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Serra Ros, Xènia; Curbet, Joan, dir. Shakespeare as Predecessor of Gothic Fiction : the Female Figures in Hamlet. 2016. 22 pag. (801 Grau en Estudis Anglesos)

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Shakespeare as Predecessor of Gothic Fiction:
The Female Figures in *Hamlet*.

Treball de Fi de Grau
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June 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Joan Curbet, who has guided me through the whole process of writing this paper; giving me reference, advice, and corrections to improve my work, as well as all the support I needed. I would also like to thank Dr Elisabet Pladevall, who offered advice and support to me and all my colleagues during the process of writing the TFG. Finally, I would like to thank all my family and friends.

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Abstract

Analysing Shakespeare's works in retrospection we can see that several of the motifs used in the Gothic of the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth century to criticize the patriarchal system are also used in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* with the same intention. Such criticism was the product of the rapid changes that both, the Elizabethan and the Victorian societies, experienced. These changes were the source of inner anxieties among the population, who saw the new social structure as dysfunctional. The uneasiness and the anxieties of the population were captured in the Gothic literature through different symbolisms. In this paper I will discuss three of these symbolisms or motifs: the victimized female and the 'Femme Fatale', the fossilization and the aesthetics of the corpse, and the family romance understood as a source of evil and madness. I will aim to claim that the female heroines in *Hamlet*, Ophelia and Gertrude, challenge male supremacy making use of these three Gothic features.

Keywords: Shakespeare, Gothic, patriarchal, female heroines.

1. Introduction

William Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest English play-writer of all time. Born in 1564, his works were written and published during the Elizabethan era, a period delimited by the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and known as the golden age of Britain. The Elizabethan era, then, was a period of economic wellness as well as a period of calm and internal peace after the many conflicts between Protestants and Catholics that took place during the English Reformation, and before the political tensions between the monarchy and the parliament that arrived later on. This estate of wellness and tranquillity in the country contributed to create a high national pride and a patriotic feeling that allowed the flourishing of arts and literature, supported and encouraged by Queen Elizabeth I. This flourishing of arts and a prolific production of literature gifted Britain with the apparition of well-known authors such as Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon and, last but not least, William Shakespeare, who made the most important contribution to the Elizabethan theatre.

However, for the British population of that time not everything was as easy and marvellous as it seems. Major and rapid changes concerning economy and politics took place, leading to a shift from a feudal system to a new modern economic and social system. Some of these major changes, as Louis Montrose emphasizes, were "the combination of population growth, price inflation, unemployment and underemployment" (Montrose, 1996: 21), joined with the many "transformations in agrarian modes of production and disruptions of traditional rural communities and values, the expansion of a speculative and entrepreneurial market and the development of radically new financial institutions and investment instruments, widespread geographic mobility and rapid social mobility" (Montrose: 21). Added to those changes we also find many improvements and significant progresses in science and technology. Thus, all these developments supposed a "major transformation in cultural life" (Montrose: 22) and an "abrupt break with the past" (Phythian-Adams, 1972, cited in Montrose, 1996: 23). All these changes spread an inner

agitation among the country that Shakespeare captured in his plays. This skill of displaying the country's inner agitation in a subliminal way, by making use of features like monstrosity and insanity, is what has encouraged a few scholars to attempt to link the Elizabethan author with the Gothic literature of the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth century. This connection between Shakespeare and Gothic literature may seem inappropriate at first, due to the differences between the former author and the latter genre, given the fact that Shakespearean drama and Gothic fiction belong to different periods: *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002) locates the beginning of Gothic literature around 1764, when *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole was first printed. But not only this: while Gothic fiction has usually been belittled in critical terms, and Gothic writers have not always received the acceptance they deserved, Shakespeare has always had such a good reputation that he is claimed to be one of the greatest authors of all time. It is hard to believe, then, that those marginal Gothic authors can have anything in common with the well-known play-writer. However, as mentioned before, several scholars have noticed how Gothic storytelling tends to restore some of the motifs and codes of late Elizabethan plays.

