunately, her love life never ceased to be very unlucky. She fell in love with Spanish writer and lawyer Ignacio Cepeda, but he did not correspond her feelings and later married another woman. They remained friends for most of their lives and maintained a very close relationship and extensive correspondence, so much so that it is

[3] The information about her dramatic production is retrieved from:
Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Bologna: Il Capitello del Sole, 2002.
Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, Vol. I (siglos XVII, XVII, XIX), Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de directores de escena de España, 1996, pp. 765-793.
[4] María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*. Madrid: Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2000, p. 10.

precisely through such epistolary collection that it was possible to retrace a more detailed and rich biography of the author. De Avellaneda asked Cepeda to burn all her letters after her death but he never did and, after he passed away, Cepeda's wife decided to publish their epistolary correspondence.

In 1846, de Avellaneda married Pedro Sabater who died a few months after their wedding because of a serious illness. For such reason, since she was assisting her dying husband, de Avellaneda did not manage to be among the audience during the first performance of *Egilona* at Teatro de la Cruz in Madrid. In 1855, she met and married Spanish politician Domingo Verdugo y Massieu. After three years of marriage, Verdugo got seriously wounded during a discussion with a man who, a few days before, publicly attacked and ridiculed de Avellaneda during the performance of her comedy *Los Tre Amores.* Verdugo never fully recovered from the injury and died in 1863 while they were in Cuba. Indeed, as Hugh A. Harter underlines, de Avellaneda and her husband decided to leave Europe and move back to her birthplace in 1859 where "the receptions given her [in Cuba] were spectacular and continuous."[5] While in Cuba, "in 1860, she was crowned in Teatro Colón in Havana with a gold wreath, and special festivities were prepared to welcome her back to Puerto Príncipe."[6] In the meantime, she continued to enrich her literary production with novels and poems. In her homeland, she also founded a periodical titled *Album Cubano* which was supposed to be published bimonthly. Yet, after her husband's death, she felt compelled to move back to Spain, where she died in 1873. At the time de Avellaneda was born, Cuba was a Spanish colony and it is for such reason that her mother's family settled on the island decades before her birth and her father was sent there to work. The fact that de Avellaneda's birthplace was legally administrated by the Spanish government and she spent most of her life in Spain—from her teenage years until her death—ensured her inclusion into the Spanish literary historiography and genealogy of Spanish women writers. Nevertheless, it should be underlined that she also rightfully belongs to the Cuban and Latino-American literary tradition, whose studies on women writers only began a few decades ago. Although her position among these two literatures and cultures can appear controversial, it should be remarked that, from a feminist perspective, her identity is intersectional[7] and transnational. Thus, she cannot be constrained in one of the two categories when there is no evidence that she identified herself as belonging to only one of them. Her life and works demonstrate a great open-mindedness that was probably the result of her experiences both as a

---

[5] Hugh A. Harter, "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba)", in Diane E. Marting (ed.), *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990, p. 214.
[6] Ibid. p. 214.
[7] The theory of intersectionality was first postulated in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw. A more detailed explanation of intersectionality can be found in Chapter 3, paragraph 1.2.

Cuban and as a Spanish woman, therefore she should be analyzed taking into account her multilayered and fluid individuality who transcended national borders.

Although she was really appreciated by other Spanish intellectuals and she formed a strong bond with her female colleagues, a sort of lyrical sisterhood defined by Susan Kirkpatrick "*Hermandad Lirica*,"[8] her career was characterized by harsh sexism and discrimination. Since she belonged to a wealthy family, de Avellaneda had the opportunity to study more than the average of Cuban and Spanish girls, and, given her propensity for reading and writing, she dedicated most of her free time to such activities. As she wrote in her autobiography, *El Cuadernillo de 1839*, her early years in Cuba gave her the chance to grow up far away from the behavioral norms imposed on young girls in Spain, as well as from the social and moral codes that regulated Spanish society. In Cuba she experienced greater freedom, and she did not perceive her femininity as an obstacle either to her passion for literature or to a career in the literary field. On the contrary, her stepfather's relatives in La Coruña, with whom she was staying when they first moved to Spain, considered her love for books as an inappropriate entertainment for a young lady and reckoned she received a higher education than a woman deserved and needed for her future life. The family of her stepfather embodied the typical attitude of the Spanish bourgeoisie; they appear extremely worried about her lack of "feminine qualities" and abilities to do the housework, which influenced her chances to find a suitable husband. She remarks that "my stepfather's relatives used to say I was good for nothing because I could neither iron, nor cook, nor knit; because I neither cleaned the window panes, nor made the bed, nor swept the floor of my bedroom."[9] Interestingly, they also regarded her fondness for Rousseau's philosophy as evidence of her atheism, which was perceived as badly as heresy in 19th century Catholic Spain. As Tula[10] recalls:

> Gracias al cielo no podían herirme en mi honor por mucho que lo desearan, pero daban mil punzadas de alfiler a mi reputación bajo otro concepto. Decían, que yo era atea, y la prueba que daban era que leía las obras de Ruseaux[11], y que me habían visto comer una manteca un viernes. Decían, que yo era la causa de todos los disgustos de mamá con su marido y que *la* aconsejaba no darle gusto. La educación que se da en Cuba a las Srtas. difiere tanto de la que se les da en Galicia, que una mujer, aun de la clase media, creería degradarse en mi país egercitándose en cosas, que en Galicia miran las más encopetadas como una

---

[8] A detailed explanation about the *Hermandad Lírica* can be found in the first chapter of this thesis, paragraph 4.2. Susan Kirkpatrick addresses the issue in the following essay: Susan Kirkpatrick, "La 'Hermandad Lírica' de la década de 1840", in Marina Mayoral (ed.), *Escritoras Románticas Españolas*, Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, pp. 25-41.

[9] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, "Autobiografía. El Cuadernillo de 1839", in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Poesías y Epistolario de Amor y de Amistad,* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1989, p. 169.
Original quote: "Las parientas de mi padrastro decían por tanto, que yo no era buena para nada porque no sabía planchar, ni cocinar, ni calcetar; porque no la*b*aba los cristales, ni hacía las camas, ni barría mi cuarto." Complete quotation below in the text.

[10] According to all her biographies, her autobiography and correspondences Tula is the official nickname of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: she signed her letters as Tula and her closest friends called her that.

[11] Rousseau.

> obligación de su sexo. Las parientas de mi padrastro decían por tanto, que yo no era buena para nada porque no sabía planchar, ni cocinar, ni calcetar; porque no la*b*aba los cristales, ni hacía las camas, ni barría mi cuarto: Según ellas yo necesitaba veinte criadas y me daba el tono de una princesa. Ridiculizaban también mi afición al estudio y me llamaban *la Doctora*.[12]

As the last passage shows, because of her love for studying they called her *la Doctora*, "the female doctor," which was clearly meant in a negative and sarcastic sense since, at the time, women were not allowed to study and, thus, could not become doctors. As she started to publish and became quite popular as a writer, critics began to praise her for her works but also to question her "femininity" because of her literary skills. Indeed, she was frequently accused of being too brilliant to be a woman, which implied that she had masculine characteristics and, consequently, was not properly female. The ideal feminine figure in 19th century Spain, which was also admired and reiterated in Spanish Romantic literature, was the *ángel del hogar*, the angel of the hearth. As we have seen in the first chapter, the notion of the "angel in the house" was also very prominent in English and Italian 19th century literature, representing all the positive virtues women should have in order to be regarded as proper ladies and perfect wives in the eyes of the bourgeois society. Of course, such a strict definition of womanhood, so closely linked to the house and, more specifically to the hearth,[13] caged women inside the domestic sphere. It implied that, in order to be recognized as angels in the house, women needed to stay in and reject any possible occupation outside of the family realm. A public figure as de Avellaneda, educated and acclaimed as a writer, represented the opposite of the *ángel del hogar*, thus, she was perceived as a dangerous example of femininity or, even, not feminine at all. As María Prado Mas pinpoints in the introduction of her edition of de Avellaneda's *Baltasar* and *La Hija de las Flores*, a number of articles in which the author was "masculinized"—because described with masculine adjectives—were published in different journals in the course of the years.

---

[12] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, "Autobiografía. El Cuadernillo de 1839", in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Poesías y Epistolario de Amor y de Amistad,* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1989, p. 169. English translation: "Thank God, even if they wanted to, they could not hurt my honour, but they tried anyway to damage my reputation. They used to say that I was an atheist, and the proof resided in the fact that I read Rousseau, and that they saw me eat butter on a Friday. They said that I was the reason of all the troubles between my mom and her husband, and that I told her not to please him. The education girls receive in Cuba is very different from that girls receive in Galicia; a woman, even from the middle class, would think to demean herself in my country by carrying out tasks that in Galicia even the richest girls see as compulsory for their sex. The relatives of my step-father used to say, thus, that I was worthless since I could neither iron, nor cook, nor knit; because I neither cleaned the window panes, nor made the bed, nor swept the floor of my bedroom: according to them I needed to have twenty maids and I acted like I was a princess. They also used to ridicule my passion for studying and called me *la Doctora*."

[13] The Spanish word "hogar", just like the English word "hearth" as a double meaning: literally means hearth / fireplace but, figuratively, by extension, indicates the home. Therefore, in both cases the phrase "ángel del hogar" / "angel of the hearth" refers to the domestic fire where women used to cook and, more generally, to the home. The same notion can be found in Italy with the expression "angelo del focolare." Interestingly, "focolare" literally translates "hogar" and "hearth" in the same sense of domestic fireplace.

One of the most famous cases is certainly José Zorrilla's portrait of de Avellaneda in his *Recuerdos del Tiempo Viejo* (1879). In his text, the famous Spanish poet and playwright Zorrilla narrates the first time he met Tula at the Liceo de Madrid, around 1840, and what he thought of her, knowing very well her literary production. In particular, he writes that although she was physically beautiful and feminine, and her voice and gestures were very feminine and sweet, there was something extremely masculine in "her gaze, her way of writing, her thoughts and especially in the poetry that revealed her talent."[14] He continues saying that "she was a woman, but merely because of a mistake made by nature, which wrongly put the soul of a man inside such a feminine body."[15]

> Porque la mujer era hermosa, de grande estatura, de esculturales contornos, de bien modelados brazos, su cabeza coronada de castaños y abundantes rizos, y gallardamente colocada sobre sus hombros. Su voz era dulce, suave y femenil; sus movimientos lánguidos y mesurados, y la acción de sus manos delicada y flexible; pero la mirada firme de sus serenos ojos azules, su escritura briosamente tendida sobre el papel, y los pensamientos varoniles de los vigorosos versos que reveló su ingenio, revelaban algo viril y fuerte en el espíritu encerrado dentro de aquella voluptuosa encarnación pueril. Nada había de áspero, de anguloso, de masculino, en fin, en aquel cuerpo de mujer, y de mujer atractiva. . . . Era una mujer, pero lo era sin duda por un error de la naturaleza, que había metido por distracción un alma de hombre en aquella envoltura de carne femenina.[16]

Zorrilla's description of de Avellaneda is very detailed on her physical attributes and qualities, as if he found her very attractive but, at the same time, could not understand how such a beautiful woman could also be incredibly talented. As the above passage displays, he thoroughly examines de Avellaneda's figure in order to spot some masculine characteristics that could match and justify her brilliant mind, but he cannot find any. Hence, the only explanation he can come up with is that nature made a mistake by giving a masculine mind to such a beautiful woman. Zorrilla goes on narrating how, since he saw in her nothing more than "the highest inspiration of privileged genius,"[17] he treated her as a friend and a colleague, without giving her the special attentions that "women deserve from men in modern society."[18] Remarkably, the masculinization of de Avellaneda enacted by Zorrilla is not, in his opinion,

[14] José Zorrilla, *Recuerdos del Tiempo Viejo,* 1879, cited in María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

[15] Ibid. pp. 12-13. Original quote: "Era una mujer, pero lo era sin duda por un error de la naturaleza, que había metido por distracción un alma de hombre en aquella envoltura de carne femenina." Complete quotation below in the text.

[16] Ibid. pp. 12-13. English translation: "The woman was beautiful, tall, statuesque, her head was crowned with many brown curls, and gracefully located on her shoulders. Her voice was sweet, soft and feminine; her movements languid and measured, and the actions of her hands delicate and flexible. But the steady look of her blue eyes, her writing dashingly lying on paper, and the manly thoughts of the vigorous verses that revealed her genius, revealed something manly and strong in the spirit caged inside that voluptuous childish embodiment. There was nothing rough, angular, masculine in that female body, in that attractive female body. . . . She was a woman, but merely because of a mistake made by nature which wrongly put the soul of a man inside such a feminine body."

[17] Ibid. p. 13. Original quote: "la alta inspiración del privilegiado ingenio."

[18] Ibid. p. 13. Original quote: "las atenciones que la dama merece del hombre en la moderna sociedad."

something negative. On the contrary, by attributing her a masculine soul and treating her as a friend, he implicitly puts her on the same level as any other popular male writer. Therefore, in his opinion, he is complimenting her and her talent. The sexism interiorized by society reiterated the idea that only men could have any artistic talent, and thus dedicate themselves to literature, poetry, paintings and other strictly masculine creative professions. Conversely, women, as Zorrilla implicitly underlines, were weak and ethereal creatures who needed to be given special attention, admired and helped, because of their fragile nature and lack of proper education. A further example of "positive" criticism towards de Avellaneda's compositions, which, nonetheless, questions once again her gender identity is provided by an article that appeared in the periodical *La Illustración* in 1851, written by Ferrer del Río. In his paper, del Río affirms that it is not fair to define de Avellaneda as a "poetisa" because, given her extraordinary talent, she deserved to be called "poeta" as any other male poet. He goes on remarking that de Avellaneda is "a man of talent" who knew her worth and was not afraid of showing her genius in every literary genre.

> Poeta y no poetisa debe llamarse a la que en cultivo de tan noble arte ha alcanzado el lugar y los laureles de la señora Avellaneda . . . un hombre de talento, un poeta a quien la naturaleza ha obligado a tomar el seudónimo de mujer. . . . Aquí se revela el poeta, y no la débil mujer que se contenta con exhalar modestamente el perfume de su ternura y de su amor, sino el hombre que en toda su virilidad que con la conciencia de su fuerza pide el laurel y se dispone a alcanzarlo en la pública palestra, en el drama, en la tragedia, en la novela y en la oda. . . . Tan varoniles acentos no han salido jamás de los labios de una mujer… Con esto está hecho el más cumplido elogio de la señora de Avellaneda.[19]

As María Prado Mas highlights, it should be considered that male writers were really surprised to recognize in some of their female colleagues[20] a great talent, which they were convinced was a masculine prerogative. Therefore, del Río, just like Zorrilla, was genuinely persuaded that masculinizing de Avellaneda by calling her "hombre" was the greatest praise and token of esteem she could receive. Tula never directly replied to these articles, but in 1850 she penned a piece in which she willingly remarked her feminine nature and her propensity for feelings and passions. She also pinpointed, explicitly referring to those critics who masculinized her, that she did not perceive herself as a "poeta" because no man could ever "see the world the way she

---

[19] Ferrer del Río, "Poesías de las Exma. Señora doña Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda de Sabater" in *La Ilustración*, 19 de marzo 1851, cited in María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 14-15. English translation: "*Poeta* and not *poetisa* should be called the one who, while cultivating the art of poetry, managed to reach the glory of Ms. Avellaneda . . . a man of talent, a poet obliged by nature to adopt a female pseudonym. . . . This is the way a poet reveals himself, not the weak woman who modestly gives off the perfume of her tenderness and love, but the man who with his virility and strength demands the laurel wreath and is ready to achieve it in the public arena, through his drama, tragedy, novel and ode. . . . Such masculine words were never uttered by a woman … and this is the most generous compliment we could give to Ms. Avellaneda."

[20] De Avellaneda was the most popular female writer of the time in Spain and her masculinization was probably the most widespread, nevertheless, the same happened to other female writers, such as Carolina Coronado and many others.

sees it, or understand things she way she understands them as a woman."[21] A harsh reply to the critics who believed female authors had to become more masculine in the way they approached writing in order to be acknowledged as good as men was instead given in 1857 by poet and playwright Carolina Coronado. In her article, Coronado remarks how genius and talent can reside in both women and men, and it can cause great damage in society to deny female writers' genius, or to change their sex, just because society is not ready to admit that women and men can be equally talented.[22] In her piece, Coronado also mentions the masculinization of de Avellaneda, highlighting how, according to her, the Cuban author is both "poeta" and "poetisa", because she is able to give to her writing a variety of tones and nuances that extends from the manliness of the warrior to the tenderness of female characters. It is indeed, the mixture of sensibility and dynamism that identify the "perfection of genius,"[23] exemplified by de Avellaneda and other authors as Shakespeare, Schiller, Lope de Vega and Hartzenbusch.[24]

Despite the appreciation expressed by many colleagues and intellectuals, and the great response of the audience to her dramas, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda experienced more direct forms of discrimination because of her gender and the career she decided to pursue. Her non-admission to the Real Academia Española represents the most striking example of the difficulties that even a talented woman as de Avellaneda encountered in order to be acknowledged as equal to her male colleagues. In 1853, when she was already famous all over Spain, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda applied to be admitted as a member of the prestigious RAE (Real Academia Española), filling the position left vacant by famous writer Juan Nicasio Gallego, who died that same year. Many intellectuals and members of the RAE, such as Duque de Rivas, Manuel José Quintana, Eugenio de Tapia and others, strongly supported her admission but, in the end, her application was rejected because of her gender. Defiantly to what usually happened during the regular voting to admit a new member of the RAE, de Avellaneda was not judged on the basis of her literary merit. The members, indeed, did not discuss if she was worthy of the RAE, but rather if a woman could have access to the Academia and be officially recognized as one of its illustrious members. As Concha Fernandez Soto recalls, only six participants voted in favor of her admission, while fourteen voted against; it was hence

[21] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's article for the journal *El Almendares* (1850), cited in María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.
Original quote: "Creo que tengo, o al menos he tenido, grandes facultades de sentimiento, si bien confieso con más pasión que ternura… han dicho que yo no era poetisa, sino poeta: Yo creo que no es exactamente verdad: que ningún hombre ve ciertas cosas como yo las veo, ni las comprende como yo las comprendo."

[22] Carolina Coronado's article for the magazine *La Discusión* (1857-1858), cited in María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

[23] Ibid. p. 17. Original quote: "El conjunto de estas dos cualidades es la perfección del genio."

[24] Ibid. pp. 16-17.

decided that women could not be members of the Real Academia.[25] Furthermore, her application to the RAE came as shocking news for the literary environment, it was regarded from many intellectuals as a scandalous and daring action, since women were not supposed to aspire to these prestigious institutions. As a result, her rejection was object of ridicule and satirical articles that appeared in several periodicals.[26]

1.2 *Sab*: recounting the woman and / as the *other*

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's first novel, *Sab* (1841), is worth being briefly mentioned for the way the issue of *otherness* is addressed in the narration, in relation to the oppression of women and marginalized people. *Sab* is one of the first antislavery novel written in Spanish[27] and, interestingly, subverts the traditional abolitionist narrative of the time. Indeed, as Brígida Pastor underlines, while most antislavery novels were about a love story between a white man and a mulatto woman, de Avellaneda proposes to her readers the opposite situation: a mulatto male slave who "dares to love a white woman."[28] The protagonists of the novel, set in Cuba, are: Carlota, a young woman and heiress of a wealthy family that owns sugar plantations, Teresa, her orphan cousin, and Sab, a mulatto young male slave who belongs to Carlota's household. Sab and Carlota grew up together and are very fond of each other, but while Sab is deeply in love with her, Carlota falls in love with Enrique, an English man, son of a merchant, and marries him. According to Kirkpatrick's analysis of the text, Carlota, Teresa and Sab constitute a sort of "trinity, a fragmented but mysteriously whole entity that at once projects the perception of the Romantic self's division and promotes the values of intersubjectivity."[29] Each of them serves as an alter ego for the other, representing a different and specific aspect of marginalization in society. Sab, as a slave, is the most discriminated individual in society. Nonetheless, his being a mulatto makes him a hybrid creature who is neither black nor white and is, thus, rejected from both social groups. Teresa is an orphan and is born out of the wedlock; therefore, her gender and social condition do not give her any chance to live the life she dreams of. Although she would like to get married, she is alone, illegitimate and without a dowry. Hence, her only option is to be admitted in a convent and become a nun. Carlota, wealthy and married to a man she loves, is instead forced inside a domestic sphere she is not used to, and is obliged to comply with the norms imposed on wives by society, finding herself oppressed

[25] Concha Fernández Soto (ed.), *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. Errores del Corazón, 1853.* op. cit., p. 13.
[26] María Prado Mas, *Baltasar, La hija de las flores de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 31-32.
[27] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 147.
[28] Brígida Pastor, *El Discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: Identidad Femenina y Otredad,* Murcia: Cuadernos de América sin nombre, 2002, p. 94.
[29] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., pp. 147-148.

by a situation that was supposed to bring her happiness. Carlota's segregation is made even more evident by the differences between her and her husband. While she is a Romantic soul, a sensitive and passionate woman ready to sacrifice all that she has for love, Enrique exemplifies the materialistic world of commerce: he is cold, sensible and pragmatic, not used to showing affection to other people. As de Avellaneda writes:

> Carlota era una pobre alma poética arrojada entre mil existencias positivas. Dotada de una imaginación fértil y activa, ignorante de la vida, . . . se veía obligada a vivir de cálculo, de reflexión y de conveniencia. Aquella atmósfera mercantil y especuladora, aquellos cuidados incesantes de los intereses materiales marchitaban las bellas ilusiones de su joven corazón.[30]

After her marriage, Carlota quickly learns which is her role in society. When she discovers that her father-in-law found a way to exclude her sisters from their father's testament so that she is the only heiress, Carlota is shocked and begs her husband to give her sisters what they legally own. Enrique refuses and criticizes her for being so naïve. In that moment she realizes that, without her husband's consent, she has no power over her own money and no legal authority to act. She discovers that she is not a subject but a powerless object owned by her husband and, as such, her voice would not be heard. As Kirkpatrick explains, "the gap between her desire and the world cannot be bridged, because women's political subordination enforces the radical separation between feminine feelings and male public world."[31] De Avellaneda seems to remark that marriage, even when is not imposed by families but freely chosen by a woman—as in Carlota's case—is still a social cage that prevents women from expressing their subjectivity and asserting their authority. The character of Teresa represents a further critique of the institution of marriage and women's condition in society. She was born outside of holy matrimony, and for such reason, she is excluded from the legitimate ranks of society and the marriage market, since she does not have a dowry to be offered to a possible suitor. In her case, the convent where she is relegated becomes the social cage where her subjectivity is repressed and her agency demolished by a system that does not allow the emerging of female individuality. Although differently, Carlota and Teresa embody the oppression of the female gender in society, forced within the domestic sphere and obliged to suppress their voice and desires, whatever the social class. Ironically, they also represent the only two paths proper women could take at the time: they could either be wives or nuns, since spinsterhood was highly

---

[30] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, 1841, Ed. Carmen Bravo Villasante, Salamanca: Anaya, 1970, p. 213. English translation (by Susan Kirkpatrick, 1989): "Carlota was a poor poetic soul thrown into the midst of a thousand materialistic existences. Gifted with a fertile, active imagination, ignorant of life, . . . she found herself obliged to live according to calculation, caution and convenience. That mercenary and speculative atmosphere, that incessant worry about material interests, dried up the beautiful illusions of her young heart."

