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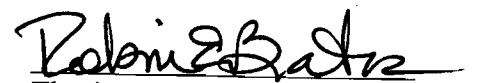
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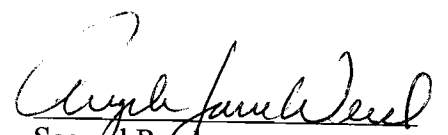
Virgin, Wife, and Widow:  
Shakespeare's Heroines and Patriarchal Identifiers

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## Abstract

By using William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*, this work will show the tragic journey of Ophelia, Kate, Cordelia, and Desdemona in order to exemplify their central roles of a "virgin", "wife", and "widow", and a lesser role of a woman. During Elizabethan and Medieval times, a woman's portrayal in society was based on labels for her identification. She was given titles such as the "virgin", "wife", and "widow." With the complications of a patriarchal society a woman had to balance her own life with the men in her life, specifically her husband and father, causing her to form a duty to her father, who gave her life and that to her husband, whom she thinks is her chosen life. The concept of a divided duty arises. This concept combined with the feminine ideals of the early modern period will show the truth about how a woman's identity is not as simple as it seems; in fact, the hardships she must face outweigh the benefits of her relationships with the men in her life. The impression of stability between her father and husband are all patterns that are taken under account by Shakespeare in his plays, but it is Desdemona who suffers the experiences of all three. The final concept is about the value and importance of a woman just as she is without any labels.

## Review of Related Literature

William Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies represent the relationships between father and daughter versus husband and wife, in which it is always the female that has to change her ways in order to please her male proprietor. The concept of a woman's duty is always in play with Shakespeare. For his women they are expected to perform a certain way in order for society to accept their roles. On the other hand, the men only have the roles as their superior. The way he wrote his female characters it is evident that they are always under certain levels of scrutiny by the males they are identified with. As the patriarchs the fathers are given the role of expecting perfection from their daughters. The husbands expect that same perfection in addition to having an obedient wife that will oblige to whatever they demand of her. It is certainly obvious that Shakespeare did write in the complete context of a patriarchal order.

Lynda E. Boose pioneered the subject of women in her article, "The Father and Bride in Shakespeare." She discusses the different types of family relations that are set forth by Shakespeare in order to cohabit in one patriarchal bound social order. The father-daughter relationships and the significance for each one since they are all so different from one another has a great deal of emphasis placed on it. The main focus is on the role of the father and treatment of his daughter, as the case is shown in Shakespeare's *Othello* with Brabantio and Desdemona. By highlighting the importance of the marriage ceremony Boose places a great deal of significance on the actual ceremonial boundaries that take place during marriage when the father of the bride places his daughter's hand in the hand of her husband that he has chosen for her, symbolizing a transaction of some sort. Boose very passionately describes this act and how "the

ceremony acknowledged the special bond between father and daughter and the need for the power of ritual to release the daughter from its hold” (326).

Boose concludes with the idea of how the relationship between fathers and daughters might have a special bond for Shakespeare, since it is always the daughter that has to deal with a harsh father in Shakespeare’s plays. She feels that there must be an underlying quality for Shakespeare’s own relationships with his daughter and therefore overshadows all female relationships in his plays.

In agreement with Boose, Gayle Greene’s article, “‘This that you call love’: Sexual and Social Tragedy in Othello,” reflects the exact tragedy that strikes Othello, the downfall of his sexual and social natures. She begins the article with a brief discussion of the tragic flaw between Othello and Desdemona and strives to form a conclusion of the flaw with the couple. Greene notes, “We must look for the flaw in the couple themselves, in the man, in the woman, and their love – a love that, as Othello’s intimation indicates, hovers on the edge of perdition, whose ‘absolute content’, makes him think of death” (656). Although the love that Othello and Desdemona share for one another is relative in Shakespeare’s poetry, through the expression of their feelings, there is an uncertainty about the nature of the foundation of that love. The connection between the social and sexual tragedy is self evident, in the ways that the men view their relationships with the women. Although they love the women, they love their social order even more. The reasoning is not justified as to the killings that take place of the women, but there is something strange about the magical transformation of love that keeps on destroying them both in the act of attaining a higher social and sexual power in the eyes of others (666).

Greene continues to describe the fall of man and woman in *Othello*, especially when a woman perceives to be under a case of divided duty to her father and husband. A man does not seem to have the same duty in reverse. The case of the divided duty brings Greene to her ultimate conclusion of how the division formed by the duty is completely on the side of the woman. The man just stays in accordance with his own nature and pays significance to whatever he feels is just.

Emily C. Bartels' article, "Strategies of Submission: Desdemona, the Duchess, and the Assertion of Desire," suggests that for women and female characters such as Desdemona obedience is something that needs to be ordained until they remain alive. Bartels says that, "Obedience, the very thing that has made her self-assertions safe, now leaves them and her defenseless, blurring into her tears as a 'well-painted passion'" (428). The way the sanctity of a husband's obedient wife is portrayed in *Othello* reminds her of how different a woman's role is in comparison to a man. Othello feels Desdemona has surpassed all his desires and crossed the limits over to a side he never thought she could, and now all he can think about is the vengeance in his heart for her. Now there is a concept of change that takes place at this point in the play, since Desdemona's father was already upset with her for marrying someone without his permission and now her husband is having suspicions and rage towards her as well.

In *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginitly in the Middle Ages*, Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl discuss the importance of the stages in a woman's life. They examine the roles of chastity for a virgin and widow. Sandra Pierson Prior gives her views of the relevance in Medieval society based on a woman's status in society. Through the interpretation of widowhood and virginitly Carlson and Weisl examine the

different types of roles that male identifiers used for women in the middle ages.

Although they give particular attention to medieval literature, a great deal is consistent with Shakespeare's ideas of the virgin and widow which shows a bit of a balance between the middle ages and early modern England.

According to Claire McEachern's article, "Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare's Feminism" she takes association in the same league as Phyllis Rackin and Lynda E. Boose. McEachern discusses the significance of a woman's role in Shakespeare's patriarchal society. She pays close attention to the place of a woman in a social order full of men, leading her to adjust to and explore day-to-day situations in the public. She investigates the perceptive role of gender and sexuality as used in Shakespeare's plays. McEachern explores Shakespeare's relationship between fathers and daughters throughout his plays. She describes the details in a patriarchal system as "composed of two principal systems of affective loyalties: the family, over which the father rules, and a social/ political system founded on male alliance, in which the father is invested. These two systems of authority, and the divergent commitments that they represent for the father, are conflated under the rubric of 'patriarchy' and they are imagined as compatible parts of a coherent whole, and even used analogously" (273).

This is similar to Lynda E. Boose's suggestions of Shakespeare's father-daughter relationships because Boose discusses the importance of the position of the father in the household especially for his children. The father, the patriarchal figure, has every say in all the familial relationships made by his family. For his daughter there is a particular need for his approval since she must represent a type of sanctity of their father-daughter relationship. Using the idea of culture mixed with gender and sexuality McEachern



makes her point evident as to how the treatment of women in a patriarchal culture is defined and certainly displayed.

Stephen Greenblatt is a well known name in the area of New Historicism and cultural dealings of Shakespeare. In his discussion of *Othello* he pays particular attention to the masculine and feminine roles. He discusses the importance of the roles of Shakespeare's characters by paying particular attention to Othello and Desdemona. By investigating their relationships Greenblatt offers a new vision of the male and female relationships in Shakespeare's plays.

In *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture – Emerging Subjects*, Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan do an excellent job of portraying the different types of gender labels that are present for women and how women relate to each one in a given phase of life (virgin, wife, or widow). The authors of this anthology discuss the different types of approaches to feminism and make it a point to understand how a virgin, wife and widow, refer to it in their own time and context. Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan, start with a discussion on the significance of the early modern era and its influence on women, specifically because of their gender roles. They highlight the various roles by women in a patriarchal society and form a basis of the different situations that women faced solely based on their given label in the outside world.