The key to understand where the similarities in literary production between these two eras come from, is in their respective societies. As I have already stated, part of the greatness of Shakespeare resides in the fact that he was able to capture in an indirect way the chaos and anxieties of his society. He made use of features such as monstrosity and madness to do so, and these same features were used by the authors of the Gothic of the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth century to capture the dysfunctionality of their own society. The reason why these distant authors used the same techniques, is because they all lived in agitated and dynamic societies that suffered many changes in a short period of time.

The Victorian era definitely experienced as many changes as the Elizabethan period. If in Shakespeare's times the traditional rural areas were undergoing a change due to the new modes in agriculture, in the Victorian era the changes suffered were even bigger, with the process of

industrialization. The invention of the steam engine provoked a shift from agriculture to manufacturing. This shift led to the abandonment of the rural areas to move to the city, where plenty of job opportunities in factories were offered. The major gain the Industrial Revolution obtained was a tremendous economic and industrial growth, that brought large-scale changes in society: the new economic opportunities helped to improve the quality of life, but at the same time, they helped to reinforce the difference between social classes. As a positive thing, another outcome of the industrialization was the rising of the middle class thanks to the development of skilled labour.

This new modern society was seen as an insane and decadent society by many writers, like Charles Dickens, who captured in his works how this was in fact a structure that was mistreating its population and, especially, its children. Many other authors felt also free to use their works as a tool to make a criticism on what they thought that was an insane urban world. The one of these criticisms that calls my attention the most is the criticism made on the patriarchal system. In the Victorian era the woman was considered 'the Angel in the House', her place was at home taking care of the husband and the children. The education women received was different from the one men received: women learned how to be good wives and how to properly carry out domestic duties, because they were considered valuable only in the domestic sphere. However, the last two decades of the Victorian era experienced the beginning of a change regarding gender issues. There was a shift from patriarchal male supremacy towards feminine independence. From this movement emerged the new woman writers¹ who criticised the old patriarchal model through their novels. To criticize male supremacy, they made use of Gothic conventions, using features like madness and monstrosity to make their statement. It was this criticism on the patriarchal system that interested me the most when reading Gothic fiction, and I could not help connecting it with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

As I have already stated, many scholars agree with the fact that there is a connection between Shakespeare and Gothic writers of the late eighteenth and mid nineteenth century,

1 Writers such as the Brontë sisters, who wrote what is now called New Fiction.

however, most of them focus only on the fact that both kinds of authors make use of what we now call 'Gothic themes' to make a criticism, or to display the dysfunctionality of their societies. I definitely agree with this statement and I will have a further look into it in the next section of this paper. However, I have noticed a lack of scholarly work focused on Shakespeare's criticism against patriarchal supremacy, when, on the other hand, I could clearly perceive it when reading *Hamlet*. From my point of view, Shakespeare uses the same devices used for the Gothic writers of the eighteenth - nineteenth century to criticise patriarchy, and it is on this criticism that my paper will be focused. In this paper I aim to demonstrate first that, looked in retrospection, we can clearly establish a connection between Shakespearean plays and Gothic literature, to the extent that some aspects of Shakespearean drama can be considered as establishing significant precedents for the Gothic. I will also claim that Shakespeare used several motifs which we would call 'Gothic' today in order to address the discussion of psychological conflicts and desires, as well as some social and cultural anxieties of his time. It is important to stress the fact that, as I have mentioned, the comparison between Shakespeare and Gothic writers is made in retrospection. The term 'Gothic' was not yet used when Shakespeare wrote his plays; then, there is no way he could be using Gothic motifs intentionally. It is just in retrospection that we are able to see the similarities between Shakespeare and the Gothic, and we are able to establish a connection between them.

