

The Female Characters' Tragedies and Struggles in Beth Henley's Plays

Thesis submitted to the

Institute of Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

by

Zeynep Kayhan

Fatih University

August 2011

© Zeynep Kayhan

All Rights Reserved, 2011

APPROVAL PAGE

Student : Zeynep Kayhan
Institute : Institute of Social Sciences
Department : English Language and Literature
Thesis Subject : The Female Characters' Struggles in Beth Henley's Plays
Thesis Date : September 2011

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Head of Department

This is to certify that I have read this thesis and that in my opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Supervisor

Examining Committee Members

(Title, Name and Signature)

(Title, Name and Signature)

(Title, Name and Signature)

It is approved that this thesis has been written in compliance with the formatting rules laid down by the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences.

(Title, Name and Signature)

Director

AUTHOR DECLARATIONS

1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification rather than that for which it is now submitted.
2. The program of advanced study of which this thesis is part has consisted of:
 - i) Research Methods course during the under graduate and graduate study
 - ii) Examination of several books and articles for Beth Henley's plays and American South history.

Zeynep Kayhan

August, 2011

ABSTRACT

The Female Character's Tragedies and Struggles in Beth Henley's Plays

Zeynep KAYHAN

August 2011

This thesis includes Beth Henley's dramas who is American playwright. She is famous for her drama, *Crimes of The Heart* which brought her success and prize. Her three plays, *Crimes of The Heart*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster* are analyzed in this thesis. These plays all depict women who have conflicts with the controlling men in their lives. However, each characters manage to overcome their problems with these men, so the characters have self recognitions. In other words they are strong enough to be happy at the end. The theory of feminism is observed in Henley's plays, so this theory is also explained with the authors such as John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Moreover, Henley's plays are tragicomedy which is explained in each play. Her plays are also southern gothic, and its elements, the grotesque and the disablement are expressed in detail. This work mainly focuses on the struggles of the heroines in Henley's plays no matter how much problems they face in their lives.

Key Words

Tragicomedy: A play which has both tragic and funny elements.

Heroine: The main and successful female character in the play.

KISA ÖZET

Beth Hanley'in Oyunlarındaki Bayan Karakterlerin Trajedileri ve Mücadeleleri

Zeynep KAYHAN

Ağustos 2011

Bu tez Amerikan oyun yazarı olan Beth Henley'in dramalarını içermektedir. O Gönül Suçları olan oyunuyla ünlenmiştir ve bu oyun ona başarı ve ödül getirmiştir. Bu tezde Henley'in oyunları olan *Crimes of The Heart*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest* ve *The Wake of Jamey Foster* incelenmiştir. Bu oyunlar hayatlarındaki erkeklerle sorunlar yaşayan bayanların yaşamlarını ele almıştır. Fakat, her bir karakter sorunlarını aşmayı başarmış ve kendilerinin güçlü olduklarının farkına varmışlardır. Ayrıca Henley'in oyunları trajik komedidir ve bu da her oyunda açıklanmıştır. Feminizm teorisi onun oyunlarında gözlenmiştir ve bu teori John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir ve Betty Friedan gibi yazarlarla açıklanmıştır. Bu oyunlar güney gotik altında kategorize edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın ana konusu Henley'in karakterlerinin mücadelelerini ve yaşamlarını konu almıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Trajik Komedi: Bir oyunun hem trajik hem de komik unsurlarının olmasıdır.

Kahraman: Oyundaki ana bayan karakterdir ve problemleri olsa da en sonunda mutlu olabilmektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the supportive and enthusiastic supervision of Dr. Carl Jeffrey BOON who has never stopped dealing with my thesis. Thanks for his great efforts for this thesis.

I thank Dr. Vassil ANASTASSOV and Dr. Agnes. E. BRANDABUR for participating in examining committee members and helping me in this academic process.

I am grateful to myself, since I also worked hard for this thesis.

Finally, I thank my parents who have always been very patient and supportive for me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Page	2
Author Declarations	3
Abstract	4
Kısa Özet	5
Acknowledgements	6
Table of Contents	8
INTRODUCTION-----	7
CHAPTER I	
1-1 Feminism and Feminist Authors-----	8
CHAPTER II	
2-1 The Features of Beth Henley’s Plays-----	14
CHAPTER III	
<i>CRIMES OF THE HEART</i>	
3-1 Characterizations of The Magrath Sisters-----	20
3-2 The Effect of Patriarchy-----	24
3-3 The Magrath Sisters’ Self Recognitions-----	27
CHAPTER IV	
<i>THE MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST</i>	
4-1 Carnelle Scott’s Life Story as a Protagonist-----	30
4-2 Controlling Men’s Intervening Carnelle’s Life-----	32
4-3 Carnelle’s Freedom and Purity-----	33
CHAPTER V	
<i>THE WAKE OF JAMEY FOSTER</i>	

5-1 Marshael Foster’s Tragic Life Story-----	39
5-2 Authoritarian Men Who Represent Patriarchy-----	40
5-3 Marshael Foster’s Gaining Her Agency-----	41
CHAPTER VI	
CONCLUSION-----	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY-----	52

INTRODUCTION

As a southern American playwright, Beth Henley tells Mississippi women's struggles in her plays. She is famous for her play, *Crimes of The Heart*, which brought her a Pulitzer Prize and made her a well known playwright. Her strong heroines never give up hope. Henley's plays are read through a feminist theoretical perspective, because she primarily focuses on the lives of women in American south. She also gives importance to the way women competing for male approval who are united to overcome adversity. In 1960s feminists came together to find a way to free themselves from the oppression of men, and Henley was affected from women's being oppressed by men at that time. Henley's heroines arrive at their self recognitions at the end of *Crimes of The Heart* (1978), *The Miss Firecracker Contest* (1979) and *The Wake of Jamey Foster* (1981).

In the first chapter the theory of feminism will be explained. Henley gives importance to the welfare and peaces of the protagonists of her plays. She also reveals the success of her heroines. During the late 1960 women rights movement known as women's liberation arose. Then some playwrights started to write plays about the voice of women. Beth Henley's *Crimes of The Heart* and Marsha Norman's *Night, Mother* (1983) are important feminist plays. Beth Henley is a feminist playwright, because she reveals the struggles of women in her plays, and she wrote her plays during the late 1970 after civil rights movement when women did not have many rights, so Henley and Norman wanted to reveal the situations of women in their works in twentieth century.

Feminist ideas developed long before the women's movement in the 1950s. Authors such as John Stuart Mill, Simone de Beauvoir's and Betty Friedan's ideas about feminism with their works will be examined in this chapter. They focus on the women's situations in their books as Mill does in *The Subjection of Women* (1863), Beauvoir does in *The Second Sex* (1949) and Friedan does in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Henley deals with women's situations like Mill, Beauvoir and Friedan, so they will be compared to Henley's dealing with women in her dramas. A critic, Linda Rohrer Paige says in "Beth Henley in Feminist Writers" that "*Crimes of The Heart* with its predominant themes of wife- beating, female sacrifice and hidden anger, confused identity, female rebellion and sisterhood, fares well with most women, because it unmask important feminist issues" (Paige 3). Paige reveals Henley's protagonists'

anger and rebellion toward authoritarian men, so critics do not interpret the heroines, Lenny, Meg and Babe as failures although they face difficulties. Paige also emphasizes through this critique that women of Henley are under the oppression of men in their lives, and these women are angry with them which reminds the readers of the feminist issues as these women's revealing their angers toward the controlling men. Helene Keyssar, a critic, says in "Modern Dramatists Feminist Theater" that "The script of *Crimes of the Heart* has many of the ingredients of a strong feminist drama" (Keyssar 156). Critics accept Beth Henley's plays feminist plays, because the protagonists are women and Henley's plays tell their lives with their strengths and endurances. Therefore, Henley's *Crimes of The Heart* and her other plays are analyzed through a feminist perspective thanks to her revealing the main female characters' emotions and goals although they have problematic lives.

In the second chapter other features of Beth Henley's plays will be analyzed. Beth Henley's plays have Southern Gothic elements. Southern Gothic is known for its damaged and disturbed characters. Beth Henley's plays display southern gothic features, because characters in her plays are abnormal. Moreover, the grotesque is one of the feature of southern gothic, and it means incongruous and distorted. For instance, in *The Wake of Jamey Foster* people wear Jamey's orange shirt and hat although he is dead which is bizarre. The grotesque of the Southern Gothic will be mentioned in this chapter. William Faulkner is also a Southern Gothic writer like Flannery O' Connor. These authors will be mentioned with their works like Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) and O' Connor's *Wise Blood* (1952) which have Southern Gothic elements.

Southern Gothic is a genre of Gothic which belongs to the literature of The American South. Devin Thomas, a critic, tells in his article, "Southern Gothic Literature" that Southern Gothic as a term was first used by Ellen Glasgow at the university of Virginia in 1939. Southern Gothic arose after the Civil War movements when people had suffered very much thanks to the effects of the war. People felt isolated because of economic crises and emotional loneliness. Southern Gothic genre includes flawed characters and their absurd situations. William Faulkner and Flannery O' Connor are Southern Gothic authors whose characters are abnormal and unusual like Henley's characters. Faulkner's characters are grotesque characters in *The Sound and The Fury*, since they are affected by the Civil War in a negative way, so Faulkner uses damaged characters who are affected by the war. They do not trust themselves, so they die tragically at the end. Like Faulkner and O' Connor, Henley is writing her plays

with Southern Gothic elements. The grotesque also means deflecting the serious events in our lives with a kind of hysteria. For instance, Henley surrounds death with funny situations to remind the readers that life enquires people to laugh at tragic side of it as well. Julia Ann Fesmire, a critic, says in her book, *Beth Henley: A Casebook Modern Drama* that “The grotesque is not a peculiarly southern obsession; indeed it is a part of our lives: to disregard the grotesque would be to ignore a portion of the human condition just as ignoring death would prevent us from fully appreciating life” (Fesmire E-version). Fesmire emphasizes that the grotesque causes people to laugh at tragedy. In Henley’s *Crimes of The Heart* the Magrath sisters laugh and enjoy each other even if their parents are dead and their grandfather is in coma. That is why her plays possess lots of humor which are mixed with tragedy.

In the third chapter Henley’s *Crimes of The Heart* will be examined. This play brought Henley success, because it reveals her specific and unique use of humor with tragedy. *Crimes of The Heart* tells of the lives of three Magrath sisters who are Lenny, the eldest sister who is thirty years old, Meg the middle sister who is twenty seven and Babe, the youngest sister who is twenty four years old and married to Zackery, a cruel lawyer. When the sisters talk about their grandfather’s being in the hospital, they burst out laughing which means they do not want to be affected by serious problems in their lives such as grandfather’s being in coma. They also laugh, because they have nothing to do rather than laughing. They laugh in relief, since their grandfather can no longer exist which is the source of the hysteria. Moreover, feminism is connected to women rights, and the Magrath women defend their rights like Babe who cooperates with Barnette Lloyd to reveal Zackery’s hidden crimes such as illegal actions of his in the past including the fact that he often beats her. Southern gothic elements are observed in this play as well. Ann Maloney, a critic, points out in her article, “*Crimes of The Heart A Southern Gothic Screwball Comedy*” that “In *Crimes of the Heart*, playwright Beth Henley's darkly daffy comedy keeps dipping into drama, but the characters' eccentric ebullience insistently breaks through, like the sun on a cloudy day. But those clouds are there, giving the play an edge. Call it Southern Gothic screwball comedy” (Maloney E-version). This statement of Ann Maloney reveals that *Crimes of The Heart* has Southern Gothic elements, since this play is not only tragedy, but it is also a comedy which is named as tragicomedy. In fact there is a link between tragicomedy and southern gothic, because both of them mix tragedy with humor. Characters laugh at their problems which means both tragedy and humor exist in Henley’s plays which is a Southern Gothic feature.

The theme of suicide is one of the most important topics in the play. Henley, Norman and Faulkner use this theme in their works like *Crimes of The Heart*, *Night*, *Mother* and *The Sound and Fury*. Babe desires to commit suicide when she is caught with Willie by her husband. She first directs the gun towards herself, but she thinks that her mother did not want to die, so she changes her idea and shoots her husband. Her mother wanted to live, but she suffered because of her husband, Jimmy Magrath, who had made her very upset when he left her. He did not care about his family, and he had finally abandoned them at the end. The girls' mother could not bear it, because she felt very alone. She hanged herself with a cat, as she did not want to die alone. This suicide affected the sisters very much, so they destroyed all the pictures of their father. The suicide of the mother affects Babe especially, because she feels that she suffers the same situations like her mother. Unlike her mother she decides to live as a result. First of all Zackery is like her father who does not care for her. In this situation Babe takes her mother as a model for herself in terms of committing suicide, because both her mother and she felt alone when they attempted to commit suicide. However, Babe's recollecting her mother's suicide caused her to change her mind and decide to live as she tells Meg. Thus, Henley's protagonists want to live no matter how much they have troubles in their lives as Babe Botrelle does.

