

Semiotic and symbolic order in Shakespeare 's All's Well That Ends Well (1623) and Webster 's The Duchess of Malfi (1613)

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ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the portrayal of powerful female characters in Webster 's The Duchess of Malfi (1613) and Shakespeare's All's Well That Ends Well (1623) through the lens of feminist theory. It demonstrates the strategies that Helen and the Duchess employ to challenge patriarchal norms, positioning them as nonconformist women who pave the way for other women to assert their identities. This paper will show clearly the interplay between the semiotic and the symbolic in the text and how subjectivity is revealed through language. In each play, the struggle between these two aspects shows how the Duchess portrays the triumph of the symbolic, which represents patriarchal society, over the Duchess's strategies, while Helen shows the victory of the semiotic, which represents personal drives and desires dominating the symbolic. Furthermore, the paper will explore the strategies that these women use to achieve their goals, highlighting their intelligence and their management of the people around them.

KEYWORDS: Subverting Patriarchal Norms, Kristeva, Female Challenging Strategies.

Introduction:

Although the Elizabethan Age is considered an illustrious period in English literature because it is marked by the influence of the Renaissance and the exploration of new horizons, women were treated as inferior to men and deemed as a source of corruption in English society (Waqas & Maqbool, 2016, p.1). They tried to resist the common oppression they faced, even though Queen Elizabeth ruled England. Even women writers were marginalized and prevented from acting on stage in plays. Also, home was considered their domain, with little recognition of their role in society (Waqas & Maqbool, 2016, p.2). Two notable works from the 16th century, like Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623) and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), shed light on the marginalized women. These two plays show Helen and the Duchess as revolutionary women.

After her father's death, Helen, the daughter of a physician, experienced unrequited love for Bertram, the Count of Roussillon. Although they are from different social classes, Helen insists on pursuing him. She decides to offer an effective medicine to the king in exchange for the freedom to choose her husband, Bertram. Although he does not love her and sets challenging conditions for their union, Helen can meet these conditions through her intelligence and strategic plans. In Webster's play, the Duchess, a young widow

and the ruler of Malfi, faces objections from her brothers, the Cardinal and Duke Ferdinand, who prevent her marriage for many reasons. But the Duchess weds her steward, Antonio. After the birth of her children, her secret marriage was discovered by her brothers through Bosola. Finally, unfortunately, the Duchess, her husband, and two of her children were killed by her brothers. But one of the Duchess's sons survives and assumes her vacant position as ruler.

Shakespeare is known for his sympathetic portrayal of women, depicting their ability to struggle. Two kinds of women are presented in his works: those who seek equality with men by challenging the social norms and those who conform to the expectations and the established norms of a patriarchal society. Both of these two kinds of female characters, conformed or rebelled, in his plays face the oppressive dominance of men during the Elizabethan era. (Haniph, 2017, pp. 325-329). On the other hand, John Webster, in his two plays, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) and *The White Devil*, the heroines transcend the patriarchal norms, challenging the rigid structure of male dominance. (Marie, 2007, p. 1).

The heroines of the two plays, Helen and the Duchess, are deemed voices to challenge the patriarchal ideology of their age, defending the silenced women in society. So, by examining Julia Kristeva 's feminist theory, the research will analyze these two female characters under the two concepts, semiotic and symbolic. These two concepts show how language can shape subjectivity through a character's speech. Kristeva wrote her work *Revolution in Poetic Language*, which combines semiology from Ferdinand De Saussure and psychoanalysis from Sigmund Freud. In this work, she presents insights into the signifying process in characters' conversations (Raina, 2017, p. 6).

The semiotic aspect can be seen through the language. It can reveal the speaker's inner drives and impulses that sometimes appear unconsciously through his conversation. On the other hand, the symbolism portrays the patriarchal structures of society. Throughout the interaction between the semiotic and symbolic in characters' speech, it is very easy to discover how family-based socialization practices influence subjective construction. It creates a continuous dynamic conflict that shapes the characters' interactions and the meaning-making process within these two plays.

Both Helen and the Duchess show inner drives that represent semiotic aspects. Although they encounter many obstacles set by patriarchal society, they use challenging strategies to face these social norms, which represent a symbolic challenge. Helen uses Machiavellian strategies and sophisticated plans like bed-trick and ring plot to navigate her circumstances, although she lacks power and money. She depends only on her cunning to gain her goal. Also, the powerful and wealthy Duchess marries her steward, Antonio, against social norms (Rathod, 2020, pp. 2-4).

