



Article Info/Makale Bilgisi

✓Received/Geliş: 11.03.2017 ✓Accepted/Kabul: 14.07.2017

DOI: 10.5505/pausbed.2018.26213

Araştırma Makalesi/ Research Article

FEMINISMS IN PAM GEMS' PLAY DUSA, FISH, STAS AND VI

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine Pam Gems' Play Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi (1977), which portrays the inner lives of four women, through a blend of three major feminist perspectives; namely liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. The play supports the "the personal is political" feminism as well, since the reason of the oppression of women is the political decisions of men that have great impact on the lives of each individual woman. The four title characters represent a spectrum of female experience and women narratives in a style of biographical theatre. The common foreground for them is their struggle to survive in a male-dominated society. The play depicts friendship as a bond intended for solving individual problems with men rather than collectives fight against patriarchal power. The unbalanced gap between the political and the personal life causes Fish's downfall when she realizes women have no complete liberation in the private life.

Key Words: *Liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, personal is political, women's theatre, Pam Gems.*

PAM GEMS'İN DUSA, FISH, STAS AND VI ADLI OYUNUNDA FEMİNİZMLER

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı üç ana feminist perspektiften olan liberal feminizm, radikal feminizm ve sosyalist feminizmi harmanlayarak dört kadının iç yaşantılarını tasvir eden Pam Gems'in Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi (1977) adlı oyununu incelemektir. Oyun, aynı zamanda "kişisel olan politiktir" feminizmini destekler, çünkü kadınların baskılanmasının sebebi her kadının yaşantısında büyük bir etki bırakan erkeklerin politik kararıdır. Başlıkta isimleri geçen dört karakter, kadın deneyimlerinin çeşitliliği ve biyografik tiyatro stiline kadın söylemlerini temsil eder. Onların ortak planı erkek egemen toplumunda ayakta kalma mücadelesidir. Oyun, ataerkil topluma karşı müşterek savaşımdan çok erkeklerle yaşanan bireysel sorunları çözmek amaçlı bir bağ olan arkadaşlığı gösterir. Politik ve kişisel hayat arasındaki dengesiz boşluk, Fish'ın kadınların özel hayatında hiçbir özgürleşmenin olmayacağını fark ettiğinde çöküşüne sebep olur

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Liberal feminizm, radikal feminizm, sosyalist feminizm, kişisel olan politiktir, kadın tiyatrosu, Pam Gems.*

The purpose of this paper is to examine Pam Gem's Play Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi (1977), which portrays the

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inner lives of four women with a spectrum of female experience through a combination of three major feminist perspectives; namely liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism. There are several elements of liberal and radical feminism, which dominantly appear in the text. The play also touches socialist feminist ideals which emphasize the idea that there is no improvement for women if their actions consist of no collaboration. The play's ending with the suicide of Fish points out that women's inability to balance the private life with the political life (which is personal is political feminism) may bring disaster. Fish, who is a political activist, suggests that liberal feminism would be ineffective when the characters tend to survive individually under patriarchal power. Gems reminds the audience of the limitations of individual effort as Fish did, and the insufficiency of the liberation of women as an individual enterprise. There is no improvement in women's lives if not done collectively, which is the main focus of socialist feminism. Conversely, the play depicts friendship as a bond intended for solving individual problems with men rather than a collective fight against patriarchal power. This emphasizes a lack of socialist feminism and the play tends to focus on the lives of four women separately drawing the audience/reader's attention to liberal feminism. We shall first give some brief information about the playwright, then "sexual politics" which shapes feminist theatre, and finally discuss the three main branches of feminism applicable in the text.

