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## **Finding Female Identity Through Shakespeare) - Review**

Andrea Puskás. *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare*. 2014. Budapest: Tinta Könyvkiadó.

At first sight, one might think that the title of *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare* is revealing. The book surely contains a number of feminist analyses of adaptations of certain literary works written by Shakespeare. This premise is definitely destroyed as soon as we open the book and take a look at the table of contents. Such chapter and subsection titles as *Adaptation and/or Intertextuality?*, *Recycling Shakespeare*, *Solving the Inferiority Complex*, or *Frightening Feminism?* clearly indicate that what the author is dealing with in this monograph is a much more complex area of research than one might assume based on the title. The book consists of seven chapters; the first four dealing with the theoretical framework, the last three containing one analysis of an adaptation each. The fact that the scope of the approach used by the author stretches way over the conventional “boundaries” of literature studies becomes quite clear from the initial chapters, which aim to establish the theoretical (and terminological) background of topics such as *adaptation*, *feminism*, *female identity* and *feminist adaptations and interpretations of Shakespeare*. The author emphasizes that, in order to fully appreciate the feminist perspective, it is essential to differentiate between the feminist interpretations and the feminist adaptations of Shakespeare. The literature review on feminism is partially based on questions such as “Does being a woman reader influence

the reading process and the interpretation of the text?” (10) which, considering the magnitude of effect female identity can have on literature in general, certainly evoke the interest of the reader. The author points out that one of the most difficult tasks while writing the book was to answer the question: What does it mean to be a woman? Amongst many other concepts (e.g. poststructuralist theory, gender) the investigation of female identity reaches even language acquisition and psychoanalysis; fields of study which clearly indicate the interdisciplinary approach used in the book. The author also points out the inconsistencies within feminist criticism of Shakespeare which she tries to eliminate by providing a comprehensive classification of feminist approaches to Shakespeare. In the last three chapters the author applies the findings of her research of the aforementioned subjects by analyzing three feminist adaptations: Bryony Lavery’s *Ophelia*, the Women’s Theatre Group and Elaine Feinstein’s *Lear’s Daughters* and Paula Vogel’s *A Play About a Handkerchief*. The analysis of each adaptation focuses on similar, but at the same time quite distant aspects of female identity, such as: *the nature of tragic female identity*, *different interpretations of representing women characters*, *the great variety of feminist approaches and interpretations*. One of the aims of this book undoubtedly illustrates the complex nature of the topic: “[...] the monograph aims at proving

that adaptation always melds with theory, that feminist adaptations and the depiction of female identity of feminist adaptations are deeply politically motivated and inseparable from contemporary social, political and cultural issues, social realities that determine the formation of female identity.” (12) One of the findings of the book is that the variety of the political, social and cultural implications and the great number of schools of thought within feminism prevents the formation of a single definition of the concept. The work calls attention to the fact that the role of women in literature “is determined by such female realities as housework, raising children, working at paid jobs [...]”. (127) The author points out that the search for the answers stated about female identity led to even more questions, which ultimately showed that defining female identity is not merely a task but rather a “life-long pursuit”. Based on the analysis of the feminist adaptations of Shakespeare, the author concludes her book by stressing that instead of trying to imagine women as being uniformed, the emphasis should be placed “on a celebration of diversity and individuality, and the individual’s ability to choose, reinterpret, construct and reconstruct.” (129) *Female Identity in Feminist Adaptations of Shakespeare*, with its engaging and paradoxically current topic(s) is recommended to anyone, who is interested in feminism and female identity.