

THE LIBERATING TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S AND DRŽIĆ'S COMEDIES^a

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Abstract

During the time of Queen Elizabeth I, the prevailing belief was that women were intellectually, physically, and morally inferior to men. While some female characters in Shakespeare's plays conform to the stereotypical image of the era, many others challenge these stereotypes. Influenced by the Renaissance and the portrayal of the queen as a powerful and dominant ruler, Shakespeare depicted women in his plays as intelligent, brave, noble, and not significantly different from men. Independent young women such as Rosalind from *As You Like It*, or Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing* present a dramatic contrast to characters like Hermia from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Hero from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Though not independent in the modern sense of the word, they certainly are independent when compared to the typical women of Shakespeare's time. This paper will examine how Marin Držić created female characters and whether the Renaissance spirit in Dubrovnik, which changed the lives of all social classes in many ways, also influenced the transformation of female characters in his works. In certain segments of the texts (e.g., *Tirena*, *Skup*, *Dundo Maroje*), a conservative, patriarchal criticism of society, especially aimed at the youth and women, is evident. They are depicted as idle, unintelligent, and obsessed with fashion. However, in Držić's comedies, when it comes to conditionally *liberated* female characters, one can encounter fairies, courtesans, women from Kotor, and maidservants. Some of them undergo transformations of identity, which will be explored in terms of motivation and function. In the end, an attempt will be made to conclude the extent to which the cultural spirit of an era could (or could not) influence the *liberation* of female characters in the works of these two authors.

Key words: Shakespeare, Držić, female characters, transformation, identity.

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ОСЛОБАЂАЈУЋА ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЈА ЖЕНСКИХ ЛИКОВА У ШЕКСПИРОВИМ И ДРЖИЋЕВИМ КОМЕДИЈАМА

Апстракт

У доба краљице Елизабете II важило је уверење да су жене интелектуално, физички и морално инфериорније од мушкараца. Један број женских ликова Шекспирових драма уклапа се у стереотипну слику времена, али неретки су и они женски ликови који те стереотипе руше. Под утицајем ренесансе, али и слике краљице, моћне и доминантне владарке, Шекспир у својим комадима слика жене као интелигентне, храбре, племените и не много различите од мушкараца. Независне младе жене попут Розалинде из драме „Како вам драго”, или Беатриче из драме *Много буке ни око чега* представљају драматичан контраст у односу на Хермију из драме *Сан летње ноћи* или Херу из драме *Много буке ни око чега*. Оне нису независне у модерном смислу речи, али засигурно јесу у поређењу са типичним женама Шекспировог доба. У раду ћемо испитивати и на који начин је Марин Држић креирао женске ликове, те да ли је ренесансни дух у Дубровнику, који је на много начина изменио живот свих друштвених слојева, утицао и на трансформацију женских ликова код овог аутора. У неким сегментима текстова (нпр. *Тирена*, *Скуп*, *Дундо Мароје*) приметна је конзервативна, патријархална критика друштва, посебно усмерена на омладину и жене. Оне се квалификују као нерадне, неинтелигентне и залуђене модом. Међутим, у Држићевим комедијама, када је о условно „ослобођеним” женским ликовима реч, јављају се виле, куртизане, Которанке и слушкиње. Код неких од њих долази до својеврсних трансформација идентитета, чијом ћемо се мотивисаношћу и функцијом бавити. На крају ћемо покушати да изведемо закључке о томе у којој мери културни дух једне епохе (ни)је могао утицати на ослобађање женских ликова ових двају писаца.

Кључне речи: Шекспир, Држић, женски ликови, трансформација, идентитет.

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's comedies *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *As You Like It* present a diverse array of female characters representing various personalities, attitudes, and perspectives on the world. While some of these characters conform to conventional norms and reflect the gender stereotypes of Elizabethan times, others challenge these norms, portraying strong, independent, and intelligent women who question the expectations of a patriarchal society. These characters highlight Shakespeare's awareness of behavioural and character differences among women, challenging the prevailing views of his time. In this sense, Shakespeare's comedies can be seen as reflecting societal changes in attitudes towards women during the Renaissance.

