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Master's Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the *femme fatale* archetype and its representations in literature and movies. Its aim is to explore whether they represent feminist heroes who changed the traditional roles of women in society or whether they are stereotypical characters represented as male fantasies objectified into sex symbols based on the prejudices and injustices of patriarchal society. The *femme fatale* archetype is analysed in 1862 Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel *Lady Audley's Secret*, 1940 Raymond Chandler's novel *Farewell, My Lovely*, 1961 Blake Edwards' movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and 1992 Paul Verhoeven's movie *Basic Instinct*. The theoretical framework of the paper explores the influence that feminism and feminist literary criticism had on the shaping of the *femme fatale* character and it also explores the feminist point of view on the character and its representations in literature and movies. The main part of the paper analyses the *femme fatale* archetype in the mentioned novels and movies and its relationship with other male and female characters. It explores the way these women challenged the existing patriarchal system and how they were punished for their unconventional behaviour. If they succeeded in refusing to play the traditional women's role, they were given the most negative characteristics. In addition, it also analyses the noir genre in which this archetype is most frequently present and the influence the World Wars had on shaping this genre and the *femme fatale*.

Keywords: feminism, gender and sex, feminist literary criticism, noir genre, *femme fatale* archetype

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INTRODUCTION

Feminism today is a highly debated topic which roots go as far as the sixteenth century. The feminist theory has come a long way since its beginnings and it has changed and adapted in accordance with the circumstances of the specific period. In the course of time feminism developed into women's struggle to end the notion of stereotyping on the basis of gender. The aim of this paper is to explore the influence of feminism on cultural constructs, such as literature and movies in which the *femme fatale* archetype bears all the social concerns and prejudices that feminists tried to overcome. It will explore different representations of *femme fatale* and how different time periods influenced their lives and destinies. The paper will look at whether they were given a chance to represent feminist concerns and succeed in converting the traditional patriarchal values or whether they succumbed to the stereotyped role of a woman oppressed, obedient and objectified according to male desires and fantasies.

The first chapter examines the history of feminism, its forebears and their initial resistance to the injustices that the women sustained. It follows the development of feminist movement and its political and social engagement in the form of various women's liberation movements and reforms. It lists some of the most prominent feminists, their works and their influence on the development of feminism. It provides an insight into women's radical actions that led to marriage and education reforms in the nineteenth century. This chapter also notes the dissociations and divergences of the feminist subgroups and different forms of the feminist theories. Following the history of feminism, there is also an exploration of the cultural context and the way feminists changed cultural constructs, including literature and movies. It also illustrates the theoretical and practical work by feminist literary critics.

The second chapter analyses the genre conventions of noir fiction and film noir in their most frequent form of the detective and crime stories. It explains the noir genre and the way it transgressed from an arbitrary set of stylistic characteristics to a genre. It explores its development through history and how the two World Wars influenced its emergence. Related to that is the *femme fatale* archetype which is introduced in the third chapter. It explains the creation of this archetype and its origins from the feminist point of view. It examines the relation between the *femme fatale* and the detective which is the moving force of the noir genre. This chapter outlines their features and representations in literature and movies and examines their destinies. At the end of the chapter, it demonstrates the modern day *femme fatale*, which is epitomized by Madonna.

The last chapter brings an analysis of the four works of art, all of which have elements of noir genre, hence they depict the character of *femme fatale*. It analyses the novels *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) written by Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) written by Raymond Chandler, and the movies *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) produced by Blake Edwards and *Basic Instinct* (1992) produced by Paul Verhoeven. This chapter analyses the elements of noir genre, the influence of feminism, the representations of the *femme fatale* archetype in these works and her relation to the detective who represents the patriarchal system. They are analysed taking into consideration the thesis of the paper. The fourth chapter is followed by the conclusion.

1. FEMINISM AND FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist activity in the early modern period differed from the in the twentieth century, which makes it hard to determine the exact beginning of feminist. Looking back, the history of women's struggle against oppression shows examples of resistance that can be identified as "feminist in nature" (Hodgson-Wright 3). Feminism as a political movement solidified in the 1960s and 1970s. It is "a belief that women are and should be treated as potential intellectual equals and social equals to men. . . [A] feminist can be of either sex." (Mukhuba 7235).

1.1. THE HISTORY OF FEMINISM

As mentioned, the early modern period showed only a slight improvement in the women's position in the society; they did not have any formal rights, "including the right to vote", and "were barred from receiving a university education" (Hodgson-Wright 4). Moreover, it was very difficult for women to be economically independent, so the marriage was a way of securing their future – they were legally dependent on their husbands. Husband's role in the marriage was to provide the wife with sufficient means to maintain her for the rest of her life, while all her property automatically became her husband's. However, wife's role was mostly limited to childbirth, and she had no rights over the children in the matters of bringing them up and educating them — they legally belonged to their father. The idea that women were an inferior branch of human race inevitably had to change.

Stephanie Hodgson-Wright claims that creating a sense of one's history is a way of seeking public recognition (5). All the early texts concerning women were written exclusively by men, and moreover, some philosophers considered women inferior to men which shows the extent of people's overall degrading opinion of women, being that philosophers' thoughts and ideas were accepted as universal truths, especially in the past. One of the first examples of resistance that can be identified as feminist in nature is women's participation in debates. It happened in the late sixteenth century in England, which was a period when "the ideal of female behaviour was 'chaste, silent and obedient'" (Hodgson-Wright 6). By speaking up, women challenged patriarchal authority which is recognized as feminist. Besides, women were concerned not only with the marriage and motherhood, but also with unequal opportunities for intellectual development. "In 1656, Mary Oxlie wrote . . . that if woman is intellectually inferior to a man," (Hodgson-Wright 10) it is because women's inferiority is

culturally imposed. There are many women in history proving that, when they are given the chance, they are capable of reaching the same levels of intellectual development as men. For example, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, women poets such as "Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn and Anne Finch", (Hodgson-Wright 12) wrote about female friendship and relations with other women. This is significant because that way women are not identified only through their marriage or poet/mistress relations, which was a tradition in poetry, but also through emotional, spiritual and intellectual bonds with the same sex. The seventeenth century was also a period when female literary tradition was constructed. Even though overall legal and economic position of women did not improve, "it is a sure testimony to the fact that this community of women was making its presence felt in one of the country's most crucial cultural arenas" (Hodgson-Wright 15).

Generally, the period 1550-1700 shows various instances of women's resistance that are feminist in nature and it made the change in attitude towards women possible. The following years are marked by major changes which led to the first wave of feminism – a period when terms 'feminism' and 'feminist' came into use. "Nineteenth-century feminism evolved very much as a response to the specific difficulties individual women encountered in their lives: hence the emergence of 'key personalities'. . ." (Sanders 16). One of the most prominent events to set things into motion was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which marks the beginning of modern feminism. In the book she addresses the middle-class women as major influences on society, and because of that, she stresses the importance of moral and intellectual influences, but she avoids being radical. Her concern is the way girls are educated, so her objective for it is "to prepare them for the possibility of economic independence, to give them freedom and dignity" (Sanders 17), and to find balance between civic and familial responsibilities. Her *Vindication* sparked off numerous reactions, especially by writers of advice manuals and conduct books, for example Mrs Sarah Ellis's conduct books, which supported the idea of female emancipation. At the time, the notion of "separate spheres" (Sanders 18) was prevalent which meant that men went to work, while women dealt with domestic and family matters. However, this could not be applied to the working-class and middle-class single women who had to work, especially with "the invention of machinery for spinning and weaving" that "removed traditional women's occupations from the home and took them into factories" (Sanders 18). This change brought immense success to Mrs Ellis's conduct books because she encouraged women, particularly

middle-class ones, to strive to have a role in society, and not only in relation to their husband and children, but also as moral influences to the society and other women.

In the early nineteenth century the status of a married woman was "that of *femme covert*" which "stated that by marriage, 'the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything'" (Blackstone qtd. in Sanders 20). Changes were brought about after the case of Caroline Norton against her husband. He took their three children and tried to sue her for divorce, which encouraged her to write a pamphlet *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill* under a male pseudonym – which was still necessary to give weight to her arguments, in which she complained that the law deprived a woman of her children. This resulted in the Infant Custody Act (1839) "which permitted separated wives of 'good character' . . . to have custody of any children under seven . . ., and access to their older children" (Sanders 21). Not only did Norton influence bringing the Infant Custody Act into force, but she was also partially instrumental in introducing the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. She continued her research on women's legal position which led to her "English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century" (1854). The Matrimonial Causes Act was introduced "after 25.000 women had signed a petition in favour of married women's property ownership", which "allowed married women to keep their earnings, and to inherit personal property, with everything else going to their husband" (Sanders 21). Consequently, the position of women was improved, especially in the case of divorce.

In the 1850s a group of "middle-class, activist women who discussed and published their views about women, and met (from 1857) at 19 Langham Place in London" (Sanders 23) was established, hence their group was called 'Langham Place'. The most prominent members were Barbara Leigh Smith and Bessie Rayner Parkes, who besides creating their own works, established a publication "The English Woman's Journal" and a Society for the Promoting of the Employment of Women. The purpose of their work was to tackle the issues of bad education the women received, difficulty finding jobs, and minimal choice of professions for women. Moreover, they simultaneously tried to change the overall attitude that 'a lady' should not work and also stop the habit of preventing women from work "by false notions of gentility from becoming economically independent" (Sanders 23). As Valerie Sanders states, while the 1850s was a period of marriage reform, the 1860s and 1870s saw an improvement in girls' education (25). There was a development of women's employment

opportunities, especially in teaching, philanthropy, nursing, work-house visiting, and others. There were new women's colleges, Queen's and Bedford College in London, that attempted to make boys' and girls' education standards equal. Furthermore, one of the last major reforms that launched in the nineteenth century was the right to vote. The issue of women's suffrage was prominent already in the 1830s. In 1867 the House of Commons voted on whether women should have the right to vote, but it was overruled by 196 votes to 73. The first time that the term 'feminist' was used was in 1895 "in the *Athenaeum,* a year after the popular novelist Sarah Grand had coined the phrase 'New Woman'" (Sanders 26) describing the new generation of women seeking independence and equality in marriage. The vote was finally won in 1918 for women over thirty. Nonetheless, one of the issues that became more evident in the period of voting reforms is that certain women believed it is acceptable to lead a traditional quiet life with her family. Therefore, the suffragists became divided among themselves as some groups identified themselves as anti-suffrage still believing in the philosophy of 'separate spheres'. Unfortunately, the development of feminism was slowed down by war in 1914 and it will remain dormant until the 1970s.

In the early 1970s there was a divergence of views concerning the struggle against oppression: first wave feminism was "individualist and reformist" (Thornham 29) and centred more on the equal rights between men and women, whereas 'new feminism', or 'women's liberation', was "collective and revolutionary" (Thornham 29). Because of the changed social and political situation, the feminism became notably more radical. For example, in America Betty Friedan, who published a book named *The Feminine Mystique*, founded National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. Its aim was to make woman equal to men in terms of their rights, privileges and responsibilities in the American society. Its activity resulted in a Bill of Rights for women in 1967. Also, in America there was the Women's Liberation Movement that tried to make a change through a "process of 'consciousness-raising' – the move to transform what is experienced as personal into analysis in political terms, with the accompanying recognition that 'the personal *is* political', that male power is exercised and reinforced through 'personal' institutions such as marriage, child-rearing and sexual practices" (Thornham 30-31). So the feminists had to change people's awareness in order to bring about some major changes. The feminist movement was slightly different in Britain, mainly because the context was not the same. Here the Equal Rights groups were related with the industrial militancy of working-class women, and, unlike American liberal or radical

feminism, the British feminism reflected rather "a Marxist-socialist inflection" by the "radical left-wing politics" (Thornham 31).

In the USA there was also the Black Movement which contributed greatly to the development of Women's Liberation and participated in the formation of the first radical feminist groups. At the time, Robin Morgan wrote *Sisterhood is Powerful* which described the double burden of gender and race that the black women are faced with, which is what differentiates them from the feminist movement of 'middle-class white women'. As a result, black women who fought for a total emancipation had a hard time identifying with the 1970s feminist movement. Similarly, the working-class women in Britain also had a difficulty relating to women of upper class. So, the issue of social division in Britain was not that of race and class as in the USA, but predominantly that of class. Lesbian women in general also experienced the hardships of oppression and were active within the radical feminist movement. Anne Koedt argues that lesbianism is only a part of women's struggle against "the 'sex role system'" (Thornham 33), but she acknowledges that lesbian women face a similar double burden that black women are faced with.

As feminism became a conscious political movement uniting women in their struggle against oppression, it opened a space for feminist theorists to explore the identity of a woman and its possible transformations. It was followed by a large number of feminist theoretical writings raising questions like "[d]oes being female constitute a "natural fact" or a cultural performance, or is "naturalness" constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex" (Butler viii). The most significant theoretical writing trying to answer such questions was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), with the title suggesting de Beauvoir's argument that woman is culturally constructed as the 'Other'. She argues that one is not born as a woman, but becomes one because a society produces a woman as a being, and is described as feminine. Humans can understand our Self only in opposition to something that is not-self. However, "men have claimed the category of Self or Subject exclusively for themselves, and relegated woman to the status of eternal *Other*" (Thornham 34). So a woman has to accept herself as 'Other' for a man because everything humans have in civilization, as a society, is constructed by men.