[31] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 150.

frowned upon. However, both scenarios lead Carlota and Teresa to solitude and unhappiness, reiterating the idea that there is no solution to women's condition in a society that prevents them from asserting themselves as subjects.

Sab, of course, as a mulatto man and a slave symbolizes a different type of discrimination, which comes from colonialism and exploitation in Cuba. Following Rousseau's philosophical notion of the *bon sauvage,*[32] de Avellaneda portrays Sab as a peaceful, generous and sensitive man, inclined to see the best in those around him and to sacrifice his life and happiness for the people he loves. He resembles the archetype of the ideal Romantic man, gifted with superior sensitivity and understanding of the world, as well as with a special connection to nature. In a specific passage that sees him and Enrique in the forest during a storm, de Avellaneda depicts Sab as subdued into the natural elements so much so that the storm itself appears to derive directly from Sab's anger towards Carlota's husband: "Sombrío y siniestro, como los fuegos de la tempestad, era el brillio que despedían en aquel momento sus pupilas de azabache."[33] His loving connection with nature is also exemplified in another passage where Sab compares himself to his horse, since both of them are living creatures which were born in slavery, exploited by those in power. Nevertheless, Sab remarks how the horse is luckier than him, because it does not have a mind and is not able to think. The horse, he concludes, suffers without really realizing that it would deserve a better fate.

> Tú eres el único ser en la tierra que quiera acariciar estas manos tostadas y ásperas: tú el único que no se avergüenza de amarme: lo mismo que yo, naciste condenado a la servidumbre…, pero ¡ay! Tu suerte es más dichosa que la mía, pobre animal; menos cruel contigo el destino no te ha dado el funesto privilegio del pensamiento. Nada te grita en tu interior que merecías más noble suerte, y sufres la tuya con resignación.[34]

On the contrary, Sab is aware of his condition of slavery and is continuously conflicted between his desire to fight for his freedom and his love for Carlota and her family. Indeed, in the course of the narration, the anger and impatience he feels regarding his oppression are occasionally vented and explicitly stated. He shows his wish to be part of a revolt against the system that exploits him, and to oppress the people who constantly oppress him and his equals. However,

---

[32] We know from her autobiography that she was fond of philosophy and of Rousseau. Thus, we can assume she knew very well Rousseau's theories about nature and the myth of the noble savage.

[33] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, 1841, Ed. Carmen Bravo Villasante, Salamanca: Anaya, 1970, p. 77. English translation (by Susan Kirkpatrick, 1989): "Gloomy and sinister, like the fires of the storm, was the gleam flashing at that moment from his jetty pupils."

[34] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, 1841, edición de José Servera, Madrid, Ediciones Catedras, 2003, p. 148. English translation: "You are the only living being on heart who wants to caress these burnt and rough hands: you the only one who is not ashamed to love me: you were born destined to be enslaved, just like me…, but your fate is more blessed than mine, poor animal; destiny was less cruel with you since it did not give you the fatal privilege of thinking. Nothing screams inside of you that you would deserve a better fate, and you bear your fate with resignation."

he does not act on such a desire, proving once again to be torn between what he thinks is right and what society taught him to do. The first moment he dreams about an uprising against the oppressor is while talking to Teresa. He says:

> He pensado también en armar contra nuestros opresores, los brazos encadenado de sus víctimas; arrojar en medio de ellos el terrible grito de libertad y venganza; bañarme en sangre de blancos; horrar con mis pies sus cadáveres y sus leyes y perecer yo mismo entre sus ruinas.[35]

In another situation, when he explicitly asserts his desire to subvert the social order, he affirms that "the descendants of the oppressors will be oppressed, and black men will be the terrible avengers of the red men."[36] While the other two marginalized characters, Carlota and Teresa, realize the injustices they experience in their everyday life but accept the situation displaying resignation rather than resentment, Sab is more vehement and even violent in expressing his anger towards society. For such reason, the frustration conveyed by Sab during the recount is to be regarded as a collective sentiment shared by the three protagonists, but repressed in Carlota and Teresa's discourse because of their necessity to conform to the rules imposed on women by society. As Kirkpatrick explains:

> Although the cases of Teresa and Carlota imply a social critique, exposing the heartlessness of a society ruled by the marketplace and the impotence of women who preserve the human value of love, they conform to the feminine ideal of the domestic angel in that they do not condemn or denounce social injustice, nor do they register the slightest thought of rebellion. Yet, the three characters are so closely associated that the anger suppressed in Carlota and Teresa seems to speak in Sab's violent fantasies.[37]

The parallelism between the conditions of women and slaves exemplified by Carlota, Teresa and Sab, and explicitly portrayed by Sab at the end of the novel in a letter to Teresa, is a recurrent topic also in other literatures. As we have seen in the previous chapters, also Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson and Luisa Amalia Paladini addressed the same issue in their texts, comparing the lack of freedom of slaves to that of women caged inside the domestic sphere and destined, in both cases, to obey the orders of their legal masters and husbands.[38] The comparison between woman and slave is also identified by Brígida Pastor who reckons Sab as a character in between the male and female gender; "as a man he has a masculine identity but

---

[35] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, 1841, edición de José Servera, Madrid, Ediciones Catedras, 2003, p. 157. English translation (by Susan Kirkpatrick in *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 154): "I have also thought of arming the shackled hands of their victims against our oppressor; of hurling into their midst the terrible war cry of freedom and vengeance; of bathing in the blood of whites; of treading their corpses and their laws under my feet and perishing myself among the ruins."

[36] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, op. cit., p. 113. English translation by Susan Kirkpatrick in *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 154.
Original quote: "Los descendientes de los opresores serán oprimidos, y los hombres negros serán los terribles vengadores de los hombres cobrizos."

[37] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 154.

[38] The same issue was previously discussed in Chapter 1, paragraphs 3.2 and 4.2.

as a slave he shares women's social condition."[39] The similitude is also evident in Sab's last letter to Teresa, in which he attacks society because it considers him inferior and, thus, prevents him from expressing his thoughts and talents—just as it happened to women, and especially to women writers. Interestingly, Sab's vehement tones against society and the colonizers—for the way they treat colonized people, imposing on them the idea that "obedience, humility and resignation—these are the virtues"[40]—slowly fade away towards the end. Despite his desires of freedom, Sab seems subdued by the events and renounces his need to fight against the system without a specific motivation. As Kirkpatrick argues, "Sab disavows the desire to rebel, though he fully appreciates the logical necessity of revolt. . . . Sab's reasons for not acting on his political awareness appear vague, revealing a narrative impulse divided against itself in the attempt both to justify and contain Sab's anger."[41] The lack of rebellion of both Carlota and Teresa, and finally of Sab himself, despite his wishes for better living conditions, could depend on de Avellaneda's conflicted relation to Spanish society. As Kirkpatrick underlines,

> In the imagined expression of a slave's outrage speaks, in fact, the anger of a young colonial woman who aspired to pour out her own subjectivity in writing capable of captivating the great centers of civilization and culture, but who was told to be silent and resign herself to the self-abnegating virtues of the angel of the hearth.[42]

In the end, it can thus be argued that the three protagonists represent a reflection of the author and her marginality, as the daughter of a creole woman and a colonial. Although she recognizes the injustices of the society she lives in, Tula—just like Sab—cannot act on her desire to subvert the social order because she needs to protect her reputation. Since *Sab* was her first published novel, de Avellaneda probably believed that in order to pursue a literary career, she would have to come to terms with the unfair way society treated women.

1.3 De Avellaneda's tragic production: a brief overview

As previously mentioned, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda penned many texts belonging to different genres and for more than a century she has been mainly remembered for her Romantic poetry, which earned her the reputation of the most acclaimed Spanish female poet of the Romantic age. Her extensive dramatic production has been recovered and studied in the last decades thanks to a growing attention to women's studies in the literary field as well as to the

---

[39] Brígida Pastor, *El Discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda: Identidad Femenina y Otredad,* Murcia: Cuadernos de América sin nombre, 2002, p. 92.
[40] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Sab*, 1841, Ed. Carmen Bravo Villasante, Salamanca: Anaya, 1970, p. 227. English translation by Susan Kirkpatrick in *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 156. Original quote: "Obediencia, humildad, resignación—ésta es la virtud."
[41] Susan Kirkpatrick, *Las Románticas: Women Writers and Subjectivity in Spain 1835-1850,* op. cit., p. 155.
[42] Ibid. p. 157.

interest in her works for the stage expressed by Spanish and Latino-American theatre scholars. Between 1844 and 1869 she penned twenty-three dramas of which only two were not performed during her lifetime, the drama *Catilina* and the comedy *El Milionario y la maleta*, written respectively in 1867 and 1877. Other three of her plays were staged, according to the evidence collected in Hormigón's volume *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español* (1996), but the manuscripts were later lost: *Los puntapiés* (1851)*, Hortensia* (1853) and *La sonámbula* (1854). If most of her dramatic texts were defined by the author herself as dramas, comedies, tragedies or tragic dramas, Caratozzolo interestingly argues that two of her less renowned plays belonged to a further theatrical subgenre, that of the "loa"[43]: *Gloria de España* and *El héroe de Bailén*, performed respectively in 1851 and 1852.[44] The summary of her dramatic texts provided by Hormigón shows that, out of twenty-one plays,[45] there are seven comedies, three tragedies, two tragic dramas, eight dramas and one oriental drama, which can be assimilated to a tragedy given its tragic ending.[46] A brief overview is in order, so to give an idea of the extent of her dramatic production and of how prolific she was in the decades she devoted herself to the stage:

Leoncia, 1840 (published in 1917)
Alfonso Munio, 1844
El Príncipe de Viana, 1844
Egilona, 1846 (published in 1845)
Saúl, 1849
Los puntapiés, 1851 (lost)
Flavio Recaredo, 1851
La verdad vence apariencias, 1852
Errores del corazón, 1852
El donativo del diablo, 1852
La hija de las flores o Todos están locos, 1852
Hortensia, 1853 (lost)
La aventurera, 1853
La sonámbula, 1854 (lost)
Simpatía y antipatía, 1855
La hija del rey René, 1855
Oráculos de Talía o Los duendes en palacio, 1855
Los tres amores, 1858
Baltasar, 1858
Catilina, not performed (published in 1867)
El milionario y la maleta, not performed (published in 1869).[47]

---

[43] The "loa" is a subgenre typical of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro,* a type of minor dramatic composition that was usually staged in theatres before the main play of the night. It was generally used to catch the audience's attention and prepare them for the comedy that was to be later performed. Source: Manuela Sileri, "Apuntes sobre la clasificación y evolución de la loa: una propuesta", in *Etiópicas*, 1 (2004-2005), Universidad de Huelva, pp. 243-270. Retrieved from: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/60634635.pdf [accessed 24/09/2019].
[44] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Bologna: Il Capitello del Sole, 2002, p. 16.
[45] Excluded the two "loas."
[46] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 765-793.
[47] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
Cfr. Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 765-793.

This paragraph will report a concise commentary of some of her tragedies, selected according to elements in common that can give us a better understanding of the themes and literary strategies employed by de Avellaneda in her tragic production, in preparation for the close reading of *Egilona* (1845).

The first play ever penned by Tula was indeed a tragedy, *Leoncia*, performed for the first time in Sevilla on the 5th of June 1840. The female protagonist of the drama, Leoncia, is a middle-aged woman whose destiny appears doomed right from the beginning of the text. She is a marginalized figure who lost everything she had, including her mother and her daughter during a tragic shipwreck. The character of Leoncia is shaped differently from the typical submissive and naïve tragic heroine; she is described as neither young nor beautiful and, alone in Madrid, she exercises her own authority over herself and her actions. Furthermore, she had a daughter at a really young age when she was seduced by a libertine man who abandoned her right after discovering she was pregnant with his child. Therefore, she appears as a complex figure who does not fit into the traditional female narrative promoted by society and often represented on stage. As Alexander Selimov argues in his article "The making of *Leoncia*: Romanticism, Tragedy and Feminism,"

> Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda appropriates the strategies of male-generated and male-centered Romantic discourse to construct her female protagonist. Leoncia is not a typical idealized female character objectified by male desire, but a full-fledged romantic hero(ine), who exercises agency in her confrontation with a hostile environment. . . . As the plot progresses, the author emphasizes more fully the archetypal nature of the romantic heroine's experience. Leoncia suffers unjust persecution and debasement by Madrid's society.[48]

The author mixes Romantic and classical elements in order to build a story that is centred on the passions and the way they affect people's lives, as well as charged with *pathos* and *coups de théâtre.* The classical dramatic device of the *anagnórisis* has an essential role in the development of the plot since it appears twice—Hormigón defines it as a "doble anagnórisis"—and influences the rhythm and the progression of the dramatic action.[49] Indeed, Leoncia discovers that the woman her lover Carlos is about to marry is her daughter Elena, who did not die in the shipwreck but was saved and adopted by a noble family. She renounces telling the truth not to ruin her daughter's future happiness but, a moment later, she finds out that Carlos's father, don Fernando, is the man who abandoned her many years before and, thus, the father of

---

[48] Alexander Selimov, "The making of *Leoncia*: Romanticism, Tragedy and Feminism", in *Gender and the Politics of Literature: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* Ed. María C. Albin, Megan Corbin, and Raúl Marrero-Fente. *Hispanic Issues on Line* 18 (2017): 249–263, p. 250.
Retrieved from:
https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/192133/hiol_18_08_selimov.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed 24/09/2019].

[49] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 769.

Elena. Hence, Leoncia realizes that Carlos and her daughter, who are about to get married, are indeed brother and sister. At this point, she tries to kill don Fernando with a dagger but, when Elena stops her, she sees "the fruitlessness of her efforts just like many classical heroes before her"[50] and decides to kill herself instead. If Leoncia, at the end of the play, embodies the traditional tragic heroine, in the course of the dramatic narration she is utterly Romantic, torn between her passion for a younger man, her struggle with a society that does not accept her desire to defy conventions and her longing for auto-determination. Indeed, the fact that she is an unmarried woman, without a family to protect her, puts her reputation in danger, so much so that her behavior and sexuality are under constant scrutiny and she is relegated at the margins of society. Her inner conflict, as highlighted by Selimov,

> conforms to the typical Romantic model, where the tragic outcome emerges from the clash between an idealistic individual and a corrupt society. The society is positioned to win because it has a total control over the moral framework, which gives it power over all of its members, but especially over those who desire to be recognized as virtuous. The ability to manipulate the concept of virtue, particularly as it applies to women, is what enables the society to include or exclude individuals at will, and that power is what enables the patriarchal order to exercise dominance. On the other hand, if we take a close look at the causes of social marginalization of Leoncia, it becomes evident that she is denied the possibility of happiness, not because of her social class, status, race or religion (which happens quite frequently in romantic literature), but because she does not conform to the social standard of a virtuous woman in mid-nineteenth century Madrid.[51]

In this case—as well as in that of *Egilona* and many other female writers' tragedies—suicide represents for the Romantic heroine the only way out of society. Self-inflicted death seems to be the only means women have to escape a social order that does not allow them to freely express themselves and their subjectivity, and live following their desires and feelings.

A similar situation occurs in her first *drama trágico*, *El Príncipe de Viana*, published and performed in Madrid in 1844, at Teatro de la Cruz. While *Leoncia* follows a classical structure, and is divided into the canonical five acts, *El Príncipe de Viana*—just like the tragedy *Alfonsio Munio* (1844)—is instead constituted of four acts. The two female protagonists of *El Príncipe de Viana*, Queen Doña Juana de Enríquez, wife of King Don Juan II de Aragon, and Isabel de Peralta, daughter of the Queen's counsellor, appear right from the beginning as diametrically opposite. Doña Juana is presented as a cold and despotic queen who is plotting so that King Don Juan's first son from a previous marriage, Carlos, is disowned by his father, losing thus his title of legitimate heir to the throne. Her plan is to make her husband believe that his son betrayed him and conspired with his enemies to dethrone him. The king trusts her and imprisons his own son, who is instead portrayed as an honest and valorous man. Isabel, Doña Juana's opponent, is depicted as a trustworthy young lady, generous and passionate. She cares very

[50] Alexander Selimov, "The making of *Leoncia*: Romanticism, Tragedy and Feminism", op. cit., p. 253.
[51] Ibid. p. 254.

much for Carlos and cannot accept the schemes designed by Doña Juana. Indeed, when she discovers that Doña Juana ordered the prince's murder and managed to achieve her goal, she confronts her and then kills herself. Remarkably, in Isabel's last monologue before the King and Queen she repudiates her own father, who supported Doña Juana's scheming, and, strongly affirming her agency and authority over herself, she commits suicide. Suicide represents once again the only way to escape society, which is in this case dominated by violence and a heinous thirst for power. As Hormigón pinpoints,

> la pasión desbordante de Isabel, que siente como suya la traición de Doña Juana, la lleva al suicidio como única salida. Refleja una actitud tremendamente romántica ante la vida, en la que ésta no vale nada si aquello por lo que se lucha ha dejado de existir.[52]

Isabel can be identified as a typical Romantic heroine, whose passion, valour and political awareness are greater than those attributed to the male protagonist Carlos.[53] According to both Caratozzolo and Picon Garfield, the play features a "masculinization" of the female characters who appear much more determined and tenacious than their male counterparts.[54] Garfield indeed highlights how, in many dramas written by de Avellaneda, female characters demonstrate cleverness as well as political and sentimental insight, so much so that they manage to influence, change or even subvert the unwinding of the events.[55] In the case of *El Príncipe de Viana*, although in opposite ways, both Doña Juana and Isabel have a strong impact on the plot. They disrupt the traditional power dynamics that see the woman in a subordinate position to the men by asserting their authority and agency in the social order. In this regard, Evelyn Picon Garfield argues that

> Los personajes de mayor conciencia política en *El Príncipe de Viana* resultan ser las dos mujeres quienes representan campos políticos antagónicos. Ambas tratan de manipular o influir en los hombres débiles de cuyo poder y/o amor dependen. . . . En general, en el teatro de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, las mujeres que participan en el ambiente del centro del poder político son ambiciosas e influyen en él. A veces su caracterización es positiva—Nitocris y Elda en *Baltasar* y Bada en *Recaredo*—otras veces, es nefasta—Fulvia de *Catilina*.[56]

---

[52] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 771. English translation: "the overflowing passion of Isabel, who feels Doña Juana's betrayal as hers, leads her to commit suicide as the her only way out. It reflects a deeply Romantic attitude towards life, that is, that life is not worthy of being lived if what you fight for no longer exists."

[53] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, Bologna: Il Capitello del Sole, 2002, p. 86.

[54] Ibid. p. 86. Cfr. Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 90.

[55] Cfr. Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 90.