Like Traub, Kaplan and Callaghan, Phyllis Rackin opens the world of Shakespearean women and defines their brilliance in her book, *Shakespeare and Women*. Rackin discusses the different types of issues that women faced in a day and age where they had to be suppressed otherwise they would have further labels on them, besides those three common ones of virgin, wife and widow. Rackin makes it a point to show

just how timeless these women were because they faced every situation that they were presented with in a society where women were not held to the highest of regards. It is essential to view how strongly Rackin feels about the dealings of women in scholarly works, especially since it is because of the words used by writers such as Shakespeare that make most readers gather an opinion instead of viewing what is happening themselves.

Sharon Hamilton discusses her views on the daughters in Shakespeare's plays as all serving a distinct purpose. In Shakespeare's Daughters, she highlights every possible type of daughter that Shakespeare has represented in his plays. She mentions every angle from daughters who are rebellious to those who acquiesce to the simpletons who forgive and forget the mishaps they went through. Hamilton provides a very distinct and case-by-case basis for all the women while paying close attention to their relationships with the males in the plays. She explores the reasoning and states, "for whatever political or personal reasons, Shakespeare explored the father-daughter bond again and again. According to the typical pattern, a middle-aged to old man, usually a widower, has an adolescent daughter for a time—the manor house or the castle contains the whole world in their girlhoods" (6). Each female character has a distinct quality about her according to Hamilton and is therefore viewed a specific way.

Like Hamilton, Lorna Hutson opens the world of feminism and contains her ideas to the renaissance world. Her depictions of the women for Shakespeare are especially fascinating since she explores all the roles of these women and discusses how society viewed each one. In her *Feminism and Renaissance Studies*, she goes through the

specific areas that are important in order for a woman to be held in high regard of chastity and grace.

In comparison to Hamilton and Hutson's views, Lagretta Tallent Lenker exemplifies brilliance in her book *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw*. Lenker makes key arguments to the relationships between fathers and daughters and why the concept of patriarchy is so important for them. She pays close attention to the daughter in Shakespeare's plays more so than the women because in order to capture the essence of the father-daughter relationships. She cites examples of how both Shakespeare and Shaw use the fathers and daughters to develop certain relationship in their plays.

N. H. Keeble discusses the relevance of the seventeenth century woman in his work, The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman: A Reader. Keeble pays close attention to the dealings of a woman in a time and place where certain restrictions were upon her. He discusses the masculine and feminine ideals placed by society on both genders and how there were certain things expected from both. At a time when the ruler of England was a woman, Keeble describes the various opinions the general public formed in regards to the common women in society. Essentially the place of a woman, according to Keeble in the seventeenth century was indoors as opposed to a man whose primary responsibility was outdoors.

Margaret Hallissy begins by exploring the different types of conducts present for women and then goes on to express certainty and relevance for these rules for the women who obliged and those who challenged them, as is the case for Shakespeare's female characters. Hallissy discusses the roles of virgin, wife and widow in correlation to the

regulations that society expected from them. She links these medieval conducts to those of Chaucer's and shows a parallel of how women were treated by the general public based on their given title during certain stages of life. In *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of Conduct*, she discusses how the ways Chaucer dealt with his female characters has a close linkage to how Shakespeare developed his female roles in his plays. Chaucer developed his female roles according to how women were treated at the time; either his women acted in extreme accordance to the rules of society or they were completely at opposite ends.

Richard Burt and John Michael Archer discuss the importance of the chastity in their book *Enclosure Acts – Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*. They describe the particular kind of a woman that fits the roles of virgin, wife, and widow, while highlighting key areas for each woman during certain stages of her life. The fascinating journey from one phase to the next for a woman exemplifies important stages in her life.

Studied together, these critical and historical works can present a framework for reading Shakespeare's roles for women that correspond to the ideas of gender identification and roles of patriarchal identifiers. Whether it was Ophelia who faced her peers as the ageless virgin, Kate the wife who was tamed by her husband, or Cordelia who presented in society as the functional widow, each woman graced the path of righteousness because she was expected to and because she could handle every situation thrust her way.

Obedient, bashful, obliging, and well behaved are some of the words that William Shakespeare vividly utilizes in his plays to describe characteristics of the perfect early modern woman. The terms, found in a patriarchal society, have over the years characterized many women as the ideal candidate for a daughter, wife, and mother. These terms have also taken the woman to yet another level of identification with titles such as the “virgin”, “wife”, and “widow”. Any terms not relating to this concept seem to cross the line and force the woman to be an outlaw of the societal ways. Naturally, the males in society when associating their best fits in the opposite sex, have used what they feel are suitable words. However, for women the question arises as to why a man needs to find the perfect archetypal woman who must fit into these categories. What about those women who are not the perfect fit simply based on these criteria? For Shakespeare, the women in his plays never seem to have a central role as the authoritative character. They are always construed to be the ones who need to be rescued from a disaster or tamed in order to achieve the best possible desire for the rest of society. In *Othello*, the case takes place with Desdemona and how she has a greater duty to the two men in her life, her father and husband, of finding the balance between being a woman, a daughter and someone’s wife. Othello regards Desdemona as an obedient woman. Should that be something that a husband should label his wife? For Shakespeare’s time and age, yes, it is quite evident, but how does that make the woman who is titled the new name feel? Sadly, Shakespeare does not question this in his writings.

Lorna Hutson explores the various theories during the Renaissance age and notes, “In the discourses of humanism and bourgeois family theory, the proper woman is an absence: legally, she vanishes under the name and authority of her father and her

husband; as a daughter and wife, she is enclosed in the private household. She is silent and invisible: she does not speak and she is not spoken about,” (317). Based on these theories, in *Hamlet*, I will explore the virginal Ophelia, followed by the taming of Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and then explore Cordelia’s lonesome state of a functional widow in *King Lear*. I will go through the tragic journey of Desdemona in *Othello*, in order to exemplify her central roles of a daughter and wife, and lesser role of a woman. Through this task, I hope to explore the significance of each phase for the women and the men in their lives who put them through these ordeals. Based on this I will question Shakespeare’s choice of having characterized Ophelia as the simpleton virgin, Kate as the obliging wife, Cordelia as the lonesome widow, and Desdemona as someone’s daughter, wife, and functional widow instead of just a woman.

The first stage of a young woman’s life was that of a virgin. In early modern England, especially for a patriarchal society, there was a great deal of emphasis placed on the status of virginity, specifically for her father’s economic and social well being through the process of her marriage. Without his daughter being under this label, he could not get her married or have any type of a societal status, since it was believed to have been his duty to keep his women under a specific code of law, a condition no less in order for society to conform her to the next level of someone’s wife.<sup>1</sup> Her chastity was of high relevance especially since it was her sole means to escape from the patriarchal

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<sup>1</sup> According to Medieval societal ways, it seemed that the proper role of the virgin was to cohabit with her family as well as the general public until her marriage, at which time she was able to lose her virginal and sinless status and continue her life as the pure woman who would become the good wife. With the attributes of such Christian influence in the middle ages, it was expected that purity remain one of the strongest qualities that a woman inhabits, otherwise, if her soul and body are tainted, she must devote her life to God in every way she can. “For Medieval Christianity, virginity is the single most important aspect of purity in humans; virginity is what can make a human being worthy of being sacrificed to God” (168). Prior, Sandra Pierson. *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages*. Carlson, Cindy L. and Angela Jane Weisl, ed. Houndmills: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1999.

proprietorship (Burt and Archer 249). It was considered of the utmost importance that this virginal girl must attain all the desired qualities in order to ensure cultural, economic, and social bounds so that her family, specially her father could attain an association in society in order to enhance his rank. Even the way a woman clothed herself based was on her father's level in the social order in order to influence the rank of the man chosen to be her husband, and she must avoid social climbing through inappropriate dress (Hallissy 22). The clothing for women was another area of scrutiny, although one must dress according to rank, they should also dress within religious bounds of Christianity. According to the hierarchy, elaborate clothing was a sign of pride and lust which was not looked upon favorably, while a plain dress signified the true virtue of a woman (Hallissy 117). Although a woman should dress accordingly to her significant status, of a virgin, wife, or widow, it was understood that simplicity was held in the highest regards. The stature of simplicity suited the virgin's father's reputation more than that of his daughter because everything reflected on him, especially since it was at this point in her life, when her proper mate was chosen by her father, it became his duty to take her under his regime and find out if she can be the proper wife he wants. Naturally, the only way to prove her virginity was on the night of her wedding upon which there must be the breakage and blood from the hymen in order to prove her validity in her husband's eyes. Once this action took place the woman reached a new level of someone's true and obliging wife and was now able to start a family for him.