In Držić's comedies, a conservative, patriarchal critique of society is evident, portraying women as unintelligent. For instance, in Negromantov's Prologue of *Dundo Maroje*, it is stated: "And women from those parts – just like ours, who are said to have slightly lighter minds than

men, obsessed with fashion and lazy..." (Držić, 1962, p. 191). Moreover, most of these judgments are expressed by women themselves. However, certain characters undergo a transformation in the manifestation of their identity. For example, in *Tripče de Utolče (Mande)*, a character from Kotor defies social norms and decides to fight for her right to free love, providing a stark contrast to other female characters in the comedies. In *Grižula (Plakir)*, to her potential mother-in-law's dismay, Gruba embarks on a journey to the mountains to search for her fiancé. Similarly, in *Dundo Maroje*, Pera, disguised as a young man, travels to Rome, albeit with an escort, to retrieve her chosen one. Likewise, viewed as a female character, considering her character, Venera in *Venera i Adon* publicly declares her love and fights for it.

When comparing these characters to Shakespeare's heroines, one can observe similar motifs of transformation and liberation among female characters defying patriarchal society. This suggests that the two authors employed similar approaches and motifs in creating characters in their comedies, all aimed at challenging the conventions of their times. The transformation of female characters in Shakespeare's and Držić's comedies is an important theme that has attracted the attention of numerous researchers. Throughout history, as well as literary history, there have been examples of brave and strong female characters who challenge authorities because they believe that "there are certain unwritten laws and principles that a moral person sticks to and fights for" (Milošević, 2010, p. 598). This paper will emphasize perspectives centred on subverting traditional gender roles and expectations, as well as the importance of women in creating a better and more just society.

The female characters in Shakespeare's plays have drawn significant critical attention since their creation. Various aspects of their personalities, such as glamour, fame, and intelligence, have been analysed. His heroines changed as society evolved, reflecting the contradictory ideas that society grappled with. The ideal to which the women of that period were expected to aspire involved being obedient, passive, and modest, never forgetting their subservience to men. In addition to these, an important aspect of Shakespeare's comedies includes certain heroines whom Shakespeare endowed with much more independence and freedom than strict social norms allowed. Emancipated and valued for their autonomy, independence, and intellect, they represented everything that women of that period were not allowed or were supposed to be.

Shakespeare wrote during a time when women were considered physically and intellectually inferior to men. According to Newman, men marked the centres of power, while women were merely instruments through which this power was realized in a political or social context (Newman, 1991, p. 23). Despite a woman – Queen Elizabeth I, being on the throne, Elizabethan society remained largely patriarchal. All other

women, except Queen Elizabeth I, had no legal rights to exist or act independently from the men to whom they belonged. Before marriage, women were seen as their fathers' property, and after marriage, they passed into the hands of their husbands. The romantic love that modern society knows, based on mutual attraction, was almost absent in Renaissance England. Marriage was predominantly viewed as a business arrangement between two families. William Shakespeare's Renaissance society did not traditionally value women's freedom. The only two socially acceptable positions for women were marriage or life in a convent. There were no other social or economic factors that supported unmarried women, either physically or emotionally. Women were prohibited from engaging in any domain outside the home. They had no right to higher education, no right to vote, and were mostly focused on performing tasks and adopting values that made them good daughters or wives. Many believe that the power of men was so unattainable precisely because it was conditioned by the lack of education for women (Kemp, 2010, p. 29).