When asked about the relationship between 'feminism' and women's work in contemporary theatre, Pam Gems distinguishes between political polemics and subversion as the two functions of drama: "I think the phrase 'feminist playwright' is absolutely meaningless because it implies polemic, and polemic is about changing things in a direct political way. Drama is subversive." (Goodman, 1993: 15) This statement implies polemic in itself since Gems' drama encompasses drawing attention to feminist issues and an attempt to change things in an indirect way. Several critics argue that Gems successfully draws attention to the subject of women through her drama bringing an alternative theatre. Burkman (1993) argues that Gems' strength in playwriting depends on her ability to write about feminist issues without producing polemical plays (192). Christopher Innes (1992) emphasizes Gems' works as dramatizing "the human reality of women who have been transformed into cultural symbols." (453-454). Although Gems refuses to be categorized as a feminist, her dramas voice the reassessment of gender in the post-1960s. She sees drama as a medium of communication to open up the audience's perceptions by directing them to rethink the position of women and give them a voice.

Gems' subject matter is women and she gives them a voice to exist in this masculine oriented society. Gems' plays tend to focus on the lives of women who try to survive and establish a life of her own that is perhaps why we see her plays entitled by certain names of women. In each play, Gems formulates the existence of strong and successful women and how they try to survive in an oppressive patriarchal society. By placing the women as centre stage emphasizes the need for collective solidarity, Gems does not imply a hostile attitude in gender issues.

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, 1983: 49)

Gems' articulation draws attention to this point: it is not only women who are abused men are "damaged" by women as well as it is clearly seen in the quotation. According to this view both men and women become victims of the system. Gems treats both sexes equally which depicts the fact that she has an egalitarian mind. In her essay "Imagination and Gender" (1983), Gems 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). Dimple (2003) views it as "a kind of bi-sexuality" which constructs an integration of gender (87). Gems tends to construct integrity of both sexes by pointing out a kind of androgyny characteristics in forming an egalitarian society. Plausibly, Gems suggests equal rights for everyone, which I believe is a tendency for liberal feminism. Gems' ideas which appear both in the afterword and her essay also point out the use of liberal feminism, which emphasizes equal treatment between the sexes by minimizing the

differences between them. Liberal feminism encourages women to take equal opportunities with men to give a voice and take responsibility for power. It defines and supports the female as individually responsible for her own life and improvement. (Gems, 1993: 2008) As a matter of fact, there is a plurality of feminine voices, which will be discussed in the play *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas* and *Vi*.

Feminist theatre, which is also called alternative theatre, in the post-1968 period was upgraded by the emergence of "sexual politics" as a term. Both terms labeled "sexual politics" and "cultural politics" (they are often employed without an explanation of what ideology or events they refer to) are useful in discussion of feminist theatre since they have contributed much to changes in social structure, and to a reassessment of the individuals' roles in that structure. Sexual politics is usually defined as ideas and activities that are concerned with how power is shared between men and women, and its affect on their relationship. Kate Millett's book *Sexual Politics* (1969) based on her PhD dissertation argues that sex has a neglected political aspect and that patriarchy plays an important role in sexual relations. It has been received as a classic feminist text and academic feminist literary criticism. Michelene Wandor (1981) uses the term for discussing feminist theatre as her work *Carry on Understudies* touches on the relation between sexual politics and post-war British theatre. Wandor (1981) states that British women's theatre in the 1980s "raised important questions about the way theatre is organized, produced" and that "sexual politics introduces another kind of radical critique to its vocabulary by raising questions about a division of labour based on gender, and about distorted and debasing representations of sexuality" (xix). Wandor provides a solid base for the subject of sexual politics in contemporary feminist theatre in her work.

Sexual politics in the theatre is related to the perspectives on gender and power in performance. The play *Dusa* depicts a sexual politics which criticizes women trying to cope with patriarchal power. Before discussing power and gender in the play, some brief information about the playwright and the play which represent various aspects of modern women shall be given.