[56] Ibid. p. 90. English translation: "The characters with the greatest political consciousness . . . are the two women who represent opposite political realms. They both manipulate and influence the weak men on whose power / love they depend. . . . In general, in de Avellaneda's theatre, the women who participate in the political domain are ambitious, and they strongly influence it. Sometimes their characterization is positive—Nitocris y Elda en *Baltasar* y Bada en *Recared*—some other times, it is negative— Fulvia de *Catilina.*"

The character of Fulvia[57] appears particularly interesting because, as that of Doña Juana, modifies for the worse the course of the historical events, because of a conflict between the personal and the political sphere. Indeed, while Doña Juana conspires against her husband and stepson in order to get the power, Fulvia betrays her lover Catilina, causing his death, because of her insane jealousy. Catilina, was a political man in Ancient Rome who is famously remembered for the conspiracies he organized with the support of the population and other senators. As Hormigón underlines, the author employs the historical events mainly as a framework for the development of the personal story of Catilina, his wife Aurelia and his mistress Fulvia.[58] Catilina is depicted as a controversial figure. He struggles and schemes to subvert the social order and the Roman republic in order to establish a more equal society that is not constructed on the social separation between patricians and plebeians. Nevertheless, at the same time, he is unfaithful to his wife and lies to both her and his lover Fulvia so that they do not betray him and disclose his machinations. Unfortunately, Fulvia realizes that he is playing with her feelings and decides to denounce him to Cicero who manages to stop the conspiracy, and later causes Catilina's death. Fulvia is thus the central figure who, as suggested by Picon Garfield, influences the dramatic narration by creating a destructive plot twist that leads to the fall of the hero.[59] Although negatively, Fulvia follows her passions and sentiments of jealousy. She subverts once again the stereotypical image of the subaltern woman, as well as the traditional power dynamics in which the masculine is the subject.

It should be also underlined that, in *Catilina*, de Avellaneda enacts a manipulation of history that, as we will later see, is also present in *Egilona*. The story of Catilina and the episode of his death are different from that recounted by Tula, who introduces some changes both in the development of events and in the historical characters. Indeed, according to the historical sources, Catilina died many years after the conspiracy mentioned in the play and Fulvia was not his mistress but the lover of one of the men who participated in Catilina's plot.[60] The re-writing of history carried out by de Avellaneda allowed her to introduce into the plot the theme of social equality, supported by Catilina in a long speech that parallels the thoughts expressed by the mulatto slave in Tula's novel *Sab*.[61] Contextually, de Avellaneda's new version of historical events gives her the chance to locate, at the core of the drama, a woman and her *micro*history. This prevalence of *micro*history over *macro*history, of the personal desires and experiences over political necessities, constitutes a sort of *leitmotiv* in de Avellaneda's dramatic

[57] The female protagonist of the drama *Catilina* (1867).
[58] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 792.
[59] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 90.
[60] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 792.
[61] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 91.

production. Whether her dramas deal with renowned historical moments or endeavors, as in the case of *Catilina* and *Saúl*, or with minor historical episodes, such as *El Príncipe de Viana* or *Egilona*, history is always recounted from an unofficial perspective, that of the marginalized figures. It is precisely such characters, usually women relegated at the margins of society, who regain centre stage in de Avellaneda's dramas and manage to assert their authority and individuality, even when it leads them to lose their lives. The construction and affirmation of a female Romantic subjectivity is the greatest *leitmotiv* of de Avellaneda's literary production, from her poetry to her novels, and certainly in her dramas. As we will see in the next part of this chapter, *Egilona* features issues of social inequality, female subjectivity and re-writing of history, as well as a female protagonist who embodies the typical tormented and passionate Romantic heroine that Tula incorporated in most of her dramatic texts—and probably also identified herself with.

2. *Egilona: drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros*

1.4 Historical context and introduction

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda wrote *Egilona* in three days in 1845 but, because of some issues with the company of actors, she managed to have it staged only in 1846, on the 18th of June, at Teatro de la Cruz in Madrid. The drama is written in blank verse and divided into three acts, the last of which is further split into *cuadros*, or scenes.[62] As it was already highlighted in the first paragraph, Tula could not attend the first performance of *Egilona* because she was in Paris with her husband, Pedro Sabater, who was suffering from a severe illness and went to France to be cured. According to Vittorio Caratozzolo, the drama was not particularly acclaimed by the critics and, probably for such reason, it was not subjected to further revision, that she instead carried out on other dramas.[63] Among the several reviews about the dramatic text, Caratozzolo mentions the one written by Hartenzbusch, who made a notable comment about the gender of the author. Indeed, he said that if he considers *Egilona* as a text written by a male poet, he can only moderately praise the work, but if he takes into account that a woman composed it, he finds himself absolutely fascinated by the tragedy.

> Mucha, buena y propia poesía, con sencilla y noble entonación, siempre digna del coturno, con flúidos y hermosos versos desde el principio hasta el fin. Esto juzgando la obra como de poeta y no como de poetisa; que si hubiéramos tenido presentes las consideraciones que se deben a una persona del bello sexo no hallaríamos palabras con que elogiarla.[64]

Such double standard, which implicitly reiterates the idea that women are intellectually inferior to men and not as talented as them, affected all Spanish female writers. Differently from most of her colleagues, de Avellaneda managed to become a very appreciated poet and playwright regardless of her sex. Nonetheless, as we have previously seen, her gender was always regarded as a problematic element in relation to her talent. Furthermore, *Egilona* was written and performed almost at the beginning of de Avellaneda's career, years before her most acclaimed dramas, such as *Saúl* and *Baltasar*. The illustrious Spanish scholar Emilio Cotarelo y Mori,

---

[62] The term *cuadro* in Spanish theatre and drama derives from the typical comedy of the *Siglo de Oro,* when it was called *escena* and used to define a scene that did not imply a change of scenery. John Allen explains that, when the term *escena*, in the following centuries, began to be used to indicate the inner division of acts connected to the change of characters on stage, *cuadro* maintained the previous significance of *escena*. Allen defines *cuadro* as "una acción escénica ininterrumpida que tiene lugar en un espacio y tiempo determinados." Source: John Allen, "La división de la comedia en cuadros", in *En Torno al Teatro del Siglo de Oro. Actas de las jornadas XII-XIII celebradas en Almería,* edición de José Berbel, Heraclia Castellón, Antonio Orejudo y Antonio Serrano, Almeria: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 1996, pp. 85-94, cit. p. 85.

[63] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 93.

[64] Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch's comment on *Egilona* in the journal *El Español*, 16th of July 1846, collected by Emilio Cotarelo y Mori in *La Avellaneda y sus obras: ensayo biográfico y crítico*, 1930, and cited in Concha Fernández Soto, *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Errores del Corazón, 1853,* op. cit., p. 21. An English translation of the quote is embedded in the text.

who published in 1930 a detailed research on the author and her compositions titled *La Avellaneda y sus obras: ensayo biográfico y crítico*, lists a series of works written on the same theme which could have influenced de Avellaneda in her recount of Egilona's misadventures.[65] He mentions the tragedy *Egilona* composed by Cándido María Trigueros (1768) and the drama *Abdalaziz y Egilona* (1814) penned by the historian José de Vargas Ponce. Interestingly, Cotarelo y Mori also suggests the dramatic works published after de Avellaneda's *Egilona*, highlighting the impact that her tragedy had on the following dramatic production. In this regard, he suggests *Abdalaziz* by Manuel Cortés (1849) and *Los Juicios de Dios* (1857) by Ramón de Valladares. Nevertheless, the life and endeavors of Egilona were at the core of other dramas already in the 18th century. There is evidence that in 1760 playwright Cándido María Trigueros penned the drama *La Egilona, viuda del Rey Don Rodrigo*, and, in 1785, Spanish poet Antonio Valladares de Sotomayor composed a play with the same title. As a matter of fact, Vittorio Caratozzolo pinpoints that the story of Rodrigo, the last Visigoth King to rule over Spain before the Muslim invasion, was a popular theme in Spanish literature, as proved by the thorough research conducted by the illustrious Spanish historian Ramon Menéndez Pidal in his book *Floresta de leyendas heroicas españolas: Rodrigo, el último godo*, published in 1924. In the dedication of her drama to her friend and actress Barbara Lamadrid, de Avellaneda affirms that she wrote the tragedy under the request of Barbara herself, so that she could play the role of the female protagonist. It is unknown whether her friend asked for a tragedy with a leading female character or she explicitly requested the subject of Egilona since, unfortunately, neither de Avellaneda's autobiography nor her letters report details of the origins of the drama and its creative process. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice the close relationship that Tula had with actors and actresses, who, as mentioned in the first chapter, were marginalized and mistreated by society. Indeed, de Avellaneda refers to Barbara calling her "amable Barbarita"[66] and underlines the great talent of her friend, who contributed to the success of her previous tragedy *El Príncipe de Viana*, where Lamadrid interpreted the female protagonist. Furthermore, Tula explicitly dedicates the whole work to Barbara as a sign of her friendship, "la afectuosa amistad que le profesa,"[67] proving not to be afraid of being publicly associated with a woman who worked as an actress.

---

[65] Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, *La Avellaneda y sus obras: ensayo biográfico y crítico*, Madrid: Tipografía de Archivos, 1930.
[66] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* Madrid: Imprenta de D. José Repullés, 1845, p. 3.
[67] Ibid. p. 3.

The tragic drama is set in Sevilla at the end of 715 A.D.[68] At the time, the Muslims, led by the Emir Muza, already defeated the Visigoth army of King Rodrigo, husband of Queen Egilona, and conquered Andalucía. While Rodrigo is believed to be killed during a battle, Abdalasis, the son of the Muslim leader Muza, becomes the new Emir of Sevilla and falls in love with Egilona. The Visigoth Queen realizes she has feelings for the Emir, who proves to be kind and generous, and decides to marry him. Indeed, he promises her that, as a wedding gift, he would free all the Visigoth hostages, including those considered more dangerous. At this point, the action further develops in two directions. On the one hand, Abdalasis discovers that one of the hostages is Rodrigo, who is not dead and is, thus, still Egilona's legitimate husband. On the other hand, the audience finds out that Caleb, the captain of the Emir's guards who is also in love with Egilona, is plotting to murder Abdalasis because he despises him, and he is jealous of their happy marriage. The play opens with Caleb speaking to himself about his doomed love for Egilona and his anger towards Abdalasis. The location of the scene is described in the stage direction at the beginning of Act I, which is more detailed and exhaustive than those featured in the other scenes and acts. Indeed, the stage direction begins saying that

> El teatro representa un dilatado y pintoresco jardin del palacio del Emir Abdalasis, situado á la inmediacion de Sevilla. Al fondo, ó donde convenga, se verá un costado del palacio, que estará iluminado como para una fiesta. Caleb aparece reclinado en un banco de césped, fijos sus ojos en el alcázar. Es una hora avanzada de la noche, y á fines del acto comienza á amanecer.[69]

This evocative opening proves not only de Avellaneda's ability to imagine the performance on stage and give directions to the company, but also her skills at portraying a fictional reality so much so that even the readers of the text can easily picture the scene in their minds. She is extremely detailed in the description of how the stage scenography was supposed to be like, highlighting the connection between the actors and the scenery around them. As in the other two tragedies examined, the stage directions inserted by the author also serve the purpose of conveying the characters' emotions, so much so that even the readers of the play—those who, just like us, could not witness the representations which took place in Madrid in 1846—can immediately figure the tone of a specific dialogue. It is the case, for example, of Caleb's monologue, in which he talks "*(con amarga ironía)*"[70] and he later "*(se levanta agitado)*."[71] A

[68] Juan Antonio Hormigón (ed.), *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español*, op. cit., pp. 771-772.
[69] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene i, p. 5. English translation: "the stage shows a wide and picturesque garden of the Emir Abdalasis's palace, near the city of Sevilla. In the background, or when it suits the most, the audience will see a side of the palace that is lit and adorned as for a party. Caleb is reclined on a bench on the lawn, staring at the palace. It is one o'clock in the morning, and at the end of the act, the sun starts to rise."
[70] Ibid. Act I, scene i, p. 6. English translation: "with a bitterly ironic tone."
[71] Ibid. Act I, scene i, p. 6. English translation: "he gets up shaken and agitated."

further example is at the end of Act I, when Abdalasis is first described as worried about discovering that Rodrigo is still alive and, subsequently, while discussing with Ermesenda, he tries to hide his anxiety.[72] The language employed by de Avellaneda is simple but charged with *pathos*, almost melodramatic in some key passages, as it was common during the Romantic age also in other countries, as we have seen in Italy with *Rosmunda in Ravenna*. The melodramatic tone of the play also emerges from the stage directions, which emphasize the protagonists' emotional turmoil. As a matter of fact, de Avellaneda is considered to be one of the most famous representative authors of Spanish Romanticism. Although she was mainly remembered and passed on as a great Romantic poet, many scholars argue that, even in her dramas, it is possible to retrace a very prominent Romantic sensibility and Romantic themes. As it will be discussed in the next paragraph, topics as doomed and conflicted love, *otherness* and religion, homeland and history are the main issues tackled in the dramatic narration, together with the construction of a female Romantic subjectivity in a context of political oppression. Many of these themes were also featured in the other two dramas analyzed, *Mary of Scots* and *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, therefore, this last close reading will help us investigate a further perspective on the subjects taken into account and consequently draw the conclusions in the last part of this research work.

2.2 Representation of gender, subjectivity and power in *Egilona*

The tragic drama *Egilona*, similarly to *Mary Queen of Scots* and *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, only features two female characters, Queen Egilona and her maid and friend Ermesenda.[73] The fact that we deal with a text where the female protagonist is mainly surrounded by male characters[74] proves us that the relation between the two genders in the play mirrors the reality of the time—as women in power were a rarity—and is constructed by the author according to specific sexual dynamics. Egilona, although a queen and thus a subject with authority in Sevilla, appears right from the first Scene as Caleb's object of desire and the cause of conflict between the captain of the guards and the Emir. She is introduced to the public through Caleb's gaze as the "feliz

[72] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., p. 25. Original quotes: *(preocupado)* / *(Esforzándose por disimular su agitación)*.

[73] The presence of a maid or an intimate female servant/friend who loyally assists the protagonist is quite recurrent also in other women's tragedies, such as, for example, in the case of Hannah More's *Percy* (1777) with Elwina and her maid Birtha; Mary Darby Robinson's *The Sicilian Lover* (1796) with Honoria and her attendant Agnes; Marianna Starke's The Widow of Malabar (1799) with Indamora and her attendant Fatima; and Rosario de Acuña's *Rienzi el Tribuno* (1876) with María and her maid Juana—who is actually her aunt.

[74] Except for Egilona and Ermesenda, the other dramatis personae of the play are all men: the Emir Abdalasis, new husband of Egilona, King Rodrigo, former husband of Egilona, Caleb, the captain of the Emir's guards, Zeyad and Habib, two Muslim noblemen at Abdalasis's court, Godo 1 and Godo 2, two Visigoth guards, and a Muslim court page.

cristiana"[75] who has just married Abdalasis and who excites in Caleb the most violent jealousy. Indeed, when he hears she is approaching the garden with Ermesenda he immediately decides to leave because his eyes cannot stand to see "her divine grace"[76] without driving him to madness.

> CALEB:
> ¡Cielos! ¡Egilona!
> ¡La sangre siento cual hirviente lava
> por mis venas correr…! Debo alejarme;
> que si aquí solo sus divinas gracias
> contemplaran mis ojos, ¡en delirio
> pudiera…! Sí! Pudiera asesinarla![77]

When in Scene ii, Egilona enters the stage together with Ermesenda and presents herself to the audience, she appears conflicted about her situation. As Elizabeth I and Rosmunda, Egilona is a tormented figure, torn between her desires and what society considers right and proper. However, differently from the Italian Queen, she is given by de Avellaneda the chance to speak her mind in a significant number of monologues and dialogues, so that the public get to know her from her own point of view. In Egilona's struggle between the love she feels for Abdalasis—despite he embodies the enemy of her country and her religion—and her duty towards her homeland and her former husband Rodrigo, it is possible to retrace the typical opposition between women's aspirations and the reality they live in. Such opposition is also featured in de Avellaneda's novel *Sab*, as previously discussed. Sab himself is, in fact, conflicted between his desire to rebel against colonialism and his necessity to fit into the Cuban society of the time. In this regard, Egilona, just like Sab, can be regarded as a representation of de Avellaneda herself, who lived in a constant struggle between the rules and behavioral codes society imposed on women, and her ambition to express her talent and pursue a literary career.

The Visigoth Queen is not a passive character. On the contrary, during the unwinding of the events, she demonstrates to be a strong and determined woman who is willing to renounce her life and realm not to betray her love and her principles. Nevertheless, in her first monologue, she appears as the subaltern, the oppressed and the conquered. What complicates the situation is that the man who invaded her kingdom and stole her husband's crown is also the father of Abdalasis, the man she falls in love with. As she explicitly says in Act I Scene i, when Ermesenda asks her if she is unhappy because she hates Abdalasis for what he represents:

---

[75] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene i, p. 6.
[76] Ibid. Act I, Scene i, p. 6.
[77] Ibid. Act I, Scene i, p. 6. English translation: "Oh my! Egilona! I feel my blood is running through my veins like burning lava…! I need to go away; if my eyes see her divine grace, I could go mad… and murder her!"

EGILONA:
¡Odioso! Tanta
nobleza y dignidad, tanto cariño
nunca inspiraron odio, ni en el alma
de la triste Egilona hallar pudiera
tan indigna pasión fácil entrada.
¡Amo á Abdalasis! ¡Sí, le adoro, amiga![78]

Therefore, the traditional dichotomy oppressed/oppressor is charged with more complicated nuances. From a post-colonial perspective, and following the traditional themes of conquest narratives employed to analyze *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, Egilona represents the objectified territory that Abdalasis penetrates and conquers. Their marriage, after the supposed killing of her first husband King Rodrigo, could seem driven by Abdalasis's desire to secure the loyalty of Spanish people by marrying their Christian queen. Furthermore, from this point of view, it can appear similar to the forced marriage imposed on Rosmunda by Alboin, in which the woman is merely seen as a commodity, useful to reach a better social position or legitimize a new ruler. It is here, though, that de Avellaneda turns the tables and changes the typical conqueror/conquered and subject/object discourse, shifting power positions. Egilona is certainly the conquered and the object but she falls in love with the conqueror/subject, who loves her back and explicitly recognizes her superiority and authority as a queen. Indeed, in Act I Scene ii Abdalasis tells his wife that she should "never implore anyone", not even him. She should instead "rule and order" because she is a queen and "she is the queen of him": "Nunca suplicará Egilona. Ordena, manda cual soberana en mí."[79] In Act I Scene iii, Abdalasis further proves his respect for Egilona's agency and explains his conception of marriage as an equal partnership between husband and wife. In that occasion, he gives her a ring, which symbolizes his commitment to sharing his power with her,[80] and affirms:

ABDALASIS:
Sí, dueño caro;
Y porque nadie a tus piedades trabas
Pueda oponer jamás, orne tu diestra
(Le pone su anillo)
el auréo anillo que doquier se acata,
prenda de autoridad, de mano insigna:
de todo mi poder depositaria
te hago al cederte tan preciosa joya.[81]

---

[78] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene ii, p. 8. English translation: "Hateful! So much nobility and decorum, so much affection could never inspire hatred, neither in the soul of sad Egilona could ever so easily grow such a shameful passion. I love Abdalasis! Yes, I adore him, my friend!"

[79] Ibid. Act I, Scene iii, p. 13.

[80] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

[81] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene iii, p. 14. English translation: "Yes, my beloved master, and since I do not want anyone to come between you and your merciful deeds ever again, I give you this golden ring *(he gives her the ring)* which represents my authority and gives power to the hand that wears it: I bestow on you all my power by offering you this precious jewel."

The power dynamics between them are subverted so that they both appear, alternately, as the subject and the object of the discourse. The reason for their equality can be explained by the fact that both of them, although differently, represent the notion of *otherness* and marginalization. As it will be addressed in the next paragraph, they both belong to social categories that are regarded as inferior, *other* than the norm: Egilona is a woman, while Abdalasis is a Muslim in Christian Spain.

In this regard, the character who symbolizes the norm is Rodrigo, the former King of Sevilla. Rodrigo is the hero who fought to defend his homeland and who, after his release from prison, reclaims what belongs to him: his crown and his wife.

> RODRIGO:
> … ¡usurpador! que soy Rodrigo!
>
> ABDALASIS:
> ¡Rodrigo…! Mientes, desdichado, mientes!
> Rodrigo pereció: su cuerpo frio
> el Guadalete sepultó en sus ondas.
>
> RODRIGO:
> ¿Dó está Egilona? ¡Venga! ¡Yo lo exijo!
> ¡Venga, y sus ojos en mis ojos clave!
> ¡Yo la reclamo, infiel! ¡Soy su marido!
> Hija y mujer de rey, cual digna reina
> Debe vivir ó perecer conmigo.[82]

With Rodrigo's reappearance, Egilona returns to her status of object, a property of his former husband who projects onto her his desire to retake possession of his realm. As soon as he discovers that she married Abdalasis, he explicitly affirms that she is not supposed to decide for herself. Since she is a queen, she should act according to the behavioral codes imposed on women and female monarchs. That is, she should honor her royal status by sharing the fate of her husband, and die with him—"cual digna reina / debe vivir ó perecer conmigo."[83] Nevertheless, de Avellaneda subverts this new power dynamics created by Rodrigo, and turns Egilona again into an authoritative subject who asserts her subjectivity against the impositions of patriarchal society. When Egilona finds herself in the difficult situation of choosing between Rodrigo and Abdalasis, she knows she cannot follow her heart and decides to come back with her former husband, so as to comply with social norms and honor her Christian faith. Indeed,

---

[82] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene vii, p. 23. English translation: Rodrigo "Usurper!" / Abdalasis: "Rodrigo! You lie, miserable man, you lie! Rodrigo died: river Guadalete buried his cold body in its waves" / Rodrigo: "Where is Egilona? I want her to come here! I demand that! I want her to come here and see me with her own eyes! I demand her, infidel! I am her husband! As a daughter and wife of a king, as a proper and dignified queen she has to live or die with me."
[83] Ibid. Act I, Scene vii, p.23.

she acts accordingly to the code imposed on women and tells Abdalasis that her role, as a wife and as a queen, does not let her any choice but to be by Rodrigo's side. In the following passage, the stage directions suggested by the author are significant, since they intensify the meaning of Egilona's words through the use of substantives such as "dignity" and "emotion", which underline the solemnity of the moment.