In the context of Dubrovnik, the position of women did not differ significantly from that in Shakespeare's England. During the 13th and 14th centuries, women's lives, especially those of the higher classes, were controlled by parents, brothers, or tutors. Marriages were often arranged¹, sometimes when the prospective spouses were still children, and exorbitant dowries posed problems, leading many girls to enter convents. Husbands had the right to physically 'correct' their wives' behaviour, even to the point of expulsion from the home. Divorce was nearly impossible, leading some men to engage in affairs with servant girls². Aggressive individuals physically assaulted women (through beatings, kidnappings, rape), servants and other female citizens alike – on the streets and even inside homes (Dinić-Knežević, 1974, p. 139). However, the Dubrovnik of that time differed from many European cities in one aspect – all women were equal under the law³. Women who enjoyed more freedom and could resist arranged marriages, move about more freely, and were somewhat equal to their husbands were commoners (Janeković, 1994, p. 94).

The lives of ordinary women, whether citizens or commoners, did not change much with the arrival of the Renaissance in Dubrovnik, even

¹ There were also restrictions on marriages between citizens of Dubrovnik and members of other Dalmatian communities; thus, at one point, the municipality of Dubrovnik prohibited marriages between its citizens and people from Kotor (Janeković, 1994, p. 73);

² Regarding female labor service – maids and servants – and their position, refer to (Janeković 1994, pp. 122-123);

³ "But what particularly impresses in medieval Dubrovnik and places it among the most advanced cities of that time in Europe is the equality of all women under the law. All women, regardless of their social class, were subject to punishment according to the crime they committed, so that in prison, noblewomen could be found just like maidservants" (Dinić-Knežević 1974, p. 34);

though “out of all Croatian lands, Dubrovnik was the most open to Western influences in the 16th century during the Renaissance's flourishing, and was the most prepared to accept early modern conceptions of women” (Fališevac, 2003, p. 119). Nikola Gučetić and his wife Mara Gundulić wrote at that time about the morals, intellect, spirituality, and beauty of women (in comparison to men) (Fališevac, 2003, p. 119-120). In this period, some women, apart from being characters and sources of inspiration for writers, also became active participants in public life. There are testimonies about the female authors, the sisters Bunić, and the first ‘female’ myth revolved around Cvijeta Zuzorić⁴ (Fališevac, 2003, p. 120). However, we cannot escape the impression left by the fact that the poetic writings of these female authors have not been preserved. It seems that regardless of everything, they have remained part of the ‘mythical narrative’.

Therefore, Marin Držić is also a bearer of such a tradition concerning the position of women in Renaissance Dubrovnik. Taking everything into consideration, for example, the portrayal of active women in his comedies and the crafting of Držić's female characters become clearer.

SHAKESPEARE'S AND DRŽIĆ'S HEROINES

The transformation of female characters in Shakespeare's comedies is a central theme explored in contemporary feminist criticism. Shakespeare's comedies have frequently been the subject of debates concerning the role and status of women in society, and many theorists have focused their analyses on the changes that occur with female characters throughout the plots. Of particular interest is the study of how women were portrayed in English literature during the Elizabethan era. A review of the criticism leads to the conclusion that the female character in English Renaissance literature, including Shakespeare's comedies, is presented as the ‘other’ in relation to the male character, ensuring that women are never equated with the main character. Shakespeare's heroines, such as Hero and Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hermia and Helena from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Rosalind from *As You Like It* undergo a process of transformation reflected in their shift from traditional roles of obedience and subservience to roles that can be described as characterising independence and autonomy.

The female characters in Shakespeare's comedies are initially presented in patriarchally shaped and subordinate roles to the male characters. However, as the plot develops, these women break free from these traditional roles and become independent individuals who make decisions

⁴ About the position of women in Renaissance Dubrovnik and the role of Cvijeta Zuzorić, refer to (Petaković, 2011);

about their own lives and destinies. For example, in the play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia, the beautiful and initially obedient daughter of Egeus, defies her father's demands for her marriage, despite it being considered inappropriate for women at that time. In the first act, she decides to confront her father and run away with the man she loves. Unlike Hippolyta, the submissive and passive queen of the Amazons, Hermia dares to make decisions for herself and refuses to accept established authority (Dreher, 1986, p. 98). Her resistance to this authority is met with strong opposition from a patriarchal society. Shortly after Theseus announces that he has won Hippolyta, Egeus approaches him and complains that his daughter refuses to marry Demetrius (1.1.22). Angry about her decision, he pleads with Theseus to order her to comply with patriarchal norms or to order her death. In this, he portrays Hermia in the same way women of that period were typically portrayed and perceived – as objects to be traded. The independence and human qualities that Hermia seemingly possesses are taken away from her by Egeus when he says, “She is mine, and all my right of her I do estate unto Demetrius” (1.1.97-98)⁵.

