Early Feminist Movement: Abigail Adams

There are femisnt movements that are well known and there are some we know nothing about. Women had a hard time breaking free from the control of men, but fought for their voice to be heard. Early Feminists Movements are best described through Shakespeare's play showing that women had a choice, Elizabeth the First by being a successful powerful ruler without a man by her side, and Abigail Adams actively using her voice.

William Shakspere was a man who wrote plays that represent women as strong independent characters. His plays were in the 1500's where it was a time when women were not outspoken. They were supposed to be obedient and do what they were told. His plays showed the opposite though by showing that women had a choice. The women in his plays were outspoken and would make fun of men.

The play Love's Labor Lost revolves around three men who have sworn off women for three years. Things do not go as planned because they end up falling in love with women. The women in the play are strong and outspoken which is unheard of in the real world when the plays were written. For example when Boyet is talking to the Princess of France about her attributes he will mention that would attract the King, she responds by saying "Good Lord Boyet, my beauty, though but mean, Needs not the painted flourish of your praise...Like humble-visaged suitors, his high will."(Shakespeare 2.1 497-518). She is saying to him that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Boyet can not brag to the King about her beauty without him seeing her himself and passing judgment. She also says it does not make her feel better for him to compliment her. She also says no care for the King's decision to have a three year lock down from women because she says "Before we enter his forbidden gates."(Shakespeare 2.1 510). The Princess of France is an outspoken woman who is taking charge to get things down. There is also a scene where the Process of France uses a bow. (Shakespeare 3.1 1097-1138). She is referred to as being a good shot. They also engage in trash talk and everyone is treated equally whether they were male or female. It would be very surprising for a women to use a bow and engane in trash talk because that is a very masculine role to do. Gender roles were set that women had to be gentle, kind, and loving creatures.

The play also shows the women manipulating the men. The men have no idea what is going on and the women make fun of them after. (Shakespeare 4.2 1881-2231). The women decide to switch places and see if the men notice. They mock the men and say how desperate they were for the women. It is fun for the women to joke around with the men. The men are in love with the women and want them to become their wives, but with the sudden death of the Princess father they decide to leave and there is no marriage. Each man asks the women to be their wife and they are denied and told to wait (Shakespeare 4.2 2278-2822). They are told they must wait a year before they are allowed to attempt to woo them again. This would be very different for the times because women didn't really have a choice in who they married and when. Yet all four women in this play told the men no. The four women in this play showed strength, masculine qualities, and having a choice in their lives.

Romeo and Juilet is a well known play for its tragic love story and enemies become lovers. Juilet in the beginning says it would be an honor to get married. Yet when her father announces

that she is to wed she responds by saying she will not wed the man. She replies to her father's request by saying, “Not proud, you have; but thankful, that you have: Proud can I never be of what I hate; But thankful even for hate, that is meant love.” (Shakespeare 3.5 2253-2255). She is saying she will not marry a man who she would hate because marriage is supposed to be about love. In the end she ends up faking her death so that she can live with Romeo and give up her name. Since Romeo actually thought she died, he decided to kill himself. Upon waking up and seeing Romeo dead, she also decides to kill herself. The play shows Juliet's strength to say no to marriage and to ultimately end her life instead of living without Romeo.

As You Like It is a play that surrounds Rosalind who is dressed up as a boy to cure Orlando's love for her. Rosalind dressing up as a boy is pretty weird for the time when the play came out. When preparing to dress up as a man she states, “Good my complexion! dost thou think, though I am...out of thy mouth that I may drink thy tidings.,”(Shakespeare 3.2 1300-1307). She refers to the men as drunks. She says she would probably be more convincing with a cork hanging out of her mouth. She describes to Orlando how men seem when they are in love by saying, “ A lean cheek which you have not; a blue eye and sunken,...than seeming the lover of any other.” (Shakespeare 3.2 1457-1465). The men are described as not taking care of themselves with unshaved beards and an unkempt appearance. Rosalind refers to men as being unkempt and drunk which would be a very outspoken statement for a woman to make.

Macbeth is a play where the male main character is manipulated by women to kill the King and fails on the throne due to paranoia. The witches meet with Macbeth and start hailing him as the new King to plant the idea of murder in his head. (Shakespeare 1.3 149-179). He demands that they explain further, but they just vanish. For all Macbeth knows, they could just be talking crazy, but he takes them seriusly and devises a plan to murder the King. Macbeth feels like he wants to back out with murdering the King because of the honor he has given him, but his wife starts to say he's not a man if he doesn't do it. (Shakespeare 1.7 507-566). She tells him to have courage and to become a man. Lady Machebth is going against her husband's wishes and is pushing him into murdering the King. She says by not killing th eKing that Macbeth is breaking a promise to her. Lady Macbeth is very disobedient and outspoken towards her husband.