All my statements for this paper will be based on a close analysis of *Hamlet*. In the first part of the paper, I will discuss the cultural continuities between Shakespearean and Gothic works, listing and explaining briefly some Gothic features that were used to make a criticism on patriarchy. In the second part of the paper we will see how, from my point of view, these same Gothic features used to criticise patriarchy were already used by Shakespeare, and how he displayed them on *Hamlet*. To do so I will carry out a deeper analysis on the motif of the female 'heroines', women who are usually submissive but at the same time try to free themselves from male authority. I will show how this Gothic feature of the female 'heroine' finds its place on *Hamlet* through the analysis

of the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia. We will be able to see, then, to what an extent these two female characters, and especially the situational patterns which they represent and evoke, present a criticism on patriarchy and prefigure the later canon of Gothic literature.

2. Cultural Continuities: Prefiguring the Gothic

As I have mentioned before, previous research on Shakespeare has demonstrated that Shakespearean literature and Gothic literature have many features in common. Thus, we could declare that some Shakespeare's plays can be seen as predecessors of the Gothic genre. However, as I have already stated, we need to keep in mind that this statement is claimed from a retrospective point of view. It would be a mistake to claim that Shakespeare was using specific features to intentionally create Gothic literature, because the term 'Gothic' was not used until 1765, when Horace Walpole published the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, changing the title of the first edition from *The Castle of Otranto: A Story*, to *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story*. Having said that, I would like to clarify that even though throughout this paper I may refer to Shakespeare as the predecessor of Gothic, I have no intention to place him as a Gothic writer. He lived in the Elizabethan era and therefore his plays were shaped by the dilemmas and the political and social conflicts of that period. Although I aim to demonstrate that we can clearly find Gothic elements in some of Shakespeare's plays like *Hamlet*, which will be the object of study in this paper, we cannot refer to Shakespeare as a Gothic writer.

For authors like Andrew Smith, the Gothic "often appears to delight in transgression" (Smith, 2007: 3). Gothic literature makes a social criticism not by passively replicating "contemporary cultural debates about politics, philosophy, or gender" (Smith: 8), but rather, as Smith states, by reworking, developing and challenging them. Gothic fiction makes such criticism utilizing symbolisms that stand for the anxieties of a specific society in a specific period of time. As

societies developed and changed, Gothic motifs and symbols also changed. Taking into account that the production of Gothic texts has never ceased, this genre has suffered many "national, formal, and generic mutations" (Smith: 4) during its large existence. Although some features of the genre such as "representations of ruins, castles, monasteries, and forms of monstrosity, and images of insanity, transgression, the supernatural, and excess" (Smith: 4) have prevailed, defining the genre, some other features have not, and these alterations have created slightly different types of Gothic texts according to the period of time in which they were written. Then, it would be appropriate to specify which Gothic period has more features in common with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. This period, as mentioned in the introduction, would be the Gothic from the 1790s to the 1890s. In those years there was a gradual internalisation of the repertoire of features considered to be 'evil'. Monsters were no more like "Walpole's animated giants, [...] externally manifested sources of danger. Instead, by the mid-nineteenth century such horrors had largely been internalised" (Smith: 87). This means that the monstrosity and evil of the story was usually symbolised with madness and insanity, as we can perfectly see in *Hamlet*.

In other words, taking an overall view of the genre, there is "a connection between Shakespeare and Gothic writing of the early nineteenth century." (Drakakis, 2008: 1). The Gothic genre made a social criticism, and so did *Hamlet*. There are many characters in the play who present different forms of social controversy, however, in this paper I will only focus on Gertrude and Ophelia, who by standing in representation of the oppressed woman in a male chauvinist society, offer an anti-patriarchal discourse. In the next section I will expose some Gothic features used as symbols of oppressed women in society that were used by Gothic writers to make their own anti-masculist discourse. On the last section of this paper we will see how both, Ophelia and Gertrude, stand for the following Gothic features, bearing out the aim of this paper: that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has also several features that connect him with the semantic field and, as I am going to argue, it is a prime example of female oppression in patriarchal societies. Thus, the following three features are

used in Gothic literature as well as in *Hamlet* to condemn patriarchy.

