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On Gender and Identity in Three Shakespearean Texts

Jocelyn Dukes Crawley
Georgia State University

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ON GENDER AND IDENTITY IN THREE SHAKESPEAREAN TEXTS

by

Jocelyn Crawley

Under the Direction of Dr. Robert Sattelmeyer

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study was to examine the role that sociocultural and political mores play in shaping male and female value systems. The aforementioned value systems were examined with respect to the role they played in the development and evolution of the individual's self-concept as well as how such persons interacted with other individuals in context of romantic/sexual relationships. To contextualize the construction of individual and collective identity as it pertains to the amorous sphere, consideration was given to culturally bound realities such as religious and political mores as they unfolded within both the Renaissance era and world of the text as constructed by its author. Findings included a great propensity towards the silencing and subjugation of women when they entered romantic relationships with men. However, various passages and themes of the plays examined revealed that female independence and agency can be realized within the romantic sphere.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Identity, Sexuality, Shakespeare, Sex, Race, Romance, Sexism, Feminism, Heteronormativity

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Jocelyn Crawley

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Jocelyn Crawley

Honors Thesis Director: Dr. Robert Sattelmeyer
Honors Program Director: Dr. Robert Sattelmeyer

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my pastor, Bishop Eddie L. Long. His support and encouragement throughout my undergraduate career have been integral to my intellectual and emotional growth.

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I would like to acknowledge my mother and father as people who have played a profound and instrumental role in my academic career. Their encouragement in my ability to succeed and excel has increased my confidence and morale. I would also like to acknowledge my sister and friend, Dawn Crawley. As an individual determined to make and accomplish goals, she embodies the spirit of excellence I seek to attain. My brother, Cedric Crawley, has also served as a model of eminence I want to emulate. In addition to my family members, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Paul Voss. Without his vast knowledge of the life and works of William Shakespeare, this thesis would quite likely never have come to completion. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Sattelmeyer, Dr. Elizabeth West, Dr. Janet Gabler-Hover, Dr. Marilyn Richtarik, Dr. Reiner Smolinski, Dr. Carol Marsh-Lockett, Dr. Wayne Erickson, and Dr. Peter Lindsay for their support in all of my academic pursuits.

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On Gender and Identity in Three Shakespearean Texts

As gender theory becomes more prevalent in academic discourse, many academics have begun to examine what romantic and sexual relationships in literature reveal about the way women and men relate to each other and how this relates to the formation and evolution of identity. While many Renaissance texts offer valuable information regarding paradigms pertaining to gender and identity, Shakespeare's plays contain some of the most complex and convoluted representations of women and men and, because these depictions are diverse, various comparisons and contrasts can be made. These juxtapositions reveal that while heterosexual romance can often function to generate equality and reciprocity, they more often reify a very reductionist conception of self and other. This fact becomes evident when one considers three of the most popular Shakespearean romances: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. As an analysis of these three plays makes evident, many heterosexual romances in Shakespeare's literature worked to reinforce male power by subjugating and silencing women.

That most Shakespearean romances reinforced and perpetuated male power becomes evident when one considers *The Taming of the Shrew*. Set in the town of Padua, the play delineates the troubled and tempestuous relationship of Kate and Petruchio. Determining that he desires marriage, Petruchio begins pursuing a woman whom the townspeople collectively call 'Katherine the curst' (I.ii.127). Informing Petruchio that Katherine possesses a slew of undesirable attributes, Hortensio states that she is "renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue" (I.ii.99). Agreeing with Hortensio's assessment, Grenio refers to Kate as a "wildcat" (I.ii.192). Concluding that their assessments of her character must be accurate, Petruchio notes that "she is an irksome brawling scold" (I.ii.183) but goes on to state that he plans to pursue a romantic

relationship with her. Informing his comrades that her boisterous and ostensibly ingratiating temperament will not preclude him from attaining her, Petruchio notes that in his time he has “heard lions roar” (I.ii.196) and concludes that taming Kate’s tongue does not constitute an insurmountable challenge.

As Petruchio’s language makes evident, he views the prospect of a relationship with Kate as a conquest. This fact becomes evident when one considers Petruchio’s assertion that he has “heard lions roar” (I.ii.196) and subsequently states that a woman’s tongue “gives not half so great a blow to hear” (I.ii.204). That Petruchio views Kate as property rather than a person becomes more evident when one considers his brief discussion with her father. Informing Baptista that he wants to wed his daughter, Petruchio notes that “I am rough and woo not like a babe” (II.i.136). In making this statement, Petruchio reinforces the reader’s understanding that he views their potential relationship as a conquest in which he will subdue her.

While Petruchio deems Kate an object whom he can and should subdue, the text makes evident her proclivity for an independent identity and self-assertion. That she possesses a mind and will of her own becomes evident during their first conversation. Engaging in heated dialogue that reveals their divergent views regarding what constitutes a good courtship, the two resort to insults and Kate eventually hits him. Initially showering her with a slew of compliments, Petruchio notes that he is “moved to woo thee for my wife” (II.i.193). Unmoved, Kate refers to him as a “movable” (II.i.196), this term signifying her belief that he is inconsistent and unreliable. She goes on to note that “asses are made to bear, and so are you” (II.i.200). In making this statement, Petruchio reinforces the reader’s understanding that he views women through a profoundly patriarchal lens. Asserting both that women are made to bear children and bear the weight of a sexual partner, Petruchio reveals his view that women’s primary role in relationships

is utilitarian. Inasmuch as this view promotes the notion that a woman's role in sexual relationships and procreation is primarily slavish and secondary to men, Petruchio's statement reinforces the notion that female desires and autonomy are ultimately insignificant.

The heated stichomythia between Kate and Petruchio continues to escalate as they refer to each other as animals. After Kate compares him to a buzzard, Petruchio goes on to refer to her as a wasp (II.i.210). After he insists that he is a gentleman (II.i.220), Kate decides to test the veracity of this statement by hitting him (II.i.221). After the two continue their verbal quarrel, Petruchio brings the conversation to a close by informing Kate that "thou must be married to no man but me" (II.i.274) and goes on to state that he is born to tame her.

When one considers the depth and scope of the discussion that transpires between Kate and Petruchio, the fundamentally heliocentric nature of their relationship becomes glaringly evident. Openly engaging in a war of words which reveals his sense of superiority, the dialogue between Kate and Petruchio functions as an outline and precursor to their relationship.

Demonstrating that he views women as fundamentally inferior by noting that they are born to bear, Petruchio concludes their conversation with the assertion that he is born to tame and must have her as his wife. In making this statement, Petruchio reinforces the reader's understanding that he views his position in the relationship as that of a patriarchal possessor. Stating that his purpose and ultimate aim is to subdue/tame her, he goes on to note that he must *have* her. This language makes evident his view of Kate as a consumable product who exists to gratify his variegated desires which include reducing her to a conquest and ensuring that her freedoms are limited by his presence and proclivities.

That the relationship between Kate and Petruchio will be predicated on inequality and psychosomatic subversion becomes more clear when one considers Kate's response to the reality

that she will soon wed Petruchio. Informing her father that she does not desire marriage, she states that she must “be forced to give my hand, opposed against my heart” (III.i.8-9). After Tranio points out that Petruchio’s antics and coarse behavior do leave something to be desired, he goes on to point out that he is an honest man (III.ii.25). After she notes that she wishes she had never seen him, Katherina exits the room weeping. This act demonstrates her aversion to the idea of marrying and works to reinforce the reader’s understanding that neither the courtship nor marriage are predicated on mutuality and a genuine interest in connecting intellectually and/or emotionally.

The reader’s understanding that Katherina and Petruchio’s relationship remains rooted in andocentric thought and practice becomes yet more evident when one considers that, directly prior to their wedding, Katherina states that she “must be forced to give my hand, opposed against my heart” (III.i.8-9). In making this statement, Katherina asserts that marrying Petruchio does not constitute a decision she makes out of genuine interest in him as a romantic partner and companion.

That Petruchio and Kate’s relationship purports patriarchal paradigms regarding gender becomes more evident when one considers events surrounding their wedding. Clothing himself in what Tranio deems “mad attire” (III.ii.123), Petruchio wears inappropriate clothing to the wedding in an attempt to embarrass Kate. In addition to humiliating her by wearing unsuitable clothing to his wedding, Petruchio goes on to demonstrate that her will and desires mean nothing to him. When Kate implores him not to leave by stating “Now if you love me, stay” (III.ii.206), Petruchio responds by asking Grumio for his horse. Angry at his utter disregard of her, Kate states that she wants to go to the bridal dinner. In doing so, she both openly acknowledges that Petruchio has disrespected her and simultaneously asserts her ability to make decisions about her

life without his input. Aware that she is attempting to assert herself, Petruchio goes on to demonstrate that he will not allow her to operate as an independent agent when he states that the wedding guests can go on to the bridal dinner while she must go with him. Crystallizing the reader's understanding that he occupies the sphere of independent personhood while she exists as slave like object, Petruchio goes on to call her "my goods, my chattels, she is my house, my household stuff, my field, my barn, my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything" (III.ii.232-234). In saying this, Petruchio informs the reader that he exists as fully human and that Kate is a mere utilitarian object whom he will consume at leisure and for pleasure.

As made evident by the type of relationship Petruchio and Katherina have, their romance ultimately works to reinforce the reader's understanding that phallic paradigms prevail in their marriage. Their interaction functions as a demonstration of the way in which most heterosexual relationships are predicated upon men acting as independent agents while women exist as relational beings. In the case of Petruchio and Kate, the former's existence as an independent agent becomes evident when one considers both his decision-making process and the way he relates to his partner. When conversing with his comrades regarding his future plans, Petruchio states that he has come to "wive and thrive as best I may" (I.ii.55). By making this claim, Petruchio demonstrates that he has a clear purpose which necessitates the utilization of his independent reasoning skills. As made evident by the term "wive and thrive," Petruchio's plan incorporates climbing the social ladder through the acquisition of economic wealth and attaining a wife. While both of these plans necessitate interacting with others, they are predicated on thinking and acting as an independent agent. This becomes evident when one considers the fact that both the accumulation of wealth and determination to seek out a romantic partner necessitate the imposition of independent thought, strategy, and decision making.

