

The Nature of Gender: Are Juliet, Desdemona and Cordelia to their Fathers as Nature is to Culture?

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Abstract

This article brings ecofeminist critical thinking to William Shakespeare's female characters: Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Desdemona in *Othello*, and Cordelia in *King Lear*. Beginning with the principal that women and nature are similar in many ways (reproductive function, discrimination, subordination, possession, violence), ecofeminism focuses on the interaction between the two. Ecofeminism grounds its beliefs in the fact that patriarchal domination gets imposed through different binary oppositions including man-woman and culture-nature categories. By applying ecofeminism's positions, the authors will provide a critical thinking of the production of socially imposed inequalities seen through Juliet, Desdemona, and Cordelia. Since out of many different publications on the topic of ecofeminism none has provided such an approach, the authors believe that the article presents an important addition to the literature on both Shakespeare and ecofeminism.

Second-class Status of Women and Nature

'The secondary status of woman in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact.'¹

Ecology has been for a number of decades an important issue addressed and theorised by many different disciplines, especially in the Western world. The ambiguity and the lack of a firm definition of the term often results in its misuse – there is no general agreement on which set of meanings is covered by the term 'ecology'. Rather, it has been seen as a battlefield of different power groups and their own interests, constantly manipulated and modified.²

The problem of defining ecology was recognised during the early phase of ecocriticism as the postmodern era brought new perspectives to ecology.³ What's more, ecofeminist literary criticism has grown in recent decades as a subfield of ecocriticism, bringing marginalised and suppressed elements of the society and its discriminatory systems into focus.

Sherry B. Ortner summarises basic principles of ecofeminist thinking. First and foremost, ecofeminism tries to make visible the connections – historical, conceptual, and experiential – between gender domination and environmental deterioration and profiteering by male prepotency. Secondly, ecofeminism underlines the relation of men to culture and that of women to nature. Culture has been perceived as surpassing 'untamed' nature while men are seen as dominant and of higher rank over 'untamed' women. Or rather, as understood in literature, ecofeminism has been articulated as 'an effort to link feminism, the study of women and the women's values, with the exploration of environmental issues'.⁴ Since women are related to nature in many different ways (reproductive status, discrimination, possession, violence), they share the same subordinate position. Thirdly, women and nature have been oppressed at the same time in the same way and thus it is a woman's duty to bring to an end male power over both.⁵

Viewed from social, cultural or economic levels, women have always occupied secondary positions. Ortner believes that the way women are treated varies from one culture to another, as well as from one period in time of that cultural tradition to another. The main principle of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social structure was the patrilineal descent principle – i.e., the absolute and unquestionable authority of a father, and later on of a son.⁶ The absolutist argument of a male dominance was based on theories of divine right royalism. God empowered Adam the first born with domination over other beings on earth. In England, the succession of 'natural' power of the father had remained unbroken through the male line till the succession of Queen Elizabeth I.⁷

'A doctrine of Nature' and nature's law⁸ in any of Shakespeare's plays is not just one of many topics to be uncovered and analysed.⁹ According to Edgar C. Knowlton, it can be considered to be 'the core of the view of life held by Shakespeare', which is 'bound up with the history of the concept of Nature' and can be summarised as follows:

God is good, and so is Nature, the divine agent, His agent. Man must follow the law of nature, which is the same as the law of reason. This principle postulates the existence of free will, urges the ideal of a golden mean, and involves discipline not for its own sake but the sake of a higher purpose. In the vehicles of a comedy and satire, at times indeed of tragedy, the object often is to indicate and punish the unnatural, the artificial, and to expose the charlatan, the pretender, the hypocrite. Warnings are addressed to the master humour and the master passion. In tragedy the aim tends to reach beyond folly, which is associated with the unreasonable, and to grapple with vice, and with sins against love, such as disloyalty and ingratitude. In conduct man should behave with temperance, but on occasion when fidelity is at stake, he should be willing even to lay down his life. The purposes of conduct and of art are to know Nature and to follow her, by reason to learn her principles, to practise them, and not to eliminate feeling. In this view is nothing incompatible with experiencing a sense that the innocent suffer and that life is stern and mysterious.¹⁰

