

POLIN DENVER

English and American studies

BA, 4. félév

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem

Bölcsészettudományi Kar

Témavezető:

Fábián Annamária

egyetemi adjunktus, ELTE BTK

A WOMAN VIRTUOUS, A WOMAN BASE - THE DUALITY OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN ENGLISH JACOBEAN DRAMA

Kulcsszavak: archetype; dráma; női karakterek; Jacobean korszak

In the English Jacobean Era, two crucial points regarding women's standing in the eyes of society can be observed: firstly, women were perceived through the prism of Eve's transgression and, secondly, "they were either seen as temptresses and whores or as virgins and saints" (Hickerson 73). These two major views formed a particular framework through which women, both in English society and in drama, were perceived.

Although both women of the Jacobean Era and female characters of the drama of that period tend to be classified into supposedly neat categories of sin or virtue, the classification that is supported both by social and religious views on women at that time and by scholars there is a pattern in drama that can be observed: the standing of female characters is not always as definite and decided as it may appear. This ambiguity emerges in other characters' attitudes towards women and in the deeds and essences of female characters as well.

My hypothesis is that there occurred an amalgamation of polarities in female characters of Jacobean drama, with the amalgamation emerging due to several factors. Firstly, one woman could be both an angel and a devil depending on the onlooker, thus embodying mutually exclusive archetypes. Secondly, with notions of Eve's fall being deep-rooted in English society, a woman's virtue was not safe from the taint of the devil—a phenomenon that further disrupted the supposedly neat system of categorization. Thirdly, a woman's standing in society could also be liminal, with her either belonging to two opposing categories simultaneously or being placed somewhere in between.

This paper will aim to explore, firstly, how the framework I established above manifests itself in Jacobean drama, namely in the following plays of that time: Cyril Tourneur's and/or Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (a male-centered play) and John Marston's *The Insatiate Countess* (a female-centered one) and how female characters operate within this framework. Secondly, by choosing one play centered around male characters and another—around a female one, I will observe whether there is a difference in the framework, that is, does the fact of a female lead lessen the significance of it or not. Lastly, I aim to observe how the pattern, that is, the amalgamation of polarities, can be traced in both of these plays, with female characters being more subtle in their standing than might be supposed.