Unlike Petruchio, Kate eventually accedes to a value system predicated on a relational mode of being and knowing. This becomes most evident when one considers issues surrounding her relationship with Petruchio. As made evident by the way their relationship begins, Kate's ability to assert her own opinions and make independent decisions remains limited. Beginning with the heated stichomythia she has with Petruchio, her acquiescence to his power becomes evident. Although she initially rejoins every negative statement and coercive advance that he makes, Petruchio concludes their verbal argument with the assertion that he is born to tame Kate and will have her as his wife. After Kate goes on to state that she will not marry him, Petruchio notes that she will. While Kate does not immediately offer a clear response to Petruchio's insistence that they will marry, her accedence to Petruchio's hegemonic rule over her through marriage becomes evident when she later informs Baptista that she must be forced to give her hand against her heart (III.ii.8-10). In stating this, Kate confirms her conformance to a relational way of being and knowing which ultimately precludes her from exercising intellectual and emotional freedom. That her lifestyle becomes primarily relational as a result of her decision to marry Petruchio becomes evident when one considers that most of their dialogue and interaction demonstrates how she depends on him for the satisfaction of her basic needs rather than utilizing her mind and body to acquire necessities.

That Kate remains dependent on Petruchio for the satisfaction of her basic needs becomes evident when one notes the fact that, in one of many instances meant to exert power over her, Petruchio precludes her from eating. When the servant Peter presents them with a meal including meat, Petruchio states that neither he nor Kate can consume the food on account of the fact that it was burnt. Noting the inaccuracy of his assessment, Kate notes that the meat "was well" (IV.i.157). Refusing her rationale, Petruchio discusses how he starves Kate when he notes that

she “is sharp and passing empty” (IV.i.176). He goes on to state that “she ate no meat today, nor none shall eat” (IV.i.184). Ultimately, the fact that Petruchio starves Kate and she submits to this abuse demonstrates both her conformity to prototypical conceptions of how a woman should conduct herself and the psychosomatic attrition and eventual annihilation that results from doing so. This fact becomes evident when one considers that in addition to starving Kate Petruchio precludes her from sleeping. Stating that he has begun his reign (IV.i.185) over her, Petruchio asserts that “last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not” (IV.i.185). Noting the effect that both sleep and food deprivation have on her, Kate states that the lack of sleep makes her “giddy” (IV.iii.9). In saying so, Kate affirms that the psychosomatic annihilation which results from her accedence to a relational modality has led to the abnegation of her personhood. Unable to assert herself by making independent decisions with respect to what she eats and when she can sleep, Kate has literally lost her mind.

Furthering the reader’s understanding that Kate has no psychosomatic power, Petruchio successfully attempts to determine what clothes she can wear. When Kate notes that she likes a certain cap given that gentle women wear them, Petruchio states she’ll have one “when [she is] gentle” (IV.iii.71). In addition to precluding her from having the cap, Petruchio states that the gown made for Kate has flaws despite the fact that he knows the tailor made it according to the pattern outlined. Ignoring Kate’s insistence that she has never seen “a better-fashioned gown” (IV.iii.101), Petruchio goes on to insult the tailor for his inability to make Kate’s garments appropriately. Just as happens when he deprives Kate of food and sleep, Petruchio has the last word regarding whether or not the garments are purchased and this fact makes evident the fact that Kate has no rule over her mind and body. Unable to determine what garments she adorns herself with, her body no longer functions as a locus for and symbol of her personhood. Rather

Kate's body becomes the sphere through which Petruchio asserts his own authority and rule. As made evident through this fact, Kate has given herself over to a fundamentally insane mode of being and knowing.

That Kate submits herself to the sort of hegemonic relationship which signifies that she no longer possesses a mind or body becomes evident when she makes her final soliloquy. Revealing that she agrees to follow all of the prototypical sociocultural mores regarding what a heterosexual relationship should be, Kate states that "thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign" (V.ii.146-147). Going on to note that women "are bound to serve, love, and obey" (V.ii.164), she concludes that females should "place [their] hands below [their] husband's foot" (V.ii.177). This closing statement crystallizes the reader's understanding that Petruchio's wills and desires have prevailed in their romantic relationship.

Able to operate as an agent with independent thoughts that become actions which determine the direction of his relationship, Petruchio proves that he retains the full personhood which is constructing and operating according to independent thoughts. Thus, as made evident by interaction between the couple as well as the conclusion of the play, Kate and Petruchio's relationship constitutes an archetypal heterosexual romance. Petruchio adopts the modality of individuation which generates a greater degree of intellectual, emotional, and spatial freedom while Kate chooses a relational modality. In doing so, Kate engenders her psychosomatic annihilation by giving Petruchio control over her mind and body.

As noted earlier, Kate's willingness to give Petruchio rule over her constitutes a type of insanity. Defined as being afflicted with a serious mental disorder impairing a person's ability to function, insanity ultimately connotes the inability of an individual to actualize themselves in a productive and efficacious manner. While Kate initially expresses her desire to attain and

maintain freedom to exact her own will, her attempts to be a free agent are complicated and eventually negated by her accedence to the patriarchal power structure. The eventual negation of her ability to think and act independently functions as proof that she has gone insane. Having lost her own mind, she willingly submits herself to a man who has starved her, precluded her from sleeping, and will not allow her to wear what she wants to. Noting the ultimately schismatic affect that Petruchio has on Kate, Coppelia Kahn argues that pretending to agree with the man's absurd ideas and requests thrusts her into "a schizoid existence" (128). Indeed, her periodic outward acquiescence to Petruchio's ideals generates a dualistic mode of existence comparable to schizophrenia. Eventually, this shifting back and forth from actual individual personhood to mindless body who exists solely for another generates total loss of independent reasoning faculties which would entail individuation and decision making.

Arguing against this notion, John C. Bean notes that the soliloquy proves that "because she now appreciates her own powers, Kate is able to envision the family as an ordered kingdom in which the subject's obedience is a response not to the king's will but to the king's love" (116). Yet Petruchio's behavior in no way parallels commonly conceived definitions of love. Tyrannical and manipulative, his actions demonstrate that he ultimately desires to control and silence Kate until she accepts her position as objectified inferior. Thus, the obedience of which Bean speaks does not result from the sort of reciprocity and mutual respect that reflect genuine love. Rather, her obedience results from psychosomatic manipulation and her eventual accedence to an inferior existence which, while denigrating and oppressive, offers periodic pleasures and consistency. This fact becomes evident when one considers the scene in which the fact that Kate's mind has been changed becomes evident. In Act 4, Scene 5, Petruchio repeatedly orders Kate to declare that the moon is the sun in one of innumerable attempts to prove that he

maintains the dictatorial leader in the relationship. Frustrated and annoyed with his perpetual attempts to generate agreement that does not exist, Kate finally accedes to his insistence that she call the sun the moon after Hortensio states “say as he says, or we shall never go” (IV.v.11). This statement engenders Kate’s agreement with Petruchio’s insistence that she agree with him and ultimately proves that her motivations for the final soliloquy were not a response to the king’s love (as argued by Bean) but rather a proclivity for conforming to social norms because they can occasionally bring about desired results. In this case, the desired result is arriving at their intended destination.

When one views *The Taming of the Shrew* in totality, the ruling paradigm becomes apparent. In an attempt to secure romance and devotion from a woman, men can use hegemonic principles to attain this commitment. Indeed, the whole relationship ultimately amounts to Petruchio playing cruel mind games with Kate until she agrees to advocate and conform to his patriarchal ideology. Arguing this very thing, Detmer states that Petruchio “tests her tendency ‘to cross’ him until she submits, that is, until she “incorporates the world view of the aggressor” (288). In essence, *The Taming of the Shrew* can be considered a play that displays (and perhaps thus reifies) patriarchal paradigms regarding how men and women should relate to each other.

While the imposition of prototypical and fundamentally patriarchal paradigms in *The Taming of the Shrew* result in Kate’s eventual insanity, Desdemona’s acquiescence to damaging sociocultural mores functions as a precursor for her literal death. Set in Venice, Othello details significant events that transpire in the lives of the protagonist and his wife, Desdemona. Ultimately demonstrating the imposition of the archetypal heterosexual romantic script, Desdemona’s actions are guided by her collusion in a prototypically female mode of being and knowing while Othello conforms to a masculine system of thought. While Othello learns to think

and act as an individual possessing gifts and talents that can be utilized to further his personal progress and benefit his community, Desdemona chooses to place the most primacy on fostering and maintaining a positive and productive relationship with her husband.

That Othello conforms to the gender script advocating that he as a male locate and actualize his self as an independent agent in the world becomes evident when one considers his career. A military man, Othello has engaged in “battles, sieges, fortunes” (I.iii.130). Having been sold to slavery (I.iii.138) at one point, Othello eventually regains his freedom and, through informing Desdemona about the depth and scope of his career, he gains her love and the two eventually marry. While this plot summary may seem to convey the sort of mutuality reflecting equality and love, the unfolding of events reveals that their romance is fundamentally prototypical. In describing how they become romantically involved, Othello notes that “she loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them” (I.iii.168). In making this statement, Othello reinforces the reader’s understanding that his motivation for loving Desdemona is rooted in her admiration of the things that he has done. In essence, even Othello’s love for an other is predicated on a self-centered ideology. Furthering the reader’s understanding of the masculinist paradigms he conforms to, Othello uses the term “won” (I.iii.42) to describe the fact that he successfully courted and married Desdemona. Rife with connotations of war and conquest, the term “won” makes evident the fact that Othello ultimately views Desdemona as an object to be acquired through the imposition of warlike tactics. While his language and the paradigm this ideology is rooted in may demonstrate that Desdemona possesses value, it ultimately dehumanizes her by indicating that she is an object to be won.