Pam Gems was born in 1925 to working class parents and came to writing for the theatre late like many women dramatists, after twenty years of marriage and raising four children. Like Caryl Churchill, Gems wrote radio and television plays at home while rearing four children. She took a degree in psychology at Manchester University (1946-9) she married at the age of twenty-four right after graduation. She lived with her family in Paris in the fifties, then the Isle of Wight, finally moving to London in the seventies. The 1970s were a heady time for the women's liberation movement; therefore, she was able to find time and inspiration to write her plays in that atmosphere. Gems has written more than twenty-five plays, the most well-received productions include *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas* and *Vi* (1976), an episodic drama about several problems of the four city women; *Queen Christina* (1977), her first major play related to gender roles and sexual identity; *Piaf* (1978) expressing incidents from a Parisian singer's life; *Camille* (1984) the only women presented are prostitutes.

Gems in *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas* and *Vi* represents female experience pointing out the individual stories of each four title women characters: *Dusa* represents maternal instinct, *Stas* demonstrates the theme of sexual stereotyping, *Vi*, the anorexic who almost died, depicts her alienation, and *Fish* "offer[s] an alternative to the (male-dominated) politics of confrontation" (Innes, 1992: 458). The play originally titled as *Dead Fish* which foreshadows *Fish's* death at the end of the play, was written for the Women's Company. The play consists of two acts that display the different problems of four women. *Dusa*, *Fish*, *Stas* are almost 40 years old, *Violet* is a little younger than the others, but the struggle it depicts continues: women who are exploring sisterhood, transforming their relationships with men, wrestling with the concept of motherhood, and confronting with the price they have to pay which causes a loss of their independence.

There are so many different storylines for each character demonstrating women's experience and struggle to survive in a patriarchal society. Women's lack of economic freedom and feminine collaboration shown through women living in groups explain the reason why women take refuge and start living in domestic interior of *Fish's* small London flat. Anxious and vulnerable *Dusa* is an artist who is locked in a battle with her husband over custody of their two children. *Fish*, who is described as "natural authority and self-confidence of the upper-

middle classes”, is an activist. She is infatuated with her unfaithful ex-lover Alan who is attractive having a “lovely back”. Stas works as a physiotherapist but earns extra money by providing “personal services” for rich men. Stas is “discreet, efficient, reliable” and progresses through her life with a sense of purpose; her primary purpose is to go to Hawaii to study marine biology. Finally, Violet (Vi) is an agoraphobic punk with an eating disorder.

Pam Gems dramatizes a community of four different women who are brought together through very different circumstances. The odd-looking title consists of the names of four women who only share a flat but not much else. Each has her own distinct problem and attitude towards the kind of life style she wants to lead. Yet, each seems to be a victim of the patriarchal capitalist system. The play portrays their inner lives and their common attempt to survive in a man-made world. The reason why the four women are living under the same roof is never explained in the play but female friendship is laced with politics. Those characters most probably represent a historic icon of early feminism. As Keith Peacock (1991) states history and historical characters are used to explore feminist concerns:

. . .their employment of history as a means of de-naturalising the role of women in society. By offering an analytical, feminist and often socialist perspective on the past, their dramatists set out to reveal that treatment of women in a male society was often the result not only of sexual stereotyping or ingrained superstition but also of economic pressure. (167).

Actually, women form women’s culture separate from the dominant patriarchal culture of men. In the light of this view the play can be read through a radical feminist perspective.

Radical feminism strongly emphasizes that patriarchy is the main cause of the oppression of women so they demand a radical change in the social structure on behalf of women. Patriarchy is the primary of all systems of male dominance and as a result it is regarded as the main cause of women’s social and economical problems (Case, 1988: 63-64). This also draws attention to “the personal is political” since the primary sociological, cultural, and economical problems all stem from the patriarchal oppression. “The personal is political” feminism works in this play since the main reason of those four women’s struggle is to survive in a male dominated society. It challenges both male dominance and female passivity in patriarchal society. According to Hartmann (1979) women’s personal problems stem from a collective oppression of male domination. Therefore, “the personal is political” phrase leads to great potential for taking up an action uniting women who experience the same feelings. Women in this play have some personal problems because of a patriarchal dominant society involving political and social causes that need to be reestablished to make a more meaningful life for women. Gems’ subject matter is gender based and gives women a voice and presence in masculine dominant world.

