



FROM SUFFRAGETTE TO DIVERSITY OF VOICES IN FEMINIST DRAMA: PAM GEMS'S *DUSA*, *FISH*, *STAS AND VI*¹

FEMİNİST TİYATRODA SÜFRAJETTEN ÇOK SESLİLİĞE: PAM GEMS'İN "DUSA", "FISH", "STAS AND VI" BAŞLIKLİ TİYATRO ESERİ

Özden DERE

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Abstract

Feminist drama, as a suitable genre for the discussion of debates over different views within the feminist movement itself, developed in parallel with women's movement. It is possible to find the examples of first-wave drama in England in the plays on women written for the groups of suffragette theatre such as the Actress's Franchise League supported by the suffragette movement that was mainly an effort of women to gain the right to vote. These plays were written and performed to raise awareness. After the development of suffragette drama, the abolition of censorship in Britain by the Act of Parliament in 1968 may be regarded as a landmark and as the second step in terms of the development of feminist drama in England because it gave the feminist playwrights of the time the opportunity to deal with subjects that were formerly regarded as taboo. Hence, as opposed to the first-wave; that is, suffragette drama, the second-wave post-war feminist drama was characterised by representing women's issues in a larger scale. Almost all woman playwrights with different attitudes were able to reflect their concerns over women's problems on stage and most of them received consistent support from smaller, alternative theatres, and women's companies. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore and exemplify the multiplicity or diversity of voices in post-war British feminist drama through a detailed analysis of Pam Gems's *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas and Vi* (1976).

Öz

Feminist hareketin kendi içerisinde farklı görüşlere ilişkin tartışmaları ele almak için uygun bir tür olan feminist drama kadın hareketine paralel bir şekilde gelişmiştir. Britanya'da birinci dalga drama örneklerine, esasen kadınların oy kullanma hakkı kazanmasına yönelik bir çaba olan Süfrajete (Suffragette) hareket tarafından desteklenen Actress's Franchise League gibi Süfrajete tiyatro grupları için yazılan kadınlar ile ilgili oyunlarda rastlanmaktadır. Bu oyunlar farkındalık yaratmak için yazılmış oyunlardır. Süfrajete tiyatrosunun gelişiminden sonra, Britanya'da 1968 Parlamento Kararı ile sansürün kaldırılması İngiltere'de feminist tiyatrosunun gelişimi açısından hem bir dönüm noktası hem de ikinci adım olarak değerlendirilebilir; zira bu karar feminist oyun yazarlarına önceleri yasak kabul edilen birçok konuyu ele alma olanağı sağlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, birinci dalga, diğer bir deyişle, Süfrajete tiyatrosunun aksine, savaş sonrası ikinci dalga feminist tiyatro kadın sorunlarını daha geniş bir ölçekte ele alma özelliği taşımaktadır. Bu dönemde, farklı yaklaşımlar benimseyen kadın oyun yazarlarının neredeyse tümü kadın sorunları ile ilgili kaygılarını sahnede ifade etme olanağı bulmuş ve bu yazarların çoğu daha küçük ölçekli alternatif tiyatrolar ve kadın birliklerince desteklenmiştir. Bu bilgiler ışığında, bu çalışmanın amacı, savaş sonrası İngiliz feminist tiyatrosunda görülen çok sesliliği veya çeşitliliği Pam Gems'in *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas and Vi* (1976) başlıklı oyunu üzerinde ayrıntılı bir inceleme yapmak suretiyle incelemek ve örneklendirmektir.

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Feminist drama, as a suitable genre for the discussion of debates over different views within the feminist movement itself, developed in parallel with women's movement. The genre was suitable because it could reflect conflicts more directly and comprehensively through dialogue. It could also reach masses and this would allow consciousness-raising activities to be more effective as well. It is possible to find the examples of first-wave drama in England in the plays on women written for

¹ This study is based on my master thesis titled "Feminist Voices in Post-War British Drama: Pam Gems's *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas and Vi* and *Loving Women*, Caryl Churchill's *Vinegar Tom and Top Girls*, and Sarah Daniels's *Ripen Our Darkness* and *Beside Herself*."

the groups of suffragette theatre such as the Actress's Franchise League supported by the suffragette movement that was mainly an effort of women to gain the right to vote. These plays were written and performed to raise awareness. Katharine Cockin recounts the development of suffrage drama in her *Women's Suffrage Drama* as follows:

Many women, including actresses active in the women's suffrage movement in Britain, wrote plays and sketches as an integral part of their political campaigns, especially between 1908 and 1914. They did not necessarily regard themselves as writers, but moved to write for the first time because the vote promised to change women's lives in ways that went far beyond their participation in party politics. Enfranchisement, they believed, would represent a fundamental transformation of women's lives. It is this conviction which inspired specifically feminist interventions in the arts and the theatre, as distinct from the more generalized lobbying for democratic change. (128).