In contrast to Hermia, who bravely defies her father, Helena epitomizes the obedient and submissive woman, fully willing to prioritize a man's happiness over her own. Through an act of self-sacrifice, she informs Demetrius that Hermia has fled with Lysander, even though she is aware that this knowledge will affect her happiness. Loyal to the man she loves, Helena tries to please him by following him, even though she knows he pursues another woman. An ideal, submissive woman, she remains content even as her independence is taken away.

In the play *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero is portrayed as the ideal Renaissance woman – beautiful, loyal, quiet in the presence of men, and completely under the control of her father, Leonato. When Leonato suspects that Don Pedro might seek Hero's hand in marriage, he orders her to accept his proposal despite the obvious age difference (2.1.61-63). Hero obeys his will, as well as the will of everyone else in her surroundings. Thus, Don Pedro easily courts and wins her on behalf of Claudio. Despite being influenced by Beatrice, a free-spirited and independent woman, Hero does not initially show signs of wanting to take any voluntary action. However, after being falsely accused and publicly shamed despite her innocence, during the repeated wedding ceremony, she declares: “One Hero died defiled, but I do live, / And surely as I live, I am a maid.” She takes a clear stand for herself and rejects the previous accusations. This action restores her honour and reputation, contributing to the exploration and shifting of gender roles and expectations.

⁵ All references and quotes from Shakespeare's plays are from Taylor et al. (Eds.). (2011). *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Modern Critical Edition*;

Unlike Hero, Beatrice resists the will and commands of men in her surroundings. She refuses to marry, and instead chooses to embrace her independence and individuality, opting to select her suitor or reject those who do not suit her preferences. Beatrice is never punished for her sharpness; instead, Shakespeare finds her an ideal partner in a man who possesses a similar wit and intellect (Gay, 1994, p. 144). However, this strong woman is aware of the limitations imposed on her as a woman. When Hero is accused, Beatrice realizes that she cannot be the one to seek revenge; she must persuade Benedick to do it on her behalf. Despite being constrained by her actions, Shakespeare grants her character sufficient verbal wit, portraying her as a woman who skilfully manipulates words to achieve her goals. Even at the very end, just before marrying Benedick, she agrees to the match only after emphasizing that they marry because she wants to, not because he wants to.

In the play, *As You Like It*, Rosalind is aware of and accepts the limitations placed upon her as a woman. However, unlike Beatrice, she does not rely on men to carry out her plan. Instead, she assumes the identity of a man, which initially liberates her from the constraints she previously faced at court and positions her as the leading character in the play, dictating the terms of the relationships she develops with others. Nevertheless, the dramatic irony that Rosalind successfully attains all her desires is not solely because she is characteristically strong and independent; rather, it is because she has taken on a male identity, a facet that should not be overlooked. These transformations are significant not only in Shakespeare's comedies but also represent a part of the broader social context in which the prevailing understanding of gender roles began to change.

In her study *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*, Iлона Bell examines the roles that women play in Shakespeare's comedies, particularly in the context of courtship. She argues that the female characters in Shakespeare's comedies transform from objects of courtship into subjects who actively participate in the process of love. According to her assertion, Hermia, Beatrice, and Rosalind are female characters who fight for their independence and freedom to choose their partners (Bell, 1998, p. 10-11). In her analysis, Bell primarily focuses on the character of Hermia, asserting that she represents Shakespeare's feminist heroine who refuses to be subordinate to men. She also points out that Beatrice and Rosalind are strong and independent women who take an active role in the process of love, rather than being passive and waiting for someone to court them. Bell concludes that these characters were revolutionary in Shakespeare's time, as they fought for their independence and freedom in a strictly patriarchal society. She also emphasizes that these characters remain relevant today, as they continue to fight for women's rights in the modern world.