While Othello’s behavior and relationship with his wife indicate that he internalizes and embodies the prototypical masculine script dictating that he place primacy on thinking and acting

as an independent agent, Desdemona also conforms to constricting paradigms rooted in a hegemonic gender schema. Rather than think and act as an individual who continually acknowledges and satisfies her desires, Desdemona repeatedly demonstrates that she adopts a relational mode of being and knowing by constantly subjecting herself to her husband and father. This fact becomes evident when one considers both her internal monologues and actions. Interestingly, her first line in the play concerns the well-being of her husband. In response to Cassio's greeting, Desdemona asks, "What tidings can you tell me of my lord?" (II.i.88). Centering her own existence around Othello, Desdemona's first utterance indicates that her life revolves around him. That Desdemona remains subjected to her father just as she does her husband becomes evident when one considers her first line in the play. Indeed, her first statement is "My noble father, I do perceive here a divided duty; To you I am bound for life and education; My life and education both do learn me How to respect you" (I.iii.179-182). In making this assertion, Desdemona reveals that she considers obeying her father and following his instructions to be integral to her own existence. When one considers Desdemona's reliance upon both her husband and her father for wisdom and instruction, the relational mode of being and knowing that she adopts becomes apparent.

One might argue against the notion that Desdemona's existence and actions reflect complete conformance to a relational system of thought. Indeed, several conversations within the play indicate that she does value herself as an independent agent. In conversing with Iago and Emilia regarding the latter's character, Desdemona asks Iago "What wouldst thou write of me, if thou shouldst praise me?" (II.i.116). In making this inquiry, Desdemona indicates that she places at least some importance on issues surrounding herself. Moreover, Desdemona challenges the commonly accepted notion that women are by nature weak and passive when she decides to play

an active role in repairing the damaged relationship between Cassio and Othello. Informing Cassio that she will do all that she can to mend their ruptured friendship, she states that “If I do vow a friendship, I’ll perform it to the last article” (III.iii.21-22). Throughout the play, she relentlessly entreats Othello to consider the cause of Cassio and, in the act of doing so, indicates that she possesses both an independent will and the cognitive faculties necessary to persuade others. Desdemona’s recognition of herself as an individual whose emotional and intellectual needs merit acquiescence can even be noted when one considers her relationship with her husband. While she does place a great degree of primacy on ensuring his happiness, she does so at least in part because she recognizes that doing so is mutually beneficial. Indeed, the text makes evident that she loves him (I.iii.248). This love makes her continual concern about his well-being both logical and beneficial inasmuch as her certainty of his psychosomatic wholeness generates peace and joy on her part. Making evident her desire that they continue to dwell in a state of genuine reciprocity and concern for each other that generates verdancy and elevation, Desdemona states “The heavens forbid but that our loves and comforts should increase even as our days do grow” (II.i.185-186). As made evident by the words themselves, their mutual love and comfort will positively benefit Desdemona and through this short speech the reader understands the way in which Desdemona’s conscious choice to have a relationship with Othello demonstrates that she possesses a mind and will of her own which make self-actualization possible.

Yet while some of Desdemona’s thoughts and actions reveal her proclivity for adopting an independent mode of existence, her life and death ultimately reflect her accedence to the relational system of thought that generates both her metaphorical and literal death. Indeed, despite her periodic assertions of independence, she ultimately allows her husband to determine

the course of her life. This fact becomes evident when one considers that after insisting that he invite Cassio to dine with him, Desdemona finally concludes “Be as your fancies teach you; Whatever you be, I am obedient” (III.ii.89). In stating this, Desdemona reveals that while she does possess cognitive faculties and a will of her own, she will ultimately allow Othello to make the final determinations regarding issues that affect her. This decision crystallizes the reader’s understanding that she has adopted a relational mode of existence which ultimately works to subjugate her.

The debilitating effect of the relational role Desdemona adopts becomes evident when one considers the continual erosion of her rights which takes place throughout the play. While her relationship with Othello initially reflects at least some degree of mutuality and reciprocity, his lack of faith in her fidelity eventually generates dissonance between them and this in turn results in the implementation of verbal and physical abuse which lead to her psychosomatic negation. This abuse can be noted when one considers that after he becomes upset with her as a result of the fact that she expresses platonic love for Cassio, Othello hits her (IV.i.234). Furthering his derogation of her, Othello openly humiliates and ridicules her in front of Lodovica. After she attempts to leave and Othello calls her back into their presence, Desdemona begins to cry and—apparently indifferent to her anguish—he encourages her to continue crying (IV.i.249). He goes on to verbally abuse her by asserting that she is “false as hell” (IV.ii.41) as a result of his growing but unconfirmed suspicions that she is having an affair and lying about it. In addition to calling her a liar, Othello goes on to call her a whore (IV.ii.81). That this verbal abuse negatively affects Desdemona to the point of psychosomatic debilitation becomes evident when one considers her response. After he has subjected her to both verbal and physical abuse, Desdemona remains in the relationship and attempts to convince Othello that she has been

faithful. While obeying his commands, Desdemona also argues with him about the fact that she has been chaste, informing him that her religious training functions as a part of the impetus for her faithfulness (IV.ii.83). In addition to this, Desdemona continues to obey Othello's every edict despite the fact that he has thoroughly devalued and degraded her. When he orders her to bed, she complies. Moreover, when Emilia states that she wishes Desdemona had never seen the man, Desdemona affirms the fact that she still loves him by maintaining that "my love doth so approve him that even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns—prithce unpun me—have grace and favor in them" (IV.iii.18-20). These acts indicate the sort of psychosomatic dissolution that Kate undergoes during her courtship with Petruchio. Just as Kate periodically asserts her own will but eventually adopts the self-abnegating mindset that results in her insanity and ultimate absence from the text, Desdemona continually colludes in her own oppression by assenting to the hegemonic desires of her husband. Moreover, just as Kate's continual accedence to an andocentric system of thought results in her metaphorical death, Desdemona's verbal and nonverbal consent to her husband's patriarchal ideology results in her demise.

While Kate's psychosomatic attrition and eventual annihilation results in a symbolic death, Desdemona's conformance to a patriarchal mindset engenders her literal death. While one could not accurately blame Desdemona for her own death (only suicide would justify such an assertion), her decision to remain in a psychologically and physically debilitating environment made her death possible. As the text makes evident, Othello repeatedly asks her to confess that she has been unfaithful. Desdemona repeatedly refuses to make such a confession and, after ignoring her request that he let her live for half an hour, Othello strangles her (V.iii.85). Through this act, the reader comes to understand that Othello and Desdemona's relationship conforms to the aforementioned hegemonic structure which promotes individuation in men and a relational

mode of being in women. Just as the outcome of these disparate modalities result in Kate's metaphorical death, Desdemona's willingness to adopt a patriarchal mindset through which she abandons logic and her own well-being to please her husband demonstrates her symbolic death and gives rise to her literal annihilation. Thus, just as *The Taming of the Shrew* details a romantic relationship in which the prevalence of patriarchal paradigms engender the psychosomatic attrition of the female, *Othello* also functions as a play through which one notes the annihilation of a woman as a result of her unwillingness to abandon debilitating sociocultural mores.

While the relationships between Kate and Petruchio and Othello and Desdemona demonstrate a collusion in a patriarchal system of thought that engenders the psychosomatic annihilation of the female participants, Romeo and Juliet's romantic union constitutes a relationship that defies the andocentric system of thought that guided Renaissance culture. That Romeo and Juliet have a relationship that transcends socioculturally constructed conceptions of gender becomes evident when one considers how they think and act as individuals. As made evident by his discourse and decisions, Romeo does not conform to the ideology of individuation advocated and reinforced by the patriarchy. Rather, many of his internal monologues reflect a proclivity for placing primacy on interaction with others. This fact becomes evident when one considers his first conversation in the play. After recognizing that his friend seems unhappy, Benvolio asks why and Romeo responds that his melancholy results from his inability to enter a romantic relationship with Rosalyn. Explaining the situation, Romeo states that the woman he loves has taken a vow of chastity (I.i.216). Sympathizing with him, Benvolio encourages Romeo to forget the woman by gazing on other beauties. Although Romeo states that he does not believe he will find a woman as attractive as Rosalyn, his assumptions are proven wrong when he meets Juliet at a party. After requesting a kiss and subsequently learning that Juliet is a member of the

family his parents loathe, Romeo concludes that he is in love with her and begins making strides towards marrying her.

Both the frustration he experiences on account of his inability to enter a romantic union with Rosalyn and his emerging love for Juliet demonstrate the way in which he adopts a relational mode of existence and agency. In so doing, his character and personhood function as the inversion of sociocultural mores. Rather than placing primacy on acting independently and establishing a world of his own, Juliet's life and well-being become primary in his consciousness. This becomes evident when one considers the words with which he woos her. Noting that if the fact that their families are feuding precludes them from attaining unmitigated love and unity, Romeo states that if his name were a word written, he would "tear the word" (II.i.99). Going on to assert the intensity of his love for her, Romeo states that "stony limits cannot hold love out" (II.i.109). Both of these amorous assertions and his decision to marry her despite the fact that they are from feuding families makes evident the fact that maintaining a relationship plays a central role in how Romeo conceptualizes himself as a person. This in turn leads to the reader's understanding that he conforms to a relational modality rather than an ideology of individuation.

To further understand that Romeo adopts a relational mode of existence and agency, one can consider his interaction with other people. As made plain by the text, the first conversation Romeo has with the friar concerns the fact that he no longer wants to be in a relationship with Rosalyn as a result of the fact that he now finds himself enraptured with Juliet. After noting that the fact that he no longer cares for Rosalyn and has quickly moved on to pursuing a relationship with Juliet indicates Romeo's proclivity for being mercurial, the friar goes on to note that he will still marry the couple because doing so may result in peace between their feuding families.

