Gender Rapresentation in Star Wars Films

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Sveučilište u Zadru

Odjel za anglistiku

Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

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Završni rad

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Zadar, 2017.

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Zadar, 1. rujna 2017.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present to which extent the representation influences the portrayal of female characters in the Star Wars films. Firstly, the basic notions such as gender, male gaze and representation will be introduced and then later on used to describe and explain particular occurrences in the observed examples. All of these are closely related to the feminist film criticism, a theory highly influenced by the works of Laura Mulvey. This theory will be a central part of this paper's objective as it connects the focal notions when we talk about the issue that is gender representation in the films.

Aforesaid theory argues that cinema works as a representational system through which a woman is attributed a passive role of a bearer of the meaning. This role grants visual pleasure for its spectators who do not only identify themselves with male heroes but are also able to symbolically possess female on the screen through scopophylia. In addition, movies create a perfect environment for female sexual objectification. Together with voyeurism and fetishisation, cinema plays on our primordial need for pleasurable looking and that is why female characters are often either sexualised or used to commence male hero's narrative.

Henceforth, we plan to introduce two major female characters in the Star Wars franchise, Leia Organa and Padme Amidala. Through their separate, but rather similar narratives, it will be examined what role women usually take in such movies. Specifically, I will talk about their representation in relation to the important male characters in their lives, and how such representation failed to portray women as equal driving forces as it was done in the cases of their male counterparts. What is more, in many instances in first six Star Wars movies, women and used as sexual objects or as a tool for gender diversity. Through these two characters, one can follow how representation is used to establish the gender hierarchy which is often based on imparity for women and men do not hold the same position in this system.

In addition, when we talk about first two movie trilogies it is evident that Padme and Leia are the only significant female characters. This illustrates how women are not only objectified and used in fetishisation, but they are also greatly under-represented. All these issues will be discussed and vindicated using few selected scenes from the original and prequel trilogies. The most important works that are referred to in this paper are those by Mulvey, de Beauvoir, de Lauretis, Hall, and Chaudhuri, as well as a thesis by John Paul Pianka entitled *The Power of the Force: Race, Gender and Colonialism in the Star Wars*.

2. Theoretical background

2.1.Gender

To start the discussion about the ways in which images are controlled by film's reflection on the socially established difference between the sexes, firstly we must talk about the gender. A massive misconception nowadays is that gender and sex are equal. Even though in most of the cases they are very closely connected, this is not true. While sex is biological, gender is a socially constructed part of one's identity. Therefore, gender does not emerge from the sex, nor is it as strict and as definite. Judith Butler argues that if we agree that the gender incorporates cultural meanings assumed by the sexed body, it is completely impossible to claim that it follows from sex. Because it is a socially constructed component, gender does not depend on sex, does not mirror it, nor is it restricted by it. (6)

One can furthermore claim that the gender is formed from the prior formation of natural sex which then served as a politically neutral surface for culture to act on. (6) Consequently, as Simone de Beauvoir put it: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one." (330) For her, gender is not constructed but implied. She states that gender is an aspect of one's identity that is progressively attained. (335) Therefore, we have to completely preclude any notion of homogeny between natural sex and constructed gender. "Being a female and being a woman are two very different sorts of being." (Butler 35) Thus, what interests me in this paper is to show how the practices of looking contribute to the way in which the hierarchy of gender is fabricated and maintained. (Eagleton 177) As a result, this brings us to the role of male gaze and representation.

2.2. Male gaze and representation

Attributed as the most pervasive and technologically developed apparatus of phallocentric visual culture, (Mulvey 836) cinema is especially important in the construction of the male gaze. What is more, cinematic images are invested with the power to incite their spectators,

and as such they play a very significant role within the representation and ideology production. Images on the screen "exert power and act as instruments of power". (Sturken Catwright 93) Spectators, hereby defined as ideal subjects socially constructed by cinematic apparatus, identify themselves with the subject on the screen and consequently with the entire ideology behind the film's narrative. This process is finalised through the gaze which is defined in psychoanalytic film theory as not the act of looking itself, but the viewing relationship features of a specific array of social circumstances. (Sturken Catwright 93) Consequently, looking contributes to the way in which the hierarchy of gender is fabricated and maintained. (Eagleton 177) Moreover, the unconscious of patriarchal society has had a grave influence on film form, and therefore it is important to talk about the representation of the female form in a symbolic order. (Mulvey 833)

Representation is described as "the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture through the use of language, signs as images which stand for or represent things." (Hall 15) According to his constructionist's theory approach to representation, it is us who construct the meaning through the representational systems such as concepts and signs. A woman is customarily represented as the image and sexual object for the male heterosexual pleasure, and the male gaze is an omnipresent practice in today's society. She is portrayed to play and signify to male desire. (Mulvey 837) Taking this into consideration, one can claim that cinema works as a representational system. It uses a skilled manipulation of visual pleasure where a woman acts as a signifier for male other. She is bound by symbolic order in which man is able to fulfil his phantasies by imposing them on her silent image as the bearer, never the maker of meaning. (Mulvey 834) In feminist film theory, this type of representation is seen as a conscious strategy of a male dominated film industry. (Chaudhuri 23)