In this second stage of a woman's life, where she is finally conventionalized as someone's wife, she must have the proper qualities that a good wife must maintain throughout her entire life until she dies. Up to this point in the woman's life she had to

maintain a certain lifestyle that was demanded by her father, as her sole male proprietor, but now the roles have shifted where she is now ordained in society as a wife, a good wife, who must maintain the standards of her husband as well as that of the new family she has joined. What was considered her position in her father's household had no means of representation in her husband's. If required, she must learn the new ways of a different type of social hierarchy based on the demands of her husband who was now the voice of the law for her. As Phyllis Rackin explores the journey of these women, she notes, "Sanctioned by law and religion and reinforced by the duties and customs of daily life, they were deeply embedded in the fabric of culture," (27). The way a husband was to provide for his family, his wife was expected to serve the household as well as provide children, specifically male heirs, for the continuation of the family name. While it was not necessarily an extremely negative ordeal if the woman could not provide a male child, it would certainly lessen the way others viewed her and her husband. Since it was the woman's duty to provide for her husband and without the son, he could not continue his family name or his economic welfare. A female child would not be able to run the family's financial operations, causing their financial status to suffer. She would be absorbed in her husband's family, or die childless, diverting the fortune to the nearest male heir. Just as a daughter/ virgin does for her father's ranks, the good wife must continue these standards for her husband because now her duty is to demonstrate loyalty and service to her husband; a key phrase according to "rank and fortune" (Hallissy 22). Once a wife maintained a similar lifestyle from her father's to her husband's household, she attained what the public viewed as her deserved status.



The last label in the early modern period that a woman could receive was of a widow; this is the most difficult of all three because it is at this point that she must repeat the cycle of a virgin as well as the new laws set forth through her stages of being someone's wife. Although it is a grueling time in one's life to lose a loved one, there is simply no means to objectify or even recover from such a loss, especially if one became a widow at a very young age. With the societal standards for young and older widows, there is certainly a new means of struggle for that woman who is already facing such a harsh time. In such times, through the death of a husband, a woman was the target of a completely new set of ridicule from the community. If she was past child bearing age, she was to become a living monument to her husband's memory, dedicating her life to good works and to prayer for him more so than others (Hallissy 23). If she was at an age where she was young and able to remarry, although it was allowed, it was certainly thought as a contradiction to her vows to her late husband, making her an object for further ridicule and judgment. In cases where the widow had children not yet of age, her first duty was to her children. If she had sons of age, she must live with them and continue a lifestyle similar to her husband's as well as that now of her son who has taken priority in her life as the leading man. Although Elizabethan and Medieval societies placed a difference between the age barriers of a widow, there was not really a difference at all. Although remarriage was a possibility, it would mean the widow was forgetting her loved one and moving on, however, simply based on the church and society's efforts the people set what they thought were different standards for a younger and older widow.

For instance, the older widow was expected based on society and in fact urged to perform good deeds, such as taking care of the sick and elderly and praying for her

husband's soul. Now this is exactly what she would do if she was a younger woman so, in actuality, for women it did not matter if she was a certain age, once her husband passed away, she devoted her life to him regardless of any other reason. Simply so that society could say they allowed remarriage it was in their book of codes, but was very rarely acted upon, especially since the social group to which they belonged added other constraints (Hutson 189). Remarriage was certainly the case for a male had he become a widower because society felt he needed the physical relationship with a wife, especially since he was the provider. Sandra Pierson Prior discusses the aspects of virginity in "The Physician's Tale" and how there are essentially two separate traditions on the subject. She notes, "the views on virginity in the later Middle Ages draw on two quite different traditions: the pagan Roman one and the medieval Christian, monastic one. In the Roman tradition, the virginal daughter and the chaste wife are supremely valued because they are central to a patrilineal society, since only chaste women—virgins before marriage and monogamous afterwards—can guarantee that a man's sons are his biologically...for pagan Roman society, perpetual virginity in women is as unthinkable, if not more so, as sexual promiscuity" (167). This is certainly the case for Shakespeare's women since their virginal status means more to their marriages and future childbearing situations than any other regard.

The constructions that fall upon a woman who is faced with titles such as a virgin, wife, and widow progress through every stage of her life. While she is under her father's regime, she must maintain the subordinate and virtuous rules provided to her by her father. After her father selects a man who he feels is suitable in every regard for his daughter to marry, the ritualistic embodiment of providing the husband with his

daughter's hand takes place under which a girl's father passes on his legacy to a new man. That man must now take over and have his new wife abide by all the rules that are stated for her in order to be the obedient wife that he desires. As Valerie Traub explores these gender specific rules, she notes, "One of the central insights to feminist inquiry is that gender serves not only as a sign of bodily difference, but, in the words of Joan Scott, as 'a primary way of signifying relations of power.' Thus, the discourse of gender may involve knowledge and disciplines seemingly far removed from the actual experiences of women or men" (44). At no point during this sanctioning is the woman asked what she wants in her life. In fact, even her mother does not question her own husband because ritualistically she is going through the exact same thing as that of her daughter.

In *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture – Emerging Subjects*, Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan do an excellent job of portraying the different types of gender labels that are present for women and how women relate to each one in a given phase of life (virgin, wife, or widow). The authors of this anthology discuss the different types of approaches to feminism and make it a point to understand how each type of woman (virgin, wife and widow), refer to it in their own time and context. Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan, start by discussing the significance of the early modern era and its influence on women, specifically because of their gender roles. They highlight the various roles by women in a patriarchal society and form a basis of the different situations that women faced solely based on their given label in the outside world.

One of the most fascinating sections is on the emphasis that is placed on a woman's virginity. Here they discuss how, "female virginity was required to ensure the

legitimacy of heirs to a male bloodline essential for the reproduction of patriarchal society. Virgins who lived this narrative were valued and assured a place of respect within their society...those who were – or allowed themselves to be – sexually violated before marriage were easily reconstructed as social pariahs, actual or metaphorical ‘whores’” (254). Among other areas of conversation and debate, sexuality and gender embark on a new phase of life for these women. Both gender and sexuality embrace the virtues of Shakespeare’s Ophelia and Desdemona, the virginal women. Shakespeare seemed to have a certain gender adaptation when it came to his female heroines but Traub, Kaplan, and Callaghan, explain just how this feminist approach lead to some disagreements between the various roles of women.

Like Traub, Kaplan and Callaghan, Phyllis Rackin opens the world of Shakespearean women and defines their brilliance in her book, *Shakespeare and Women*. Rackin discusses the different types of issues that women faced in a day and age where they had to be suppressed otherwise they would have further labels on them, besides those three common ones of virgin, wife and widow. Rackin makes it a point to show just how timeless these women were because they faced every situation that they were presented with in a society where women were not held to the highest of regards.

