

Representation of Women as Femmes Fatales: History, Development and Analysis

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ABSTRACT--- *The intention of this paper is to trace some of the history and the development of representation of women as femmes fatales in the western religious, mythological and literary narratives. It will explore the stereotype of the femme fatale character that has been established over ages. This study assumes that seduction and destruction qualities attached to the character of the femme fatale are not ends in themselves, but may be attributed to some social or economic or psychological reasons. To illustrate further, the paper provides examples from religion, mythology and literature to explain the representation of the femme fatale. To shed more light on the possible motives and purposes of a femme fatale character, the major female protagonist of George Eliot's novel Adam Bede shall be analyzed.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The evil woman or the seductress who tempts men and brings about his destruction is one of the oldest themes of literature, mythology and religion in most cultures. According to Mario Praz, the writer of the classic study of romanticism, *The Romantic Agony*: "There have always existed Fatal Women in both mythology and literature, since mythology and literature are imaginative reflections of the various aspects of life, and the real life has always provided more or less complete examples of arrogant and cruel female characters" (1978, p.161). The noticeable characterization of the fatal woman, or femme fatale, in the western literature and mythology has shifted back and forth over time; she was portrayed heavily in the tragic drama of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and was something of an obsession for a number of poets and novelists in the Victorian age. The intention of this paper is to trace some of the history and the development of the femme fatale in the western culture, exploring the stereotype of the femme fatale character that has been established over ages. To illustrate further, a thorough analysis of the major female protagonist of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* will be provided as an example for the femme fatale character, her purposes and intentions.

The meaning of the femme fatale according to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (1997) is "a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations." In *The Women's Companion to International Film*, Annette Kuhn explains that "the femme fatale is primarily defined by her desirable, but dangerous, sexuality which brings about the downfall of the male protagonist" (1990, p. 154). The femme fatale, then, is an attractive female who uses her charms to seduce or/and destroy a male protagonist. She is always temptress because of her physical charms and constitutes a specific danger to men. The femme fatale may also be manifested in other forms as well such as "a hag, a witch, a supernatural woman using means such as love-potion, incantations and other snares to enslave a worthy male of heroic dimensions" (Thekkeveetil 1983, p. 12).

The various manifestations of the femme fatale both in literature and in mythology are somewhat more complex. She may appear as a high society lady, bejeweled and surrounded by wealthy people; on the other hand, she may appear as a low class woman or girl who is striving to change her living style. She is manifested in other forms as well such as a mythological figure of super-powers that preys on the weaker males. In all cases, a handsome face, exotic clothing, and an aristocratic demeanor are required to hide their personality. Despite the different portrayals of the femme fatale in literature, two of the key features are always associated to her: a refusal to submit to conventional rules controlling the man-woman relationship, and she is amoral or beyond the common tradition of morality. "If she is within the bounds of moral regeneration, she is so excessively selfish that, even in the act of seeking personal redemption, she hurts and destroys her lover" (Thekkeveetil 1983, p. 15)

An initial question that should be answered about these sexually attractive women who are branded as femmes fatales is what is their intent behind their seductive acts? Or is it possible that their fatality has more to do with the consequences of unconscious motives or past events? Paul Huvenne and Kees van Twist, in their foreword to *Femme Fatales: 1860-1910*, distinguish the ordinary seductress and the femme fatale as "two essentially different species." For the mere seductress, "sexuality and voluptuousness are ends in themselves." The femme fatale, however, "uses her feminine attractions to lure men to their destruction" (Huvenne 2003, p7). Thekkeveetil shares the same opinion with Huvenne about the destructive nature of the femme fatale. He states that "The destructiveness of the femme fatale is not a

transient weakness or a character flaw. Instead, it is an intrinsic and immutable dimension of her persona. Consequently, the femme fatale is not capable of moral regeneration” (1983, p. 16).