Like Knowlton points out, referring to Alexander Schmidt's *Shakespeare-Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, for Shakespeare, nature has numerous meanings.¹¹ Knowlton exposes several meanings of the term 'nature' in Shakespeare: sometimes Shakespeare addresses nature as the creator; sometimes nature is contrasted with art, while sometimes it is opposed to the change of death and signifies changes in human life – for better or worse. In addition, nature means that people have bodies and souls, and that both have certain needs. Nature means that each individual is given a specific type of character, fixed to some degree, which limits his/her responsibility because he/she cannot always be in control of himself/herself. Also, it means that individuals have feelings that can direct their reactions and actions. From the definition of nature as a feeling, Shakespeare derives 'broad moral law' – man has to act in harmony with nature, whose ethical field relates to both the private and political domain.¹² According to Lionel C. Knights, Shakespeare saw two opposite but very intimate paths that connect man to the world around him: nature and human values. Shakespeare connects the two through the use of natural imagery 'to evoke and define qualities that are humanly valuable'.¹³ Therefore, nature is understood as the necessary basis for every society.¹⁴ That leads us to conclude that nature acts as a social construct, which can then be employed in a political and cultural sense; it can maintain and regulate the existing social order.

Whilst outlining arguments for believing that nature is a socially constructed concept, the authors will analyse the representations of

this connection as seen through fictional female characters: Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Desdemona in *Othello*, and Cordelia in *King Lear*. This type of reading aims at making visible the connection between a patriarchal structure and its operation within the literary chosen pattern and the society-nature relationship in the non-literary pattern.

The Nature of Gender

The patriarchal daughter had to fulfil three roles in her life within the private family context: a daughter, a wife, and a mother. First defined by the rules of her father's house and later of her husband's house, patriarchal daughters mirrored the real picture of successful socialisation in the family. Father, mother, natural laws, and laws of the patriarchal society, customs, and habits were the alpha and the omega that every patriarchal daughter had to respect and obey. Also, doctrine, example and discipline played an essential part in educating children in the family of the Elizabethan age. John Stockwood, according to John Drakakis, in his book *A Bartholmew Fairing for Parentes ... 'Shewing that Children are not to marie, without the consent of their Parents, in whose power and choise it lieth to provide wives and husbands for their sonnes and daughters'* (1589) writes that it was the children's duty to obey their parents without question.¹⁵ Moreover, within a family, daughters were 'produced' by their mothers, who passed mothering capacities, duties, roles and the desire to be mothers to them, and they were defined by their relationship with the father.¹⁶ It is within the family surroundings that a woman's identity was formed.

Shakespeare was quite familiar and aware of the whole aforementioned situation. What he did was apply it to his fictional characters; precisely to his female characters. While father and son relationships appear in twenty-three plays, father and daughter relationships appear in twenty-one dramas and in one narrative poem.¹⁷ The relationship they create primarily depends on the underlying socio-economic realities, as well as the ritual, stereotypical ones. The marriage ceremony was the basic ritual model from which Shakespeare drew the father-daughter relationship. Since the authors are quite limited for space, they will present the oppression and subordination of the following female characters as seen in their father-daughter relationship: Juliet-Capulet (*Romeo and Juliet*), Desdemona-Brabantio (*Othello*) and Cordelia-Lear (*King Lear*).¹⁸

‘They say that ye have put marriage to them but a very bargain; wherein is sought alliance, or portion, or reputation, with some desire (almost indifferent) of issue; and not the faithful nuptial union of man and wife that was first instituted’.¹⁹ Marriage and marriage ritual in the sixteenth and seventeenth century was a pattern of and for the community that surrounded it, as well as the only initiation point of and for every young woman/daughter if she wanted to be accepted in the society. This type of pattern was seen as a ‘contract’ traditionally intended for women and perceived as their basic obligation – their only career. A man, on the other hand, remained independent; mostly free to choose whether to enter a marriage or not and who to be his wife. Within this pattern lies the paradigm of all binary conflicts that define this bond.