2.3. Feminist film theory

This theoretical film criticism, highly influenced by the feminist theorist Laura Mulvey, argues that women on the screen do not appear as autonomous entities. They only exist in their reference to men, and never the other way round. What is more, while a man is the Absolute, a woman a mere Other. (de Beauvoir 240) Hence, men look at women while women watch themselves being looked at. Simply said: men act and women appear. These structures of looking are not natural, but historical. They emerge from strongly established patterns of hierarchical gender inequality system. (de Beauvoir 241) In this system, women are disciplined by the visual and they learn their subordinate place by its repetition through various manners of visual representation, especially cinema. (Eagleton 177)

Cinema echoes our visual pleasure and it is the feminine that bears the burden of exhibitionism. (Eagleton 185) Because it incorporates in its very core the variations of the look, cinema can be easily distinguished from other types of visual representation. That is to say, by putting the spectator in the masculine position of an observer, it predetermines how woman is to be looked at. (Chaudhuri 35) In this situation, men claim the subject position, while women take the position of an objectified Other which consequently results in them being denied their own existence. (de Beauvoir 240) This is why films can be used to observe how culturally constructed analysis of sexual difference controls the ways in which women are represented on the screen. (Mulvey 833)

For Laura Mulvey film efficiently conjoins narrative with the spectacle. She says that female presence is essential to the spectacle in any narrative film, but on the other hand it is her visual presence which tends to work against the plot development. (837) A female heroine is strictly represented in relation to the feelings she induces in the male protagonist, but in herself she does not have any significance at all. (Boetticher) Her main function is to be displayed for the gaze and enjoyment, while the hero is the active principle of culture in quest to conquer a

reluctant feminine object of his desire. (de Lauretis 119) This brings us back to the question of representation in the gender portrayal.

2.4. Why is representation important

When you think about the enormous success of Star Wars and the influence it had and continues to have on numerous generation, it is crucial to talk about the importance of representation. Stuart Hall is famous for his work about representational practices, especially when we talk about encoding/ decoding model he introduced. Namely, he argues that structures that produce visual, or any other kind of material intended to be consumed by mass public, encode certain meaning into their products in the form of a meaningful discourse. This is the first step in a process where message can lead to an effect, meet a need or simply be put to a use.

> "It is this set of decoded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct, or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences. In a 'determinate' moment the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment the 'message', via its decoding, issues into the structure of social practices." (Hall 509)

What he ultimately wants to convey is how meaning can be encoded in the narrative by its producer, and it can be based on social context and conception. However, it is the decoding process that makes all the difference. Hall says that that same assumptions and meanings can be differently interpreted by their consumers. This is especially important since it focuses on the significance of understanding the meanings and its interpretations by both those who produce it and those receive it. (Hall 510) Therefore, movies like Star Wars have the power to encode certain meanings in their narrative, and the decoding process that happens when the general public consumes the final result often has immense influence on them. Thus, the narratives of Leia and Padme did not only influence their generations, but they also continue

to normalise the practices presented on the screen. Needless to say that this is a big problem when we talk about representation of gender especially because these movies play an enormous role in many people's lives.

Talking about Stuart Hall and in the context of gender representation on the screen, we can further connect this to his study of ideology and Gramsci's notion of hegemony. In particular because incorporated together they can illustrate how movies like Star Wars might seize particular formations of sexuality and formulate them to appear natural and expected, as it can be seen from the examples of both Leia and Padme. It is also interesting to mention how Hall's precursor Louis Althusser defined this. He disputes that individual's identity of self is engrossed into and produced by the leading ideology in what he calls interpellations. (17 4) According to him, media apparatuses such as movies have in a way the power to "interpellate" their consumers into a certain set of beliefs which then results in the acceptance of a particular worldview encoded in the film. In Star Wars we can connect this notion with examples of how female characters' treatment was normalised and accepted by the public due to the enormous success of the movies. Only recently did people start talking about several instances in Star Wars movies where their disadvantageous influence has had a massive role in shaping of the gender landscape in Star Wars universe.

However, Hall deemed this approach little bit too deterministic, as he claimed that perhaps it is more likely that identity is constructed within the representation. Hence, cinema serves as a form of representation which is capable "to constitute us new subjects and thereby enable us to discover new places from which to speak." (Hall 235) Still, one still must talk about gender representation in a quite negative context for it is undeniable that this problem is still very much present as it will be presented here by using examples from Star Wars first six movies starting with Leia.