The transformation of female characters in Shakespeare's comedies is also addressed by the critic Coppélia Kahn. In her study *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*, she argues that the female characters in Shakespeare's comedies challenge traditional roles and expectations of patriarchal society. Instead of adhering to gender-conditioned roles and being passive objects of male desire, they become active agents in shaping their destinies. Kahn emphasizes that female characters are often portrayed as manipulators who use their intelligence and charm to achieve their goals. Kahn particularly highlights the character of Rosalind from the play *As You Like It* as an example of the transformation of a female character. Rosalind, who starts as a distressed and vulnerable young woman, disguises herself as a man to escape into the forest and avoid an arranged marriage. In this role, she becomes more aggressive and self-assured, and her male appearance allows her to move more freely through the world. Kahn interprets this transformation as a way to highlight the societal barriers that prevent women from being independent and free. According to Kahn, characters like Rosalind are not merely decorative objects or passive victims. By subverting their gender roles, they offer a vision of a more just society that provides equal opportunities for all. Kahn also points out that these female characters, when disguised as men, often start behaving in a 'masculine' way and take on a dominant role in their interactions with other characters. This indicates that gender roles are not based on nature or biology, but are socially constructed. Kahn concludes that Shakespeare, in his comedies, plays with the idea that women could have power and freedom to move through the world, but only if they take on male roles or otherwise challenge societal constraints. However, she also observes that these transformations, while perhaps liberating for women within the context of the drama, actually demonstrate how strong and limiting social conventions can be in real life (Kahn, 1981, p. 160-170).

In Dubrovnik, during Marin Držić's era, the social position of women was highly unfavourable, and it did not undergo the Renaissance changes that were taking place on a broader scale. Specifically, girls were allowed to appear in public only on major church holidays and in the company of older relatives (see Rešetar, 1958, p. 353; Pavlović 1958, p. 217). This fact is also mentioned by Pera, Maro's fiancée, in *Dundo Maroje*, when she responds to Dživo's question of how she knows that the Church of Our Lady is large: "Why wouldn't I know, Dživo? Wasn't I at the Mass in the Church of Our Lady every Christmas with my Aunt?" (Držić, 1962, p. 215). It's interesting to note that their attendance of theatre was also restricted. Only married women accompanied by their husbands could attend performances, while young girls sat in separate areas behind wooden grates called "balaturi" (Pavlović, 1958, pp. 216-217).

The Renaissance period brought about a series of changes in the perception of the world and humanity's place within it. Consequently, there were certain shifts in the construction of the image of women in art, influenced by philosophy. However, throughout this entire period, deeply rooted in preceding traditions, women were mostly treated ambivalently, if not always negatively (see Banić-Pajnić, 2004, p. 69-89). The tradition underlying such a view of women presupposes their moral, intellectual, and physical inferiority. Even in cases where certain texts may have commendable intentions, there is often an implication of inferiority:

A striking example of the pronounced ambivalence of Renaissance attitudes toward women is, paradoxical as it may sound, the Renaissance praises of women. Most often, these praises were directed at the traditionally prescribed virtues of women or the traditional roles attributed to them in society (as homemakers, wives, and mothers). These praises, in fact, merely reinforced their inferiority and justified their subordinate role in society.