> EGILONA:
> *(A Abdalasis, con dignidad y emoción)*
> Señor, un sacro nudo
> Me enlazó con Rodrigo: me someto
> á aquella suerte que le des; pues nunca
> ya separarme de su lado debo.[84]

Nevertheless, towards the end of the drama, when the Muslim mob attacks the palace to kill Egilona, and Abdalasis goes into battle to defend her, she openly confronts Rodrigo and tells him to save himself and run away. She explains that she could never leave Abdalasis in the moment of need because she deeply loves him, even if her love is illegitimate and could be seen as a "crimen."[85]

> EGILONA:
> ¡Huye sin mi!
> . . . .
> ¡No es por mi vida!
>
> RODRIGO:
> *(con acento trémulo y terrible)*
> ¿Pues por quién…?
>
> EGILONA:
> Por la suya… ¡Yo le amo!
>
> RODRIGO:
> ¡Amas al musulman…!
>
> EGILONA:
> ¡Ese es mi crimen![86]

Egilona, thus, reclaims an agency which is both personal and political. Personal because it is linked to her feelings and desires, and political, because she is not only choosing between two men but also between two cultures and religions. Abdalasis and Rodrigo, both depicted as valorous heroes, not solely belongs to two different countries and faiths, but rather embody the

---

[84] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Cuadro Segundo, Scene iv, p. 75. English translation: "*(to Abdalasis, with dignity and emotion)*, my lord, a holy knot ties me and Rodrigo, I submit myself to his fate; since I can never leave his side."

[85] Ibid. Cuadro Primero, Scene vi, p. 66.

[86] Ibid. Cuadro Primero, Scene vi, p. 66. English translation: Egilona "Run away without me! . . . it is not for my life!" / Rodrigo "*(with a trembling tone)* For whom then?" / Egilona "For his life! I love him!" / Rodrigo "You love the Muslim!" / Egilona "It is my crime!"

most positive aspects of their nations and beliefs. They represent the idea, already present in *Sab* and in most of her dramas, that virtues and good qualities are *super partes* and are not connected to a specific social class, nationality or religion. Indeed, Muslims and Christians are portrayed as both good and bad, depending on both their actions and the *gaze* of the observer. What de Avellaneda strongly condemns, indeed, is violence and extremisms, which are, in the end, the real enemies of the protagonists.

Remarkably, the real antagonists in the drama are Caleb and Habib and all the other courtesans who plot to betray and kill the Emir. Caleb in particular, the head of the uprising, is depicted by de Avellaneda as the embodiment of masculinity and patriarchy. He is a man driven by his thirst for power, who is willing to use violence in order to possess what he desires and rule over other people. Abdalasis and Egilona are instead characterized by an interesting mixture of masculine and feminine qualities, so much so that they appear to be almost fluid and hybrid figures. They embody the typical elements of the Romantic hero, since they all appear to be sensitive and generous, empathic and honorable, yet torn and tormented by their troubles. Such characteristics put them in a difficult position inside a society that is governed by discrimination and violence and, for such reason, the ending is tragic for all of them. If in typical women's Romantic tragedies, the female protagonist dies because it is her only way out of a world that oppresses, harms and marginalizes women, de Avellaneda sees death as the only escape also for the other representative of alterity, Abdalasis. Egilona and her Muslim husband die together because it is the only way their doomed and illegitimate love can survive without being repressed by society. The Romantic theme of love connected to death that we already saw in other historical dramas, such as *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, *Ines* and *Percy*, plays a prominent role also in *Egilona*. Their passion and feelings, which have the right to exist also outside marriage, prove the modern attitude of de Avellaneda regarding love. After portraying a slave who loves the daughter of his master in *Sab*, the author creates a situation in which two people belonging to different cultures fall in love and, despite the difficulties connected to their sentiment, do not deny their feelings. It is possible to notice, in this regard, a similarity with de Avellaneda's biography and her relationship with Ignacio Cepeda. Although they were both married to other people, they carried on with their epistolary relationship throughout their life. De Avellaneda seems to support a certain degree of freedom of thought and proposes a kind of love that is not necessarily connected to the wedlock—which makes her mindset groundbreaking for the time. While Abdalasis dies murdered by Caleb, and Egilona kills herself because of her love for Abdalasis, Rodrigo manages to escape death. Although alive, he is obliged to give up his realm and crown, and to live a life without the woman he loves. Even

though Rodrigo does not embody a category of *otherness* but, on the contrary, he represents the white Christian Spanish hero, he appears different from the other male characters. Notwithstanding his initial desire to reclaim what he had lost and to murder is enemy Abdalasis, he later distances himself from to the traditional patriarchal values he was supposed to promote. When the palace is attacked, and Abdalasis fights to protect Egilona, Rodrigo puts aside his hatred towards the Muslims and helps his enemy to defend the queen and the castle. Furthermore, it is Rodrigo who risks his life in order to save the Emir when Caleb and Habib, in the last *cuadro*, ambush him. Differently from Caleb and Habib, Rodrigo crosses the boundaries of stereotyped masculinity and the traditional behavior it implies, and proves to be a generous and honorable man who decides to fight for a right cause, regardless of its personal implications. Rodrigo and Abdalasis, as suggested by Evelyn Picon Garfield, end up with respecting each other when Abdalasis recognizes Rodrigo's right over Egilona as her first husband.[87] In turn, Rodrigo thanks Abdalasis for defending the prisoners from the violence of his guards and praises Abdalisis's valour, as well as his right to reign over the Spanish population:[88]

> RODRIGO:
> La tuya [mano] lo empuñó con tanta gloria
> que es superior al mío tu derecho,
> y católico, godo, destronado,
> y rival tuyo en fin, no me avergüenzo
> de confesar que tu virtud te hace
> digno monarca del hispano pueblo.[89]

Therefore, the two men not only defy the stereotypical conventions of masculinity but also deconstruct the opposition that their different religions traditionally create, laying the foundations of a fruitful dialogue which could change the norms of the society they live in.

Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda shows a very innovative approach in dealing with social differences, inequalities, religion and gender issues. Despite her modern attitude regarding women's rights to affirm their agency, it should be underlined that, just like in *Sab*, de Avellaneda mediates her strong affirmations with subtle references to Egilona's loyalty to her belief. According to some history scholars, the real Queen Egilona converted to Islam when she married Abdalasis. Nonetheless, as we will further address in the following paragraphs, de Avellaneda rewrites history and hints that not only she maintained her religion but also

[87] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 95.
[88] Ibid. p. 95.
[89] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Cuadro Segundo, Scene iv, p. 76. English translation: "Your hand held the poniard with such glory that your right to reign is superior to mine, and as a Catholic, a Goth, a dethroned man and your rival, I am not ashamed to confess that your virtue makes you the worthy king of Spanish people."

converted the Emir to Christianity. The issue of his evangelization is explicitly stated only on one occasion, when Abdalasis tells Egilona about his love for her and says: "¡Y es el tuyo mi Dios! ¡mia tu patria!"[90] The process of his conversion is not recounted in the text, but the audience is led to believe that the Emir's words are probably true in the course of the dramatic narration. Indeed, in Act II Scene vi, Habib accuses the Emir of marrying an infidel and becoming "a puppet in the hands of a slave,"[91] sacrificing his duties and his faith.

> HABIB:
> Que de una esclava
> Eres juguete mísero: que en mengua
> de tu pasada gloria, con infieles
> en vergonzosa unión aquí te encuentras,
> sacrificando tu deber, tu culto,
> á la impura pasión que tu alma alberga.[92]

A similar hint is suggested by Ermesenda who, when Egilona still has doubts about her marriage to Abdalasis, tells her that maybe that is her mission: to convert the soul of her spouse to the real God and the sacred law.

> ERMESENDA:
> ¿Y quién sabe, … si á la dulce
> y elevada misión no estás llamada,
> de someter el alma de tu esposo
> del verdadero Dios á la ley santa?[93]

Even though de Avellaneda demonstrates to believe in women's right to choose for themselves, she also feels the need to assert Egilona's propriety, and she manages to do that by means of explicit references to her spotless honor, despite her illegitimate marriage. Indeed, what emerges from various dialogues is that Egilona never consummated her marriage with Abdalasis, preserving herself from sexual intercourse with a man who is not her legitimate spouse. Egilona seems to hint at her appropriate sexual conduct when she says that providence saves her honor—"La providencia salva mi honor."[94] Similarly, Abdalasis hints at the fact that he respected Egilona's integrity in a dialogue with her and Rodrigo, in which he says: "Y tú, Egilona: … yo te juro que tu honor … respetando, á mi razon consultaré."[95] As in her first novel

---

[90] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene iii, p. 15. English translation: "Your god is now mine! Your homeland is now mine!"
[91] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 34. Original quotation below in the text.
[92] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 34. English translation: "You are the puppet of a slave, as your past glory wanes you find yourself shamefully married to an infidel, sacrificing your duty, your faith for the unholy passion that grows in your soul."
[93] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 11. English translation: "Who knows, what if that is exactly your sweet and high mission, to convince your husband to submit his soul to the true god and the holy law?"
[94] Ibid. Act III, Cuadro Primero, Scene iv, p. 62.
[95] Ibid. Act III, Cuadro Primero, Scene v, p. 64. English translation: "And you Egilona: I promise you I will respect your honor."

Sab, the author seems torn between her desire to see her marginalized characters assert their political agency and fight for their freedom, and the necessity of maintaining a socially accepted behavior that would not compromise their respectability. As we have already seen, female writers had to be careful with the creation of fictional characters who act too daringly, since it could have a negative impact on their own reputation. The character of Egilona proves in various occasion her political agency, also in quite daring ways, such as the moment she decides to free the hostages imprisoned by the Muslim army and gives orders to Caleb and the other guards, without asking her husband's permission first.

> EGILONA:
> ¡Caleb! no morirá: yo lo prohíbo:
> yo, cuya voluntad, tú lo confiesas,
> es al Emir precepto sacrosanto.
>
> CALEB:
> ¡Y qué, señora! ¿juzgas que me atreva
> su mandato á infringir…? Si lo revoca,
> como hará, no lo dudes, si te empeñas
> en salvar al cautivo…
>
> EGILONA:
> Lo revoco
> en su nombre yo misma.[96]

Therefore, we can suppose that de Avellenda's intention was probably to balance the political awareness that Egilona displays on many occasions with a more proper social and sexual behavior that makes her appear respectable to the audience.

2.3 *Otherness*, religion and homeland

As addressed in the previous chapter, religion represents in *Egilona* the central issue of *otherness*, together with gender. Similarly to *Mary Queen of Scots*, the drama develops between two opposite religions, Christianity and Islam, which are in a constant conflict against each other. Spain, a Christian country, is conquered by Muza's Muslim army and finds itself, for the first time, to host the cohabitation of two different faiths. Of course, the main problem is that the people belonging to one belief consider those belonging to the other as the enemy. Many dialogues feature invectives between Christians and Muslims, linked to stereotypes that turn the *other* into the evil. When Rodrigo, in prison, finds out that the Emir married Egilona, he

---

[96] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act II, Scene viii, p. 41. English translation: Egilona "Caleb! He will not die, I forbid it: I, whose will, you said so, is for the Emir a sacred commandment." / Caleb "and what, my lady? Do you think I will dare to not respect his order? If he revokes the order, as he will, do not doubt that, if you keep trying to save the hostage…" / Egilona "I myself revoke the order on his behalf."

declares to be his foe and attacks him by questioning his noble spirit and heroism, implying that Muslims do not have the same notions of honor and integrity as Christians.

> RODRIGO:
> *(Cercado de soldados, que lo empujan dentro)*
> ¡Hé aquí de tu nobleza la alta prueba!
> ¡De un musulmán este es el heroísmo!
> . . . .
> pues otra vez lo que te dije digo:
> que tu enemigo soy, que te aborrezco,
> y seguro no estás si yo respiro.[97]

Even Egilona, when she discovers that Abdalasis lied to her, refers to him as belonging to an evil race—"¡Raza funesta! / ¡Pérfida raza de la Arabia fruto!"[98] Remarkably, de Avellaneda combines together issues of religion and patriotism and shapes the characters of Abdalasis and Rodrigo so that they appear as the embodiment of their nationalities and faiths. In this regard, Abdalasis represents a double *otherness*, as a Muslim in a Christian country and as an Arabic man in Spain. Nevertheless, after the Muslim invasion of Spain, it is Rodrigo who personifies the infidel in the Emir's Islamic court. Although there are hints that Abdalasis converted to Christianity, he is still regarded as a Muslim from all the other characters. This could lead us to think that either the Emir never really converted or his socio-cultural belonging defines him more than his actual belief. Despite his new faith, he could be still considered Muslim from a cultural and national perspective, thus remaining the *other*, regardless of religion.

The marriage between Abdalasis and Egilona, rather than uniting two populations, is regarded by the opposite factions as a betrayal: either of the Queen or the Emir. Habib is the most critical towards their union, and as we have seen, he accuses Abdalasis of sacrificing everything he has for Egilona, including "su culto."[99] Habib considers their marriage as a "criminal union" that shocked the entire country and invites the Emir to go out of the palace and look at the faces of his people, whose disdain for his matrimony with an inferior woman—"una sierva"[100]—is made visible in their facial expressions.

> HABIB:
> España con escándalo contempla
> la criminal unión que tu delirio
> hoy á su vista atónita presenta.
> Sal si te atreves del suntuoso alcázar
> donde tu insana vanidad despliega

---

[97] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene viii, p. 24. English translation: "*(surrounded by soldiers, who push him inside)* This is the proof of your nobility! This is the heroism of a Muslim! . . . I tell you again what I have already told you: I am your enemy, I despise you and you will not be safe until I die."
[98] Ibid. Act II, Scene viii, p. 43.
[99] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 34.
[100] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 35.

este fausto real; donde el incienso
de los viles cristianos que te cercan
respira con placer tu loco orgullo.
Sal, Abdalasis, sal, y la vergüenza
que cubre los semblantes musulmanes
será a tus ojos evidente muestra
del indigno baldón que al tuyo imprime
el enlace fatal con una sierva.[101]

Interestingly, the harsher criticism against patriotism and fanaticism is pronounced by Abdalasis himself who, to the above mentioned monologue, answers that only a fanatic and insane mind could think and act the way Habib does—"Para pensar cual tú, fuera preciso tu ciego fanatismo y tu demencia."[102] Indeed, when the Emir orders his guards to imprison Habib, he explicitly addresses his former friend saying that he knows Habib was the one inciting the mob against him and Egilona with a deceitful rhetoric of nationalism and intolerance.

ABDALASIS:
A mi esposa ultrajó, y en su insolencia
corrió a excitar al pueblo, que presume
alucinar con engañosas muestras
de patriotismo y religioso celo.[103]

Habib represents, thus, fanaticism and extremism, an obstacle to Abdalasis's wish for a peaceful and united realm where their two religions can live together. Nevertheless, Habib knows he can count on a multitude of Muslim people ready to punish Abdalasis's "rebellion," as he argues in the following verses:

HABIB:
(con energìa)
Rebelde á tu monarca, impio,
tu religión augusta menosprecias,
y el cetro y la mujer del vil Rodrigo
á precio de tu honor comprar intentas.
. . . .
El clamor general presto á tu oído
Harán llegar en indignadas quejas
los buenos musulmanes: ¡no lo dudes!
De tu palacio á las doradas puertas
acudirán en breve: por salvarte,
si es menester, desplegaran la fuerza,
y con la sangre de la infame goda
las manchas lavaran de tu flaqueza.[104] *(Vase)*

[101] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act II, Scene vi, p. 35. English translation: "Spain is witnessing today the shameful union which is the result of your madness. Go out of the palace if you dare . . . and you will clearly see the shame your Muslim people feel towards you because of your marriage with a servant."
[102] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 35.
[103] Ibid. Act II, Scene vii, p. 37. English translation: "He insulted my wife and he dared to incite my people against me with false hopes and a deceitful display of patriotism and religious zeal."
[104] Ibid. Act II, Scene vi, p. 35. English translation: "*(with energy)* You rebelled against your own king, ungodly man, you belittle your great religion, and you try to buy Rodrigo's scepter and wife at your honor's cost. Good

At the beginning of the drama, even Egilona regards her marriage with Abdalasis as a crime she is ashamed of. In a long and intense dialogue with her maid Ermesenda, Egilona recalls all the good qualities of Abdalasis, underlining how his triumphs and his valour are a positive token for the Muslims but have been a disgrace for Spain. It was thanks to his honor and ability in the battlefield that he made the Calif proud of him, but, at the same time, precisely because of his bravery, he subjugated the Iberian Peninsula.

> EGILONA:
> ¡Gloria y virtud funestas á mi patria!
>
> ERMESENDA:
> Es Abdalasis…
>
> EGILONA:
> Del Califa apoyo;
> Orgullo de la gente musulmana;
> firme sostén del Alcorán impío…
> es quien á Iberia sujetó á sus plantas,
> y con arroyos de cristiana sangre
> regó los lauros que en su sien se enlazan.
>
> ERMESENDA:
> En él son esos…
>
> EGILONA:
> Títulos de gloria,
> Timbres de honor… mas para mí de infamia.[105]

In the course of the dialogue, she repeats many times that her love for the Emir is a "criminal amor" and a "unión nefanda" because she married an enemy of her homeland—"enemigo de su ley y de su pueblo."[106] The *reason of state,* in this case, seems to prevail over her love for him, which, as we know, triumphs at the end of the drama when she decides to kill herself in order not live without him. She is torn between her duty towards her population and her feelings, between politics and personal issues, just like Elizabeth I when dealing with the supposed betrayal of her cousin Mary Stuart. In Act I Scene i, she also recounts a dream she had about Rodrigo accusing her, a "cristiana" and "digna reina," of converting to Islam—"del infiel opresor . . . vé a recibir la fé."[107] A good explanation to her dream, which interestingly connects

---

Muslims will soon come to save you if necessary, and they will wash away the stains of your weakness with the blood of your infidel wife."

[105] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene ii, p. 8. English translation: Egilona "Glory and unfortunate virtues to my homeland" / Ermesenda "It is Abdalasis…" / Egilona "He is the Califs's right arm and the pride of the Muslims; he firmly believes in the ungodly Coran . . . he is the one who subjugated the Iberian Peninsula and with rivers of Christian blood he watered the laurels of the crown on his forehead" / Ermesenda "For him those are…" / Egilona "Titles of glory, marks of honor… but for me they are marks of infamy."

[106] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 9.

[107] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 9.

Egilona to Orra created by Joanna Baillie, is given by her maid. Indeed, Ermesenda suggests that her nightmare is not her conscience speaking, but rather her mind that, in a difficult moment of anxiety and panic, produces such terrible and delirious thoughts.

> ERMESENDA:
> Ese delirio tormentoso prueba
> el pánico terror que te acobarda.
> No es tu conciencia, no, la que te acusa;
> es tu mente, Egilona, la que insana
> en su febril agitación, produce
> ridículos terrores y fantasmas.[108]

Egilona replies that she is weak and guilty because, after Rodrigo's death,[109] she should have acted as a queen and die with him, as it was custom at the time: "Flaca y culpable soy, pues no he sabido / como reina morir."[110] On the contrary, Ermesenda does not see any fault in Egilona's conduct. She reckons her queen behaved as a true Christian, since she could bear the misfortunes that happened to her and managed to be accepted and loved as a monarch all over her realm. Indeed, she reminds Egilona that her homeland wanted her to live. Furthermore, the marriage that she sees as a disgrace is instead perceived as a source of hope by her people, who consider the Emir as a loyal friend and not an oppressor.[111] The marriage with Abdalasis could thus strengthen her position as a monarch and help her do much more good to her people. Indeed, Ermesenda argues that if the love she and Abdalasis share is not enough for her happiness, she should feel happy in knowing that her position allows her to help her country.

> ERMESENDA:
> Como cristiana
> la desventura soportar debiste.
> Tu vida ¡Oh Egilona! demandaba
> esta patria que adoras, y el enlace
> que juzgas tu baldón, es su esperanza.
> Cuando á su trono te elevó Rodrigo
> con inferior autoridad reinabas
> que la que aquí gozaste prisionera,
> y que con tu himeneo hoy afianzas.
> Sí; mas que reina por tu pueblo hiciste
> hora puedes hacer, y si no basta
> el amor del Emir á tu ventura,
> en practicar el bien debes hallarla.[112]

---

[108] Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros,* op. cit., Act I, Scene ii, p. 10. English translation: "This tormented delirium is the proof of the panic and fear that are troubling you. It is not your conscience that is accusing you: it is your mind, Egilona, which, in its insane and hectic agitation, is creating these ghosts and absurd nightmares."

[109] At the beginning of the play, when this dialogue takes place, both Egilona and Ermesenda do not know Rodrigo is still alive.

[110] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 11.

[111] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 11.