3. General Leia Organa

Princess Leia, later known as General Organa, is the most influential Star Wars female character. She is an imprudent and bold young woman whose first appearance in the franchise is in the role of Senator from Alderaan. In *A New Hope*, her strong authority figure is epitomised in her exterior. She is wearing a long white gown covering her entire body and a high and tight up do which makes her in no way sexualised. Moreover, she is portrayed as an undisputable leader. After being captured and imprisoned by the Empire, she shows a remarkable bravery which is very surprising taking into consideration that Star Wars is basically a classic tale about a hero setting off to princess's rescue. However, even though Princess Leia does require rescuing, she does not completely succumb to the usual lower-plan portrayal this commonly presupposes. (Pianka 37)

In fact, after she has been freed by Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, it is her who takes the head in the escape mission. She takes the weapon, shoots the emerging Stormtroopers and even saves the male heroes in the process. What is more, she is the first one to work out the Empire's cunning plan behind their easy escape from the Death Star. Just from this scene it is obvious why Leia is regarded as one of the focal examples of how a female protagonist should be represented on the screen. She is tenacious, fearless and exceptional female heroine. (Pianka 38) In her essay *Princess Leia: Driving Force of Generation,* Tiffany Mraz recognises this as she writes:

> "I am a strong and confident woman today, in part, because of Princess Leia. I'm persistent, passionate and probably talk back more than I should. I'm not afraid to give my opinion and fight for what I think is the right thing to do. Carrie Fisher, as Princess Leia in a fantastic imaginary world, made me believe in the power of myself. And that is a Force to be reckoned with." (Mraz 2017)

Hence, it is not surprising that Princess Leia is widely regarded as a feminist icon.

While it is true that in the first movie she is portrayed as a spirited young woman unshaken in front of the Dark Side, this will radically change with the unexpected popularity of the franchise. A woman who efficiently emasculated one of the male characters, and decidedly affected her own rescuing, will be conformed to a much more traditional female role in the following films. Her previous indifference is now replaced with not so subtle amorous feelings towards Han Solo, as she slowly becomes more or less useless for the entirety of the second film. Within the first twenty minutes of *The Empire Strikes Back* Leia will require rescuing. Even more surprising is when she gives in to her feeling for Han as they fervently kiss. In the last film, her plunging continues as she is once again imprisoned. Enslaved by Jabba the Hutt, Princess Leia in her sensual golden bikini is once more waiting to be freed by courageous male heroes. (Pianka 40)

The same feisty princess from *A New Hope* is now, two films later, a subject of one of the most iconic images of male phantasy in the film history. What is more, after being rescued, a woman who singlehandedly killed more Stormtroopers in the first movie than any other character, is suddenly completely incapable to shoot even one. From this we can see how easy it is to conform a woman to her traditional gender role with a tool as powerful as silver screen. (Pianka 40) Despite the abrupt change in the character which could have been to some extent expected from the popularity of the films and the era in which it was filmed, Princess Leia still remains a heroine with an abundance of formidable traits. However, what is important to acknowledge is the influence the representational patterns had on the development of Leia's character. Let's start with her romance with Han.

3.1.Han and Leia

As we have seen from the previous examples, Leia was firstly introduced as a capable leader of Rebellion Alliance, only to have her character conformed to a more accustomed female role. This can best be demonstrated through the development of her and Han's

relationship. Firstly completely uninterested in any kind of romantic endeavour, her character undergoes a radical shift in the second movie as she slowly starts to succumb to her feeling for Han. (Video 1) In *Star Wars Episode V*, she is confronted by him about her feelings when he takes hold of her hands making it impossible for her to escape which then ends in them passionately kissing. (Pianka 40) In this moment, Han as the male hero retains his role of an active principle of the culture which was previously denied to him due to the completely different portrayal of Leia's character from the *Episode IV*. (de Lauretis 119) Moreover, he does it by using forceful methods which itself can raise other questions about the gender representation and violence.

Here, Leia is depicted as the object of desire, a mere obstacle to be traversed. It is the masculine subject who plays the active part in the narrative and who will consequently conquer that reluctant or hesitant feminine object. Princess Leia's character serves as what is in feminist film theory regarded as "an element of plot space, a topos, a resistance, matric and matter." She is structured around Han's male desire, and because of her status of a woman, she is represents the narrative enigma. (de Lauretis 119) This scene is a clear example of phallocentric representation, where woman is shown as an object to be obtained.

Moreover, it can be argued that Leia is in this scene represented on two different levels. She is an erotic character for Han, a damsel to be seduced, but she is also an erotic object for the spectator. Because movies like Star Wars are typically controlled by heterosexual film narrative, it is not surprising that Leia is the one to bear the burden of sexual objectification. Firstly she was glamorised and isolated in her strict authority stance, but as the narrative evolves she starts falling in love with Han. By doing this, she becomes his property and gradually her eroticism is subjected to the male protagonist. (Mulvey 840) Mulvey argues that through self-identification with male characters, in this case with Han, and through participation in his power over Leia, the spectator is able to indirectly possess her, too. (840)

This notion works perfectly in the context of most iconic Princess Leia moment, her slave outfit.