As already mentioned, Women's Liberation Movement called for a change through a process of 'consciousness-raising'. Similarly, Betty Friedan calls for a change of cultural image of femininity in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). She argues that the reason

women felt dissatisfied is identified as 'feminine mystique' – it "says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity . . ." (Thornham 35). Friedan explained that, since American society's ultimate goal is individual fulfilment, women should only join the society in the matter of personal achievement through work in order to reach their fulfilment. However, Friedan's argument of self-transformation as a crucial factor leads her to blame women for their status in the society. On the contrary, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* finds its origins in the radical feminist movement. Millett redefines the term 'patriarchy' from "the rule of a dominant elder male within a traditional kinship structure" to "the institutionalized oppression of all women by men" (Thornham 36). She argues that sexual politics is a way of life maintained through ideological control. Consequently, women have accepted their inferior status as natural. Unlike Friedan, she does not blame women for their position, but justifies their complicity as a way of surviving in a society in which they are almost completely dependent on men.

Unlike American liberal and radical feminism, British theorists follow other directions which emerged in the early 1970s: socialist feminism and psychoanalytic feminism. British feminist Juliet Mitchell wrote an essay "Women: the longest Revolution" and a book *Woman's Estate* (1971) in which she confronts Marxist/socialist theory for seeing women's liberation as "merely an adjunct to class analysis" (Thornham 38). She objected that radical feminists, like Kate Millett was, offer over-simplistic and universal view of patriarchy. Even though she agrees that there is an ideology promoting sexual politics, she argues that "women's oppression takes place always in specific historical circumstances" (Thornham 39). Similarly, Sheila Rowbotham also supported the notion of both a revolution in consciousness and a historical analysis of women's oppression within capitalism. Moreover, she expands this by adding that revolution has to take place within language and culture as well, not only material structures. This dual structure of oppression made Juliet Mitchell think about what could explain the way sexed identities are acquired and maintained by humans, and, at the same time, how could those identities be seen as culturally constructed and transformable. Mitchell saw that psychoanalysis could offer answers to these questions, although it ignores the material structures that take part in women's oppression.

French feminism saw the development of the feminist theory during the 1970s which originated in the politicised climate, like in the USA. First women's groups were formed in 1968 under the name of Mouvement de Libértation des Femmes (or the French MLF). Unlike Americans, French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva used

psychoanalytic theory and followed de Beauvoir's argument that woman is constructed as the 'Other'. Like Sheila Rowbotham, they sought "to explore ways in which language and culture construct sexual difference" (Thornham 40), which they did through the work of the French psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan whose theory helps explain the way language constructs sexual difference. He explains that the infant is born with an independent identity of its own mirror-image, and through acquiring language he or she is immersed in the society, that is the patriarchal 'Symbolic Order'. It is the Law of the Father whose privileged signifier is the Phallus. It is "opposed to the realm of Imaginary, the world of the first mother-child relationship in which the child acquires, through seeing its reflection, a sense of itself as a separate being" (Thornham 41). Its realm is constructed through sets of binary oppositions in which the 'male' counterpart is the privileged one. Though the "feminine is never a mark of the subject. . . Rather, the feminine is the signification of lack, signified by the Symbolic, a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference" (Butler 27).

All in all, second wave feminism and the feminist theory written during that period show determinism and certainty about future emancipation of women. However, as much as the feminists criticized the politicised climate and its ideological means, they also, given the position to speak from, had to say things from political necessity. For example, 1978 National Women's Liberation Conference in Britain saw a split between radical and socialist feminists, which shows a clash between feminist political positions. Since the beginning of its second wave, "feminism has acquired an academic voice both within and beyond Women's Studies, but as a political identity it has fractured along lines of multiple differences between women, and both young women and high-profile media women seem to believe that 'second wave feminism' has dissolved into 'postfeminism'" (Thornham 42). Looking back, not all feminist requirements had been fulfilled, and if they were, it was only partially.

As Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter wrote in *The Illusions of 'Post-feminism"* (1995) "post-feminism has never been defined. It remains the product of assumption" (Gamble 43). The term 'postfeminism' is a very flexible phenomenon and is under the influence of media. Postfeminism generally focuses on issues of victimisation, autonomy and responsibility, and it questions the status of women as victims unable to control their lives; their ideology emerges from liberal humanism which can be adapted to each person individually. Moreover, in the media, postfeminism joyously celebrates parting from "the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement" (Gamble 44) and it rejects feminist ideas of the second wave feminism. Many feminists argue that postfeminism

betrayed the history of feminist struggle. Susan Faludi in her Backlash *The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991) characterizes postfeminism as "a devastating reaction against the ground gained by second wave feminism" and argues it "is the backlash, and its triumph lies in its ability to define itself as an ironic, pseudo-intellectual critique on the feminist movement" (Gamble 45). Media became such a large influence that women started to accept the notion that feminism is unfashionable and that they should not care. One of the most identifiable faces of postfeminism was Naomi Wolf who wrote *Fire with Fire* (1993). She agrees with Faludi in that backlash is primarily a defensive reaction on the part of the male-dominated establishment and she mostly blames popular media for distorting and caricaturing feminism's image. However, she also argues that feminism itself is partly to blame for that image because it did not allow women to freely express their identities and be who they are within the feminist movement, but it started to form a narrow definition of how women should be like. The media convinces women they can have everything they want in their life, only with the help of pills, make up, cosmetic surgery, fashion, and other. So, this means that postfeminism does not allow them freedom; instead they are again bounded as in the past, only with other, commercial things. The media-led postfeminist phenomenon has reached a stalemate and it is unlikely that there is a solution out of it.

However, there were feminists who dissociated themselves from the postfeminism and identified themselves as members of a 'third wave'. Unlike second wave feminists, the third wave ones accept the contradictions and pluralism because it originates from the movement for emancipation of women of color. Also, the rejection of theoretical language makes third wave feminism easily accessible. Its name suggests the continuation of its earlier feminist movements and avoids the backlash postfeminism received. It is not exclusive to white middle classes, especially since its origins are in the US immigrant community.

To sum up, in this chapter the history of feminist movement shows the lasting effort of feminists for better treatment and equal rights and opportunities. In the beginning, feminist activity had a different form, and its activities were mostly feminist in nature. With the feminist writing and critique, feminism slowly started to manifest itself more openly. Feminism was shaped by social structures such as class, education and opportunities so it shaped differently with generations, finally cementing itself in the 1960 and 1970s. Postmodern period brought a more diversified postfeminism which was highly contested and led to tensions among theorists, critics and ordinary women. In that period, third wave feminism showed itself as a lifeline for those who put effort in continuing the originating

ideas and attitudes of first wave feminism. The next chapter will depict some of the circumstances of the periods of feminist movements and how it affected shaping the cultural climate.

1.2. FEMINISM AND ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT

Generally speaking, as much as feminist movement is a shared effort of women against the oppression of men, it is also affected by cultural structures which shape people's ideas, thoughts and attitudes, and consequently forms an overall climate in which they live in. There are many parts of culture changing the course of the movement that feminist could not influence and some of these cultural structures are the notion of gender, the influence of the developing world and its changes, the technologies, language, philosophy and religion.

Feminism is a phenomenon that is present in all parts of the world, but the concept of feminist movement and its theoretical and practical aspects conventionally applies to the west (America and Europe). However, the growing influence of postcolonial theorists such as the already mentioned Hayatri Chakravorty Spivak, then Trinh T. Minh-ha and Chandra Taplade Mohanty resulted in generating greater attention for the role of feminism in other cultural contexts, or precisely, in the third world countries. India is a great example of an extremely difficult struggle for equal political and legal rights of women. Surprisingly, Indian feminists focused more on the issues of the 'first world' feminism, while at the same time India struggled with injustice such as "political under-representation, domestic violence and adherence to misogynistic traditions such as *sati* (the self-immolation of widows)" (Kurian 67). Ghandi recognised the potential women had and encouraged them to fight for their rights and opportunities, but their responsibilities, fear of assassination and family disapproval made women remain quiet. The only way a woman in India could gain a significant position is through family connections, as can be seen in the example of Indira Ghandi. The 1970s (second wave feminism) saw the growing consciousness among women of the need to reshape their subordinate position in Indian society. In 1975 a report was published under the name of "Towards Equality" that for the first time dealt with the issues of women's oppression in India, for instance "female infant mortality, child marriages, illiteracy, and dowry" (Kurian 71). The report sparked off intense social and political turmoil as all underprivileged sections of society expressed a sense of collective consciousness by voicing their dissatisfaction with inherent sexism, hypocrisy and blindness to violence and the question of gender and

communal identity. A series of protests and demonstrations across the country led to campaigns resulting in the rape law amended by the government and raising consciousness about the humiliating aspects of dowry, which turns girls into economic liabilities, and *sati*, when widows are immolated as a supposedly voluntary act. Subjecting women to stereotypical roles is a consequence of "[t]he dominance of patriarchal attitudes and the complexity of caste, class and religious identities in India" (Kurian 77). Second wave feminism enabled women from the lower sections of society to be a part of women's liberation movement, while third wave feminism saw raising public awareness and more frequent feminist publications.

Concerning the issues of gender, in the 1960s women's studies were developed which helped shape the emancipatory feminist theory that strived to equalise the masculine and feminine as a binary opposition, rather than make the feminine dominate masculine. It explored all aspects of gendered identities as "a biological, cultural, social and/or psychic construct" (Phoca 56). Sexual difference was a highly debated topic at the time. For example, Laura Mulvey's 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" explores sexual difference from a psychoanalytic (Lacanian) point of view. She depicts symbolic relation of power in patriarchy by understanding the male gaze as a language. Looking at a woman makes her passive ('to-be-looked-at-ness'), while it makes a man empowered over her. Mulvey's essay prompted Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford to call for the redefinition of masculinity in their 1988 *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, for it should no longer be based on oppression, violence and misogyny. The definition of gender was always widely debated "because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constitutes identities" (Butler 3). However, there was an essentialist notion that gender is biologically determined, whereas anti-essentialists believed that it was patriarchy that made the women's status as 'Other'. Language also supported this dual notion by linguistic distinction between the terms 'feminine' and 'masculine', which imply social, cultural and psychic aspects, and 'female' and 'male', which imply biological aspect of identity. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak agrees with Derrida that "western philosophical discourse has constructed woman as a product of linguistic difference, according to a model of binary oppositionality" (Phoca 59). She alleges that essentialist gender politics is bound by understanding the identity's subject through gender identification and desire. However, anti-essentialist gender theorists argue that gender does not convey an

inner essence about the subject. One of the most prominent feminist theorists, a cult figure of the time, was Judith Butler who believed that all gender and sexual identities are performed. In her 1990 *Gender Trouble* she argues that gender gives the impact of being the norm through its performance and that "sex becomes a 'corporeal project', a sustained performative act. The notion of an 'authentic' essential masculinity or femininity is replaced by the notion that all gender/sexual configurations are performed, constructed by recycling of gendered signs of sexuality and desire" (Phoca 60). So to conclude, masculine and feminine are only the modes that are culturally obtained.

The issue of the reconfiguration of gender and sex was most evident in the 1990s with the emergence of queer studies and queer theory. Fixed sets of gendered/sexual normativity, heterosexual culture and subject positioning were explored and debated because queers did not want to adapt to the norm of the time, they did not fit into the agreed-upon categories. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick concurred with Foucault's notion, that the 1870s were the starting point of classifying homosexuals in the society, and tried to reconfigure the map of sexual/gendered identification because, she argues, the categories of identities are determined by gender, class, race, nationality and sexual orientation, which results in significant difference among people and constructs various overlapping categories. According to Kosofsky Sedgwick, gender "is determined by the binary framework of masculinity and femininity. Sexuality, on the other hand, is determined by its slippage from semantic meaning, traversing both sides of the sex/gender dyad, but also exceeding them" (Phoca 63). So she supports feminist anti-essentialists deconstructive strategies explaining people should look further than just blindly complying with the same sex/gender identification. The period 1975-1991 shows a range of exploration by feminist theorists on how sexual difference constructs identity, concerning both genders. It was theorised that the female subject can surmount the oppression that the society put on her and the gender ascribed to her. By the 1990s deconstructive anti-essentialist feminism reconfigured a notion of fixed sexual/gendered categories claiming a number of different sexual identities, as Judith Butler stated that "[w]hen the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice" (6).

Technology is also an important part of feminism as it manifests itself in the form of cyberfeminism. Virtual world of computers and the Internet offered women imprinting their mark in a male-dominated area which was significant because in most cases "the symbolic representation of technology reproduces the stereotype of women as technologically ignorant

and inept" (Tsaliki 80). The notion of sexual stereotype where men are identified with culture and science, while women with nature and intuition, is a social construction. However, things started to change as women began to explore new technologies. Also, within this information system, oppositions do not exist in the same form as they did before, which means that cyberspace offers possibilities for female emancipation. Furthermore, Donna Haraway in her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) considered the cyborg a new image of feminism as "the blurring of boundaries between human and machine will make the categories of male and female obsolete, and open up the way towards freedom, beyond gender" (Tsaliki 83). Technology allows departing from the boundaries of the body, a change from the physical space to the symbolic cyberspace; the experience of combining technological with human identity is represented by Claudia Springer's term 'the pleasure of the interface'. It is then logical that many social groups take part in cyberspace where divisions and oppression are thought to be overcome.