Rackin seems to care more about what the women are than what they were expected to be. Rackin, a leading feminist, shows what is right and wrong in a given situation, whether she is for or against Shakespeare’s ways of treatment for women. Rackin notes, “Shakespeare has been claimed as, *inter alia*, a royalist, a democrat, a Catholic, a Puritan, a protofeminist, and a misogynist. All of these claims, and many others, have been strenuously argued and documented with abundant quotations from his

writings and just as strenuously refuted” (111). It is essential to view how strongly Rackin feels about the dealings of women in scholarly works, especially since it is because of the words used by writers such as Shakespeare that make most readers gather an opinion instead of viewing what is happening themselves. She notes, “What is indisputable, however, is that he was a writer of remarkable power and that his writing still has an authority unequalled by any other secular texts. For women, therefore, what matters is not what Shakespeare thought and felt about us, but what words he wrote enable us to think and feel about ourselves” (111). This shows a great deal that has been put into play about how important the role of women is and just how significant of a role it plays in conversation to one’s own interpretation of classical literature.

In Claire McEachern’s article, “Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare’s Feminism” she takes association in the same league as Phyllis Rackin and Lynda E. Boose. McEachern discusses the importance of a woman’s role in Shakespeare’s society. She pays close attention to the place of a woman in a social order full of men, leading her to adjust to and explore day-to-day situations in the public. The thing that McEachern investigates in this article is the perceptive role of gender and sexuality as used in Shakespeare’s plays.

McEachern explores Shakespeare’s patriarchal relationship between fathers and daughters throughout his plays. She describes the details in a patriarchal system as “composed of two principal systems of affective loyalties: the family, over which the father rules, and a social/ political system founded on male alliance, in which the father is invested. These two systems of authority, and the divergent commitments that they represent for the father, are conflated under the rubric of ‘patriarchy’ and they are

imagined as compatible parts of a coherent whole, and even used analogously” (273). McEachern quotes James I as writing, “Kings are compared to fathers in families: for a King is truly *parens patriae*, the politic father of his people.” McEachern argues of this that, “in effect, however, these systems are hardly versions of each other but are in radical competition” (273). It is essential to show the relationship of the two in order to understand the basis for their relation as well as the means for which it is based upon. This is similar to Lynda E. Boose’s suggestions of Shakespeare’s father-daughter relationships because Boose discusses the importance of the position of the father in the household especially for his children. The father, the patriarchal figure, has every say in all the familial relationships made by his family. For his daughter there is a particular need for his approval since she must represent a type of sanctity of their father-daughter relationship. Using the idea of culture mixed with gender and sexuality McEachern makes her point evident as to how the treatment of women in a patriarchal culture is defined and certainly displayed.

Similar to McEachern’s beliefs and ideals Lynda E. Boose discusses the different types of family relations that are set forth by Shakespeare in order to cohabitate in one patriarchal bound social order in her article, “The Father and Bride in Shakespeare”. Specific emphasis is placed on the role of the father and treatment of his daughter, as the case is shown in Shakespeare’s *Othello* with Brabantio and Desdemona. Highlighting the emphasis of the marriage ceremony Boose places a great deal of emphasis on the actual ceremonial boundaries that take place during marriage when the father of the bride places his daughter’s hand in the hand of her husband that he has chosen for her, symbolizing a transaction of some sort. Boose very passionately describes this act and how “the

ceremony acknowledged the special bond between father and daughter and the need for the power of ritual to release the daughter from its hold” (326). For some of Shakespeare’s plays Boose discusses the importance for the daughter such as for Rosalind and Viola, to relate their future husband to their fathers and how this is what Shakespeare intended for his female characters to do. However, other instances, as with Desdemona, show a girl’s failure to please her father, causing her a division in her duty of wife and daughter.

This article deals with a great deal of father-daughter relationships and the significance for each one since they are all so different from one another. Boose concludes with the idea of how the relationship between fathers and daughters might have a special bond for Shakespeare, since it is always the daughter that has to deal with a harsh father in Shakespeare’s plays. She feels that there must be an underlying quality for Shakespeare’s own relationships with his daughter and therefore overshadows all female relationships in his plays.

Boose expresses her feelings about the figure of the fathers in a daughter’s life and how it seems to have a great deal of significance for the daughters in the aspects of marriage, specifically the marriage ceremony. Boose wants the readers to understand that the daughter’s wedding ceremony is her rite of passage from her father’s rule to her husband’s. She suggests that, “In tragedies like *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the father’s failure to act out his required role has a special significance, one that we can best apprehend by looking not at the logic of causal narrative progression but at the threat implied by the violation of ritual,” (328). William Shakespeare does just this throughout his works; he uses an inauspicious view in supporting the father’s in his plays, where as

the daughters are told every time that they are in the wrong in their drastic conclusions. Boose goes on to say that, "Within the father-daughter plays, the daughter's association of father with husband is so strong that even when a woman as independent as Rosalind or Viola first thinks about the man she will eventually marry, her thoughts immediately call to mind her father," (327). With this idea, she makes a clear and concise argument of how important it is to have the correct role of a father in their daughter's life.

In accordance with Boose, Gayle Greene's article, "'This that you call love': Sexual and Social Tragedy in Othello," reflects the exact tragedy that strikes Othello, the downfall of his sexual and social natures. The article begins with a brief discussion of the tragic flaw between Othello and Desdemona and strives to form a conclusion of the flaw with the couple. Greene notes, "We must look for the flaw in the couple themselves, in the man, in the woman, and their love – a love that, as Othello's intimation indicates, hovers on the edge of perdition, whose 'absolute content', makes him think of death" (656). Although the love that Othello and Desdemona share for one another is relative in Shakespeare's poetry, through the expression of their feelings, there is an uncertainty about the nature of the foundation of that love. The connection between the social and sexual tragedy is self evident, in the ways that the men view their relationships with the women. Although they love the women, they love their social order even more. The reasoning is not justified as to the killings that take place of the women, but there is something strange about the magical transformation of love that keeps on destroying them both in the act of attaining a higher social and sexual power in the eyes of others (666).



Greene continues to describe the fall of man and woman in *Othello*, especially when a woman perceives to be under a case of divided duty to her father and husband. A man does not seem to have the same duty in reverse. She notes, “Shakespeare shows woman, at her best, as capable of a courage which eludes the men as acceptant of a challenge which, like Emilia’s, encompasses ‘heaven and men and devils’” (665). Greene expresses her desire for the responsibility that both men and women in Shakespeare have over one another, although women are the ones physically hurt by the men, as in *Othello*, the men are mentally wounded because of the crimes they commit. She suggests “Though the men do the killing, it is they who are the more tragically mutilated” (665). This scenario is justifiable to the demise of Othello since he had the woman who loved him the most, but due to his social nature, he could not appreciate the truth behind her love for him.

The most fascinating work of all is Margaret Hallissy’s, where she begins by exploring the different types of conducts present for women and then goes on to express certainty and relevance for these rules for the women who obliged and those who challenged them, as is the case for Shakespeare’s female characters. Hallissy discusses the roles of virgin, wife and widow in correlation to the regulations that society expected from them. She links these medieval conducts to those of Chaucer’s and shows a parallel of how women were treated by the general public based on their given title during certain stages of life. In *Clean Maids, True Wives, Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of Conduct*, she discusses how the ways Chaucer dealt with his female characters has a close linkage to how Shakespeare developed his female roles in his plays. Chaucer developed his female roles according to how women were treated at the

time; either his women acted in extreme accordance to the rules of society or they were completely at opposite ends.

Hallissy notes, “Chaucer relied heavily on his audience’s knowledge of the rules that governed women’s behavior, but he went far beyond what his contemporaries could do. Often Chaucer used the common store of material, as did his contemporaries, but not in their formulaic fashion” (7). Essentially Chaucer would question the roles placed on women and try to form a connection based on how they were actually treated by men as opposed to how the women were represented in society. In *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer describes the woman and how society defines her based on her sexual behavior and from there converts her role only possible virtue to pertain to her chastity.<sup>2</sup> Hallissy goes on to say, “Instead, Chaucer used the material with great psychological sophistication. Consciousness of the minutiae of the climate of thought within which he was working will enable us to gain greater appreciation not only for his artistry but also for his androgynous sensitivity to his female creations” (7). This is certainly, what Shakespeare did in his plays. He gave his females roles that either obliged with everything that society had to offer or completely turned away from it. Hallissy ends with pointing out the obvious relation that was expressed for the women at this time: whether a woman was a virgin, wife, or widow her first obligation to everyone in her household and outside in civilization was to stay virtuous and silent. Her role was to be under the regime of whomever the male was in the household, whether it be her father, husband or brother. A woman had to oblige otherwise she would be known as a rebel in society.