3.2. Leia: Male the Gaze be with you

After her amorous interlude with Han, things only get worse for Leia. In *Episode VI* she is captured by Jabba the Hutt who forces her into a golden slave bikini. (Video 2) What is more, she has to lie on his throne seductively as she awaits Luke and Han to come to her rescue. Fully dressed powerful figure from the first film is now portrayed as an almost naked, helpless girl in a scene that many people agree on to be one of the most iconic images of male phantasy in the film history. (Pianka 41)

This is the moment in the movie that Laura Mulvey explains through her notion of scopophylia, one of the pleasures offered by cinematic apparatus. She argues that cinema portrays a hermetically sealed realm, oblivious to the presence of the audience. This results in them forming a sense of separation and consequently a feeling of being able to fulfil their voyeuristic phantasies. "Scopophylic arises from the pleasure of using the other person as an object of sexual simulation through sight." (Mulvey 839-842) When a movie is as popular as Star Wars, the creators often use scopophylic tendencies of their audience as a tool to play on their phantasies and secure the film's success. It is possible that this is exactly what happened in Leia's case.

While Han and Luke are portrayed as brave young heroes, Leia has to in addition possess a feminine vulnerability expected from her. Despite her bravery and formidable traits, she is the one to act as an image, while men are bearer of the look. Mulvey claims that this split between active/male and passive/female often happens because our world is ordered by very strong patterns of sexual discrepancy. What is more, the controlling male gaze is used to project its phantasy on accordingly styled female figure. (837) In this scene, Leia is exploited as an object for display. Her golden bikini is used as tool for strong visual and erotic impact, what Mulvey

says to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Unequivocally, she is displayed as a sexual object to conform to male desire, whether they might be on the screen or in front of it. (837-839)

In the context of psychoanalysis, female figures are said to pose much deeper problem. Her lack of penis implies castration threat, and movies regularly portray women with the meaning of nothing more but sexual difference. However, a woman displayed for the gaze and pleasure of opposite sex strongly re-triggers this primal fear it originally signified. (Mulvey 840) Thus, films usually deal with this problem by demystifying her mystery. The simplest way to take away this threat she signifies is by substitution of fetish object or by turning her into a fetish object itself so that she becomes reassuring rather than threatening. (Mulvey 841) In *Star Wars*, Leia in her golden bikini has been turned into a fetish object. The threat she evoked in the first movie with her display of what is commonly regarded as a set of male traits and therefore even more threatening, is now revoked as she becomes a more reassuring figure, unmistakeably at disposal to the male pleasure and enjoyment.

Inarguably, this scene is at the same time the lowest and highest moment for Leia in all three movies. While the overall impression of this scene is Leia's amazing performance as an outstanding female character, the truth still remains: this is her most objectifying moment in the franchise. Image of her as a slave lounging in Jabba's throne room entered the popular culture and sexual fetish history as one of the most famous examples of female fetishisation, particularly in geek culture.

The extent to which this costume remains immensely popular even today can be fully grasped should one observe the most popular cosplay outfits on occasions such as Comic-Con where Slave Leia costume is still predominantly used. When asked why they wear a costume which obviously plays to the male phantasy and represents one of the lowest points for their beloved Princess, many cosplayers have the same response. They claim that the strength Leia showed wearing that attire inspired them to reach outside their comfort zone, and her

composure in that scene served as inspiration to every female Star Wars fan. (Pianka 39) Slave Leia, despite its many negative connotations, inspired and continues to encourage young women to stay strong and dignified in any situation, and teaches them how to keep their dignity unharmed and at the same time demonstrate their forbidding emotional power when faced with misfortune.

In her newest and unfortunately very last book due to her recent passing, *The Princess Diarist*, everyone's favourite princess Carrie Fisher wrote about her stance on metal bikini scene. She argues that she is aware of the negative connotation but at the same time claims that women forgave her that scene because they understood that she was not in in voluntarily, and men knew that she represented something much bigger than just a sex thing. Her Leia was a perfect portrayal of a woman "equal if not better than a man." Fisher recalls the popular slogan of the Star Wars era which claimed that "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle" to back up her assertion that "many females of all ages seem to have been glad I had arrived on the scene, a heroine for our time." Moreover, she writes that her as Leia was something that both men and women agreed on. Even though they did not like her in the same way, they did like her with the same zeal, and they accepted the fact that they all liked her, something that is quite unusual when we talk about fantasy genre. (152)

Another interesting instance when Madam Fisher referred to the infamous bikini scene was in *The Wall Street Journal* in 2015. She said,

> "To the father who flipped out about it, 'What am I going to tell my kid about why she's in that outfit?' Tell them that a giant slug captured me and forced me to wear that stupid outfit, and then I killed him because I didn't like it. And then I took it off. Backstage."