Following his conversation with the friar, Romeo engages the Nurse in a discussion about pursuing Juliet. After telling the Nurse to inform Juliet to meet him at Friar Lawrence's cell, he offers her money. The Nurse rejects this offer but states that she will help Romeo with arrangements for the wedding.

As made evident by his conversations with both the friar and the Nurse, most of the conversations Romeo takes part in revolve around his relationship with Juliet. This clearly identifies him as an individual who exemplifies a relational mode of existence. Indeed, rather than pursuing a relationship in a self-centered way that ultimately functions to glorify oneself, Romeo's pursuit of Juliet reflects a desire for a union predicated on mutuality and reciprocity. Indeed, one could argue that his ultimate desire is intimacy and unicity, basing this assertion on his discussion with the friar regarding why his infatuation with Rosalyn could not give rise to a relationship. Informing the man that he and Juliet love each other while his love for Rosalyn was unrequited (II.ii.82), Romeo demonstrates that he desires union rather than domination or one-sided affection. Therefore, textual evidence gives rise to the notion that his relationship cannot be considered a reflection of the individuation and selfishness promoted and purported by the patriarchal value system.

Yet while Romeo accedes to a relational system of thought over and above the individuation ideology, he does make conscious decisions that both reflect and establish his independent personhood. Herein lies the distinguishing factor between the sort of identity embodied by Romeo and other male figures such as Petruchio and Othello. While Petruchio and Othello conform to the sort of independent personhood that reflects accedence to an ultimately damaging and reductionist identity, Romeo attains the sort of seity that makes egalitarian and unific love possible. By identifying and embracing a self that recognizes and values the

fundamental worth and equality of the other, Romeo embodies the sort of personhood that transcends the rigid and hegemonic system of gender relations which encourages men to seek dominant positions in romantic and sexual relationships. For this reason—his ability to operate both independently and as a relational agent—Romeo constitutes an individual capable of expressing and experiencing a unific and egalitarian love.

Just as Romeo's behaviors demonstrate his proclivity for embodying a plenary mode of being and knowing, Juliet's thoughts and actions reveal that she also possesses the sort of personhood that surpasses normative conception of what a woman should be as well as how and to what degree she should love. That Juliet does not conform to the archetypal idea of what a woman should be and think becomes evident at the play's onset. Rather than embodying and acceding to the relational system of thought which ultimately abnegates independent identity, Juliet asserts herself as an individual by expressing her views regarding marriage. When her mother asks how she feels about marrying a potential suitor, Juliet responds that "it is an honor that I dream not of" (I.iii.65). In making this assertion, Juliet demonstrates the fact that she possesses an independent mind and will of her own. When Juliet's nurse and mother attempt to sway her through the use of rational arguments demonstrating why marriage would be beneficial, she responds by stating that she'll "look to like, if looking liking move: But no more deep will I endart mine eye than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (I.iii.95). Here, Juliet demonstrates that while she will allow the views of her mother and the nurse to generate positive sentiments regarding marriage, she will ultimately look at potential partners with a somewhat apathetic attitude.

While Juliet's demonstration of independence becomes apparent through her expressed indifference towards marriage that she possesses an independent mind and will of her own

becomes yet more obvious when one considers her relationship with Romeo. Her independence and agency are made evident when one contemplates the fact that she chooses Romeo for a romantic partner despite the fact that they are from feuding families. When she discovers that Romeo is a Montague, she entreats him to deny his name and goes on to assert that if necessary she will no longer be a Capulet (II.i.78). In so doing, Juliet asserts that her position as a member of a powerful family does not override her desire and ability to make independent decisions.

The role that concepts of family loyalty and allegiance play in proving that Juliet thinks and acts independently becomes more evident when one considers her reaction and ultimate response to the fact that Romeo has killed her cousin Tybalt. Upon learning from the Nurse that Romeo killed Tybalt, Juliet experiences and expresses deep anxiety and remorse. Lamenting the loss of her cousin and the fact that Romeo has been banished, Juliet asserts that “Tybalt’s death was woe enough, if it had ended there” (II.ii.114). Yet while she feels deep and sincere anguish regarding the loss of her cousin, Juliet’s words and actions make evident the fact that her ultimate allegiance rests with Romeo rather than the Capulets. This fact becomes evident when one considers that she refers to Tybalt as “my dear-loved cousin” (III.ii.67) while calling Romeo “my dearer lord” (III.ii.67). Juliet goes on to urge the Nurse to give Romeo a ring symbolizing her faithfulness to him. In so doing, Juliet asserts the fact that she understands prevalent principles regarding family dynamics and ultimately states that while she recognizes that her husband has killed a family member, she believes that maintaining their relationship has become and should remain her primary concern.

While Juliet’s thoughts and actions make evident the fact that she does not conform to socioculturally inscribed regulations which encourage women to adopt a relational mode of existence, her life decisions also demonstrate her proclivity for placing primacy on others. This

fact becomes evident when one considers that while Juliet reveals her ability to act independently on numerous occasions, many of her decisions reflect her accedence to a relational system of values. To understand how the ideology of relational being and knowing remains prevalent but not entirely primary in Juliet's consciousness, one need only consider the depth and scope of her relationship with Romeo. As made evident on numerous occasions, Juliet demonstrates devotion to her romantic partner. Both her willingness to cut family ties and her choice to remain in the relationship despite the fact that Romeo killed Tybalt demonstrate her ability to occupy both relational and individual spheres. That she acts in a relational fashion becomes evident when one considers that the decisions she makes are rooted in her desire to maintain a relationship with Romeo. That she also acts as an individual can be seen on innumerable occasions, including informing her father that she will not wed Paris so soon after the death of Tybalt. Thus, when one considers Juliet's behavior throughout the play, it becomes apparent that she adopts both a relational and individual mode depending upon what she thinks any given situation calls for.

As becomes plain upon juxtaposing and analyzing the behavior of Romeo and Juliet, the couple's interaction marks a departure from the relationships between Othello and Desdemona and Kate and Petruchio. Unlike these individuals, Romeo and Juliet are able to establish and maintain a relationship predicated upon reciprocity rather than the implementation of the hegemonic values esteemed within patriarchal cultures. Yet to suggest that the couple's relationship remains free from andocentric influence would be naïve. Indeed, as various scholars have pointed out, Renaissance culture was rife with male-centered ideologies and their implementation. Explaining this very thing, Nostbakken asserts that "within the male-dominated hierarchy of English patriarchy, not only were husbands traditionally granted supreme authority over their wives, but women were also regarded as the weaker sex, physically and morally" (85).

As this statement implies, the English culture of Shakespeare's Verona was predicated on laws and customs that privileged men. Yet despite the influence that these biased mores may have had on Juliet and Romeo, their interaction reveals that they were perhaps less receptive to patriarchal edicts than their literary contemporaries. Indeed, the couples of *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew* were presumably endowed with the same free will and cognitive faculties as Romeo and Juliet, yet their thoughts and actions imply that they chose to conform to the sexist values of their societies. With this in mind, one might wonder why Desdemona—a woman possessing certain class privileges in light of her father's station in society—would maintain a marriage with a man constantly accusing her of adultery. Indeed, her credibility and value within her society had already been attacked on account of the fact that she chose to marry a man of another race. Compounded by his continual accusations regarding adultery, Desdemona's anguish and disease throughout the text become apparent. Yet despite his violence and psychological abuse, she remains in the relationship until it brings about her demise. Faced with disparate yet similarly difficult situations, Juliet does not opt to remain within a cultural system which works to reify female subordination and silence. Rather, she challenges her father when he attempts to ensure that she will marry Paris. She also challenges the cultural notion that women place a great degree of primacy upon marriage when she informs the Nurse and her mother that the institution is a desire she does not have. Thus—as becomes clear when one examines the decisions of Desdemona and Juliet—the impetus for their divergent decisions seems to be rooted in the fact that they possess the ability to think and arrive at their own conclusions regarding how to live and interact with others. When one considers the weight of import their rational faculties have in determining the course of their lives, the role that free will plays in determining whether or not one will accede to sexist ideologies seems quite grand.

In addition to raising issues with respect to the scope and signification of free will, the reading of his plays draws the reader's attention to various other significant issues pertaining to the characters within it. Amongst other questions, the romantic relationships Shakespeare's characters maintain raises the question of whether or not sexism is wrong. This question is not without practical and literary significance given that accedence to a system of values predicated on sexism is often predicated on the notion that male dominance is advantageous for the entire society rather than a select group of men who reap its benefits. If one views the world and its socioeconomic and political structures through this lens, the nature of discourse moves away from positing whether or not relationships are predicated on equality and mutuality. Rendering this type of interrogation all but unnecessary, the advocates of a social system predicated on sexism render it meritorious given that women benefit socially, economically, and personally. Yet, when one considers Shakespeare's plays through this lens, it becomes evident that sexist paradigms and procedures do not result in the elevation of a woman's status.