2.1. The Victimized Female and the 'Femme Fatale'

Female characters have often become an object of study in Gothic literature. It has been noticed that they can usually be divided into two categories: the victimized female and the 'femme fatale'. Both categories stand in contraposition to one another. While the 'femme fatale' is considered to be a sexual threat, the victimized female, also named the trembling victim or the persecuted maiden, is represented as a respectable woman and the victim of a predatory male. The trembling victim is frail and silent and she usually feels sympathy for her predator, who annihilates her and sometimes provokes her madness. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia would be the victimized female while Gertrude is the 'femme fatale', the sexual predator.

These two antagonistic roles have called the attention of many scholars who have focused on feminist issues to do their research. In 1976, the scholar Ellen Moers drew a division between male Gothic (Gothic texts written by men) and female Gothic (Gothic texts written by women). In female Gothic the man is seen as an usurper of women's power who also victimizes them. The scholar Tyler R. Tichelaar argues that in reaction to this depiction of men as villains who victimized women, the "masculine Gothic, instead, depicts its male protagonists as victims of transgression, although that transgression was often committed by them and brought about their own downfall" (Tichelaar, 2012: 30).

There are also differences between male and female Gothic regarding the feminine characters of the play. In female Gothic the character of the victimized woman is turned into a heroine when she undergoes a process of maturity. The female character begins as a silent victim who throughout the experience with the sublime (landscapes and castles), will grow psychologically, moving "from innocence to experience" (Rae, 1999) and evolving into a stronger woman. On the other hand, in the Gothic tradition of the mid nineteenth century as well as in the male Gothic and *Hamlet*, the outcome of the trembling victim is much more unfortunate. The

victimized female is condemned to a miserable existence as an irrelevant nun or as an insane woman, whose life will probably come to an end prematurely due to natural causes or, more commonly, suicide.

2.2. The Fossilization and the Aesthetics of the Corpse

In Gothic fiction the female is often represented as a very pale woman, with a physiognomy that clearly resembles a dead body. If we focus on the victimized female, she is not only physically described as a body without life, but she is also reticent and restrained by male power. In a sense, the female body is like a corpse, unable to operate and react. It is not surprising to find this kind of physical description in Gothic texts, given the Gothic attraction for the aesthetics of the corpse. But why this obsession to picture the female as a fossilization? If the object of male desire is depicted as a corpse, it inevitably leads to the premise that Gothic writers manifested a desire for necrophilia.

In 1989, a study concerning the sexual attraction to corpses was carried out by the investigators Jonathan Rosman and Phillip Resnick. They stated that "the most common motive of the true necrophiles was to possess an unresisting and unrejecting partner" (Rosman & Resnick, 1989: 158). This statement bears out the fact that in Gothic literature, as well as in the real life of the mid nineteenth century, the basic and most valued aspect of womanhood was to be the object of male desire, and to accomplish this, the more passive and easier to dominate they were, the better. Their inactivity highlighted male authoritativeness, strengthening their power.

However, we should not see the Gothic obsession for necrophilia only as the result of male sexual preferences. As Fred Botting claims in his book *The Gothic*, this is a genre that has "consistently depicted the transgression of natural and moral laws, aesthetic rules and social taboos" (Botting, 1995: 1); this "transgression enables limits and values to be reaffirmed" (Botting: 2). In other words, the horrifying transgressions that take place in Gothic literature have the function to restore and reinforce social and moral values. Gothic is about crossing borders, and with necrophilia, the physical and aesthetic borders are totally transgressed. But in the final analysis,

transgression makes visible how limits are actually necessary, and how the lack of them leads to a corrupted and rotten society.

2.3. Family Romance and the Source of Evil and Madness

During the Victorian era the family structure underwent some variations, due to the rapid changes society was experimenting. On this brand new society modernity brought the disfigurement of the previous family model. It became more frequent to see families with an absence of the father. This lack of the 'pater familias' had its consequences, seen on literature in the form of a dysfunctional family romance where the mother is highly sexualized and this sexualization becomes a source of evil and madness.