Contrary to both Thekkeveetil and Huvenne, Jennifer Lee Hedgecock (2014) believes that the seduction of the femme fatale women are rarely ends in themselves. She attributed seductive actions, or maybe violence, of the fatal women to socioeconomic reasons which is central to the domain of this study. She says: “Her socioeconomic dilemmas drive her to commit bigamy or murder as an escape from poverty, and her resilience to such economic hardships undermines any specific definition of her” (p.2). The femme fatale only desires the socioeconomic mobility and power or maybe social advancement. She strives for her financial independence and a place in a better community or a higher social class. “The femme fatale character embodies socioeconomic problems, such as abandonment, poverty, and spinsterhood, that real-life, unmarried, middle-class women must overcome” (Hedgecock, 2014, p. 21).

The feminist community specifically formed a revolt against the conventions of femme fatale of western culture, rejecting idea of the feminine ideal, producing a different understanding of women, and giving the femme fatale a new identity. Eleanor Marx (1884), the sister of Karl Marx, confronted cultural forces that usually determined the value of women and the femme fatale “reinvents herself, but only to attack the very domestic roles by cross-dressing, remaining unmarried, and calling for personal styles or professional pursuits” (cited in Hedgecock 2014, p. 209). Barbara Taylor in *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (1993), on the other hand, attributes the behavior of the femme fatale behavior not to any mental or physical deficiencies, but the “product of a male-defined social order which consigned women to a stultifying, crippling way of life” (p.4). The widely known feminist Helen Cixous also reconfigured the femme fatale as “a subversive, feminist figure challenging patriarchy; [...] she's not deadly. She's beautiful” (cited in Smikin, 2014, p.23). The behavior of the femme fatale is seen as a tool to escape and overcome the values and restrictions of male-dominated society.

Although the real motives behind the seductive and destructive behavior of the femme fatale are not always clear, this paper assumes that seduction and destruction are not ends in themselves. In the course of this study, the term femme fatale is used in specific sense: to indicate a tempting human, not supernatural, female character of specific purposes. She is found in literature and mythology and usually associated with a male downfall in one form or another. The motives of such a female are not necessarily evil but may arise from a socioeconomic need or a disturbing past experience.

To identify a female character as a femme fatale, a naive male protagonist must be present. The male victim is usually naïve and his naivety is tested in the presence of the femme fatale, who threatens to contain him. Here we see one of the main characteristics of the femme fatale: she must have an effect on men; unless the male protagonist is present, the woman is not fatal. Frequently he becomes “the novel’s detective, a role forcing him into manhood” (Hedgecock, 2014, p 9). Sexual tension is present between a sexually repressed male protagonist and the sexually experienced femme fatale, and is often threatening to the male protagonist who lacks knowledge about the power of a seductive woman. Mario Praz's (1978) provides some characteristics of the sexually repressed male lover under the influence of the femme fatale:

In accordance with this conception of the Fatal Woman, the lover is usually a youth, and maintains a passive attitude; he is obscure, and inferior either in condition or in physical exuberance to the woman, who stands in the same relation to him as do the female spider and the praying mantis to their respective males: sexual cannibalism is her monopoly. (Praz 1978, p. 231)

Therefore he is physically inferior and is no match for her character. This, definitely, results in a psychological sense of inferiority that increases his attachment to the femme fatale. This attachment provides him with a sense of satisfaction and self-sufficiency that he already lacks.

This male protagonist, in the course of the plot, is either has no desire to liberate himself from the entrapment, or he fails to recognize the full extent of the seduction of the fatal woman. The man, consequently, suffers either a moral decline or a physical decline. A good example of the moral decline of a hero under the influence of the femme fatale is Sir Lancelot who falls in love with Guinevere, the wife of King Arthur, while Samson is a striking example of the physical decline of a hero who is deceived by a femme fatale named Delilah.

2. EXAMPLES OF THE FEMMES FATALES IN THE RELIGIOUS, MYTHOLOGICAL AND EPIC NARRATIVES

While the term ‘femme fatale’ might not have come into common usage until the twentieth century, (Allen 1983, p.vii) the fatal woman herself has been rooted and generously represented in the religious stories, popular narratives and mythology of western culture. The figure of Eve is obviously a foundational one in understanding the rise