The perseverance of the Magrath sisters is observed in *Crimes of The Heart* no matter how much they suffer. Henley's real emphasis is on the characters, so she deals with the solutions and happiness of her characters. In Kathleen Betsko's *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights* Henley says that I want to write characters whom you can still like because of their human needs and struggles ...I try to understand that ugliness is in everybody. I am constantly in awe that we still seek love and kindness even though we are filled with dark, bloody, primitive urges and desires" (Betsko E-version). Henley emphasizes with these words that she gives importance to the reunion and love of her main female characters rather than their hatred toward men in their lives although they are angry with them. She also wants to say that a person can have both good sides and bad sides. For instance, Babe shoots her husband, but the readers can feel compassion for her sorrows. Although the sisters suffer, they become successful to get what they want at the end. Lennie calls her lover, Charlie, by phone, and they decide to meet, so there is a hint that they will have a good future together. Meg also finds happiness from her sisters rather than from being a Hollywood singer. Moreover, Babe finds herself falling in love with Barnette Lloyd who

reveals Zackery's crime of beating her. She gives up the idea of dying as a result, so the sisters in *Crimes of The Heart* heal each other in time.

The fourth chapter will study *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. It tells the struggle of the main female character, Carnelle. She is a young girl who wants to win the beauty contest of "The Miss Firecracker" which is held every June in a small town in Mississippi. Carnelle not only wants to win the beauty contest, but she also tries to overcome the low-esteem which is caused by her miserable childhood. She actually tries to get rid of her bad reputation, because men call her "Miss Hot Tamale." Henley again writes a play which is about a troubled, southern family. Carnelle Scott is obsessed with the beauty contest, because she imagines she will be happy through the victory of the contest which she hopes will compensate for her life. Although she works hard for the contest, she loses it. However, Carnelle's cousin, Elain, who is thirty, won the contest when she was eighteen. Carnelle comes last in the contest, and she is humiliated by people especially by town men like Ronny, but she does not care about them. She understands who she is, and she herself says that she is not very sad when she loses the contest. Paige says that "Elain never recognizes her own limitations nor does she break from patriarchy's bonds, those tying her to the servitude, either to husband, to town or to beauty" (Paige 10). As Paige also says, Henley does not regard Carnelle as being the loser, because she is really the winner of her life unlike Elain who could not find happiness in her life although she was the winner of the contest.

In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Southern Gothic elements exist. For instance, characters die which is tragic, but they die in absurd situations. Carnelle's father dies when he chases the truck of icecream. Her friend, Popeye uses huge eyeglasses which is incongruous. Moreover, Carnelle's aunt grows hairs into her body when she becomes ill, and she then dies. These deaths of the characters are the grotesques which are exaggerated very much. Carnelle is laughing no matter how much she suffers from the result of the contest. That is also a Southern Gothic issue, because tragedy is combined with comedy in this play too. Carnelle's losing the contest is a tragedy, but her singing a song and dancing is a comedy which is connected to Southern Gothic. In fact there is a relationship between Southern Gothic and tragicomedy, since dark incidents occur with humor in tragicomedy which also takes place in Southern Gothic.

The Miss Firecracker Contest can be read through feminist theory, because Carnelle as the heroine of the play struggles against men who despise her. Moreover, she is defending her rights against men who humiliate her. Ronnie Wayne whom Carnelle dated calls her “Miss Hot Tamale”, and he does not think that she can win the contest. However, Carnelle ignores him as he ignores her. Delmount also thinks that Carnelle can never win the contest. She always bears these men’s humiliations. Authoritarian men are problems for women according to feminists. In this play Carnelle is strong enough to respond to men about her being decisive in winning the contest. She is also not affected by anyone which again reveals her strength. Carnelle does not win *The Miss Firecracker Contest* which is an irony and feminist side of the play, because she does not become an object of men when she loses it. In other words if she won the contest, she would be known for only her beauty by men. She realizes that her own life is more important than everything, so she enjoys herself at the end with her cousin and friend. Carnelle then becomes the heroine, as she is able to overcome her sorrows through her inner strength. That is why this play has feminist features, because Carnelle is still happy, and she understands that a beauty contest is nothing in life.

The Wake of Jamey Foster will be examined in the fifth chapter. It points out the sorrows and emotions of Marshael Foster. Marshael is Jamey Foster’s thirty three year old widow . The setting is Broadway. Marshael and Jamey’s relatives come to Marshael’s home for funeral of Jamey’s. Actually, they reveal their problems in the funeral like Wayne who is Jamey’s brother and Collard who is Marshael’s sister. Collard is a young woman who feels herself alone, and Wayne expresses his love to her although he is married to Katty. Marshael is the protagonist of the play, and during the funeral she reveals her sorrows because of Jamey during the funeral. Marshael did not have proper parents as they were always having arguments when she was a child, so she wanted to be happy by marrying Jamey. However, Jamey also could not make her happy, because he did not take his responsibilities seriously in his marriage. He did not care for his family, and he always spent his time with a young woman, Esmeralda. In other words he thought of his pleasure rather than his family. He even died when he was near his lover through being kicked by a cow. When he was in a hospital, Marshael visited him. She saw him with Esmeralda who is blonde and fat. She expresses her sorrow through these words of Jamey. “Hey, Marshael why don’t you try one of those delicious caramel pecan balls Essay brought? You could stand some weight on those saggy bones. “It fiercely hurt my pride like I wasn’t even a woman” (Henley 127). It is apparent from this speech of Jamey that he did not have any respect for Marshael, and he did not care

about her feelings. However, Marshael is consoled by her sister, and she decides not to be unhappy anymore.

Henley's heroines become aware of their desires. In *Crimes of The Heart* the Magrath sisters try to understand what they desire. For instance, Lenny becomes aware that she is still liked by men. She calls her lover, Charlie, to meet although she lacked the courage to call him at the beginning. Babe wanted to die twice, but she becomes aware that she wants to live. In fact it is Henley's method that she reveals her heroines who recognize themselves at the end. Female characters recognize themselves, as they are not unhappy at the end. This is Henley's technique, because her plays end with comedy even if they are tragedy, so they are called tragicomedy. For instance, the Magrath sisters recognize themselves that they can be happy together as they are not only sisters but also companions. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Carnelle Scott as a heroine becomes aware that she wins life although she loses the beauty contest no matter how much works she puts into it. She ignores what other people think about her as she only cares for what she desires. She is able to say that the night has been a good one although she loses the contest at the same night. Marshael in *The Wake of Jamey Foster* becomes very upset because of her husband, Jamey's deceiving her and making her upset when he was alive, but she understands that her own life and independency are more crucial than her sufferings and pains in the past. That is why she laughs towards Brocker's joke at the end. It is important to say that the laughter of the female characters reveals their strengths as they are able to smile no matter how much they suffer.

CHAPTER I

1.1 Feminism and Feminist Authors

Feminism is one of the political ideologies of nineteenth and twentieth century which is about women rights and advancements. It emerged, because women have felt oppressions because of their sex, and they also needed to defend their rights against patriarchal society. Feminist authors such as Judith Evans and Imelda Whelehan divide feminism into three parts liberal, radical and socialist feminism in their books like Evan's *Feminist Theory Today* (1995) and Whelehan's *Modern Feminist Thought* (1995). Liberal feminism defends the equality of the genders. It also focuses on the individual desires and decisions of women without being led by men. Moreover, socialist feminism expresses that women should also work and gain their economic freedom and social life. On the other hand radical feminism is direct reactions of women against the male's supremacy which Whelehan mentions it in her book. Radical feminism also means women's separating themselves from men. According to radical feminism women do not want men's existence in their lives.

In fact feminism has a long history. According to Evans liberal feminism argues that all people are equal and they should be able to pursue their rights and self interest. Modern liberal feminism says that women should not only deal with the housework and childcare, but they should also be equal to pursue their rights and self interest. Authors such as John Stuart Mill, Mary Wollstonecraft and Betty Friedan are associated with liberal feminism. Wollstonecraft's work *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is crucial to reveal that women lack enough education unlike men. She wants to say in this book that women should not be valued only for their appearance. They can be successful if they have enough opportunities like men. She says that;

women are everywhere in this deplorable state, for, in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before their faculties have acquired any strength. Taught from their infancy that beauty is women's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage only seeks to adorn its prison (Wollstonecraft 131).

Wollstonecraft makes it clear that women have been regarded as superficial humans who are regarded for their only beauty. They have never had the same respects and career like men, because they are not accepted as strong as men because of their biological features. Mill also finds women very clever and talented, so he thinks they should have the same rights and opportunities like men which is also Mill's and Wollstonecraft's idea.

Marxist feminism contends that women should be against patriarchal society. Women are oppressed under patriarchal power according to this feminism. For Marxist feminist theory, Friedrich Engel's *The Origins of The Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) is a crucial work. Engels thinks that male power is observed everywhere. Moreover, family has an important role for the capitalist system, because men are usually breadwinners, and women are homemakers in general society. Nevertheless, Marxist feminism argues that inequality of the business of the genders should be vanished. In other words women should not be seen only as housewives, but they should also have good jobs to be respected and valued. Imelda Whelehan says in her book, *Modern Feminist Thought* that "The calculated avoidance by classic Marxists of gender issues creates a theoretical slippage whereby women's oppression predates and yet becomes organic to capitalism" (Whelehan 48). Whelehan emphasizes that women are oppressed by patriarchy, but they should raise their voices against it. In other words patriarchal oppression has been a big problem for women, but women should not allow themselves to be silent against it according to Whelehan. They should also have careers in which to work and gain their economic freedoms in Marxist feminism according to Whelehan.

Radical feminism emerged in America in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whelehan mentions in her *Modern Feminist Thought* that radical feminism symbolizes the direct frustrations of women by men because of their being oppressed. Radical feminists are against patriarchy too. According to Whelehan women totally separate themselves from men in radical feminism. Radicals concentrate on the individual lives of the women in general as well. There are differences between radical and social feminism. Radical feminism focuses on the personal lives of women. Whelehan says that "Important aspects of women's lives such as marriage, childcare, sexuality, health and work could not be readily addressed by slogan, 'the personal is political' sought to elevate these issues to a matter of urgent political concern"

(Whelehan 73). As Whelehan emphasizes, radical feminism also deals with the oppressed women's emotions and reactions to the male supremacy in their private lives. Beth Henley as American dramatist reveals her main protagonists' anger toward the authoritarian men in their lives. For instance, Babe suffers under her husband's oppression because of Zackery's controlling, beating and restricting her. Radical feminism is remarkable in Henley's plays, because the heroines' lives are told with their private lives too. The grandfather of the Magrath sisters represents patriarchy, and Lenny lives under his oppression as do her sisters. Their being controlled by their grandfather is connected to their private home lives. However, they manage to overcome this oppression, as they solve their problems together.

In Henley's plays liberal feminism and radical feminism elements are observed. The Magrath sisters are liberated and free at the end of *Crimes of The Heart*, so radical feminism elements exist in this play and also in *The Miss Firecracker Contest* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. Women's separating themselves from authoritarian men is crucial in radical feminism according to Whelehan and Evans, and it takes place in Henley's plays as well. For instance, Carnelle does not want any men in her life any more, because she wants to struggle as a young woman which is her own decision. In *The Wake of Jamey Foster* Collard is a radical feminist, because she blames Wayne's love towards herself. She hates Brocker who tries to attract her sister, Marshael. She does not like men too. However, liberal feminism is much more observed in three plays, since Henley's women give their own decisions at the end of the plays.

John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1863) argues for the equality for women in society. Mill argues that women should have freedom to do what they want. However, men do not allow them to participate in different activities such as education and work which is wrong according to Mill. Men are different from women, because they not only want women's obedience they also need their affection which is Mill's thought. Mill says in *The Subjection of Women* that "All men except the most brutish desire to have in the woman most nearly connected with them not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely but a favourite" (Mill 130). Mill actually does not agree with this idea of women's being a slave of the patriarchal society, and he defends the equality of women as a male feminist author. Although Mill is a male author, he defends the equality between men and women which means he is aware of the inferior situations of women thanks to their not having the same conditions and chances like men to get proper educations and jobs. Mill is also a liberal

feminist, and he finds women very talented and clever too. As Mill defends the equality, Henley also reveals the equality in her plays, *Crimes of The Heart*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. While men who represent patriarchy are dead, men who are good are not dead like Charlie, Doc. Porter and Barnette Lloyd. Lenny wants to be together with Charlie, and Meg spends one night with Doc. Porter which makes her happy. Moreover, Barnette Lloyd loves Babe, and he helps her very much. It is clear that these men do not oppress the Magrath sisters. They love them, so there is an equality between them. Henley's heroines seek the kind of liberalism Mill champions in his essay. For instance, the Magrath sisters are not controlled by their grandfather anymore, as he is in the hospital. They gain their freedom like Marshael and Carnelle which is connected to Mill's liberal feminist idea, as they are free and happy thanks to revealing their strengths against the difficulties they have lived.