Radical feminists claim (Aston, 1994: 66; Wandor, 1981: 136) that promotion of women by living in egalitarian standards unlike liberal feminists view is not enough to end patriarchal oppression. Instead radical feminists develop their own values and culture with an emphasis on women’s creativity. They want to establish “female counter-culture” with their own standards excluding the dominant male culture. The four women in the play living in Fish’s house form a kind of women’s culture where there is no validation of male ideology. Bringing together contemporary women from different backgrounds to form a female culture, Gems provides a kind of supportive system for the four women in that culture.

The play voices radical feminist ideals because the women have common experience, which place them together in a house as a shelter from patriarchal oppression. As Dimple (2003) emphasizes women in the same house “have a common cause which binds them through the division of class and culture” (67). Radical feminism is clearly seen in the play in terms of women getting together to form a women’s culture, even though there is no common ground for their solidarity and sisterhood.

The play also embodies socialist feminist ideals and criticism which points out the lack of concepts

of collaboration and sisterhood. The play touches the lack of unity and integration among women who coincidentally come together. We do not know much about their connection, how and why they get together. Fish's unpredictable suicide at the end of the play draws reader's attention to the lack of supportive system of sisterhood. Sisterhood is an initiation for a social change in which feminist struggle should target social change, and then it may create an interactive dialogue among women. Socialist feminists suggest that there is no success in feminism unless it is done in collectives, therefore the effort of individual enterprises seems inadequate and the characters are left alone unless they unite to progress.

From social feminist perspective, the women think capitalism has given men economic power to oppress and dominate them. To solve the issues of oppression, they believe that women should have jobs which will provide themselves with independent financial means and self-reliance. It is only Fish who has no financial problems: she is described at the beginning of the play as having "all the natural authority and self-confidence of the upper-middle classes". (Gems, 2008: 5) The others live in Fish's house taking the place as a shelter. Pam Gems emphasizes sisterhood to get rid of the burdens of male economic power. Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi are encouraged to solve their own problems and overcome their difficulties with men by strengthening women's self-reliance in a patriarchal society. Women should also preserve their sisterhood which may solve not only their own problems but also the problems which stem from capitalism. It is important to note that socialist feminists like Heidi Hartmann (1979) believe in the idea that all women do not suffer from a common patriarchal oppression. There are many factors like class and gender that have an important role in women's oppression. If analyzed through class and gender oppression, it would be possible to see some privileged women suppressing other women like Marlene did in Churchill's play *Top Girls* (1982). In this perspective there should be a unity among women which includes all women. For this reason the play criticizes the lack of unity between four women. The women in a flat only form physical togetherness but all are interested in their own problems. There is no sisterhood among them which hinders their forming women's community to take up an action. Certainly there is a friendship among those women however they make individual efforts in order to survive in patriarchal society. This is the main point in the discussion of women's condition through a socialist feminist perspective.

Collectively oppressed women in the play try to find a way to survive and there is weak solidarity among the four women. For instance, when Dusa breaks down Fish tries to help her psychologically: "Oh, my love, I'm sorry! (She embraces Dusa, who gulps, trying not to break down) How could I . . . I forgot!" (Gems, 2008: 9). In another scene, Dusa, newly divorced mother, tells Violet of her ex-husband's kidnapping of her children, although she has the custody of them. She loses her hope and courage to live. She feels paralyzed because she is left in a helpless situation and is unable to resolve her personal problem since she is financially disadvantaged. Socialist feminism, as Dolan (1991) states, views women as a class oppressed by material conditions and sees the primary cause of women's oppression in the patriarchal capitalist system (10). From a socialist feminist perspective, Dusa's oppression and her resentment is presented as follows:

DUSA. He's taken the children.

VIOLET. Where?

DUSA. They don't know. He took them for a drive . . . saw my mother . . . didn't come back.
Apparently . . . (She cannot speak)

VIOLET. What you gonna do?