There are several approaches to the upcoming communication via computer, one of which is 'liberal cyberfeminism'. It considers the computer "as a liberating utopia that goes beyond the polarity of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and cyberculture as a new frontier of sexual activism and rebellion" (Tsaliki 84). Cyberspace offers the participants the anonymity and 'gender-bending', and allows them liberation and participatory democracy. This led to a 'Virtual Sisterhood', an electronic network led by women who "enjoy their femininity and kick ass at the same time . . . without acting like women are victims" (Tsaliki 85). However, if the sexual difference is lost, the experience of being a woman is also going to be lost. Furthermore, women still feel the Internet is a 'male space' because of their low visibility on the Internet and the cultural dominance of masculinity (their expertise and technological user-friendliness), especially in the field of linguistic styles and conventions. Furthermore, Susan Herring's research on gender participation in networking showed that male participants frequently silence female participants the same way they do it in real life, for instance ignoring topics raised by women or considering women's responses pointless and unimportant. Not only women are silenced and ignored in cyberspace, they are also sexually harassed (cases of cyberstalking and cyberrape). This resulted in another approach to the computer-mediated-communication which is 'radical cyberfeminism' by setting up "women-only lists and bulletin board systems as exclusively female spaces" (Tsaliki 90).

So it seems that new technologies and cyberspace offered women a lot of opportunities for improvement of their position in the society. However, the cyberculture

itself did not offer women equal terms. Moreover, even though the cyberspace offers anonymity, there are some structures that construct sexual difference and some modes of behaviour are understood as a language, for example of feminism. Some academic researches on writings by feminist led to the development of interdisciplinary field of language and gender. The researches on contribution to language by women were formed on the basis of stereotypes. For example, Otto Jespersen in his *Language: Its Nature and Development* writes that "women's contribution to language is to maintain its 'purity' through their 'instinctive shrinking from coarse and vulgar expression" (Talbot 140), determining it as women's empty-headed foolishness. Feminist sociolinguists noticed that men's usage of language is often taken as the norm. Furthermore, Muriel Schulz argues in her essay "The Semantic Derogation of Women" that the English terms that are marked as female are consistently degraded and used more rarely. Following research on language and gender shifted the focus from language forms to language functions. Pamela Fisherman in her study "Interaction: the Work Women Do" used three couples in her research and analysed their conversation which "tended to centre around the men's interests" and she noticed that "the definition of what is appropriate and inappropriate conversation becomes the man's choice" (Talbot 143). Other forms of male dominance through language are women's silence and the silencing of women, the latter being interrupting or talking over women in authoritative positions. This miscommunication among adults tried to be explained by Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker in their 1982 essay "A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication" in which they asserted that different patterns of interaction are a result of gender segregation in childhood. Some writers used this miscommunication and wrote series of self-help books. Feminist critics allege these kind of books wrongly promote suppression of power, that is the illusion that men and women are equal but different ('women are not oppressed but misunderstood'), and manifest gender as difference, which only verifies gender stereotypes.

However, in order to examine properly how language constructs sexual/gendered difference, the interaction between language, personal identity and social context needs to be addressed. Mary M. Talbot concludes that "in order to explore patterns of male dominance effectively, we need to do so by examining the institutions, situations and genres which establish men in positions where they can dominate women" (146). Feminist philosophy is, like language, one more social construct trying to explore patterns of male dominance in society, and its origins date back to the 1970s in the USA. It seems to follow three stages. Firstly, there is the development of critiques of the existing philosophical canon, which

includes examination of the western interpretations of the philosophical texts and how were women excluded from that canon. Secondly, there is the constitution of new philosophical interpretations, arguments and approaches, contained within "various, discrete subdivisions of the main branches of philosophy . . . feminist ethics, feminist epistemology, feminist philosophy of science" (Anderson 150). And lastly, there is integrating feminist philosophy within the broader domain of philosophy, that is the assimilation of feminist critiques, reconstructions and insights into philosophy. Nevertheless, feminist philosophy today is not well known and taught in departments of philosophy. It is not recognised that feminist philosophers do "some of the most vital work in philosophy today, . . . working on the essentially contested concepts at the core of philosophy" (Anderson 152). It is mostly formed on the grounds of psycholinguistics, discourse analysis and film theory. First of all, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray were most prominent in examining the psycholinguistics which is the study of psychological factors that allows using language as the condition for all meaning and value. Secondly, Foucault's discourse analysis is focused on how identities and subjectivity are constructed in different discourses. Lastly, Laura Mulvey and her account of 'the male gaze' is a part of exploring the subjectivity in feminist film theory. Furthermore, one more reason why feminist philosophy is not recognized today is a small presence of women in philosophy in general, the example being the results of the 1996 questionnaire that concluded that "if you want a job in philosophy, your bet is to be a man. Failing that, resemble a man as much as possible" (Anderson 156).

Similar to the issue of greater presence of men in science, technology and philosophy, religion is not excluded from that practice. Religion is a belief in one privileged, non-embodied, transcendent and masculine divine being and other spiritualities, which is what feminists want to reverse. There had been several strategies addressing religious issues, first of which is a critique of religious scriptures; an example is the famous feminist biblical scholar Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who examined Christian writings and concluded they preserve the masculine tradition. Moreover, there is a critique of religious myths, metaphors, theologies and dogmas in which notions of divine masculinity still influence the lives of women and men. For example, Phyllis Trible mentions "descriptions of God in terms of a mother who labours to give birth . . . or as a midwife helping in the process of childbirth" (Jasper 161). In Hinduism, there is goddess Kali whose 'unfeminine' behaviour does not resemble that of the women within Hindu tradition. She has no children, no permanent household and is portrayed wearing skulls and severed heads. Lina Gupta implies Kali is a

representation of repressed anger against the injustice of women. Kali is considered violent and ruthless, while a male god behaving the same would be considered brave and powerful. Furthermore, there is an argument of traditions not conforming absolutely to the male-centred model. For example, Ines Talamantez observed that the American Apaches' deity is the female 'Isanaklesh'. In this culture, women are equally powerful as men and they are celebrated in the community. In addition, another strategy is the construction of new religious perspectives. Being dissatisfied with existing forms of religion, some women felt the need to express their relationship to the divine in their own authentic way. For instance, Naomi Goldenberg and Carol Christ developed "a distinctively woman-centred vision of the divine with both a descriptive and a polemic intention, drawing attention, particularly, to the absence of feminine" (Jasper 165), worshiping the goddess and claiming woman power and justice. On the whole, religion is mainly accepted in western terms of believing in a single god and largely male-dominated corresponding structures. This means that these structures and male point of view are privileged enough to marginalise women from power or independency. However, slight changes and an improvement are noticed in religion too.

This chapter presents the way feminism is influenced by cultural structures such as gender, technologies, language, philosophy, religion, and so on. The overview of these structures shows that they are largely male-dominated and presents the contextual situation mostly in the west, that is America and Europe. Subjecting women to stereotypical roles is a consequence of the dominance of patriarchal attitudes. There was a belief that women can overcome the oppression which was followed by a struggle for reconfiguration of gender and sex, of a definition of religion, patriarchy, and others, all of which represented men's point of view solely, and ignoring or excluding women. Even so, technology and cyberspace provided anonymity and 'gender-bending' which seemed to offer many more opportunities for women than in real life. However, this platform proved to also be male-dominated and abusive towards women. By exploring patterns of male dominance, women did succeed in improving their status in these areas of culture. The following chapter is going to explore the influence of women and their presence in literature and movies.

1.3. FEMINISM IN LITERATURE AND MOVIES

As already mentioned, if women want to change their inferior position in society, they need to begin their struggle on all fronts. Such is the case with literature and movies. Consequently, the impact that feminism had on academic literary studies is enormous. British universities until the 1980s taught mainly male-authored works from English literature, while female writers were often skipped or taught without referring to the feminist issues. Women teachers tried to change that by including "feminist-oriented approaches to text" and "[b]ecause there were so few women-authored texts on the curriculum, the critical attention to these feminists focused on representations of women in male-authored works" (LeBihan 129). The latter was sometimes counterproductive since women were usually depicted as virgins, who would end up married, or as whores, who would end up tragically. This is also the case with the archetype of *femme fatale* which will be explored in the following chapters. Feminists embarked on reforming canonical curricula by rediscovering forgotten and underrated texts written by women. The Virago Press in London, established by Carmen Callil, influenced the curriculum greatly by publishing only works by women, mostly British and American text from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Elaine Showalter wrote her 1978 significant work *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* on the aesthetic standards in writing and the critical approaches. She argues women create different content with so many common features that a specific tradition could be formulated. This tradition is characterized by interrelation between the writers and their society that is still being established. Showalter explains women's writing develops through three phases: Feminine, "'*imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition'", Feminist, "'*protest* against these standards and values', and finally," Female, "'*self-discovery*', 'a search for identity'" (LeBihan 131). She also calls for the establishment of female critic approach for analysing women's literature, called 'gynocritics'.

Toril Moi in her 1985 *Sexual/Textual Politics* claims a difference between 'Anglo-American Feminist Criticism', that was mostly indifferent towards literary theory, and 'French Feminist Theory'. However, they share a common issue of adequate representation for women and femininity. Furthermore, throughout the years there was one issue within feminism that became prominent, and that is the difference among women: middle-class, working-class, disabled, coloured, lesbian, bisexual women. Within the term 'women', they all share common experience, but each 'subgroup' has its own, separate experience. Feminism should be based on the commonness, but the differences should be recognised, represented

and acknowledged, not ignored and hidden. For example, lesbian women were sometimes judged anti-feminist and excluded by feminists, which had a certain effect on the representations available to queer women of themselves. Lesbian love was ignored in the literary works, it was rather interpreted as a friendship or written about using codes and symbols. It is also noticeable that lesbian canon consists mostly of the subgenres that are academically less valued, such as romances, detective narratives, autobiographies, coming-out stories and the likes. Similarly, black feminist literary criticism was concerned with the way they would be represented in literary works. The issues of cultural identity were tackled by feminist critics by "reading work by white writer and . . . developing appropriate aesthetic judgements for black writing" (LeBihan 138).

In short, women's struggle for their recognition in literature led to transformed approaches to it and to the integration of their voices. However, the work is not done and there are other social structures to be dealt with, one of which is the film industry. Women's roles in the film industry are not different than in other social structures, and are especially oppressed and objectified on the account of their sexuality and victimisation. Consequently, feminism aimed to change such image of a woman and woman's position within the film industry. It emerged with the issue of sex-role stereotyping which offered the limited scope of oppressive images of women in movies, which reflects social structures and changes that are dealt with in the previous chapter. These images are often misrepresented "according to the fantasies and fears of their male creators" (Thornham 95) and the major issue is that the cinematic images reflect the social context in which they are produced. Sue Thornham argues that "film stereotypes are seen as the product of unconscious assumptions too deep-rooted to be changed simply by having more women in positions of power within the film industry" (95). The task of changing this situation is very difficult as a theoretical and practical framework would be necessary in order to explore and demonstrate the power of these images representing the society and culture.

British and American film theorists differ in that the Americans have a 'sociological' approach in viewing film representation (mirroring reality), while the British see movies as texts that consist of verbal and visual codes producing specific meanings. These codes have to be examined because movies bear a certain ideology, that is the "representational system, or 'way of seeing' the world which appears to us to be 'universal' or 'natural' but which is the product of specific power structures which constitute our society" (Thornham 96). This means that patriarchal ideology gives meaning to the code 'woman', and since movies have the same

ideology as a reality, what should be examined is what meanings and desires that code contains. Laura Mulvey furthered this account of a woman as 'code' and a purely textual analysis to spectator-screen relationship and visual pleasure from a psychoanalytic standpoint, as the name of her essay suggests: "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Movies offer dream-like illusions and perceptions and let the spectator escape the reality and embrace his/her desires and fantasies through these movie images that are looked at with the camera's all-powerful gaze. Due to the fact the spectator is envisioned as male, it is not difficult to conclude that this code of woman is structured in patriarchal society and men's dreams and obsessions. Because women are the objects of the (voyeuristic) gaze, they are sexualised and provided as a pleasure only for the male spectator. Women are passive, serve only to be looked at, and do not contribute much to the storyline, whereas men are the heroes who actively control the events. Mulvey did not say anything about the female spectator, so Mary Ann Doane's work expanded her account of the gaze. Doane analysed movies of the 1940s aimed at the female spectator and concluded that mechanisms used by masculine psyche, like voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism, are not present in such movies. Unlike men who are displayed with their desired and fantasized images, women are offered "identification with herself as image, as object of desire or of suffering" (Thornham 98). The only thing is that the identification does not provide a feeling of heroism or empowerment, it is related to the feelings of anxiety and fear. The movies only confirm the overall accepted notion of gendered identities. In relation to the women's passivity and to-be-looked-at-ness and movies, there is a test that questions these factors, popularized by Alison Bechdel – the Bechdel test, or the Bechdel-Wallace test, and to satisfy the criteria for the test, (1) there have to be at least two women in the movie, preferably named, who (2) talk to each other, about (3) something besides a man. The test became a part of the mainstream feminist criticism in the 2010s and indicates whether the women's presence in movies is active or passive.

Until the 1980s, feminist film theorists used primarily psychoanalytic approach which has since been reinterpreted and the focus shifted to the fantasising spectator and the multiple positions that cinema offers him. For example, Stuart Hall in his 1973 paper titled "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" suggests accounting for the whole communicative process instead of just meanings in texts and their effects. He proposes three linked 'moments', of production, of the text and of viewing, and the meanings during the process of each of these are differently realised. If the text does not offer a single position from which it needs to be understood, that means there is a possibility of perceiving these meanings in many

other ways. Probably the way men and women are raised throughout their lives and taught about the stereotyped roles of men and women influences their reading of the text in only one way. There is also a concern of women as female audience, especially when it comes to black women. Even so, black women may experience oppression by white women because of the racial differences, which is a phenomenon called 'black women invisibility'. The 1990s saw a split between feminist film theory and feminist filmmaking, the latter moving into the mainstream of narrative film production. The problem was that filmmakers tried to articulate women's experiences, and in efforts to do so, they would offer only intellectual pleasure of didactic approach, but the emotional pleasure would be left out. Nevertheless, the mainstream did not only mark a split, but also a success at the same time as it offered reaching to a larger audience and a filmmaking freedom, while still focusing on the feminist issues: "the relationship of women to language, and to public and private histories; sexual difference and its relationship to other forms of difference; the limits and possibilities of desire; the relationship between women – in particular between mothers and daughters" (Thornham 103).