In her book *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (1985), Catherine Belsey points out the means, referring primarily to the very space of movement and being, through which different relations between men and women are produced. Belsey insists that identity is constructed primarily in and through the difference in the relationship between man and woman; marriage presents the institution in which this difference can be perceived the best.²⁰

Various Elizabethan documents, official and unofficial, comment on family relation state on the absence of affect when stepping into marriage. Or as Juliet puts it: I’ll look to like, if looking liking move: / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly (1.3.97–99).

Without exception, patriarchal daughters had to listen and obey the decision made by their father on the issue of marriage. Lawrence Stone mentions the case of the Earl of Southampton, who, in his will, put a requirement that his dowry and support after his death are to be abolished if his daughter is disobedient in relation to her husband.²¹ Thomas Beacon in *Catechism* (1560) warns young girls not to step into marriage deceived by their lover’s sweet words but instead seek for the parental consent first, as well as that of teachers and friends.²²

Perceiving Juliet as being an obedient daughter, Capulet arranges her marriage with the Count Paris without ever asking for her consent or opinion. Although when asked what her opinion on marriage is, Juliet will say ‘It is an honour that I dream not of’ (1.3.66). When faced with her father’s final decision on her marrying the Count Paris,

Juliet decides to step out of the expected frame that, as it has been mentioned, was unacceptable.

Marrying a daughter had a couple of important issues. First, families on both sides of the couple to be married had to have an economic interest in it. Second, marriage presented a stereotypical act or ritual – i.e., the symbolic passage of father's 'giving' of his daughter's hand to her husband-to-be. In this way, father fulfilled his duty of producing the continuity and the stability of the society itself. Thus the new family unit is created based on a new husband-wife relation. That is why Capulet would emphasise Juliet going to church. Also, the prime thought of Capulet was, 'Day, night, work, play, / Alone, in company, still my care hath been / To have her match'd, and having now provided / A gentleman of noble parentage / ...' (3.5.177–79). Within this relation pattern, we may reconstruct the problem of family bonds, filial obedience, and paternal possessiveness.²³

By calling her different names from 'a wretched, puling fool' to 'a whining mammet in her fortune's tender' (3.5.183–84) and more, Capulet reminds Juliet of his duty as a father, of her duty as his daughter, and of her destiny as a woman in a society. Specifically, since daughters were seen as their father's property, it was his right to affirm his paternal authority to discredit her right to choose a future (based on *her* own choice of husband).

CAPULET: And you be mine, I'll give you to my friend;
And you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good:
Trust to't, bethink you; I'll not be forsworn. (3.5.191–95)

Mary Astell in her book *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700) gives an interesting approach to marriage that could easily be applied as a sort of additional explanation to such behaviour of Capulet. Astell approaches marriage from a male perspective; from what they expected from a woman in marriage to be. She writes that a woman had to manage the family, well. Her husband was to be her prime interest. Also, a woman had to rear children and take all the care and trouble of their education. She had to preserve her husband's name and family. She whose beauty, wit or good humour is agreeable conversation, had to entertain him at home when he has been contradicted and disappointed abroad. She always had to be on his

side, to conclude him in the right, when others were so ignorant, or so rude, as to deny it.

A woman is someone who will not be blind to his merit nor contradict his will and pleasure, but make it her business, her very ambition to content him; whose softness and gentle compliance will calm his passions; to whom he may safely disclose his troublesome thoughts; and in her breast discharge his cares; whose duty, submission and observance, will heal those wounds other people's opposition or neglect have given him. In a word, one whom he can entirely govern, and consequently may form her to his will and liking, who must be his for life, therefore cannot quit his service, let him treat her how he will.²⁴

Thus, following this line of thought and hearing that his only child is not grateful and delighted, and thankful and proud of his decision to marry her, Capulet regrets that she was born. He addresses her by saying:

Hang thee, young baggage! Disobedient wretch!
 I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
 Or never after look me in the face:
 Speak not, reply not, do not answer me;
 My fingers itch. Wife, we scarce thought us blest
 That God had lent us but this only child;
 But now I see this one is one too much,
 And that we have a curse in having her.
 Out on her, hilding! (3.5.159–68)