Many women writers who wrote plays in this period believed that enfranchisement would provide women with more than their participation in politics and these writers' aim "*was a conscious attempt to construct an 'authentic' woman's drama*" (Stowell 1). Both Elizabeth Robin's *Votes for Women* (1907), and Cicely Hamilton's *Diana of Dobson's* (1908), which deals with the same themes as her essay *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), may be regarded as examples of drama supported by the suffragette movement. Elizabeth Robins, who was an actress, playwright, novelist and suffragist, recounts her conversion to the suffrage movement in her *The Feministe Movement in England* as follows:

I AM one of those who, until comparatively recently, was an ignorant opponent of Woman Suffrage (...) I was not alone in my error. It turns out that not only have men a great deal still to learn about women, but that women have a great deal to learn about themselves. I have been prosecuting my education in this direction almost daily since a certain memorable afternoon in Trafalgar Square when I first heard women talking politics in public. I went out of shamefaced curiosity, my head full of masculine criticism as to woman's limitations, her well-known inability to stick to the point, her poverty in logic and in humour, and the impossibility, in any case, of her coping with the mob (...) I had found in my own heart hitherto no firm assurance that these charges were not anchored in fact. But on that Sunday

afternoon, in front of Nelson's Monument, a new chapter was begun for me in the lesson of faith in the capacities of women. (n.p.).

Her play *Votes for Women* includes a recreation of the above-mentioned Trafalgar Square suffrage rally and she writes about the aspects of sex antagonism which had led to women's resentment about being disenfranchised (Kelly 109). Cicely Hamilton, who was an actress, suffragist, writer, and journalist, wrote for suffrage as well. For Hamilton writing and political activity were interconnected and inseparable. The transition from street demonstrations and the visual arts to drama was straightforward and the movement from one to the other would demonstrate the diversity of women's talents and would pave the way for women to the role of intellect (Cockin 129). Cicely Hamilton in her *Marriage as a Trade* argues that "woman, as we know her to-day, is largely a manufactured product" and she has been allowed a single reputable "trade marriage" (Hamilton 202). As a consequence, education available for a woman is intended to teach her obtaining a husband. Her *Diana of Dobson's* also deals with "these same trade aspects of marriage" (Stowell 3).

After the development of suffrage drama, the abolition of censorship in Britain by the Act of Parliament in 1968 may be regarded as a landmark and as the second step in terms of the development of feminist drama in Britain because it gave the feminist playwrights of the time the opportunity to deal with subjects that were formerly regarded as taboo. Colin Chambers and Prior, in his *Playwrights' Progress*, describes the influences of this significant action in the following words:

Around 1968 a moral and political curtain dropped in the theatre, with the alternative movement on one side, feeding off its own energies and motivated by a common ideology of being separate from and rejecting all that lay on the other side... It was now the era of instant theatre, on any issue, created by anyone, in any style, performed anywhere. A radical, flamboyant, egalitarian edge to the work permeated the whole process: workshops and collectives replaced traditionally atomized ways of working; old hierarchies and divisions were broken down. Censorship in the shape of Lord Chamberlain's office was abolished in 1968 and no subject was taboo. (17).

The period after 1968 was a prolific era in which any playwright could reflect any subject in any style. It was the time of alternative theatres that advocated equal rights. These alternative groups led to the emergence of women playwrights such as

Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, Sarah Daniels, along with others who continued to write in that period such as David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths and David Hare and regional theatres became stronger. In this respect, it may be said that the stage gradually turned out to be a political arena through which any play could reflect its own ideal independently. This prolific period also allowed women writers to deal especially with women's problems in a patriarchal society and even with taboo topics such as pornography and child abuse in their own style. Within this context, almost all women dramatists were able to reflect their different attitudes towards women's problems on stage and most of them received consistent support from smaller, alternative theatres, and women's companies.

Actually, the development of feminist theatre in Britain in the late 1960s was based on three factors: women's movement, leftist movement resulting from the political and the social upheavals of the period and the rise of the fringe theatre. This was a turbulent period (1968-1969) in Europe, in Britain, as well as in the United States where there was abundance in academic conferences, university conferences and street protests voicing problems concerning cultural and sexual politics. The rise of the feminist movement in this period paved the way for the first gender-based political demonstrations since the suffragette movement. For instance, demonstrations against Miss World and Miss America Contests were staged between 1969 and 1971 and these demonstrations included a critique of long-accepted stereotypes of women as sex objects by rejecting such forms of representation (Wandor 37). Women participating in these demonstrations discovered the effectiveness of giving their messages by means of public performance on the grounds that it reached more people than the methods such as isolated group discussions or newspaper distribution which they had previously used. In this sense, such demonstrations may be regarded as the first step to a transition from early female consciousness-raising to professional feminist theatre. The next step in this progress may be considered to be the development of the 'fringe' theatre. The emergence of fringe theatre companies gave separate groups dealing with women's issues an opportunity to reflect their concerns. For instance, fringe companies such as Red Ladder, Portable Theatre, The Pip Simmons Group, and The Warehouse Company were influential in terms of the development of The Women's Street Theatre Group and Monstrous Regiment. In Britain, playwrights including Sarah Daniels, Ann Jellicoe, Jane Arden, Doris Lessing and a second generation of feminist playwrights such as Caryl Churchill, Pam Gems, and Louise Page worked with these groups (Goodman and De Gay25).

Thus, the major concern of this study will be to exemplify and examine the diversity of feminist voices and approaches in post-war feminist drama in Britain, which has come a long way since the leading demonstrations of suffragette theatre, through an in-depth analysis of Pam Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*. This study, however, is not an attempt to examine the work of the playwright under discussion and to make a judgment on her world view basing her work on a political label; but to point out the comprehensive nature of post-war feminist drama through showing which feminist voices operate in her play. The primary purpose of this study is therefore to explore in which ways Pam Gems explains the role of women in the society and her solutions to women's problems in her *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*, in other words, to find out which feminist voices are to be seen in the play rather than labelling the play and limiting it to simply one standpoint.