This chapter showed that the representation of women in literature and movies remained the same and bore the same characteristics of oppression against women as well as in the other social structures. Women's inferior position and image has improved, especially after the introduction of the Bechdel-Wallace test which pervaded the popular culture and contributed a lot to the general awareness of the problems regarding representation of women in films, even though there are still issues to be tackled. The next chapter will introduce a field of feminist literary criticism and its relation to the economic, political, social and psychological oppression the women experienced in their culture.

1.4. FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

The 1970s was the decade when "the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s inspired a body of scholarly writing that transmuted feminism into works of history, literary criticism, anthropology, sociology, and psychology" (Epstein Nord 732). Feminist literary criticism is a school of theory characterized by pluralism and diversity, and it has for its main objective set to reveal the implicit and explicit marginalization of and oppression towards women in male writings. Feminist literary criticism, despite its name, values, explains, explores and theorises all areas of art, culture and cultural structures. It explores the ideas and attitudes adopted in certain societies and contexts and expands the boundaries of its

recognition, all in order to change the oppression and injustices against women. As Čale-Feldman and Tomljenović argue in their book *Introduction to Feminist Literary Criticism* (*Uvod u feminističku književnu kritiku*), it is difficult to determine it as a single, agreed-upon and closed methodological system of clearly distributed branches (10). Its pluralism and diversity are shown in all its branches and internal polemics. The term 'feminist' in feminist literary criticism etymologically originates from the Latin word *femina*, meaning 'a woman'. The term 'woman' has always been defined as 'a not-man', defined in a negative opposition to 'man', and has always been given negative images. For de Beauvoir, "women are the negative of men, the lack against which masculine identity differentiates itself" (Butler 9-10). What is more, men are quite reluctant to actively participate in the feminists' struggle so it is not an easy task to fit the feminist criticism in the free market of literary and theoretical novelties.

Even criticisms can be criticized, as is the case with the feminist literary criticism. There are some allegations about it that are often brought up, the first of which is that feminist literary criticism cannot bring about any new theories or terminology that would result in the development of any area of society or culture. It is presumed that throughout history, literary theory, theatrology (theatre studies), film theory, and arts constructed a sufficient and generally accepted terminology, while at the same time feminist literary criticism has not contributed to it. This can be explained with the fact that it is primarily focused on the already customary terms, ideas and approaches to literature. Moreover, literature as a social and cultural construct does not consist solely of texts, but also their creation, editing, distribution, evaluation, preserving is included; it is dynamic and historically variable. Čale-Feldman and Tomljenović state in their book that feminist literary criticism is roughly determined as a heteronomous approach emerging from the outside of arts and literature, which deals with the issues of sex, sexuality and gender identity definitions from the physiological, psychological, social and political standpoints (21). It is heteronomous because it refers to and uses the terminology from a number of scientific disciplines. The second allegation criticizing feminist literary criticism is that is not coherent and comprehensive as a system, but rather consists of several mutually inconsistent branches. The reason for this claim is that this school of theory and its practical usage is only recently outlined and more precisely determined, and what is more, it originates in different cultural and ideological contexts and is related to different traditions. In brief, no matter the pluralism and variety of areas of interest, disciplines and objectives, it encompasses it all under a single objective which is fighting for women's rights

and opportunity equality. The next allegation is concerned with the fact that literary theory omits feminist literary theory from its textbooks. The truth is that even though this claim is partially true, there are some more recently published textbooks mentioning it. However, only a small portion of the book is dedicated to feminist theory.

In addition, feminist literary theory highlights the importance of the three-way relationship between the author, the literary work, and the reader. None of these parts can be explored outside their cultural and historical context, as well as their literary tradition. The author has long been considered as the primary source of the intended meanings of the texts. Female author's body of work has to be understood in regards to their desires, but also in regard to material obstacles, such as economic dependence, lack of space and time, doing everyday familial and house chores and so on. The authors of *Introduction to Feminist Literary Criticism* conclude that these obligations and a lack of socialisation imprinted significant marks in women's imagination and aspirations in their literary works that manifested themselves in the form of motifs of uneasiness and wishing to escape their ever-present reality (Čale-Feldman and Tomljenović 81). The gynocritic Nancy Miller encouraged women to keep writing and fighting for their female literary authority, because she argues, the author is just a name, but behind that name is a personality and a personal imprint is given to each literary work. However, the depiction of male figures as authors was far more superior to that of the female ones, since their works were considered secondary, insignificant, and imitated. Female authors are always burdened by their gender identity, in that they evoke certain stereotypes and other cultural connotations in the patriarchal culture. This certainly conditions the reception, the understanding and the evaluation of the author's work. That is the reason why, until the nineteenth century, so many female writers published their works anonymously or under a male pseudonym. For instance, Jane Austen published her work under the disguise of a nameless lady, while George Eliot and George Sand took up male names.

When it comes to texts, reading them means giving them a specific expression and experience, which depends on the context, the culture the reader is living in, with the collective or individual reader's expectations, and other factors. The text invites the reader to interact all the consisting social, historical and cultural factors. A woman as a reader, so believes Judith Fetterley, should resist being identified within the fixed gender identity system, because that will make them identify with the female characters, who are always neglected, beaten up, raped, lost, evil or angelic even, as Fetterley concluded by examining

literary works authored by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, according to Čale-Feldman and Tomljenović (98).

Then, there is the problem of how to read a book. Well, Janice Radway explored female readership's habits in the late twentieth century and realised that reading enables women to escape their reality, temporarily being out of reach from the emotional exploitation of their family. Even so, female readers wanted literature to satisfy their current emotional needs, and for that, they would read sensational and love stories. Moreover, the European culture of the nineteenth century published a myriad of educational and religious articles, tracts, textbooks, and other forms of literary works which content signified the harmful effect of reading for women and their environment. It was even argued that reading takes women away from their responsibilities and housekeeping duties. As Čale-Feldman and Tomljenović claim, reading romantic novels was especially frowned upon because it would damage the young girls' souls, stealing away their time and decreasing their work capability (103-104). Women would become bad mother and wives, especially if they would come across sexual content in the books. This kind of propaganda only expressed men's fear of women's realisation that they could be independent and free, so they put the blame to the women's foolishness and susceptibility.

Moreover, there were certain defining moments in the history of feminist literary criticism that made it more academic. To begin with, there is Kate Millett with her 1970 book *Sexual Politics* in which she develops her theory of sexual politics, as the title suggests. It is deeply committed to feminist political change, however, "it ignores not only women writers but other early feminist scholarship" (Lanser 7). Nonetheless, it stands as a starting point for feminist literary criticism because it was the first account to consider the larger cultural context in which literature is produced. Then, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* in 1979. Their book focused on the women writers and 'female' literature and it experienced an extremely well reception for its style, accuracy and rich prose. Its importance was in that it "reaffirmed the primacy of "close reading" within a conventional literary framework, perpetuated a female equivalent of the "great tradition," and maintained notions of "women's writing" that are unwittingly exclusive and essentialist" (Lanser 8). The subtle, but important change that *The Madwoman in the Attic* brought after *Sexual Politics* is that the emphasis was shifted from the 'feminist' to 'literary' in feminist literary criticism, that is it examined not only the subject, but also the methodology. What is more, the shift from the emphasis on

‘literary’ to the emphasis on ‘criticism’ came by the mid-1980s. It meant that not only patriarchy was explored as a subject of criticism, but feminism itself also. This became prominent with Toril Moi’s 1985 book *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, which is significant because it offers the deconstruction of feminism. Moi she claims her book explores all the methods, principles, and politics of the feminist criticism. What her book fails to do is properly examine and explore the injustices and issues of lack and lesbian feminist criticism.

To sum up, even though histories of women’s writing and prefaces to feminist theories can be found in large numbers since the 1970s, “no history of feminist literary criticism, understood as a specific intellectual project that emerged from the women’s movement in the late 1960s” (Moi E79) was ever published. This proves that there is still a lot of work to be done, many questions to be raised and many issues to be resolved. Moreover, this chapter showed how feminist criticism survived some internal division, inconsistencies and disagreements over essential theoretical questions. One of the questions presented in the chapter was whether women write differently than men in some fundamental way. Moreover, feminist theorists argue their work and expertise on gender politics go unnoticed, but at the same time they are counteractive when claiming they are born with a higher understanding of things that is not available to male intelligence. Feminist literary criticism should continue to pursue their aim of revealing the implicit and explicit marginalization of women in male writings, but, as Judith Butler proposes, “feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms” (13).

2. GENRE CONVENTIONS OF NOIR FICTION AND FILM NOIR

The previous chapter shows a historical, cultural and social overview of feminism and its influence on popular culture, literature and movies. Literature and movies were male-dominated, as other cultural structures, so it is interesting to explore in depth the genres of literature and movies where women played mostly stereotypical roles. One of the most famous such role is the archetype of *femme fatale*, which will be discussed later, that was mostly present in noir fiction and film noir. Noir fiction is a literary genre influenced by hardboiled detective novels. Noir fiction was a genre even before it was known as that. The prose is "blunt, ironic and tough" and it "emulates the language of the streets" (Davis 9). Noir depicts what life gives in its randomness and how people react to it. They mostly react instinctively and according to their nature which relates this to the determinism of naturalism: the naturalistic, grim view of life. Furthermore, these novels were adapted into the films noir of the 1940s. The term "refers to a cycle of American films first perceived by Europeans as having cohesive and consistent themes and a distinctive style" (Miller 43), even though there are also some from the European production. Some of the most famous works of noir fiction are Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) and *Double Indemnity* (1943), and Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953). The most prominent films noir are Fritz Lang's 1944 *The Woman in the Window*, Billy Wilder's 1944 *Double Indemnity*, Howard Hawks' 1946 *The Big Sleep*, Carol Reed's 1949 *The Third Man*, Orson Welles' 1958 *Touch of Evil*, and Roman Polanski's 1974 *Chinatown*.

As Laurence Miller argues in his paper, there are several events that gave rise to film noir (43). First, there are the cataclysmic events of the twentieth century, meaning the two world wars. Films noir expressed the atmosphere of the century's dangers and unpleasantness, especially the long depression that lasted after the wars. The next one is the post-World War II period that saw a considerable rise in criminal activity which "is reflected in a steady high output films of the 1940s and 1950s which focused on a variety of criminal acts" (Laurence 45). And lastly, as mentioned, roman noir served as an inspiration a number of times for movie adaptations as they enjoyed wide popularity. Laurence also lists some of the most frequent themes in such literary works and movies: revenge and vengeance, framed, false accusation, obsession and femme fatale, changing identity or posing as someone else,

dilemma, psychopathy, and many more (48-49). Film noir has several more characteristics that make it easily recognisable. For example, the movies are often depicted with "low-key lighting, high-contrast photography, mean streets (usually wet with rain), pools of light from street lamps, flashing neon, sleazy hotel rooms, reflectors . . ., disorienting camera angles, and a sense of entrapment" (Dick 155). So they are recognised for their dark visual style and their pessimistic vision of desperation and loneliness. Also, it is characteristic for films noir to begin with shots of cars and roads at night, with the attempt of creating sense of a nocturnal claustrophobia.

However, films noir were also influenced by the changing circumstances of specific time periods. As Chinen Biesen argues in her essay about the director Joseph H. Lewis' films noir, from

> its shadowy emergence in World War II to its changing style in the postwar era, film noir developed an array of incarnations . . . film noir centered on tough guy detectives and femme fatales in hard-boiled pulp fiction, naïve ingénues in *roman noir* female gothic suspense thrillers, and psychotic antiheroes such as sadistic Cold War gangsters and tormented cops in postwar noir films. (63)

After the First World War, technology advanced considerably so production was made easier with the lightweight cameras and better lenses, contributing to the film noir's characteristics of a shadowy look, high contrast and low key lighting "similar to those of German expressionist film" (Davis 9) that make it so distinctive in the world of cinematography. World War II brought a change in cultural and industrial climate, production and reception, and that period was marked by a successful production of films noir, and also by a new audience of working wartime women. With men overseas, the production of female gothic crime thrillers flourished, originating from literary noir gothic thriller. By the end of the war, men began arriving from military service trying to return to their civilian life. Consequently, movies that depicted crime-fighting masculine gangster stories emerged in the postwar era. That was the time when the popularity of film noir increased as it became popular with war-hardened audiences. Even its visual style and gender roles changed as it became extremely masculine. As time passed, gangster stories became inspired by documentary realism, stories of actual gangsters, for instance Al Capone. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that gangster movies of 1928-34 were also the ancestors of film noir, and in the postwar period, they again became the inspiration for the production of such movies.

Noir tales are mostly set in the modern urban landscape with dark and gloomy streets. Locations were often used to heighten suspense and fear because many people stray from potentially dangerous urban neighbourhoods at night. However, reading noir fiction or watching film noir, they find themselves in these exact locations. They can "imbue an overall look and feel, metaphorically enrich the story, induce fear and suspense, psychologically draw us into the mind of a character, relate to the familiar and, powerfully, remind us how things were that no longer are" (Hollins 61). Many films noir "include deep-focus photography of confined spaces shot from high and low angles; emphasis on *chiaroscuro* through effects of low key and back lighting; and often, a tendency to protract the duration of shots" (Conley 16) in order to enable seeing all the complexities of the composition. Also, Venetian blinds often create a sense of imprisonment as their shutters create strips of light and dark across the object, as shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. Strips of light and dark from the Venetian blinds in *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940) <http://www.filmnoirblonde.com/the-first-film-noir-stranger-on-the-third-floor-stakes-a-claim/>.