Another Feminst was Elizath the first. Who was known as the virgin queen. Her ruling was known as the Golden Age. It is amazing that during her time she evaded marrying a man or being controlled by a man. A lot of people did not like a woman ruling, but accepted it because she was strong and outspoken.

Elizabeth at a young age was targeted by men half her age because of the potential her position could hold. Elizabeth experienced harassment from a young age. One of the well known events was done by Thomas Seymour who was over twenty years older than her. Elizabeth went to live with Katerhine Parr after her father's death. Katerine Parr was married to Seymour, which is how their paths crossed. Elizath was only 14 at the time and faced sexual harassment from this old man. He would come into her bedroom ticking her, stricking her on the back and buttoocks (Wilkinson). The worst incident is when he was found in her bedroom where he was pinning her down and cutting away at her gown (Wilkinson). Katherine saw that she needed to protect Elizath from her power hungry inappropriate husband and sent her away. Even after Katherine died, Seymour would send Elizath suggestives letters that he wanted to marry her and rule as the future king (Wilkinson). These events are horrific occurrences that could have swayed Elizabeth from marrying a husband. She did not want to give up her control. Even though she

was constantly urged to in order to produce a heir she still said no.

Elizabeth decided that instead of getting married that she would remain the Virgin Queen. Her big fear is that a male would come in and overrule all her decisions. In the sixteenth century men were known to hold power over their wives and control their lives. She was fearful this would happen so she decided not to get married. She referred to it as, “As the ‘Virgin Queen’, Elizabeth’s perceived purity had a ‘political dimension’ and wasn’t just about physical and moral purity. By stating that ‘her motivations, her mode of governance, her acts are all pure in mind and body’, Elizabeth was able to garner support for her reign.” (Wilkinson). Being a virgin was a very important aspect to a woman's life. Elizath used this to her advantage and manipulates everyone so she doesn't have to marry. She was all saying because she was only married to another country, which means she is constantly making decisions that would be the good of her country.

Another way Elizath was a feminst was by the creation of the female icon. She chose to show her power in a very symbolic way through portraits. She had striking features that made her the image of femininity with the curling red hair, faultless pale complexion, and ageless beauty (Wilkinson). Her paintings commonly had the dress stitched eyes and ears to leave the message that she could hear her everyone everywhere (Wilkinson). She would always present a regal appearance so that even though she was gang she would always hold an ageless beauty and strength. Her portraits would show a symbol of her chastity by wearing black and white. She used her image to manipulate everyone that she was powerful and strong.

Abigail Adams was a first lady. She was her husband’s John Adams coest advisor and he would often go to her for advice. She was very educated when it came to public affairs and always made sure to keep her husband updated. She was denied a position in politics, but when her husband became president she actively worked with him.

There is a well known letter that was between Abigail and her husband. In this letter she stands up for women and acts as a feminst. First she clearly states in the letter about how can Americans liberty be strong when they deprive others of it. (Foner 247). She is very clearly advocating for the African Americans, Native Americans, and women. African Americans were enslaved and forced to do harsh work. Native Americans were being pushed from their land and forced to assimilate. Women were controlled by men. She also asks that he is more generous to the ladies and give them freedom with a loving marriage or they will form a rebellion (Foner 247). She is expressing them the women want rights. Men should no longer control them and they should be given a voice. Abigail had no problem voicing her concerns for people's rights to her husband.

Abigail Adams was also someone who believed everyone had the right to be educated. She especially advocated for girls to have a school that would be equal to boys (First Lady Bibliography). She thought in order to be a good mother that they needed the education so that they could raise their children better. It would help their children make better informed decisions. Abgal was someone who educated herself in order to be a good first lady and a smart woman. She was lucky to have access to a library in order to teach herself to read and write. She wanted every woman to have the same chance.

Not only was the first lady smart, but she was also outspoken. She had no problem speaking her mind. She also on multiple occasions defended her husband. She spoke up for her husband

during his election. The Anti-Federalist thought she was too outspoken and would publicly attack her by slandering her (First Lady Bibliography). She would respond calmly and ignore them still advocating for her husband. Something else she agreed with her husband on was the Alien and Sedition Act of 1798 (First Lady Bibliography). It was basically an act to shut down political radicals and those who criticized John’s decisions. She found it to be a good act because they could not publish any more lies about her husband. It is very uncommon for a woman of her time to be so outspoken and publicly defend her husband.

Women preserved through time to earn their freedom. They were confined to their strict set roles, but wanted their voices to be heard. Shakspeare’s plays showed that women were smart and had a lot of control. Elizabeth the First ruled gracefully without a man by her side. Abigail Adams was an outspoken first lady who fought for her voice and others to be heard. These actions helped paved a way for more feminst movements to come.