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the discussion of the ideal good woman, Elaine Tuttle Hansen discusses this in her article, “Irony and the Antifeminist Narrator in Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 82 no. 1 (1983): 11-31.

Margaret Hallissy also embraces the ideas of courtesy literature for women in the early modern era by defining a few of their key conducts which were expected of them. She notes, “courtesy literature repeatedly enjoins women to keep silent in church, instead of taking advantage of the gathering to ‘rowne togedyr,’ exchange whispered observations with their friends” (77). She goes on to explain the ideal wife and how it is her expected duty to tell her daughter “to be nought of many wordes in general, but especially in church, where ‘iangelying with fremded [or] sibbe’ is especially inappropriate” (77). According to these revelations by Hallissy it is evident how important the conduct of women was especially in places of religions affairs.

Based on the evidence presented by such scholarly works, it is evident to note that women were treated a certain way in the early modern era simply based on a few titles. Each woman had to deal with a different type of outlook based on her given label in a society. Besides forming a daily pattern of things to do and society rituals to uphold, women were expected by the public to dress and conduct themselves in a certain manner. It would be improper for a wife to conduct herself as a virgin would or for a widow to move around society as a wife would; each woman had a specific code of law in regards to their behavior. Their demeanor was another aspect that society expected them to follow a special way in order to represent their families as well as their own lawful ways to the general public. Everything from clothes to jewelry had a mannerism which was expected to be handled by the women in a certain fashion.

The women were expected to have a certain silence about them in places of worship. In everyday occurrences, the women were required to dress according to their husbands or fathers rank in society as well as their own age. Simplicity was certainly

looked favorably upon even if one had a great deal of fortune. Heads were meant to be covered and there was a certain necessity of veils that had to cover the women when they stepped out of the house. Even the jewelry they wore must be within limits, since anything excessive was not considered the sign of a true lady.

During Elizabethan and Medieval times, the males seem to always have women obey their rules and regulations, especially since the males were the sole proprietors and society gave them the entire opportunity to rule their estates as they desired. Of course, the society full of other males who approached this idea of having women follow their rules favor other men doing the same. Margaret Hallissy associates these ideals with those provided of the women and states, “Purity, fidelity, and loyalty: these ideal feminine qualities were developed and demonstrated by a host of specific behaviors prescribed in books for women written by male authorities. As William Caxton said in his preface, women were expected to learn to behave themselves, shaping their lives to words in books.<sup>3</sup> The rules were well known; so when model behaviors, or their opposites, were presented in literature, such details served as a shorthand method of characterizing women” (2). Using words out of books to describe women became the normal behavior since there was a certain expectation for the perfect type of a woman to evolve when she entered her husband’s household from her fathers, who at this stage in her life was sure to have taught her the basics of behavior with her husband.

In Elizabethan England, just like the common woman seen thus far as the virgin, wife, and widow, a woman of a higher state such as Queen Elizabeth, at the start of her

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<sup>3</sup> In a preface to his translation of *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, William Caxton notes, “This book is a special doctrine & techyng by which al yong gentyl wymen specially may lerne to bihaue them self virtuously as wel in their vyrgynyte as in their wedlock & wedowhede” (3). *The Book of the Knight of the Tower*, trans. William Caxton, ed. M. Y. Offord. London: Oxford UP, 1971

regime seemed to go through the same hardships simply because she was a female amongst males in a higher position of state authority. Phyllis Rackin agrees this to be the case because when Queen Elizabeth began her rule it was a different type of a government for the people of England, simply because a woman now took on the place of a King. This is exactly what set an uncertainty among the population, especially since in the households the men were the rulers and now the nation was being ruled by a woman; someone who had always been inside the house would now be leading the country. In *The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman*, N. H. Keeble states, "Woman's place was within doors, her business domestic... Women of evident intelligence themselves accepted this divorce between the private (feminine) and public (masculine) spheres and, despite the recent precedents of Mary Queen of Scots, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth, they shared the age's 'distastes... for the notion of women's involvement in politics" (186). At this point no one said that women could not do well in areas of politics or economics, the fact was that women were never allowed to do certain roles by their fathers and husbands. Women were expected to serve their fathers, husbands and families, the world outside of their houses had no means for them to be part of it. In fact, women were best viewed under patriarchal order and according to their fathers and husbands later on their sons were the future of the households.

In early modern times and specifically for Shakespeare the role of the father was to be the patriarch, a very orthodox way of thinking but very true for all of his plays. When the father decided he wanted to marry off his daughter, the sedate virgin did not have a say in the matter and had to oblige to her father's decisions. This was just something that the female child did, she accepted all of the rules and regulations set forth

for her by her father, and questioning them would be considered immoral. In cases where she had a brother, along with her father's laws she also had to uphold those provided by her brother. For the case of the virgin, let us examine the role of Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

Sharon Hamilton puts Ophelia in the category of "Daughters Who Acquiesce" (80). She is certainly an obedient daughter; in *Hamlet*, Ophelia is the daughter who attentively listens to every word her father, Polonius, says to her. However, the men in Ophelia's life do not seem to care for her as much as she cares for them. She puts her father and brother, Laertes, before her lover, Hamlet, which causes her to show a sense of disloyalty towards her lover, although she is just doing what she has always been taught, to go in order of ranking of her males. In regards to Ophelia's being, Lagretta Tallent Lenker notes, "she represents a paragon of Elizabethan womanhood, a beautiful young woman whose family has position, who is cared for by her brother and father, and who is secure enough in her identity to engage in witty repartee with her counseling brother" (54).

Mistakenly when Ophelia tells her father that she desires Hamlet, both Polonius and Laertes tell Ophelia that Hamlet is not right for her. Although she thanks them both for their concern of her heart's desire, there is something about Hamlet that makes her long for him day and night and she cannot escape him. Ophelia tries her best to be loyal to her family first and then to Hamlet, but that loyalty costs her her love.

Innocently caught in the middle of her father, brother and lover's rivalry, Ophelia takes sanctuary in her songs. After her father's death, her songs help her pass through all the upset that is going on in her life and take away from it the good moments, especially once Hamlet strays away from her. Sharon Hamilton notes, "Only in her mad songs does she find a voice for her grief, her sexual longings, and her bitterness" (80). This is

certainly the case because no one else listens to what Ophelia is trying to say. She is left in the middle of them all. If she goes against her father's wishes, she is dishonoring his memory. If she goes against her lover's desires she feels she is disobeying the man she loves, and her brother is certainly of no help, because he feels that she must obey every single one of his rules, even though she already has two other men telling her what to do. At this stage, the innocent virgin is torn between the loves she feels for all three of the men in her life, but one after another they all disappoint her by criticizing and ridiculing her for no reason. Laertes tells Ophelia to 'fear' the songs that she sings for Hamlet, (1.3.33, 29-30), in order to warn her of his ties to her. Hamilton notes that, instead of helping her, however, "In retrospect, this speech contains irony upon irony: in listening with too credent ear to this song, Ophelia loses not only honor but sanity. In the end, overwhelmed by fear, the only songs that she can hear will be her own mad ones," (82). Ophelia cannot choose sides as to which man in her life will take better care for her or which man means well. With cases like these what ends up happening is that since she cannot decide between the men in her life, she loses sight of what is the one thing most important to her, herself. She loses interest in herself and is divided between the men. Polonius' virtue of "To thine own self be true," disappears and leaves the woman helpless to the surrender of all the men by killing herself, so essentially the only way that Ophelia can find sanctity in her life is through her death. Her death is the only place where the men in her life seem to leave her alone and let her body commiserate her love for Hamlet. Her possible suicide causes her to attain a level of closure for herself where no one can order her around and let her be, just as she is, the simple and ideal Elizabethan daughter

who tried her best to please all in her life, except for the one person who deserved her attention the most, herself.