Noir stories have several stock characters, the first being *femme fatale* and the other one a detective who is caught in her web. The noir genre deals with the relationship of the individual to the law. There are several ways (techniques) in which the story can be narrated: classic third person narration, voice-over and flash-back, subjective camera,[1] and

[1] Also referred to as a point of view shot. It is a movie scene showing what a character (the subject) is looking at.

documentary style.[2] While the film noir is one of the more modern American genres, "it may also be the most past-haunted, most history-bound, and most time-conscious form in our cinema" (Telotte 1); it presents a confrontation with the past and the history. Sometimes these movies use time in order to build a sense of urgency and anxiety, for example if time is used in the form of a pressing deadline.

As already mentioned, noir genre warns the readers or viewers about the situation after the Second World War. Men had to go to war and women had to take over their roles in the workforce, while at the same time keeping their old roles as housewives and mothers. Consequently, these accustomed roles caused the need for a redefinition of masculinity and femininity. The heroic detective has to resist the lady's sexual charm and remain strictly professional. The femme fatale desires "for more and for better" and "is deadly and dangerous for those who succumb to her lure, but the detective's desire for truth can be fatal for the dark lady too" (Pituková 25). The detective has a chance of surviving only if he succeeds in resisting the lady, while her choices are to escape, end up fatally or accept a traditional peaceful family life. Thus, the strong and undefeated detective shows his masculine dominance and reasserts control, whereas the independent femme fatale is ultimately defeated. In fact, desire is the moving force of the majority of hard-boiled detective stories, and both the lady and the detective are victims of their desires. Even though both the literary works and the movies present women in their stereotyped roles as well, *femme fatales* were more likely "to be repressed, captured, killed or punished in different way for her transgression, strength and desire for independence, either financial or personal" (Pituková 26), as they have to pay for their crimes. The detective is a tough and solitary man who lives according to his own set of rules and his own moral code. He is alone because he trusts no one. Film noir "validated not the gangster or organized crime, but the ordinary citizen, both working and middle class" (Broe 22). So, he is a common man, while the criminal is usually an upper-class character. He looks rough and is very mysterious which makes him attractive for women, who, in turn, can be fatal for him. And even though they are his central problem as they challenge his masculinity and desire, they are also crucial to his struggles. The literary and film noir stories always revolve around intrigues, doubles-crossings and traps for the detective who is lured into them by *femme fatale*. At the end of the story, the two confront each other because none of them wants to give up their desires, and ends up being "a lethal

[2] It is achieved by using a narrator who is off-camera and is never seen. This "voice" is an objective storyteller.

clash of individual desires which can result only in resignation, escape, pessimism or bloodbath" (Pituková 27).

This chapter shows how noir genre seeks to reaffirm masculinity and place women in a position of abjection or otherness. The masculine detective is a problematic and tough figure whose role is to protect the vulnerable women. These women are constructed within the framework of misogyny based on historic masculine fears and anxieties. *Femme fatales* are always related to the negative qualities that present a threat to the patriarchal structure which is going to be analysed in depth in the next chapter.

3. *FEMME FATALE* ARCHETYPE

The previous chapters explored the historical, cultural and social context of feminism, the way women were represented in literature and movies, and especially in noir genres where masculinity and femininity were redefined and heavily stereotyped. From a feminist point of view, the character of *femme fatale* represents the most direct attack on traditional womanhood and the nuclear family because she refuses to play the role of a devoted wife and loving mother that the mainstream society prescribes to women. Being "a staple of the Western cultural imagination for centuries" (Lota 150), she represents everything men should fear about women: sex, attractiveness, and refusal to serve. This and the next chapter explore the archetype of *femme fatale* and its influence and meaning in the society and whether she represents a feminist hero converting the traditional role of women, or a negative symbol serving only as a sexual object to satisfy male desires. As Jelena Šesnić argues, the types of women found in literature throughout history are mostly represented as mothers, Medusas, Amazonians, sisters, slaves, angels and demons (7). Romanticism was a period when women and femininity were nostalgically described, almost blending them with nature, in contrast to masculinity. This phenomenon of romantic nostalgia for a supposedly female authenticity and naturalness emerges from the notion of historical progression in which femininity, even though it is considered to be the more primitive form, functioned as an idealized male sanctuary from the dangerous world of technology. However, the constant factor in every period of literature is that the woman, "a dark lady" (56) according to Šesnić, was always

tamed, and her rebellious nature subverted. So the authors construct their female characters in accordance with pre-default types, which says a lot about their fears, anxieties and limitations.

Krešimir Nemec agrees with Šesnić in that heroes encountered mysterious and dangerous *femme fatales* even in the oldest myths and legends (60). With the nineteenth-century fashion of describing the characters as either extremely positive or extremely negative, *femme fatale* bore all the negative qualities and was an epitome of immorality. Many suppressed traumas and memories, scruples of moral nature found their way in the demonic nature of this archetype. It is constructed in several different layers, depending on how idealized the woman was or how many fears and traumas she brought to the story. Nemec recognizes four layers (62), the first being beautiful women full of fatal attractiveness that incorporates danger and threat. This juncture of lovely and dangerous or seductive and threatening creates a dynamism which makes women fascinating but destructive and echoes the ideas of the Romantic sublime. Then, there are the domineering, self-confident and superior qualities of *femme fatale*. They are intelligent, sly and funny, and belong to the upper class society. Next, their power arises from male erotic fantasies. This is the reason they are depicted as lascivious, amoral and lustful, which is the opposite to the puritan idea of a woman as a mother and wife. *Femme fatale* sustained all the taboos and prejudices of each period. And lastly, they were characterised by irrational features. For example, they brought death, misfortune and failure, so they are often identified with the demonic symbols of snakes, wild beasts, witches.

Furthermore, their function in the storyline can be also divided according to Nemec (72-73). Firstly, they serve as a negative force preventing the positive characters from achieving success and fortune. *Femme fatale* functions as the antagonist and the rival to the woman of opposite characteristics, a nice and noble woman. Secondly, she can function as the main character, the protagonist. In such narrative she dictates every storyline and subjects other characters to herself. Thirdly, if not as a main character, *femme fatale* appears only in very significant parts of the narrative in which she directs the storyline employing her intrigues and greedy ambitions. And lastly, she can function as a victim of her own malicious schemes.

In her 1978 essay “Women in Film Noir”, Janey Place named referred to *femme fatale* as a ‘spider woman’. Even though she is treated as a villain, she is of great importance to the story. Her masculine features arise from historical circumstances in which men returned home

from their wartime duties only to find women being employed in the workforce, taking over what used to be perceived as men's duties. These women's professional ambition "proved disturbing to the returning soldiers, and this disturbance is reflected in the *femme fatale*" (Lota 153). Men wanted their old roles back, unsettled by the fact that their women took control. Consequently, they wanted to see them contained on the big screen.

However, the character of *femme fatale* changes with time in line with the changing historical construct, depending on the anxieties of the specific period. She becomes more openly sexual and seductive, while staying similarly mysterious as before, reflecting a decline in censorship and certain feminist improvement. Moreover, the archetype of *femme fatale* is the real-life actress: she lies, cheats, murders, and then cries and apologises only in order to double-cross someone again. If she does not succeed in deceiving a man with words, she will usually employ her looks and beauty. Some of the notable features of her appearance include "a cigarette, long, sexy legs that often dominate the frame, thick, luscious lips, gorgeous, wavy hair that frames her face perfectly and attire that is often very flashy" (Mercure 115), and very revealing, as presented in Figure 2. Her appearance and inclination to perform for the male protagonist is an example of how society constructed movies to support an idea of women primarily as objects ('to-be-looked-at-ness'). So that the male is seen as active and his male gaze projects his fantasy onto a woman.

Fig. 2. Rita Hayworth as a *femme fatale* <http://cargocollective.com/FilmNoirGuide/Signatures-of-Film-Noir>.

As a literary device, *femme fatale* mirrors the protagonist's moral, physical, or spiritual decline and failure. Moreover, she is the one who triggers his downfall, so she represents his doom. The reason why the protagonist (the detective most frequently) is so attracted to her is that she is a fantasy, while the real woman is not that enticing. So, the more unreachable and lethal she is, the more attractive she appears. In front of *femme fatale*, men become vulnerable and easy to manipulate because they are unable to control their sexual desires, fantasies and illusions about that woman. The difference between the two is that "the detective strives to maintain his code of honor, thus fights off the sexual desire for the woman, and the woman is willing to abandon whatever ethical concerns just to gain what she desires, long for" (Pituková 31). At the end, she suffers as a victim of her own desires, but also as a victim of the society's rules and expectations. She becomes a threat to the patriarchal system when she confronts these rules and expectations, hence she has to be punished for that. "The *fatale* myth is common to all cultures and her iconography is widely recognized as a result of a blanket of nineteenth-century European representations as well as earlier cinema incarnations. Woman = sex = death is an equation inscribed into mass consciousness around the world. . ." (Stables qtd. in Lota 150). She is a symptom of male fears about women and femininity, and the fact that she is often destroyed by the end of the movie signifies the threatened male reestablishment of control.

3.1. *FEMME FATALE* TODAY

The previous chapters demonstrated the archetype of *femme fatale* throughout history and classic and modern literature and movies. The last two decades have redefined this archetype within the cinema and the popular culture, that is how the ever-present media demonstrates them. So there is a continued interest in and the performance of the role of the *femme fatale*, and some of the examples are Angelina Jolie, Uma Thurman, Madonna, Spice Girls and many more. Even though women's place in society changed significantly since the nineteenth century, the development of the *femme fatale* that continues in the new millennium shows the eternal cultural uncertainty of women's progress. One of the most publicly prominent women in today's society is Madonna, depicted in Figure 3, who with her constant changes of appearance and her affirmation of female power and sexuality embodies and represents the modern day *femme fatale*.

Fig. 3. Madonna as a modern day *femme fatale* <http://onthecoverofamagazine.blogspot.hr/2014/02/>.

Madonna is a famous American singer, songwriter, actress, and businesswoman, who is referred to as the "Queen of Pop". She is very open about her sexuality, and even though she identifies herself as a heterosexual, she was in more than one relationship with a woman and she kissed other women on stage. That way, Madonna "parodies traditional female stereotypes and adopts at her will identities that 'contradict' herself as a heterosexual female" (Mistry). Therefore, she supports the idea that no one is restricted to a single traditional gender identity, and the ideas of female empowerment and of the freedom to express female sexuality. The way she does it is through the reversal of the mechanisms used to control women; in her video *Open Your Heart* a woman performs sexual acts for men who give her money. However, as they have less and less money, so they are losing the sight of the woman. So, even though the woman is using her sexuality in order to control men, she is not punished for that, but men are punished for not giving her what she wants. Madonna herself claimed that she can be a sex symbol, but she does not have to be a victim for that. Furthermore, she maintains her autonomy within the recording industry and is acclaimed as a role model for businesswoman in her industry having a great deal of financial power.

To conclude, there are many examples of fatal and destructive women in literary and cinematic history and popular culture. It has been that way since the Bible and ancient mythologies. She is often a passive character who is objectified by male sexual desires and

illusions, so she serves as a person who takes the blame for everything in the novel or movie and is the focus of the author's hostility. The mystery and charm of a *femme fatale* follow an archetypal pattern based on the male perception of female sexuality as something deadly and sinful. The next chapter will investigate some practical examples of *femme fatales* in literature and movies and the way they are represented.

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE *FEMME FATALE* ARCHETYPE AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN LITERATURE AND MOVIES

4.1. MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON'S *LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET* (1862)

Lady Audley's Secret is a sensation novel published in 1862 and it was Mary Elizabeth Braddon's most successful novel. Sensation fiction centred on criminal stories and was very popular during the 1860s and 1870s. Its novels were called 'novels-with-a-secret', as the name of the novel would suggest. *Lady Audley's Secret* was published after the period of introducing the Infant Custody Act (1839) and the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), which improved the position of women in relation to their marriage, that is divorce, and the legal custody of children. However, women's education was still an issue that had to be resolved. For the book, Braddon took inspiration from a real-life woman, Constance Kent, who allegedly murdered her step-brother out of revenge. The main characters are the beautiful Helen Talboys/Lucy Graham/Lady Audley, a rich widower Sir Michael Audley, his daughter Alice, his nephew Robert Audley, and Lady Audley's husband George Talboys. Lucy Graham is an enchanting blonde governess who marries Sir Michael Audley and leads a luxurious life. In fact, her real name is Helen Talboys which she changed to escape her old life; she was married to George Talboys who left her and their son Georgey in order to earn money in Australia. However, Sir Michael's nephew George is Robert's friend and he brings him to their house in Audley. Strangely, George disappears and Robert is determined to find the

culprit. He finds out that Lady Audley was actually George's wife and confronts her with these allegations. She sets the inn where he stayed overnight on fire, but he manages to escape. Eventually, she confesses everything and is appointed to an insane asylum. In the end, it is revealed that she tried to murder George, but he saved himself.