of the myth of the temptress woman in the Christian tradition culture, Kathleen McLuskie remarks how the Church fathers insisted on woman's direct descent from Eve which gave her the attributes of lust and duplicity (2000, p. 105). Eve's weakness in allowing herself to be deceived and tempted by Satan, in the form of a serpent, is seen as the trigger for original sin, which in turn led to the fall and the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. While both Adam and Eve ate of the fruit from the forbidden tree of knowledge, the Genesis identifies Eve as the instigator: persuaded by the serpent that she will not die if she eats of the tree in the middle of the garden, only that her eyes "shall be opened", she "took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (3:5-6, cited in Simkin2014, p. 25). Adam redirects the blame when God asks why he has eaten the forbidden fruit: "The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (3:12,cited in Simkin2014, p. 25). When Eve diverts the blame to the serpent, God punishes the three of them. Eve is perceived to be the one who tempted Adam and the one to be blamed for the fall from paradise and the misery of the human race.

For John A. Phillips (1984), the Old Testament Eve maps closely onto the myth of Pandora; "the trickster god Hermes, the one who imbued her with her knavish nature, is the equivalent of the serpent; the eating of the fruit parallels the opening of the jar; and the outcome of each for is the same, with the earth turned from a paradise into a problematic place where hard labor, birth and death are facts of life" (Phillips 1984, p. 19). Pandora, then, is another image of the femme fatal that was manifested in the Greek mythology. According to the myth, Pandora is the first woman who was formed out of clay by the gods. The titan Prometheus had originally been assigned with the task of creating man. Because he is dissatisfied with their creation as a weaker race, he teaches them how to make fire, which is the privilege of gods only. Zeus punishes Prometheus for this act, and commands other gods to create a woman, Pandora, and endow her with the beauty and cunning. He, then, delivers her to the foolish younger brother of Prometheus, for a bride. Pandora is given a box or a jar as a wedding present. Gods tell her that the box contained special gifts from them but she is not allowed to open the box ever. When she arrives to her husband's house, Pandora opens the box and releases a swarm of evil spirits trapped within. They would ever afterwards plague mankind (Smith, 2005, p. 112).

Pandora is Zeus's punishment for Prometheus's disobedience. The eighth-century poet Hesiod describes Pandora as "a sheer, impossible deception" characterized by "lies, and wheedling words of falsehood, and a treacherous nature" (cited in Henderson and McManus 1985, p. 5). She is a representation of the foolish woman who is not able to control her desire in opening the box. Her desire becomes fatal not only to her husband but also to all mankind.

The more striking and culturally resonant figure of the fatal woman in the Greek mythology is the character of the Medusa. According to Ovid, Medusa was a woman of renowned beauty, "the jealous hope, of many a suitor. Of all her charms, her hair was loveliest" (Ovid 1986, p. 98). After Medusa is raped by Poseidon in Athena's temple, Athena punishes her by transforming her hair into serpents and giving her a face and eyes that would turn men into stone. Because Medusa's sexuality is forced upon her, she becomes a female victim of a disturbing, sexually violent past. Regardless of Medusa's punishment, she becomes a femme fatale using beauty as something lethal, and her name is associated to seduction and dangerous attraction.

While Pandora and Medusa are examples for the femme fatale from the Greek mythology, the Helen of Troy in Homer's *Iliad* represents the femme fatal in the classical epic. Helen has unmatched beauty that drives her many suitors wild with love for her. Her beauty is described by Homer as a threatening "Beauty! Terrible Beauty! A deathless Goddess" (1998, p. 124). This beauty is dangerous because it ignites sexual desire. This beauty hides a dark heart of betrayal. She leaves her husband Menelaus and elopes with Paris, the prince of Troy, despite her knowledge of the consequences that may happen. Helen plays the role of a femme fatale as she brings death to warriors from both the Greek and Trojan sides including the lives of her husband and lover. Her fatality is viewed in pursuit of advancement and more power, but this pursuit leads to the destruction of the old world.