[112] Ibid. Act I, Scene ii, p. 11. English translation: "As a Christian, you had to suffer and endure misfortune. O Egilona, this homeland that you adore wanted you to stay alive, and this marriage that you consider your disgrace is, in fact, its only hope. When Rodrigo made you his Queen, you had less authority than you were granted as

In this passage, Egilona and Ermesenda represent two opposite points of view on Egilona's marriage, but, implicitly, also on the relationship between Christians and Muslims, and on the dynamics oppressor/oppressed. From Egilona's perspective, Christians have been conquered and oppressed in their homeland. Therefore, Muslim people are the enemy to be fought and expelled. Ermesenda does not deny the invasion and the oppression, but reminds her queen that the previous situation was not very different. She continues saying that Abdalasis is a good ruler, loved by Spanish people, and a good husband. Indeed, as a woman and a queen, Egilona gained a greater authority and agency with Abdalasis—a freedom of action which Rodrigo never allowed her to have. The conflict between the desire to remain loyal to her country and religion, and the love for her kind and generous opponent, seems to have no solution in the drama. The two women, who probably portray a series of contrasting thoughts that the author herself had in mind, are interrupted while talking and cannot reach an agreement. The end of the drama shows that, despite various setbacks, Egilona decides to follow her heart over her sense of belonging to Rodrigo and what he represents: Christianity and the homeland. Egilona's suicide puts an end to all the hypothesis about the future of the queen as the wife of a Muslim Emir in Spain, and raises a further point. Indeed, what led to the tragic end of the drama was people's refusal to conceive a society where two different beliefs and cultures could pacifically coexist. As Caratozzolo underlines "vince dunque, alla fine, il discorso epico, nutrito di nazionalismi, di intolleranza, di sterilità affettiva."[113] The audience, though, cannot help but being emotionally touched by the "tragic figure of the losers"[114] Egilona and Abdalasis, who symbolize the author's hope for a more embracing society, as well as her awareness of the difficulties and the limits that the freedom of thought, love and religion imply.

2.4 Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and the re-writing of history in *Egilona*

The real history of Egilona and Abdalasis, according to the various historical sources, appears very different from that recounted by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. The greatest manipulation enacted by the author certainly regards Rodrigo, who is killed during the war between the Muslims and the Christians and is definitively dead. Consequently, the marriage between Egilona and Abdalasis does not encounter the obstacle of her first husband who

---

Abdalasis's prisoner, and certainly less power than that you acquire today with your marriage. Yes, you can do more for your people now, and if the Emir's love is not enough for your happiness, you have to create your own happiness by doing good."

[113] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 108. English translation: "The *epic dicourse* wins in the end, nourished by nationalisms, intolerance and emotional sterility."

[114] Ibid. p. 108.

reclaims her love and possession. Furthermore, historians argue that Egilona converted to Islam when she married Abdalasis. In this case as well, de Avellaneda's version differs from the original sources and seems willing to reclaim the honor of a Christian queen who was passed on as an infidel who betrayed her faith for love. As suggested by Picon Garfield, the legend of Don Rodrigo represents a canonical narration in Spanish history and culture, therefore, the subversion of the canon enacted by de Avellaneda allows her to re-appropriate a marginal historical figure, that of Egilona.[115] If Egilona was remembered as the widow of Rodrigo and, later, as the wife of Abdalasis, with her tragedy, Tula manages to give her a new historical dimension in which she can assert her subjectivity. De Avellaneda's manipulation of history appears to work in a double direction. On the one hand, the author acknowledges Egilona's active role in the unwinding of the events, bringing the queen from a marginal to a central position inside the dramatic narrative, and redeems her memory and reputation. On the other hand, she also changes the public perspective on the historical figures of Rodrigo and Abdalasis, who move from a central to a subaltern role and acquire a more complex and subversive personality. As we have already seen in the previous paragraphs, Rodrigo and Abdalasis are portrayed as two generous and sensitive men, who, despite being enemies, recognize the valour and honour of their opponent. The history recounted by de Avellaneda is a combination of *macro* and *micro*history, where the *macro*history is often deconstructed in order to let the Romantic subtext emerge. Rodrigo and Abdalasis, as the men—and warriors—who embody their nations, religions and cultures, can be easily identified as the protagonists of the *macro*historical events that characterize the narration. They are the ones ruling their countries, fighting on the battlefield and, later, fighting for Egilona's love. Nevertheless, as Picon Garfield underlines, the two start to respect and appreciate each other when they discover that Egilona and the realm are in danger. In this way, de Avellaneda questions the patriarchal discourse of canonical historiography, which would see Abdalasis and Rodrigo as the stereotypical combatants whose only goal is to kill the enemy. As in the case of *Mary Queen of Scots* and *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, *micro*history seems to prevail over the traditional narrative of great endeavors, which is present but not prominent in the development of the plot. Indeed, the Muslim invasion of Spain has already occurred when the drama begins and the story focuses more on the consequences than on the event *per se*. As it is usual in Romantic female writers' historical dramas, the repercussions of the Muslim conquest of Sevilla prevalently hit marginalized categories, which, in this case, are represented by Egilona. After Muza subjugated her people, she was held prisoner and only her social rank preserved her from being treated as

---

[115] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: el discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

any other war hostage. Interestingly, it is because of the feelings Abdalasis felt for her that her history changed and she took on again the role of the queen. Therefore, the personal sphere that characterizes *micro*history has a strong impact on the development of the plot and on the relationship between the two religions. The mob that attacks the palace revolts against Abdalasis precisely because he chose to marry a Christian woman, putting his feelings before his people. The author re-writes, thus, a history where the "feminine" domestic sphere of sentiments changes the course of the historical events related to the invasion of Spain.

The dramatic element of Rodrigo's return—that can fall into the definition of *anagnorisis*[116]—is not only a literary device that changes the canonical historical recount about King Rodrigo, but constitutes a clever stratagem that let the personal domain emerge and dominate the political. The struggle of Egilona between two men and two cultures bestows on the dramatic narration a greater *pathos* and adds a remarkable variation to the theme of the doomed love which leads to death. Indeed, as we have already discussed, in Egilona's case, death is a choice that she makes in order to escape a society in which she is not valued and respected. Therefore, the change de Avellaneda introduces to the traditional story serves the purpose of promoting a female agency, which Egilona asserts at the end of the drama. Furthermore, the personal difficulties she encounters during the narration, her doubts and indecisiveness which permeate the whole plot, further highlight the importance of the marginalized historical characters and their personal discourse. As Hugh A. Harter argues,

> The inclusion of the return of Rodrigo—a detail invented by Gertrudis and not found in other versions of the story of Egilona and Abdalasis—makes two dramas in one, first, that of the love story of the widow and the emir and their struggle for happiness in the face of the political, social, and religious obstacles that threaten to overwhelm them, and second, the problem of Egilona as lover newlywed to one man while still the wife of another whom she had thought dead. Either story would conceivably have sufficed for the drama.[117]

The reason why de Avellaneda decided to combine "two dramas"—to use Harter's terminology—is proposed by Caratozzolo, who suggests a reading of the play through the contrast between the protagonists' individual history and the corresponding collective history of the Spanish people oppressed by the Arabs.[118] According to the scholar, a comparison between these two histories demonstrates that, when there is a mutual intention to understand the *other*—both in the case of two people or two populations—the biased power dynamics

---

[116] Caldera defines *anagnorisis* as the final and unexpected recognition of one of the protagonists, whose identity was hidden or unknown during the whole story. Source: Ermanno Caldera, *El Teatro Español en la Época Romántica,* op. cit. p.56. In this case, the text features the unexpected recognition of one of the hostages in the Muslim prison, who turns out to be Rodrigo himself.

[117] Hugh A. Harter, *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* Boston, Twayne, 1981, p. 94.

[118] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 104.

subject/object collapse, positioning both subjects on the same level.[119] As we have seen in the previous paragraph, it is particularly true for Abdalasis and Egilona, since the Emir addresses his wife as his peer and not as a subaltern. The two of them try to create a similar environment also for their people, deconstructing the prejudicial boundaries between their cultures and religions. With their marriage, they seem willing to exemplify the union of their populations and, thus, the merging of the individual and collective history—which could respectively correspond to the definitions of *micro* and *macro*history given by Ginzburg, Gonzalez, Cerutti or Levi.[120] From this perspective, we can affirm that Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, through her re-writing of canonical history, manages to create an historical context that is shaped by the personal histories of the protagonists, anticipating the theories of feminist scholars as Joan Scott, Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle and Nancy Strom Dye, who envisioned "a new history" which encompassed "personal subjective experiences as well as public and political activities."[121]

[119] Vittorio Caratozzolo, *Il Teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit., p. 104.
[120] The issue of *micro* and *macro*history is addressed in detail in Chapter 3, paragraph 2.1.
[121] Ann D. Gordon, Mari Jo Buhle and Nancy Strom Dye, "The problem of women's history", op. cit., p. 89.

CONCLUSIONS

In the 18th and 19th centuries, as the first chapters of this thesis argued, the presence of women in the literary field was more prominent than official historiography previously recounted. Through the investigation of English, Italian and Spanish literature, this research work tried to show to what extent the situation of women writers during the Romantic age was analogous in the three different European national contexts examined. Women made an essential contribution to the development of literature, as well as to the creation of cultural networks that allowed a wide diffusion of new literary movements, theories and ideas. In England, female writers of the calibre of Ann Radcliffe and, later, Mary Shelley, gave new fundamental inputs to many different genres such as, for example, that of gothic fiction, contributing to its popularity in the following centuries. Joanna Baillie, for instance, changed the rules of dramatic composition, introducing a deep insight into the characters' minds and a close investigation of their passions, which drive the development of the plot and actions. In Italy, the role of the *salonnières* was crucial for the expansion of Romantic and patriotic ideals, as well as for the cultural growth of the country. In Spain, writers such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Carolina Coronado and, later, Fernán Caballero, played a crucial role in the cultural and literary progress of society. How is it possible that so many women were completely erased from literary historiography for so long? How can it be that acclaimed female authors, considered among the most extraordinary pens of their times, were later discarded so easily? Unfortunately, the answer utterly resides in their gender. Neither their ability to write nor their successful careers could change the fact that they were women in a world dominated by men. Men were running most of the periodicals and wrote, in fact, the majority of reviews and criticism. Moreover, they passed on, through their anthologies and collections, most of the literature that survived in the following centuries. The intrinsic sexism rooted in most male intellectuals contributed to the creation of a biased selection of authors and texts from which women were mainly excluded. The few female writers remembered and passed on were believed to be the first and only women writers in the history of literature, when the panorama was really much wider. Elaine Showalter, in her *A Literature of Their Own*, was one of the first feminist scholars to address this issue, specifically that of women novelists, underlining how the geography of female writing is broader and more varied than the ideal mapping passed on by male writers and critics:

> In the atlas of the English novel, women's territory is usually depicted as desert bounded by mountains on four sides: the Austen peaks, the Brontë cliffs, the Eliot range and the Woolf hills. This book is an attempt

> to fill the terrain between these literary landmarks and to construct a more reliable map from which to explore the achievements of English women novelists.[1]

As this thesis displayed in the first chapter, the contribution that women writers made to the development of Romantic literature in their countries is undeniable. In particular, the focus on theatre and drama elaborated in the second chapter proves that women's presence in the theatrical environment of the 18th and 19th centuries in England, Italy and Spain was much more prominent than what previously handed down by traditional literary historiography. Notwithstanding the obstacles the feminine gender encountered when approaching a career connected to the stage, theatre was certainly not a strictly masculine environment. Women managed to be recognised as outstanding actresses and prolific theatre managers, but also wrote about and for the stage, often dominating the scene for years, as in the case of Elizabeth Inchbald, Joanna Baillie and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. As we have seen, the number of women who penned dramas, comedies or tragedies was significant, especially in England and Spain, where the theatre was the most appreciated form of popular entertainment. In Italy, it should be remarked that the Romantic age saw a significant diminishing of original dramas and a rise in fame of operas and melodrama. Therefore, both male and female dramatists were less engaged with tragedies than in the previous centuries. However, women in Italy largely contributed to the birth and growth of the genre of *improvvisazione*, which became famous all over Europe and had a strong impact on the theatrical culture of the time. As the third chapter pinpoints, feminist scholars' studies and researches conducted from the 1970s onwards allowed us to rediscover a wide panorama of women who walked out of the domestic sphere and wrote about themselves, their lives, and the political and socio-cultural contexts in which they lived. Furthermore, the great work of feminist critics and theorists helped us to rethink women's writing from new perspectives, to reread their texts "with fresh eyes,"[2] contextualising women's thoughts within a specific historical framework and the patriarchal societies of the time. This process necessarily leads to re-position the importance of the lives and works of female writers, who did not share the same access to education and social conditions as men and, thus, had a hard time affirming themselves as authors. Since the prominence of women's literary production was underestimated because of their gender, feminist scholars suggested to recognise gender itself as a fundamental category of literary analysis, which allows a more in-depth exploration of the themes and subtexts featured in women's works. As discussed in the first chapters, women often had to compromise their life and reputation in order to be accepted

[1] Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of their Own. British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. vii.
[2] Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken", op. cit., p. 18.

as professional writers. They had to be very careful with the way they publicly behaved, or they risked being openly ridiculed. For such reason, even the messages conveyed by women in their texts had to be appropriate for their gender, since explicit political compositions were regarded as a dangerous encroachment onto a masculine domain. As we have seen, women often featured in their texts different stratagems—such as metaphors, allegories, hidden references—to address burning issues of the time, maintaining an apparent propriety.

Tragedy, in particular, as the "high" genre of theatre which dated back to Ancient Greece, was considered as belonging to the masculine public sphere. Therefore, women's approach to the genre was highly frowned upon, in all the three countries examined. Nevertheless, female writers managed to write and put on stage a great number of tragedies, and with success. Women not only appropriated the classical genre but also followed the Romantic trend that was spreading across Europe, employing a variety of innovative dramatic devices and adjusting them to their female perspective. By dealing with tragedy from a female point of view, combining old patterns with a new Romantic sensitivity and introducing issues of gender and *otherness*, women challenged the norms of a very canonised genre. For this reason, their decision to test themselves and their skills with the genre of tragedy can be regarded as a daring act of agency. In a society that did not believe women to be as intelligent as men and, thus, inapt for a literary career, female dramatists confronted their male counterparts in the field that, more than any other, was generally reckoned as exclusively male. Women's exclusion from the theatrical environment—although, as we have seen, more theoretical than practical—was enacted from a double angle. On the one hand, women were discouraged from approaching a playwriting career because of their supposed mental inferiority, reiterated in many cruel critical attacks against female writers. On the other hand, the ambiguity of the theatrical environment, as we have seen in the course of the thesis, was regarded as inappropriate for a respectable lady. Therefore, the reputation of the women who were connected to the stage was continuously under scrutiny and, possibly, object of slanders and calumnies. These two issues were, of course, closely related. Since women were perceived as less intelligent, less wise and sensible than men, they were supposedly more vulnerable to temptations and unable to discern right from wrong, especially in the equivocal context of theatre. Nevertheless, as this thesis attempted to prove, women were not only as brilliant as men in penning dramas, but also very determined in their choice of writing for the stage. Despite the difficulties encountered and the harsh criticism they received for being women who meddled in a public domain, they managed to compose tragedies that were appreciated both on stage and on the printed page.

Following the interest in history that characterised many European Romanticisms, women employed historical backgrounds in most of their tragedies, whether they labelled their plays as "historical tragedies" or not. Indeed, even if history is only present as an external framework, it allows female playwrights to set their stories in a different epoch and place, in which they can deal with debated issues related to the present, questioning the social order but without disrupting the *status quo*. As Lilla Maria Crisafulli argues,

> i drammi romantici ricorreranno a due categorie di storia: l'una come cornice entro la quale si svolge il dramma o come serie di fatti e di azioni esterni designati dal *play*, l'altra, lukácsianamente, come condizione inevitabile insita negli stessi drammi e nel loro modo di rappresentare, entrambi condizionati e perfino determinati dai conflitti in atto nel loro tempo.[3]

All the tragedies examined in this thesis—both in the general analysis and in the close readings—are set in a distant past that allows the authors to introduce the audience, or the readers, to situations and topics related to women's experiences and social conditions. Indeed, as this thesis attempted to demonstrate, women used tragedy not only as a literary genre but also as a means through which they could discuss social and political issues, express their opinions to a vast public and affirm both their authority and *authoriality* as female playwrights. The great *leitmotiv* that links the main themes they tackled in their plays is, as mentioned above, women's social conditions, lack of civil rights and power over themselves. Such issues appear as the core of most of women's tragedies, even when the plot and the topics addressed are not openly associated with the difficult situation women were living in 18th and 19th centuries European societies. The Romantic theme of love connected to death is present in many of the tragedies analysed, such as in *Percy* (1777) by Hannah More, *Orra* (1806) by Joanna Baillie, *Erminia* (1817) by Diodata Saluzzo di Roero, *Leoncia* (1840) and *Egilona* (1845) by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* (1837) by Luisa Amalia Paladini and *Ines* (1845) by Laura Beatrice Oliva. The protagonists of these tragedies are not allowed, by their families or by social circumstances, to choose their own destiny. They are often obliged to marry someone they despise, as it happens to Elwina in *Percy*, and Rosmunda. Some of them are separated from the person they love either because of religion, as in the case of Egilona, or because of social class, as Ines and Orra, or even age, as it happens to Leoncia. What all these different cases have in common is women's social role as commodities, instead of subjects with

---

[3] Lilla Maria Crisafulli, "Dramma Storico e Drammaturgia Femminile in Epoca Romantica", op. cit., p. 15. Crisafulli is here paraphrasing a quotation from T.A. Hoagwood & D.P. Watkins, *British Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays,* Cranbury-London-Missisauga: Associated University Presses, 1998, p. 47.
English translation: "Romantic dramas will employ two categories of history: one that serves as a framework either within which the drama develops or as progression of events and actions designed by the play, the other, drawing from Lukàcs's theories, as an inevitable condition intrinsic in the dramas themselves and in their way of representing reality, both conditioned, even determined by the current conflicts of the time."

desires and rights. Female playwrights display and denounce to what extent the condition of women in the social order is that of the object, sold and bought following conveniences and families' political alliances. By doing so, they anticipate a notion later developed by Luce Irigaray, who saw in the exchange of women through marriage the foundation of patriarchal society. In her essay "Women on the Market" (1977), Irigaray argues that

> The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women. Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the natural kingdom. The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves, according to a rule known as the incest taboo. Whatever familial form this prohibition may take in a given state of society, its signification has a much broader impact. It assures the foundation of the economic, social and cultural order that has been ours for centuries.[4]

Furthermore, agents of *otherness* such as age, class and religion play a double role in preventing women from marrying men who fall outside of the normalised categories of society and are thus regarded as marginalised individuals. Orra cannot marry Theobald because he is an impoverished nobleman, and she is kept prisoner because her title and fortune would help Glottenbal improve his social position. On the contrary, in the case of Ines, it is her who has no title and is not allowed to be with the man she loves because he is a Prince. Therefore, whatever the combination of different intersectional elements, the result is consistent. The female protagonists of women's tragedies are destined to arranged and loveless marriages, mirroring the situation of real women in society. The connection between doomed love and death, *Eros* and *Thanatos* is, thus, immediate. Female characters often prefer death to an unhappy life. Whether they commit suicide or sacrifice their life for their beloved ones, their death is depicted by female dramatists as a sort of tragic escape from a reality in which women could not survive. The only exception is Orra, who is driven mad by the terrible events she endures because of Glottenbal and his father. Even in this case, though, madness is portrayed by Baillie as both a consequence of women's situation in society and a way for the protagonist to escape reality.

As we have discussed in the previous chapters, religion is a prominent theme in women's tragedies. Of course, it was a crucial issue in European societies and a fundamental element of identification and cultural belonging. People with different faiths were considered as inferior both morally and intellectually, therefore they were often discriminated and marginalised in society. The matter of *otherness* in relation to religion is particularly complex since the point of view of the gazer changes continuously, according to the country investigated. In *Mary Queen of Scots,* we have seen England's internal conflict between Anglicans and Catholics,

---

[4] Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market", op. cit., p. 170. Cfr. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, op. cit.

represented by their Queens, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I. If Catholicism is regarded by Elizabeth and her court as a danger for both her crown and her population, especially after the massacre carried out by her Catholic sister Mary Tudor, in Italy Catholicism was the norm, and the same can be said for Spain. Therefore, the issue of religion as an agent of *otherness* is present in many tragedies but continuously shifting depending on the narrating voice. While gender as a category of analysis finds a common ground all over Europe, as women were similarly treated and discriminated in the countries examined, religion divided Europe itself creating *otherness* among people sharing the same gender, class, age and nationality. Nevertheless, it is interesting to notice that the *other*, that is the infidel, is in some cases also the protagonist's beloved one. Both Egilona and Erminia are in love with a man with a different faith, respectively Abdalasis and Tancredi. In both cases, the *other* is portrayed as kind, valorous and worthy of love and respect, but such virtues do not change the illegitimacy of their relationship, destined to a tragic ending.[5] Although many female dramatists examined were also religious women, as in the case of Mary Deverell and Diodata Saluzzo di Roero,[6] the description of characters belonging to different beliefs are never typified as completely evil or immoral, but rather explored and understood. A clear example is Mary Stuart in *Mary Queen of Scots*, whose "non-normative" faith in Anglican England does not define her as a wicked person at Elizabeth's eyes, and is not the reason for her death. Remarkably, in *Egilona*, just like in de Avellaneda's novel *Sab*, the characters who represent alterity are placed in a sort of parallelism with the female protagonists, in which the male *other* and the woman share unfair social conditions and a tragic destiny. Similarly, in *Mary Queen of Scots*, the two female protagonists are both presented as the *other*, depending on the belief of the gazer, and, as women, are both subjected to the patriarchal power that rules over society, whether Catholic or Protestant. A different use of the theme of religion is made by de Avellaneda in her tragedies *Saúl* and *Baltasar*, in which faith becomes an instrument for the characters' freedom from oppression. Elda's trust in God—as we have seen in chapter three, probably the Jewish God—gives her the power to contrast Baltasar's tyranny and to assert her authority and refusal to marry the king, despite her status as slave.