This novel does not belong to the noir genre, but there are several matching elements. As already mentioned, sensation fiction is centred on criminal stories, which is the case with noir genre also, as they mostly deal with crime and detective stories. Lady Audley epitomizes the *femme fatale* archetype, while Robert Audley fits the role of the detective of noir genre. The setting, weather and characters are often gloomy and dark: "the house . . . was very old, and very irregular and rambling . . broken down by age and long service" (Braddon, ch. I), "The wintry day . . . was sharp, frigid, and uncompromising . . . It would accept no sunshine but such January radiance as would light up the bleak, bar country without brightening it" (Braddon, ch. XXII), "trouble and gloomy thoughts leaving a dark shadow upon his moody face, which neither the brilliant light of the gas nor the red blaze of the fire could dispel" (Braddon, ch. XIII). These images induce fear and suspense and draw us into the mind of a character. The novel also deals with the relationship of the individual to the law, as the barrister Robert Audley tries to find the murderer of George Talboys, although in the end he gives up remanding her to the authorities. The novel also introduces the theme of the past and history, for example, Lady Audley's new lavishing life is disordered when a person from past, George Talboys, visits her. However, she wants to forget her past troubles and build up a new life: "I am weary of my life here, and wish, if I can, to find a new one. I go out into the world, dissevered from every link which binds me to the hateful past, to seek another home and another fortune" (Braddon, ch. XXVII). There is also a motive of "a clock tower, with a stupid, bewildering clock, which had only one hand–and which jumped straight from one hour to the next–and was therefore always in extremes" (Braddon, ch. I). This clock symbolically indicates the uncertainty of events and of their occurrence, so that the characters never know when their past will haunt them.

As already indicated, Robert Audley fits into the role of the heroic detective from the hard-boiled genre, and Robert has to resist Lady Audley's charm in order to achieve his goal: "and I give you my word of honor that I am steeled against my lady's fascinations" (Braddon, ch. XXV). If he had succumbed to her charm, the truth would not have been revealed, and he would have ended up as George Talboys, who was almost murdered, or Sir Michael Audley, who was broken-hearted and whom she planned to poison at one point. In resisting her charm,

Robert Audley showed the masculine dominance and her defeat depicts the reassertion of male control. As in all noir fiction and movies, desire is the moving force of the characters: Lady Audley desires a luxurious and care-free life and she does not want to give it up at any cost: "If the struggle between us is to be a duel to the death, you shall not find my drop my weapon" (Braddon, ch. XXXII). Robert, on the other hand, desires justice and revenge for his friend and will not give up until he succeeds. This brings about the final confrontation between the two of them. Since she lied, tricked people, tried to murder and hurt loved ones, she has to be punished, so she is taken to an insane asylum. Moreover, as the detectives are always solitary guys in the noir genre, so is Robert Audley: "[h]e was handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty; the only son of a younger brother of Sir Michael Audley" (Braddon, ch. IV). Lady Audley tried to lure Robert into her intrigues, but he was the only one to suspect something was not in accordance with her story, showing his superiority over her intrigues.

Lady Audley as a *femme fatale* is introduced in the novel firstly by the means of her appearance: "Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination, by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile" (Braddon, ch. I). She had big blue eyes, curly blond hair and she was graceful and slender, everyone loved her and was attracted to her. She had a childish behaviour which made a perfect canvas for executing her cunning and destructive schemes. Although her appearance is not typically sexy and fatal at first, her attractiveness is still dangerous and threatening because she uses it as a weapon: "As I grew older I was told I was pretty–beautiful–lovely–bewitching . . . by-and-by I listened to them greedily, and began to think that in spite of the secret of my life I might be more successful in the world's great lottery" (Braddon, ch. XXXIV). Her inclination to be desired by men makes her objectified (to-be-looked-at). She loved the luxurious and extravagant things she acquired by marrying Sir Michael: "Shall I sell my Marie Antoinette cabinet, or my pompadour china, Leroy's and Benson's ormolu clocks, or my Gobelin tapestried chair and ottomans" (Braddon, ch. XXXI). Furthermore, after confessing all her crimes and talking to Dr. Alwyn Mosgrave who devoted his attention to the treatment of insanity, he concluded she did not inherit madness from her mother completely, only that she has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. She was traditionally compared to a witch who is symbolically identified with misfortune and failure. She functions as the protagonist of the story, trying to subject the storyline and other characters to herself. She is also put in contrast to the women

of opposite characteristics, for example Alicia Audley and Clara Talboys, who were good in nature and innocent.

Sir Michael Audley is the most prominent example of how Lady Audley manipulated men into doing what she wants. She is so enticing to him that his "wakeful nights and melancholy days, so gloriously brightened if he chanced to catch a glimpse of her sweet face" and he "had fallen ill of the terrible fever called love" (Braddon, ch. I). It is interesting to notice how in this novel the man was not led by his sexual desires, but with the illusion and fantasy of a perfect woman. And she was aware of the control she had over him which she abused until he found out everything. Moreover, one of the themes of the novel is madness, mental instability. She herself exclaims that she tried to kill her first husband because she is mad, "because [her] intellect is a little way upon the wrong side of that narrow boundary-line between sanity and insanity" (Braddon, ch XXIV). However, it is interesting that she is put into an asylum as "a way of stopping her shameful behaviour from ruining the character of nobility" (Moqari 78). According to Dr. Mosgrave, she is not insane but intelligent. This is what made her a threat to the patriarchal society: her intelligence and her refusal to behave in accordance to the norms of the society; hence she is victim of the society's norms and expectations. She is put into the asylum as a warning to other women and also to stop her from corrupting and challenging the patriarchal system. In addition, her actions were led by self-interest and survival, since she wanted to escape poverty and the miserable life she led after George Talboys left her and her son with her drunken father. She is strong and clever enough to work her way out of poverty (she possibly even fakes madness to avoid going to prison), but since she lives in a male dominated society, she is bound to suffer and not prevail. She was not absolutely evil – she marries Sir Michael because she believes her husband is not coming back as he never wrote to her. Also, she claims she "took pleasure in acts of kindness and benevolence" and she believed she "might have been a good woman for the rest of [her] life" (Braddon, ch. XXXIV). She epitomizes the 'Other' that de Beauvoir has related to the concept of female, of the inferior in relation to a man. Lady Audley is inferior in that she does not choose and is treated as an object; her first husband George Talboys offers the most money for her and chooses her as his wife as did Sir Michael Audley.

All in all, Lady Audley did not want to accept the norms and the rules of patriarchal society, but rather she took her life into her own hands and tried to make her own decisions, and in doing so, she equalled men for which she had to be punished. However, she was aware of the deluding and manipulating men and she used her intelligence and looks as a means of

achieving her final goal: escaping poverty and having a care-free life. In essence, she was not evil and did not want to cause harm until she was threatened with going back to her old life. Robert Audley represented the harsh patriarchy and made Lady Audley passive and submissive. Even though she threatened the gender limitations through her engagement in masculine activities, at the end she did not succeed in converting the traditional role of women in the society.

4.2. RAYMOND CHANDLER'S *FAREWELL, MY LOVELY* (1940)

In 1940 Raymond Chandler published his second novel featuring the detective Philip Marlowe named *Farewell, My Lovely.* It is a crime novel of the hardboiled genre and it has all the elements of the noir genre. It revolves around crime, its detection, criminals and their motives. Raymond Chandler is one of the most notable influences on the hardboiled genre of the late 1930s and 1940s. These years mark a period after the World War I and the beginnings of the World War II and that was the time when the development of feminism was slowed down. Until then, women had improved their position in the matters of the legal custody of children and their legal property after the divorce, and also there was an improvement in girls' education (new women colleges) and in women's employment opportunities. The most prominent change was that in 1918 women over thirty had the right to vote, so the overall position of women in society saw some important positive changes. This novel is a classic noir hardboiled novel with the classic tough detective and *femme fatale*. The main characters are the detective Philip Marlowe, an ex-convict - Moose Malloy, the beautiful Mrs. Lewin Lockridge Grayle/Velma Valento, her husband Mr. Lewin Lockridge Grayle, a suspicious businessman - Laird Brunette, Lindsay Marriott and a policeman's daughter - Anne Riordan. The story is set in Los Angeles when Moose Malloy enters the bar trying to find his girlfriend Velma Valento. Marlowe happens to be there and witnesses Malloy murdering the manager. Being a private investigator, he starts looking for Velma, while at the same time helping Mrs Graye find her jade necklace. He gets involved in all sorts of shady dealings, ends up beaten up, held captivated, drugged, all the while collecting clues in resolving the intrigue of the mysterious Velma Valento. At the end, he confronts Mrs. Grayle, who actually is Velma Valento, with her ex-boyfriend Moose Malloy. She kills Malloy, does not succeed in killing

Marlowe and escapes. After three months they find her, however she kills the policeman and kills herself.

As mentioned, this crime novel has all the classic elements of the noir genre. It is in the first place a detective story, and it is characterized as ironic and tough. There are many examples of irony, straightforward conversation and street language: “Jesus, that’s a boy. Well, the hell with him. They got him on the air now. Probably at the end of the hot car list. Ain’t nothing to do but just wait” (Chandler, ch. 3), “Daid, brother. Gathered to the Lawd” (Chandler, ch. 4), “It’s a swell theory. . . Marriott socked me, took the money, then he got sorry and beat his brains out, after first burying the money under a bush” (Chandler, ch.12). That kind of writing style makes the characters more familiar and more relatable to the ordinary readers. The novel deals with the themes of framed accusations (in the case of Moose Malloy), obsession with *femme fatale* and changing identity (Mrs. Grayle), blackmailing, dilemmas, pursuing the bad guys, and others. It depicts gangsters, such as Lair Brunette, prosecuted by the detectives and the police alike, which puts focus on the masculinity of both the bad and the good guys. As most noir tales, it is set in the modern urban landscape of Los Angeles: “It was one of the mixed blocks over on Central avenue” (Chandler, ch. 1) and the storyline happens frequently at night, for example when Marlowe is trying to find Brunette, which heightens the sense of obscurity and uncertainty: “It was late at night, on a lonely road, and she stopped” (Chandler, ch. 12). As already indicated, the novel contains the usual stock characters such as *femme fatale* and the detective. There is an interesting relation between Marlowe and the law; he was once an investigator in California and now works as a private detective. He has friends in the police who warn him not to get involved with the case and the suspects, which he does nevertheless.

Marlowe lives alone and likes his solitude, lives according to his own set of rules and does not like to adapt them to the other people. He is tough and brave which is evident many times in the novel: “Philip Marlowe, Private Investigator. One of those guys, huh? Jesus, you look tough enough” (Chandler, ch. 3); “You’re so marvelous. . . So brave, so determined and you work for so little money. Everybody bats you over the head and chokes you and smacks your jaw and fills you with morphine, but you just keep right on hitting between tackle and end until they’re all worn out” (Chandler, ch. 40). Because he is so determined and rough, he is quite attractive to women, for example to Mrs. Grayle and to Anne Riordan. He is so headstrong that even the charming Mrs. Grayle cannot threaten his masculinity. He considers her beautiful and they kiss, but he is not caught in her web. Furthermore, he is a common

man, while Laird Brunette is an upper-class character: “He don’t run the town. He couldn’t be bothered. He put up big money to elect a mayor so his water taxis wouldn’t be bothered. If there was anything in particular he wanted, they would give it to him” (Chandler, ch. 36). The detective resists Mrs. Grayle’s charm and beauty so he manages to unfold her mystery and bring the truth to light – that she is guilty for the death of Marriot, Moose Malloy, the policeman who wanted to arrest her and for the attempted murder of Marlowe. Again, as shown in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the hero shows his masculine dominance and defeats *femme fatale*.

As for Mrs. Grayle/Velma Valento, she desires a better and more luxurious life which makes her commit all the crimes. In achieving this, she used her sexiness and attractiveness and she refused to conform to the rules and the norms of the society. Her beauty incorporated danger and threat and it makes her fascinating: “It was a blonde. A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window. . . Whatever you needed, wherever you happened to be-she had it” (Chandler, ch. 13). Also, she is self-confident and determined, for instance when she tells Marlowe to sit next to her even though her husband was there. She is intelligent and acts like she belongs to the upper class society with her clothes and jewellery, especially her expensive jade necklace: “She shouldn’t have it worn it out-ever. But she’s a reckless sort of woman” (Chandler, ch. 8). So, she epitomized everything that was thought to be unconventional at the time–and sustained these prejudices against beautiful women. What is more, it is interesting to point out that in the novel Mrs. Grayle appears rarely in the story, in contrast to Lady Audley in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Mrs. Grayle is being mentioned throughout the course of the novel, but she is seldom physically present: the first time briefly after the first third of the novel and again at the end of the novel. So she does not function as the protagonist of the novel; she appears only in very significant parts of the narrative in which she directs the storyline employing her intrigues and greedy ambitions. Nonetheless, despite her brief appearances in the novel, she is crucial to the story. In addition, there is one more difference between her and Lady Audley – Mrs. Grayle is more openly sexual and seductive, shows her intentions without reservations and feels no guilt over her actions. She is being objectified because of her appearance and she does not resist it in order to achieve what she wants.

The difference between the detective and *femme fatale* is that Marlowe followed his moral code which did not allow him to be seduced by a murderer and let her get away with it, while Mrs. Grayle was willing to abandon every moral concern just to gain what she desires:

"A girl who started in the gutter became the wife of a multimillionaire" (Chandler, ch. 39). But not only did she have to achieve that, she also had to maintain that position. She bribed an old woman who recognized her as Velma Valento; she murdered Marriott who could threaten her because he was familiar with all her atrocities; she shot Moose Malloy five times because he was an inconvenience; she tried to murder Marlowe as he figured out everything, and she murdered the policeman who tried to arrest her. For all of that, she had to be punished and humiliated, so she killed herself as an example of what happens to a woman who goes against the rules. And although Marlowe was not the one who was hurt, there were two men romantically involved with her at one point in her lifetime who ended up broken-hearted, or dead. The first one was Moose Malloy: "He was a big man but not more than sex feet inches tall and not wider than a beer truck" (Chandler, ch. 1). As soon as he got out of the prison, he went to an old bar where she used to work to find her. He claimed he had not seen her in eight years and that she did not write to him in six, and he tried to make up excuses for that in order to justify her. At the end he found out that she was the one who turned him to the police, and that is when she shot him. Marlowe was aware of how much he loved her and when the medic assumed that he has a chance for survival, Marlowe concluded that "[h]e wouldn't want it" (Chandler, ch. 39), "It didn't matter to him that she hadn't written to him in six years or ever gone to see him while he was in hail. It didn't matter that she had turned him in for a reward. . . He had killed two people himself, but he was in love with her. What a world" (Chandler, ch. 40). Malloy also represents the connection to the past, something she tries to escape. As mentioned, she used to work in a bar and that is the first place Malloy visits – he looks for her in the place which reminds him of her, but she ran away from it a long time ago. She lived very comfortably with her new identity and all the material possessions she was given by her husband, and as soon as she became aware of Malloy's presence, she felt her new life is threatened by the ghosts of her past.