As a poor young woman from the lower class, Helen is deprived of many things in her life, repressing many needs as she mentions in her speech. Even the tone of weakness is very clear in her voice. She believes that Bertram is very far from her as a “star”. Also, she comes from a low social status, so she is not directly connected to society, which is deemed the symbolic order. That is why Helen is connected with semiotic order, which represents her drives and her needs rather than society, which represents symbolic order (Rathod, 2020, p.40). She is an alienated character because, first, she is a woman, and second, she is from a low class in a society that respects only men and people with power and money, so as a result, the audience sees that in Helen, the semiotic order is stronger than the symbolic. In addition, in her quest, she only depends on her intelligence and Machiavellian strategies without any assistance from the people around her in getting her target. (Rathod, 2020, p.27).

Helen refuses all the established norms that are related to women and class. She does not submit to them, creating her new way to penetrate society for her own interest. She only gets all her connections and positions from her strategy and plans because she is not very internalized with the patriarchal society and its ideology. Her semiotic forces are enough to disturb the symbolic forces in the play (Rathod, 2020, p.40). Helen is overwhelmed by her semiotic forces, which are her love for Bertram as well as her agony from her longing for him. In her speech, Helen says:

“Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie, which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky gives us free scope, only doth backward pull our slow designs when we ourselves are dull. What power is it that mounts my love so high, that makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye? The mightiest space in fortune nature brings to join like likes and kisses like native things. Impossible be strange attempts to those that weigh their pains in sense and do suppose..... “(Shakespeare, 1623, p.20).

From this soliloquy, the audience can notice her eloquent and provoking speech, which makes her a semiotic character. In the first line, Helen states that the power that pushes us to conquer our barriers resides in ourselves as people, not in external or divine forces. This reflects her agency and self-determination in challenging and subverting patriarchal norms. From this quotation, it is very clear that Helen tries to transcend the limitations of her society and shows us her awareness of social and cultural constraints that hinder her progress in her mission to marry Bertram (Kristeva 1980, p.35).

Furthermore, Helen 's clear expression about her love for Bertram challenges the common norms in her society that deemed women only as objects used to satisfy male desire, not as active agent pursues her love. She invites the audience to reconsider the strict gender roles and power dynamics that were taken for granted in the Elizabethan age. (Kristeva 1980, p.38). That is why Helen perceives that she has to take the responsibility to alter the external forces that disturb her quest to marry Bertram. Besides, she understands



that everyone is able to shape their destiny and only through their actions and decisions can one determine their life. For Helen, everyone is responsible for his happiness, stripping himself from divine forces and other people. Then, she declares her objective to get her target. Through these lines in the above quotation, the struggle semiotic and symbolic commence. (Kristeva, 1969, p.29).

In other words, it is the moment that Helen decides to challenge and change the patriarchal ideology with her real identity and as a woman without position, power, and money because she is not internalized with the ideologies of her time. She uses many Machiavellian strategies without penetrating the limits of her society and being guilty before people. (Kristeva, 1969, p.34).

O, were that all! I think not of my father, and these great tears grace his remembrance more than those I shed for him. What was he like? I have forgotten him. My imagination carries no favor isn't but Bertram's. I am undone. There is no living, none, if Bertram is away. 'Twere all one that I should love a bright particular star And think to wed it, he is so above me. In his bright radiance and collateral light must I be comforted, not in his sphere. The' ambition in my love thus plagues itself: The hind that would be mated by the lion must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague, To see him every hour, to sit and draw His arched brows, his hawking eye, his curls In our heart's table—heart too capable Of every line and trick of his sweet favor. But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy must sanctify his relics. Who comes here? (Shakespeare, 1623, p.13)

In this quotation, in Helen's speech, the semiotic elements are very clear. She is in love with Bertram, and she feels that it is an unrequited love. She longs for him, realizing that being his wife is very difficult because she is from a low class. Her "great tears" show the suffering that comes from her love for him. She calls him a "star" because he is of high rank, knowing that breaking this strong social hierarchy is impossible, and it needs effort to reach her target. (Kristeva, 1974).