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) discusses feminist theory as well. Women are accepted as the "other" in this book. Beauvoir thinks that women should not be inferior to men. Moreover, she mentions about women's taking the role of second place in society. While men are supposed to work and gain money, women are expected to take care of their children rather than work outside. Women who depend on their husbands' economy are in an absurd situation, because women should also work to get their economic freedom as Beauvoir says in *The Second Sex*. Actually, there is a master-slave relationship between the married couples according to Beauvoir. Women have always depended on men which caused them not to be equal with them. The inequality makes women more aggressive and depressed in their marriage. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe was a passive southern woman before she shot Zackery. There was a master – slave relationship between Zackery and her, but she could not bear his cruel behaviors, and she got help from her lawyer to defend herself. In other words Babe does not want to be a slave of her husband, so she defends her rights. It is clear that there are features of feminism in *Crimes of The Heart*, because Babe does not want to remain silent toward her husband's cruel behaviors any more. Thus, characters defend themselves in Henley's plays which would be approved by feminist theory.

Betty Friedan is a feminist author whose book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) analyzes women's situations. Friedan mentions in this book that women have been conditioned to believe that only marriage will make them happy. Hermione Hoby, a critic, explains about Friedan's thoughts in her article, "*The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan" that women at

age seventeen desired to be a perfect American housewife, so housewifery attracted most of the women. However, they could not find the happiness they expected before, so they suffered because of their husbands' oppressions which Friedan also says in *The Feminine Mystique*. In Hoby's article Friedan's speech means as "The women [...] who grow up wanting to be 'just a housewife', are in as much danger as the millions who walked to their own deaths in the concentration camps" (Friedan E-version). Friedan emphasizes that women were not aware of their being in danger, because most of them became upset as their dreams could not become the same as they thought before. They had problems with their husbands, but their inner pains became a mystique which Friedan emphasizes it, so the title *The Feminine Mystique* reveals the women who face unfairness in their marriage. The pain is caused by the discovery that their marriage does not necessarily make them happy. Friedan's conclusion in this book is the necessity for women's getting education. Only education can save them from their problems according to Friedan. She is labeled as a liberal feminist, because she wants women to free themselves from their situations as she finds marriage dangerous when they are oppressed by their husbands. Friedan also proves that women had taken major responsibilities during the Second World War, but they were pushed out of the work-force back into the home to become good consumers, so they become frustrated. Henley portrays Marshael in *The Wake of Jamey Foster* who expected that marriage could save her from her unhappy life, but she could not find what she expected when she married Jamey. She became a servant of her husband, Jamey. She was not only a housewife, but she also dealt with her home and her children more than Jamey. Thus, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is a crucial book to reveal that marriage was a wrong idealization for women in 1950s.

Beth Henley is a feminist playwright, since she shows women as suffering from male domination searching for self realization. *The Miss Firecracker Contest* includes a lonely orphan, Carnelle. She becomes happy with the small things which make her a sympathetic character, so Henley focuses on the female characters in her plays. Henley also puts humorous situations in her plays to entertain readers by them. The humor of her characters reveal their persistence and endurance too, because they find ways to solve their problems and break out of their submissive roles. Henley chooses her characters from the real life. Characters are also from the middle class rather than aristocracy. She also gives importance to motherhood since a character like Babe is affected by her mother's suicide in *Crimes of The Heart*. Thus female characters suffer from the corrupted men around them, but Henley reveals their struggles.

Beth Henley's plays can be read from a feminist perspective. The female characters in her plays struggle against the patriarchal society. For instance, *Crimes of The Heart* is considered as a feminist work by many critics. In feminist play the subjectivity of the women are very crucial, and it is also observed in Henley's plays, because she writes about the subjectivities of her women who seek their agency. Elaine Aston, an author, says in *Feminist Theatre Practice* (1996) that "There are two key ways in which you might begin to respond; By presenting a group or a community of women as the biographical subject or by subjecting the individual in the spotlight to deconstruct the feminist play" (Aston 106). Aston mentions about the feminist aspects in her book, and her ideas are applicable in Henley's plays in terms of the individualities of the women. For instance, Babe is suffering from her husband as a southern woman, and she tries to achieve self realization, so Barnette's help rescues her. If Lenny's situation is discussed, she really develops through her sisters' healing and helping her. Before Meg and Babe came to be with her, she tried to celebrate her birthday party on her own, and she felt herself alone at the beginning of the play. She feels happy when Meg arrives, and she is encouraged by her. In this situation Henley's heroines find resources to avoid failure.

CHAPTER II

2.1 The Features of Beth Henley's Plays

Beth Henley's plays are both tragic and comic. She uses characters who are able to laugh at their problems. Gene Plunka says in *The Plays of Beth Henley: A Critical Study* (1980) that "Henley's tragicomic vision reminds us that the act of striving for love, self esteem, or dignity typically goes unfulfilled, yet one must be able to laugh at life's absurdities or else succumb to its neuroses" (Plunka 191). Plunka's analysis clearly reveals that Henley's plays are able to make the readers laugh at the absurdities of life no matter how much there are tragic events of the protagonists. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Carnelle is able to enjoy herself at the end, and she dances with her songs although she loses the contest which also cause the readers to have compassion for her too. The concept of humor reveals that characters have funny situations as well as tragedies whereby people are like Henley's women in life, as they have both tragic and happy events which Henley reflects through her heroines. Henley creates funny characters, but she does not ridicule them, because she does not reveal their faults. Henley also uses realistic events from everyday life. Such usage shows that ordinary life is like what she shows in her plays. Major absurd events which seem normal puts southern gothic element into Henley's plays. People are not always happy in an ordinary life, and they also are not sad most of the time. That is why she reflects her female characters with their humor and tragedies in her plays. Thus, Henley's plays are tragicomedy in which she combines tragedies of her heroines with comic scenes.

In modern dramas death is very crucial, as it affects the main characters' psychologies. Henley uses death which is connected mostly to men who represent patriarchy in her plays. In *Crimes of The Heart* grandfather who controls the Magrath sisters' lives is in coma, and his health condition is not good. Actually, the sisters come together when their grandfather is in coma. In other words Henley wants to reveal her women characters' emotions and past experiences through the death of men who represent patriarchy. For example, readers get informations about Babe's hatred towards Zackery after she shoots and wounds him. Men who are dead or dying in the plays of Beth Henley reveal the main female characters' oppressions and troubles because of them. For example, Meg does not want to see her dead

father's picture any more which proves how she is angry with him. Their father left their mother, and his absence leads the Magraths to move from Vicksburg to Hazlehurst, and their mother hangs herself in that place because of her husband's leaving from her. On the other hand readers learn Marshael Foster's deep sorrows after Jamey Foster's death in *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. She is telling her being affected by Jamey's ignorant behaviors after his death. It is clear that the main female characters' emotions are emphasized through the dead and ill men in their lives. In fact authoritarian men like Zackery, grandfather and father who cause the female characters to suffer are not able to prove their existence any more although they cause them to suffer because of their being dead or dying. In this situation Henley's women are heroines and winners, since they are alive unlike controlling men in their lives who are dead and disappeared.

Henley's plays are classified as southern gothic, since some characters die violently under absurd circumstances. That is also tragicomedy which is Henley's one of the most important technique. Ridiculous accidents occur, but they result in death. For instance, Carnelle's father dies chasing the tropical ice cream trunk in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. Her uncle George fell to death when he tried to pull the bird from the chimney. Aunt Ronelle of Carnelle dies because of the cancer which caused her to grow big hairs over her body. On the other hand Lenny's horse dies as it is harmed by lightning. Jamey Foster has been fatally kicked in the head by a cow. These death situations are very funny and sad although they are disasters for the characters. In this situation Henley uses tragicomedy through these interesting deaths of characters. In Southern Gothic characters are incongruous and ludicrous which also takes place in tragicomedy, so there is a similarity between them. In other words Henley's tragicomedies are read with southern gothic elements.

Henley uses the grotesque according to Julia Fesmire which is one of the features of southern gothic. The meaning of the grotesque is diverse. The first meaning of the grotesque is incongruous, and Henley uses this technique through her bizarre characters. The sisters laugh when they talk about their grandfather's being in coma which is unusual, because it should be a sad event for them. Moreover, the grotesque is connected to the laughing matter. Henley's method is generally about focusing on the sympathetic characters who are funny as well. Although her characters commit crimes like Babe or they are failures like Carnelle, Henley makes them heroines in her plays. Julia Ann Fesmire points out through this speech in her book, *Beth Henley: A Casebook* that;

To simplify Henley's use of grotesque as a sign of moral and emotional weakness would be to divide her plays wrongly into characters who are deficient and characters who are whole, without acknowledging that is only by working through the grotesque that Henley's characters can find redemption or grace (Fesmire 6).

Henley's using funny manners make her characters be forgiven by the readers although they attempt to murderous and homicidal attitudes, because the heroines of Henley are not bad people as Fesmire also points out through her speech above. They are forgiven by the readers, because we sympathize with them. For instance, Babe flirts with a boy who is ten years younger than her, but she still makes the readers laugh and enjoy, so the grotesque has incongruous characters like the Magrath sisters.

One of the theme is disablement in Henley's plays according to M. Beth Meszaros who says in her article, "Portrayals of Disability in the Comic Theatre of Beth Henley and Martin McDonagh." Henley reveals her characters who are physically disabled, so her tragicomedies include disabled characters which is a grotesque, since characters are problematic and disabled in grotesque. For instance, Babe tells Meg's behaviors after her mother's suicide. She says to Lenny that;

Back when we used to go to the library, Meg would spend all her time reading and looking through this old back book called Diseases of The Skin. It was full of the most sickening pictures you'd ever seen. Things like rotting- away noses and eyeballs dropping off down the sides of people's faces and scabs and sores. She'd force herself to look at the poster of crippled children stuck up in the window at Dixieland Drugs (Henley 35-36).

This story reveals the unusual and psychologically damaged child, Meg, who behaves abnormal as breaking down the social norm during her adulthood too. She feels terrible after her mother's suicide, and she looks at these abnormal pictures to reveal that she is brave enough to watch them. However, she is very sensitive and vulnerable in her nature. She does extreme and unusual behaviors to forget her tragedies. Thus, physical and psychological disablements are the features of the grotesque which Henley reflects in her tragicomedies.

Henley's characters try to put their existence in an absurd world. Although her characters

feel nothingness in an absurd world, they want to get the dignity and respect. However, they realize that they do everything for acceptance of their own selves. “Perhaps the value of her theater is that we can relate to her characters on a visceral level as individuals with broken dreams and unfulfilled lives who have an intense desire to find love in an absurd universe that guarantees little else but pain and disappointment” (Plunka 191). This analysis of Gene Plunka makes it clear that Henley deals with the general human being, because people generally try to fulfill their goals in an absurd universe which causes them to suffer and disappoint as well. If it is connected to one of her characters, Carnelle can be an example of it. She desires to win the “Miss Firecracker” contest to get respect for herself, but she understands that it symbolizes nothing at the end, so she does not become upset even if she loses it. In other words all of her preparations for the contest and her desire of it turn into nothing. In this situation she becomes aware of her own self and personality, so she enjoys with herself, and she understands that life is not only limited to beauty contest which is nothing in fact, but it is about who she is and what she really wants. As a result Henley wants to say that significant things may become nothing in an absurd life.

Although Henley’s plays are set in racist places, she reflects racism as absurd in her works. There were discriminations of whites against blacks during Civil War. White people were very racist against blacks, but Henley focuses on humanity in her plays in terms of not making discriminations between the races. For instance, Babe has relationship with Willie who is black which emphasizes that Henley is not racist, since she gives importance to the human being, so she reflects racism as absurd in her plays. Babe says that “I thought, ‘God, I’d like to kill somebody for just being cruel like that to some innocent person” (Henley 35). In her speech Babe reveals how she dislikes Zackery’s racist behavior towards Willie. Henley gives a clue through Babe that she finds racism as absurd. Moreover, Zackery Botrelle is white, but he is not a good character in the play. In other words Zackery who is racist in the play cannot put his existence while Babe who is not racist defends both Willie Jay’s rights and hers. With Zackery’s absence, a reader can understand that racism disappears with him when he suffers in the hospital. If racism was a good attitude for Henley, Zackery would not be shot by Babe, his wife. It is clear how Henley is against racism, and she accepts it absurd through her heroine, Babe’s being defensive against her husband’s racist behaviour.

There is a connection between Southern Gothic and feminist theory, as they both have

morality. Henley as a literature author uses moral elements in her plays through her protagonists. For instance, the heroines are good who manage to be happy at the end. Carnelle does not think anything bad toward anybody which reveals her purity as a moral character in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. In *Crimes of The Heart* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster* readers again meet with good and moral heroines who struggle to fulfill their goals. Henley's plays are read through feminist theory, and women should not be humiliated by men according to feminist theory. Morality exists in feminist theory in terms of not making discriminations between the genders which Henley reflects it in her plays. The heroines defend their rights in Henley's plays too like Babe who defends her rights against her husband in *Crimes of The Heart*. Moreover, Henley uses Southern Gothic elements in her plays which also has moral issues like feminist theory. The characters are disabled in her plays, but they are good like Lenny who has a deformed ovary which is a grotesque. However, she is a responsible and good character. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Popeye's eyes are disabled, and she uses huge eye glasses which is a grotesque too, but again she is a pure and naive girl who is Carnelle's friend. Therefore, both Southern Gothic and feminist theory are incorporated in terms of morality in Henley's plays.