Furthermore, another victim to her fatal behaviour was her husband, Mr. Grayle who was an investment banker and enormously rich, "worth about twenty millions" (Chandler, ch. 13). He met Mrs. Grayle at the radio station in Beverly Hills that he owned. In him, she saw a chance to live the way she always wanted. While he was staying at home, she would go out and have fun. She cheated on him with other men and he was aware of it, but he did nothing about it, for example when he caught Marlowe and Mrs. Grayle kissing. He only went quietly out of the room and there "was an infinite sadness in his eyes" (Chandler, ch. 18). Even after she murdered Moose Malloy, he did not want to tell anything incriminating about her because

he was so crazy about her that he did not care about what she had done. However, despite everything she did, Mrs. Grayle did feel sympathy towards him because he let her do whatever she wanted without complaining. He enabled her to have a life she wanted and when she killed herself, she spared him a lot of pain:

> I'm not saying she was a saint or even a halfway nice girl. Not ever. She wouldn't kill herself until she was cornered. But what she did and the way she did it, kept her from coming back here for trial. Think that over. And who would that trial hurt most? Who would be least able to bear it? And win, lose or draw, who would pay the biggest price for the show? An old man who had loved not wisely, but too well. (Chandler, ch. 41)

To sum up, *Farewell, My Lovely* is a classic example of noir fiction and Mrs. Grayle is a classic example of *femme fatale*. She uses her "attractiveness and slyness to manipulate men in order to gain power, money and independence" (Pituková 29). Chandler allows for the possibility that she is not ultimately evil by letting her escape in order to spare her husband the pain. By killing herself, she is punished for her transgression of the social norms. Phillip Marlowe represents the patriarchy in this novel which at the end prevailed and corrected the "rebellious" and "unconventional" woman. Mrs. Grayle is again an example of how women who attempted to change their position in the society had their voices silenced. Even more importantly, she, like Lady Audley, is represented as a criminal (a murderer) which suggests that rebelling against male dominance is a crime.

4.3. BLAKE EDWARDS' *BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S* (1961)

Breakfast at Tiffany's is a 1961 film directed by Blake Edwards, while the screenplay was written by George Ayelrod. The movie is deemed culturally, historically and aesthetically significant and it won two Academy Awards, one for Best Original Score and the other one for Best Original Song ("Moon River" by Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer). The movie was produced in the aftermath of the World War II, which is the period when feminism began to take a radical form. It was a few years before the Bill of Rights for women (1967) was brought and Women's Liberation Movement tried to make a change through the process of 'consciousness-raising'. So that period was marked with the beginnings of women's studies and of feminism as a conscious political movement uniting women in their struggle against oppression. The movie is loosely based on Truman Capote's novella of the same name

(1958), and the main characters in the movie are the elegant Holly Golightly/Lula Mae Barnes (Audrey Hepburn), her neighbour Paul Varjak (George Peppard), his "decorator" Mrs. Failenson/2E (Patricia Neal), Holly's ex-husband Doc Golightly (Buddy Epsen) and a rich Brazilian José da Silva Pereira (José Luis de Vilallonga). The movie is set in New York when Holly is returning home early in the morning. Later, a new neighbour Paul, who is a writer, wakes her up as he had no key to the building, and Holly is dressing up to visit a mobster Sally Tomato at Sing Sing prison, for which she is paid. Paul and Holly start to spend time together more often and she invites him to the parties, at which she meets rich and affluent men. One day, her ex-husband Doc comes to visit her and take her home, but she refuses. Even though Paul and Holly spend the night together, she plans to marry José for money and move to Brazil. In the meantime, Holly gets arrested in connection with Sally Tomato's drug ring, and even though she is released the following morning, José ends their relationship due to her arrest. Paul confronts Holly about his love and her behaviour and she decides to run after him and they kiss: "People do fall in love. . . You call yourself a free spirit, a wild thing. And you're terrified somebody's going to stick you in a cage. Well, baby, you're already in that cage. You built it yourself. . . It's wherever you go. Because no matter where you run, you just end up running into yourself" (Edwards 01:50:27-01:50:53).

The movie is classified as a romance, a comedy of manners and a drama, but it also has elements of film noir. Firstly, it has some characteristic noir themes, such as the presence of *femme fatale*, a change in identity and dilemmas and complications related to the past. Secondly, noir movies are often depicted with a recognisable visual style, like the lightning which directs the viewer's attention to the characters. For instance, when Holly and Paul are lying in his bed, he turns off the light, but the rest of the room is much darker than the characters. Moreover, the movie is set in the modern urban landscape of New York and begins with the scene of an almost empty street very early in the morning, when the Sun has not risen yet, creating a sense of loneliness and disturbance. Thirdly, the movie depicts a gangster Sally Tomato, who is in prison for having a connection to drugs, which was a frequent feature of films noir. The next important feature is the connection to the past and history. In this case, it is Holly who is trying to leave behind her real identity and the life with her ex-husband when she was poor. And last but not least, they have characters that fit into the roles of *femme fatale* and the detective, even though they are quite adapted, that is softened to match a wide audience's taste. Holly Golightly is more elegant and not an openly sexual version of *femme fatale*; she does get involved with a lot of men, but it is not depicted

in a graphically sexual way. Also, even though Paul Varjak's character lacks the kind toughness and determination that the classic detectives, such as Philip Marlowe, show, he represents the patriarchal system that has to tame the *femme fatale* in the movie. Furthermore, the movie fails to pass the Bechdel test that questions the active presence of women in movies; it satisfies the first criterion, that is that there are five women who are given names (Holly, Mrs. Failenson, Mag Wildwood, Miss Beverly Hills, Irving) and the second one since Holly talks to the librarian and Mag Wildwood. However, these conversations are in regard to Paul's book and Rusty Trawler, so the movie fails to meet third criterion.

Also, the two novels analysed in this chapter showed how the detectives tried to resist the lady's sexual charm in order to punish her for her criminal activities and forbidden behaviour, and they do not want to be romantically involved with them. However, Paul honestly likes Holly, and not only because of her appearance, and he tries to help her figure out who she is and what she wants in her life: "When I find out what I want, I'm gonna let you know" (Edwards 00:30:25-00:30:27). The problem is that he is trying to help her and love her by trying to make her fit the society's rules and conventions, i.e. the patriarchal system: "Holly, I'm not going to let you do this. . . Holly, I'm in love with you. . . I love you, you belong to me" (Edwards 01:48:56-01:49:07). He is not very masculine, but she is also not very fatal, so the consequences of their clash of desires are not harsh; she is not murdered, captured or severely punished. However, the viewers are led to believe that she accepts the ordinary life of a married couple and that is enough to show how the male control is again reasserted.

It is interesting to note that they are both similar in some way; they do not like to work, as she is living off her dates and suitors, while he is not such a successful writer and also has a mistress who supports him financially. She is sometimes shown more masculine than him. For example, when Holly is leaving to visit Sally Tomato at Sing Sing, Paul tries to stop a taxi but does not succeed. Then Holly whistles in a manly way and the taxi stops, while Paul notices how he could never do it. However, because he is a man living in a male-dominated world all his actions seem justified, while she seems to be irresponsible and has to change her way of living only because she is a woman. Moreover, he is the one who chooses to break off his relationship with Mrs. Failenson, whereas Holly is the one who is left multiple times (first, when Rusty Trawler gets married to another woman, and the second time when José ends their relationship on the account of her arrest). Moreover, Holly shows understanding for Paul when she sees Mrs. Failenson leaving him money: "$300, she's very

generous. Is it by the week, the hour or what? . . . Oh, Fred. Darling Fred, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Don't be angry. I was just trying to let you know I understand. I understand completely" (Edwards 00:18:32-00:18:51). However, Paul judges Holly and the way men give her money for keeping them company (even though it is not indicated they indulge in sexual relationships). It is especially evident when she expresses the intention of marrying Rusty Trawler because her brother would soon get out of the army and she would have to take care of him financially: "If I were you, I'd be more careful with my money. Rusty Trawler is too hard a way of earning it" (Edwards 01:03:52-01:03:57). Holly does not like to be vulnerable in front of men and acts defensive in such cases, for instance when she cries in her sleep and Fred asks her why she is crying: "If we're going to be friends, let's just get one thing straight right now. I hate snoops" (Edwards 00:24:26-00:24:33). However, when they spend time together, they have fun and feel comfortable with one another. She spent time with rich men only to get paid, but she spends time with Paul even though he does not shower her with gifts or money. They rather spend time walking around and doing things they have never done before.

Paul Varjak is a common man, in contrast to all the men Holly spent time with partying and going out. Holly becomes central to his life, as she inspires him to start writing a novel about her, and also because he ends his relationship with Mrs. Failenson who financially supported him. What is more, classic *femme fatales* usually had many negative qualities and were represented as immoral. However, Holly is described mostly positively, as attractive, elegant, with a good taste in fashion and jewellery, naïve and a bit eccentric. The last feature was then considered negative and that is what made her be oppressed by society. She is intelligent and funny, and loves to be a part of the upper class society. This is evident in her tendency of dressing very classy (the little black dress, pearls, big glasses), organising parties and being interested in men who are rich and affluent. It is interesting that she finds Tiffany's so enticing: "Calms me down right away. The quietness and the proud look of it. Nothing very bad could happen to you there. If I could find a real-life place that made me feel like Tiffany's then... Then I'd buy some furniture and give the cat a name" (Edwards 00:08:39-00:08:55). Tiffany's is a New York City luxury jewellery and specialty retailer known for its luxury goods and for diamond jewellery. It is considered an arbiter of taste and style so it is the best way to represent the sophisticated, elegant and graceful Holly, who is presented in Figure 4. Moreover, she is not dependent on male attention; for her, they are only a means for financial gain and security, but she does not like to be 'caged'.

Fig. 4. Audrey Hepburn as elegant Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) <https://bellabox.com.au/beautyguide/beauty-icon-audrey-hepburn>.

In the movie, Holly functions as the protagonist, the main character who dictates the storyline. On the one hand, women from the 1950s and the 1960s had long hair, lived in suburban areas with their family, a dominant husband who was a provider and they were expected to be conservative. On the other hand, Holly was a single woman in New York City, she was open-minded and charming, and she was her own provider, even though it was through the manipulation of men. However, she never intended to hurt anybody on purpose, and if she did, she tried to make them understand her standpoint. The only man who was genuinely hurt by her actions was Doc Golightly, who saved her and her brother Fred: "Which is a sight different from the way they come to us. A couple of wild young'uns, they was. I caught them outside the house stealing milk and turkey eggs. Lula Mae and her brother had been living with some mean, no-account people about 100 mile east of Tulip" (Edwards 00:48:45-00:48:59). He is a part of her past that comes back to haunt her; he calls her Lula Mae which is her real name, but she refuses to be called that way because she is not like that anymore: "Please Doc, please understand. I love you, but I'm just not Lula Mae any more. I'm not" (Edwards 00:56:15-00:56:26). This shows that she is very caring, which is also notable in the way she supported Paul in his writing and how she apologized to him for being rude, and the way she returned to the alley to find her cat. Usually, these narratives have a woman who is the opposite of *femme fatale* and usually has all the good qualities. In *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, it is quite the contrary. There is Mag Wildwood, a member of the upper

class society who comes to Holly's party and brings José and Rusty Trawler with her. She is loud, rude and uncouth, and not as nearly elegant as Holly.

To conclude, Holly Golightly and Paul Varjak represent quite different characters than film noir usually employed. Paul as the detective archetype was not as nearly as rough and enterprising, but as a male member of the patriarchal system, he has to 'punish' her for representing a threat to the rules and expectations of the society, and he tries to help her by making her fit these rules. Holly is elegant, lovely and lost in searching for her identity, and she is not vicious as other representatives of the *femme fatale* archetype. However, she is independent, different, eccentric and depicts a lot of things that men fear about women. She lives according to her own rules, but ~~at~~ in the end she is subverted and tamed, i.e. accepts Paul's love for her and, as the movie suggests, probably tries to settle with him and accept a more traditional role for women.