Working Definitions of Major Feminist Strands to Be Discussed in The Study

The second-wave feminist movement begins with the publishing of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and it ends in late 1990s. This period witnessed an enormous increase in the feminist writings and debates since miscellaneous voices began to integrate their own ideals with feminism and each of them evaluated feminist movement in a different way. As Mark Fortier states in his *Theory/Theatre: An Introduction*: "The point is often made that, just as there is no universal woman but only women, there is not one feminism but feminisms" (71). Among these different feminist viewpoints, there are three major voices: the liberal, the socialist and the radical.

Gayle Austin, in her *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*, defines these three viewpoints referring to several theorists such as Sue-Ellen Case and Jill Dolan. Austin, in her book, gives Dolan's description of liberal feminism that: "liberal feminism developed from liberal humanism, stressing women's parity with men, based on universal values" and provides a summary of the qualities of liberal viewpoint as follows: first of all, it minimizes differences between men and women, secondly, it works for success within the system and demands not revolution but reform, and finally argues that the individual is more important than the group (5). In *Materialist Feminisms* written in collaboration by Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, liberal feminism is described similarly as: "a branch describing the view that women's oppression will end once women have achieved legal equality and equal opportunity with men through their own efforts" (2). Based on these descriptions, it may be said that liberal feminism primarily focuses on the

individual freedom. According to the liberal viewpoint, a woman should have awareness about her potential and try hard to cope with the problems she has in the patriarchal society.

Socialist feminism, on the other hand, combines Marxist theory with feminism. It includes elements both from the class analysis developed by Karl Marx and from feminism. Austin, in her *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*, refers to Jill Dolan's description of socialist feminism, which Dolan calls materialist feminism, as "deconstructing the mythic subject Woman to look at women as a class oppressed by material conditions and social relations" (5). She also summarizes the socialist viewpoint as a theory minimizing the biological differences between men and women, stressing material conditions of production such as class and gender and attaching significance to group rather than the individual (6). Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean define socialist feminism as a branch which claims that "unless the economic inequalities and class oppressions of capitalist society are specifically addressed, even radical feminist alternatives will end up repeating them" (2). In socialist feminism, men are challenged due to both their class power and their gender power in that the male in patriarchal societies is regarded as superior to the female. Therefore, it may be claimed that the purpose of socialist feminism is to examine the interaction between power relations based on both class and gender. Socialist feminism includes a demand for change not only in the position of women in terms of gender biases but also in the basic structure of society in terms of class, production and political relations. Thus, like radical feminism, socialist feminism may be regarded as revolutionary.

In *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*, Austin refers to radical feminism, to what Jill Dolan describes as the form that "bases its analysis in a reification of sexual difference based on absolute gender categories" (5). For Austin, radical feminism stresses the superiority of female attributes and difference between male and female modes, it favours separate female systems and the significance of individualism. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, in their collaborative work, *Materialist Feminisms*, describe radical feminism as an approach "arguing that the key to women's oppression is men's power over women, a power so embedded in all existing social structures that it cannot be overcome without a general transformation of the society" (2). Within this context, it would not be wrong to suggest that radical feminism claims that the root of women's oppression is men's power over women and this oppression predates capitalism, therefore, it is the most basic kind of

oppression in society. Secondly, men's power over women is so firmly set in all social structures that it cannot be overcome unless society has undergone a general transformation. Thus, radical feminists think that the root cause of women's oppression is not legal systems as the liberal feminists claim or class conflict as the socialist feminists claim but patriarchal gender relations. For this reason, radical feminists believe that the way to deal with patriarchy and oppression of all kinds is to attack the underlying causes of these problems and address the fundamental components of society that support them such as social systems and institutions which are used as means to maintain male power.

Feminist Voices in Pam Gems's *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*

Even though Pam Gems is involved in the development of feminist theatre, particularly with her plays produced by the Almost Free Theatre and Women's Theatre Company, she distances herself from feminism, stating that the term implies polemic, and polemic is closely related to changing things in a direct political way. For her, "*Drama is subversive*" (qtd in Goodman and De Gay 15). It encompasses a process of changing things not in a direct but in an indirect and obscure way. In an article about political drama titled "Not in Their Name", which Gems wrote for *The Guardian*, she describes the function of drama:

The irony is all theatre is political in a profound way. Why? Because it is subversive. It can, without resort to the vote or the gun, alter climate, change opinion, laugh prejudice out the door, soften hearts, awaken perception. Of course it can because human learns not by precept (the exhortations of so much political theatre) but by imprinting. Yell at a child to be quiet and you are teaching him to yell. (n.p.).

In the same article, she also states that "*Drama is not, as we are often reminded, in the business of offering solutions. Drama influences. Not frontally, but subtly, through the stratagems of entertainment, through popular engagement*" (n.p.). Within this context, the function of drama is not to impose doctrines on the audience but to influence the audience's mind and to open up their perception by means of entertainment. For this reason, Gems distinguishes her plays from extremely political plays of recent drama which she considers to include precepts, exhortations and a direct criticism of men. The gender-based nature of her subject matter is probably the result of the fact that she thinks there is a need to give women voice and presence on the male-dominated stage. She says: "*We have our*

own history to create, to write" (Innes 237). She therefore presents women's problems on stage without ever implying hostility between the sexes. In the afterword she wrote for *Dusa, Fish Stas and Vi*, she says:

The antagonism between the sexes has been painful, an indictment of our age. It is true that many women have been drawn, properly, to the Women's Movement after abuse by bad husbands, fathers (...) they have had hopes pushed aside, seeing brothers favoured from infancy. It makes for grievances, fear and resentment. But, as often, one sees men hopelessly damaged by the women (...) their mothers. We cannot separate ourselves. (Gems, *Plays* 71).