(Banić-Pajnić, 2004, p. 78)

While some women in Renaissance Dubrovnik, such as Mara Gučetić or Cvijeta Zuzorić, enjoyed a different social position, the majority were uneducated and confined to their homes until marriage. Those unable to marry due to dowries or other reasons often found themselves in convents (see Fališevac, 2003, p. 121). Therefore, it is not surprising that Pera, Maro's fiancée, took the bold step of dressing as a man and embarking on a journey to Rome to retrieve her fiancé. However, her daring action is likely motivated not by faithful love, but by fear (compare Švelec, 1968, p. 223). Hence, as much as her move might appear to be an expression of transformative emancipatory action, even considered scandalous by Maroje (Držić, 1962, p. 313), it is driven by what Dživo says: "And if we were to return to the City, not having achieved what we came for due to misfortune, there would certainly be nuns to accept you," to which she responds: "Even the nuns would not accept those walking in this way" (Držić, 1962, p. 21).

However revolutionary Držić's portrayal of Pera's activity may be, she is subject to circumstances and remains passive throughout the entire play⁶. In the text *Grižula*, Gruba, enchanted by a fairy for her chosen one,

⁶ Women cross-dressing in literary texts is not a novelty; instances can be found even in oral epics and the writings of Držić's contemporaries. The reasons were more or less the same: pursuing professions not available to women, joining the army, dueling, embarking on distant journeys, as well as engaging in prostitution, and lesbianism. During the author's time, cross-dressing was even legally sanctioned (see Čale Feldman, 2001, p. 161). Pera committed three offenses (theft, traveling, cross-dressing), but she remains passive until the end of the play, unlike other heroines, perhaps, with similar inclinations (for more on the transvestism of this character and in general, see Čale Feldman, 2001);

embarks on a quest. Nonetheless, she exhibits more activity than Pera, and Držić permits it due to her 'Vlahinjica' status, though she still faces condemnation, this time from Dragić's mother Vukosava. Similar to many older characters in Držić's works, she critiques the behaviour of the younger generation. More severe condemnation comes, for instance, from Stojna, Miljenko's mother, and Tirena (Držić, 1962, p. 90), countered by Radat, who deems it typical of the young, but also notes inappropriate behaviour in some older women (Držić, 1962, p. 91-92)⁷.

Držić allows certain female characters to transform their roles in his other dramatic works as well. In *Tripče de Utolče (Mande)*, the main protagonist, Mande, stands out as the only one among Držić's female characters to openly discuss erotic desire. She deceives her elderly and alcoholic husband, adopts a disguise as a man to move freely outside her home, and fulfils her desires with younger men (see Fališevac 2013, p. 189)⁸. Mande is evidently in an arranged marriage, yet she takes matters into her own hands. Despite having other suitors, the focus of the text shifts towards two women who outsmart the men or, in other words, assert control over them, subordinating them in a certain way. This dynamic expresses a *Boccaccian triumph of women over men*: Kata over Lone, Džove over Krisa, Mande over Tripče (Držić, 2017a, p. 20).

In a sense, the courtesan Laura in *Dundo Maroje* also undergoes a transformation in her social role. The initial change takes place after her move from Dubrovnik to Rome, evident in her name change, and further solidifies in the resolution when, after finding her father and getting married, she transforms into a respectable woman. It is noteworthy that the role of the courtesan undergoes a certain transformation in Držić's work. Despite her materialistic tendencies, she chooses Maro, a young and handsome man, and one could argue that she loves him. This raises the question of whether this love would have developed if the author had allowed him to become impoverished, prompting consideration of whether Laura is a stereotypical courtesan or a subversive character (see Gjurgjan, 2011).

Another woman who selects and contends for her chosen one is Venera in the text *Venera i Adon*. However, she is also a *servant*, albeit to a *shepherd from above* (Adon). With the aid of her charms and her son Cupid, she manages to win over the man/god of her life.