3. EXAMPLES OF FEMMES FATALES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH DRAMA

Long before she receives her title, the femme fatal thrived in Shakespeare's drama. Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra are both unusual women in Shakespeare's plays that associated to the power of destruction as a defining quality. The former represents the driving force behind her husband's destruction, spurring him on to murder of King Duncan in order to clear his own path to the Scottish throne. Contrary to his mild nature, she pushes him to kill the king which brings about the destruction of himself. Fearing that her husband is full of the "milk of human kindness" (Shakespeare 1990, 1.5.16), Lady Macbeth invites the spirits "that tend on mortal thoughts" to "unsex" her and "fill her from the crown to the toe, top-full of direst cruelty" (1990, 1.5.39-42). By mocking his manhood and virility ("When you durst do it, then you were a man" [1990, 1.7.49]), she uses her verbal charms to dominate over him and propel him further towards his destruction. Lady Macbeth uses her verbal charms much more than her physical seduction and beauty to motivate her husband to commit a crime against his king, community and himself. She, herself, had her socioeconomic reasons to behave in a monstrous manner; becoming a queen of more power and glory. To achieve her aim of more power, she behaves in a mannish manner much closer to word 'fatale' than the word 'femme'.

In some senses the reverse of Lady Macbeth, Cleopatra is considerably distant from the adjective 'fatale' and much closer to the noun 'femme'. Cleopatra is a more conventional model of the dangerous beauty. She is known for her strong sexuality and beauty. She uses this sexuality to entangle Mark Antony, who leaves his country and wife for her own sake. She betrays him and risks his life and army for her own safety. She is one of Shakespeare's few female characters for whom sex is a treacherous means for staying in power. Because of her tricks and wiles, Antony is defeated and commits suicide by falling on his own sword. Shakespeare's depiction of her as a threat to Roman leaders makes her "the very type of the Romantic femme fatale" (Praz 1978, p. 214).

Mark Antony, on the other hand, is depicted as the weaker naïve male who has no desire to liberate himself from the entrapment. He fails to recognize the full extent of the evil in the fatal woman. He dismisses his duties, social status and wife for Cleopatra's sake: "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall" (Shakespeare 2008, 1.1.35–36). Although she betrays him into battle several times, Antony despairs from Cleopatra for a short while and condemns her for leading him into infamy, but quickly forgives her. When Cleopatra makes a rumor that she has committed suicide, Antony, racked with grief, determines to join his queen in the afterlife. Antony suffers a physical decline and kills himself because he has no desire to free himself from Cleopatra's entrapment.

4. REPRESENTATION OF THE FEMME FATALE IN THE ROMANTIC LITERATURE

A different version of the femme fatale also haunted romantic poets. This version is similar to Cleopatra's image: a woman of strong sexuality and influence on male protagonists, but of supernatural powers such as spells, incantations or magical powers. Some of the femmes fatales in this period may be placed under a curse or an ancestral doom that has been transmitted through generations. She may also be a pagan goddess or a witch or a vampire of unholy powers. She may transform into a serpent or a swine or a cat or another animal which presents the satanic nature of these fatal women. Throughout the Romantic poetry the erotic and supernatural powers of the femme fatale are often associated with death and violence that ends in the destruction of her male partner.

Two of the earliest, frequently referenced fatal women from the romantic period are Coleridge's Geraldine in his poem "Christabel" and Keats's La Belle Dame in his poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (the beautiful woman without mercy). The former, Geraldine, is a young woman who is rescued by innocent victim Christabel. Geraldine is one of the earliest literary depictions of the female vampire and represents desire and the darker side of human nature. She portrays herself as a victim of male violence, but in fact performs her own acts of seduction against the innocent soul of Christabel and her father. At times, Geraldine's true nature is revealed in a deformed body she hides under her white dress and the snakelike hissing she directs toward the resistant Christabel.

Geraldine is a maiden of elegant but obscure origin. Before she takes on an alluring female shape, she is gendered very similar to a "toothless mastiff bitch" that howls "from her kennel beneath the rock" (Coleridge 1956, 1.6-7). Geraldine's transformation into "a damsel bright" (1956, 1. 57) is a form of disguise to hide the fatal nature with a beautiful look of a female. Geraldine is a snake-like creature whose eyes can mesmerize her victims, but pretends to be a damsel in distress to get herself invited into the castle of Sir Leoline, Christabel's father, and takes over the mother's role by seducing the father. Her weapons are sex and seduction rather than the brutal force and fangs.