That societies predicated on male rule cannot always generate the general well-being of women becomes evident when one examines the relationship of Kate and Petruchio. As made clear by the text itself, Petruchio operates according to principles legitimating his psychosomatic abuse of women. In discussing his desire to court Kate with her father Baptista, Petruchio argues that she will yield to him because he is "rough and woo not like a babe" (II.i.137). In making this statement, Petruchio reveals his accedence to a system of relations with a woman predicated on generating a relationship predicated on hegemony. That Petruchio seeks to maintain a position of power in this hegemonic system of relations becomes evident when one considers several events preceding and following his marriage to Kate. During his wooing process, Petruchio informs Kate that her father has consented that she will become his wife (II.i.262-263). In making this

statement, Petruchio reinforces the reader's understanding that he finds it acceptable for the decision to wed to be left in the hands of a woman's father rather than the woman herself. In addition to this voiced accedence to a hegemony predicated upon ensuring that men rather than women make decisions regarding how reality will be constructed, Petruchio goes on to argue that he is born to tame her. As made evident earlier, this taming process transpires through practices such as starvation and sleep deprivation. Thus, the text clearly demonstrates that Petruchio is a sexist. What a holistic analysis of the text does not indicate, however, is that this sexism benefits Kate. Were one to argue that the ends justify the means, a thoughtful consideration of the pain and suffering Kate endured during the courtship phase of her relationship with Petruchio points towards her final soliloquy. Indeed, if the ends justify the means, her final assessments regarding her views about both her husband and relationships between men and women in general would best indicate whether or not the quality of her life had increased or decreased as a result of interaction with Petruchio. As delineated in the soliloquy, the result of Petruchio's influence is an attitude of slavish servitude which purports the patriarchal paradigm in which men rule both the domestic and public spheres. Stating that husbands are "thy lord, thy life, thy keeper" (V.ii.147), she goes on to argue that women are bound to "serve, love, and obey" (V.ii.164). Abandoning her original proclivity for challenging Petruchio's assumptive and controlling behavior, Kate here asserts that women should not seek for "rule, supremacy, and sway" (V.ii.163). When the reader considers these statements in light of other events that transpire throughout the play, the meaning of Kate's words becomes clear. Formerly an agent operating according to principles of actualized free will and the pursuit of happiness, Kate's interaction with Petruchio results in her eventual accedence to a system in which it is suitable for a woman to "place [her] hands below [her] husband's foot" (V.ii.177). Thus when one considers Kate's agreement to relegate herself

to the position of powerless slave, the effect of Petruchio's sexism becomes evident. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the enforcement of a patriarchal value system does not result in the elevation of women. Rather, it generates the stagnation of women's minds as they cease expressing their independent thoughts or forego thinking entirely in an effort to keep peace between themselves and their husbands.

Just as sexism works to generate the disempowerment of women in *The Taming of the Shrew*, patriarchal attitudes engender female powerlessness in *Othello*. Evidence of sexist attitudes in the play become evident when one considers the expressed thoughts of both Othello and Desdemona. In detailing the inception of his relationship with Desdemona, Othello informs his listeners that he "won" (I.iii.94) her. Using war-like language, Othello's word choice conveys his view of her as a thing or object to be gained as a result of psychological or physical combat. Elaborating on the origins of their relationship, Othello goes on to point out that Desdemona began loving him after learning of his valor in war. Noting that "she lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd" (I.iii.167), Othello draws attention to various sexism made evident through the practice of war. Discriminatory against women in many ways, precluding women from participating in war prevented them from attaining the power gained by increasing in rank and thereby occupying influential political and government positions. Thus, when faced with the argument that sexism should remain an integral part of society given that it is good, one can easily argue that this is not the case. Indeed, the inequalities it engenders—whether by confining women to the home or precluding them from entering positions which could be a locus for power—are ultimately bad in the sense that they perpetuate the type of illegitimate discrimination rooted in arguing that a person's sex alone should be grounds for denying them access to mediums of socioeconomic and political incline.

When one engages how and why sexism is legitimated within both explicitly and implicitly patriarchal circles, the conversation regarding both male and female roles in the world becomes yet more complex. In essence, arguments surrounding the issue of legitimizing sexism frequently give rise to the question of whether or not women are being exploited. A potentially vague term, the word exploited is generally used to express a system of thought and practice in which a group of people are consistently used in a manner that renders them products rather than persons. When one considers the term exploitation in terms of patriarchal thought and practice, it becomes clear that one of the primary intents and effects of sexism is the use and abuse of women. As noted earlier through the examination of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Petruchio's interaction with Kate reflects the sort of coercion and control that can accurately be considered abuse. Moreover, the legitimization of this abuse can be at least partially attributed to the fact that Petruchio is male and Kate is female. (Drawing this conclusion remains contingent upon the aforementioned and generally acceded to notion that heteronormative marriages in Renaissance society were predicated upon the notion that men take active roles while women remain passive.) Yet while the oppression Kate experiences is intrinsically connected to the fact that she is female, the hegemonic gender system present in Paduan society is complicated by the reality that just as men exert power over women, they also subjugate other men. This fact becomes evident when one considers various scenes in the play, including the moment in which Petruchio attempts to frustrate Kate by denying her food. When Kate does not answer his question regarding how her meat tastes, Petruchio responds by snatching up the meat and ordering Grumio to take it away. In so doing, Petruchio manifests the power he has over Grumio, another male. This act reveals that the gendered structure of Paduan society involves not only interaction between men and women, but men and men as well.

Clearly, understanding and deconstructing the way men use other men has an effect on relationships between men and women. In essence, the individual who is being used occupies a less powerful position than the individual who is doing the using. Therefore, in a patriarchal world predicated on the notion that true masculinity is irrevocably connected to one's ability to control situations and other people, any male who is subject to the control of another male is categorically female. Here we understand the term "female" to signify an individual who occupies a position of submission. Based on this understanding of the signification of men who are being controlled by other men, the complexity of the gender system becomes evident. Moreover, while women occupy the sphere of inferiority and appropriation within a patriarchal system of thought, many women within Shakespeare's texts have more power than other men. This fact becomes evident when one examines the premise of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. Desiring a wife, Petruchio goes to extreme measures in efforts to secure a marriage. While he does subject Kate to a slew of near torturous events in an attempt to ensure that she will be his bride, Kate attains and maintains power insomuch as she remains unwilling to marry Petruchio. As stated earlier, this power becomes evident when one considers scenes in which she objects to his attempt to control her by protesting when he denies her food and arguing with him about which clothing items she will wear.

Just as *The Taming of the Shrew* contains elements revealing the centrality of female power within the text, *Othello* is rife with scenes and dialogues that demonstrate Desdemona's power. Indeed, Desdemona reveals her ability to bring about the end that she desires by informing her father that her duty as a married woman is to her husband rather than him. Clearly, this statement reveals that Desdemona possesses the ability to be assertive when necessary and also reveals that she has chosen to embrace love where she found it despite the power of

prejudice she is likely to experience as a result of the fact that her husband is a Moor. Other scenes depicting Desdemona's power include her challenging the likelihood of Iago's racism towards her husband when, in response to his reference to a woman being fair and witty, she asks "How if she be black and witty?" (II.i.130). In voicing this, Desdemona displays her power by revealing that she is not afraid to engage the issue of race as it pertains to her and Othello.

As made evident by various events that transpire within Desdemona's life as well as the decisions that she makes, the woman indeed has power. The discussion of the type of and degree to which women have power engenders questions regarding how this authority signifies upon and/or relates to men. As many theorists readily state, to argue that patriarchal societies produce men whose power over women and themselves is ubiquitous belies the fact that this power remains constantly contested by events and other people. That men do not always maintain control over situations becomes apparent when one considers Erickson's assertion that Othello is "not just Iago's pawn but also a pawn in the larger strategic game of the Venetian government" (124). Indeed, Othello exists as a subject immersed in a world rife with sociocultural signification. These significations extend to the issue of war, a phenomenon which—while oftentimes resulting in the social elevation of members participating in it—can often result in their decline. When one considers that Othello has proven himself a valiant warrior and attains military stature within the text, arguing that war can be a source of disempowerment for him might seem absurd. Yet the historically manipulative and exploitative nature of government systems indicates that deeming Othello a pawn could be an accurate summation of his condition. Moreover, codes of conduct for war have often been cited as mediums through which potentially damaging ideologies and prescriptions are put forth. Examining this issue, Nostbakken notes that the world of the soldier "emphasizes masculine behavior and relationships in a way that threatens

to undervalue women and create divisions along gender lines” (102). In asserting this, Nostbakken draws attention to how even when men occupy positions which constitute a sphere of power the likelihood of having to conform to social codes remains high. The possibility of having to conform to group values reveals the loss of power men who act as soldiers may experience, as their minds and wills are often subordinated in an attempt to complete their duties and assignments.

Like *Othello*, various scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* reveal the fact that at many points men lack power while women possess it. This becomes clear when the reader considers that various events in Romeo’s life render him disempowered whereas Juliet maintains the ability to affect and often control situations of significance. This fact becomes apparent when one considers the fact that Romeo killed Tybalt. As a result of this decision, he is banished from his community. Moreover, the fact that he is a Montague compromises his ability to see Juliet openly, thereby determining where he goes and with whom he speaks about pertinent matters in his life. Romeo’s power over his own existence is further limited when he believes that Juliet is dead. Unable to imagine a life without her, he opts to kill himself, an act which reveals his inefficacy—or disempowerment—in the face of an extenuating circumstance.

Clearly, examining the presence of subversive ideas and behaviors within a patriarchal system expands the reader’s understanding of how and why women and men adopt various ways of being and knowing. Moreover, the conversation and subsequent conclusions regarding gendered behavior with respect to issues of power and agency generates yet more questions. Specifically, within a system ostensibly predicated on ensuring that men maintain a degree of socioeconomic and political power that women never attain, how does a woman attempting to survive—and even thrive—respond? A comparison and contrast of the thoughts and acts of Kate,

Desdemona, and Juliet reveals that women have various ways of addressing patriarchal power. Examining their divergent modes of considering and/or challenging oppressive male paradigms raises the question of whether or not Shakespeare's female characters can and should be considered feminist.

If one were to examine the existing body of literature regarding what constitutes a feminist ideology, divergent ideas would surface. For the purpose of discussion here, adopting and maintaining a feminist perspective will be defined as believing that women and men should be considered social, cultural, and political equals. This belief entails agreement with the idea that women—as a historically subjugated class—should operate in their own interest in a manner that challenges—rather than perpetuates—patriarchal ideas. Were one to accept this definition of a feminist ideology as valid, it might seem that Kate of *The Taming of the Shrew* could not be considered a member of the group. Indeed, despite her initial attempts to attain an identity which would allow her to think and act independently, her final speech near the conclusion of the play reveals that she consciously chooses to collude in the system of oppression Petruchio attempts to immerse her in. Like Kate, Desdemona periodically makes decisions and statements revealing her attempt to act in her own best interest. Yet as the play goes on, it becomes apparent that she remains determined to continue her relationship with Othello despite the fact that he has become abusive.