Once the ideal virgin is married, she becomes the obliging wife. As seen in *Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare takes us through the journey of two sisters who are complete opposites of one another in order to ensure how daughters strive to please and achieve certain goals to satisfy their fathers and husbands. Through the comedic roles of Bianca and Kate, the ideal daughter is characterized. Baptista combines both his daughters to form the ideal daughter. Bianca holds the qualities of a good Elizabethan daughter, although a bit spoiled, and Kate is the exact opposite until she is tamed by Petruchio, which in true regard will make the shrew, Kate, the perfect Elizabethan wife.

After the deal between Baptista and Petruchio of taming Kate takes place, Petruchio achieves his level of male dominance in order to show just how strong of a man he is that he will be able to domesticate the shrew that no other man has enticed. Petruchio succeeds in his endeavors and makes a lady and an obedient wife out of Kate through his methods of cruelty towards her, in order to cultivate her as though she was a beast. The entire process is a bit harsh as to how Petruchio strives to make Kate into anything but a shrew. Sharon Hamilton notes, "Bereft of food, sleep, and conjugal rights, Kate experiences physical suffering and the terrors of someone else's violent temper for the first time in her coddled life. As Petruchio intends, the treatment causes her to move beyond egotism to empathy" (105). Although Shakespeare portrays this entire fiasco through a comedic act, it is still a shame that a man has to tame a woman as though he would be refining an animal simply in order to prove that he too can have an obedient and efficient wife. The men are so focused on their paths to self-cultivation of this



woman, that they treat her with the utmost cruelty, just to prove their ability to tame a woman. Shakespeare at the end of this play shows a reversal of roles between both of Baptista's daughters, where Bianca the good daughter has become the shrew and the original shrew, Kate, is tamed by her husband's efforts alone. She is now the obedient wife that Petruchio desired and finally attained the ideal Elizabethan wife in the end.

Kate's concluding speech is a momentous step towards her surrender to her husband. She says:

Such duty as the subject owes the prince,  
 Even such a woman oweth to her husband  
 Why are our bodies soft, and weak, and smooth,  
 But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
 Should well agree with our external parts (5.2.169-172).

Kate deals with the ideas of her duty to her husband and herself. In the end, she has no choice but to surrender to him because the world sees him as in the right and not her. The way Kate completely acknowledges Petruchio as her lord, king, and keeper has overwhelmed many critics with its abolishment of feminine identity. Among these, Rackin notes, "Kate's final speech rationalizes the submission of wives to husbands not only on the traditional analogy between husband and king, but also on the now-familiar ground of the physical differences between male and female bodies" (28). Kate's speech clearly declares the male perceptions of having the woman be the mere weak link in the relationship and the man is the one who is her ruler at the end of the day. This is certainly the case because Kate has admitted defeat to her husband and it is he who has

won the battle in taming her. Based on her own conclusions she must now accept her role of the obedient wife.

To show the role of the idealistic widow, Shakespeare takes us through *King Lear*, to view the case of Cordelia. Cordelia, the youngest of Lear's three daughters, is the well behaved and most kind hearted out of them all, but seemingly cannot praise her love for her father. Since she does not go through Lear's ritualistic test in the beginning of the play she is later on renounced by Lear from the kingdom. Cordelia holds a virtuous and generous state of mind as compared to her sisters, Goneril and Regan, who can easily maneuver their father. Cordelia loves him for who he is and not for materialistic reasons, just as the good daughter is to love her father. The fact that King Lear is a patriarch in society is what causes his ultimate demise in judging his daughters because he holds their false truths more into account than the true love that Cordelia has for him. Throughout *King Lear*, Cordelia has a passion for the truth. She is very much involved with seeking the truth behind every matter, as is shown by the way she deals with her father. It is the memory of her loving nature that wins in the end even though she dies. When Lear finally realizes that she was a good daughter, it is no longer an idea of importance because Cordelia is already dead. It is a shame that she dies by the time she is accepted by others, especially her father.

Once Lear banishes Cordelia and later on abdicates the throne, he learns the true value of the other two daughters who are not as pleasing as Cordelia was. Cordelia is not a widow, but she ends as a widow would, without father or husband to identify her. Cordelia is forced to live the life of a functional widow. The way she is dismissed from the land shows just how much she loved her father. Even after his dismissal of her and

her land, she still wishes well for him. Her husband has not died, he is very much alive, but he has left her to fend for herself while he has gone back to France. She is functionally a widow who is all alone just as an actual widow would be in the case of her husband's departure. Even though her husband is alive, the way he leaves her is just as though he has died because she is left to survive on her own as another woman who is a widow would. This level of a lonesome state is indication of her life as that of a widow. She is repeating the cycle of a virginal woman who is all by herself, except for the case of a virgin her father would be there, whereas for Cordelia her father has also left her. When she dies, she dies as herself.

In *Othello*, the virtues of the virgin, wife and widow are all represented within Desdemona. As the play begins Desdemona's relationship with her father, Brabantio, is shown as one filled with utter respect and sincerity. She holds her father on a pedestal of high moral and ethical standards. She sees him as a person who is all knowing as well as someone who would not want her to be harmed in any way, shape or form. In fact, Brabantio until this point views Desdemona as his fair child and "jewel" (1.3.195). Although this can be portrayed as a typical relationship between a father and daughter there is always the concept of one side having more control. Desdemona is the symbol of virginity at the start of this play and presents all the qualities that the patriarchal society expects from her. The point of controlling a woman is essential to *Othello's* story, between both the men in Desdemona's life. With Brabantio, Desdemona is controlled to his highest limits, because she is his daughter and that means that whatever her father says must be the last word and law of that household. He feels that he has the final and ultimate say in anything she does or will do because it must require his consent. For her

father, she is perfect because she is the obedient daughter who will oblige to him no matter what. However, things take a twist when she decides to marry Othello, and once her father finds out everything changes. This gets a bit vague for the reader because while reading this play it seems evident that in her father's eyes it would be all right if it was he who had chosen a husband for her. Lynda E. Boose suggests, "For in Shakespeare's time—the ceremony acknowledged the special bond between father and daughter and the need for the power of ritual to release the daughter from its hold," (326). Here, it is different since it is his daughter who made her own choice, without consulting him.

This case is quite interesting because Desdemona's father is upset that she has married someone, but more upset because he did not select the husband. It seems as though Desdemona's worth for her father is simply a piece of property, had he been the one opting to sell his property it would be alright, but since she did it herself there is a huge problem. While this could be a racial issue, it was Brabantio who associated with Othello first; it is at his house where Desdemona first met Othello. She says:

DUKE.                                 What would You, Desdemona?

DESDEMONA.         That I did love the Moor to live with him,  
 My downright violence and storm of fortunes  
 May trumpet to the world: my heart's subdued  
 Even to the very quality of my lord.  
 I saw Othello's visage in his mind,  
 And to his honour and his valiant parts  
 Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate;

So that, dear lords, if I be left behind  
 A moth of peace, and he go to the war,  
 The rites for which I love him are bereft me,  
 And I a heavy interim shall support  
 By his dear absence. Let me go with him. (1.3.247-258).