Keats's "La Belle Dame" is a femme fatale with long hair, exotic dress and sexual appeal. The male character in the poem is a knight who meets a "Lady in the meads" (Keats 1956, 4.13) and instantly falls in love with her. They spend the day together and have a wonderful time. However, in a dream, the knight receives a warning that he has been put under a spell by the woman; eventually, he ends up alone and dying. Throughout this poem, the "Lady" is described as a magical creature, a "fairy's child" who speaks in a "language strange" (Keats 1956, 7. 27-28). She sings a beautiful song while riding the knight's horse. Like Geraldine, La Belle Dame is a maiden of elegant but obscure origin. She is a supernatural being who can put a spell on a man to make him love her. She tempts the knight with her beauty and song then destroys him by draining his strength and leaving him in the barrenness cold of winter. She reduces his masculinity and entraps him with her feminine sexuality.

5. IMAGE OF FEMME FATALE IN THE VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Despite her extended fame and remarkable existence in the literary, mythological and religious texts, it is in the nineteenth century that the femme fatale emerges as a powerfully resonant figure that infuses the culture of the period. The scholarly studies focused on her in this era, particularly from critics working within a range of feminist critical-theoretical positions. Jennifer Hedgecock (2014) considers the place of the femme fatale in the Victorian literature and Bram Dijkstra (1988) looks at both literary and visual arts; both find her to be an indicator to patriarchal anxieties about the rise of the new woman and of wider social and political changes. Adriana Craciun (2003) focuses on the first half of the century and makes connections between the femme fatale existence and debatable questions about gender and culturally constructed images of women. Heather Braun (2007) situates her in the culture of the nineteenth century, tracking her rise to familiarity by the beginning of the twentieth century. The scope of this part of

this paper is to apply the image of the femme fatale to one of George Eliot's female characters in the famous novel *Adam Bede*. The assumption, here, is that socioeconomic conditions and a disturbing past underlie the exotic behavior of the femme fatale. It is only a means used by the female character to escape from hard social or financial conditions or to hide and overcome a painful past experience.

The image of the femme fatale in the Victorian age is different from historical figures such as Cleopatra, Helen of Troy or Geraldine. She does not always bear a sexuality that is wild and predatory. She is introduced as a middle-class or even a lower-class woman who enters the mainstream Victorian culture without being detected as dangerous. This modest physical appearance is a necessity to blend into the society. She is young and attractive, yet dangerous but other characters regard her as harmless due to her uncommunicative manner.

Physical appearances still play a significant role in the characterization of the Victorian femme fatale but only to construct an acceptable image of women, such as the domestic image suitable to the upper-class standards. Sophisticated beauty is disguised behind a face of child-like innocence or a domestic image to pose no moral threat. Popular Victorian femme fatale seems too harmless to be taken for a fatal woman. Yet such camouflage is necessary if dangerous women are to invade aristocratic homes and marry wealthy men. Additionally these disguises help guarantee the femme fatale's success when she decides to break from poverty and pursue better options in upper-class homes by enchanting gentlemen.

Femme Fatales as strong extremely beautiful women do not fit the standards of the Victorian society because the "male-dominated culture defined normative rules for female sexuality, activity, and intellect" (Hedgecock 2014, p225). From a young age, girls were told how to be an "angel of the house" (Braun 2007, p107). They followed the stereotypical gender roles with which society had cruelly burdened them with from the very moment of their births. Keeping their houses clean, cooking each and every meal for their families, and always having a delicate, submissive attitude towards their male counterparts are a few of the most important things a woman during this nineteenth-century culture would need to perfect. On the other hand, men viewed women as attachments to their own existence. Women were degraded to objects for entertaining men. The good woman, specially the unmarried one, is the one who plays piano well, dances nicely in dancing balls, and the one who hunts a wealthy husband. A woman's success depends on capturing desirable male suitors. The femme fatale who desires autonomy and social advancement understands the oppressive nature of the social class system that keeps her subordinated. She also understands that she challenges the conventional norms and values of the society. Therefore, enters into it by performing the role of the domestic woman that fits the values, to serve her own purposes of economic autonomy and social advancement.