To her, it is true that many women have been abused by their husbands or their fathers, and for this reason they began to be interested in Women's Movement. However, it is not only women who are abused; men are also damaged by women; for example, by their mothers or by their wives. Men suffer as much as women in the patriarchal system. Hence, men as well as women are both victims of the patriarchal system. In her essay "Imagination and Gender", she touches upon the same subject saying that: "*There will always be the chauvinists among us, of both sexes (...) but, if we believe that there is only Us, then something is released, something egalitarian*" (150). For Gems, the way and means are therefore to find a solution that would meet the needs of both sides, and to believe that there is only 'Us' rather than 'you' and 'me.' This is the only way to advocate equal rights for everyone, for both women and men.

Gems begins her writing career on the fringe with smaller theatre groups. In fact, her writing career may be divided into three periods. The first period covers some pieces for radio and television in the 1950s and the 1960s before her direct contact with Almost Free Theatre and Women's Theatre Company. It is only in the second period of her career that she primarily gains recognition. After she has moved to London, she writes *My Warren* (1973) and *After Birthday* (1973), for Almost Free Theatre and Women's Theatre Company and some productions by Women's Company such as *Go West Young Women* (1976) and *My Name is Rosa Luxemburg* (1976). The third period, in which she reaches The West End, starts with her play *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* (1976) and includes plays such as *Queen Christina* (1977), *Piaf* (1978), *Loving Women* (1984), and adaptations such as *Uncle Vanya* (1978), *Camille* (1984), and *The Seagull* (1991), most of which have been performed by the most prestigious theatres of England such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Other Place, and the Royal Court.

Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi (1976) is one of Gems's well-known plays that has attracted the attention of critics. Written in the third period of her writing career, the play was originally titled *Dead Fish* and it was written for the Women's Company. After the premier at Edinburgh Festival, it was transferred to commercial stages, reaching the Hampstead Theatre in 1976, and was titled *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi*. The play consists of two acts; a series of scenes that deal with the different problems of four women. Gems, in her play, dramatizes the story of four different women in their twenties and she creates a connection between their different problems by putting them in one flat which belongs to Fish. The common ground for these women is their struggle to survive in a male-dominated society. All of these women, three of whom can be regarded as minor characters, are shown as trying to make progress in gaining their own identities and with the story of each character a different feminist issue is revealed from a different perspective. Through Fish's story, Gems both examines the conflict between patriarchal politics and sexuality in private life and she underlines the difficulty women have in reconciling personal life with political life. She deals with maternity through Dusa, prostitution through Stas, and the male gaze through Vi. In that sense, it may be claimed that the play presents a blend of various feminist voices.

The radical voice reveals itself in the patriarchal ideology that dominates, in a sense, haunts the lives of almost all female characters in the play. Even though no male character appears on stage, they keep controlling and dominating female characters and they may even determine their survival and death. In Fish's case, patriarchal ideology functions as a motif that drives Fish to an in-between state. Fish is split between patriarchal politics; that is, between sexual politics, and her personal sexual life. She has

[A]ll the natural authority and self-confidence of the upper-middle classes. She is from a background of intellectuals... Having considered the inadvertency of her privilege and the mores of middle-class values; she has attached herself to a political group on the left, and is seeking to find a supportable adventurous and equitable way of life with her long-standing lover. (*Dusa* 47)²

Fish can be regarded as ostensibly the strongest character in the play as she helps others. She keeps reinforcing others' belief in and hope for future. Nevertheless, she cannot help herself even though she is the one who encourages others to survive.

² Hereinafter all references to this play will be given as *Dusa*.

Since she is not satisfied with the middle-class values, she joins a left-wing political group and her major purpose is to establish an equitable relationship with her long-standing lover Alan that would “break the moulds,” meaning that it would change the traditional sexual roles completely in the relationship, by doing something that has not been done before (*Dusa* 69). This way, Fish creates an ideal relationship in her mind that would provide both sexes with an equitable and fair way of life. Her gradual decay resulting from her inability to accept the fact that her long-standing lover does not want to struggle for such a relationship that would deprive him of the advantages he has as a man and the fact that he leaves her for another woman leads her to suicide.

At the beginning of the play, Fish is seen on stage for the first time, talking to Dusa. It is revealed that Fish has got married to someone and they have stayed for a while in his brother’s farm where he lives. However, Fish is not satisfied with this marriage.

I picked up the carving knife (...) he was sitting at the table on one of those mod stools (...) you know, tipping backwards and forwards. I went to cross behind him and I had this terrible feel wanted to stick it in his back (...) that it was the correct thing to do. (*Dusa* 52).