As in the case of *Baltasar*, in which de Avellaneda portrays a battle between temporal and spiritual power, religion is often combined with political issues. Indeed, politics was a controversial terrain for women. On the one hand, they were excluded from decision-making

[5] It should be underlined that Erminia actually converts to Tancredi's faith at a certain point, but, despite her conversion to Christianity, they cannot be together because of her past as a Muslim and as Dicomano's fiancé.

[6] As we have seen, Mary Deverell was a well-known religious essayist, therefore, even though we do not have much biographical information we can assume from the content of her works that she was a religious person. As far as Diodata Saluzzo di Roero is concerned, her biographical information confirms she was a Catholic.

processes, since they could neither vote nor be elected, and were not allowed to openly discuss their political opinions because it was not appropriate for their sex. On the other hand, most English, Italian and Spanish women writers were eager to be legally recognised as citizens with duties and rights towards their countries, and to have the freedom to express their political view. Politics, as Kate Millett theorised in her groudbreaking volume *Sexual Politics*, published in 1969[7], is utterly a matter of sex and power. The power dynamics of patriarchal society see women in a subaltern position to men who, as the only political agents, hold and exercise the power. Power is, indeed, what creates and legitimises biased social structures and divisions, from that of social classes to those of gender. For such reason, as postulated by Deleuze and Guattari,[8] every piece of literature written by people belonging to minor groups, excluded from the exercise of power, has a political value since the thoughts and voices of the subaltern are always silenced and ignored. The sexual power dynamics described by Millett are frequently retraceable in many women's tragedies, both in the dichotomy oppressor/oppressed and in the subject/object binarism. The subject, who is often also the oppressor, is in most cases the male protagonist of the story, while women fall into the category of object/oppressed, mirroring the reality in which female dramatists lived. Nevertheless, as this thesis tried to prove, female playwrights often used their tragic works to enact a subversion of the traditional power dynamics, managing to reverse the subject/object structure so that women could affirm their subjectivity. It is evident in de Avellaneda's *Egilona*, in which the female protagonist moves from being the object of Rodrigo, Abdalasis and Caleb's desire to being a subject with power and authority, recognised and celebrated by her husband, who sees her as his equal. A similar pattern occurs in *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, when Rosmunda, prisoner and Alboin's object of conquest and desire, plots to kill her husband, reclaiming her power over him. Notwithstanding their status as objects and commodities for their families, also Elwina (*Percy*) and Orra assert their subjectivity when they affirm their own feelings and desires. Elwina tells his father about her unhappy marriage with Douglas and her chaste love for Percy, while Orra states that she does not want to marry because she dreams of an equal relationship with a man who would regard her as a partner and not a slave, and of a realm in which she can reign without being subjected to a male power. De Avellaneda's Elda (*Baltasar*), a Jew slave and thus the epitome of powerlessness, subverts her position of "oppressed" and becomes a subject with authority when she declares that even if they cage her body, her soul will never be tamed. She also strongly refuses to kneel before King Baltasar because she only recognises the authority of her

[7] Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, op. cit.
[8] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, op. cit.

God, asserting her individuality while also reclaiming her right to belong to a different religion and culture, which should be worthy of respect. On the contrary, in *Mary Queen Scots*, Deverell describes a situation in which two queens are forced to fight against each other in order to maintain their power, in a patriarchal society that does not regard them as suitable for their positions. In this case, Deverell portrays two figures who are apparently subjects with authority over themselves and their people, but who turn out to be powerless objects in a sexual political structure in which the subject is patriarchal society itself—represented by all the male politicians, noblemen and courtesans who surround the two queens. Indeed, Elizabeth manages to keep her crown and maintain her power only when she rejects her femininity and turns her back to Mary, condemning her to death in order not to be reckoned weak by the other male European monarchs. From this perspective, we could say that Elizabeth I undergoes the typical subversion of the subject/object position carried out by other female playwrights. Nevertheless, a more in-depth analysis shows to what extent Deverell wants to demonstrate that, in order to become a subject, women have to make difficult choices and compromise their private life, just like Elizabeth does. The ultimate act of self-assertion enacted by most female protagonists is, in fact, suicide. In tragedies such as *Egilona*, *Rosmunda in Ravenna* and *Leoncia*, the decision to renounce their lives is taken by female protagonists because it is the only way to finally affirm their own subjectivity and authority, at least, over themselves. The issue of politics is also present in female tragedies with a patriotic connotation. It can be found, especially in Luisa Amalia Paladini's *Rosmunda in Ravenna* and Rosario de Acuña's *Amor á la Patria*, in which clear references to the oppression of Italy and Spain are made. De Acuña is very explicit in conveying her patriotic principles, and her female characters, María and Inés, are openly political and ready to sacrifice their lives for their homeland. Conversely, Luisa Amalia Paladini shows a more prudent approach to the matter. She only leaves some hints to her audience about the necessity for Italian people to take a strong position against their oppressors. Indeed, Rosmunda's plot to kill Alboin, the man who invaded her realm, is somehow justified by Menete—and the author herself—as a valorous and courageous act that should serve as an example for the Italian population. Rosmunda, María and Inés (*Amor á la Patria*), despite their gender, represent the ideal patriotic heroes, devoted to the fight for independence, even at the cost of their lives.

Remarkably, the representation of gender that emerges from the tragedies analysed is very different from the typical female portrayal retraceable in Romantic male writers' texts. Women are not depicted as weak damsels in distress, but rather as strong, passionate characters, who are aware of their unfair social conditions. In addition to the typical features of the Romantic

hero, destined to a tragic destiny and constantly torn between desires and reality, women playwrights' female characters also experience marginalisation and lack of power, which exacerbate their dramatic role. Despite their active and brave behaviour, their valour and courage, female protagonists cannot really subvert the social order in which they live. Therefore, in the end, death appears to be the only way to escape from a society that does not give women the chance to affirm their individuality and to take possession of their fate. As a matter of fact, the portrayal of female characters mirrors the situation of women at the time, drawing a parallel between the tragic existences of these fictional heroines and the difficulties encountered by women in their everyday life, among bias, discrimination and lack of civil rights. By transposing on paper the experiences, feelings and hopes of historical women, female playwrights manage to shift the audience's attention to the *micro*historical elements of the past, and to bestow a newfound importance to women and the domestic sphere. The choice of writing about history gave female dramatists the opportunity to revisit events from a new perspective, and to rewrite such episodes with a focus on what historiography previously ignored and erased. What Evelyn Picon Garfield[9] underlines about *Egilona* can as well be said about other tragedies such as *Rosmunda in Ravenna*, *Ines, Mary Queen of Scots, Tullia*, *El Principe de Viana* and *Catilina*, in which real female historical characters, forgotten by official recounts, were given a new literary and historical dimension thanks to a female revision. English, Italian and Spanish female playwrights put at the centre of their compositions the struggles of marginalised characters who are usually not even present in historical chronicles. In female tragedies in particular, women are at the centre of the unwinding of events. They not only dominate the domestic sphere but also the public realm, since the two are not rigidly separated but rather merged in the "continuum of sociability" theorised by Tracy C. Davis.[10] Public and private domains influence each other, since the consequences of the first have an impact on the second and vice versa. By exploring and recounting the happenings occurred in the domestic sphere and the experiences lived by marginalised people, female dramatists manage to give a more comprehensive narration of the historical events on which their tragedies were based. Furthermore, putting women at the forefront of the scene gave them the opportunity of investigating female characters' lives and mind, giving back to them the importance they deserved as subjects of history, rather than two-dimensional background actresses. Interestingly, female playwrights employ the same pattern also for fictional female characters, as in the case of *Erminia*, *Rienzi* and *Rienzi el tribuno.* The female protagonists of such tragedies

[9] Evelyn Picon Garfield, *Poder y Sexualidad: El discurso de Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*, op. cit.
[10] Tracy C. Davis, "The sociable playwright and the representative citizen", op. cit., p. 18.

are not, in fact, real historical women but are created by the authors and incorporated inside historical episodes, as it was custom in historical novels of the time, such as in Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi*. Even in this case, female dramatists place fictional female characters at the core of the plot, giving them the opportunity to play a fundamental role in the unwinding of events. Erminia, a secondary character in Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) becomes the protagonist of Saluzzo di Roero's homonymous tragedy, proving herself to be a courageous and loyal heroine who values her new faith and her love for Tancredi above her own life. Indeed, it is thanks to her sacrifice that she manages to save both Tancredi and Boemondo's lives. History is rewritten, from a female perspective, also in the English and Spanish versions of Rienzi's story, penned respectively by Mary Russell Mitford and Rosario de Acuña. Rienzi's daughter Claudia (in Mitford's tragedy) and wife María (in de Acuña's text) represent the most honourable virtues, in contraposition to the male characters who, as political men, appear corrupt and untrustworthy. Remarkably, in both cases, the incorporation of female characters allows the authors to intersect politics with love, the public with private sphere, proving once again to what extent they are interconnected. In this regard, the work carried out by female dramatists unveils a forgotten part of history, that is, the consequences that political events had on the life of ordinary people. While official historical recounts focused on the great endeavours of illustrious men, the *micro*history narrated by female playwrights in their tragedies[11] brings to the fore the effects of such endeavours on those who did not have the right to participate in conflicts and political campaigns; mainly women, but also other marginalised categories. What emerges in female playwrights' texts is also the important role that the domestic sphere of affections played in the development of the public sphere of politics and the events connected to it.

A different case must be made of *Mary Queen of Scots*, for which, of course, we can neither talk about marginal figures, nor female characters forgotten by official historiography. Nevertheless, Deverell manages to rewrite history with a different goal; to give a new portrayal of Mary and Elizabeth from an innovative personal dimension. She thoroughly explores Mary and Elizabeth's minds from a more intimate perspective, and she is able to let emerge the private side of their relationship, the feelings and fears they shared as queens in a society ruled by men. Although historiography never denied Mary Stuart and Elizabeth I's political importance, Deverell reveals their more human side, remarking their similarities and the views they shared as women in power whose private lives had to be constantly compromised with their public

[11] Female dramatists also dealt with the issue of *micro*history also in other genres, such as in the case of Luisa Amalia Paladini, who entirely focused her novel *La Famiglia del Soldato* on the ordinary life of a bourgeois family in Turin during the war with France at the end of the 18th century.

roles. Deverell's *Mary Queen of Scots*, Paladini's *Rosmunda in Ravenna* and de Avellaneda's *Egilona* demonstrate to what extent even women in positions of power were subjected to the norms of patriarchal society. In all the three case studies, we see how the female protagonists struggle to be recognised as authoritative figures in a political environment—the court—that is dominated by men. Their personal sphere is continuously scrutinised and questioned since, as monarchs, women are supposed to dismiss their feelings and abandon any weakness they may have, in order to demonstrate to their people that a woman can be as good a ruler as any other king. At the same time, queen's public role is relentlessly attacked by male subjects who reckon women unfit for an authoritative position. On the one hand, because women's supposed mental inferiority and their irrational and fragile nature were incompatible with the public role of monarch. On the other hand, because a public position could "turn" women into hybrid creatures with masculine characteristics and it was, thus, regarded as perilous for their femininity. The four queens portrayed by the three selected female dramatists are in a constant struggle with themselves, torn between their desires, love and feelings, and the implications of the role assigned to them. Mary Stuart, Rosmunda and Egilona share the tragic fate reserved to those women who could not renounce their femininity, their emotions and their public position. They all tried to prove their fitness for the role of queen, affirming their authority and subjectivities as both women and monarchs, in a society that saw such categories as opposed and conflicting. In their characters, Deverell, Paladini and de Avellaneda merge together *micro*historical and *macro*historical elements, combining domestic and public domains so to overcome the notion of the separate spheres. The same can be said for Elizabeth I, torn between the sisterly love for her cousin Mary and her need to secure her position on the English throne, attacked by English Catholics and other European kings. Elizabeth's inner conflicts cease in the moment she realises that, in order to be respected as a monarch, she has to act like a stereotypical male monarch, hiding her feelings and her caring side in favour of an unforgiving attitude towards her enemies. Elizabeth I is the only queen, among those examined, to survive precisely because she learns how to play by men's rules and to publicly appear as cruel as her people expect a male ruler to be. As we have seen in chapter four, she willingly *performs* stereotypical masculine acts and behaviours in order to be recognised as authoritative and powerful as a man in her position would be.[12]

---

[12] In this regard, the term "*performs*" refers to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In her 1990 volume *Gender Trouble*, Butler clarifies that "gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*."
Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. op. cit., p. 191.

This inclusive rewriting of history is particularly important not only because it reclaims women's historical presence and contribution, but also because it questions the canons according to which official history was narrated and passed on. Female playwrights employed the genre of tragedy and the wide appeal it had at the time to publicly recount women's stories, re-inscribing them into history. Following Hélène Cixous's words in her pioneering essay "Le Rire de la Méduse,"[13] writing is necessary for women both to affirm themselves and their subjectivity through an act that was considered as masculine, but also to narrate and describe the world from a female perspective that includes women's experiences. Writing about women in history means to reclaim women's existence, not only as secondary characters but as the protagonists of events. The portrayal of women given in female dramatists' tragedies, that is physical subjects with desires, fears and feelings worthy of being expressed, could appeal to female readers and spectators. Indeed, they may identify with the female characters on stage—or on the page—and reconsider their own personal experiences as valuable. In this sense, the work of female playwrights on female historical characters both implicitly reconstructs a female genealogy and narrates, to a wide public, a variety of women's stories, achievements and struggles that were often ignored. Most importantly, these dramatists gave a voice to women of the past who were silenced by official historiography and, through such recovered voice, conveyed the message that women's experiences mattered, even in a patriarchal society that denied them the right to reclaim their social and political role. Women dramatists, centuries before the birth of feminist criticism, took possession of a genre considered strictly masculine and used it to write about women, to bring them centre stage, and to recoup their history and position in society. These feminist writers *ante litteram* seem to respond, before time, to Hélène Cixous's appeal to women:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement. . . . I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. . . . Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.[14]

As this thesis tried to demonstrate, rereading women's historical tragedies in the light of feminist theories unlocks new interpretations and unveils subversive messages conveyed in their texts. Obviously, the subversion enacted by women should be contextualised within the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as within the socio-cultural environment they were living in. For this reason, their subversive opinions are often balanced with more conventional attitudes, in a

[13] Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse", op cit.
[14] Ibid. pp. 875-876.

sort of constant negotiation with the behavioural norms imposed on women in society. Nevertheless, we must never forget that women playwrights started to write for the stage when it was regarded as socially improper, when writing was seen as a masculine act and they were often forced to choose "the needle" over "the pen", as remarked by Deverell's "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle"[15] (1781). In such a difficult and biased socio-cultural situation, these female playwrights not only grabbed a pen and wrote many texts belonging to many different genres, but also challenged both the classical and Romantic canons of tragedy, bestowing a newfound importance on women as subjects and on the domestic space, the *micro*history, recounted through the plots of their historical dramas. When feminist criticism was born in the 1970s, feminist scholars realised there was a consistent group of female writers of the past centuries that had been completely ignored by literary historiography, but they did not know the extent of such phenomenon. After many decades, we are still unveiling many of these women's lives and works and, thanks to the help provided by feminist theories, scholars have been able to read women's texts from different points of view, thus, managing to uncover and contextualise their words, opinions and messages. In particular, considering the difficulties women had to enter the theatrical environment, the rediscovery of female playwrights and their historical tragedies is fundamental both to reconstruct a female literary genealogy and to study, from a new female perspective, the theatre, culture, language, society and literature of the time. History as well, recounted by these women, appears very different from what official narrations have reported, and that is why their historical tragedies are so crucial in delineating a new comprehensive and inclusive vision of our past. If it is true that literature is the mirror of society, we can argue that the tragic production of the female dramatists examined in this thesis certainly gave us a remarkable view of society that was worth exploring.

[15] Mary Deverell, "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject", in *Miscellanies in prose and verse*, 1781, op. cit.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

England:

AUSTEN, Jane. 1818. *Northanger Abbey.* Vol I, Chapter 5. Retrieved from: http://www.jausten.it/jarcna05.html [Accessed 30/12/2018]

BAILLIE, Joanna. "Introductory Discourse". In *A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind, each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy*, 1798. Retrieved from: https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=3-oVAQAAMAAJ&hl=it&pg=GBS.PA29 [accessed 24/02/2019]

———. *Orra: A Tragedy in Five Acts,* 1806.

BARBAULD, Anna Laetitia. "The Mouse's Petition", 1773. In Lilla Maria Crisafulli (ed.) *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi,* Vol. 1, Roma: Carocci, 2003.

COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. *Collected Letters*, ed. by E.L. Griggs, 6 voll., Clarendon Press, Oxford 1956-71, vol. I. In Crisafulli, Lilla Maria (ed.), *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi*, Vol. 1, Roma: Carocci, 2003.

DEVERELL, Mary. *Sermons on various subjects*, 2nd edition, revised and enlarged by the author, London: printed for the author by W. Strahan, 1776.

———. *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse,* 1781.

———. "Letters to Candidus, in answer to his encomiums on learned and good ladies." In *Miscellanies in prose and verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds.* Vol. II. Printed for the author by J. Rivington, Jun. St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1781, 47-90.

———. "On Reading the Poems of Phillis Wheatley." In *Miscellanies in prose and verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds.* Vol. II. Printed for the author by J. Rivington, Jun. St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1781, p. 268.

———. "An epistle to a divine on the united merits of the pen and needle: in answer to some poetical lines on this subject". In *Miscellanies in prose and verse, mostly written in the epistolary style: chiefly upon moral subjects and particularly calculated for the improvement of younger minds.* Vol. II. Printed for the author by J. Rivington, Jun. St. John's Square, Clerkenwell, 1781, pp. 91-95.

———. *Mary Queen of Scots: an historical tragedy.* Printed for the author and sold by her at No.7 at New Bond Street, 1972.

INCHBALD, Elizabeth. *The Massacre,* 1972. In Crochunis, Thomas C. and Eberle-Sinatra, Michael (eds.), *British Women Playwrights around 1800.* 15 April 1999, p. 8.

MITFORD, Mary Russell. *Rienzi: A Tragedy, in five acts.* Fourth Edition, London: John Cumberland 19, Ludgate Hill, 1828.

MORE, Hannah. *Percy*, 1777.

POLWHELE, Richard. *The Unsex'd Females,* 1798.

ROBINSON, Mary. *A Letter to the Women of England on the Injustice of Mental Subordination*, 1799. London, Printed for T.N. Longman, and O. Rees, No. 39, Paternoster Row. Retrieved from: https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/robinson/mrletterfrst.htm [Accessed: 21/04/2016]

Italy:

BANDETTINI, Teresa (Amarilli Etrusca). *Rosmunda in Ravenna: a tragedy*, Lucca: Dalla Ducal Tipografia Bertini, 1827.

DI BAGNOLO, Coriolano. "Elogio Storico di Diodata Saluzzo Contessa Roero di Revello scritto dal Conte Coriolano di Bagnolo". In *Poesie Postume di Diodata Saluzzo Contessa Roero di Revello, aggiunte alcune lettere di illustri scrittori a lei dirette.* Torino: Tipografia Chirio e Mina, 1843.

GUACCI Nobile, Maria Giuseppina. "Di qual poesia abbisogna il secolo presente", in *Foglio settimanale di scienza e lettere ed arti*, I, 1839, 11, pp. 82-84. In Musella, Silvia, Augurio, Francesco, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol.60. Roma: Treccani, 2003.

MANZONI, Alessandro. *Il Conte di Carmagnola*, 1820. In Bacchelli, Riccardo (ed.), Alessandro Manzoni, *Opere*. Milano-Napoli: Ricciardi, 1973.

———. *Lettre à Monsieur Chauvet sur l'unité de temps et de lieu dans la tragédie*, 1823.

———. *Sul Romanticismo: lettera al Marchese Cesare D'Azeglio*, 1823. Electronic edition by Liber Liber, 2013.

OLIVA, Laura Betrice. *Ines*. Firenze: per la società tipografica, 1945.

PALADINI, Luisa Amalia *In morte di Teresa Bandettini fra gli Arcadi Amarilli Etrusca,* Lucca, Tipografia Rocchi, 1837.

———. *Rosmunda in Ravenna.* Venezia: Tipografia Molinari, 1837.

———. *L'Orfana di Lancisa.* Milano: Stamperia Dova, 1838.

———. *Pel Congresso degli Scienziati italiani in Lucca, Ode*, Tip. Rocchi, Lucca 1843.

———. *Manuale per le Giovinette Italiane.* Firenze: tipografia di T. Baracchi, 1851.