6. HETTY THE FEMME FATALE AND ADAM THE MALE VICTIM IN GEORGE ELIOT'S ADAM BEDE

Despite the portrayal of women in general and the femme fatale in particular in the Victorian literature, a number of critics argue that George Eliot challenges her society's representational tendencies with respect to women. Susan Gorsky, for example, claims that "in the pictures which they present, [George Eliot's novels] reveal the problems which women faced, the limitations of the traditional female role, and some alternatives to the currently accepted ideals" (cited in Lawless 1990, p. 255). Ina Taylor (1989) similarly suggests that "no [nineteenth-century] reader was left in any doubt that George Eliot found much to criticize in the behavior of a male-dominated society" (1989, p. 200). Considering specifically Eliot's famous novel *Adam Bede* (1859), Lawless claims that *Adam Bede* "establishes George Eliot as a feminist writer in the finest intellectual tradition" (1990, p.250). Eliot in *Adam Bede*, portrays a female character named Hetty Sorrel, as femme fatale, who breaks the norms and values of Victorian society because of her desire in a better life.

In *Adam Bede*, the unconventional woman character, Hetty, has an affair with a wealthy man, Captain Arthur Donnithorne, whom she mistakenly thinks that he may get married to her. She keeps her pregnancy a secret and then murders her baby once it is born. She deceives another male suitor named Adam Bede, who is considered to be her fiancé and the male victim of the femme fatale. Hetty's manners and fatality can be attributed to a desire in the female character for autonomy and social advancement. It may also be attributed to unconscious past experiences that she would like to escape from.

Hetty is a beautiful, lower-class girl who lives and works in her uncle and aunt's farm. She quietly seeks out a better materialistic life and is so captured by the glittering gold, jewelry, and upper class finery things. Hetty possesses a negative attitude against her rural lifestyle. She is described as a "perfect beauty" (Eliot 1980, p. 274). Despite her flawless features, she has a "vain little nature" (Eliot 1980, p. 199), that is revealed in her habit of "gazing at the pleasing reflection of herself in polished surfaces" (Eliot 1980, p.74) at the Hall Farm, and in the dairy, when she "tosses and pats her pound of butter, slyly conscious that no turn of her head [is] lost" (Eliot 1980, p. 84) by Arthur. She always thinks of the impact her looks have on the men in her village which shows a form of vanity in her character. Moreover, Hetty is

deceptive and manipulative: she sneaks out under false pretences to meet Arthur in the chase. She also hides her pregnancy and relationship to Arthur from her fiancé, Adam. In addition to her lies, Hetty likes to feel that Adam is “in her power,” using her beauty to “entice him” into her “net” (Eliot 1980, p. 99) and away from Mary Burge. Hetty also hopes her beauty will help her gain materially. Her vain musings, for example, reveal a belief that her looks will elicit a marriage proposal from Arthur, a man of “wealth and grandeur immeasurable” (Eliot 1980, p.97). Vain, deceptive, sexually conscious of her beauty's power over others and willing to use this to her advantage, Hetty seems to fit the character of the *femme fatale*.

Although Hetty has many of the qualities associated with the *femme fatale*, Eliot opens a window in Hetty's past to allow readers have a glimpse of the reasons that may affect her moral and emotional development. Hetty is raised as a “domestic help” (Eliot 1980, p. 143) for the Poysers' family; hated and unwanted. Mr Poysers' father, who is Hetty's grandfather, never forgives his daughter, Hetty's mother, for marrying a poor man against his will: “A long unextinguished resentment, which always made the grandfather more indifferent to Hetty than to his son's children. Her mother's fortune had been spent by that good-for-naught Sorrel, and Hetty had Sorrel's blood in her veins” (Eliot 1980, p. 383). Mrs. Poysers treats Hetty well, but often scolds her vehemently along with the servants. She never treats the orphan niece as an equal to her own children. Though they wish the best for Hetty in marriage, the Poysers do not see her as “a daughter of their own,” but as a “penniless niece. For what could Hetty have been but a servant elsewhere, if her uncle had not taken her in and brought her up as a domestic help to her aunt” (Eliot 1980, p. 143). Hetty occupies a position below the Poysers' children. Therefore, her behavior works as a self-defense strategy and a way to escape from a miserable reality.