DUSA. I haven't any money! How can I find the bugger when I haven't any money? They won't even look at you . . . they know the man's got it . . . they don't even listen! (Her voice breaks)

VIOLET. How much do you want?

DUSA. Hundreds! Lawyers . . . detectives . . . where am I going to get it?

. . .

DUSA. What's that?

VIOLET. What do you think, money!

DUSA. Is it yours?

VIOLET. It's her escort money. She's saving up to do marine biology.

DUSA. What?

VIOLET. She's going to Hawaii University . . . it's what she wants. (Gems, 2008: 15-6)

Capitalist male economic power is the basis of Dusa's oppression. Dusa does not earn money; therefore she is financially dependent. She is unable to get her children back because she is financially disadvantaged and has no money to pay for the lawyer to defend her case. Violet's conscience is disturbed for this unequal treatment of a woman so she helps her friend by stealing Sta's money that she saved for her education. First, Dusa rejects to take Sta's money with a disturbed conscience, then she accepts to take it because of her maternal instinct weighting heavier than her morality. Both Violet's choice and Dusa's reaction can be analysed through "personal is political" feminism. Those women have no choice but to steal Sta's money which clearly expresses the economical instability of domestic women that are lost in the burden of the patriarchal capitalist system. Patriarchy is the main cause of women's disposition and oppression. Still another woman (Sta's) has to pay the price which also proves the impossibility of solidarity or breaking away from socially constructed roles.

DUSA. I can't take this!

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

DUSA. I feel sick.

VIOLET. Oh Christ.

DUSA. (clutching the money and getting up, resolved) Thanks!

VIOLET. Don't thank me. (Gems, 2008: 13)

Dusa's identity is defined by maternity, so she innately accepts the social constructed idea of "motherhood". She has no feminine identity of her own even in this case she is suppressed and struggles much to get her children back from the patriarchal power represented by the "ex-husband" figure. The ineffective solidarity (caused by patriarchal oppression) of women because of an emergency case will shatter the dream of another: Violet gives Stas' money to Dusa that she saved for realizing her dream. In other words, money works for realizing one's dream when the other's dream shall be shattered. On the other hand, Stas is not aware of the fact that the money she saved is easily given away to another woman's consumption. Still, women have to pay the price. In this respect, "the personal is political" feminism emphasizes the idea that the women's problems stem from a patriarchal dominant society involving political and social causes which oppress women like Dusa. Women tend to solve their problems individually which also voices liberal feminism.

The women have weak solidarity. In another scene, Dusa and Fish quarrel about who would follow Fish whenever she leaves home in depression in Act Two:

DUSA. Stas, do something . . . go after her, follow her . . . !

STAS. What do you think I am, I'm not bloody Sam Spade . . . you follow her!

DUSA. How can I? I can't follow her . . . how can I follow her, I've got to stay by the phone . . . anyway, the TV people are coming to interview me. (Gems, 2008: 28)

No one takes the responsibility of the other. Everyone in this play seems to live her own life and try to cope with her distinct problem. Plausibly, this is the imposition of the patriarchy leaving each woman on her own trying to survive. Sternlicht (2004) explains the difficulty for women "to get control of their lives in what is still so clearly a man's world, for their lives are full of uncertainties" (123). No woman in the play shows empathy with the others, which seemingly hinders them becoming a group. Thus, the individual becomes more important than the group. Still, women are honest, listen to the other; helpful to each other and most importantly never exploit each other. What those women lack is the attempt to form a collective to fight for all women's case: "the personal is political". Liberal Feminist ideas appear, as Keyssar (1984) interprets communication among women in the play as a significant point: "[to] be genuinely in community, however, more than passive acceptance is necessary, and it is the ability – or inability – of each of the women to be responsible to the others that establishes the main tensions of the drama" (132).