This quotation makes the audience know the reasons behind her plans and actions to marry Bertram. Through her quest to marry him, Helen overcomes many obstacles through her cunning. Also, this reflects the Elizabethan society's strict system of hierarchy that pushes her to make her plans to be his wife. Because of her "ambition" to be Bertram's wife, which are considered her desires and inner drives that are called semiotic, she challenges all obstacles she faces in her journey to reach her aim. These barriers, like the firm norms and classicism in the Elizabethan age which are called symbolic that prevents her from reaching her target. These words are the starting point in her quest to marry Bertram. This can make the play's structure like a circle (Kristeva, 1974, p.19). Helen uses a feminine voice that gives the impression of her weakness, telling her audience that she is facing the rigid patriarchal society with her real identity as a woman because she is not internalized within the norms of male-dominated ideas. In her statement, "I will stand for a little, though therefore I die a virgin" (Shakespeare, 1623, 140), this statement shows openly that she will challenge the patriarchal ideology by keeping her virginity, which the patriarchal society pushes her to lose to satisfy men.

She wants to stay a virgin because she thinks that virginity, which society wants to strip her of, is considered the feminist identity she rejects, and to act according to the expectations of her society. By doing this, she declares her resistance to the established norms of the Elizabethan age, aiming to shape a new picture of a new woman on her own, and a picture which is not familiar to her own society. Also, this speech uncovers the tension between semiotics that represents Helen's passion for Bertram, as well as her plans to impose her identity on the society of that time, and the symbolic order that represents the patriarchal ideology. She rejects all the ideas that were common in her society. (Kristeva, 1974, p.43).

Here on my knee before high heaven and you, that before you and next unto high heaven I love your son. My friends were poor but honest; so's my love. Be not offended, for it hurts not him that he is loved of me. I follow him not by any token of presumptuous suit, nor would I have him till I do deserve him, yet never know how that desert should be. I know I love in vain, strive against hope, yet in this captious and intangible sieve, I still pour in the waters of my love and lack not to lose still. Thus, Indian-like (Shakespeare, 1623, p.39).

Through the conversation between Helen and the countess, Helen demonstrates her real physical and spiritual weakness. Even the countess notices that through her eyes" The many-colored Iris, rounds thine eye?" (Shakespeare, 1623, p.35). The tone of her voice shows the audience her suffering and agony because of her love for Bertram. What makes her worse is her being from the lower class, and Bertram is from is from noble origin. Finally, Helen reveals to the countess her love for Bertram. Besides, Helen kneels to the countess when she confesses her real feelings towards Bertram. She states openly about her motives and drives that make her travel to Paris to heal the king. She shows the audience that she realizes her difficult situation, making her take the responsibility of changing the circumstances for interest (Kristeva, 1989, p.23).

She also reveals her inner drives and repressed desires since her childhood as a physician's daughter, so the text witnesses a strong struggle between the semiotics order, which is considered her deep feelings and repressed needs, and the symbolic order, which is considered the norms and the traditions of her society. There is a strong resistance from the semiotic order that comes from her inner drives and desires to the society structure that hinders her aim (Kristeva, 1989, p.76). In the final scene, Helen says, "All's well that ends well. Still the fine's the crown. Whate'er the course, the end is the renown"(Shakespeare, 1623, p175). The play demonstrates how semiotic order overcomes the symbolic order. This quotation gives a clear picture of the interplay between semiotic orders and symbolic order as discussed by the feminist theorist Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1981, p.56).

The conflict between the semiotic and symbolic orders demonstrates the signifying process in the play text, giving subjectivity to it. Helen is considered the semiotic maternal, pre-linguistic domain that ruins the patriarchal limitations of the symbolic order through the play. Her intelligence and will to pursue Bertram,



a man from a higher position in social standing than she is, and also her rejection of societal traditions, clarify the power of semiotics to subvert and change the common hierarchies. In the last sentence, the semiotic and the symbolic are astonishingly reconciled. The conclusion of the play gives a clear example of Kristeva's notion that the subject is always moving between the semiotic and the symbolic order, and the line "All's well that ends well" refers to the happy ending when Helen's semiotic disturbance produced a satisfying resolution that is rewarded with "the fine's the crown" and "the renown". (Kristeva, 1981,p.23).

The semiotic can shape the symbolic instead of being controlled by it, Kristeva says, "The subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'purely' semiotic or 'purely' symbolic"(Kristeva, 1981, p.67). The play accepts the reconciliation between the two realms. It implies that Helen's semiotic embodiment is a transformational force because it reshapes the limitations of her acceptance within the symbolic order, not only a rebellious rejection of it. Helen's "renown" is deemed that semiotics can destroy, alter, and then control within the symbolic framework. The conclusion of the play focuses on active interaction between the mother, pre-linguistic urges, and the prevailing societal institutions, showing how the semiotic is able to alter the symbolic order. (Kristeva, 1981, p.68).