4.4. PAUL VERHOEVEN'S *BASIC INSTINCT* (1992)

Basic Instinct is a neo-noir erotic thriller film released in 1992, directed by Paul Verhoeven and written by Joe Eszterhas. It is one of the most financially successful movies of the 1990s and it won MTV Movie Awards for Best Female Performance (Sharon Stone) and Most Desirable Female (Sharon Stone). The 1990s were a period of third wave feminism which brought a radical struggle against the oppression of women from men, but from other women also. It concerned the black and queer movement in which minority groups among women expressed their problems and struggles. Moreover, with the emergence of queer studies the issue of the reconfiguration of gender and sex became more evident, especially with Judith Butler's 1990 *Gender Trouble*. The movie sparked a heated controversy over its explicit sexuality and depiction of violence. The main characters are the detective Nick Curran (Michael Douglas), writer Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone), Dr. Beth Garner (Jeanne Tripplehorn), Catherine's girlfriend Roxy Hardy (Leilani Sarelle) and detective Gus Moran (George Dzundza). The movie starts with the brutal murder of a former rock star Johnny Boz. The case is assigned to Nick Curran who suspects Boz's girlfriend Catherine, a crime novelist, of Boz's murder. In fact, everyone is convinced she is the murderer after the murder of a policeman, Nilsen, but there is no evidence. Her novels correspond with the real-life events (murders especially), and now she is writing a novel about a detective who falls for the

wrong woman and is killed. There are several suspicious deaths happening and the story gets more complicated. At the end, Beth, who once slept with Catherine, is considered to be the murderer, while Catherine gets away with everything, although the viewers may conclude that she set up Beth.

The movie falls into the category of neo-noir, which is a genre of modern motion pictures and other forms, but it has all the elements of film noir, only with updated themes, content and visual style. The movies deals with the themes of false accusations (in the case of Beth Garner), *femme fatale* and obsession with her (Nick's obsession with Catherine), dilemmas, psychopathology, and others. As other noir stories, this is also set in the modern urban landscape, that is San Francisco. The location is sometimes used to induce fear and suspense, for instance when Nick drives Catherine home from the interrogation, and Catherine asks Nick about the men he killed as a policeman, outside it is dark and there is heavy rain, which sets an atmosphere of claustrophobia in the car and tension building up. Moreover, when Catherine is in the interrogation room, strips of light and dark from the Venetian blinds can be seen across her body, which is shown in Figure 5. The characters are often cynical and there is the language of street: "but why is it you got your head so far up your own ass" (Verhoeven 01:07:56-01:07:59). The movie has classic stock characters of films noir, the first being *femme fatale* Catherine Tramell and the detective Nick Curran caught in her web. It also deals with the relationship of the individual to the law, as Nick Curran is the policeman, but he was involved in the accidental shooting of two tourists. It is questionable whether it was accidental because there are indications of him passing the lie detector test by tricking the machine. In this case, it is not Catherine who is haunted by the troubled past but Nick. He used to drink heavily, use cocaine, there was the already mentioned case of shooting the tourists, and his wife committed suicide. When Catherine comes into his life, she brings all these memories back. It is also evident that Catherine Tramell is the ultimate psycho *femme fatale*: "You're dealing with a devious, diabolical mind. . . Now, the fact that she carried it out indicates psychopathic obsessive behaviour" (Verhoeven 00:18:30-00:18:48). She is the modern day version of *femme fatale* archetype who is fearless more than ever and is extremely scary to men who have no powers and no control over her.

Fig. 5. Sharon Stone as *femme fatale* in *Basic Instinct* (1992) <http://www.allmovie.com/movie/basic-instinct-v4149>.

The movie fails the Bechdel test as well as *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, except *Basic Instinct* meets only one of the three criteria: there are more than two named women (Catherine, Beth, Roxy and Hazel). The criterion that fails to satisfy the Bechdel test is that there are no women engaging in conversations, which means that the third criterion automatically cannot be fulfilled. Moreover, this movie differs from the previously analysed works of art in that here the detective cannot resist the lady's sexual charm and does not remain professional. Nick breaks all the rules in order to get her, but he is only being lured further into her intrigues. Catherine does not desire for more and better because she has everything she wants. She knows who she is and she does not need a man to provide for her. In her strength and independence, she represents the ultimate "female monster". She is truly deadly and dangerous for those who succumb to her lure because mostly they end up dead. Since Nick did not succeed in resisting Catherine and is obsessed with her: "Forget about her! Go somewhere, sit in the sun. Get her the hell out of your system. . . She is screwing with your head! Stay away from her" (Verhoeven 01:01:48-01:02:03), he has no chance of surviving, which is suggested at the end of the movie, when, after sleeping together, an ice pick is seen under the bed. Catherine ends up strong and undefeated, as she got away with everything she did. To her, Nick serves the same purpose as Johnny Boz did – she will keep him alive as long as he gives her pleasure. She is a completely independent woman, financially and mentally,

and she keeps certain people around only if she can use them for her own purposes: "Catherine Tramell, sole heir. Estimated assets: $110 million" (Verhoeven 00:16:48-00:16:52). She reasserts control throughout the movie because other characters' desires are related to her, either wishing to bring her down or seduce her, while her desires are not related to others, but only to herself, so nobody other than herself can destroy her. Although Catherine is judged according to the rules and expectations of the patriarchal system, she does not let other oppress her or punish her for her behaviour. Nick seems to be tough and determined, but he is actually weak and easily falls under the influence of stronger personalities and vices. For example, the more he becomes acquainted with Catherine, the more he returns to smoking, drinking, becoming violent and unpredictable. Catherine controls him and his every move, and while he thinks he is playing the game, she is winning with her every move "She knows where I live and breathe. She's coming after me, Gus" (Verhoeven 00:53:04-00:53:11).

Catherine Tramell represents the most direct attack on traditional womanhood and family because she refuses to play the role of a devoted wife and loving mother the mainstream society prescribes to women. She leaves men flabbergasted at the sight of her looks, her behaviour and her determination to live her life the way she wants to. For example, she is successful because of her awareness of male fears which leads her "to embarrass her interrogators at the police station by openly discussing her sexuality in terms that they would only have expected from men" (Deleyto 35). As shown in Figure 5, Catherine is a beautiful, ravishing blonde who is full of fatal attractiveness. She smokes, drinks and uses cocaine, has long and sexy legs that often dominate the frame, has luscious lips and gorgeous hair that frames her face. She dresses with taste, and not only does she wear short dresses, but she also wears suits that remind of male suits. Her beauty and danger function in a way that creates dynamism in her character. She is absolutely domineering, self-confident and intelligent which makes her even more destructive. She not only asserts control by manipulating men, but also by sexually overpowering them – when they reach pleasure during intercourse, she is always on top and the men's hands are tied up. What is more, she is not only manipulative towards men, but also towards her girlfriend Roxy who is jealous of Nick. Roxy says about Catherine: "She likes me to watch" (Verhoeven 01:17:17-01:17:20). As mentioned, she is extremely rich, and she owns two huge luxurious houses and two expensive sports cars, so financial independence is what makes her even more self-sufficient. The most important change in the archetype of *femme fatale* in this movie is that Catherine is educated – she

majored in literature and psychology on Berkeley. Moreover, Catherine can function in the movie as the antagonist. She is the 'bad guy' of the story who is the opponent to all the other characters. Catherine is very open about sexuality, she is very seductive and provocative, like when they asked her if she ever tied Johnny up and she answers: "No. Johnny liked to use his hands too much. I like hands and fingers" (Verhoeven 00:26:18-00:26:24). She indulges in many almost strictly sexual relationships with men and women and is not afraid to talk about her sexuality. By being openly bisexual she parodies the traditional female stereotypes and adopts any identity she pleases.

Catherine mirrors Nick's moral, physical and spiritual decline and failure. Moreover, she is the one who triggers his downfall. Nick is so attracted to her because they are similar in some aspects: "Then she's as crazy as you are, Curran" (Verhoeven 00:20:48-00:20:50). They are both unpredictable, both are dangerous to other people and are unable to control their sexual desires, fantasies and illusions so they both abandon whatever ethical concerns to gain what they desire. Even though Catherine is so open and does not hide anything, for example when Gus tells her how she has to make stories up all the time as a writer and she says: "Yeah, it teaches you to lie" (Verhoeven 00:23:39-00:23:40), she is still mysterious to men as they cannot figure out her behaviour. It does not apply only to the characters in the movie, but also the male spectators who feel threatened: "the threat frequently comes from an evil, psychotic female character, direct heir of the mysterious and destructive *femme fatale* of *noir* films, who becomes the monstrous figure of the genre and, as such, the most potent focus of the spectator's fascination/repulsion" (Deleyto 21). Catherine represents the product of the ideology at the end of the century when traditional female stereotypes seemed to get weaker and less credible. Deleyto argues that the female monstrosity is caused by male paranoia, which for Freud, was a "defensive mechanism against homosexuality" (28). In the movie, this theory can be applied to Nick and Gus. Nick claims Gus is his only friend, while Gus is constantly trying to remind Nick of her manipulation and psychopathy. He is also hostile towards Catherine and extremely aggressive when he finds out Nick had slept with her, which could indicate his jealousy. This is the same pattern of behaviour Roxy expressed toward Nick, and Roxy and Catherine were openly in a relationship. Although Nick loves being with women, he "is a little too anxious to prove his sexual potency" (Deleyto 29).

It can be said that Catherine Tramell is represented as a negative symbol and is objectified throughout the movie. However, she succeeded in converting the traditional role of women in society by asserting control over male power. She prevailed over the traditional

order and refused to be oppressed or punished for her actions, that is, the society could not contain her. However, being one of the few *femme fatales* who actually can stand as a feminist hero of the movie, she still had to be ultimately evil and psychopathic in order to achieve this. This shows that women have to go to extreme lengths to achieve equal status to men, and even then they will not be accepted as peers, but be perceived as evil, domineering and outright psychopathic. Through Catherine's character the movie supports the idea that no one can be reduced to a single traditional gender identity, and also the ideas of female empowerment and the freedom to express their sexuality, even though lesbians are shown as psychopathic murderers which raised a lot of controversy. However, as Deleyto concludes, the "monstrosity of women along with the fragmented nature of Tramell's narrative delineation are the film's hysterical contribution to the current backlash of male victimization in the face of women's gains in equality" (32).

CONCLUSION

As a political, cultural, social and intellectual movement, feminism has brought many changes to the existing cultural constructs. The struggle against oppression had to take many forms and be enacted in different areas of life in order to raise consciousness about the issues relating women's position in the society. Today, owing to the widespread media attention, it is much easier to voice the concerns of the oppressed and the silenced. However, the history of feminism shows how much effort and determinism had to be invested in order to come to this point. One of the issues was that, at first, most women believed that the patriarchal system and misogyny were the correct ways of operating in a society and that women should not be entitled to their rights and equal opportunities.

Due to the fact that some women held a public position or had any influence on the society, it was easier for them to raise their voices so the things started to change. The changes happened slowly and it took a long time until the actions against oppression could actually be considered 'feminist'. The most instrumental factor in women's resistance was the emergence of feminist literary criticism. This meant that feminists could not affect the present and the future only, but the past also as they put effort in revealing the implicit and explicit marginalization of women in male writings and in rediscovering long forgotten or ignored female writings. This is why works of art, literature and cinema are so important. They shape the readers' and viewers' attitudes, enabling them to see things from others' points of view and perspectives, which makes it easier to understand other people's struggles and burdens.

In literature and movies the *femme fatale* archetype sustained many taboos and prejudices towards women and their part in the society. It most frequently appeared as the stock character in noir genre in which *femme fatale* served to express male concerns on women taking over their roles while they were in war, hence the women in these works of art had to be resumed to their inferior role to show how patriarchy is the best way of functioning in society. Of course, with time, that role adapted to the changing circumstances. As seen in the analysed novels and movies, all the female characters were represented as fatal and dangerous to men, threatening thus the established system. So the question was whether these women have succeeded in converting the traditional role of women or whether they have kept their submissive roles as the objects of male fantasies and sexual desires. Arguably, they are represented differently in each literary work, but there is an obvious pattern showing how they are mostly punished for their unconventional behaviour, either symbolically (by being

subjected to a traditional marriage) or literally (by death or incarceration), whereas, to fulfil a feminist agenda and become absolutely independent of men, they have to take extreme measures to achieve that and again be judged for it.

The analysed movies are more recent, hence the novels are more traditional and conservative. Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) shows a Victorian type of *femme fatale*: with her innocent beauty and childish behaviour, Lady Audley was adored by everyone. However, she used her powers to manipulate men in order to escape poverty. Even though she was not evil and what she did was due to her being left by her husband, forced to take care of their child and her alcoholic penniless father, her deeds did not conform the norms and the rules of patriarchal system, hence she was punished by being appointed to an insane asylum. Furthermore, the crime novel *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) written by Raymond Chandler depicts a classic *femme fatale* who is beautiful, fatal and does not care if her behaviour is harmful to others. Mrs. Grayle uses her beauty to gain power, money and independence and would get rid of anyone standing in her way. She is most severely punished as she is not killed, but is made to kill herself, which is a humiliating and desperate act of escape. It insinuates that women are not capable of bearing responsibilities and that they are cowardly.

Furthermore, the two analysed movies show a stark difference between the representations of *femme fatale* and their destinies. In contrast to novels, they are more benevolent towards women. Blake Edwards' 1961 *Breakfast at Tiffany's* represents the least fatal *femme fatale* who is not punished as harshly as in the case with Lady Audley and Mrs. Grayle. Holly is elegant and sophisticated, but also likes to party and spend time with rich men who give her money for keeping them company. Even though she does this because she needs to financially support herself and her brother, her eccentricity goes against the society's expectations so, by the end of the film, she is made to accept the traditional family life. And last but not least, Catherine Tramell proves that *femme fatale* can assert control over men and convert the traditional role of women in society. In 1992 movie *Basic Instinct*, Paul Verhoeven constructs the most dangerous and lethal *femme fatale* character than ever before. She is an unscrupulous murderer who takes advantage of everyone and everything she comes across. Her character is bisexual which means she supported the notion of freedom to express female sexuality. However, since she manipulated men and stood as a feminist hero, she had to be represented as psychopathic and ultimately evil so as to show that women who absolutely refuse patriarchal standards are devious and perverse members of society.

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