Yes, bikini scene is not the brightest moment in Leia's story for various reasons, but nonetheless, she still continues to be one of the greatest feminist icons in fantasy genre. Star Wars franchise tried to continue the Leia's legacy in the prequel series where the same Leia

effect was attempted through the character of Padme Amidala. Unfortunately, they did not succeeded.

4. Senator Padme Amidala

Padme makes her first appearance in *The Phantom Menace* as a recently elected Queen of Naboo, a strong political figure despite her very young age. Like Leia, she spends first movie completely disinterested in men, concentrating her attention on political matters. She has a starring role in admirable scenes such as peace fostering between people and Gungass, or when she leads the assault on Theed Palace. However, these are scarce. Instead of amending the flaws made with her precursor and using it as a scheme to bring to life a new heroine for her generation, Padme's creators famously failed. In the end, a woman who had such potential to continue Leia's legacy and was a leading voice for diplomacy at the sunset of Galactic Republic, a spokesperson for anti-war movement and co-founder of what will later become recognised as the Rebel Alliance, was conformed to the role of nothing more but a mere love interest for the male character. If you look it closely, Padme's only function was to give Anakin Skywalker a love story background. (Pianka 42-43)

Besides this, another thing mother and daughter have in common is that they both were introduced to the franchise as they are about to be captured. Even though, just like in Leia's case, two men come to her rescue, Padme does not contribute to her saving mission. What is more, she becomes somewhat of a burden for Jedi master Qui Gon Jin and his Padawan, Obi Wan Kenobi as they escape Naboo only to find themselves hiding on Tatooine. There she makes acquaintance with young Anakin Skywalker and his mother which symbolically represents her first step towards her final fall.

In the following movies her downfall continues behind the façade of a strong character and a leader figure by her being a Queen, Senator and a representative for Naboo in the Galactic Senate. What is more, she is the opposition leader to the Military Creation Act that advocates the creation of the clone army, which proves her sophisticated political intelligence and strength. However, she slowly succumbs to Anakin's romantic advances as her character

completely conforms to the typical female movie role. This is especially visible in instances such as the rescue attempt of Anakin's mother, when after failing to save her, Anakin returns and confesses to Padme to have an entire tribe slaughtered, to which she responds by comforting him. Afterwards, they exchange their vows in a secret ceremony on Naboo where a queen becomes nothing more than just another ancillary character.

In *Episode III*, Padme has not much of a function which can demonstrate a typical female role in the film. Now, she is pregnant with Anakin's child and spends the majority of film worrying about her husband. Even in her admirable political career she encounters failure when Supreme Chancellor Palpatine transforms the Republic into the Galactic Empire by declaring marital law. Her ultimate defeat is symbolically foreseen as she utters her most iconic line: "So this is how liberty dies, with thunderous applause." (Video 3) Her downward spiral continues as she learns that her husband has tuned to the Dark Side. Not wanting to accept Obi Wan's news, she goes after Anakin and begs him to come back. Dark Anakin, who is now completely under Palpatine's control, accuses her of betrayal and adultery as she refuses his offer to rule the Galaxy with him. He chokes her into unconsciousness, and her very last scene is of her giving birth to their children after which she dies. Relationship between Padme and Anakin is one of the prime examples of how representation intervenes into portrayal of female characters on the big screen. They are characterized as a weaker sex and are subjected to representation which negates their personal depth and potency.

4.1.Anakin and Padme

As previously stated, Padme's character does not have as many heroic attributes as Leia's, but it might have had it if it were not for the insistence on her love story. What is more, her passion for Anakin exhibits several patterns of seriously destructive behaviour in a relationships. It is interesting to follow how their love story progresses form children with seemingly different life paths, to young, star-cross lovers and finally to the downfall of their

love. Furthermore, we can use their narrative as an example of how exactly Hollywood cinema sees female gender and how they are conformed to the usual practice of gender representation. It could be argued that woman's position in the film almost always revolves around her physical appeal to men. She is represented in accordance to the mating games she plays with him, while he is not shown in relation to her but in an extensive multiplicity of roles. (Kaplan 83)

Anakin and Padme meet in the *Episode I*, and because they are both children, there are no signs of possible romantic interest whatsoever. However, in the next episode Anakin is a young man who, after seeing Padme one decade later, starts falling in love with her. Moreover, he stars his courtship which borderlines with both harassment and stalking. Pianka argues that this gives impression to the male audience that this is a proper way to court women. Likewise, he claims, to the female audience it shows that men who treat them like this must truly love them. (44) After he declares his love for her, and confesses his agony, Padme finds herself in uncomfortable position as she is unable to return his sentiments. Despite the obvious reasoning behind her rejection, Jedi Code and her being Queen, the audience empathises with the male hero and blames her for his pain. (Pianka 44)