She does not love her partner; on the contrary, she is so full of hatred that she wants to grab him and stick the knife in his back. Then, she accepts that the relationship has been a mistake: “Oh, you’re right, I should never have done it. It was only to spite Alan” (*Dusa* 52). Fish’s words indicate that she is still under the influence of her relationship with the man called Alan, in the past. After that, Fish says that her old lover, Alan, has been going out with another woman. She says: “*All of a sudden he wants a house and garden. We should have had a child (...) I should have done it last autumn, we both wanted it then*” (*Dusa* 52). It is understood that their relationship has come to an end because Alan wants her to be an ordinary woman who conforms to the sexual roles determined by the patriarchal society. Then, she adds: “*I should have done it. The only reason I didn’t is because he wanted it to shut me up*” (*Dusa* 52). It is obvious that Fish also wants to marry Alan but she does not marry him because she thinks that he wants marriage to restrict her life into domestic servitude. Being a feminist, she does not want to dedicate her life to Alan or sacrifice it for him as many women conforming to the culturally and socially determined roles of patriarchy do. She rather wants to have a relationship which will go beyond the patriarchal norms providing her with the

right to use her free will and with equal opportunities with the opposite sex. Fish tries to suppress her disappointment by having another marriage. However, her confession about the fact that she has this relationship only to make her ex-lover disturbed reveals that she is still interested in him. All through the play, she maintains the same manner, hiding her disappointment and trying to seem strong. In spite of all her efforts, she cannot overcome her sense of loneliness in maintaining her struggle for establishing the ideal relationship she has created in her mind and her psychological situation becomes gradually worse in the course of the play.

Unwilling to accept that her lover has left her for a woman who is psychologically dependent on him, Fish progressively becomes more upset. Even though she tries to conceal her feelings, she cannot hide the fact that she hopes to renew their relationship and she constantly expresses her regret for her reluctance to have a baby. As she asserts, *“I’m prepared to change myself! Anything he wants! I’ll swing from the chandeliers (...) I have done! (...) You know she threatened to kill herself?”* realizing that she cannot fulfil her personal needs, such as having a child from the man she loves without conforming to the traditional sexual roles, Fish is now ready for the change Alan wants her to make, in other words, for the change to become acceptable as a woman in the patriarchal society (Dusa 60). Next time, Fish appears on stage *“wearing a dress, jacket, and makeup”* (Dusa 61) in a manner which is exactly the opposite of her appearance in the previous parts of the play. Realizing that Alan has chosen a woman who is more inclined to undertake the conventional socially-constructed sexual role of a woman, Fish wears more feminine clothes probably to show Alan that she is ready for the change he wants. However, her makeup is “crooked” reflecting the fact that she is unable to conform to the socially constructed idea about what women should do.

In Fish’s speech during which she directly addresses the audience when she appears on stage the second time, the major problem of Fish and the major theme of the play are reflected through an analogy drawn between Fish and Rosa Luxemburg:

So why is Rosa Luxemburg relevant? She fought for socialism, but that was sixty years ago. Why is she important? (...) She is relevant because amongst other things she fought Lenin on the notion of necessity for a central part of intellectuals to run a revolution (...) The nature of the social and political contribution of women is, at this moment, wholly in question. (Dusa 55).

Rosa Luxemburg is a German pacifist and a revolutionary leader. She is a political figure who fought for socialism. In the above-given quotation, it is revealed that she was appalled by socialism because she thought that any mistake made by people who do things for themselves, that is to say, by the working-class people, were more valuable than any theory coming from an elitist committee. She called for peace during World War I and was killed by the reactionary forces. Rosa Luxemburg paid the prize for women's participation in politics and she lost her life for it. Fish says that this event took place sixty years ago but women still have similar problems. The contribution of women to politics is now in question and there is a wonder about the power of feminism. Fish asks what women should do.

Rosa constantly demonstrates that the emergence of women thinkers in politics modifies the Marxist theory as we know it. It is not enough to be told that we may join (...) that they will let us in (...) When they need our labour force. To be outside may be oppression. To be inside may well be total irrelevancy. It's not just a matter of equal pay (...) equal opportunity. For the first time in history we have the opportunity to investigate ourselves (...) For the first time in history we are not bleeding to death (...) we are more than receptacle for genetics (*Dusa* 55).

Fish remarks that it is not enough to say that women can join politics. For them, participating in politics means to be regarded as individuals who can be more than child-bearers. Rosa's attempt was not only a matter of joining politics; Rosa was trying to know herself, to assert her identity, to discover her potential and finally to prove herself that she could do more than childbearing and domestic tasks. However, the society in which she lived did not allow her to achieve complete satisfaction in all aspects of her life. Fish continues:

Rosa never married Leo. She never had the child she longed for. The painful hopes in the letters from prison were never to be realized. She writes to him from Zurich about seeing a fine child in a park, and wanting to scoop him up in her arms and run off with him, back to her room. Usually when people write about her nowadays they leave all that out. (*Dusa* 55).

Luxemburg fought for socialism, she died for it, and however she never had the child she wanted. Due to socially and culturally determined sexual roles, she had to sacrifice her life to assert her identity and become a complete "self". Fish goes through the same dilemma as Luxemburg. She sets out an ideal relationship in her

mind which would give her the chance for self-knowledge. However, her lover Alan does not want to renounce the advantages bestowed on him by the male-centred society. He wants to shut her up; to limit her life to the roles determined by the patriarchal society; to become psychologically dependent on him. For this reason, he marries a woman who needs him, whom Fish describes as somebody willing to give Alan the life he longs for: “*She’s ‘dependent’. She needs him. So (...) forget the struggle, forget politics*” (Dusa 60). Things get worse when Stas reminds Fish of the fact that Alan’s wife may be pregnant, but Fish rejects the situation.