While Kate and Desdemona's thoughts and actions can be interpreted as collusion in the system of sexism which engenders her demise, many critics argue that Juliet's behavior demonstrates the actualization of feminist thought. Discussing her contributions to the orchard scene in Act II, Honegger points out that "Juliet's participation in the composition of the sonnet foreshadows her active role in the developing relationship with Romeo" (170). While the orchard

scene may or may not demonstrate Juliet's conformance to feminist edicts, the woman's thoughts and values regarding how she should interact with men become further convoluted when one considers that she does not conform to behavior traditionally associated with a Petrarchan heroine. As Honegger points out in his analysis of Juliet's behavior, she "is the very opposite of a Petrarchan heroine in that she falls immediately in love with Romeo" (170). This observation possesses a great degree of relevance with respect to Juliet's attitude regarding issues pertaining to men and women. In essence, can a woman who immediately offers herself to a man—whether emotionally, intellectually, or sexually—truly be considered feminist? This question gives rise to other questions, specifically the role that early infatuation with a man plays in determining whether or not she should be considered sexist. Such interrogations are relevant to feminist discourse given that experiencing and/or expressing amorous feelings for a man during the incipient stages of a relationship might belie the fact that the woman in whom these emotions and feelings transpires may not have acquired the emotional intelligence skills necessary to preclude her from the pain of manipulation and abuse at the hand of another individual. If Juliet has been exposed to informative mediums designed to teach her what form (if any) love should exist in and manifest itself, the reader could accurately conclude that her disregard of such information demonstrates her disregard for self. Moreover, if indeed she pursues romantic interaction during the early stages of a relationship knowing that this could result in damaged emotions and disappointment, perhaps she should not be considered feminist on account of the fact that the ideology incorporates the notion that women should act in their own interest. Whether or not the reader finds these arguments persuasive, it seems clear that Juliet's almost immediate infatuation with Romeo raises issues as to the existence and/or depth of a feminist ideology on her part.

If one does not conclude that Juliet thinks and acts in a definitively feminist fashion based on her deviation from the prototypical Petrarchan script, one might argue that her statements during Act 2 Scene 1 demonstrate her assertiveness and independence. In examining what Juliet says to Romeo during their exchange, Honegger points out that “it is she who gets down to the reality of love and the problems that such a liaison creates, whereas Romeo is still busy searching for new oxymorons and metaphors” (172). Indeed, the orchard scene is one wherein Juliet discusses how the Montague-Capulet feud problematizes their relationship and also frankly asks whether or not he loves her. In asking questions and engaging issues relevant to their evolving relationship, Juliet conforms to a feminist ideology by thinking in a manner designed to benefit her both personally and politically.

In addition to posing questions regarding whether or not a perceptive reader can and should categorize Shakespeare’s women as feminist or not, examining issues of gender and identity gives rise to questions regarding the ideological views of Shakespeare’s men. Indeed, analyzing and deconstructing the way male characters think and act within a heteronormative world raises the question of whether or not they can accurately be deemed misogynists. Often defined as hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women, misogynistic attitudes and practices manifest themselves in many forms. To better analyze the existence and/or prevalence of misogynistic praxis in Shakespeare’s texts, it is necessary to consider both the internal monologue and dialogues of the author’s central male characters.

One of the most thoughtful and romantic figures in the works of Shakespeare, Romeo the Montague finds himself romantically frustrated throughout the text. Although perhaps seemingly unrelated to the issue of sexism, an examination of various statements—both spoken and silent—reveal that Romeo’s views regarding love and sex could be considered at least somewhat

misogynist. This fact becomes evident when one considers his doomed attraction to Rosalyn. Originally noting that he is drawn to the woman on account of both her beauty and intelligence, Romeo subsequently makes assertions that seem to convey physical appeal is central to his love for Rosalyn. After Benvolio advises him to look at other beautiful women in an attempt to forget about her, Romeo responds by noting that no other individual could possibly be as attractive as Rosalyn. Addressing Benvolio, Romeo asks his friend to “Show me a mistress that is passing fair, what doth her beauty serve, but as a note where I may read who pass'd that passing fair?” (I.i.237). In using an extended dialogue to inform Benvolio that he does not believe he can find a woman as attractive as Rosalyn, Romeo’s words seem to indicate that his attraction to Rosalyn is purely physical. If this is the case, the presence of sexism becomes apparent. Reifying the extant paradigm that women are primarily bodies rather than minds, Romeo’s extended discourse regarding the fact that Rosalyn is beautiful works to indicate that he may be interested in a woman who exists as an object rather than intellectual and emotional companion. Indeed, his repeated references to the woman’s beauty and fairness seem to indicate that this claim is valid.

If one were to deem Romeo’s seeming obsession with Rosalyn’s physical form as proof that he accedes to a fundamentally sexist ideology, challenging this notion would necessitate citing a male/female relationship which does not incorporate fixation on the woman’s corporeal form. When one analyzes the relationship between Romeo and Juliet, it becomes clear that physicality is not the only aspect of her personhood that he reveres. During their initial encounter, however, Romeo draws attention to the fact that he finds her attractive. Stating that she “teach[es] the torches to burn bright” (I.iv.160), he goes on to note that Juliet’s beauty is “too rich for use” (I.iv.163). In so doing, Romeo’s thoughts parallel his general disposition towards Rosalyn. Drawn to her on account of her good looks, he subsequently develops romantic feelings

for Juliet because of her comeliness. Indeed, he goes on to ask whether he loved until now, citing her beauty as the factor which generates these amorous emotions.

Although Romeo's initial encounter with Juliet quite likely indicates the presence of a sexist attitude, the development of their relationship demonstrates the actuality of an intimacy involving intellectual engagement. Engaging in a flirtatious stichomythia revealing their mutual attraction, Romeo uses theological language to indicate that he would like to kiss her.

Responsive to this request, Juliet goes on to reference the significance of religious rules and regulations stating that lips are to be used for prayer before sharing a kiss with Romeo. Herein lies evidence of a relationship incorporating the life of the mind in addition to fixation with the body. As their courtship continues, however, Romeo makes yet more references to her physical form. When they meet again, he compares Juliet to the natural elements, arguing that she is fairer than the moon (II.I.48). He goes on to note that her eyes are more beautiful than the stars and concludes this short monologue with his expressed desire to touch her cheek. Thus as earlier, Romeo's continual references to Juliet's physical form seem to indicate the presence of some patriarchal paradigms insomuch as he apparently deems it fitting and appropriate to make the reality of her body central to the relationship.

As the relationship between Romeo and Juliet progresses, the reader notes that the pattern of placing primacy on the body while simultaneously venerating the mind continues. When explaining his predicament to Friar Lawrence, the first adjective Romeo uses in his description of Juliet is "fair" (II.i.54). Yet when Friar Lawrence questions the legitimacy of the relationship because he had recently expressed interest in Rosalyn, Romeo goes on to state that his interaction with Juliet is unique. Maintaining that "her I love now doth grace for grace and love for love allow" (II.i.81), Romeo reveals that mutuality and reciprocity are integral to his relationship with

Juliet.

When one juxtaposes Romeo's seeming fixation with Juliet's body to her own views regarding his corporeal form, it becomes evident that she is not as obsessed with physicality as he is. Her first extended analysis of his personhood transpires during the balcony scene in which she laments the fact that their relationship is doomed because they are from feuding families. Noting that the entire problem is unnecessary and trivial because a name is simply a name, she goes on to note that Romeo would retain his "perfection" with or without the title Montague. Here, her use of the term perfection in reference to his person does not incorporate the concept of his corporeal form. Indeed, there is no mention of eyes, hands, lips, or other body parts. Thus although she never explicitly states what her attraction to Romeo is rooted in, his physical form is not integral to her budding love for him. Rather, while Romeo's expressed thoughts during the balcony scene indicate that her physical beauty is integral to his attraction, Juliet spends much of their encounter discussing the philosophical implications of his name and identity. Upset that their relationship is problematized because he is a Montague, Juliet notes that "'tis but thy name that is my enemy, thou art thyself, though not a Montague" (II.i.80-81). Aware that his name has nothing to do with his ideas or value system, she goes on to state that it is "no part of thee" (II.i.90). In addition to this assertion, Juliet's discourse regarding their relationship incorporates favorable assessments of his personhood. Maintaining that Romeo possesses a "dear perfection" (II.i.88), she goes on to call him "gracious" (II.i.155). As made evident by the text, neither of these referents exist in context of external beauty. Rather, Juliet speaks of Romeo's dear perfection during her discussion of how insignificant names are when considering an individual's personhood and merit. Similarly, when Juliet refers to Romeo as gracious, the adjective draws attention to his entire personhood as the term gracious modifies "self" (II.i.155). Thus, when one

considers the balcony scene in entirety, the implications of both lovers' speech reveal that much of Romeo's attraction is predicated upon her corporeal loveliness. Conversely, there are few terms that Juliet uses which indicate that her attraction to Romeo is primarily physical. These facts give rise to two compelling arguments. One, based on the primacy Romeo places on physical beauty in women (as evidenced through his assessments of both Rosalyn and Juliet), he can be considered at least somewhat sexist. Two, accedence to the notion that Romeo is sexist impairs the reader's ability to accurately define the relationship between him and Juliet as one that transcends the boundaries upon which heteronormative relationships are predicated. Thus while a comparison and contrast of the couple's relationship to that of Othello and Desdemona and Petruchio and Kate may reveal that their interactions reflect a greater degree of parity, this does not entail belief in the notion that their love is free from the type of hegemonic influence that precludes reciprocity.