Subsequently, Padme is represented as a temptress in her closefitting and revealing attire which is just another example of a woman being portrayed from a phallocentric locus. Hence, she practically has no importance except as a spectacle and a drive for a young hero to behave in a certain manner. Anakin could never be a sexual object "according to the principles of ruling ideology" but since he is the main drive for the story and action maker, audience identifies with him through their narcissistic admiration, as he becomes a perfect version of one's self. (Mulvey 838)

In this scene Anakin confesses his deepest emotions as he admits that she has been on his mind since he had met her. (Video 4) Somewhat excessively, he declares that his soul is tormented by not being able to be with her. Essentially, he admits that he is in pain when he is

not near her which effectively places the burden of the culpability on Padme. It is up to her to help him with his pain as he says “I am hunted by the kiss that you should have never given me.” By the simple mean of what Jonathan Culler call performative utterance, “utterances that do not describe but perform the action they designate,” (Culler 95) he places the responsibility of the kiss on her and ultimately blames her for playing with his feelings.

This is not an unusual for cinematic representation of the start of the relationship and romantic dynamics between the sexes. What is more, it can be argued that men represented on the screen often exhibit the same characteristic of stance with which they claim ownership over the female they desire, in which she often does not have a say. For instance, Padme realises to which extent she has afflicted Anakin, and finally gives up to temptation. Thus, Anakin is represented as a tragic hero in quest for true love and a helpless romantic, while she is a temptress who kisses him in one and rejects in another scene. This kind of representation Simone de Beauvoir explained as men’s work. “The representation of the world like the world itself is the work of men. They describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth.” (196)

4.2.Padme: Representation of the She

The rest of the movie continues with the same pattern of representation. Padme serves a little purpose if we do not take into account her being a love interest. Even taking that role into consideration, it is safe to claim that her character is present only to deem the male protagonist more heroic. Moreover, after their secret wedding affair, she becomes enslaved by her feelings. All she cares about is Anakin and their relationship as she starts to slowly lose even those rare instances of heroism from the previous films. In *The Return of the Sith* not only does she not participate in any battle, she also does nothing but talk about Anakin for the majority of the

movie. From the end of the film it becomes obvious that her entire purpose is to be in a relationship with the male hero. (Pianka 43)

When Anakin turns to the Dark Side, she confronts him making it abundantly evident that he is her most important reason to live. (Video 5) Defeated she says to him "Anakin, all I want is your love." Despite her obvious unconditional love for him, he chokes her in his anger and she is rushed into emergency childbirth. She gives birth to twins after which she suddenly dies without any known medical reason. It is implied that Anakin's turning to the Dark Side made her completely lose her will to live. This the most crucial line in the series for it shows that without Anakin her life is pointless, and even her children are not enough for her to stay alive. (Pianka 2008)

Padme's destiny feasibly implies that woman's life has no meaning outside her relationship with man, and teaches female audience that it is vital to have a man in their lives. On the other hand, from Anakin's character the male audience learns that the only way to woman's heart is through manipulation and harassment. This is why this couple illustrates some of the most rudimentary patterns of a dysfunctional relationship as they jointly damaged the entire gender landscape of the Star Wars universe. (Pianka 46)

Nevertheless, just like people found positive aspect in Leia's slave scene, so did they defend Padme's actions, namely the "giving up on her life" part. In her article *In Defense of Padme Amidala: The Queen Sacrifice*, Anika Dane talks about symbolism behind her sudden decease. She claims that Padme's spirit weakens together with the Republic's demise, just as Anakin's strengthens with the growth of the Empire. In the end, her fate was completely intertwined with the Republic's existence.

> "It is clear in her dialogue. It is clear in her costuming – she is nearly always wearing layers, and ostentatious trappings," Dane writes. "When she is not it is because "the

> Republic does not exist here". Her clothes are as overdone and unwieldy – if beautiful- as the politics of the Republic she serves." (Dane 2015)

Therefore, taking this into consideration, one could claim that it was not Anakin's betrayal that made her lose all will to live. Senator Padme Amidala died long before, together with the thunderous applause that destroyed all she believed in.