I trust him! Oh I know he’s said some nasty things (...) about being fed up with me (...) the pain (...) but that is not what it’s all about. We’re breaking the moulds together. Not easy. Alan? (...) it’s tiring (...) We have to break new ground. Together (...) We were tired! She must have seemed like a rest anyway, I ran off with. (Dusa 69).

Till the end, Fish maintains her belief and trust in Alan and in his commitment to the ideal relationship she has created in her mind. Only after Stas has reminded her of the fact that Alan’s wife may have a child, does she realise that she has lost him. In the end, she commits suicide, leaving a note for her friends:

Oh my loves (...) How could I have got it so wrong? I thought there was understanding. I thought we were getting somewhere. There is no love, and I can’t face the thought of fighting (...) forgive me. It’s hard. I wanted so much to sit under a tree with my children and there doesn’t seem to be a place for that any more, I feel cheated. (Dusa 70).

Her note shows that Fish has failed to survive in the patriarchal society. She has tried to keep the balance between her personal and her political life. She really wants to have a child and she really wants to transform herself into a woman that Alan and the patriarchal society would accept but it is too late since Alan has already left her for a woman who meets his expectations. The play ends with her question: “*My loves, what are we to do? We won’t do as they want any more, and they hate it. What are we to do?*” (Dusa 70). Fish’s question reminds the audience of one of the serious problems of women, the failure of family unit to balance sex and power relations. Fish could choose marriage but this time she would not have had a chance to assert her identity through political activism. She chooses her identity as a woman, working for a political cause, she chooses to live as an independent woman, but this time she loses her chance to marry. Feeling isolated and being unable to fulfil her emotional and personal needs due to her commitment to

establish an equitable relationship, Fish kills herself. Her commitment to establish an ideal relationship is damaged by her inability to keep her personal and political life in balance.

Violet is also oppressed by the patriarchal ideology. At the very beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to the fact that Violet, who can be regarded as the weakest and the most helpless of the four characters, is anorexic. “*She is one of the vast numbers of working-class adolescents who are bright, restless or maladjusted*” (Dusa 47). Her reluctance to eat exacerbates her health problems and other three women are obliged to take her to hospital in the last scene of the first act. Gems touches upon a common problem of contemporary women, anorexia, through Violet’s reluctance to eat. There are many causes for anorexia and the researches on this illness commonly focus on explaining the existing factors, including biological, social and psychological. According to these studies, there have been various reasons of anorexia in different periods. The belief that the body is a prison confining the spirit and the will and it should be controlled dates back to classical times. The same idea is transformed into an act of self-starvation by women for religious reasons in the Middle Ages (Wykes and Gunter 2).

In addition to these studies, there have been many feminist attempts to explain anorexia in terms of the “male gaze”. According to these theories, male gaze expresses a power relationship. For instance, Morag MacSween, in *Anorexic Bodies*, provides an overview of the feminist explanations of anorexia and she refers to Kim Chernin’s *Obsession: The Tyranny of Slenderness*. MacSween says that Chernin looks at the negative effects of the male gaze on women and cultural pressures on them to achieve and maintain a single socially-approved body shape (54). In *The Hungry Self: Women, Eating and Identity*, Chernin argues that anorexia should be regarded as a struggle for self-development and it is directly related to women’s identity. She states that anorexia is a consequence of the fear and guilt which women feel when they move into male sphere of self-development and power. The result of these fear and guilt is the transformation of this desire for change and self-development into isolation and eating disorders (MacSween 56). In contemporary society, contribution of the perceived media pressure on women to be thin has been considered to be particularly important (Wykes and Gunter 15). The media in contemporary society, including the film industry and advertisements promote thinness as the ideal female form. In *The Media and Body Image* by Wykes and Gunter, it is suggested: “The female form is traditionally conceived as soft and

rounded while the masculine form, in contrast, is taut and lean” (5). It is also claimed that:

For over 30 years in Western societies, however, young females have reported more positive attitudes towards a small body size and thin physique with the exception that a well-developed bust is often preferred (...) A thin body shape is associated with success personally, professionally and socially. (7).

For this reason, most women in contemporary patriarchal society have to pay great attention to their appearance because women are appraised in accordance with their appearance and physical attractiveness rather than their personality. With regards to the media, film industry and advertisements which should appeal to the viewer’s expectations; however, the viewer is put into the position of a heterosexual man. The images of women in film industry and advertisements are therefore presented in such a way as to appeal to the gaze of the heterosexual man and to measure up to the image of women existent in his mind. For instance, in a scene there may be a panning on the curves of a woman’s body or there may be an allusion to the beauty of female body to make a product more attractive in an advertisement. Considering all these factors, feminist theory suggests that women are reduced to objects, particularly to sexual objects by the media. Under the influence of these films, of such advertisements and programs promoting thinness as the ideal female form, most contemporary women try to conform to this ideal image that appeals to the gaze of heterosexual men. Violet’s unwillingness to eat and rejection of her own body may be said to result from her wish to appeal to the male-gaze and to conform to the ideal female shape represented in the media. Her isolation, in that sense, represents the discomfort that male gaze creates in many women. Violet endangers her health because of the distress which is caused by the male-gaze and the patriarchal oppression operating in the form of male-gaze. On the other hand, in the second act, she is depicted as healthier and stronger. With the help of the other three women, she begins to feel better and by the end of the play, she starts going out and even finds a job. She manages to overcome her illness and distress, by the help of other women’s support and her own efforts. Thus, along with the radical voice revealing itself in the patriarchal oppression through the male-gaze, her story may also be claimed to reflect liberal voice in that it emphasizes the power of human potential that forms the basis of liberal feminism.