If the reader concludes that the primacy Romeo places on Juliet's body should not give rise to the notion that he is a sexist, she or he could consider his rationale for attempting not to fight Tybalt. Referencing his love for Juliet as the primary reason he is trying to avoid a confrontation, Romeo states "O sweet Juliet, thy beauty hath made me effeminate, and in my temper soften'd valor's steel" (III.i.117-119). The sexist implications of the statement can be seen when one considers Romeo's feminization of pacifism. Associated with masculinity in a patriarchal world, fighting comes to signify a type of valor and courage which manifests itself through the physical and mental will of men in war. Through their continual association with one another, both fighting and masculinity come to be conceptualized as fundamentally positive entities whose essential characteristic is the ability to bring about a desired end. Just as fighting is associated with masculinity because the former connotes a positive and effective mode of

being and acting, patriarchal worlds give rise to the conflation of pacifism with femininity. A signifier for weakness and cowardly comportment, the belief that war should be avoided at all costs becomes conflated with womanhood, the feminine. Ultimately, this conflation functions to highlight the sexist implications of a patriarchal world in which ideologies are assigned gender in a manner reifying the notion that to be male is to be strong while to be female is to be weak. When one considers these constructed and fundamentally sexist realities in context of Romeo, his chauvinism becomes evident. In stating that her beauty has made him “effeminate” (III.i.118), Romeo maintains that his will to avoid a fight in order to maintain good standing with Juliet is a fundamentally female decision. Indeed, this choice constitutes a female decision because to avoid fighting is to be fearful and cowardly, traits constantly conflated with femaleness. Moreover, in addition to reifying the notion that womanhood is equivalent to cowardice, Romeo also reinforces the reader’s understanding that his primary attraction to Juliet is physical. Indeed, in noting that “thy beauty hath made me effeminate” (III.i.118), Romeo again references her physical body as primary to his love for Juliet and compliance with her will.

Complicating discourse regarding Romeo’s ideas and attitudes regarding women and himself, Watson and Dickey draw attention to similarities between the play’s central character and other literary figures notorious for rape. To legitimate their claim that Romeo’s behavior bears certain similarities to a predator, Watson and Dickey draw attention to Juliet’s internal musings about him. Citing Juliet’s fear that perhaps Romeo “meanest not well” (II.ii.150), Watson and Dickey build a case for the man’s less than perfect image in the eyes of his lover. In addition to examining Juliet’s uncertainty regarding his intentions and character, Watson and Dickey point out that the Nurse also has hesitations about Romeo’s purpose and desires in the young woman’s life. Noting that the Nurse warns Romeo not to lead Juliet into a “fool’s

paradise” (II.iv.165-166), the writers draw attention to the fact that Romeo may be an “amorous predator” (94). In addition to these notations, Watson and Dickey examine the fact that Romeo stabs Juliet’s cousin Tybalt with a knife. Conceptualizing this act in context of abuse, the writers point out that many Shakespeare contemporaries view the stabbing as parallel to rape (95).

Thus—as made evident by both the commentary of Watson and Dickey and the other theorists they cite—one can view Romeo’s thoughts and actions as evidence of sexist behavior. Indeed, Juliet’s seeming inability to discern Romeo’s true intents and the Nurse’s fear that he may lead her charge into a fool’s paradise can give rise to the notion that he behaves in an assumptive and/or arrogant fashion rooted in a patriarchal conception of himself as a male subject in a world that devalues and manipulates women. Similarly, the aggression and violence intrinsic in Romeo’s decision to stab Tybalt conforms to the masculinist model of identity predicated on using force to attain the end one desires. Like the aforementioned assumptive and arrogant attitude one might argue Romeo maintains, the aggression he displays in stabbing Tybalt contributes to the argument that he possesses and adheres to patriarchal paradigms.

While one can cite innumerable passages within the play in order to build a case for the notion that Romeo’s behavior constitutes sexism, Romeo’s reaction to what he perceives to be Juliet’s suicide further complicates discourse regarding whether or not he conforms to a patriarchal modality of being and knowing. Near the play’s ending, Romeo sees Juliet’s lifeless body and decides that his only viable option is suicide. Professing that he will “lie with [her] tonight” (V.i.34), Romeo goes on to discuss obtaining poison from an apothecary. In deciding to kill himself, Romeo reveals his turmoil regarding the perceived suicide of his lover inasmuch as he cannot conceive of a fruitful and productive life without her. If one chooses to view the conclusion of the play through this lens, Romeo’s life decisions are ultimately not sexist acts

meant to degrade and devalue Juliet while upholding a system of hegemony which privileges men. Rather, Romeo's suicide—brought into being as a result of his grief at having lost his lover—demonstrates the depth of his devotion to his partner and therefore his ability to transcend the separatist and selfish values of patriarchy. In essence, Romeo's suicide conforms to the definition of selflessness given that he no longer wants to live a life without the woman to whom he expresses benevolent love. Yet one could also easily argue that Romeo's suicide conforms to the edicts of a phallogocentric world inasmuch as killing oneself constitutes an act of aggression and assertion. Indeed, ending one's life in this case could be an attempt to accomplish one's own will. Romeo wants to be with Juliet and—because of her death—cannot. If viewed through this lens, Romeo's suicide can be considered more proof that he operates according to sexist paradigms. Here, the presence of sexism lies in his proclivity for making decisions related to his romantic relationship which are predicated on selfishness and disregard for the thoughts and values of others. Indeed, Romeo's suicide can be considered a selfish act given that he leaves behind a grieving family that will have to grapple with the intellectual and emotional complexities engendered by his absence. A deeper degree of selfishness can perhaps be located in the fact that Romeo's suicide can be considered an attempt to transcend the borders and boundaries created by his epistemological and physical distance from Juliet after she has died. Rife with grief and anxiety regarding the loss of his wife, one could easily argue that Romeo kills himself in an attempt to escape the psychological pain brought about by his lover's absence. If one interprets Romeo's actions this way, it becomes clear that his suicide should not be considered a benevolent and loving act which bears no semblance to patriarchal ideologies. Rather, his life decisions (particularly his suicide) epitomize a sexist value system predicated upon men acting in their own interest irrespective of how others think and feel.

Discourse regarding the possible signification of Romeo's suicide and what this says about the depth of his relationship with Juliet is further complicated by the asseverations of Wilder regarding the man's musings before drinking the poison. After summarizing Romeo's cognitive processes by analyzing his speech with the intent to ascertain the relevance of memory, Wilder goes on to maintain that the entire scene incorporates a failure to attain that which is desired. In this scene, the desire is Juliet. Arguing that the apothecary scene reveals how Romeo "approaches her but does not reach her" (160), Wilder goes on to argue that he uses the poison as a means to reach her in a fashion similar to his attempt to render Friar Lawrence and the Nurse utilitarian individuals through whom he secures a relationship with his lover. In making these assertions, Wilder draws attention to another important aspect of the discussion surrounding whether or not Romeo is sexist. The issue here transcends the boundaries of Wilder's expressed assertions regarding Romeo's failed attempt to attain a means through which he can access Juliet and delves into other problems raised by her assessments. Simply put, if Romeo uses aggressive and/or masculinist means in order to attain a desirable end and is unsuccessful in attaining that desirable end, should his attitudes and actions still be considered patriarchal and/or sexist? The question seems logical and relevant given that traditional conceptions of patriarchy incorporate the notion that the entity possesses the power—through sociocultural and political implementation—to exact its will. Indeed, implicit in deeming any facet of society fundamentally patriarchal is not only the notion that male rule and female subjugation exists, but that the ideological system of thought which makes this hegemony possible *works*. Therefore, if any individual acceding to its edicts attempts to generate a desired end and finds himself unsuccessful in so doing, should not their action—and their identity—be considered categorically unpatriarchal? If this is the case, one can identify Romeo as existing outside the

boundaries of patriarchy not because he lacks the will and desire to exact a selfish will, but rather because he never actually attains that which he desires.

When one considers both the aforementioned argument regarding what patriarchy does and how Romeo's actions constitute a departure from this definition, discourse regarding sexist thoughts and attitudes can be incorporated to examine the life and mind of Juliet. Indeed, discourse regarding whether or not Juliet conforms to patriarchal edicts can be considered in terms of her perceived desire to accomplish a goal or attain a desire as well as whether or not she was successful in these endeavors. When one examines her doings throughout the text, it becomes apparent that she does have identifiable aims. These aspirations include maintaining a romantic relationship with Romeo and attaining peace and certainty regarding events surrounding the slaying of Tybalt. In voicing her discontent regarding these events to the Nurse, Juliet states that knowing that Romeo is banished has become the source of immense woe and anguish. Ultimately, Juliet's attempts to attain a long-standing relationship with Romeo remain unfruitful as life circumstances such as banishment and familial tensions complicate and eventually stagnate her desire to have a productive and positive relationship with her husband. Moreover, Juliet never attains the sort of certitude and quiescence she desires with respect to the murder of her cousin, Tybalt. In essence, neither her tears nor anxiety regarding the death of Tybalt bring him back to life. In addition to this, her internal tensions regarding whether or not and how Romeo will be implicated in these events are exacerbated when the Prince of Verona announces that he has been banished. Thus, just as Romeo remains unable to attain his desires and can thereby be classified as existing outside the boundaries of patriarchy, so too can it be said of Juliet that she does not conform to the principle of attaining one's personal and/or romantic desires. The difference between Romeo's failure to conform to the definition of the

term patriarchy and Juliet's inability to do so lies in the fact that her attempts to act in her own interest cannot be categorized as attempts to uphold the patriarchy. For, unlike Romeo—who exists as a male—any attempt on her part to generate productive and positive change would be actualized through a female. Despite their differences in sex, however, both Juliet and Romeo are similar in their inability to attain a desired goal. Thus, when one juxtaposes their failed behaviors, it becomes evident that one could qualify their actions as fundamentally feminine inasmuch as the term implies weakness, effeminacy, penetrability, and a slew of other terms connoting inefficacy and worthlessness.