The movement towards gender equality that the last two decades of the Victorian era experienced, also influenced to this sexualization of the feminine body. Male supremacy was being challenged by the new feminist women, and patriarchy needed to reinforce itself. As we have seen, in Gothic literature, the victimized female stood for representation of the victimized woman. However, time was passing by and the more modern the society became, the more obsolete was patriarchy. With this new modernity, new female characters appeared in literature. This new females stood in representation of a new model of woman, the one brought by modernity. This new model of woman was sexualized in more transgressive ways: her sexual acts were always transgressive and were thought to be a source of evil, as we will see on the further analysis of Gertrude.

3. Further Analysis on Ophelia and Gertrude

Phyllis Rackin states that "No woman is the protagonist in a Shakespearean history play. Renaissance gender role definitions prescribed silence as a feminine virtue, and Renaissance sexual

mythology associated the feminine with body and matter as opposed to masculine intellect and spirit" (Rackin, 1985: 329). Nonetheless, Shakespeare does find the way to make his female characters heard. They may not have a loud and clear voice, but if you learn to read between lines, you will definitely notice that they do have a voice, a voice that, as Rackin suggests, "challenges the logocentric, masculine historical record" (Rackin: 329). Following Rackin's point of view, Shakespeare's male protagonists stand against female characters who tried to disgrace their masculine projects. We can see how these female characters are forcefully voiced in *Hamlet*; in Rackin's own words, these feminine voices "imply that before the masculine voice of history can be accepted as valid, it must come to terms with women and the subversive forces they represent" (Rackin: 329-330).

History is always told by the winners, by those who have the power, and therefore we only have the hegemonic part of history. In *Hamlet* it seems that Shakespeare, by giving voice to the outcasts, in that case the female characters, is trying to give the non-hegemonic part of history, the part that has been buried by more powerful forces. Thus, using Gothic features such as insanity or sexual transgression, Shakespeare does give a voice to Ophelia and Gertrude: a voice that may not always be heard, but that always stands against patriarchy.

3.1. Ophelia

Ophelia has often been disregarded as a character worth studying when analysing *Hamlet*. It is not difficult to understand why if we take into account that, in contrast to what I have just stated in section 3, she seems to have no voice at all. Her acts are not triggered by her own impulses or desires but by what the patriarchal authority orders her to do. We can see one example of that when Polonius and Leartes command Ophelia to stop seeing Hamlet. Ophelia agrees, and by doing so she is not only dismissed of her own free will but, in addition, she is treated like a child by her father, manifesting how women in patriarchal society are unable of thinking and acting on their own:

POLONIUS: Affection, pooh! You speak like a green girl
Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his tenders, as you call them?
OPHELIA: I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
POLONIUS: Marry, I'll teach you. Think yourself a baby
That you have ta'en his tenders for true pay

(1.3. 177-178)

Then, we can see how visibly Ophelia seems to be a puppet of patriarchy. Her only function in the play seems to be "the object of Hamlet's male desire" (Showalter, 1994: 220). Ophelia's existence is linked to Hamlet; as Lee Edwards states, "we can imagine Hamlet's story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet" (Edwards, 1979, cited in Showalter, 1994: 222). There are plenty of scholars who agree with such a statement: Ophelia by herself has no story, she is just a passive character who seems to have no value at all. As Sandra K. Fischer claims, "she constitutes the 'other' in *Hamlet*" (Fischer, 1990: 1), that is, in Catherine Belsey (1985) words, the "vis-à-vis" of Hamlet. It seems that many other feminist critics agree with them. Annie Leclerc objects that "woman is valuable in so far as she permits man to fulfil his being as man" (Leclerc, 1980, cited in Fischer, 1) and "John Holloway assesses the function of Ophelia as reinforcing the centrality of Hamlet" (Fischer: 1).

In the next fragment of the play we see how Ophelia is left voiceless by Hamlet. Her submissiveness leaves her with 'nothing' to think:

HAMLET: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
OPHELIA: No, my lord.
HAMLET: I mean, my head upon your lap.
OPHELIA: Ay, my lord.
HAMLET: Do you think I meant country matters?
OPHELIA: I think nothing, my lord.