On the other hand, the female protagonist of John Webster's play is the Duchess of Malfi. She is a young widow who challenges her brothers' attempts to forbid her from remarrying. Because she is driven by her instinct as a woman, the Duchess secretly marries her steward, Antonio, having three children. Her action depicts her desires and inner drives, which are called the semiotic order. She is also deeply internalized with patriarchal ideology. Besides, she controls political power that forces her to abide by the social standards of her age, which makes her a symbolic character. As a Duchess, she is so proud and strong, and this is very clear in her language and actions as she faces the difficulties of her situation with masculine power. (Kristeva, 1974, p.20).

Her conduct demonstrates an intentional adaptation of masculine features to protect herself, her family, and her maid. She plans carefully every step to marry Antonio. She uses her political post to assert her authority. She confronts terrible situations bravely, refusing to show any mark of weakness. For the Duchess, a woman embraces masculine features to be courageous and assertive. Lastly, the duchess faces her tragic end, then her son inherits her position. Webster suggests through this outcome that if a woman wants to step change in a male-dominated society, she must embody her feminist identity without sacrificing her femininity for masculine features, as she does so undermines her female core (Kristeva, 1974, p.45).

Although she follows her instinct to be a wife and mother, the Duchess penetrates the symbolic order with symbolic power. She challenges the social standards, using the structure that confines her. By embracing masculine features, the duchess faces the patriarchal society, so this process leads to her downfall. The Duchess embraces the struggle between one's desires and the social expectations that dictate conduct, showing how women's agency in a restrictive environment is very complex. (Kristeva, 1974, p.67).

Despite doing something uncommon for her society, this proves that she does not refuse the standards of the Jacobian society because she gets married in secret, taking the responsibility for all the issues she confronts in her life. She says: "Shall this move me? If all my royal kindred Lay in my way unto this marriage, I'd make them my low footsteps"(Webster, 1613, p.16). From this line, the Duchess begins her rebellion against the male-dominated society that embodies her brothers. She distinguishes her identity as a woman who needs to be a mother and a wife from her political identity. She says, " I wink'd and chose a husband"(Webster, 1613, p.16). From this line, the duchess embodies the man 's role because she will propose a man, and this is his job. No one can propose to her because of her high political position, so she should choose a husband herself. Also, due to her high position in society, she should follow the standards of it, which represent the symbolic order. The Duchess is part of society, so she will be insecure if she follows its standards. (Kristeva, 1974, p.34).

In the end, she marries in secret, saying, "So I through frights and threatening will assay this dangerous venture"(Webster, 1613, p.16). This line states that the Duchess understands the seriousness of her behavior by her marriage to her steward, Antonio. As a man, she speaks proudly, showing the audience that she is deemed an example of a woman who arises as an individual who penetrates the complicated family and social norms that aim to restrict her, which makes her a crucial representation of the struggle between the individual 's need for self-expression and the social forces that repress it (Kristeva, 1977). *The Duchess of Malfi* embodies the feminine principle in a manner consistent with Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, which is related to maternal and pre-Oedipal stages of development. Her daring act to marry because of love rather than for financial benefits or power can be explained as a direct defiance of patriarchal norms that represent the symbolic order of her society. Her obligation to her inner drives and emotions represents the semiotic, which is the pre-linguistic mode of existence, though her symbolic importance is evident in her penetration of symbolic order, which Kristeva associates with the Oedipal stage and the paternal function. Because she works within a male-dominated society, the Duchess is involved with the symbolic language and the structures of power to assert her agency and autonomy (Kristeva, 1977, p.24).



The Duchess's manipulation of language and employing strategic rhetorical tactics are deemed a symbolic involvement with the symbolic order, attempting to defy the regime that tries to control her. The struggle between the semiotic and symbolic is represented in her relationship with her brother Ferdinand, who is considered the patriarchal authority that tries to suppress her. (Kristeva, 1977, p.34). When the Duchess is murdered by her brother's assassins, it is seen as a symbolic sacrifice of the semiotic to the symbolic order, and even in her death, the Duchess stays strong. Her courage and dignity in defying her tragedy serve as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit. So the Duchess quest depicts the difficulties of female agency and the conflict against patriarchal tyranny, showing the hard strife between the semiotic and symbolic realms in her life and society (Kristeva, 1977, p.56).