What Juliet does by refusing her father's decision is that she consciously violates the ritual, the nature of what it means to be a woman in that society, and the role and the decision of her father. This results in her father's failure to act out his socially imposed and expected role to 'give away' his daughter to the Count Paris. On the other hand, Juliet is a victim of a destiny incorporated into the female body that is seen, at the same time, as her wealth and her burden. Her mother, Lady Capulet, is also a victim of her father and her husband. She acts the same way towards her daughter as her mother acted towards her. 'I would the fool were married to her grave' (3.5.140). Her verbal references only allude to ritual structures without actually invoking them. In her relation to Juliet, she is cruel and evil towards her. Lynn S. Chancer in her book *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness* explains this behaviour through gender sadomasochism, claiming that it is because of this

desire that women develop the ability to adjust to their destiny that continually repeats.²⁵ Her destiny is her negation and her obstacle at the same time. Juliet does not want to follow the same path as her mother did. But, living in a patriarchal society, they had no choice but to accept a second-class position.

So what does it mean for Shakespeare to present a female character who refuses that norm? Jill Ehnenn sees an answer to this question in examining how the women who played Shakespeare's female characters in nineteenth-century Britain used their roles to 'become critics of morality, writing character analyses that simultaneously legitimized their heroine's behaviour and their own questionably public position'.²⁶ Shakespeare, simply by reflecting upon the constraints and (im)possibilities that surrounded people in the time during which he lived and wrote, created complex characters through which he then challenged the reader to think of his or her own conclusions. For Shakespeare to present a female character who refuses that norm means to create a character who refuses to act according to gender and social norms and who, by doing so, creates new possibilities for herself in the future.

Although lack of parental consent did not affect the validity of a marriage, it was a powerful psychological and above all economic influence. Thus, fathers like Capulet, Lear and Brabantio depended on threats of disinheritance to constrain their children. It was the custom in the sixteenth and seventeenth century that the bride was expected to bring with her a dowry in the form of either money or property. Once married, this money went directly from her father to the groom, who often used it to marry off one of his own daughters. The ritual of marriage with parental blessing was also needed for the release and the psychological separation of the daughter from her father's hold. The custom of the time also dictated that, once a daughter was married, father was to change his role from the protector to an observer. Mothers had no active role in this ritual.²⁷

Elizabethan marriage customs stated that a woman had very little, if any, choice over who her husband might be. The autonomy of a woman to choose her future husband was unthinkable, unacceptable, shameful – even scandalous. Elizabethan women were submissive to men; they were raised to be obedient. In *Othello*, the rupture of the marriage ritual dramatises the father-daughter rupture. The father here has only one daughter, who he loves possessively and has denied several suitors. Hearing that Desdemona has run away from home in

order to marry the lascivious Moor, Othello, without the parental blessing but out of love, Brabantio sees it as an act of treason and his own failure. He senses loss and emptiness that will result in rage and denial. ‘... gone she is; And what’s to come of my despised time, / Is nought but bitterness’ (160–62). Lynda E. Boose explains this by the inverted model of both ritual archetypes of father’s bringing the bride to the altar and of the folktale pattern of the groom’s kidnapping her from her father’s fortress.²⁸ In Shakespeare’s inverted model, the father storms ‘the groom’s quarters attempting to recapture the bride’.²⁹ Brabantio’s action dramatises the wish of the father in most of Shakespeare’s plays. Brabantio wants to lock up, retain, withhold and possess his daughter. He cannot accept that his only treasure has been stolen, as he perceives it. For, Desdemona could not ‘fall in love with what she fear’d to look on’ (1.3.98). His stubbornness will lead him to hear something he dislikes. He orders Desdemona to tell the congregation who she is obedient to. Desdemona recites her actual wedding vow to obey and serve Othello, forsaking all others, including her father:

My noble father, I do perceive here a divided duty:
 To you I am bound for life and education;
 My life and education both do learn me
 How to respect you; you are the lord of duty;
 I am hitherto your daughter: but here’s my husband;
 And so much duty that my mother show’d
 To you, preferring you before her father,
 So much I challenge that I may profess
 Due to the Moor, my lord. (1.3.181–89)

In her speech, Desdemona reveals her divided duty to her ‘lords’. Brabantio hurls her and Othello across the stage with the words: I here do give thee that with all my heart / Which but thou hast already, with all my heart / I would keep from thee (1.3.193–95).