———. *La Famiglia del Soldato*. Firenze: Felice Le Monnier, 1859.

SALUZZO DI ROERO, Diodata. *Ermina*. In *Versi di Diodata Saluzzo di Roero.* Quarta Edizione, corretta ed accresciuta. Volume IV. Torino: Vedova Pomba e Figli, 1817.

———. *Tullia*. In *Versi di Diodata Saluzzo di Roero.* Quarta Edizione, corretta ed accresciuta. Volume IV. Torino: Vedova Pomba e Figli, 1817.

Spain:

ACUÑA DE LA IGLESIA, Rosario. *Amor á la Patria,* Madrid: Imprenta de José Rodriguez, 1877.
———. *Rienzi el tribuno, drama trágico in dos actos y epílogo.* Madrid: Imprenta de José Rodriguez, 1876.

CALERO DE LOS RÍOS, Encarnación. "A la señorita doña Carolina Coronado", in *El Pensil del Bello Sexo* 8 (11 Jan. 1846): 66-67. In Kirkpatrick, Susan, *Las Romanticas: women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1989.

CORONADO, Carolina. "A la señorita doña Encarnación Calero de los Ríos", in *El Pensil del Bello Sexo* 25 Jan. 1846: 85-86. In Kirkpatrick, Susan, *Las Romanticas: women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1989.

COTARELO Y MORI, Emilio. *La Avellaneda y sus obras: ensayo biográfico y crítico*, Madrid: Tipografía de Archivos, 1930.

GOMÉZ DE AVELLANEDA, Gertrudis. *Egilona, drama trágico en tres actos y cuatro cuadros.* Madrid: Imprenta de D. José Repullés, 1845.
———. *Saúl: tragedia bíblica en cuatro actos.* Madrid: Imprenta de José María Repulles, 1849.
———. *Baltasar, drama oriental in cuatro actos y en versos.* Madrid: Imprenta de José Rodriguez, Factor, 9, 1858.
———. *Sab,* 1841. Edición de José Servera, Madrid, Ediciones Catedras, 2003.
———. *Catilina,* 1867.
———. *Leoncia* (1840), 1917.
———. *Il Principe de Viana,* 1844.
———. "Autobiografía. El Cuadernillo de 1839", 1939. In Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Poesías y Epistolario de Amor y de Amistad,* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1989.
———. *Poesías y epistolario de amor y de Amistad.* Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1989.

LARRA, Mariano José de. *Obras de Mariano José de Larra*. Ed. C. Seco Serrano. Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 127-130. 4 vols. Madrid: Atlas, 1960.

MIRANDA, Vicenta García. "A las españolas", in *Gaceta del Bello Sexo* 15 Dec. 1851: 10-11. In Kirkpatrick, Susan, *Las Romanticas: women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1989.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Literary Criticism on English Romanticism, Theatre and Drama:

ARMSTRONG, Nancy. *Desire and Domestic Fiction. A Political History of the Novel*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.

BADIOU, Alain. *Rapsodia per il Teatro: arte, politica, evento*, a cura di Francesco Ceraolo. Cosenza: Pellegrini Editore, 2015.

Baiesi, Serena. *Letitia Elizabeth Landon and Metrical Romance. The Adventures of a 'Literary Genius'.* Bern: Peter Lang, 2009.

BENNETT, Susan. "Outing Joanna Baillie". In Burroughs, Catherine (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance and Society 1790-1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

BERENDT, Stephen C., Kramer Linkin, Harriet (eds.). *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period.* New York, the modern language association of America, 1997.

BERTINETTI, Paolo. *Storia del Teatro Inglese dalla Restaurazione all'Ottocento, 1660-1895.* Torino, Einaudi, 1997, 2006.

BLACKBURN, Robin, *The American Crucible. Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights.* London, New York: Verso, 2011, 2013.

BOLTON, Betsy. *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic Stage: theatre and politics in Britain 1780-1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

BOOTH, Michael R., Stokes, John, Bassnett, Susan. *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

———. "Sarah Siddons". In Booth, Michael R., Stokes, John, Bassnett, Susan, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

BRATTON, Jackie. "Miss Scott and Miss Macauley:'Genius comes in All Disguises'", in *Theatre Survey,* 37 [1996], pp.59-73. Cambridge University Press.

BURROUGHS, Catherine (ed.). *Women in British Romantic Theatre: drama, performance and society 1790-1840.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

———. *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the theatre theory of British romantic women writers.* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.

———. "The Persistence of Closet Drama: Theory, History, Form". In Tracy C. Davis, Peter Holland, *The Performing Century. Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 215-235.

BUSHNELL, Rebecca (ed.). *A Companion to Tragedy.* Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

CANZIANI, Elam et al., *Come Comunica il teatro: dal testo alla scena*. Milano: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1978.

CAREY, Brycchan. “Inventing a Culture of Anti-Slavery: Pennsylvanian Quakers and the Germantown Protest of 1688”. In Cora Kaplan and John Oldfield (eds.), *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery,* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, pp. 17-32.

CARLSON, Marvin. “Elizabeth Inchbald: a woman critic in her theatrical culture”. In Burroughs, Catherine, *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, Society 1790-1840*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

CARLSON, Julie. *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women.* New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, 2007.

CIMA, Gay Gibson. “‘To be public as a genius and private as a woman’. The critical framing of nineteenth-century British women playwrights”. In Davis, Tracy C. and Donkin, Ellen, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

COX, Jeffrey N. *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years.* Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2014.

———. “Re-Viewing Romantic Drama” in *Literature Compass 1* (2004) RO 096, 1-27. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

———. “The Death of Tragedy; or the Birth of Melodrama.” In Tracy C. Davis, Peter Holland, *The Performing Century. Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 161-181.

CRACIUN, Adriana. *Fatal Women of Romanticism.* Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2003.

CRISAFULLI, Lilla Maria, Pietropoli, Cecilia, (eds.). *Le Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi: tra identità e genere.* Roma: Carocci, 2002.

———. “Introduzione. Le poetesse del Romanticismo”, in Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Cecilia Pietropoli (eds.), *Le Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi: tra identità e genere.* Roma: Carocci, 2002.

———. “Dramma storico e drammaturgia femminile in epoca romantica”, in *La Questione Romantica*, No.14, Primavera 2003, Napoli: Liguori.

——— (ed.). *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi,* Voll. 1-2, Roma: Carocci, 2003.

———, Pietropoli, Cecilia (ed.). *The Languages of Performance in British Romanticism.* Berna, Peter Lang, 2008.

———, Elam, Keir. *Manuale di Letteratura e Cultura Inglese.* Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2009.

———. “Women and Abolitionism: Hannah More and Ann Yearsley's Poetry of Freedom”. In Kaplan, Cora and Oldfield, John (eds.), *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

———, Sportelli, Annamaria (ed.). *Teatro Romantico Europeo e Identità Nazionale.* Napoli: Liguori, 2012.

———, Liberto, Fabio (ed.). *The Romantic Stage: A Many-Sided Mirror.* Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2014.

CROCHUNIS, Thomas C. (ed.) *British Women Playwrights around 1800: New Paradigms and Recoveries*, n.12, November, Université de Montreal, 1998.

———. "Authorial performaces in the criticism and theory of Romantic women playwrights". In Burroughs, Catherine (ed.), *Women in British Romantic Theatre: Drama, Performance, Society 1790-1840*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

——— (ed.). *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist. Critical Essays.* London: Routledge, 2004.

COCHRAN, Peter (ed.), *Byron's Correspondence and Journals 13: from Ravenna, January - October 1821.* Retrieved from: https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/02/13-ravenna-18216.pdf [Accessed 17/01/2020].

CURRAN, Stuart (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism.* 2nd Edition. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

———. "Women readers, women writers", in Curran, Stuart (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 2010.

DAVIS, Tracy C., Holland, Peter (eds.). *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre History.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

———, Donkin, Ellen (eds.). *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

———. "The sociable playwright and the representative citizen", in Davis, Tracy C. and Donkin, Ellen (eds.), *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

DAWSON, P.M.S., "Poetry in the Age of Revolution". In Stuart Curran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, 2nd Edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

DEGLI ESPOSTI, Paola (ed.). *La scena del Romanticismo inglese (1807-1833). I. Poetiche teatrali e tecniche d'attore.* Padova, Esedra Editrice, 2001.

———. *La scena del Romanticismo inglese (1807-1833). II. I luoghi teatrali, i generi, la spettacolarità.* Padova, Esedra Editrice, 2003.

DE MARINIS, Marco. "Problemi di analisi testuale dello spettacolo: codici spettacolari e convenzioni teatrali." In Giulio Ferroni (ed.). *La semiotica e il doppio teatrale*. Napoli: Liguori, 1981, pp. 219-238.

DE TORO, Fernando. *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre.* Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

DONKIN, Ellen. *Getting into the Act: women playwrights in London 1776-1829.* London, Routledge, 1995.

ELAM, Keir. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama.* London and New York: Routledge, 1980, 1987.

———. "Appunti sulla deissi, l'anafora e le trasformazioni nel testo drammatico e sulla scena. II. Segmentazione di brani da alcuni testi teatrali." In Canziani, Elam et al., *Come Comunica il teatro: dal testo alla scena*. Milano: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1978, pp. 97-128.

———, Crisafulli, Lilla Maria (eds.). *Women's Romantic Theatre and Drama: history, agency and performativity.* Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010.

FAFLAK, Joel, Wright, Julia M. (eds.), *A Handbook of Romanticism Studies,* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012.

FERGUSON, Moira. *Subjects to Others. British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834.* New York: Routledge, 1992.

FERMANIS, Porscha, Regan, John (eds.). *Rethinking British Romantic History 1770-1845.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

FERRONI, Giulio (ed.). *La semiotica e il doppio teatrale*. Napoli: Liguori, 1981.

GARNAI, Amy. *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

GREENBLATT, Stephen (ed.). *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture,* Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1982.

———. "Towards a Poetics of Culture", in Michael Payne (ed.), Stephen Greenblatt, *The Greenblatt Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

———. "The Faerie Queene". In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, Eight Edition, New York: Norton & Company, 2006.

——— (gen. ed.). The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Tenth Edition, Vol. D "The Romantic Period". New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

HALLIWELL, Stephen. *Aristotle's Poetics*. London: Duckworth, 1986, 2009.

HIGGINS, David, Ruston, Sharon (eds.). *Teaching Romanticism*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

HEAD, Pauline. "Who is the nun from Heidenheim? A Study of Hugeburc's *Vita Willibaldi*". In *Medium Aevum*, Vol.71, n.1 (2002), published by the Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, pp. 29-46. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43630387 [Accessed 10/01/2020].

HOAGWOOD, Terence Allan, Watkins, D.P. *British Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays,* Cranbury-London-Missisauga: Associated University Presses, 1998.

INGRASSIA, Catherine, *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writing in Britain, 1660-1789*, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

JANOWITZ, Anne. *Women Romantic Poets: Anna Barbauld and Mary Robinson*, Horndon, Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2004.

KAPLAN, Cora and Oldfield, John (eds.), *Imagining Transatlantic Slavery,* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

KUCICH, Greg. "Staging History: Teaching Romantic Intersections of Drama, History and Gender" in Berendt, Stephen C., Kramer Linkin, Harriet (eds.). *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period,* New York, the modern language association of America, 1997.

———. "'A Haunted Ruin': Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition, and the Critical Establishment", in *The Wordsworth Circle* 23, 1992, 64-76.

———. "The History Girls. Charlotte Smith's *History of England* and the politics of women's educational history". In Porscha Fermanis and John Regan (eds.) *Rethinking British Romantic History 1770-1845.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Romanticism and the re-engendering of historical memory", in Mathew Campbell, Jacqueline M. Labbe and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.), *Memory and Memorials 1789–1914. Literary and Cultural Perspective.* London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

———. "Joanna Baillie and the re-staging of history and gender". In Crochunis, Thomas C. *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist. Critical Essays.* London: Routledge, 2004.

LOOSER, Devoney. *British Women Writers and the Writing of History 1670-1820,* Baltimore: The John Jopkins University Press, 2000.

———. "Catharine Macaulay: The 'Female Historian' in Context", in *Revue de littérature et de civilization (XVIe – XVIIIe siècle),* 17: 2010 *Comment les femmes écrivent l'histoire*. Association Études Épistémè. Retrieved from: https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/666

LYNCH, Deidre Shauna. "Introduction to the Romantic Period 1785-1832". In Stephen Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Tenth Edition, Vol. D "The Romantic Period", New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018, pp. 5-10.

LYONS, John. *Semantics 2*, London, New York, Melbourne, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

MANN, David. "Checklist of Female Dramatists 1660-1823", in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 5, 1990, pp. 30-62.

MARINO, Elisabetta. *La Metamorfosi nella Mente. I drammi a carattere mitologico di Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron, P.B. Shelley, Mary Shelley.* Napoli: Paolo Loffredo iniziative editoriali, 2016,

MELLOR, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*, New York: Routledge, 1993.

———. "Joanna Baillie and the Counter-public sphere", in *Studies in Romanticism,* 33 Winter 1994, pp. 559-567, Boston University.

———. "Making an Exhibition of Her Self: Mary "Perdita" Robinson and Nineteenth-Century Scripts of Female Sexuality". In *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 22:3, 271-304, Routledge, 2000. Retrieved from: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08905490008583514 [Accessed 21/04/2016]

———. *Mothers of the Nation: Women's political writing in England 1780-1830.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002.

MIDGLEY, Claire. *Women against slavery. The British campaigns 1780-1870.* London, Routledge, 1992.

MOERS, Ellen. *Literary Women.* Garden City (NY), Doubleday, 1976.

MOODY, Jane. *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000.

——— and O'Quinn, Daniel. *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

NEWEY, Katherine. "'From a female pen' The proper lady as playwright in the West End theatre, 1823-1844". In Davis, Tracy C. and Donkin, Ellen, *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

———. "Women and History on the Romantic stage: More, Yearsley, Burney, and Mitford". In Burroughs, Catherine, *Women in British Romantic Theatre*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

PARSONS, Timothy H. *The British Imperial Century 1815-1914: A World History Perspective.* Lanhan: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, 2019.

PASCOE, Judith. *Romantic Theatricality: gender, poetry and spectatorship.* Ithaca, London, Cornell University Press, 1997.

PURINTON, Marjean. "Revising Romanticism by Inscripting Women Playwrights". In Crochunis, Thomas (ed.), *British Women Playwrights around 1800: New Paradigms and Recoveries*, n.12, November, Université de Montreal, 1998.

ROBERTSON, Fiona (ed.). *Women's Writing 1778-1838: An Anthology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

ROBINSON, Daniel. *The Poetry of Mary Robinson: Form and Fame.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

ROSE, Margaret. *Storia del Teatro Inglese: l'Ottocento e il Novecento.* Roma: Carocci, 2002.

ROSENTHAL, Laura J. "Entertaining women: the actress in eighteenth century theatre and culture". In Moody, Jane and O'Quinn, Daniel. *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

RUSSELL, Gillian. "Private Theatricals." In Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn, *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 191-203.

SAGLIA, Diego. "Letitia Elizabeth Landon (L.E.L.)". In Crisafulli, Lilla Maria (ed.), *Antologia delle Poetesse Romantiche Inglesi,* Roma: Carocci, 2003.

———. "'Womanhood summoned unto conflicts' in the Historical Tragedies of Felicia Hemans and Mary Russell Mitford", in *La Questione Romantica*, No.14, Spring 2003, Napoli: Liguori.

SCULLION, Adrienne (edited by). *Female Playwrights of the Nineteenth Century.* London, J.M. Dent, 1996.

SEGRE, Cesare. "Narratologia e Teatro." In Giulio Ferroni (ed.). *La semiotica e il doppio teatrale*. Napoli: Liguori, 1981, pp. 15-26.

SERPIERI, Alessandro, "Ipotesi teorica di segmentazione del testo teatrale". In Canziani, Elam et al., *Come Comunica il teatro: dal testo alla scena*. Milano: Edizioni il Formichiere, 1978, pp. 11-54.

SHATTOCK, Joanne (ed.). *Women and Literature in Britain, 1800-1900.* Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2001.

SPONGBERG, Mary. "Jane Austen and the *History of England*", in *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 23, Number 1, Spring 2011, pp. 56-80, John Hopkins University Press. Retrieved from: https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2011.0012 [Accessed 20/05/2019]

STOTT, Anne. "Deverell, Mary (d. 1805)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Retrieved From: Retrieved from www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45845 [Accessed 16/11/2017]

TOWSEY, Mark. "Women as readers and writers". In Catherine Ingrassia (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Women's Writings in Britain 1660-1789*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 21-36.

TURNER, Cheryl. *Living by the Pen. Women writers in the eighteenth century.* London, New York: Routledge, 1992, 1994.

UBERSFELD, Anne. *Reading Theatre*. Translated by Frank Collins. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

VERNANT, Jean-Pierre and Vidal Naquet, Pierre. *Myth and Tragedy*. New York: Zone Books, 1990.

WATT, Diane. *Women, Writing and Religion in England and Beyond 650-1100*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

WILSON, Carol Shiner and Haefner, Joel (eds.). *Re-visioning Romanticism. British Women Writers 1776-1837*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

WORRALL, David. *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

———. *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality 1787-1832. The Road to the Stage.* Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

WU, Duncan (ed.). *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Literary Criticism on Italian Romanticism, Theatre and Drama:

ANTONUCCI, Giovanni. *Storia del Teatro Italiano*, Roman: Newton, 1995.

BASSNETT, Susan. "Adelaide Ristori". In Booth, Michael R., Stokes, John, Bassnett, Susan, *Three Tragic Actresses: Siddons, Rachel, Ristori*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

BELLEZZE, Ilaria. *Antologia delle poetesse romantiche italiane.* Torino: carta e penna, 2007.

BERTOLO, Bruna. *Donne del Risorgimento: le eroine invisibili dell'unità d'Italia*. Torino: Ananke, 2011.

BETRI, Maria Luisa, Brambilla, Elena (a cura di). *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia.* Venezia: Marsilio, 2004.

BORGHI, Maurizio. *La manifattura del pensiero. Diritti d'autore e mercato delle lettere in Italia (1801-1865)*, Milano, FrancoAngeli, 2003.

BRAND, Peter, Pertile, Lino. *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature.* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

CADIOLI, Alberto. *Romanticismo Italiano.* Milano: Editrice Bibliografica, 1995.

CAMBRIA, Adele. *L'Italia segreta delle donne*. Roma: Newton Compton, 1984.

CAMILLETTI, Fabio. *Classicism and Romanticism in Italian Literature. Leopardi's Discourse on Romantic Poetry.* Routledge, 2013.

CARSANIGA, Giovanni. "The of Age of Romanticism (1800-1870)", in Peter Brand, Lino Pertile, *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

CHEMELLO, Adriana (a cura di). *Saffo tra poesia e leggenda: fortuna di un personaggio nei secoli 18. e 19.* Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2012.

———. "Fuori dai repertori. Donne sulla scena letteraria ottocentesca." In *Dimensioni e Problemi della Ricerca Storica,* n.1 (2010), Roma: Carocci, pp. 45-60.

CHIAPPINI, Simonetta. *Folli, sonnambule, sartine: la voce femminile nell'Ottocento italiano.* Firenze: Le Lettere, 2006.

COSTA-ZALESSOW, Natalia. *Scrittrici Italiane dal XIII al XX secolo: testi e critica.* Ravenna: Longo, 1982.

COSTETTI, Giovanni. *Il teatro italiano nel 1800*. Rocca San Casciano: Licinio Cappelli Editore, 1901.

CAVALLETTO CIOTTI, Giovanna. *Attrici e società nell'Ottocento italiano: miti e condizionamenti*. Milano: Mursia, 1978.

DEL CARLO, Torello. *Luisa Amalia Paladini*, tip. Giusti, Lucca, 1881.

DE PAZ, Alfredo. *Europa Romantica*. *Fondamenti e paradigmi della sensibilità moderna.* Napoli: Liguori, 1994, 2000.

DI RICCO, Alessandra. *L'inutile e il maraviglioso mestiere. Poeti improvvisatori di fine Settecento.* Milano, 1995.

DONI, Elena [et al.]. *Donne del Risorgimento*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011.

FACCIOLI, Emilio. *Il Teatro Italiano: la tragedia dell'Ottocento. Tomo primo e Tomo Secondo.* Torino, Einaudi, 1981.

FARINELLI, Giuseppe, Tonucci, Antonia Mazza, Paccagnini, Ermanno. *La Letteratura Italiana dell'Ottocento.* Roma: Carocci, 2002.

FERRI, Pietro Leopoldo. *Biblioteca femminile italiana raccolta, posseduta e descritta dal conte Pietro Leopoldo Ferri*. Padova: Tip. Crescini, 1842.

FORLANI, Alma e Savini, Marta (a cura di). *Scrittrici d'Italia: le voci femminili più rappresentative della nostra letteratura raccolte in una straordinaria antologia di prose e di versi: dalle eroine e dalle sante dei primi secoli fino alle donne dei nostri giorni.* Roma: Newton Compton, 1991.

FRANCESCHETTI, Antonio, Sanguinetti Katz, Giuliana. "Diodata Saluzzo di Roero (1774-1840)". In Russell, Rinaldina (ed.), *Italian Women Writers: a Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook,* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

GIORDANO, Antonella. *Letterate Toscane del Settecento: un regesto.* Firenze: all'insegna del giglio, 1994.