In addition to the examined female characters, elderly women also have a role in the plays, despite their undesirable position in reality. Alongside physical punishment for transgressions, as mentioned in the

⁷ The relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, as well as their conflicts, is also discussed by Satir in the Prologue of *Skup* (pp. 137-138), as well as by Dobre in *Skup* (p. 160);

⁸ One cannot be certain to what extent D. Fališevac's viewpoint can be supported, suggesting that this text can also be read as an early example of feminine/female writing (Fališevac, 2013, p. 192);

texts (see, for example, Omakala in *Grižul'* (Držić 2017b, p. 16-17), other aspects of their bodily existence were under threat:

They were exploited by noblemen and noble sons, often with the knowledge of the masters, because it was practical for them for more than one reason. And when they gave birth, if they were not banished, they could leave their children outside the doors of Klarisa to be accepted into the orphanage, which many Dubrovnik citizens bequeathed in their wills, reconciling themselves with the world, for a certain sum of ducats. And if they were banished – which was not uncommon – they could increase the number of “wicked” women in Duičin's stairs, in Podmirje, or a similar place.

(Švelec 1968, p. 73)

However, Držić provides these women with a form of satisfaction by granting them the opportunity to articulate their sufferings and participate in the affairs of their masters. Dunja Fališevac generalizes the attitude towards women's speech in this author's works. Despite not often being the initiators of the dramatic action and occasionally being portrayed in a stereotypical, even faceless manner, “they find their voice, have their text, express their opinions, their views on life (which often differ from male views)” (Fališevac, 2013: p. 193-194). Considering their, in most cases, mutual solidarity and support, it leads to the conclusion that “Držić perceives women as emotionally more potent and positive beings than men” (*ibid.*).

Despite the general portrayal of women's lives in Renaissance Dubrovnik and the criticisms directed at them in Držić's plays by both men and women themselves, with defenders on both sides, it can be inferred that certain women attain a degree of freedom in the realms of speech⁹ and action. The question arises as to whether Držić genuinely permitted liberation for women in themselves. One might argue that he did not, and that he navigates between affirmation and patriarchal criticism, aligning with the ambivalences of Renaissance Dubrovnik, or the era itself. In Držić's works, women remain the ‘other’ in relation to the world of men, to which he belongs. However, the distinction lies in their diversity, as his heroines are not always noblewomen. Sometimes, they are not even women from Dubrovnik, but rather *Vlahinjice*, *Kotorans*¹⁰, *Jeđupke*, prostitutes, elderly women, courtesans (Laura is even a woman from Korčula), fairies, goddesses, unmarried women – in other words, undefined

⁹ The entire tirade about the relationship of men towards women, as well as a kind of female superiority, and the lament for the ‘golden age’ of the Amazons, is expressed by the Vlahinjica Miona in *Grižula* (28). She even declares that she wouldn't marry even if they offered her all the wealth in the world;

¹⁰ Držić sets the entire plot of *Ugo Tripčet* in Kotor, perhaps “to avoid offending the conservative Dubrovnik environment” (Fališevac, 2013: p. 188);

women. Does this imply that a certain form of freedom is only accessible to those who are different, the 'other', and who, regardless of the size of their role, still belong to the periphery of real life?

CONCLUSION

The transformation of female characters in Shakespeare's and Držić's comedies can be viewed as liberating, as these plays portray women who defy societal conventions and expectations. These characters are often depicted as independent, intelligent, witty, and capable of adapting to various situations. They are willing to exert a certain degree of control over their lives, even if it involves disguising themselves and cross-dressing as men.

However, despite the apparent liberating elements in the creation of these female characters, it cannot be asserted that their authors played an emancipatory role. For instance, in Shakespeare, there is an uncritical acceptance of patriarchal values, and in Držić, occasional portrayals of women as sexual objects can be observed. Therefore, the representation of female characters in these dramas, while undergoing a certain transformation, needs to be critically examined. It is also crucial to note that the liberating transformation of female characters in comedies can be controversial. As some critics affirm, these characters are still constrained by societal norms and ultimately revert to traditional female roles.

Nevertheless, characters created in this manner represented a step forward in the ongoing struggle for women's rights and freedom. This type of freedom should not necessarily be perceived solely as Shakespeare's and Držić's feminist aspirations, but rather as an attempt to depict comedic situations by questioning and disrupting established societal standards. As claimed by Albert Rabil Ml. in his introduction to the translation of Agrippa's work *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*:

Humanism was a movement led by men who embraced the valuation of women from ancient texts and who mostly shared misogynistic perceptions of their culture. However, humanism also opened the door to critiquing the misogynistic tradition.