The issue is much worse than that, it is an issue of authority. The level of importance that patriarchy plays in this play is very important in order to understand Brabantio's motives for Desdemona, although they are still not ideal given the particular situation. Claire McEachern suggests that the real threat in Shakespeare's plays, "is the father's desire to contain the daughter within the parental family, then a critique of patriarchal power would be most effective in exposing the labeling of woman-as-subversive-agent, as an instrument engineered to idealize the father. Consequently, much of feminist criticism locates the sanctification of the father inscribed in various cultural texts, including Shakespeare's" (288). It is quite difficult to understand why a father would want to have such a high abundance of authority over his daughter, especially if he sees she is content with her decision. A lot could pertain to this as a cultural aspect because having a daughter was not considered the best of situations; a girl was held in harsher limits as compared to a boy during those times.

The steps that lead to Desdemona's crowning as a wife involve the words of 'I do' which seem to put a break on her relationship with her father, causing a shift of the male order to take place. It seems strange but accurate, that until the point of uttering those words Desdemona is the perfect daughter, but the moment she says 'I do,' the control shifts towards her husband in her father's eyes and this phase of her life he cannot

handle. On the other hand, if this were the situation of the father 'giving' away his daughter to the husband it would be him physically placing his daughter's hand in the hand of the husband, a binding contract in which the father is the central figure who is taking control once again. But the opposite happened in this case where the father had no control. The way Brabantio views this is physically having him hand over his daughter as a property owner would do to another man who is now the new property owner, rather the husband; it shows a transfer of ownership. It is a bit harsh but that is exactly what is going on in this play. Now everything would be perfect for Brabantio had he initially selected a man for her to marry; he would be satisfied with his decision to hand her over, but since it was Desdemona, the mere woman, who made the judgment the father is having a situational crisis with his daughter's new independent decision. Specifically, the reason for Brabantio's strong dislike of Othello now is that his daughter made a decision without his permission, a choice that Brabantio thought he had the right to make.

Once Desdemona has crossed the line from her father to her husband's side, society now puts her in her husband's regime; she is officially Othello's wife. This is the exact point where the woman feels divided between her father and husband. Now the new man in her life is her husband whereas her father was the only man in her life thus far. Desdemona married Othello for several reasons, one being that he was a hero in her eyes as well as her father's opinion of him being a strong soldier. According to Boose, "Within the father-daughter plays, the daughter's association of father with husband is so strong that even when a woman as independent as Rosalind or Viola first thinks about the man she will eventually marry, her thoughts immediately call to mind her father," (327). This is just the case because Desdemona saw that her father respected Othello, even

though physically he was different, she saw past it and noticed her father's approval of having him as an acquaintance. The fact that Othello was a Moor did not matter to Desdemona at all, since she found qualities in Othello that were appealing to her, such as his lavish charm and his friendship with her father. Beyond Othello's lifestyle, she saw how much her father approved of him and his virtuous behavior. Desdemona married Othello based on all these qualities as well as her true love for him. After leaving her title as her father's daughter, there is a shift that takes place in her titles, she is still not called a woman at any point in the play and she is always referred to as someone's daughter or wife.

Things seem to be going well for Desdemona until Othello's male self-absorption through the eyes of Iago rises. Iago tells Othello that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio, a white male, someone whom Othello did not compete with, because there was no reason to but now he is enraged. Part of the rage is due to Othello's own seclusion of being a black male in a society full of white males. The other reason is that this was a concept he could not fathom of his fair and obedient wife. The interesting thing about this entire fiasco is that it only took Iago a few general words and a brief time to dismiss Othello's views about his wife and have him become enraged with hatred. It is obvious to the reader at that point that Othello views his wife just as her father viewed his daughter, as a piece of property, one that can be bought or sold within minutes due to any given reason. Desdemona's father wanted her to obey his rules; Othello wants her to be the obedient wife. Once again, the concepts of the woman's virtues are questioned but not those of a man's.

It is quite strange how strong of an influence Iago has on Othello's views. After reiterating something when Othello thinks about Desdemona, he starts to get angry. At this point Othello does not even consider Desdemona his wife, rather he looks upon her as though she has done something wrong, even though she is still as frail as ever. However, at the same time it shows just how weak Othello's character is and how his feelings for his wife are not of love and honor, as they should be.

At this point, it is evident that Othello is angry with Desdemona, but he has no real reason to be disregarding her this way. Sadly, Othello shows his true colors of utter control and anger without setting correct limits in his relationship by trying to find out the truth from Desdemona herself, instead of believing Iago. In Emily C. Bartels' article, "Strategies of Submission: Desdemona, the Duchess, and the Assertion of Desire," she suggests that, "Obedience, the very thing that has made her self-assertions safe, now leaves them and her defenseless, blurring into her tears as a 'well-painted passion'" (428). The level of obedience between Desdemona and Othello is now out of the picture, because Othello feels Desdemona has surpassed all his desires and crossed the limits over to a side he never thought she could, and now all he can think about is the vengeance in his heart for her. Now there is a concept of change that takes place at this point in the play, since Desdemona's father was already upset with her for marrying someone without his permission and now her husband is having suspicions and rage towards her as well. Desdemona started her life with the stage of a virgin who maintained her level of chastity and willingly was able to marry and become a wife, and now that her husband despises her it is as if he is no longer available.



At one point, her father is upset with her because of her lawful yet unapproved marriage. On the other hand, her husband thinks she is having an affair with Cassio. Both Brabantio and Othello are not thinking where Desdemona stands in this situation; they are just thinking what she has done to them. Desdemona is not aware that Othello thinks she is having an affair with Cassio, but she is thinking that there is a serious change in his daily habits and treatment of her. While this entire fiasco is going on, no one stops to question how the woman in this entire situation feels. She is naturally hurt and saddened by both the men in her life. In her eyes, she has lost her father's love and is now going through her husband's harsh tones towards her. Once again, she is a figure divided between the two. She cannot make a decision because ultimately, she should not have to choose. For Desdemona it is a case of divided duty repeatedly. Gayle Greene deals with the victimization of the woman with this specific concept of divided duty. Let's take a look back as to how this all started. The most obvious scene between Desdemona and Brabantio followed by a scene later on with Othello and Iago shows the harsh truths a woman has to face. In the first scene, Desdemona is speaking to her father, Brabantio about how she feels she is between her father and husband "My noble father, / I do perceive here a divided duty. / To you I am bound for life and education" (1.3.179-81). Desdemona does feel that her father hold a very special place in her heart and this is exactly why she has such a difficult transition from the duty to her father to that for her husband. Greene notes, "the words that Desdemona uses to describe her life reveal just how desperate she is for acceptance, whether it is with her father or Othello. Through this engagement of words, Desdemona, left powerless and unaware of how to deal with a situation causes her to divide between the duty to her father and husband. The thing that

has been lost in this ‘divided duty’ is the duty she owes to herself” (663). The “divided duty” causes her the greatest harm because that is the final point of her division between her husband and father due to her dismay. As the play continues, Othello’s violent and stretched speech begins to show just how low his views are about women, the way he discusses them as a piece of property, ‘a thing’ no less (3.3.262–281). Othello begins to generalize the same views that Iago has brought up. His language shows how coarse his nature towards women has become. Not all blame can be towards Iago either, since it is Othello in his own rage. According to Greene, Othello’s response to Iago’s insinuations is a righteously vindicated recognition that ‘the forked plague’ is ‘destiny unshunnable’, a certainty possible only because a woman has been suspect from the start (660).

Iago initiates situations for Othello, who with blind faith obliges to each, causing situations to arise and further disaster to strike in his relationship with his wife, Desdemona. There are elements of the play, which Shakespeare suggests are misconceptions, brought on by the men and women; man, known for his honor feels his social order can question the behavior of what they believe, is the ideal woman through her chastity (Greene 658). Throughout *Othello*, men tell the story of what a woman is, what ideals she has to have, while considering her a material possession. Their ideas about the social order relate based on gender specific clauses in these cases. Othello’s use of certain language engages the reader in a struggle with his views on sexuality. Greene states, “His terms indicate strain or self consciousness, a conception of love which is either idealized or reductive, making it more or less than it is – ‘absolute content’, or a physical, trifling matter” (659).