The play shall also be analyzed from a liberal feminist perspective which emphasizes equality between sexes, individuality, justice, and liberty. Liberal feminism suggests bettering the position of women in society without offering any radical change in society's political, social, and economical life (Aston, 1994: 8). In a liberal feminist view, both sexes, men and women, are equal and alike and human nature has no sex because it is universal (Jaggar, 1983: 37-8). Liberal feminism neither challenges male dominance nor suppresses it by creating an all-women society, which emphasizes the superiority of women as radical feminists did. According to Gayle Austin (1990) the use of liberal feminism has not been explored yet, that is why it is not frequently used as a critical tool like radical and materialist feminism. Austin (1990) discusses liberal feminism as follows: "1. Minimizes difference between men and women, 2. Works for success within system; reform, not revolt, 3. Individual more important than the group" (6). In this sense, liberal feminism focuses on women's stories and women who are unique, successful, and trying to find ways to survive in male dominated social and political life. It emphasizes the survival of women in a male patriarchal dominant society. Like Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* we never see men either on stage or in the lives of those women in this play. Each woman has her own distinct problem and story of survival in this male dominated capitalist system. They take refuge in Fish's flat and the playwright emphasizes the difficulty of women getting control of their own lives. The women in the play are presented as passive accepters whose personal problems become political. This is parallel to Liberal feminist ideology: fix up the problem without any revolt to change the lives of women and leaving women without any meaningful collaboration, which we think is the main point that liberal feminism lacks.

Pam Gems successfully presents sisterhood among women as an effective and ideal feminist strategy that works better than the political movements of men to highlight women's rights and status in society. Helene Keyssar (1994) draws attention to "more than passive acceptance is necessary" (132) in order to be an actual community. For instance, Dusa voices the plight of the majority of divorced women: she tries to survive because men do not value women. Women help each other psychologically, which is reflected in the dialogue between Dusa and Fish:

DUSA. . . . Nobody could have worshipped his cock more than I did, it's so unfair. And what about the kids, what are they supposed to do?

FISH. You'll manage. You've just got to be tough. (Gems, 2008: 10).

Fish advises her friend to be "tough" in order to survive. Motherhood becomes a strong bond between mother and children. Perhaps that is why such strong woman figures like Dusa is represented on stage to emphasize

woman's culture the lack of a father figure it is women who struggle to survive in patriarchal society. Wayward father figure is intentionally presented to emphasize the strength of single women and this demonstrates the need for collaboration of women to survive in this capitalistic patriarchal society. Dusa states her ex-husband's lack of responsibility of fatherhood as follows: "... Overnight ... as if I was a stranger. One day it was forever ... kids ... dog ... goldfish ... and then, off! I mean, what have I given them for a father? One day he's their father, next thing something walks across his path and he's off!" (Gems, 2008: 10). All the women in the play are associated as good candidates to be a mother. The social position of a woman as a "mother" is highlighted by patriarchal society. Although Fish would like to become a mother, she could not realize her dream. Her lover found another love and separated before she had the chance of having a baby. Fish seems to repent having no child which might be an important reason of her deep depression. She had nobody to live for perhaps if she could become a mother, she would most probably not think of suicide. Motherhood gives strength to women in this case. Fish: "... We should have had a child. ... I should have done it last autumn, we both wanted it then. (Quietly) I really find birth very exciting." (Gems, 2008: 12). Since motherhood is a socially constructed role for women, which seemingly empowers them, Fish falls into the same trap of patriarchy. Internalizing the idea of becoming a mother is internalizing socially constructed role for women.

Fish is unable to balance political practices with personal life. Her relationship with men seems problematic. Through this character Gems focuses on problems of intersection between "Marxist political work and a feminist consciousness" (Case, 1988: 87). Fish leads an unbalanced private life. She defines love as "Depression" (Gems, 2008: 10). At the beginning of the play, Fish has got married to someone and has stayed in her brother-in-law's farm for some time. She had a loveless marriage full of hatred: "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 feeling I wanted to stick it in his back ..." (Gems, 2008: 11) Fish doesn't love her husband; she states that she got married "to spite Alan" (Gems, 2008: 11). She is full of regret: she regrets not having a baby when she was together with Alan, she regrets marrying another man than Alan, and she regrets Alan's marriage with another woman.