The Desdemona-Brabantio scene equals that of the Cordelia-Lear confrontation. Both present two versions of the same rejected ritual model. *King Lear* is a tragedy engaged in emotional bonding between a father and a daughter. Lear has called his court together in the opening scene because he must portion out his kingdom to three of his daughters. Cordelia is an archetypal definition of a daughter’s proper loyalties. She is very respectful towards her father, but in the opening scene, when asked how much she loves him, Cordelia will answer, ‘I love your majesty bond according to my bond, no more nor

less' (1.1.92–93). Claire McEachern states that a king himself is in self-contradiction: he wants to keep his family and his public authority. He is behaving as if Cordelia is the one who needs to buy a right to get married by proving her love to him instead of doing what he is expected to do – choose her a husband, and by doing so keep his authority and compensate the loss of his daughter. By answering to her father like she does, Cordelia is the one who reminds him of two facts: firstly, of his place in the social order; and secondly, of the fact that affection is not in first place when he is building and securing his kingdom and firming his position using family connections. Father, not the daughter, is the one who is subversive towards the laws of patriarchy, behaving irrationally and with inappropriate anger, because he cannot bear the loss of the daughter.³⁰

Unlike the similar scene in *Othello*, Cordelia has the right to choose a husband she loves. Thus, this visual and verbal opening scene is important because it eludes the marriage ritual. Because the ritual is sacred, Cordelia does not want to prostitute it like her sisters did. Her answer surprises Lear a lot, creating tension in a man who is both king and father. Being the lawgiver and protector of both domains, public and domestic, Lear considers her behaviour impolite and disobedient, 'So young, and so untender?' (1.1.106), claiming that from now on Cordelia is his 'sometime daughter' (1.1.120). Even more, he wishes 'Better thou hadst not been born than not to have pleased me better' (1.1.233–34). If she will not love him all and in the way he expects her to love him, she will lose her dowry, and cast away her symbolic ritual separation. Not only that he unnaturally gives up his kingdom; he also gives up his daughter. Lear decides to punish her, to cast her off and disinherit her. In a conversation with the first bridegroom candidate, the Duke of Burgundy, Lear will say: Will you, with those infirmities she owes, / Unfriended, new adopted to our hate, / Dow'r'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath, / Take her, or leave her? (1.1.202–5).

By posing a threat, Lear prevents the necessary blessing, thus postponing the happy ending. As Capulet does not accept Juliet's ingratitude, so does King Lear not accept Cordelia's, in the beginning. By calling her 'wretch whom nature is ashamed almost t'acknowledge hers' (1.1.212–13) he has to alienate her by marrying her to someone he hates, the King of France. The King of France perceives that this 'unprized precious maid ... is herself a dowry' (1.1.241, 259). He recognises her qualitative side, and not the quantitative value like

Burgundy. ‘Fairest Cordelia, thou art most rich being poor, / Most choice forsaken, and most loved despised’ (1.1.250–51). Although the bride and groom will exchange their vows, the lack of paternal consent renders the separation incomplete and the daughter’s future blighted. Cordelia must therefore return to be reunited with her father so that she can progress. She thus chooses her father over her husband. She returns to Lear asking him his blessing, ‘look upon me, sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o’er me’ (4.7.56–57). At the end of the play, Lear focuses on the father-daughter merger, ‘He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven, / And fire us hence like foxes’ (5.3.22–23). That father who thought that he gave all his daughters away extracts from his daughter at the end the same price he demanded in the opening scene – that she loves her father all.