(3.2 254)

We can see here that Ophelia's true will is covered by the orders and demands of male authoritativeness. Hamlet treats her as a mere child with no right to decide, or as a mere sexual object. Following the "cultural links between femininity, female sexuality, [and] insanity"

(Showalter: 221) we end up thinking that Ophelia's madness is a product of this social and sexual oppression that women suffered in a patriarchal society. In fact, "Ophelia might confirm the impossibility of representing the feminine in patriarchal discourse as other than madness, incoherence, fluidity, or silence" (Showalter: 222). It is at this point that we begin to see the use of what we now call "Gothic" features, and which are used to represent patriarchal oppression.

The most visible Gothic feature is the victimization of the female. Ophelia, following the pattern of the persecuted maiden that I have already described in section 2, is a respectable woman victim of an over-demanding male, in this case Hamlet. She is silent and sympathetic to Hamlet, unconscious that he annihilates her at the same time that turns her crazy. In a play like *Hamlet*, where madness has a crucial role, it is curious to compare how Ophelia's madness can be read as a foil for Hamlet's insanity. Her madness is seen as something directly related to womanhood, the well known melancholy that was attributed as part of womanish feelings. "Ophelia represents the strong emotions that the Elizabethans [...] thought womanish and unmanly" (Showalter: 222). In act 4.7, when Laertes cries when mourning her sister, he says of his tears that "when these are gone, / The woman will be out" (Shakespeare, 2008: 320), meaning that "the feminine and shameful part of his nature will be purged" (Showalter: 222). This denial of female forms of feeling and behaviour affects also Hamlet, who is himself disgusted by the passivity of his acts, that resemble a womanish way of acting. In spite of his 'feminine' way of acting, or rather, of not acting at all, for Hamlet, madness is still something "metaphysical, linked with culture, [however] for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature" (Showalter: 224). Hamlet's madness, then, is "associated with intellectual and imaginative genius" (Showalter: 225), while Ophelia's insanity is presented, by contrast, as a mere product of her gender.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia's "madness enables her to assert her being: she is no longer enforced to keep silent" (Charney, 1977, cited in Fischer, 1990: 7). Thus, it seems that through madness, Shakespeare finally gives a voice to the unvoiced and silent Ophelia. She could not be heard by men

in the ordinary way, so she had to find her own way to be heard, and she found it through madness. In this way, madness is seen as a tool to speak up, and to speak in the face of a dysfunctional patriarchal world. Because of this, Ophelia's madness is seen "as protest and rebellion" (Showalter: 237). As Showalter states, "for many feminist theorists, the madwoman is a heroine, a powerful figure who rebels against the family and the social order; and the hysteric who refuses to speak the language of the patriarchal order" (Showalter: 237). It is in this vision of the heroine, then, that we can find a resemblance between Ophelia and those female protagonists of the new Gothic fiction, such as the young female protagonist of *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Women were forced to speak from the outside of the patriarchal society, and their way to do so was using the language of madness, because they were the victims of a world which did not give them another option. In *Hamlet*, though, it seems that even with a new voice, Ophelia is not heard, and the only escape from this world is suicide: the fact that she kills herself shows that in this male dominant society, there is little place for women.

3.2. Gertrude

Gertrude stands in strong contrast to Ophelia. Just as Ophelia was a reminder of patriarchal supremacy, Gertrude stands as a symbol for change. The prefigured patriarchal society is shifting due to the changes that modern times impose; in this new modern world the patriarchal system is challenged, and Gertrude is the one to challenge it with her sexual transgression. Contrary to Ophelia, Gertrude's transgression is directly challenged by Hamlet, pointing out that in modern times, female voices will be listened to. However, as we have seen in Ophelia, she needs something more than her voice to be heard. With Ophelia it was madness, and with Gertrude it is sexuality and sexual transgression the means by which she is heard. The importance of her transgression resides on the fact that she feminises Hamlet, showing to the world that the intrinsic characteristics of the female body, such as passivity, are not that intrinsic anymore, and that they can perfectly be extrapolated to a male body.