Devin Thomas mentions in his article "Southern Gothic Literature" that not only Beth Henley but also William Faulkner and Flannery O' Connor write their works with Southern Gothic elements. William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* (1924) has Southern Gothic features. Faulkner is a Mississippi writer who writes about the Compson family's decline after Civil War. The family members try to save their reputations after the war, but they are affected by the depression and racism in their town. Quentin, especially is affected by the society's value, and he commits suicide. This novel has Southern Gothic elements, because events occur in both tragic and comic situation. For instance, all people in the family die tragically, but they seem sympathetic as they do not cope with the society in which they live. One of the Southern Gothic element is that characters are problematic and damaged. In this novel all characters are problematic, as they are not able to struggle enough to live, so they do not put their existence in their live as before they did. They turn from an aristocratic family to a tragic family as a result which Thomas states in his article too. Flannery O' Connor's novel *Wise Blood* (1952) has Southern Gothic elements at the same time. Hazel Motes is the main character, and he does not believe christianity although he is Christian. This novel is Southern Gothic, because everything is exaggerated with Hazel. He blinds himself, and he kills other people to show that there is no faith in fact. He really wants to say that his own freedom is

more crucial than everything, but police kill him at the end. Thus, William Faulkner and Flannery O' Connor write southern gothic works like Beth Henley.

William Faulkner is similar to Henley, since both Henley and he reveal their characters' innocence although these characters are incongruous. In Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* characters are bizarre, because they are not able to cope with the new and modern society after Civil War. They are getting worse and dying after the war. However, Faulkner reveals their innocence rather than their being failure. For instance, Faulkner's characters suffer in *The Sound and The Fury*, because they feel that the world moves without them. William Faulkner writes after the depression, so he reveals his characters' innocence rather than their being failure. Faulkner's characters feel that they are lost in a world which moves without them. A major theme is the innocence for southern writers. Henley and Faulkner depend on this theme in their works. For instance, Babe is a naive and pure woman although she commits crime. Meg is also innocent no matter how much crazy she is. It is clear that Henley reveals her women's innocence rather than their being failures. On the other hand Faulkner reveals Quentin's innocence although he is incongruous by restricting his sister to marry and resisting against changes. He is also innocent and good, but he commits suicide, as he cannot bear the changes around him any more. It is apparent that both Faulkner and Henley use the theme of innocence in their works.

Beth Henley is also similar to Flannery O' Connor, since they both look at the moral sides of their characters as Southern Gothic authors. For instance, in O' Connor's *Wise Man* Hazel Motes is an incongruous character, as he is not affected by anybody who forces him to believe in Christianity. Characters suffer because of their being incongruous although they are good. For instance, Hazel is killed by the police because of his being rebellious toward the society's expectation. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* people do not make Carnelle as the winner because of her bad reputations in her past which is incongruous as well, as she had dated with many men which is not acceptable in the society, so society does not make her the winner of *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. However, Henley and O' Connor again reveal their protagonists' innocence and purity. Although Hazel does not believe in Christianity, he is pure like Carnelle Scott.

CHAPTER III

CRIMES OF THE HEART

3-1 Characterizations of The Magrath Sisters

Crimes of The Heart is Henley's crucial play which tells of the reunion of the three sisters. Henley became the most successful playwrights of twentieth century thanks to this play, because in it she reveals her method of combining both humor and tragedy. The play tells the lives of three sisters, Babe, Meg and Lenny. Their parents are dead, so they live in their grandfather's home, and he is in coma in the hospital. Lenny is the eldest sister who is thirty years old. She has an ovary problem, so she thinks that no man will like her because of this problem. The middle sister's name is Meg, and she is living in Hollywood. She works as a singer because of her grandfather's insist, but later she leaves this job. Meg comes from California to Hazelhurst for Babe's situation, because she is arrested. The youngest sister is Babe and she is married. She shoots her husband, Zackery. She is saved from going to the jail at the end by a famous young lawyer, Barnette Lloyd. Babe is also consoled by her sisters, and she finds strength thanks to them, so there is a message of humanity and sisterhood in this play.

Lenny Magrath is the eldest sister whose endurance is remarkable among the sisters. She is thirty years old, and she lives alone in her grandfather's home. Lenny is very mature, because she takes care of her grandfather and sisters on her own. She is resembled to grandmother by Babe, because she wants to protect Babe and warns her most of the time. She is the victim of her grandfather, because her grandfather told her problem to her lover, Charlie, so they could not come together. However, Lenny calls him at the end, so they come together again. Moreover, Lenny does not like her cousin, Chick, because she accuses of her sisters about Meg's being together with married men like Doc. Porter who was her lover. She is very sensitive, and she gets courage and strength through being with her sisters. She

becomes very happy when her sisters make her a surprise by celebrating her birthday party at the end of the play. Lenny has a strong personality, because she is patient and gets what she wants in her birthday which is to be with her sisters and enjoy their company, so her wish becomes true as says it at the end.

Meg Magrath is the middle sister who also feels strong near her sisters. Meg is twenty seven years old, and she is not as responsible as Lenny. She does what she wants, so she does things without caring about others' emotions. For instance, she eats Lenny's birthday present of candies without her permission. Lenny says that "Meg's always run wild – she started smoking and drinking when she was fourteen years old, she never made good grades--never made her own bed! But somehow she always seemed to get what she wanted. She's the one who got singing and dancing lessons; and a store-bought dress to wear to her senior prom" (Henley 35). Meg has loved Doc Porter since they had been lovers when she was living in Hazlehurst, Mississippi with her sisters in her grandfather's home. Then she moved to Hollywood to be a singer. In fact her grandfather wanted her to be famous to gain more money. She is different from her sisters, because she likes being free and she does not care what anyone thinks of her. Meg does not like her old grandfather's behavior toward her sisters and herself. She complains about her grandfather's forcing her to be a singer, although she was not good at it. She stops being the victim of her grandfather too, because she quits her job of singing realizing that she was forced to be a singer although she does not have any talent for it. Then she causes Babe to be aware of that she is not alone as she is near her all the time.

Babe Botrelle is the youngest and most problematic sister. She is twenty four years old, and she is married to a rich lawyer, Zackery Botrelle. She had actually been forced to marry him, because he was rich. She commits a crime by wounding her husband, Zackery. He is famous in Hazlehurst, because he is a successful person. However, Babe is not happy in her marriage to Zackery. Her husband is also an immoral person in his life, having done some unethical crimes such as causing the failure in business of the father of a rival lawyer, Barnette Lloyd. Moreover, he beats Babe, and he uses physical abuse towards her so that Babe does not even want to hear his voice when he is in the hospital. Babe needs to find love from fifteen years old a boy, Willie Jay who is black, because she does not get enough love and kindness from her husband. Zackery beats Willie when he catches him with Babe, so Babe attempts to shoot him. He is wounded from his stomach. Babe is actually a good character who has made wrong desicion to marry Zackery. It is important to emphasize that

Babe wanted to make a suicide like her mother, so her mother's death has affected her psychology very badly. Then she thought that she wanted to live which is a clue of Henley's characters' features as they struggle for life and happiness. Babe also likes Barnette Lloyd who saves her from going to the jail, so there is a hint that she will have future with him. She celebrates Lenny's birthday party with Meg at the end. Thus, she becomes happy, and she laughs with her sisters at the end of the play by forgetting her painful past.

In southern literature suicide theme is very important, since characters give their own decisions through attempting to kill themselves. Beth Henley and Marsha Norman put suicide theme at the center of their plays, *Crimes of The Heart* and *Night, Mother*. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe intends to commit suicide to rescue from her pains because of her husband's oppression. However, she changes her idea to kill herself as a result, since she becomes aware that she loves life. Her mother gave her decision to commit suicide when her husband, Jimmy left from her. In other words Babe's mother as an individual determined her own fate while her daughters were exposed to the grandfather's oppressions after her death. Norman's character, Jessie in *Night, Mother* also commits suicide like Babe's mother, so she also leads her own way by choosing death, since she could not bear her miserable life because of her husband like Babe's mother. Both Jessie's and Babe's mother's husbands' leaving them cause themselves to commit suicide. However, Babe remembers that her mother would want to live if her father did not leave from her. Babe also suffers from her husband's cruel behaviors, but she chooses life as a result. Thus, feminist playwrights portray women who give their decisions of committing suicide like Babe's mother and Jessie or choosing life at the end like Babe.

Although suicide is a negative action, it is a triumph for Babe, who decides against suicide unlike her mother and Jessie. First of all Babe as a young housewife is in a crisis because of her husband's oppressions. She thinks that death can only save her from her pains, so she is not afraid of death like her mother. If she kills herself, she will be like her mother according to her. Babe also wants to die by poisoning herself from gas, but Meg prevents her to do it. In her suicide actions Babe feels as if she is going to a victory. In *Night, Mother* Jessie feels that she will save herself from her tragic life by committing suicide with her father's gun. An author, Christopher Bigsby says in his book, *Contemporary American Playwrights* that;

Night, Mother goes far beyond offering a critique of American society, indeed far beyond the question of a woman's relationship to her mother. It asks the most fundamental questions what is our life worth and how may we justify its continuance? But at the same time it is most assuredly not a study of a suicide: it is the study of life" (Bigsby 232).

As Bigsby points out, Babe and Jessie give importance to the meanings of their own lives. If there is no meaning in their lives, they want to die to get rid of their worthless lives like Babe's mother who accept death as a glory after her husband's quitting her. Jessie also attempts to commit suicide to gain victory through death, because she does not have anything worth in her life.

The reason why Jessie and Babe attempt to commit suicide is that they lack their husband's and father's love. Babe grows up without her father's love. She was made to live with her grandfather's oppression, and she married to Zackery from whom she also could not find any compassion, so she wanted to spend her time with Willie Jay, a fifteen year old black. She also thought of finding suicide as a salvation. Absence of father's love has an important role in Magrath sisters' lives, because they are exposed to live with their grandfather who intervened their lives most of the time. Babe, especially suffered when old granddaddy forced her to marry to Zackery thanks to his being rich. Furthermore, Jessie in *Night, Mother* has never felt her father's love in her life because of leaving from his family. Bigsby says that:

Norman may remark on the centrality of the relationship between mother and daughter in this play, but she also sketches a moving portrait of that between father and daughter. He only exists in the contested memories of the two women, is reconstructed only to have linguistically which is ironic given his silence, but he is a real force if only because he seems been the still point in Jessie's life, the meaningful silence which she now believes she can only find in death (Bigsby 236).

Christopher Bigsby emphasizes the importance of father figure in a daughter's life. Like Jessie Babe would not want to die if she had her father in her life. She wanted to die like her mother, because her father had already left his family, and he is a disappeared figure. Both Babe and Jessie feel this absence of their father's and husbands' existence, so their lives become miserable, and they think death can save them from tragic lives.

Babe Botrelle attempts to commit suicide, because she feels herself lost like Jessie and Faulkner's Quentin Compson in *The Sound and The Fury*. Suicide is not a positive behavior, but people want to die when they lose their desires and hopes in their lives which southern authors reflect like Henley, Norman and Faulkner. Babe feels herself lost, since she thinks that nobody love her, so she wants to die. However, this play has a positive ending, because Babe arrives to conclusion of life rather than death. She becomes aware that she loves Barnette and her sisters. On the other hand Quentin commits suicide, because he feels himself lost in modern society. He resists change, and he does not overcome the results of modern life after civil war. He even wants to restrict his sister to marry anyone, but she marries which makes him very upset. He commits suicide as he feels himself lost. Faulkner reveals his characters who are lost and want to die as a result. In other words southern authors portray their lost characters who find death meaningful when they do not find any meaning in their lives like Jessie, Quentin and Babe's mother.

In *Crimes of The Heart* Southern Gothic elements exist. From the beginning of the play there are unusual events as Babe's being arrested, Lenny's horse's eyes' being harmed by storm light. Characters are problematic which is the grotesque in the play. For instance, Meg is not normal who does whatever she likes without caring about the societies' expectations. She is not a determinet character, because she starts singing and changes this job, and she starts to work in pet shop. Her personality is deformed, and she is lying to her grandfather in the hospital about her keeping singing which is not true as well. In terms of physical grotesques Lenny's deformed ovary is an example. She has problematic ovary which causes her to feel that she can never marry. Babe's shooting her husband and bringing him lemonade also reveals that her psychology is not good, so she suffers psychologically. Her trying to commit suicide reveals that she has inner problems because of Zackery. It is clear that Henley writes her plays with southern gothic elements, since her characters are damaged and problematic which is a feature of the grotesque.