GRAZIOSI, Elisabetta. "Presenze femminili: fuori e dentro l'Arcadia". In Betri, Maria Luisa, Brambilla, Elena (eds.), *Salotti e ruolo femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*, Venezia: Marsilio, 2004.

GUGLIELMINETTI, Marziano and Triverio, Paola (eds.), *Il Romanticismo in Piemonte: Diodata Saluzzo.* Atti del Convegno di Studi, Saluzzo, 29 settembre 1990. Università di Torino, Centro di Studi di Letteratura Italiana in Piemonte «Guido Gozzano». Vol. 12 - Saggi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki.

GUIDI, Laura e Lamarra, Annamaria. *Travestimenti e Metamorfosi: percorsi di identità di genere tra epoche e culture.* Napoli: Filema, 2003.

MELDOLESI, Claudio e Taviani, Ferdinando. *Teatro e Spettacolo nel primo Ottocento.* Bari: Laterza, 1991, 1998.

MESSBARGER, Rebecca. *The Century of Women. Representations of women in eighteenth-century Italian public discourse.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

MITCHELL, Katahrine. *Italian Women Writers. Gender and Everyday Life in Fiction and Journalism 1870-1910.* Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014.

MORI, Maria Teresa. *Figlie d'Italia: poetesse patriote nel Risorgimento (1821-1861).* Roma: Carocci, 2011.

——— (a cura di). *Di generazione in generazione: le italiane dall'Unità a oggi.* Roma: Viella, 2014.

MUSELLA, Silvia, Augurio, Francesco. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol.60. Roma: Treccani, 2003.

MUSIANI, Elena (a cura di), *Classiciste e Romantiche. Le donne dell'Ottocento tra patria, lettere e teatro*. Antichi e Moderni, supplemento annuale di Schede Umanistiche. Rivista semestrale dell'Archivio Umanistico Rinascimentale Bolognese. Bologna: CLUEB, 2004.

——— e Salustri, Simona. "Le donne per l'Italia. Il laboratorio bolognese" In: *Storia e Futuro, rivista di storia e storiografia.* Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2012.

NATALI, Ivano e Rambelli, Paolo (a cura di). *Il teatro delle donne. Le donne di teatro. Drammaturghe e attrici italiane dal Settecento al Novecento.* Quaderno degli Incontri Internazionali "Diego Fabbri", Forlì: Tipolitografia Valbonesi, 2010.

NEGRI, Renzo. *Gusto e poesia delle rovine in Italia tra il Sette e l'Ottocento*. Milano: Ceschina, 1965.

PESCANTI BOTTI, Renata. *Donne del Risorgimento Italiano*. Milano: Ceschina, 1966.

RAIMONDI, Ezio. *Romanticismo Italiano e Romanticismo Europeo.* Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 1997, 2000.

———. *Un Teatro delle Idee: Ragione e immaginazione dal Rinascimento al Romanticismo.* Milano: BUR, 2011.

ORESTANO, Francesco (a cura di). *Eroine, Ispiratrici e Donne di Eccezione.* Milano: EBBI, istituto editoriale italiano B.C. Tosi, 1940.

RUSSELL, Rinaldina (ed.). *Italian Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

———. *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature.* Westport, Greenwood Press, 1997.

SAMBUCO, Patrizia. *Italian Women Writers 1800-2000. Boundaries, Borders and Transgression.* Fairleigh Dickinson U.P., 2014.

SANTATO, Guido. "Vittorio Alfieri, *Rosmunda.* Edizione critica a cura di Martino Capucci, Asti, Casa D'Alfieri, 1979, pp. xxii-337". In *Lettere Italiane,* Vol. 33 n. 3 (luglio - settembre 1981), pp. 443 - 447. Retrieved from: www.jstor.org/stable/26260805 [Accessed 05/09/2019]

SBRAGIA, Albert. "Romanticism". In Russell, Rinaldina (ed.), *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.

SCARPA, Domenico (a cura di). *Dal Romanticismo a oggi.* Vol.3. Torino: Einaudi, 2012.

SFORZA, Carlo. “Amarilli Etrusca e il Romanticismo”. In *Giornale Ligustico di Archeologia, Storia e Letteratura*, XIX (1892). Retrieved from: http://www.storiapatriagenova.it/Scheda_vs_info.aspx?Id_Scheda_Bibliografica=2488 [accessed 05/09/2019]

SIMONETTI, Simonetta. *Luisa Amalia Paladini: vita e opere di una donna del Risorgimento.* Lucca: Pacini Fazzi, 2012.

SOLDANI, Simonetta (a cura di). *L' educazione delle donne: scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento.* Franco Angeli, 1991.

SOLMI, Raffaella. *Poeti del Settecento.* Torino: unione tipografica torinese, 1989.

SPINOSA, Antonio. *Italiane. Il lato segreto del Risorgimento.* Milano: Mondadori, 1994, 2005.

THÉBAUD, François (ed.). “L'Ottocento” in Georges Duby e Michelle Perrot, *Storia delle donne in Occidente.* Roma, Bari: Laterza, 1991.

TIERNEY, Helen (ed.). *Women's Studies Encyclopedia.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

TRIVERIO, Paola. “In margine alle tragedie di Diodata Saluzzo”. in Guglielminetti, Marziano and Triverio, Paola (eds.), *Il Romanticismo in Piemonte: Diodata Saluzzo.* Atti del Convegno di Studi, Saluzzo, 29 settembre 1990. Università di Torino, Centro di Studi di Letteratura Italiana in Piemonte «Guido Gozzano». Vol. 12 - Saggi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki.

ZANCAN, Marina. *Il Doppio Itinerario della Scrittura: la donna nella tradizione letteraria italiana.* Torino: Einaudi, 1998.

Literary Criticism on Spanish Romanticism, Theatre and Drama:

ALONSO VALERO, Encarna. *Machismo y vanguardia. Escritoras y artistas en el España de preguerra.* Devenir El Otro, 2016.

BALLESTEROS DORADO, Ana Isabel. *Espacio del Drama Romántico Español.* Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003.

BRAVO-VILLASANTE, Carmen, Baquero, Gastón, Escarpanter, Josè A**.** *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.* Madrid, Fundación universitaria española, 1974.

———, Carmen. *Una vida romántica: la Avellaneda.* Madrid, Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1986.

CALDERA, Ermanno. "La perspectiva femenina en el teatro de Joaquina García Balmaseda y Enriqueta Lozano", in Marina Mayoral (ed.), *Escritoras románticas españolas,* Madrid, Fundación Banco Exterior, 1990.

———. "Il teatro del pathos e dell'orrore al principio dell'Ottocento: fedeltà ai canoni del Classicismo e presentimenti romantici" in *EntreSiglos*, 1991, pp. 57-72.

———. "Horror y pathos en los 'dramones' de principios del siglo XIX" in *Actas del X Congreso de la A.I.H.*, Barcelona, PPU, 1992.

———*. El Teatro Español en la época romántica.* Madrid, Editorial Castalia, 2001.

CARATOZZOLO, Vittorio. *Il teatro di Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* Bologna, Il Capitello del Sole, 2002.

CARNERO, Guillermo. *Los orígenes del romanticismo reaccionario español: el matrimonio Böhl de Faber.* Valencia, Universidad, 1976.

CASTILLA, Alberto. *Carolina Coronado de Perry: biografia, poesía e historia en la España del siglo XIX,* Madrid: Beramar, 1987.

COCA RAMÍREZ, Fátima. "Discurso Femenino en el Teatro de Gómez de Avellaneda y Rosario de Acuña". Edición digital a partir de Rafael Alemany Ferrer, Francisco Chico Rico, (eds.), *XVIII Simposio de la SELGYC (Alicante 9-11 de septiembre 2010), Literatura y espectáculo*, Alacant, Universitat d'Alacant, SELGYC [Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada], 2012. Retrieved from: http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/discurso-femenino-en-el-teatro-de-gomez-de-avellaneda-y-rosario-de-acuna/ [Accessed 8/11/2018]

CORREA RAMÓN, Amelina. *Plumas femeninas en la literatura de Granada (Siglo VIII-XX). Diccionario y Antología.* Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2002.

DÍEZ BORQUE, José Maria (Dir.) *Historia del Teatro en España. Tomo II. Siglo XVIII. Siglo XIX.* Madrid: Taurus, 1988.

———. "Pórtico Sencillo al Teatro (Del texto a la representación)". In Díez Borque, José María, *Historia del Teatro en España*, Madrid: Taurus, 1988.

DOMÉNECH RICO, Fernando (ed.). *Teatro breve de mujeres (siglos XVII-XX)*. Madrid: Asociación de Directores de Escena de España (Colección "Literatura Dramática", 41), 1996.

FERNÁNDEZ SOTO, Concha. *Gertrudis Gómez De Avellaneda: Errores del Corazón (1853).* Sevilla: Arcibel, 2008.

———. "Entre sedas y telones. La invisibilidad de la mujer dramaturga en el siglo XIX español". In Mercedes Arriaga et al. (eds.), *Escritoras y Pensadoras Europeas*, Arcibel: Sevilla, 2007.

FLITTER, Derek W. *Spanish Romantic literary theory and criticism.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

———. "Romanticism in Spain". In Gies, David T. *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

GARCÍA LORENZO, Luciano. *Autoras y actrices en la historia del teatro español.* Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 2000.

GARFIELD PICON, Evelyn. *Poder y sexualidad: el discurso de G. Gómez de Avellaneda.* Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993.

GIES, David T. "The Plurality of Spanish Romanticisms: Review-Article", in *Hispanic Review,* Vol. 49, n. 4 (Autumn, 1981), University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 427-442. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/472747 [Accessed 9/01/2019]

———. *Theatre and politics in Nineteenth-Century Spain. Juan de Grimaldi as impresario and government agent.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

———. *The theatre in Nineteenth-century Spain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

———. *El teatro en la España del siglo XIX*. Madrid: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

———. "Introduction: Gender, genre and modernity in Nineteenth-century Spain", in *Revista de estudios hispánicos*, vol. 34, n.2, 2000.

———. *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

———. "Teatro y mujer en el siglo XIX", in *Stichomythia. Revista De Teatro Espanol Contemporaneo* 8 (2009): 3-5, Universitat de Valencia.

GONZÁLEZ MARTÍNEZ, Lola. "María de Navas. Actríz y empresaria teatral". In *Mujeres Emprendedoras entre los siglos XVI y XIX.* Catálogo de publicaciones de la Administración General del Estado. Madrid: Ministerio de Economía, Industria y Competitividad, Instituto de la Mujer y para la Igualdad de Oportunidades (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad), 2017.

GONZÁLEZ SUBÍAS, José Luis. *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda y la tragedia romántica española*. Alicante: Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2007.

HARA, Jacqueline. *Carolina Coronado (1820-1911) her life and work.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.

HARTER, Hugh A. *Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* Boston, Twayne, 1981.

———. "Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (Cuba)". In Diane E. Marting (ed.), *Spanish American Women Writers: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990.

HORMIGÓN, Juan Antonio (ed.) *Autoras en la Historia del Teatro Español (1500-1994).*, Vol. I (siglos XVII, XVII, XIX). Madrid: Publicaciones de la Asociación de directores de escena de España, 1996.

KIRKPATRICK, Susan. *Las Romanticas: women writers and subjectivity in Spain, 1835-1850.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1989.

———. *Antología Poética de Escritoras del siglo XIX.* Madrid: Castalia, 1992.

———. "La 'Hermandad Lirica' de la década de 1840". In Mayoral, Marina (ed.), *Escritoras Romanticas Españolas*, Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, 1990.

MAYORAL, Marina (ed.). *Escritoras románticas españolas.* Madrid: Fundación Banco Exterior, 1990.

MILLER, Beth (ed.). *Women in Hispanic Literature. Icons and Fallen Idols.* Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983.

PASTOR, Brígida. *El discurso de Gertrudis de Avellaneda: identidad femenina y otredad.* Murcia: Compobell, 2002.

PEERS, Allison. *Historia del movimiento romántico español.* 2 Voll. Version Española de José María Gimeno, Madrid: Gredos, 1973.

PRADO MAS, María. *Gertrudis Gómez De Avellaneda: Baltasar / La hija de las flores.* Madrid, Publicaciones de la Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2000.

SELIMOV, Alexander. "The making of *Leoncia*: Romanticism, Tragedy and Feminism". In Albin, María C., Corbin, Megan, and Marrero-Fente, Raúl, *Gender and the Politics of Literature: Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda,* Ed. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 18 (2017): 249–263. Retrieved from: https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/192133/hiol_18_08_selimov.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed 24/09/2019]

SHAW, Donald L. "La critica al Romanticismo spagnolo e la sua evoluzione". In *Romanticismo 1: atti del II congresso sul Romanticismo Spagnolo e Ispanoamericano. Aspetti e problemi del teatro Romantico.* Genova, Facoltà di Magistero dell'Università di Genova, Istituto di Lingue e Letterature Straniere, Centro di Studi sul Romanticismo Iberico, 1982.

SIMÓN PALMER, María Del Carmen. *Escritoras españolas del siglo XIX. Manual bio-bibliografico*, Madrid: Castalia, 1991.

SPANG, Kurt. *El drama histórico. Teoría y comentarios.* Ansoáin (Navarra): Ediciones de la Universidad de Navarra S.A. 1998.

STATELLO, Salvatore. *Ines de Castro. Eroina del Teatro Italiano tra Settecento e Ottocento.* Circolo Socio-Culturale "Il Faro" – Riposto, 2004.

ZAVALA, Iris M. (ed.) *Breve historia feminista de la literatura española (en lengua castellana).* 5 Voll. Barcelona: Anthropos Editorial, 1998.

Feminist Methodology and Criticism:

AHMED, Sara. *Differences that matter: feminist theory and postmodernism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2004.

ASTON, Elaine. *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre.* London, New York: Routledge, 1995.

BASSNETT, Susan. "Travel Writing and Gender". In Hulme, P. & Young, T. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (pp.225-241). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BLAIN, Virginia, Clements, Patricia, Grundy, Isobel (eds.). *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English.* London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1990.

BROAD, Jacqueline and Green, Karen. *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

BURKE, Carolyn Greenstein. "Report from Paris: Women's Writing and the Women's Movement", *Signs* Vol. 3 No. 4 (Summer, 1978), University of Chicago Press, pp.843-855. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173118 [Accessed 9/05/2019]

BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. Roma: Editori Laterza, 2013. Traduzione di Sergia Adamo.

———. "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva", *Hypatia,* Vol. 3, No. 3, French Feminist Philosophy (Winter, 1989), Wiley on behalf of Hypatia Inc., pp.104-118. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3809790 [Accessed 10/03/2016]

CASE, Sue-Ellen. *Feminism and Theatre.* New York, Methuen, 1988.

——— (ed.). *Performing feminisms: feminist critical theory and theatre*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

CIXOUS, Hélène. "Le Rire de la Méduse", 1975. Translated in English by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in *Signs*, Vol.1, No. 4, 1976, University of Chicago Press.

COLEBROOK, Claire. "Feminist criticism and post-structuralism", in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

CRENSHAW, Kimberle. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8. Retrieved from: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf [Accessed 20/11/2015]

DE BEAUVOIR, Simone. *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949. Translated in English by C. Borde and S.Malovany-Chevallier, New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 2011.

DELEUZE, Gilles and Guattari, Felix, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, 1975, Minnesota U.P. 1986.

EAGLETON, Mary. “Literary Representations of Women”, in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

EDWARDS, Catharine. “Unspeakable Professions: Public Performance and Prostitution in Ancient Rome”. In Hallet, Judith P., Skinner, Marilyn B. (eds.), *Roman Sexualities*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp.66-98.

FETTERLEY, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: a Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, 1978, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

FOLEY, Helene P. “The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama”, in Helene P. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* New York: Gordon & Breach, 1981, pp.127-68.

FOUCAULT, Michel. “The Subject and Power”. In *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Summer, 1982), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 777-795.

FRANK, Marcie. *Gender, Theatre and the origins of criticism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 2004.

FRY, Paul H. *Theory of Literature.* New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2012.

GILBERT, Sandra M. e Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination*, 1979. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000.

GINZBURG, Carlo, Tedeschi, John and Tedeschi, Anne C. “Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It”, in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol.20, No.1, (Autumn, 1993), pp.10-35, The University of Chicago Press. Retrieved from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343946 [Accessed 27/05/2019]

GOERTZ, Gary and Mazur, Amy G. (eds). *Politics, Gender and Concepts: Theory and Methodology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

GOODMAN, Lizbeth. *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance.* London, New York, Routledge, 1998.

GOODMAN, Robin Truth (ed). *Literature and the development of Feminist Theory.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

GORDON, Ann D., Buhle, Mary Jo e Shrom Dye, Nancy. “The Problem of Women’s History”, in *Liberating Women’s History*, edited by Berenice Carroll. Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1976.

GREWAL, Inderpal, Caren Kaplan, *An Introduction to Women’s Studies: Gender in a Transnational World*, 2nd edition, New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002, 2006.

HOOKS, Bell. *Ain’t I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism*, 1982. London: Pluto Press, 1990.

IRIGARAY, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 1977. Translated from French by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

———. "Women on the Market", in *This Sex Which is Not One*, 1977. Translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985.

———. *Parler n'est jamais Neutre,* 1985. Translated from French by Continuum, 2002. New York: Routledge, 2002.

KELLY, Joan. "Did Women Have a Renaissance?", in Renate Bridenthai and Clandia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977.

KOLODNY, Annette. "Some Notes on Defining a 'Feminist Literary Criticism'", in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Autumn, 1975, University of Chicago Press.

KRISTEVA, Julia. *Materia e Senso: Pratiche Significanti e Teoria del Linguaggio*. Traduzione italiana a cura di Bruno Bellotto e Daniela De Agostini, Torino: Einaudi, 1980.

———. *Desire in Language. A semiotic approach to literature and art.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1980.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *The Elementary Structure of Kinship*, 1949. Translated into English by James Harle Bell, John Richard von Sturmer, Rodney Needham, Boston, 1969.

LORDE, Audre. *Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference.* Crossing Press, 1984. Retrieved from: www.clc.wvu.edu/r/download/29781 [Accessed 16/11/2015]

MASCIA-LEES, Frances E. and Sharp, Patricia. *Taking a Stand in a Postfeminist World: Toward an Engaged Cultural Criticism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

MITCHELL, Juliet. *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: a radical reassessment of Freudian psychoanalysis.* (1974) New York: Basic Books, 2000.

MILLER, Casey and Swift, Kate. *Words and Women*, 1976. San José, Lincoln, New York: iUniversity.com, Inc., 2000.

MILLETT, Kate. *Sexual Politics*, 1969. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000.

MOI, Toril. *Sexual/Textual Politics: feminist literary theory.* London: Routledge, 1985, 2002.
——— (ed.) *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

MORGAN, Robin (ed.). *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movements*. New York: Random House, 1970.

NAVAS OCAÑA, Isabel. *La literatura española y la crítica feminista.* Madrid: Editorial Fundamentos, 2009.

PEREIRA-MURO, Carmen. *Género, nación y literatura. Emilia Pardo Bazán en la literatura gallega y española.* Purdue Studies in Romance Literature, Purdue University Press, 2013.

PLAIN, Gill e Sellers, Susan (eds). *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

RICH, Adrienne. “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”, in *College English*, Vol. 34, No.1, *Women, Writing and Teaching* (Oct.1972), National Council of Teachers of English.

———. “Notes toward a Politics of Location”, in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1986.

ROBINSON, LILLIAN S. “Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon”, in Elaine Showalter (ed.) *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory,* New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

ROONEY, Ellen (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

SAID, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

SCOTT, Joan W. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

SHAPIRO, Ann-Louise. “Introduction: History and Feminist Theory, or Talking Back to the Beadle”, in *History and Theory*, Vol.31, No.4, Wiley for Wesleyan University, 1992. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505412 [Accessed: 12/05/2016]

SHIPPERS, Birgit. *Julia Kristeva and Feminist Thought.* Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

SHOWALTER, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977.

———. “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”, in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference, (Winter, 1981), pp. 179–205.

———. *The Female Malady. Women, Madness and English Culture. 1830-1980.* London: Virago, 1987.

———. “Toward a Feminist Poetics”, in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory* [1986] London: Virago Press, 1989.

STONE, Alison. *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 2009.

STANFORD FRIEDMAN, Susan. *Mappings.* Princeton University Press, 1998.

THOMPSON, Becky, *Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism.* Feminist Studies, Inc., 2002. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178747 [Accessed 16/11/2015]

WEIL, Kari. “French feminism’s *écriture féminine*”, in Ellen Rooney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2006.

WEINTRAUB, Jeff. “The Theory and Politics of the Private/Public Distinction”, in Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (eds.), *Public and Private in Thought and Practice. Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 1-42.

WITTIG, Monique. *Les Guérillères* [1969] Translated from the French by David Le Vay. Ubu editions, 2007.

WOODWARD, Kath and Woodward, Sophie. *Why Feminism Matters: feminism lost and found.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

WOHL, Victoria. "Tragedy and Feminism", in Rebecca Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

WOOLF, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own* [1929] Traduzione italiana a cura di Maura del Serra, Roma: New York Compton Editori, 2013.

ZEITLIN, Froma I. "Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama", in *Representations*, No. 11 (Summer, 1985), pp. 63-94. University of California Press. Retrieved from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928427 [Accessed 13/06/2019]