Before his father's death Hamlet had not developed his own masculine identity, and he needs the figure of his father to do so. Thus, when he loses his paternal figure, he instinctively searches for a new model to look up and flourish his masculinity, but his mother's sexual transgression will make impossible for him to see his new father as a paternal figure, also making impossible the use of the substitute father as a model of behaviour. This will bring an inner conflict to the male protagonist, who will have the "need to make his own identity in relationship to his conception of his father" (Adelman, 1994: 256), and this will eventually lead to his madness. As Janet Adelman claims, Gertrude's "failure to serve her son as the repository of his father's ideal image by mourning him appropriately is the symptom of her deeper failure to distinguish properly between his father and his father's brother" (Adelman: 257). The sexualization of the maternal body, then, leads to the lack of distinction between the two fathers that turns Hamlet into "the only repository of his father's image" (Adelman: 257) and "problematizes the son's paternal identification" (Adelman: 258). We can see this crisis of differentiation in the following passage from the play, where Hamlet forces her mother to acknowledge the difference between the two fathers:

GERTRUDE: Hamlet. thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET: Mother, you have my father much offended.

(3.4 277)

According to Karin S. Coddon (1994), madness is the opposite of self-government. In other words, a person who loses the capacity of ruling him/herself, becomes insane. In the play, this is what happens to Hamlet. For Janet Adelman, the loss of the idealized father and the mother remarriage is a "threat of maternal sexuality" (Adelman: 261) that subjects the son to the annihilating power of the mother. Hamlet manifests his disgust with this contamination of the maternal body in the third act:

HAMLET: Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty—

(3.4 281)

When Hamlet is at the mercy of his mother's power, he loses any capacity of self-government, which, as I have already mentioned, is the source of his madness. On the other hand, Adelman also argues that if we reverse the premise that the father's death leads to the sexualization of the maternal body, we obtain that "the mother's sexualized body leads to the father's death" (Adelman: 261). Therefore, the mother's sexualized body brings death into the son's idealized world, and her sexualization not only becomes a source of madness but also a source of evil.

4. Conclusion

Although the thematic features shared between Shakespeare and the Gothic novel are many, in this paper I have focused on a specific feature of the Gothic that really called my attention and interested me. This specific feature is the representation of the female heroine. During the Victorian era, dramatic social and economic changes such as the industrialization and a renewed conservatism caused major changes in cultural life. One of these changes was the challenging of the patriarchal system. In literature, the female heroine appeared as a symbol and a symptom of that change. Two opposed kinds of female protagonists emerged in many novels, the victimized female and the *Femme Fatale*. The former stood as a representation of the past, of the oppressed woman who, as a victim of patriarchy, lives in melancholy and ends up by killing herself. The latter stood as a representation of a society that was still emerging, a woman who frees herself from the chains of patriarchy through her sexual liberation, although her ending is sometimes also tragic. This tragic ending often acted as a reminder that the shift towards modernity was not completed, but was still in its way.

Thus, in this paper, I have selected three main characteristics used in Gothic fiction to represent the rupture from patriarchy, and that we can also find in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. These three characteristics are the female heroine, the fossilization and the aesthetics of the corpse, and the

family romance understood as the source of evil and madness. Throughout this paper I have focused on these three specific features when examining *Hamlet*. I have attempted to demonstrate how Shakespeare clearly shares those features of the Gothic, used to challenge the patriarchal system. Through the analysis of Ophelia and Gertrude, the two kinds of feminine heroine present in *Hamlet*, I have tried to prove that Shakespeare's feminine protagonists prefigure (at least to a certain extent) the Gothic female heroines that stand against patriarchy.

To conclude, both Elizabethan and Victorian times were periods where many social changes took place. Such changes were reflected on the literary production of both eras, creating a literature that reflected the problems and incoherences of both societies. One of these problems, patriarchy, has been the main object of study in this paper, in which I have tried to prove that the complaint against male supremacy voiced through female heroines is not a phenomenon that began in the eighteenth century with the Gothic, but in the Elizabethan era, when Shakespeare depicted the problems and anxieties of his society in his plays.

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