Hetty's fatality is caused by inequality: having lost her own position as daughter, she hates the Poysers' children as rivals and does not care much for the parents who produced them. She has no “loving thought of her second parents-- of the children she had helped to tend-- of any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood even” and “did not understand how anybody could be very fond of middle-aged people” (Eliot 1980, p. 199). Her feelings for Arthur are just a “Cinderella- fantasy in which he plays a god like handsome prince who will magically elevate her above all rivals especially Mary Burge” (Hardy 1985, p. 54). Hetty is a psychological realistic portrayal of a dark aspect of an orphaned child's experience. This experience is fostered in the unconscious of Hetty, and she behaves accordingly. Her fatality is not innate, but an outcome of the external forces that affected the formation of her character.

Eliot's novel also presents a naive male protagonist who is easily deceived by the outside appearance of the *femme fatale*. Like Mark Antony, Adam Bede, the character, has no desire to liberate himself from the deception of Hetty Sorrel, but he manages to do so at the end of the novel. Adam believes in the outward signs and takes Hetty literally at the face value: “the deep love he had for that sweet, rounded, blossom-like, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really very ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature” (Eliot 1980, p. 399). The very strength of Adam's nature is constructed to be deceived by the outward appearances of things. Only at the dance in Arthur's birthday-feast, when Hetty's hidden necklace breaks and the expensive locket which Arthur has given her falls to the floor, does Adam begin to suspect the inadequacy of his interpretations. Despite this concrete evidence of Hetty's secret life as that is unknown to him, he justifies Hetty's actions and makes them acceptable to his mind:

After all, he might be a fool, making a great misery out of a trifle. Hetty, fond of finery as she was, might have bought the thing herself. It looked too expensive for that [...] Perhaps Hetty had had as much as that in Christmas-boxes, [...] And so Adam went to bed comforted, having woven for himself an ingenious web of probabilities - the surest screen a wise man can place between himself and the truth (Eliot 1980, p.333).

Adam's will unconsciously predetermines the outcome of his thoughts in favor of his comforting illusions. He makes himself a fool who does not need to see the truth.

As Hetty's child and secret grow inside her, those close to her notice signs of change in her character, yet fail to know the reasons of change. Adam, despite his knowledge of Hetty's affair with Captain Donnithorne, is equally ignorant; he perceives signs of “change: the cheeks were as pink as ever, and she smiled as much as she had ever done of late, but there was something different in her eyes, in the expression of her face, in all her movements, Adam thought - something harder, older, less child-like” (Eliot 1980, p.398). Adam, as Eliot says of him later, “was not at all sagacious in his interpretations” (1980, p. 399). He deceives himself again by giving false interpretation of facts: “‘Poor thing!’ he said to himself, that's allays likely. It's because she's had her first heart-ache. . . . Thank God for that!” (1980, p. 399).

After Adam passes through many actions of misinterpretations, self-illusions, and misunderstandings, he manages to bring himself nearer to understand Hetty's nature as a *femme fatale*: “He saw the whole history now by that terrible illumination which the present sheds back upon the past” (Eliot 1980, p. 453). The growth of Adam's nature

and the lessons of his experience have given him a new perspective from which to view what is external to him. Adam sees the past, in which he loved Hetty blindly, in a different manner. The new consciousness he gains becomes the reason that liberates him from attachment to Hetty.

7. CONCLUSION

Despite her extended fame and remarkable excess, the femme fatale figure remained, for the most part, nameless. The first documented English use of the term femme fatale appeared in 1912 in a letter by George Bernard Shaw who referred in passing to this "fine figure of a woman" (Braun 2007, p.19). Shaw's letter remained unpublished until 1952, when the femme fatale had already begun to disappear from literature. Long before she received her sexy French title, the fatal woman thrived in different narratives. This paper records examples of the representation of women as femmes fatales in religious, mythological and literary contexts. The stereotype of the femme fatale typically reduces her to simply a dangerous woman. In fact the purposes underlying the behavior of the femme fatale should be overlooked. These women use their beauty and sexuality for a number of socioeconomic and psychological reasons such as escaping from an agonizing past or a miserable present or poverty or in search for social advancement. For the same socioeconomic and psychological reasons, Hetty Sorrel, the female protagonist of George Eliot's Novel Adam Bede, uses her charms to entangle the innocent carpenter Adam Bede in her web.

8. REFERENCES

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