Padme Amidala is not a negative character by any chance, she is simply a victim of representational patterns that work within the film industry. Even though the situation has significantly been changed, and now women and men mostly have similar sets of abilities on their disposal, women are still vastly under-represented. Additionally, their male counterparts are far more likely to end up saving them in heroic instances of their fair share of the screen time, as it can be seen in numerous examples in the Star Wars films. What is more, women are also often burdened with the stereotypical role of a mother, either good or bad. In Padme's case, she will always wear this burden because unlike Anakin she did not get a chance to redeem herself. All in all, it could be said that Padme just like "every Hollywood's woman is someone else's Other" and this will not change any time soon. (Humm 3)

5. Film industry and gender representation

A woman is someone's Other and we cannot deny the immense influence gender representation on film has on its audience. Especially when you think about in the context of first six Star Wars movies where there are only two notable women, Padme and Leia. Naturally, these movies epically fail the Bechdel Test which asks of a movie only to have two women who talk to each other about something other than men. But this is not the most astounding fact, what is interesting is how rarely do people notice female absence in such movies. This illustrates how much the narrative of our culture is actually limited that we consider two women beside dozens of male characters a perfect example of parity.

But this is not just in Star Wars. Women are widely under-represented in film and media. In their research published in an article entitled *Gender Inequality in Film*, New York Film Academy presented how prominent is gender inequality on film. It showed that in the top five hundred films from 2007 to 2012 only 30.8 percent of speaking characters were women and that 28.8 percent of them were wearing sexually revelling clothes at some moment in the movie[1]. Likewise, this illustrates the dramatic under-representation of women especially in parts where they are leading roles with only 10.7 percent of movies who feature a balanced cast. If we connect these numbers with the previously mentioned Bechdel Test, we can freely state that not only are they under-represented, women are mostly and primarily portrayed in their relation to men.

In the context of Star Wars, this can be analysed through the progression of Padme's narrative. Firstly she is portrayed as a young queen of Naboo, a strong and competent character who is not afraid to use the blaster. Moreover, she is a smart leader who is capable of guiding her people into the war and winning it. On top of it, she is represented as politically wise in her

[1] Any additonal data can be found on New York Film Academy site

role of a provident Senator. However, as her story goes on she loses her empowering status, and unlike Leia who stays true to her powerful demeanour till the very end, Padme eventually caves in both physically and emotionally. In *The Return of the Sith,* she gives up on her life without any reasonable medical cause to it. She did not die because of Anakin's Force-choke, but solely because she lost all will to live, as her droit-doctor simply worded it.

Many people argue that we just need to ignore Padme's ultimately detrimental influence on the gender representation in the Star Wars franchise when there is a role of Princess Leia Organa. Surely, Leia is a formidable female character who is both brave and smart, quick-witted and inspiring, but she is still a singular representative of female gender in a world where there is so much opportunity for females to be represented as not just ancillary characters. It is especially alarming when you realise that situation did not improve in the prequel series, 22 years after the first screening of the original episodes. Or even more common argument is just to disregard it because Star Wars is a fiction and nothing more than that. This claim is not only offensive to all Star Wars fans, but in its core it is hugely ignorant.

In her article *Leia is not enough: Star Wars and the Woman Problem in the Hollywood* published in February 2013, the journalist Laura Hudson argues that we cannot blame fiction for this problem. Especially because there is no logic behind attempting to correlate the reason behind gender and other kinds of discriminations with the internal structure of the fictional world depicted on the screen. For her fiction does not imitate life, but it is a mere imitation of how the person who wrote it chooses to organise this newly created reality. Moreover, she continues comparing structures of representation to Creationism. In her words, fiction is not Darwinian for it does not have the impartial part to it. Fiction is in fact a way for people to create their own worlds and consequently step in the role of Gods. Consequently, she claims that we need to take responsibility for our creation, particularly if it was created in our own image and this is why we should not disregard gender representation in Star Wars. For her,

genre of science fiction is a perfect vessel to work on the problem of representation, especially because it is not limited by the rules of our existing world.

> "Perhaps more than any genre of storytelling, it has no excuse to exclude women for so-called practical reasons — especially when it has every reason to imagine a world where they are just as heroic, exceptional, and well-represented as men." (Hudson, 2013)

Taking everything into consideration, it is safe to say that it was never more crucial to talk about this issue. Women are not only under-represented, but also highly objectified and on top of that, they are still conformed to their traditional roles. We need more characters like Princess Organa, because she is not enough as Laura Hudson formulated it. Moreover, we need characters who will correct mistakes made with Leia, characters who will raise new generations of women showing them in roles which proves that the other half of human population is also capable of heroic deeds that will inspire our children. Many people will claim that women assume this position because they are female, but it is not true. In words of Simone de Beauvoir: "I think thus and so because it is."

6. Conclusion

In this work it has been discussed how representational patterns work within the portrayal of female characters on the big screen. Firstly, the problem has been introduced through concepts of male gaze, representation and gender. Using Feminist Film Criticism, it has been shown how structures of female representation emerge from a system the basis of which is vastly grounded on gender inequality. In this system cinema works as a representational organism which disciplines women by the images it conveys. Another stance of this theory is that women bear the burden of gaze and as such are put into subordinate position. Therefore, the concept of gender representation issue has been acknowledged through cases of two female characters from the first six Star War movies.