Discussion

‘We are nothing but etiquette. We are carried away by it and neglect the substance.’³¹

Why do social, cultural and linguistic systems frequently construct such structures in which women are closer to nature than man? The law of nature as a system of law determined by nature gets reflected in the relationship between man and woman, as well as society members towards nature. Ortner stresses that it all actually begins with the body and with the issues of quite ‘natural procreative functions specific to woman alone’. This can be seen on three levels: 1) a woman’s body creates new life; while a man’s doesn’t, thus enabling him to get involved in cultural issues; 2) because of their reproductive ability, women are placed on a lower social scale than men; 3) being defined by the body functions and traditionally imposed social roles, women are seen as being closer to nature.³²

Shelly Eversley and Jennifer L. Morgan remind us that feminists have been engaged with the body since the 1970s, studying it as a place of ambiguity and conflict. Activists and scholars have used the concept of body for problematising ‘the material conditions of patriarchy’. They have been challenging the idea that biology is unchangeable; which is at the core of sexual inequality. ‘From the personal is the political grew gender as social construct.’³³

Moreover, as Simone de Beauvoir notices, a woman’s body is often a source of discomfort, pain, trouble and potential danger, just

like nature is, too. Uncomfortable and quite often very painful menstruations and painful childbirth simply 'contextualise' a woman's body just by its reproductive function; the male, in contrast, lacking this function, create its function externally (in politics, culture). In doing so, man creates objects, while woman creates 'only' human beings.³⁴

Richard T. Twine believes that the concept of embodiment represents a concept of crucial importance to ecofeminism: 'Historically, the human body, as a constant reminder of our organic embeddedness, has been the location of the intersection between both, the mastery of nature *and* nature-associated peoples'.³⁵ Body and biology have been used as arguments in order to explain otherness, 'selectively projecting biological determinism onto body-people; in the same way that it has been used against nonhuman animal bodies'.³⁶

Looking at the social structure of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we notice the strongly emphasised patrilineal descent principle, the absolute authority of male, the father in the family. Women in the sixteenth and seventeenth century were positioned in the family as being the 'other' through binary opposition – man/woman, father/daughter and husband/wife. Nature, on the other hand, is locked in the binary opposition culture/nature where it gains, just like women, the position of the 'other'.

Mastering identities have a history of constructing otherness by fixing in time the essence of the oppressed, and also that of their own ... Fixing essence in time is also one effect of the discourse of the 'natural' briefly discussed earlier, which attaches ideas of 'nature' to cultural traditions to produce a conservative morality/dogma of what is 'normal'.³⁷

Women have been identified through the domestic, private context, which is seen as a lower level of social/cultural organisation. Claude Lévi-Strauss in his argument in the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* perceives the family through a domestic (woman's) context, thus identifying it with nature, and opposing it to culture.³⁸ Men, on the other side, based on their inability to create human beings, get identified with the public sphere, such as culture and its contents, and are thus opposed to nature and the natural.

A discussion of the problem of domination and subordination of women and nature in Shakespeare, as presented in this article, goes beyond a set of definitions and general principles. Virtually all of Shakespeare's dramatic characters, as with every reader and theatre

spectator, have an identifiable class, a race, and a gender. By applying ecocriticism, we have investigated how Juliet, Cordelia and Desdemona have been pictured in oppression. The reason why the authors of this article believe ecofeminism is the key that connects the exploitation and domination of women with that of nature is that ecofeminism grounds its beliefs through the traditional 'female' values of reciprocity, nurturing and caring, which are present in women and in nature. Also, a common claim within ecofeminism is that dominance and power in patriarchal structures act through binary opposition that often includes: male-female, mind-body, heaven-earth, human-animal, spirit-matter, culture-nature etc.

Oppression is emphasised by binaries that appear at many levels: patriarchal, religious, scientific, etc. Similarly, men in a man-woman dichotomy oppress women, while culture in binary opposition culture-nature oppresses nature. By reorienting the issue towards ecofeminist theory, the authors considered how the ecofeminist theory enforces the idea of connections between social/cultural categories of oppression and subordination of the following female characters as seen in their father-daughter relationship: Juliet-Capulet (*Romeo and Juliet*), Desdemona-Brabantio (*Othello*), and Cordelia-Lear (*King Lear*).

