

OPUS 14 “Sir, she came in great with child, and longing”: phenomenology of pregnancy in English early modern drama (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.96)”.

Description for the General Public:

The aim of the project: The main aim of this project is to investigate portrayals of pregnant characters in English drama from the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century. Expecting a baby is not treated in the project solely as a transition phase, but a fundamental experience shaping subjectivity and identity of a woman. The topic of pregnancy becomes an object of philosophical inquiry and a philosophical dilemma requiring an in-depth analysis. It is in this perspective that the source texts of the period are investigated. These texts constitute a scientific, medical and cultural background of the period. Next, the author proceeds to the interpretation of dramas with pregnancy at their centre, taking into account results of historical and cultural analysis. The ideas of modern thinkers dealing with the topic of pregnancy become the interpretative key to a reading of expectant mothers’ portraits. The analysis in the light of the so called “phenomenology of pregnancy” serves a greater understanding and description of characters, whose experiences reflect the atmosphere and ideology of the period. The publication of a monograph solely devoted to the discussion of pregnancy in the early modern drama will be the direct effect of the project. Consequently, the research objectives will be disseminated in the academia.

Research conducted in the project: The first phase of the research project consists of working out a methodological model that will serve analysis of, firstly, the source texts of the period, and secondly, the selected dramas. At this stage, the author will build a “methodological” matrix of philosophical reflection for the subsequent analysis of source texts and dramas (e.g. Kristeva, Irigaray, Rich, Young). Next, the researcher will select and analyse source texts that deal with the issues of pregnancy (e.g. *The Birth of Mankind* by Eucharius Rösslin, translated by Thomas Raynalde, Guillemeau and his *Childbirth of The Happy Delivery of Women* as well as Culpeper 1651, Sharp 1671, Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman* 1524). Finally, the author will choose and analyse the pregnant characters and investigate their roles and functions in the structure of the works. The last stage of the research project includes the revision and publication of the monograph. Subsequent stages of the project will be accompanied by library studies and conference travels, thanks to which the research outcomes will be popularized and disseminated.

Reasons for taking up the project: We are all born of a woman, as Adrienne Rich reminds us in her groundbreaking book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Our life in the body of our mother and subsequent birth are fundamental facts of human existence. Simultaneously, pregnancy, or the experience of “a split subject”, as Julia Kristeva terms pregnancy, has never been an important topic of philosophical inquiry or literature studies. Despite the growing interest in female experience both in the present and past society, pregnancy has mostly been treated as a transition period or a rite of passage to motherhood. Pregnancy itself is a fascinating philosophical problem that encapsulates a variety of ethical, ontological and epistemological dilemmas. At the centre of these dilemmas one can find an expectant mother, the child and its father. The Renaissance is traditionally seen as a period formative for modern individualism and subjectivity. If indeed the early modern period offers a glimpse at the first great individuals e.g. protagonists of Shakespeare’s tragedies the question of subjectivity and a sense of identity of Renaissance women and expectant mothers seems a viable research area of inquiry. The English Renaissance and Baroque offers few, albeit fascinating, portraits of pregnant women (e.g. Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* by William Shakespeare, or the protagonist of *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster). Although various publications on maternity in the Renaissance are available they do not take up a philosophical analysis of the experience of pregnancy. One can assume that expecting a baby, regardless of circumstances, was a limit situation or a border experience for an early modern woman. A detailed analysis of pregnancy portrayals will shed some new light on the issue of pregnancy both in philosophical and literary studies as well as culture studies.