First of them was Leia Organa who served to demonstrate to which extent representation can contribute to harmful portrayal of female characters. Through her character we can follow how spectacle is her primordial contribution to the film's narrative. What is more, in a particular instances that has been closely analysed in this paper, it can be seen she is obviously carrying the burden of exhibitionism as she has been put into position of an object to be conformed to male desire. Additionally, her relationship with male characters exemplifies how female role is often reduced to that of a mere love interest, a role in which she is a passive participant of the narrative. Nevertheless, despite all the negative connotations one can deduct from her portrayal Leia remains in her entirety a positive character. She is courageous and bold, a princess that is her own saviour.

To show that these representational patterns are also very present throughout the series, we talked about another character, Padme Amidala. She proves the claim that a female does not hold any significance in itself, but in fact is important for the male hero's development. This is achieved through the progression of their relationship where he by succeeding in his amorous advances is deemed more heroic, while she is a mere object towards that goal. Padme

attests that women are often used as someone's Other, only there to keep the narrative moving. But just like in Leia's case, it cannot be fully claimed that Padme does not have a positive side to her character. After all, she is portrayed as a wise leader and a warrior, formidable characteristics not often seen in female characters on the screen.

The data obtained from The Bechdel Test and New York Film Academy show this is not where the problem of representation stops. Star Wars with Padme and Leia confirms the utter limitation of today's narrative. Those two characters are lone representatives of female gender in a vastness of Star Wars universe. [2]This is not only damaging in its premise but is in fact outstandingly detrimental should you itemise all of its negative aspects provided through their gender representation. For this reason it has never been more imperative to talk about these issues, especially within the context of ever expanding universe of Star Wars where female characters have so much space to develop and hold the same place as their male counterparts.

All in all, it can be said that recent movies, such as *Force Awakens,* and other expansions of this universe, as seen in *Clone Wars,* prove that there is a new hope for this saga when we talk about strong female characters. Jyn Erso and Rey are truly new heroines for their age with an array of admirable attributes, something that has been failed to be done with Padme. Nonetheless, hereby discussed issues are still covertly present in their narratives and that is why this is a topic that deserves a further research.

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[2] What I refer to here is based on first six movies in Star Wars saga. However, new movies, as well as Clone Wars animated series prove that situation has much improved in recent times. Characters like Rey and Jyn Erso are surely formidable examples of a positive female representation on the screen, but we still must talk about characters of Leia and Padme for they have shaped and influenced the Star Wars that as we know it today.

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THESIS TITLE IN ENGLISH: Summary and key words

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN STAR WARS FILMS

This is a Bachelor Thesis which is examining how representation is used in portrayal of female characters in the Star Wars. Using feminist film criticism as a theoretical background, this paper will deal with problems of representation, male gaze and gender through two characters, Leia Organa and Padme Amidala. Firstly examining Leia and her portrayal throughout series, this paper will discuss and congregate all the negative aspects of when representation interferes to the character portrayal. Using the character of Padme Amidala, it will be showed to which extent female character's narrative is limited to her relationship with a male hero. What will be specially taken into consideration in this analysis is appearance, personalities and relationships with other characters of these two film heroines and how this can be connected with the theory of representation and feminist film criticism.

Representation – Male Gaze – Gender – Star Wars – Princess Leia – Padme Amidala – Feminist Film Theory – Laura Mulvey

NASLOV RADA NA HRVATSKOM JEZIKU: Sažetak i ključne riječi

ROD I REPREZENTACIJA U ZVJEZDANIM RATOVIMA

Ovaj završni rad se nastoji baviti time kako je reprezentacija korištena u prikazivanju ženskih likova u Zvjezdanim ratovima. Kao teorijski oslonac korištena je feministička filmska kritika, te je ponuđen osvrt na probleme reprezentacije, muškog pogleda u filmu te roda kroz dva lika iz serijala, Princezu Leu i Padme Amidalu. Glavni dio ovog rada baviti će se prikupljanjem i analizom kompiliranih obrazaca negative reprezentacije ženskog lika kroz figuru Leie, te u konačnici kako reprezentacija utječe na njezin prikaz. Zatim kroz lik Padme Amidale nastojat će biti pokazano do koje je mjere naracija ženskog lika limitirana na njezin odnos sa muškom figurom. Na što će biti posebno stavljena pozornost u ovoj analizi je kako možemo korelirati reprezentaciju i feminističku filmsku teoriju sa prikazom izgleda, osobnosti i odnosa ženskih likova sa muškim glavnim junacima kroz likove Leie i Padme.

Reprezentacija – Muški pogled – Rod – Zvjezdani ratovi – Princeza Leia – Padme Amidala – Feministička filmska teorija – Laura Mulvey