

The Patriarchal Authority and Disempowerment in *Hamlet* (1601) by Shakespeare, *the Duchess of Malfi* (1612) by John Webster and *the Fair Maid of the West* (1631) by Thomas Heywood: A Comparative Study.

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Abstract

The disempowerment of women and patriarchal authority in Renaissance era will mainly be investigated in this thesis. In this era, masculine power ruled over women. They were classified as second-class citizens under several laws. They were denied the right to choose or divorce their husbands throughout their lives due to gender inequity. Because of these unfortunate circumstances, feminist writers such as John Webster in *Duchess of Malfi* and Thomas Heywood in *The Fair Maid of the West* denounced the socially determined obedience, passivity, and quiet. Some female characters go against patriarchal notions of femininity by expressing their rage and raising their forceful, angry, and aggressive voices in opposition to men's roles of authority and power. While some of them, such as characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, clearly explained how to treat women and the women's ' submission to patriarchal

society. On a parallel line, some characters resisted being obedient to men because of patriarchal one-sided thinking. They are loud and defiant women who refuse to accept their subjugation. They become custom-breakers by rejecting the humiliation they could not bear in their societies, which tells them that women should be obedient to men, but at the same time, some of the rebellious women broke the silence and raised their voices, but they were labeled as sinful. The Duchess' story ends tragically with their deaths as retribution for breaking social conventions and opposing patriarchal ideals. And Hamlet's story ends with Ophelia's death because of her submissive to men male power. Both plays end tragically, in contrast to the third play's happy finale.

This thesis provides a comparative study of the female characters in the selected plays, exposing patriarchal authority and disempowerment issues for these characters and exhibiting their strength, submissive, and rebellious voices in a time when women were persecuted

Keywords: Feminism, Disempowerment, Patriarchal authority, Rebellious voice.