Fish's marriage dreams come to an end because marriage would restrict her private life and she did not want to be a traditional domestic woman: "I should have done it. The only reason I didn't is because he wanted it to shut me up" (Gems, 2008: 12). Their relationship has come to an end because Fish rejects a traditional feminine role to become a wife and a mother, even though she regrets it. She rather wants a marriage that goes beyond patriarchal norms; she wants equal opportunity with the other sex: "seeking to find a supportable and equitable way of life with her long-standing lover" (Gems, notes on characters). Fish is not really happy in her married life, thus she "suppress[es] her disappointment by having another marriage" (Dere, 2009: 25) with a man she does not love. She tries hard to be strong but the consequence of her rejection causes her loneliness. Fish wears more feminine clothes and make-up to indicate that she has changed when she discovers that Alan prefers a feminine woman who accepts conventional feminine roles. Still, Fish is inconsistent within herself. Although Fish rejects a socially constructed feminine role, she accepts it to get her ex-lover back which brings no resolution. Fish first appears with government surplus clothes signifying that she is a political activist. Then, after separation with Alan she puts on conventional clothes of femininity and wears make-up although this does not conform to her personality. Fish's make-up is "crooked" in the play signifying that "she is unable to conform to the socially constructed idea about what women should do." (Dere, 2009: 26) In other words Fish is unable to adapt to the patriarchal idea of a woman. She cannot cope with the different aspects of life. Elaine Aston (1994) interprets that "the gap between the struggling for the 'revolution' and fighting for her 'feller' is visually encoded in Fish's costuming" (159). Fish unexpectedly commits suicide at the end of the play because she fails to connect the politics of her feminism and her personal life. She points out the personal is also the political (Case, 1998: 87; Aston, 2000: 159). Case (1988) states that Gems focuses on the clash between feminism and Marxism: "the problematic intersection between Marxist political work and a feminist consciousness" (87). Fish's leftist boyfriend's preference for a dependent woman also reveals the hypocrisy of the modern man and maybe the modern woman. Fish is obsessed with this new relationship. She is unable to focus on her political life because of her personal desire for Alan. This causes her catastrophe: not reconciling between political work and personal desire.

Fish, one of the characters in the play, makes a speech full of socialist ideals discussing perspectives on gender and power on page 16-17. Fish makes a speech on the platform talking about the historical figure Rosa Luxemburg, a German Marxist leader who fought for socialism, who suffered from many personal losses: "Rosa never married Leo. She never had the child she longed for. . . . 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." (Gems, 2008: 17) Rosa never had the child she longed for therefore she had to ignore family life and devoted herself to socialism. In the monologue Gems points out that biographers write only about Luxemburg's political life but not her personal life. Rosa's personal life is similar to Fish. Similarly, Fish associates herself with Rosa which points out the idea that the personal is political. Aston (2000) explicitly explains that "personal is political" feminism reflects the life of Rosa Luxemburg in the play: "The 'gap' between the political and the personal is further illustrated in the biographical monologue sketching the life of Rosa Luxemburg" (159) Historical figure Luxemburg is presented to depict the plight of women in modern times like Fish. Nothing has changed on the side of women; they have been suffering and trying to survive in patriarchal society since then.

The relationship between the two sexes seems problematic because the men are cruel to the four women in the play. For instance, Dusa suffers from her ex-husband's infidelity and his leaving her and the children for another woman. Her ex-husband got married to another woman and wants to take the custody of the children, which seems most cruel. Fish is never satisfied with her love affair because of the unfaithful ex-lover. She identifies love as follows: "Depression is, love" (Gems, 2008: 10). She even watches her ex-lover making love with his new partner in Act 2: "I watched them make love. From the fire escape. Pause. . . . We always left the curtains open . . . so I watched them" (Gems, 2008: 30). Fish's ex-lover realizes that he has been watched by Fish through the open curtain of his house when they come face to face from a distance but he does not care about it. Fish's emotions are hurt and she loses her self-confidence which causes her depression.