As mentioned, the 'First Society',³⁹ as family was perceived, presents the crucial concept and the frame of the patriarchal society in discussing the position of Juliet, Desdemona, and Cordelia. Each of the chosen plays reconstructs the problems of family bonds, filial obedience, and paternal possessiveness around the father-daughter relation. Historically it has been clear that the socialisation process has determined what women are in adult society just as the 'process of becoming a man happens in the mutual relationship with the surrounding'.⁴⁰ Capulet, Brabantio and Lear are all creators of their daughters' faiths. They are all determined to 'lock up' their daughters. Their determination sets up the pattern by which the daughters have to define themselves. It is self-evident that Juliet, Desdemona and Cordelia have been taught to please first their father, then their future husbands thus living up to and fulfilling their expectations for the female sex. But in order to escape the repressive will of their father, each of the daughters chose their own way, thus breaking the expectations. Juliet decides to marry in secret without her father's consent; Desdemona runs away with the Moor, also without her father's consent, while Cordelia bears the burden of her father's decision, and is thus married off to someone she does not fancy.

As David S. Kastan concludes, Shakespearean womanhood is problematic, since women have been defining themselves in relation to men. In that relationship they are at a loss, which, eventually, leads to tragedy; that is, to the destruction of female characters. Women are charged with being deceitful and are chased away, although not only women are victims.⁴¹ He also draws our attention to the fact that in Shakespeare's tragedies the goal of the tragedy is to attack and compromise the wholeness. Consequently, love, as 'both its symbol and source' is frustration; it is easily damaged and always fails.⁴²

The aforementioned analysis shows that Shakespeare recognised the instabilities of the patriarchal system, its conflicts and limitations, which he exposed and challenged in his plays. As McEachern states, Shakespeare understood that the patriarchal system put a lot of pressure on members of society, and he used that knowledge in order to make his writing more powerful. He 'rebels against the archetypes he inherits' and refuses to merely copy the notions of patriarchal norms of the world in which he was living, and which were known to him previously from 'his artistic fathers and the cultural authority they represent and embody'. Subsequently, he started investigating the nature of power within a patriarchal system, and, logically, marriage become one of his major interests.⁴³ All three situations that the authors have chosen to analyse deal with the issue of marriage of the daughter. In all three cases daughters are being disobedient to the patriarchal order and break family and public dynamics. The social norm by which it is common for parents to choose a partner for their children actually keeps a political order among men. In addition, the loss of paternal authority incurred by giving the daughter away demands compensation.⁴⁴ McEachern warns us about the conflict that is at the core of patriarchy: in order to maintain the political order that is completely man's domain, men amongst themselves make bonds by family connections. But, in doing so, father has to break his family dynamics and give up on the authority within his own family. This is especially present when marrying the daughter. Therefore, two parts of the system, private (family) and public (political), are contradicted in the sense of emotions, loyalty and authority.⁴⁵

This type of ecofeminist reading of the father-daughter relationship aims at making visible a patriarchal structure and its operation within literary text and, through this analysis, consequently challenges the 'reality' it imposes upon us even in the present. The overlooked

representation of women that equals them to that of nature exemplifies a general attitude of the time.

Conclusion

The authors' focus in this article was an ecofeminist re-reading of the relationship between women/nature and men in Elizabethan times seen both in reality and in fiction (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*). Although fictional texts do not necessarily mirror the practices prevalent in a society, the writer can never write independently of the dominant cultural and social practices that he is a part of. In Shakespeare's case his works thus present many different cultural and social codes of his time that together create a larger picture of the society itself. Therefore, fictional female characters – in this case Juliet, Desdemona, and Cordelia – do not necessarily mirror the reality of women or real-life women of the time but through them we can see the culture that they belonged to: patriarchal approaches and behaviours towards the subordinate, and the interaction between culture and nature. Judging from the analysed father-daughter relationship in the chosen plays, one may conclude the following: by positioning himself at the top of the hierarchical order, man subordinated women, junior men, children, slaves, domestic servants and nature, who were marginalised and stereotyped, and perceived as the other; within the cultural context of a society people take on roles and patterns of behaviour characteristic of a man or of a woman and pass them to every new generation.