(Banić-Pajnić, 2004, p. 87)¹¹

It is evident from all that has been discussed that the same assertion can be made for the Renaissance period:

¹¹ Rabil, A. Ml., Introduction. In. Agrippa, H. C. (1996). *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, (p. xviii), Chicago and London (quotation taken from Banić-Pajnić, E.).

The individual of the Renaissance emancipated the feminine within himself, yet this emancipation was merely declarative. Nonetheless, the process of genuine women's emancipation began then.

(Banić-Pajnić, 2004, p. 87)

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ОСЛОБАЂАЈУЋА ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЈА ЖЕНСКИХ ЛИКОВА У ШЕКСПИРОВИМ И ДРЖИЋЕВИМ КОМЕДИЈАМА

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Резиме

У доба краљице Елизабете II важило је уверење да су жене интелектуално, физички и морално инфериорније од мушкараца. Док се један број женских ликова Шекспирових драма уклапа у стереотипну слику времена и у потпуности осликава родне улоге тог периода, неретки су и они женски ликови који руше стереотипе о жени као субмисивном, крхком бићу, без права на сопствени идентитет. Под утицајем ренесансе која је између осталог означила и трансформацију жена и односа према њима, али и слике краљице, моћне и доминантне владарке, Шекспир неретко у својим комадима слика жене као интелигентне, храбре, племените и као жене које се по својим ставовима, али и по правима које захтевају ни по чему не разликују од мушкараца. Независне младе жене попут Розалинде из драме „Како вам драго” или Беатриче из драме *Много буке ни око чега* представљају драматичан контраст у односу на Хермију из драме *Сан летње ноћи* или Херу из драме *Много буке ни око чега*. Оне се не уклапају у слику идеалне жене тог времена.

Такође, оне нису независне у модерном смислу речи, али када их поредимо са типичним женама Шекспировог доба, оне то засигурно јесу.

У комедијама Марина Држића у у неким сегментима текстова (нпр. *Тирена*, *Скуп*, *Дундо Мароје*) приметна је конзервативна, патријархална критика друштва, односно величање патријархалног реда и морала, и осуђивање новотарија, посебно усмерено на омладину, нарочито жене. Оне се квалификују као нерадне, неинтелигентне и залуђене модом. Међутим, креирајући и другачије ликове, Држић балансира између афирмације и патријархалне критике управо у духу амбиваленција ренесансног Дубровника, односно времена. Ипак, чини се да код Држића жена остаје другост у односу на свет мушкараца, којем он сâм припада, с тим што се она умножава, јер његове јунакиње нису властелинке, понекад ни Дубровчанке, већ Влахињице, Которанке, Јеђупке, подводице, годишнице, куртизане (Лаура је уза све још и Корчуланка), виле, богиње, неудате – дакле, недефинисане жене.

Женски ликови у Шекспировим и Држићевим комедијама на својеврстан начин јесу трансформисани – често су самостални, интелигентни, духовити и способни да се прилагоде различитим ситуацијама. Жене су спремне у одређеној мери да преузму контролу над својим животима, упркос друштвеним конвенцијама, чак и ако то подразумева маскирање и прерушавање у мушкарце. Но, упркос евидентним ослобађајућим елементима у креирању женских ликова, не може се рећи да су њихови аутори имали еманципаторску улогу. Очито је да су ови ликови и даље ограничени друштвеним нормама и да се на крају враћају традиционалним женским улогама.

Ипак овако креирани ликови представљали су искорак у борби за женска права и слободу, која се не мора и не може нужно посматрати као феминистичка тежња Шекспира и Држића, већ пре као покушај преиспитивања и нарушавања устаљених друштвених стандарда, јер „човек ренесансе еманципирао је женско у себи, но та је еманципација била само декларативна” (Банић-Пајнић, 2004, р. 87).