3-2 The Effects of Patriarchy

Patriarchy is an ideology which is the authority and oppression of men over women. It is about power structures, so men try to reveal their powers by ruling and oppressing women. These positions of men show itself at private home like husbands and fathers who behave

very strictly toward their wives and daughters. Patriarchy is not only the rule of men, but it also influences society in terms of authoritarian and ruler men whose existences are problems for most of the feminists. Patriarchy also means the powerful men who maintain their authority over powerless women. Robin Morgan, an author says in his book, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) that “All men are our policemen, and no organized policeforce is necessary at this time to keep us in our places. All men enjoy supremacy and take advantage of it to a greater or lesser degree depending on their position in the masculine hierarchy of power” (Morgan 536). As Morgan points out, men who represent patriarchy are not welcomed by women who defend their rights against them. According to radical feminism women do not need men’s supremacy in their lives which Morgan also mentions in *Sisterhood is Powerful*. In other words feminists want to be liberated, and they do not want men to interevne in their lives. In Beth Henley’s plays men who represent patriarchy harm the heroines like their grandfather, husbands and father. However, Henley’s women become successful to motivate themselves and be happy as a result.

One of the most important men who represents patriarchy is the grandfather of the sisters in *Crimes of The Heart* with whom Lenny, Meg and Babe lived. He was a very controlling man, and he only cared for the sisters’ being rich. Lenny suffered under the grandfather’s oppression as well. He intervned the sisters’ lives very much. He did not allow them to do what they wanted. He told Lenny that she could never be together with her lover because of her deformed ovary. He affected the sisters’ fates in a very negative way, because he did not care for their emotions. He made their decisions rather than allowing them to do what they desired. However, readers do not meet failure characters, because Henley exhibits characters who are able to laugh at the life’s difficulties. Thus, grandfather of the sisters could not cause the sisters to lose their hopes, as he does not reveal his existence any more, since he is in the hospital.

The father of the sisters also affected their psychologies very much during his life. He also represents patriarchy like Zackery, because he did not care for the sisters’ mother and left her alone with his daughters. That is why the mother of the sisters wanted to kill herself as she felt alone. The sisters are affected by this event very much, and they accuse of him most of the time. They do not even want to see his picture. Paul Rosenfeldt, a critic, thinks that the protagonists suffer all from the absent men, but specifically they suffer from the absence of their fathers. He also emphasizes in “The Absent Father in Modern Drama” that “Crimes of

The Heart is indeed an entertaining play written to evoke laughter; yet behind the play is a psychological pattern that links the drama to the absent father” (Rosenfeldt 11). It is clear from Rosenfeldt’s speech that the sisters are affected by their father’s absence in their lives, so the tragic events occur like the suicide of their mother and their being forced to live with their grandfather. Although the sisters’ father Jimmy Magrath affects the sisters’ and their mother’s fate, the sisters choose life and happiness rather than sorrow and death. Thus, Henley reveals the persistent female characters who struggle against the life difficulties like dysfunctional family.

The male characters who represent patriarchy are dead or dying in *Crimes of The Heart*. For instance, the father of the sisters is dead. He is absent in the play, but his daughters do not want to remember him. In other words he is not remembered as a good person by his daughters. Their grandfather also has a very negative effects over the sisters. Not only did he decide what the girls should do, but he also intervened in their food and everything. For instance, he tried to console the sisters through giving bananas to them for the breakfast when they were crying after their mother’s death. Meg says that “The thing about old granddady is he keeps trying to make us happy and we end up getting stomachaches and turning green and throwing up in the flower arrangements” (Henley 39). Meg’s this speech proves how their grandfather wanted them to do everything even eating banana most of the time. It is also incongruous to give banana to his granddaughters all the time which is funny matter too. Moreover, Zackery is wounded, and he is about to die in the hospital, and he also causes Babe to attempt to commit suicide. These men are actually guilty although their crimes are unknown and unpunished. In this situation women in Southern America are accepted as passive who are exposed to the patriarchal societies’ oppression like Babe who is beaten by Zackery. Although she shoots Zackery, her husband is more guilty than her thanks to his cruel and unethical behaviors. However, he is in the hospital, and he does not cause Babe to go to the jail. Actually, men who are dead caused the sisters to come together and be aware how much they are strong. The sisters become aware of what they want after these men’s disappearance from their lives. They want to live and be happy, so Henley demonstrates her good and sympathized characters who are living and strong unlike the authoritarian men who are dead or dying. Henley also reveals the feminist aspect of this play through focusing on her women’s emotions and struggles who are oppressed by controlling men like their grandfather and husband in *Crimes of The Heart*.

3-3 The Magrath Sisters' Self Recognitions

Henley demonstrates female characters who assert themselves against male oppression, so this play is accepted as feminist drama thanks to the sisters' overcoming their problems. For example, Babe commits crime, but readers sympathize with her, so Henley gives a message that people can make mistakes in their lives. Moreover, Babe cooperates with Barnette Lloyd which reveals that Babe is not silent against her problem, and she wants to be saved from going to the jail. On the other hand Meg comes from Hollywood to Hazlehurst to see her sisters. She shares Babe's emotions, and she wants to help her. Lenny also wants to protect Babe and Meg. At the end the sisters come together and laugh although they face many difficulties. Actually, Meg and Lenny become very sorry when they learn that Babe may go to the jail. When she is saved by Barnette, they become more relieved than before. At the end Babe and Meg decide to give Lenny a surprise, because she is in her thirty year age. Meg and Babe buy pie and candles for Lenny, and Lenny's birthday wish comes true which is being happy with her sisters. In this situation Beth Henley's female bonding theme is crucial, because the sisters in the play prevail and get rid of their troubles together. Thus, the sisters in the play overcome their problems.

Henley gives importance to the human being. In a speech *Contemporary Women Playwrights* she says that she does not want to change the world, but she deals with the world which means that she is interested in human being with their faults and good sides without trying to find their bad sides and mistakes, so her main characters are natural. Plunka says in *The Plays of Beth Henley* that "The scope of her plays is much more universal than most critics realize. Henley's protagonists are ostracized, spiritually bankrupt, ontologically insecure, and often physically maimed optimists haunted by the specter of unfulfilled dreams"

(Plunka 191). As Plunka says through this speech, Henley reveals her characters who have unfulfilled dreams and have tragic events which are connected to all people, so her plays are universal which means everybody can have unfulfilled dreams and tragic life like Henley's characters. For instance, Babe is exposed to Zackery's beating and abusing her, but people face these kinds of problems in daily life as well. Actually, Henley does not only reflect the lives of the southern women, but she reveals everybody's common problems like problematic family and men's oppressions over women through her plays. Moreover, she uses the feeling of love rather than revenge although the sisters are angry with men in their lives. Lenny, Meg and Babe have feelings toward some men in the play too. These emotions of the sisters are

very important in their lives. For instance, Babe starts to have close relationship with Barnette Lloyd. He is an ambitious lawyer who wants to help Babe. He actually loves her although he wants to get revenge from Zackery, so he cooperates with Babe. Lenny has a feeling towards Charlie, and she calls him at the end of the play, so they decide to see each other. Furthermore, Meg has a pure love towards Doc. Porter although she is condemned by Chick because of her loving a married man. Therefore, Henley does not reflect some good and moral men in a patriarchal society. She wants to show how the female characters are happy with each other and their lovers too. It is clear that Henley deals with human being with their mistakes and emotions.

Each of the Magrath sisters does not care the expectations of the society. Actually, these women are rebellious against the society. Beth Henley gives importance to the psychology of the characters, so they behave individually in their lives. These individual decisions of them prove that they want to be free in their lives which reminds liberal feminism to the readers. In liberal feminism women are accepted as individual human beings who can give their decisions on their own. For instance, Lenny does not like Chick, her cousin, and she becomes very angry when she accuses Babe for shooting her husband and blames Meg for loving Doc. Porter. Lenny becomes like mad because of these accusations of Chick about her sisters. Then Lenny dismisses Chick from her home which breaks their cultural norms, because Chick is her cousin and they are socially and relatively attached to each other. Furthermore, Meg is a rebellious girl from her teenage years, because she never made good grades. She was also drinking alcohol including going for moonlight rides with married men in Hazlehurst. Moreover, Babe breaks down the cultural norm by being together with fifteen years old a black boy, Willie even if she is married to Zackery. She also shoots her husband which is not acceptable by the society. However, these girls reveal their emotions and desires through these rebellious behaviors. When Meg spends one night by watching the moonlight with Doc. Porter, she becomes very happy, and she returns to her home singing and smiling. She understands that she can take care of one man as her past lover. Moreover, Babe is relaxed and consoled by Willie, a fifteen years old a boy by spending her time with him although he is married to Zackery. In this situation readers meet with rebellious women who try to do their desires although they face difficulties with their dysfunctional family like old grandfather, father and husband. Thus, *Crimes of The Heart* includes angry and rebellious women against the controlling men in their lives, so this play can be read through liberal feminist theoretical perspectives, since the sisters are able to give their decisions no matter how much problems

they have faced.

In *Crimes of The Heart* the heroines hide their true selves. Lenny behaves like her old grandmother, because she wants to forget about her tragic past, and she also feels herself responsible as the oldest sister. She does not actually want her sisters to feel the absence of their parents. That is why she always warns Babe as if she is her mother. Meg also lies to her old grandfather in the hospital that she is still singing and preparing for the movie. She is unhappy about lying to her grandfather, but she lies to him about her career telling him that she is still singing. Babe also hides herself beneath an unhappy marriage. If she did not shoot Zackery, nobody would know what Zackery was like. It is clear that married women do not raise their voices against their husbands in the American south. However, this play reveals that female bonding is the solution to the patriarchy. There is a female bonding in terms of sisterhood in this play no matter how much Lenny, Meg and Babe suffered because of the controlling men in their lives. For instance, the sisters do not remember their father and grandfather any more. Although they are depressed under the tragic events as grandfather's being in coma and Babe's being arrested, the reunion of the sisters makes them prevail. At the end of the play the happiness of the sisters reveal that they are not isolated any more, because they help each other.

The Magrath sisters in *Crimes of The Heart* come into self discovery at the end. Readers are introduced to female characters' moral dilemmas and problems with their families in the play, but they become more mature with their problems. Henley's characters recognize themselves at the end of the plays through their experiences. For example, Babe suffers from her husband, Zackery when he threatens to send her to the mental institution. Then she thinks of suicide like her mum. However, Babe becomes aware how she is not alone like her mum when she attempts to commit suicide. She gets power from her sisters, and she does not want to die any more. She understands that she wants to live with her sisters. Moreover, Lenny understands that she loves Charlie, and she can be happy with him. Finally, they decide to meet and talk. Meg is also very happy with her sisters, and she becomes aware that how she likes being with her sisters, because she always says that it is a very good thing to be with her sisters at their home. Therefore, Meg, Lenny and Babe try to find meaning in life through coming together and consoling each other. They also become aware their desires and identities.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST

4-1 Carnelle Scott's Life Story as a Protagonist

The Miss Firecracker Contest tells Carnelle Scott's struggle in her life. She is an orphan, and she is twenty four years old. She is living in her dead aunt Ronelle's home. Actually, she was left to live with her aunt and her cousins, Elain and Delmount, by her father. Carnelle wants to win the "Miss Firecracker" contest which is done every July in Brookhaven, Mississippi. She wants to win the contest, because she wants to get the respect of people as she had a bad reputation in the past. Carnelle used to date with lots of men which cause these men to call her "Miss Hot Tamale". This is why she wants to get the regards of the Mississippi society without being aware of that society would never accept her as the winner of the contest because of her past life. In this play Carnelle's struggle for gaining the victory of the contest is remarkable, because she puts lots of work into it by finding a tailor, Popeye and dying her hair red. She also chooses to wear her cousin, Elain's faded red dress which Elain wore when she entered and won the "Miss Firecracker" contest. She believes from the beginning that she will be the winner. She expresses her feelings through these words. "My life has meaning. People aren't calling me, Miss Hot Tamale any more like they used to. Everything's changed. And being in that contest- it would be such an honor to me...I can't explain the half of it" (Henley 158). Carnelle wants to have respect of the people through the contest. In fact she wants to reveal her strong personality rather than beauty, because Carnelle wants to be somebody in Mississippi town, so her struggle for winning the contest makes her stronger throughout the play.

Carnelle wins her own self although she loses the contest at the end. Carnelle is judged last and falls down. People especially town men call her "Miss Hot Tamale." Carnelle ignores them, because she comes into self recognition that beauty contest is not everything in her life.

She is invited to spend one night by her last lover, Mac Sam who is a balloon man in the contest, but she rejects him. In this situation Carnelle is not weak, as she still feels good, and she does not need anybody. Only after one hour of the contest she is laughing and enjoying herself without caring about anybody. It is clear that Carnelle is strong enough to overcome her tragic life and losing the contest. At the end of the play she accepts her cousin, Delmount's offer of watching the sky light which reveals that she has already forgotten the result of the contest which also reveals her inner strength. Thus, she becomes more mature because of her experience through the contest.