Although we do not actually see how Vi's and Stas' stories fit into those types of feminist readings, we see a sign of trauma and conflict in their lives which is caused by patriarchal oppression. For instance, Violets agoraphobia and eating disorder are really important symbols for her character and psychology, which is most probably a sign of trauma. Agoraphobia can be interpreted as a reaction to the existing order and the distinction between public and private space. Violet mentions physical brutality and assault of men. She describes rape as "instinct to make contact with life, in however brutal way" (Gems, 2008: 14). Violet mentions the hypocrisy of men in the subject of rape when she reads aloud: ". . . Men tend not to disapprove of rape unless their own mother, wife, daughter or sister is involved. When this occurs they become . . . (she pauses, turning the page) ". . . hysterical." (Gems, 2008: 14). Stas' working as a prostitute, her dream of going to Hawaii and studying marine biology are also important symbols. She is disadvantaged in the dominant patriarchal capitalist power therefore she tries to save up money to have a right to education ironically playing the game according to the patriarchal order. As a matter of fact Stas uses men and she does not allow her life, unlike Dusa and Fish, to be affected by them. Stas interprets love affair when she ironically reads a piece in the paper: ". . . helium atoms are much larger . . . the dynamic tension between attraction and repulsion keeps the paired atoms at a distance. (Triumphantly) That is the unique property of the helium system." (Gems, 2008: 18) Stas does not give importance to love; beside she knows how to manipulate it in order to attain her goal. According to Keyssar (1984), Stas throughout the play reminds both her housemate and us of "the real possibility of change and the resources of personal commitment and exploitation of roles that can facilitate change." (132-133)

By way of conclusion, Gem's play demonstrates the lives of four women who try to survive in the patriarchal society. There is no stress on either female or male superiority in the play however it "minimizes difference between men and women" (Austin, 1990: 6) as liberal feminism emphasizes. The women in the play recognize the necessity to overcome oppression but do not challenge male dominance nor do they suppress oppression by forming comrade women collaboration. They help each other both passively and psychologically so there is no unity. On one hand the lack of collaboration seems to highlight socialist feminism, on the other hand the play emphasizes the constitution of individual freedom that is the main point of liberal feminists. According to liberal feminist view of the self, women's condition is presented within the public sphere without any improvement.

The play supports “the personal is political” feminism as well, since the reason for the oppression of women is the political decisions of men that have great impact on the lives of each individual woman. In this sense the play is examined under the light of liberal feminism. The play abruptly comes to an end, which indicates an open-ended plot having no resolution. The plight of women is presented throughout the play; the women are not activists. Although Fish makes a political speech in the public arena in Act One, this does not coincide with her private life since she prefers to commit suicide. Fish, as the other women in the play, does not take up an action or revolt to better her life; on the contrary she accepts her destiny, which is emphasized by the open-ended plot in Fish’s suicide note: “I wanted so much to sit under a tree with my children and there doesn’t seem to be a place for that anymore and I feel cheated. . . 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? ”. (Gems, 2008: 43)

Individual enterprise brings no resolution and the women in the play are bewildered and left as fish out of water – dead fish-- which emphasizes the weakness of a liberal feminist attitude. The playwright draws attention to the lack of unity among women by criticizing the play from a socialist feminist perspective. The main cause of the oppression of four women in the play is patriarchy. They try to survive individually not in groups, which is the major feature of radical feminism. The playwright demands a radical change in the social structure on behalf of women. This requires a separate women system, according to radical feminists, that may support welfare in women’s condition. The playwright offers no answers to the question, as the characters ask at the end of the play, what they are to do in this male-dominated world. Liberal feminism is only good for a communal support of each other but it also emphasizes the weakness and limitations of individual efforts since it brings nothing to improving the lives of women.

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