Similarly, the Duchess challenges the symbolic order with symbolic features to make the symbolic mode stronger. Because she is from a high political position, the duchess is involved with the symbolic order directly that embodies the patriarchal society, and her language has symbolic features as she always speaks with a masculine identity. This immediate involvement in the symbolic order gives the Duchess symbolic and masculine power (Kristeva, 1980). Also, she can control the situation of her marriage by proposing to her husband, Antonio. In her speech, she says:

Now she pays it, \S the misery of us that are born great! We are forc'd to woo, because none dare woo us; And as a tyrant double with his words, and fearfully equivocates, so we Are forc'd to express our violent passions A In riddles and in dreams, and leave the path of simple virtue, which was never made to seem the thing it is not (Webster,1613, p.12).

In these lines, the duchess clarifies her suffering due to her high position. She states why she proposed to him. Because of her high position, the Duchess becomes higher than the semiotic order, internalizing with the symbolic order that represents the patriarchal ideology. She is a good example of the conflict between the semiotic and symbolic. Despite her death at the end of the play, her son takes her position, which shows the audience the victory of the duchess (Kristeva, 1980).

The place that you must fly to is Ancona: Hire a house there; I '11 send after you my treasure and my jewels. Our weak safety runs upon engine wheels: short syllables must stand for periods. I must now accuse you of such a feigned crime as Tasso calls Magnanimity menzogna, a noble lie, because it must shield our honors. — Hark! They are coming. (Webster, 1613, p.64)

Bosola: Nobly: I '11 describe her. She's sad as one long us'd to \ and she seems Rather to welcome the end of misery Than shun it; a behavior so noble As gives a majesty to adversity: You may discern the shape of loveliness More perfect in her tears than in her smiles: She will muse for hours together; and her silence, Methinks, expresseth more than if she spake. (Webster, 1613, p.84).

Despite her being a woman, the duchess bravely defies all the frightening acts that are made by her brothers, like fake dead bodies and dead man's hand. These views are deemed very terrible for a woman to see. However, the duchess faces all of them strongly because she is a woman with authority as well as being internalized with masculine features, giving her male power. She is patient and proud of herself even in the hard times, and everything is clear through her language. She faces the symbolic order with the symbolic language as she embraces symbolic features to defy the symbolic order. (Kristeva, 1980, p.70). In her statement, "I will starve myself to death" (Webster, 1613, p.88), the Duchess means that this conduct of starvation represents a symbolic act to reclaim her semiotic, maternal-feminine identity to challenge the symbolic order that aims to control her. Scarifying herself is deemed a symbolic assertion of her independence, besides her commitment to the semiotic principles that are included in the play. She chooses to starve to death, demonstrating her rejection of the symbolic order's endeavor to manipulate her, even though it costs her life (Kristeva, 1969, p.34).

Also, she always says "I am Duchess of Malfi still"(Webster, 1613, p.97). This line demonstrates the strength of the duchess's self. She refuses to be controlled by the male-dominated society, and this shows clearly her symbolic disobedience to the symbolic order and her commitment to her semiotic identity. IN her speech, "I pray thee, look thou gives my little boy some syrup for his cold, and let the girl say her prayers ere she sleep" (Webster, 1613, p.100). The Duchess states to her audience her strong sense of the semiotic norm, which is represented by her motherhood. This means that her inner drives and desires that represent her semiotic identity push her to adopt the symbolic features, and this is very clear in her language to challenge the symbolic order, which represents the patriarchal society (Kristeva, 1969, p.56).

Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength Must pull down heaven upon me: — yet stay; heaven-gates are not so highly arch'd 270 as princes' palaces; they that enter there Must go upon their knees [Kneels]. — Come, violent death, serve for mandragora to make me sleep! — Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out, they then may feed in quiet (Webster, 1613, p.101).

This speech shows the audience how the Duchess is ready to welcome death bravely after facing many horrible scenes and actions from her marriage to her death. It shows her disappointment with the patriarchal society and how she does not regret what she did. This can show her strong character as a strong woman can penetrate the symbolic order with symbolic features to protect the semiotic mode of being (Kristeva, 1969). Her courageous decision to marry for love, not to get political or financial benefits, can be deemed as a defying to the patriarchal symbolic order represented by the social structure that tries to dominate her.