Carnelle's cousin, Elain is different from her as she is exposed to be the victim of her beauty and society. Elain is thirty three years old, and she has problems in her marriage because of her husband, Franklin who intervenes her choices most of the time, so she comes near Carnelle to Brookhaven by leaving her husband and two children. Actually, she finds Franklin's behaviors superficial as a rich man. Elain helps Carnelle win the contest as she gives her red dress to Carnelle. She also brings her a mask for the present. Elain was the winner of the contest when she was seventeen years old, but she could not be happy as she was trapped to her title of beauty which caused her to be known only with her beauty. Actually, men's caring for only the beauty of women is connected to patriarchal idea, so Carnelle does not become the object of the patriarchal society when she loses the contest unlike Elain. Elain does not find enough happiness in her marriage, so she is the contrast of Carnelle, because she is unhappy although she is the winner, but Carnelle is happy even if she loses the contest at the end. Elain expresses her feelings through these words of her. "Your lives aren't over not like mine is. No neither of you have to face the sort of tragedy I'm facing. Neither of you is starting life all over again feeling nothing but terror and fear and loneliness" (Henley 173). In this speech Elain is talking to Carnelle and Popeye, because Carnelle is worrying about her contest, and Popeye is feeling unrequited love towards Delmount. They feel unhappy, but Elain finds them luckier than herself, because they do not suffer from a husband like Franklin. However, Elain returns to Franklin which reveals that she cannot bear her life without somebody who adores her. Although she promises her brother, Delmount that she will not return to her husband, she changes her idea about it which again points out that Elain is the victim of her trapped and same luxury life in California unlike Carnelle who gains her freedom and own self without depending on anybody, so Carnelle does not need a title to prove her respectability unlike her. As a result Carnelle recognizes herself that beauty contest is not the most important thing in life. The important things are her

own self and happiness, so she overcomes being failure of the contest at the end.

4-2 Controlling Men's Intervening Carnelle's Life

Men who represent patriarchy in *The Miss Firecracker Contest* despise Carnelle. First of all Delmount is a wild man who does not have proper idea and attitude toward women. He comes near Carnelle in order to sell the home in which she lives. Actually, it is Delmount's mother's home, so it is given to him by her mother. He wants her to leave from Brookhaven to sell the home in which she lives. Moreover, Delmount accepts women according to his perceptive which is patriarchy image of women to accept them only beautiful, so he is obsessive. He also has a checkered past, because he was put into mental institution because of his breaking a glass over one man. Besides his being wild, he finds women's personalities as mean and insincere. For instance, he does not trust Elain about her leaving from Franklin. He also accuses of his mother as mean. He says that " Well, hell, she just turned herself into a monkey to get at us just to be mean. I always knew Mama was mean" (Henley 167). Delmount's personality is clear from this speech of his, because he even defines his mother as mean. He is also kidding about Carnelle's preparing for the contest. Moreover, he is ignorant, and he only thinks about his welfare. He gets fortune by selling the home in which Carnelle lives. Furthermore, Ronnie Wayne, a town man whom Carnelle had dated with calls her "Miss Hot Tamale", and he looks down on her desiring to win the contest. However, Carnelle does not give up against these men, and she manages to be happy even if she loses the contest.

Carnelle struggles for her desires. In fact it is Henely's important use that she depicts southern family lives in her plays. Carnelle Scott losed her mother when she was one years old. Then she lived with her father until nine years old, and her father left her to her aunt's home with her only pillow which Delmount tells Elain in their conversations. She was living with her aunt, her aunt's husband and her cousins, Elain and Delmount. Johnny Guerra, a critic, says in "Beth Henley: Female Quest and the Family-Play Tradition" that "Henley's plays all coincide with the problems of the family members" (Guerra E-version). As Guerra mentions, Henley's *The Miss Firecracker Contest* includes many problems of the family members. Elain marries to a rich man, Franklin because of her mother's force, and she comes near Carnelle with lots of problems. Delmount was also put into mental institution. These events of the characters reveal that there is family issue and problems in the play. Carnelle

becomes totally alone when she loses her aunt too, because she had a cancer. Then she tries to be respected, and she wants to be somebody in society. She makes donations to charity, and she helps poor orphan to give them dinner every week. However, her biggest dream is winning the “Miss Firecracker Contest” to make her lonely life meaningful through winning this contest. It is clear that Carnelle is strong, because she does not give up her hopes, and she also bears being alone. Therefore, Carnelle is ambitious enough to cope with being an orphan and life difficulties.

4-3 Carnelle’s Freedom and Purity

Henley’s main topic is the goodness and purity of a person in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. Carnelle as a heroine of the play symbolizes purity and endurance. She does not think anything bad around her unlike her cousin, Delmount. She gives importance to the reunion too. For instance, she is very shocked when she learns that Elain has left from her husband. She becomes sorry for Elain’s kids even if Elain ignores them. She also loves her friend, Popeye. This play emphasizes Carnelle’s ambitions and desires which means that Beth Henley focuses on the characters. In other words Carnelle’s improvement and trustworthy throughout the play are observed. The desires of Carnelle represent all of the people’s desires, because people live with their hopes and wishes. Moreover, Carnelle is exhibiting her inner feelings rather than being insincere, and she feels other people’s welfare, as she cares for Elain’s children more than herself when Elain leaves from her kids. At the end she does not show any kind of hatred towards Delmount, and she watches skylight with Popeye and him. Thus, Carnelle represents humanity, as she is a good heroine like Henley’s other female protagonists.

Carnelle Scott gives her own decisions. Carnelle wants to win *The Miss Firecracker Contest*, and nobody could prevent her to do it. No matter how much her cousins try to dissuade her to enter to the contest, she gives her decision to win it. In fact she wants to leave from Brookhaven as the winner of the contest, but she becomes aware that she does not need a gown or a title to be respected. Linda Rohrer Paige says in “Henley, Beth in Feminist Writers” that “Ultimately, Henley’s protagonist doesn’t need a gown, or a parade to recognize who she is. Refusing to be a definador confined by others, Carnelle learns to feel good about herself” (Paige E-version). Carnelle trusts herself, and she is strong enough not to be affected by other people in her lives. She leads her own way as a free woman. In other words

Carnelle gains her independency, as she is not exposed to the limitations that the beauty contest brings her. Moreover, there is a self recognition of Carnelle. In other words female characters of Henley reveal their freedoms without being the victim of anybody in their lives. Carnelle learns that she can laugh although she loses the contest. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Carnelle's struggle and recognition are crucial as the heroine.

One of the most important topic is beauty in *The Miss Firecracker Contest* which the title suggests it too. At the beginning Carnelle thinks that physical beauty is everything in life, so she adores Elain who was the winner of the contest. Carnelle says, " I feel sorry for ugly people, I really do" (Henley 165). Carnelle insists on proving her beauty although she worries that she is actually ugly herself. She loses the contest, because she had bad reputation in Brookhaven, so men laugh at her and throw things at her in the contest. Carnelle still tried to finish the contest without leaving the stage. All that she wanted a glory through winning the contest to be somebody in her town. She loses the contest, as Elain anticipated it despite the best efforts of her. In this situation there is an irony of the play, because Carnelle understands after the contest that inner beauty can suppress the outer beauty which is actually the message of the play that Carnelle gets it at the end, so she is not unhappy as she starts to have self discovery. She also learns that there is a beauty of friendship. Mac Sam as Carnelle's last lover never stops supporting her throughout the contest. He even invites her to share her sorrows at the end of the play. Carnelle is able to free herself after the contest unlike Elain who is stuck to her position as the "Miss Firecracker". Thus, Elain totally contrasts to Carnelle, because Carnelle manages to escape being the object of the society by losing the contest. She suffered, but she is still free to mature as a woman.

There is a need of love which characters feel in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. First of all Carnelle grew up without the love of her parents and with the disdain of her aunt. After her parents die, her life becomes more tragic. However, she changes, and she wants to belong to the community. Having faced by death all her life, Carnelle is trying to be happy and find her own identity. She finds "The Miss Firecracker" as a salvation of herself. However, she is not aware of that she has a bad fame because of being together with lots of men in the past, so society cannot let her win the contest. Carnelle fails to gain love and respect of people, but she finds compassion from her friends, Mac Sam and Popeye. Furthermore, Delmount and Elain also need to be loved. Elain needs love but not through her admiration for her beauty. She needs to be free and respected as an individual, so she is not as

lucky as Carnelle, because she decides to return her trapped marriage She accepts being victim of her beauty, but she does not have another chance. Delmount also needs pure love but he is so frightened by his sexual ideas that he does not realize his need to be loved until he meets with Popeye. Thus, there is an indication that Delmount and Popeye will be together and love each other which emphasizes that characters seek for love too in Henley's plays.

The Miss Firecracker Contest is categorized as southern gothic. This play is southern literature like *Crimes of The Heart* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster*, because it is about Southern United States and written by a playwright who was brought up in American South too. In addition there are southern literature elements in the play. For instance, the importance of family is one of the element that is applied to southern literature. Carnelle lives in her aunt's home, and her trying to find her own identity is crucial. Thus, Carnelle's life like Henley's other heroines is told through her problematic and dysfunctional family. Moreover, the play is southern gothic, because there are fantastic and horrible events. Frank Rich says that;

who but Miss Henley can describe one tragedy after another and make us home smiling? This time we hear about midgets, orphans and deformed kittens-and they are fortunate ones. Other characters, whether on stage or of are afflicted by cancer, tuberculosis venereal disease and most of all heartbreak- Even so, the evening's torrential downpour of humor – alternately Southern Gothic absurdist, melancholy and broad- almost never subsides (Rich E-version).

Rich expresses that this play has southern gothic elements, because there are important situations to reveal them. Everything is exaggerated with the characters in the play. Characters are incongruous with their tragic events. For instance, Carnelle's uncle and father died in a ridiculous and horrible way. Popeye's frog costumes, Delmount's bad and bloody dreams are abnormal too. In Henley's method these elements are used for grotesque, an exaggerated events, but these incidents also point out the catharsis of characters' lives which makes it southern gothic, since characters experience these abnormal things because of their sufferings. Delmount has psychological problems because of her dead mother who did not care for him, so he has bad dreams and problems as he was put into mental hospital.

The Miss Firecracker Contest expresses a feminist message, since Carnelle's trying to get

over her problems is crucial in the play. She struggles for winning *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. Carnelle becomes more mature, and she actually grows up, because she is now aware that beauty contest is not everything in life. Carnelle says to Delmount at the end “It’s just I was upset about not being able to leave in the blaze of glory. Of course, I know it does not matter I mean, the main thing is-well, the main thing is...Gosh; I don’t know what the main thing is” (Henley 204). From this speech of Carnelle it can be understood that she is not actually the loser in her life, because she gains her own independence after she enters to the public work as the contest. Thus, Carnelle does not allow anybody to lead her own life. That is why this play gives feminist message through Carnelle’s struggle and desire. This play can be read through liberal feminism, because Carnelle makes her decisions without being affected by anyone. As Whelehan points out in her *Modern Feminist Thought* liberal feminism is women’s gaining their freedoms and giving their decisions. In this play Carnelle is liberated and becomes maturer as a result.

The women are rebellious in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. Elain, an aging beauty is not happy in her marriage and motherhood. For instance, her husband, Franklin causes her to be angry with him. When Franklin is afraid of that she may kill her children in a fury she answers him by saying “ Oh, for God’s sake Franklin, no one’s going to bake them into a pie!” (Henley 166). In her speech Elain even thinks of homicide which is a tragedy of her caused by her husband. Alan Shephard says in her article, “Aborted Age in Beth Henley’s Women” in *Modern Drama* that:

The southern heroines populating Henley’s tragic comedies frequently erupt in anger towards those who engineer or sustain the emotionally impoverishing circumstances of their private lives; and just as often, they retreat from the schemes of violence bred by that anger. They relish murderous and suicidal fantasies they repudiate them (Shepard 97).

As Shepard mentions in her article, Henley’s women are angry with men who intervene their lives. They become violent and frustrated by them. Carnelle and Elain get angry with Delmount. He is outspoken as he says whatever he thinks openly. For instance, he says that “The Miss Firecracker” is absurd which Carnelle can never win, and he directly says it to her. Elain dislikes his personality thanks to his being obsessed with the beauty of women. Delmount does not accept women as proper human being even his dead mother. He represents

patriarchy as Franklin too. Moreover, Carnelle does not like Ronnie Wayne's calling her and saying "Miss Hot Tamale" to humiliate her by trying to prove that she can never win the contest. That is why she is angry with him. Therefore, Carnelle and Elaine as southern women are angry with men in their lives who despise and control them, so they are rebellious against them

The Miss Firecracker Contest is a tragicomedy like Henley's other plays. In tragic comedy there are cruelty and wildness, but drama ends with laughter. Moreover, the humor is achieved through characters who have experienced strange incidents in their lives. A critic, Nancy Hargrove says in her article, "The Tragicomic Vision of Beth Henley's Drama" that "Henley understands that life is a bizarre, sardonic comedy and that we are able to laugh in the face of the ubiquitous existential madness that engulfs us daily" (Hargrove 55). Hargrove emphasizes in this speech that Henley reflects reality of life in this play through its being both absurd and funny. For instance, Carnelle has dyed her hair bright red, and Delmount wiggles his ears. Popeye has bulging eyes, and Mac Sam is suffering from tuberculosis. Carnelle's father drops dead in summer while running out to the tropical icecream truck. Popeye's brother also died, because he was bitten by a water moccasin. These events are connected to tragicomedy, because characters die which is sad, but their deaths are funny as well. Henley's technique of tragicomedy is directly related to Carnelle's story in the play. She was an unwanted child abandoned by her father. Delmount says that "she had to sleep with every worthless soul in Bookhaven to prove she was attractive" (Henley 166). It is clear from Delmount's speech that Carnelle has chosen the wrong way to prove herself by the contest, because she is humiliated in the contest by coming last. Although this event is very tragic for Carnelle, she gets over it within one or two hours after the contest thanks to her strength which brings her to hope again. Thus, Henley's *The Miss Firecracker Contest* is a tragicomedy thanks to its including both tragedy and comedy.