Another character who suffers from patriarchal ideology is Stas. She works as a physiotherapist in a hospital during the day and as a prostitute at night for the purpose of becoming a marine biologist. She leads a miserable life so as to achieve her goal. *“Her metamorphosis from physiotherapist to hostess is startling. Before our eyes, she transforms herself from an unremarkable female employee to a glittering, heavy-headed, mesmeric-eyed Klimpt painting”* (Dusa 47). In Stas’s story, Gems deals with the nature of prostitution which is one of the major concerns of feminism and feminist theory. Catharine E. MacKinnon, in her *Sexuality*, states that sexuality is a pervasive force existent in whole social life. It is a dimension through which gender is pervasively constituted. She continues:

So many distinctive features of women’s status as second class – the restriction and constraint and contortion, the servility and the display, the self-mutilation and requisite presentation of self as a beautiful thing, the enforced passivity, the humiliation – are made into the content of sex for women. Being a thing for sexual use is fundamental to it. (qtd. in Kolmar and Bartkowski 477).

Woman’s submissiveness, her need to present herself as a beautiful object, her subservience and display are all qualities that are attributed to femininity and being a sexual object forms the basis for all these attributes. In *American Feminism: A Contemporary History* by Ginette Castro, Atkinson’s argument about prostitution is given to exemplify the feminist ideas about prostitution. For Atkinson, prostitution has always been presented by men as the only alternative to the feminine role, in other words, women have been subjected to a conflict between respectability in a life confined to their home and humiliation and submissiveness in a life of independence and violence. Women should pay with their bodies and souls for autonomy and economic success (82). In the play, even though the patriarchal oppression forcing Stas to prostitute herself signifies a radical voice, her attempts to achieve her goal through prostitution may be claimed to be a part of the liberal voice in the play as well. She gradually makes progress and in the end she manages to save enough money necessary for her to go to Hawaii in order to study marine biology. Her determination to save money for her education and her ability to reverse a disadvantage to her favour may be regarded as an evidence of liberal stance in the play.

Dusa is *“split, displaying the angst and the particular vulnerability of the breeding bitch; also the restless boredom”* (Dusa 47). She has very little money. Even though she is divorced from her husband, he remains a major factor in her life.

Dusa may be regarded as the reflection of maternal instincts in the play. She is informed that her husband has kidnapped her children. Her children mean everything to her. She reflects the unconditional love she feels for them:

You love them too much. It's unbearable. From the moment they're born. The way they look – they're beautiful... oh never mind if they are good-looking or not. Your bowels are never still. They are late. Was it a lorry (...) a man in a mac? (...) Hostages to fortune for the rest of your bloody life, I mean they can let go when they're ready. You can't. (*Dusa* 64).

In a way, she describes what is to be a mother, emphasizing that maternal instincts lead women to put their children first and to do their best to protect them. Likewise, Dusa tries hard to take her children back from her husband. From time to time she loses her hope. For instance hearing that her children are in Argentina, she tries to jump from the window, having lost her hope and courage to live. She feels paralyzed because she has no money to hire a lawyer: *“What the fuck can I do! I haven't got any money! How can I find the bugger when I haven't got any money! They won't even look at you, I've had all this already with the lawyers”* (*Dusa* 54). Seeing that Dusa is helpless, Violet offers to steal the money which Stas has saved for her education. Dusa, rejects the idea at first:

DUSA: I can't take this.

VI: She won't mind. All the same if she does. Go on – steal it!

DUSA: I feel sick. (But she clutches the money with resolve. Fervently) Thanks!

VI: Don't thank me. (*Dusa* 54).

She knows that it is not the right thing to do but her economic condition forces her to steal the money. Her maternal instincts overcome her morality and, thinking that her children are the most important components of her life, she takes the money. In the end, she manages to take her children back, owing to her determination and effort. She prefers to struggle for her children, even if her struggle requires immoral conducts such as stealing. In this respect, it may be claimed that there is a liberal voice in terms of her individual determination, along with the radical voice reflected in the oppression of patriarchy upon her.

The bond between these four women is another issue that may be handled in discussing the feminist voices in the play. Collective struggle for women's rights and calling for a joint effort may be attributed particularly to radical feminism. For

instance, Redstockings, in their manifesto, called for women to unite against male supremacy stating that *“We call on all our sisters to unite with us in the struggle”* (qtd. in Kolmar and Bartkowski 221). The backbone of this idea was that radical feminists thought all women suffer from patriarchy and the individual struggle is not enough to completely overthrow the male supremacy. With the statement in the manifesto: *“After centuries of individual and preliminary political struggle women are uniting to achieve their final liberation from male supremacy. Redstockings is dedicated to building this unity and winning our freedom”* (qtd. in Kolmar and Bartkowski 220) the significance of the unity of women was underlined. On the contrary, in the Statement of Purpose of National Organization for Women, there was no such call, instead the emphasis was on the human potential of women:

NOW is dedicated to the proposition that women (...) must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential (...) We organize to initiate or support action, nationally, or in part of this nation, by individuals or organizations, to break through the silken curtain of prejudice and discrimination against women. (qtd. in Kolmar and Bartkowski 212).