If the reader were to argue that Romeo and Juliet's inability to sustain a romantic relationship does not constitute failure and therefore feminization, she or he could point toward other textual signifiers to demonstrate how their behavior conforms to traditional definitions of the term. Indeed, their feminization becomes quite evident when one considers the suicide through poisoning and daggers that transpires in the concluding act. If viewed as an act evincing an inability to combat and overcome the vicissitudes of life which preclude happiness and productivity, the suicides themselves constitute decisions predicated on embracing weakness and concluding that one lacks the agency and power necessary to overcome an obstacle. Yet the implication of feminization in context of the suicides transcends the acts themselves and incorporates the modality through which the suicides transpire. As made evident by the text, Romeo and Juliet kill themselves with poison and daggers, respectively. Because this is the case, the reader can notice the allusion to feminization inasmuch as both drinking liquid which causes death and stabbing oneself symbolize the reduction of one's body to a penetrable object which can be entirely annihilated by another force. Indeed, this penetrability parallels the lack of power implied when one invokes the term feminization inasmuch as the term incorporates the notion of

the individual being subjected to the will or force of another. While innumerable analogies can be cited to evince the relationship between Romeo and Juliet's penetrability in context of their suicides through the use of daggers and poisons, one of the most commonly known parallels is that of the penis and the vagina. Indeed, patriarchal discourse regarding both sex organs oftentimes works to reify the notion that the vagina is ultimately inferior to the penis inasmuch as it exists as a receptacle for penetration while its counterpart acts as penetrator. When one considers the incorporation of poison into one's body as well as stabbing oneself in a manner such that skin is penetrated by a dagger, the analogous relationship between the suicides of Romeo and Juliet and the feminization that results from penetration becomes evident.

When one considers the relevance and legitimacy of qualifying Romeo and Juliet's behavior as feminized, the implications of a patriarchal Verona become evident again. Moreover, all of these issues lead back into the issue of whether or not Romeo can be considered sexist because—as made evident by the commentary produced about the play. While one might feel tempted to identify Romeo's behavior as wholly sexist or benevolent, theorist McKim complicates our perceptions of male/female interaction and the likelihood that the relationship of the text's central characters is predicated on reciprocity and selfless love. Examining these very issues, McKim maintains that Romeo possesses a “culturally-induced desire for manly, even heroic, attainment through loving that overrides any anticipation on his part for happiness, personal intimacy, or long-term relationship” (80). After deeming Romeo's decision to kill Tybalt a “violent and catastrophic response” (81), McKim goes on to argue that Romeo's decision to commit suicide after he realizes Juliet has done so demonstrates the depth of his conformance to the masculine code. Noting that Romeo's behavior constitutes “the consequence of already scripted cultural codes of honor that encourage acts of violence” (81), McKim goes on

to note that such violent acts are exacted in an attempt to prove one's "manliness, worthiness, and constancy" (81). This interpretation of Romeo's behavior greatly expands my aforementioned argument regarding whether his suicide should be deemed sexist or not. While McKim's argument regarding what he deems the attempt to attain manliness and worthiness implicit in the act of killing oneself is valid, his assertions lack the textual support which would make calling it an accurate assessment possible. Indeed, while the play clearly conveys Romeo's despair regarding the loss of Juliet, there are no statements made which indisputably reveal an aggressive system of thought which precipitates his suicide. Indeed, Romeo's general attitude is somewhat resolved and melancholy. Deemed "world-weariness" (158) by Wilder in her discussion of his expressed emotions when he contemplates suicide, textual phrases such as "art thou so bare and full of wretchedness" (V.i.68) lend credence to the notion that Romeo may not necessarily be adopting and/or maintaining an aggressive attitude in response to Juliet's death.

While Romeo's monologue regarding his loss of Juliet and impending suicide can generate much debate regarding his true and ultimate system of values when dealing with issues of sex and self, the debate becomes yet more complicated when one considers the Montague-Capulet feud that transpires throughout the course of events in the play. This feud cannot be considered unrelated to the relationship of Romeo and Juliet because the Montague-Capulet feud demonstrates the role principles of aggression and violence play in shaping both families and the individuals who comprise them. The fact that the feud between the Montagues and Capulets signifies on and mediates the identity and action of the individuals involved becomes apparent when one considers the fact that Romeo consciously chooses to kill Tybalt. Clearly, their discourse before and during the deadly exchange reveals that their antagonism toward each other is rooted in the fact that they are from feuding families. As made evident through his killing

Tybalt, Romeo's action constitutes collusion in a world predicated on aggression and violence. Thus, Romeo's behavior—behavior intrinsically connected to the fact that his family is in a feud with the Capulets—demonstrates the role patriarchal wars play in shaping the identity of the members trapped within its system. Yet to state that the feud between the Montagues and Capulets can be considered solely responsible for the presence of violence and societal dissonance becomes questionable when one considers other facets of society that give rise to patriarchal thought and practice. Pointing out this very thing, McKim argues that “the Montague-Capulet feud...is shown to be more symptom than cause of a more broadly cultural mindset” (81). Identifying this cultural mindset as one marked by “aggressive efforts to stand tall and stand above, whether through building, fighting, sarcastic discourse, or sexual conquest, functioning as invitations for put-downs and knockdowns of various sorts” (81). Entirely accurate in his evaluation of structural aspects of Veronese society, McKim's delineation of cultural mores reveals that the Montague-Capulet feud exists as a source sustaining the sort of dissonance that results from hegemonic and violent paradigms. Yet the Montague-Capulet feud cannot be considered the root of patriarchal influence in the life and mind of Romeo and all other citizens. Indeed, various extant social practices—such as spoken and unspoken rules regarding marriage and scripted roles for men and women—impede upon and induce innumerable modes of being and knowing. Yet irrespective of whether one agrees with McKim's assessments regarding the Montague-Capulet feud and Veronese society in general, the actions and expressed attitudes of Romeo seem to unequivocally reveal his proclivity for adopting both sexist and unbiased behaviors.

In addition to drawing attention to the important issue of how the Montague-Capulet feud signifies upon the character and identity of Romeo, McKim's assertions reveal the importance of

examining other sociocultural factors precipitating patriarchy in Verona. Like McKim, Davis encourages readers to examine issues that effect the livelihood and destiny of Romeo and Juliet when he asserts that the couple “are caught between a determining past and future” (29). This statement’s veracity lies in the fact that we are informed at the beginning of the play that the fate of the couple has already been settled, thus giving rise to the reader’s understanding that Romeo and Juliet’s ending is tragic rather than comic. The centrality of fate and determinism raise an important issue: why is the couple’s relationship destined to end badly? Does the question have import related to issues of sexism and patriarchy? If one considers the impetus for arguing that the couple’s relationship is doomed, the answer is quite likely yes. Indeed, oftentimes the argument that the couple’s fate is doomed remains predicated on the family feud and, because the war between the Montagues and Capulets constitutes a manifestation of masculinist thought, one could easily argue that the patriarchy (an ideology that supercedes yet exists within the social phenomenon of feuding) ruins their relationship. In her discussion of the significance of the Montague-Capulet feud, Kristeva asks us to “imagine Romeo and Juliet liberated, living according to different customs, little concerned over the animosity between their kin—and surviving” (302). The framing of this question seems to suggest Kristeva’s belief that the feud indeed is responsible for rendering their relationship a short-lived one. That being said, the reason for the fated doom of Romeo and Juliet according to Kristeva lies in the fact that they are from feuding families. As stated earlier, this fact cannot be divorced from the reality that the feud itself is rooted in a patriarchal value system. When one considers the import of patriarchy in constructing a world in which feuding families can exist, it becomes evident that one cannot divorce the fated doom of the lovers from the edicts put forth by a sexist society.

When one considers that *Romeo and Juliet* marks a departure from the prototypical

heterosexual script—one in which men subjugate and silence women—a perhaps obvious and banal question resurfaces: does the fact that Romeo does not abuse Juliet entail belief in the notion that he loves her? Indeed, one could easily argue that not subjecting another individual to physical or emotional abuse should not give rise to the notion that there necessarily exist amorous and/or benevolent feelings. Yet one might want to assert that Romeo does indeed love Juliet on account of the fact that he goes to great lengths to maintain a relationship with her. Drawing attention to this very issue of love, Goldberg points out that when one considers Romeo's previous infatuation with Rosalyn, Juliet can be considered "a replacement object" (197). Indeed, his continual references to her corporeal form can give rise to the notion that his attraction to her is primarily physical. That she is both object and replacement seems an even more plausible argument when one considers the fact that Romeo falls in love with Juliet shortly after confessing his infatuation with Rosalyn. As made evident by the discourse surrounding the relationship of Juliet and Romeo, their interaction can be interpreted as conforming to or departing from what many people would consider egalitarian love. Yet when considered holistically—in light of the fact that neither he nor she is subjected to physical or psychological abuse from the other—their relationship is most accurately defined as progressive and positive despite their shortcomings, selfishness, and suicides.

As made evident by a thorough comparison and contrasting of some of Shakespeare's most popular romantic plays, the works contain innumerable paradigms with respect to issues concerning gender, sexuality, and identity. Indeed, upon examining existential and epistemological differences between women such as Desdemona and Juliet, one would be hard-pressed to cite any evidence giving rise to the notion that essentialist ideas about gender behavior are accurate. Moreover, a reading of the plays also gives rise to the notion that the presence of

the patriarchy did not preclude women from acting as independent agents with minds and wills of their own. Noting the fact that many women attained a sexuality defying the hegemonic boundaries of andocentric thought, Belsey notes that “though there can be no doubt that Renaissance culture was profoundly and distinctively patriarchal, one sphere in which Shakespeare’s women are perfectly equal to men is their capacity for experiencing sexual desire” (48). Yet—and unfortunately—these modes of thinking and acting exist and persist through the work of Shakespeare. For indeed, although Romeo and Juliet constitute a couple who transcend the limiting sociocultural mores of Verona to attain an egalitarian relationship, Desdemona and Othello do not. Nor do Kate and Petruchio. Rather, the couples eventually find themselves inundated in a slew of legalistic paradigms that work to contain and confine their identities until they seem scripted rather than the product of continual and creative thought. Thus while *Romeo and Juliet* functions as a positive model of progressive and egalitarian love, the stories told in *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew* reveal that—amongst Shakespeare’s most popular romances—patriarchal paradigms remain prevalent.

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