Trying to take the public attention motivates the characters in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. Carnelle thinks that change is important to be successful. Robert L. McDonald, a critic, emphasizes in "A Blaze of Glory" Image and Self-Promotion in Henley's *The Miss Firecracker Contest* that "Beth Henley's identities remain very much socially constructed, and in the static categories of small town southern lie, that means that the power to make a public image lies beyond individual motivation" (McDonald 153). As McDonald mentions, Henley's characters actually seek their individuality and agency through being accepted by

society. Speaking about Carnelle she is very willing to win the beauty contest to be honoured by the society. When she loses it, she realizes that she does not even need public attention to gain her individuality.

Carnelle becomes aware of her inner beauty by giving importance to her physical beauty. The play is mainly focusing on the issue of appearance. It is clear from the title that it is connected to the beauty contest. It tells Carnele's struggle with her own appearance. She feels insecure, and she wants to get rid of her bad reputation. Her insecurities are apparent from the beginning of the play when she starts to tell her life to Popeye, and how she lost her relatives. She wants to put her past behind herself. She says that "I thought maybe I was the victim of broken dreams, but then I thought maybe wasn't" (Henley 201). It is clear that Carnelle becomes aware of her inner looking's exceeding her outer beauty. Catherine Dybiec Holm, a critic, says in his article, "Critical Essay on The Miss Firecracker Contest in Drama" that " Henley is trying to say that unmarred by outer beauty, a character's inner beauty may more easily shine through to the surface" (Holm E-version). This speech of Holm absolutely reveals the message of the play that a person's own self and inner beauty is stronger and crucial than his outer beauty, so Carnelle gets it at the end. Therefore, Henley implies that the beauty is in a person's personality which is told through her heroine, Carnelle Scott in *The Miss Firecracker Contest*.

CHAPTER V

THE WAKE OF JAMEY FOSTER

5-1 Marshael Foster's Tragic Life Story

The Wake of Jamey Foster is read through feminist theoretical perspective in terms of Marshael's improvement in time. Women's gaining their freedoms is very crucial in liberal feminism, and Marshael as the protagonist gains her freedom after her husband dies. She is a heroine, and a heroine means a strong female character in plays which makes it clear that Henley's all female characters are strong no matter how much they face troubles and difficulties in their pasts. Although she has suffered too much because of Jamey's adultery, she changes and forgets what she lived before. She smiles like Carnelle at the end, since she finds that life is not as tragic as she thought it before. She has a strong personality like Henley's other heroines. However, her improvement in time is observed after she tells her pains to her sister and Katty. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe is also changing in time as she feels better later. She tells about her troubles to her sister, Meg. In other words both Marshael and Babe are getting better in time after they share their agonies with their sisters. Therefore, Marshael is able to laugh at her problems at the end which reveals that she becomes more mature unlike her past. Marshael also overcomes her depression and agonies at the end like other heroines of Beth Henley. In other words she gets rid of her husband who caused her to be depressed.

The Wake of Jamey Foster is a tragicomedy, since it has both funny and tragic events. First of all Marshael is disappointed by Jamey because of his ignorant attitudes towards her. His dead makes Marshael unhappy, because she loves him. She also hates him as he did not care for his family any more when he was alive which is a tragic side of this play. Willie Wayne has similar features as Jamey Foster, because he also despises his wife, Katty in the funeral. However, Marshael's laugh toward Brocker's jokes reveals that she can also have

joys in her life rather than being upset all the time, so the laughter of her symbolizes her strength too. Jamey's death by a kick of cow is unusual too which is Henley's technique as she mixes tragedy with humor. The fun and joys of Marshael turns this tragedy to comedy too. In tragic comedies the ending is not sad, so this play is both tragic and comic as it ends with the joys of Marshael.

The Wake of Jamey Foster has Southern Gothic elements. Characters' death situations are connected to grotesque because of their being exaggerated. Southern gothic makes reader laugh at the tragic sides of life to ignore the tragedy. In this play people wear Jamey ridiculous, orange hat and shirt even if he is dead. People speak with him as if he is alive, so Henley emphasizes that people should not be very upset toward catharsis events like death. That is why she shows them in a funny way, so her plays are categorized as southern gothic. Characters who are morally corrupted are death or dying in Henley's plays. In *Crimes of The Heart*, grandfather is in coma who intervened the Magrath sisters' lives before. In *The Wake of Jamey Foster* Jamey makes Marshael very upset, and he is dead. There is a morality, since characters who have moral are alive while men, especially who are damaged are dead like Jamey. It is clear that southern gothic genre also includes moral concept which dramatists and authors like Henley, O' Connor and Faulkner reflect in their lives.

5-2 Authoritarian Men Who Represent Patriarchy

Marshael tries to cope with the abandonment in her life. She loved Jamey, but he never cared for Marshael's emotions and he left her, so she tried to overcome the scars of emotional abandonment. Even Jamey did not pay his hospital bills, and he left every responsibilities to Marshael. When she reveals her agonies because of Jamey, Brocker Slade who loves Marshael consoles her during the funeral. At the end of the funeral Marshael wants a triumph from him which hints that Marshael wants to forget her past. The play ends with Brocker's song to Marshael, so Brocker becomes a cure and healing for her although she suffered from Jamey's ignorances and humiliations before.

Willie Wayne who is Jamey's brother has also patriarchal features like Jamey. There are moments which reveal the violences against women in *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. For instance, Wayne behaves viciously to his wife in the funeral of Jamey. Wayne humiliates Katty as Jamey humiliated Marshael when he was alive. For instance, Wayne reveals his love

towards Collard who is Marshael's sister, and he calls her Charlotte like Jamey who loved another woman rather than his wife. He even does sexual harasses which reveals that Wayne takes place in a patriarchal society by controlling women's bodies and deceiving Katty. When Katty catches his sexuality to Collard, she becomes shocked and run to the bathroom. She answers Wayne's cruelty through these words " I hate the me I have to be with him. If only I could have the baby, it would give me someone who would love me. There would be a reason for having the fine house and lovely yard" (Henley 131). This speech of Katty emphasizes her agony and sufferings because of Wayne's deceiving her with Collard. Katty does not have a child like Marshael, because she does not like changes. However, she is unlucky like Marshael, because she is married to the selfish and authoritarian man such as Wayne. She becomes rebellious, and she expresses her violent actions as killing her neighbour's hens. In Wayne's absence Katty becomes rebellious, and she becomes courageous to speak about her violent stories, but she changes to the role of a child, even using baby talk to Wayne when he is near her. Therefore, she rebels him when he is not near her, and these rebellions of Marshael and Katty remind the readers that in Henley's plays women's emotions are crucial.

5-3 Marshael Foster's Gaining Her Agency

Henley emphasizes Marshael's emotions at the end of the play. She finds strength from her sister, Collard who consoles her. This play is similar to *Crimes of The Heart* in terms of sisterhood and family life, because Collard and Marshael console each other while Meg and Babe care for each other in *Crimes of The Heart*. For instance, Collard does not find herself as smart as her brother, Leon because of her IQ test's result. However, Marshael convinces her to believe that this test is nothing to demonstrate the people's talents. Henley wants to give the message that the characters in her plays find consolation from each other. Marshael also finds happiness from Brocker Slade who comes to funeral to console her too. He likes Marshael, and she wants him to sing for herself at the end which implies that Marshael would find happiness near him. As a result Marshael learns that life is not only restricted to death and unhappiness, so she may be happy with her family and friends.

Henley reveals Katty's pain too because of her husband, Wayne in *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. Katty's submissive results from her lack of interiority. Interiority of her does not only signify her emotional and physical readiness to have children, but it also signifies being mature. Katty lacks these features because of Wayne's despising her most of the times which

turns this play from comedy to tragicomedy because of the controlling male characters' humiliating their wives like Wayne. He does not allow her to improve herself, so she does not become social too. She could not be an adult even if she is twenty nine years old. Moreover, Collard also resists to patriarchal conventions. For instance, she becomes angry when Brocker tries to seduce Marshael during the funeral. She throws eggs to him which reveals her frustration. She dislikes and protests the sexual harassment of her brother in love, Willie Wayne, and she is angry with him as he has the patriarchal features. Collard emphasizes that women should not be a slave of men through hinting the relationship of Wayne and Katty. Shepard emphasizes the situations of Henley's women's through these words. "If it is true, as George Mariscal has said "the absence of rage or its diffident expression by Henley's abused women invite us to study the strategies by which the men organize, control, even manipulate the heroines' bitter struggle" (Shepard 98). Shepard wants to say that women have hopes and struggle in Henley's plays, but they are despised because of these ambitions of them as Jamey who despised Marshael. Moreover, Wayne's humiliating Katty because of caring of him reveals the patriarchal side of his. The women of Henley struggle toward the authoritative men which as Shepard points out in "Aborted Rage in Beth Henley's Women" in *Modern Drama*". That is why Henley's plays focus on the agency and individuality of women.

The institution of marriage is very crucial in *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. The problematic marriages cause the protagonists to suffer very much. Marshael suffers in her marriage because of Jamey's adultery and selfish manners. Jamey always cared for getting high positions in his job, but he could not be successful in his career. That is why he left behind both his wife and three children. Marshael says that "It seemed like the house and the children became mine and something else was his" (Henley 130). This speech reveals Marshael's agony and how much she suffered because of her husband's ignorant behaviors. Katty suffers from Wayne's cruel behaviors towards her too. In the funeral Wayne resembles Katty's behaviors to his mother, and he dislikes her. However, both Katty and Marshael reveal their angers behind these men. For instance, Marshael does not even want to go to the funeral of Jamey. Shepard expresses Marshael's emotions through these words. "Marshael, though liberated by her husband's sudden death from one cycle of emotional neglect, is still furiously angry at him, confessing that she still feels as if " a hole has shot through me, and all my insides have been blown out somewhere else" (Shepard 180). In this speech Shepard reveals Marshael's emotions and anger after Jamey's death. Therefore, the problems between the married couple are revealed in *Crimes of The Heart*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest* and *The*

Wake of Jamey Foster, but heroines like Babe and Marshael overcome their agonies, and they arrive to their freedoms which is the main argument in these plays.

Marshael Foster seeks for her identity. Marshael marries to a rich man, Jamey who is a historian and smart so that she can exist in high class through her husband. She gave importance to the expectations of the society before she married. She wanted to reveal the perfect marriage image, but Jamey changed after she married, so she was disappointed. Marshael wanted to fulfil her duties in her marriage as she cared for her children much more than Jamey. However, Jamey spends his time with an another woman rather than his wife. Marshael loved Jamey more than her which caused her to suffer. For instance, she is emotionally stressed in the funeral as she feels both pain and anger because, she both loves her husband and she hates him. That is why she speaks angrily with Jamey's dead body. However, she becomes aware that her own individuality and emotions are much more important, so she decides not to be sad any more. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe is similar to Marshael, because she also suffered from her dysfunctional husband, Zackery. At the end she is relieved like Marshael, because she starts to have self determination of not being sad with her sisters like Marshael. Thus, Marshael comes into recognition that her feelings are more important than the society.

Marshael comes into self recognition at the end of the play like Henley's other protagonists. She has agonies and deep sorrows because of her husband, but she understands that she is strong enough to laugh at her problems. It is actually Henley's technique that she reveals her strong women who are able to laugh at their problems and sorrows. There are characters in the play who are strange and funny like Brocker Slade. Brocker is successful enough to make Marshael laugh and smile at the end. Marshael is consoled by him, so Brocker has a role to cure her. He causes her to be aware of how life keeps going without Jamey. Robert L. McDonald, a critic, says in his article, "A Blaze of Glory' : Image and Self-Promotion in Henley's The Miss Firecracker Contest," that "Henley's heroines- Carnelle, the Magrath sisters in *Crimes of The Heart*, and Marshael in *The Wake of Jamey Foster* all qualify-show no obligation to old social requirement that surfaces remain pleasant even when the inside is dissatisfied or sick. Instead, they play the messiness of life put publicly, on the stage of the world" (McDonald 157). As McDonald points out, Henley's heroines reveal their inner feelings, so they are trustworthy and moral characters although they make bad choices. Thus, Marshael understands that she is still strong enough to be happy with her new friend,

Brockler Slade and her own self like Henley's other heroines.