Her strong commitment to her desires and emotions aligns her with the semiotic, which Kristeva relates to an emotive, pre-linguistic mode of being. Her well-known statement "I am the Duchess of Malfi, and bound to please myself" (Webster, 1613, p.97) is a first example of her challenge in front of her brother's condemnation. By exercising her agency as well as asserting her individuality, she symbolically binds herself to the semiotic realm and the maternal-feminine ideal, revolting against the dictates of the patriarchal symbolic order. Kristeva connects the symbolic order to the Oedipal stage and the paternal function, which the Duchess navigates, further solidifying her symbolic position (Kristeva, 1981, p.34).

To build her independence and agency as a woman in a male-dominated society, the duchess has to embrace symbolic language and power structures. As she wants to weaken the system that seeks to dominate her, her skillful manipulation of language and use of strategies can be considered as a symbolic engagement with the symbolic order. The interaction between the symbolic and semiotic is depicted in her relationship with her brother Ferdinand, who embodies the patriarchal power that tries to control her.

Ferdinand's efforts to surrender and destroy the duchess represent the suppression of her semiotic norms and feminine principle by patriarchal society. As a mother, this role adds symbolic weight to the Duchess's character. She connects with the semiotic, pre-Oedipal domain that Kristeva associates with the maternal through her interactions with her children and embracing of the love and emotional aspects of her personality (Kristeva, 1981, p.34).

The Duchess becomes an example of the maternal-feminine principle's rejection of male-dominated society because she rejects the limitations of the symbolic order's expectations of female conduct. Her tragic death at the hands of her brothers is considered a symbolic sacrifice of the semiotic to the symbolic order, and even though she remains a symbol of power as well as her determined courage and dignity in the face of a great ordeal, it becomes a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit. According to Kristeva's concepts, the Duchess arises as a complex and multidimensional symbolic figure because she represents the persistent conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic, the individual and society, and the feminine and masculine (Kristeva, 1989, p.34).

Her ability to strike a balance between these conflicting impulses, as well as she isn't afraid of standing up to her mistakes even in the hardest situations, adds to her symbolic values. However, her symbolic influence goes beyond her own story. She is deemed as a figure who exemplifies the common human experience and

grows as a vigorous symbol of the state of humanity and constant quest for independence and self – expression in the face of unjust social forces. That's why she becomes a crucial representation that goes beyond the limitations of her special story when she is seen through the lens of Kristeva's theoretical framework.

The blending of the semiotic and symbolic, the maternal-feminine and the patriarchal makes the Duchess an eternal representation of human struggle for freedom and the emancipation of the individual soul (Kristeva, 1989, p.67). Finally, Kristeva is concerned with the subject's identity. She believes that the subject gains its identity through language. When a character expresses its purpose directly or indirectly, it claims its subjectivity. The two plays, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613) and *All's Well That Ends Well* (1623), are good samples of Kristeva's theory of subjectivity. Moreover, they tackle the question of women and how she copes with their problems in the male-dominated society that marginalizes them.

Both these plays demonstrate the agony of women in the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages. The writers of these plays want to give voice to those female characters to express their suffering in their plays. They defy the male-dominated discourse by indicating women's presence at their age. They restore their presence by making them the protagonists of the play. They drive the play from the beginning to the end. They treat the permanent abuse of women in male-dominated societies by writing about them and making them significant in their society. Shakespeare portrays the menial life of people such as Helen, the physician's daughter from the lower class, and Webster also shows the minor life of the Duchess as a woman suppressed by her brothers, who represent the male-dominated society. This paper explains how to apply Julia Kristeva's theory of semiotic and symbolic to demonstrate how characters use language to gain their self-realization (Mohammed, 2020, p.7).

The audience of these two plays can trace the struggle between the semiotic and symbolic realms in the language of these two female protagonists. In Shakespeare 's play, it is the victory of the semiotic over the symbolic, while in Webster's play, the Duchess shows the victory of the symbolic order. The struggle of these two realms in the play is called the subject-in-process. This process ends with the winning of one of these two modes, making changes in the text. It demonstrates how the text could confirm the subjectivity of the meaning. These two texts demonstrate the conflict between the text and the meaning. Both of these texts give the same message, but each gives its significant meaning, trying to tell the audience that, through these female protagonists, women can get beyond patriarchal society through literature because literature contains poetic language that patriarchal society cannot interfere with.



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