As to the socialist feminism, it may be said that there is no such call for collective struggle because the basis of this branch is class and gender relations. For socialist feminists, like Barbara Ehrenreich or Heidi Hartmann, all women do not suffer from a common patriarchal oppression because there are other factors such as class that have a significant role in women’s oppression. Sometimes, even women can suppress other women due to class differences. In this respect, since socialist feminists think that women’s problems are the results of both class and gender, it would be wrong to claim that there is a call for a unity that would include all women in socialist feminism. In the play, the bond between these four women is not sufficient to offer an alternative to the oppression of patriarchy in their lives. Certainly there is a strong friendship between them. Each character in the play has a different problem but none of them ignores the others’ problems. Stas is seen taking Dusa to bathroom when she is about to have a nervous breakdown. Dusa and Stas are seen warning Fish about her situation. Fish uses her contacts so as to help Dusa find her children. Fish assists others in their struggle either financially or spiritually, encouraging them to believe in the happy days to come:

I really think I’m ready to have a child, I’ve got it together in my head (...) by this time, next year, I intend to be, a mother! The kids’ll be back (...) Stas’ll be in Hawaii (...) and you (...) you, my girl (...) will be

on a good vegetarian, compost grown, chemical-free diet and weigh a heady seven Stone! (*Dusa* 58).

As opposed to other characters in the play, Fish, seemingly the strongest one of these four women cannot bear and cannot overcome her disappointment with her ex-lover on her own. The friendship between these women cannot help Fish either to overcome her depression because she persistently rejects help from others. For instance, when Dusa attempts to help her, Fish refuses: “*Only I get the notion that you’re keeping an eye on me. It’s unnerving (...) That’s all right. It’s just when I think you’re trying to look after me (...) It makes me feel that you’re trying to climb on my face*” (*Dusa* 65). In the same way, all through the play she wants to avoid seeming weak and she pretends to be happy to prevent others from helping her. The friendship between these women is their major support. None of them would be able to succeed without this support. Fish commits suicide as a consequence of her refusal to accept support from other women. However, their friendship may be regarded as a bond which is intended for solving individual problems with men rather than a collective fight against patriarchy. In this sense, on the surface, it can be concluded that the feminist voice operating in the play in terms of collective struggle is either liberal or socialist feminism. However, since the lack of sisterhood is not related to class differences and because it stems from the individuality of women in finding solutions to their problems, the feminist voice which appears in this sense in the play may be regarded as liberal.

The socialist voice operates in several scenes in which class difference is brought to the fore in the play. Some of these references to class differences are actually aimed at underlining the fact that the struggle of those with a middle-class background who are after socialist ideology is futile in that they cannot understand the problems of the lower classes as is reflected in Fish’s speech on Rosa Luxemburg: “*She believed that the mistakes made by people doing things for themselves were more valuable than any theory coming from an elitist committee*” (*Dusa* 54). The same idea is reflected in the conversation between Vi and Stas about Fish’s situation. Stas states that she cannot understand why Fish does not give up politics.

STAS: She should give him the push. What’s she trying to prove? She can slum as much as she likes, she’s never going to be one of the workers.

VI: She takes it very serious.

STAS: Upper class twit, they're always the worst. (*Dusa* 55).

Stas thinks that Fish's involvement in politics is meaningless. To her, who is of the lower-class background, getting involved in politics is a common mistake among those who are from the middle class. They think that they can do something for the poor but they will never succeed because they cannot be one of the working-class people and they cannot understand their problems. For this reason, Stas gives an answer to Vi's question: "What about the workers?" with a harsh remark: "*I am the workers*" (*Dusa* 55). As to the characters in the play, the only middle-class character is Fish and others are from the lower class. Stas, Dusa and Vi are doubly oppressed because of both their gender and their class. Stas has to prostitute herself and to accept the humiliation in order to save enough money to study marine biology. Dusa has to steal money to hire a lawyer for taking back her children. Violet has no accommodation so Fish accepts her to her house. It is only Fish who does not have financial problems. The significant point is that there are differences between people, particularly among women, in terms of class, for this reason it is not possible for women who are from the middle-class to understand those who are from the working class. And particularly because of these differences women who are from the working class are doubly oppressed. In this respect, it may be claimed that a socialist voice is active in the play even if it is not as evident as other voices.

Taking into account all these, it may be claimed that, in the entire play, various feminist voices operate and the play in fact reflects several arguments over women's issues that remained on the agenda in post-war period. Radical voice which reveals itself with the oppression of women by patriarchy, liberal voice which appears in the individual struggle of women to survive in the patriarchal society – which may be considered to be as a reference to the individual potential of women – and in the lack of sisterhood between women, and finally socialist voice operating in several scenes by means of a focus on class differences, all reflect the contradictions and the diversity of voices within the feminist movement itself. In the light of this information, it may be concluded that the second-wave post-war feminist drama was characterised by representing women's issues in a larger scale as opposed to the Suffragette drama which may be regarded as a rather one-dimensional form of representation intended primarily to raise awareness about the enfranchisement of women.

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