Henley portrays Marshael and other heroines' joys and happiness in her plays at the end. Marshael decides not to be unhappy any more although she suffered from Jamey's controlling attitudes. She determined to be happy rather than unhappy as a heroine of *The Wake of Jamey Foster*. Henley wants to say that her heroines are not silent against the violence and abuses of the authoritarian men. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe decides not to be silent any more against Zackery. She is also happy and have joys with her sisters at the end of *Crimes of The Heart*. It is significant that the heroines of Henley reveal their anger after some important events happen. Marshael reveals her anger towards Jamey after he dies, and Babe shows her frustration, and she even does not want to hear his voice after she is caught by him with a fifteen year old a boy, Willie Jay. It is clear that women of Henley come to understand who they are although they are exposed to the cruel behaviors of their husbands. For instance, Babe was beaten and abused by Zackery, but she understands that he is not a good person, so she decides to be together with her lawyer, Barnette. Marshael also has her new friend, Brockler, so she can find joy in her life with him at the end. Furthermore, Carnelle Scott is despised by town men like Ronnie who believes that she can never win "The Miss Firecracker Contest" However, she does not lose her hopes although she loses the contest, so she is strong like Marshael and Babe. Therefore, Henley cares for her heroines who come into self recognitions of themselves at the end.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In conclusion Beth Henley reveals rebellious females who challenge patriarchal authority. One of the most important feature of the women of Henley is that they fight for their rights, and they do not fail against men's harming and humiliating them. Henley's women are also heroines as they have strong personalities. They do not let anyone deprive them of their hopes. Carnelle is strong enough to ignore men's humiliating her desire of winning the contest. She becomes more mature when she loses it. Marshael also decides not to be unhappy by singing and enjoying herself with her friend, Brocker at the end. That is why Henley's characters are the winners of their lives.

Henley's protagonists become aware who they are at the end. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe comes to a big recognition that she wants to live although she attempts to commit suicide. In other words she chooses her life and joys rather than death unlike her mother. Carnelle Scott also becomes aware that she is strong enough to be able to bear her failure on her own. She also experiences epiphany that her individuality is more important than the thoughts and respects of the people, so she is able to laugh at the end. Moreover, Marshael also does not care the society any more as she understands that her own emotions are more crucial than the dead of her husband. In this situation Henley portrays her heroines who arrive to their self recognitions in *Crimes of The Heart*, *The Miss Firecracker Contest* and *The Wake of Jamey Foster*.

Beth Henley's female characters have endurance. First of all Babe, Lenny and Meg's endurance and struggles are clear from their reunion. In other words they are successful to come together and heal each other. Babe's psychology is not good because of having problems with Zackery and shooting him instead of herself. However, she is cured and healed by her sisters. She is not afraid of Zackery any more through her sisters' support. Lenny as a mature woman has a strong personality too, since she feels as if the mothers of her sisters like

the oldest sister. In fact the Magrath women seek for their rights in society like Babe who decides to cooperate with Barnette Lloyd to reveal Zackery's real crimes as illegal events of him.

In Henley's plays the heroines are liberated and gain their freedom. Carnelle in *The Miss Firecracker Contest* feels herself having more freedom than her cousin, Elain. She is happy at the end of the contest, because she becomes aware that she entered to the contest for her own sake. Meg also finds happiness near her sisters too, so she is not unhappy and alone any more. Marshael in *The Wake of Jamey Foster* is free when her husband dies, because her husband caused her to be unhappy in her marriage. Actually, Marshael had troubles thanks to her love towards Jamey. Her love turned to hatred when he deceived her with his mistress. She cannot be sad any more as Jamey is dead. Therefore, the heroines of Henley gain their freedom, since they are not restricted with the controlling men in their lives any more.

The psychologies of the main characters are very crucial in Henley's plays. They become angry when controlling men intervene in their lives and try to force them to do what they want. That is why they become depressed. In *Crimes of The Heart* the Magrath sisters' psychologies were worsened when their mother committed suicide. The girls' fates and decisions were determined by their grandfather, but they heal each other through their reunion. In *The Wake of Jamey Foster* Marshael's psychology was deteriorated when Jamey left her to live with his mistress. She becomes sad too much when he dies as she still loves him no matter how much she is angry with him. However, she feels better with her sister, Collard's consoling her like the Magrath sisters who also feel better with their sisters' helps. Thus, the psychologies of the heroines are very crucial to understand their problems in Henley's plays.

The concept of death is revealed in a tragic and comic way in Henley's plays. It is important that some characters especially male characters are dead in the plays of Henley. The dead characters affect the heroines' lives in a tragic way. Jimmy Magrath affects his daughters' lives badly as he caused their mother's death. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Carnelle lives alone as she becomes an orphan after her father's death. These events are tragic, but Henley depicts them in a funny way. The deaths of the characters are exaggerated which is a technique of Henley as she mixes tragedy with comedy. Thus, deaths of the characters affect the heroines' lives badly which is a tragedy while situations of them are

unusual which are very funny, so Henley's plays are categorized as tragicomedy as well.

Beth Henley writes her plays under southern gothic genre. The plays are not only feminist works but they are also Southern Gothic. *Crimes of The Heart* has southern gothic elements, since there are both tragedy and comedy in the play. Although the Magrath sisters had many problems before, they manage to overcome their problems at the end of the play. Their laughter is an evidence to demonstrate that they struggle and never give up their hope. Some grotesque elements are also observed in the play like Lenny's deformed ovary. Meg's not caring for the society's norm is also an example of the grotesque, since she is not a normal person. However, the sisters are sympathized no matter how much they have problems. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* there are grotesques as well in terms of physical grotesques. Aunt Ronnie grows big hair over her body because of her cancer before she dies, and Delmount resembles her to a monkey which is a grotesque as it is both funny and tragedy. Thus, Henley writes her plays with Southern Gothic elements.

Henley reflects disablements in her tragicomedies. Characters are disabled like Meg who behaves unusual by behaving too much free, since she has been never normal person as she started to drink alcohol and never studied her lessons when she was in high school. In *The Miss Firecracker Contest* Popeye has a huge eyeglasses, since her brother put ear drops into her eyes rather than eye drops which is tragic and unexpected event as her eyes are not good any more, and it is also the grotesque. Thus, the grotesque has disabled characters which Henley use through her characters.

Southern authors like Beth Henley, Norman and Faulkner use the suicide theme in their works. Characters like Babe and Jessie want to die when they feel hopeless in their lives, because they lack their husbands and fathers' love. Moreover, characters' feeling lost cause them to commit suicide like Babe's mother and Jessie. They choose death rather than life when they feel depressed. Moreover, female characters give their decisions when they decide to die like Babe who feels victory when she attempts to commit suicide. Norman and Henley are grouped as feminist playwrights, because they portray women who are able to give their own decisions on their own. Henley and Norman also want to emphasize that suicide is not totally a negative term, because their characters choose death when they have no meaning in their lives.

Crimes of The Heart, The Miss Firecracker Contest and The Wake of Jamey Foster are read through feminist theoretical perspectives. The women are heroines in her plays as they are able to overcome their troubles. They are also successful to do what they want at the end, so they are the winners no matter how much they have conflicts with the controlling men in their lives. Liberal feminism is observed in Henley's plays, since the heroines of Henley are all free without being restricted by controlling men any more. They give their decisions too. They all recognize themselves as a result. Therefore, Henley's *Crimes of The Heart, The Miss Firecracker Contest and The Wake of Jamey Foster* portray the individualities of the protagonists of Henley, so they are valuable.

Henley's plays are optimistic, so the endings are happy rather than sad. Each of Henley's plays are optimistic, because characters never give up their hopes although they face many tragedies. In *Crimes of The Heart* Babe experiences many difficulties, but she never loses her hopes, because she is as strong as the other protagonists of Henley. Furthermore, Marshael is very sad at the beginning, but she changes in time which means that she still feels hope for herself. She finds happiness with her friend, Brocker and sister, Collard. The Magrath sisters also find happiness from each other, so the protagonists in *Crimes of The Heart, The Miss Firecracker Contest and The Wake of Jamey Foster* are happy, and the happy endings of each plays are connected to Henley's being optimistic. It is crucial that The Magrath sisters, Carnelle Scott and Marshael Foster all laugh at the end which symbolize that they all have hopes even if they face difficulties because of their dysfunctional families and controlling men in their lives.

Therefore, *Crimes of The Heart, The Miss Firecracker Contest and The Wake of Jamey Foster* tell women who try to seek their own identities. Babe is consoled by her sisters as Marshael is consoled by her sister. It is clear that there is a reunion between the sisters. Although the women of Henley have dysfunctional families, they manage to be happy and gain their freedom. Babe is in a danger of being arrested, but her sisters are near her. In other words the sisters heal each other through their reunion. Their tragedies are told in a humorous way which reveals that Henley's plays are tragicomedy and southern gothic. That is why the plays end with the laughters of the heroines no matter how much they had problems in their pasts. They come into big recognitions that they are strong enough to struggle against the strict and controlling men in their lives. That is why all heroines laugh at the end.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Andreach, Robert J. *Understanding Beth Henley*. South Carolina: The University of South Carolina, 2006.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. USA: Vintage, 1949.

Betsko, Kathleen. *Interviews with Contemporary Women Playwrights*. New York: Beech Tree Books, 1987.

Bigsby, Christopher. *Contemporary American Playwrights*. USA: Cambridge University, 1992.

... Christopher. *Modern American Drama*. USA: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Curry, Renee. R. and Allison, Terry L. *States of Rage: Emotional Eruption, Violence, and Social Change*. New York: New York University, 1996

Evans, Judith. *Feminist Theory Today*. London: Sage, 1995.

Engel, Friedrich. *The Origins of The Family, Private Property and the State*. New York: International, 1886.

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and The Fury*. USA: Vintage, 1929.

Fesmire, Julia Ann. *Beth Henley: A Casebook Modern Drama*. New York: Routledge, 2002.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. USA: Dell, 1963.

Guerra, Jonnie. "Beth Henley: Female Quest and the Family-Play Tradition." University of Michigan, 1989.

Hargrove, Nancy. "The Tragicomic Vision of Beth Henley's Drama." USA: Southern Quarterly, 1984. pp 59-61

Harbin, Billy J. "Familial Bonds in The Plays of Beth Henley." USA: Special Issue of Southern Quarterly, 1987. pp 54-70.

Henley, Beth. *Collected Plays*. New York: Copyright, 2000.

Holm, Catherine Dybiec. "Critical Essay on The Miss Firecracker Contest in Drama" New York: Thomson Gale, 2005.

Kerschen, Lois. "Critical Essay on The Miss Firecracker Contest in Drama." New York: Thomson Gale, 2005.

Keyssar, Helene. *Modern Dramatists Feminist Theatre*.
London: Grove, 1984. pp. 156-157

Maloney, Ann. "Crimes of The Heart: A Southern Gothic Screwball Comedy." New Orleans: The Times- Picayune, 2008.

McDonald, Robert L. "A Blaze of Glory": Image and Self – Promotion in Henley's The Miss Firecracker Contest." New York: Southern Quarterly, 1999. pp 151-57.

McDonnell, Lisa J. *Diverse Similitude: Beth Henley and Marsha Norman*. Southern Quarterly: A Journal of the Arts in the South, 1987. pp 95- 104

Meszores, M. Beth. "Enlightened by Our Afflictions' Portrayals of Disability in the Comic Theatre of Beth Henley and Martin McDonagh." Oklohama: Disability Studies

Quarterly, 2003.

Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women*. UK: New Brunswick, 1863.

Morgan, Robin. *Sisterhood is Powerful*. USA: Random House and Vintage, 1970.

Murphy, Brenda. *The Cambridge Companion to American Women Playwrights*. USA: Cambridge University, 1999.

O' Connor, Flannery. *Wise Blood*. USA: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1952

Paige, Linda Rohrer. "Henley Beth, in Feminist Writers". USA: St. James, 1996.

Plunka, Gene. *The Plays of Beth Henley: A Critical Study*. New York: McFarland, 1980.

Rich, Frank. "Theater: 'Firecracker', A Beth Henley Comedy." New York: The New York Times, 1984.

Rosenfeldt, Paul. "The Absent Father in Modern Drama". USA: Peter Lang, 1996.

Shepard, Alan Clarke. "Aborted Rage in Beth Henley's Women." USA: Modern Drama, 1993. pp 96-108.

Shinn, Thelma. "Flannery O'Connor and the Violence of Grace." Contemporary Literature, 1968: pp 58-73.

Thomas, Devin. "Southern Gothic Literature." New York: Free, 2001.

Whelehan, Imelda. *Modern Feminist Thought*. USA: Edinburgh University, 1995.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *Vindication of The Rights of Women*. Boston: Peter Edes, 1792.