Ecofeminism is meaningful and suitable in teaching different life cycles, as well as in highlighting respect for all diversities. By changing positions and behaviours – i.e., by abandoning a traditionally patriarchal approach and a patriarchal behaviour, we can stop the degradation, domination and violation of both women and nature at the same time. In addition, this article is yet more proof of the influence of human nature and its inherent conflicts on Shakespearean themes.

Notes

1. Sherry B. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?', in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 68–87.
2. Milan Galović, *Kraj Ekologije* (Zagreb: Jesenski i Turk, 2013), 9.
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4. Richard Delgado, 'Our Better Natures: A Revisionist View of Joseph Sax's Public Trust Theory of Environmental Protection, and Some Dark Thoughts on the Possibility of Law Reform', *Vanderbilt Law Review* 44 (1991), 1209–227.
5. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'.
6. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'.
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9. Berman, 'Shakespeare and the Law'.
10. Edgar C. Knowlton, 'Nature and Shakespeare', *PMLA* 51, 3 (1936), 719.
11. Alexander Schmidt's *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary* is available at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.03.0079>, accessed 13 May 2014.
12. Knowlton, 'Nature and Shakespeare', 719–23.
13. Lionel C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (New York: Norton, 1968), 114.
14. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*.
15. John Stockwood according to John Drakakis, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (UK: Longman Critical Readers, 1992).
16. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
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18. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Subsequent quotations refer to this edition.
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22. Thomas Bacon according to Powell, *English Domestic Relations 1487–1654* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1917), 156.
23. Boose, 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare'.
24. Mary Astell according to Drakakis, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 226.
25. Lynn S. Chancer, *Sadomasochism in Everyday Life: The Dynamics of Power and Powerlessness* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

26. Jill Ehnenn, 'An Attractive Dramatic Exhibition? Female Friendship, Shakespeare's Women, and Female Performativity in 19th Century Britain', *Women's Studies* 26 (1997), 316.
27. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'
28. Boose, 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare', 331.
29. Boose, 'The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare', 331.
30. Claire McEachern, 'Fathering Herself. A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39, 3 (1988), 269–90.
31. Michel De Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, rev. Willis G. Regier, Prairie Schooner 68, 3 (1994), 142.
32. Ortner, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'
33. Shelly Eversley and Jennifer L. Morgan, 'The Sexual Body', *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, 1–2 (2007), 11. 'The association of women with the corporeal and in opposition to that which is rational and refined serves as the backdrop for sometimes contradictory impulses on the part of feminist scholars and activists to both dismantle the nature/culture divide and to nurture it. ... For some, the female body, in its messy corporeality, was an obstacle to equality. ... By accepting the patriarchal notion of the female body as being more *natural* than the male, the problem becomes either surpassing the body or reinterpreting female *nature* as superior. In either case, this fixity of an unmediated female body remains. ...' The body discussed 'is not a Cartesian body in opposition to the mind, but is, rather, a social body, or bodies, deeply imbricated in and ultimately shaped by the mediating forces of economies, cultural practices, and social forms' Eversley and Morgan, 'The Sexual Body', 12–14.
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36. Lynda Birke according to Twine, 'Ma(r)king Essence – Ecofeminism and Embodiment', 48.
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40. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *Socijalna Konstrukcija Zbilje* (Zagreb: Naprijed, 1992), 68.
41. David S. Kastan, 'Shakespeare and the Way of Womankind', *Daedalus* 111, 3 (1982), 119–23.
42. Kastan, 'Shakespeare and the Way of Womankind', 120.
43. McEachern, 'Fathering Herself. A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism', 272.
44. Lynda E. Boose according to McEachern, 'Fathering Herself. A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism', 273.
45. McEachern, 'Fathering Herself. A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism', 273.

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