In a very short yet powerful speech, Desdemona uses small and intricate words to state her feelings alongside her decisions. Desdemona explains her ideas for her father and husband by expressing her desire for such a strong duty to both. She is striving for acceptance by both men. She feels that she is bound by a specific duty to both the men in her life now and is trying to figure out which way she can share herself without displeasing the other. She says:

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; you are the lord of duty;  
 I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my husband;  
 And so much duty as my mother show'd  
 To you, preferring you before her father,  
 So much I challenge that I may profess  
 Due to the Moor, my lord. (1.3.181-89)

This entire speech shows just how confused Desdemona must be throughout this entire period where all these occurrences are happening and she has to make such rash decisions one after the next. Boose states, "Desdemona answers with what is essentially the recitation of her wedding vow to obey and serve Othello, forsaking all other, including her father," (332). She uses words such as 'duty' and 'bound' to show her emotional attachment to her father and now her husband who is like her father in so many ways. Both words of 'father' and 'husband' are used to exonerate the emphasis of each and how the 'husband' is the one she must turn to now.

At this point, Desdemona is the weak figure of the play. She has to decide between the man she loves and the man she is in love with. At this point, she is just a woman who is trying to decide between her father and husband. So, essentially does Desdemona care for herself at all? No, she does not. She does not know how to, since she has never done it before. She goes from daughter to wife and is always under someone else's laws. When she is born, she belongs to her father. When she gets married, she belongs to her husband. If her husband dies then she carries the name of remaining his widow. If she has a child who is a boy, when he grows up his law is in regards towards his mother. In actuality, it would not be until her death that she would be characterized as just a woman with no other title. The title starts with a daughter, followed by wife, then mother, lastly death. Death would be the ultimate step of finally reaching the title of just a woman. If she has died then she is free from all titles, but at this point it is too late because her life is already over and she has spent her entire life under someone else's laws and never her own. So what does Desdemona do in order to make her divided duty concept comprehend with her role in society as a daughter and wife? She simply obeys her husband's desire's and her father's wishes.

Claire McEachern suggests some very interesting concepts on the woman's part in society. She notes, "To identify the place of women in Shakespeare is frequently to describe the controlling artistic and patriarchal forms. Women are celebrated (if domesticated) in comedy; marginalized (if excused) in history; empowered (if destroyed) in tragedy – and are a subversive presence in each mode" (287). Ophelia is very fragile and acquiescent with the males around her. With her father and brother she blindly trusts them in their decisions although at times she does not agree, especially when it comes to

Hamlet, yet she remains loyal to them. With Hamlet she believes whatever he tells her because she thinks he cares for her well-being above all other things. This is certainly the truth because throughout the plays Shakespeare has written, in each there is some aspect that stands out which agree with McEachern's point of view. In his comedies such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, everyone in Padua celebrates Katherine's accomplishments once her husband trains her, rather the male who had to train the female to do the right things, because the male is correct in his portrayal in society and has tamed a woman to be an obedient wife. Cordelia's love for her father and husband remains constant even though both the men in her life do not reciprocate the feelings. In the end she forgives both the men but for her father it is too late because by the time he realize his possible mistake she has already passed. Her husband's corrupt nature makes Cordelia live the life of a functional widow, even though he is alive. For his tragedy *Othello*, Desdemona is the obedient wife that is killed in the end by her husband because he feels she did not display the right role of a woman, so it was his rightful duty to kill her before his name was negatively conversed further.

This shifting causes Brabantio to form an emotional disregard for his daughter since the control is now in another male's hands, a violation in Brabantio's mind. Boose notes, "In tragedies like *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, the father's failure to act out his required role has a special significance, one that we can best apprehend by looking not at the logic of causal narrative progression but at the threat implied by the violation of ritual" (328). This is certainly what Shakespeare does, he uses an inauspicious view in supporting the fathers in his plays, where as the daughters are told every time that they are in the wrong in their drastic conclusions.

For the case of Brabantio, he tells Desdemona that what she has done to him by marrying Othello can be vouched for as an act of “treason of the blood” (I.i.168). McEachern agrees with this statement of father’s relationships with their daughters and says, “In the daughters he creates and in the stormy necessity of their removal from the control of their fathers, he forges a critical perspective from which to view patriarchy, a perspective that need not replicate patriarchy’s self-characterizations innocently or idealistically” (289). It is evident that Shakespeare had a different relationship in mind for all his daughters in the plays, but when it came to the obedient virgin, the tamed wife, and the well-behaved widow he had Ophelia, Kate and Cordelia in mind. Although Desdemona is a combination of them all together there are instances in which Desdemona takes over as the ideal Elizabethan woman, who struggled and then accomplished every means necessary in order to provide for her husband and father.

The connection between the social and sexual tragedy is self evident, in the ways that the men view their relationships with the women. Although they love the women, they love their social order even more. The reasoning is not justified as to the killings that take place of the women, but there is something strange about the magical transformation of love that keeps on destroying them both in the act of attaining a higher social and sexual power in the eyes of others (Greene 666). Based on the conclusion of having death being the ultimate point when the woman is free from all men, there seems to be the notion of the phases of a woman’s life that lead her to this point. There are essentially four phases in a woman’s life. The first is that she is born into her father’s house, where he is the sole caregiver for her until he finds her a suitable suitor. Consequently, she is married off to a man who is now her sole proprietor as well as

someone who takes the place of her father, in the sense that he now takes care of her. Then, if the woman has given birth to a son, in most cases they do, once she is older she becomes the responsibility of her son, who takes place of his father as the sole proprietor and caregiver; hence, the chain continues repeatedly. The last phase is death; once the woman dies, it is the only opportunity she has to be on her own and able to characterize herself as just a woman, no additional titles of daughter, wife, or mother are present.

The way the chain flows is that, a girl/ woman is born into her father's house. She is then married off to a man and goes to her husband's house. When she finally has established a family life, and gets older, if she has sons, she lives with them. The transition goes from man to man to man. In the end the only way, she is on her own and alone is if she dies, because in the end that is something that she can do only on her own and no one can prepare or set that up for since that is in the hands of the Lord. The cycle seems to repeat itself in order for the woman to have a chance to take the divided duty a step further into the hands of what is held just and accountable for her, as opposed to what steps she has to take to get there.

It is evident how Shakespeare felt about woman through the dialogue and the roles he had them portray in the plays. Although the father figures in the plays always have a strong and demanding presence in relation to their daughters, it is quite awkward that as soon as a woman is married that figure which was so strong in their minds as their father, so quickly shifts towards their husbands. Whether it is Desdemona and Othello, Cordelia and Lear, or Kate and Petruchio, the husband always wins in the end, or is it just that simple? For a brief moment, let's use the example that Iago presented to Othello, which started this entire chaos of Desdemona having an affair with Cassio. Let's say that

it was true and everything Iago said was correct about Desdemona and Cassio's affair.

What would happen in that case? Would it be correct to say that Desdemona is a woman at that point or would she still have the title of Othello's wife having an affair with a man?

It is an interesting concept because we shall never know the real story of what the outcome for that would have been. If this were the second story as to Desdemona having an actual affair with Cassio, how Shakespeare would write Desdemona's character? If Desdemona did everything that Iago said she did, she would be a woman with no other title having the affair. Although, we shall never know what to make of this but it is an interesting idea to put forth. The woman is just a woman when she is doing something of ill will. She is a wife or a daughter when a father or husband figure is involved in the situation. Is it a matter of honor or justice that takes the woman from the image of a daughter or wife to that of a whore? Essentially, society sets all these balances on a woman, but never on a man. Does Othello kill Desdemona out of rage, possible love, or both? It could be that it was a combination, since Othello was so shocked by his ideas of what Desdemona did that the rage took over and completely took away from any feelings of love present. It was not until he killed her that he realized he harmed the one thing in this world he loved the most, his possession of her.

For Shakespeare's plays, all the rebellions are doomed to fail. The way he has made the plays, with all the interesting scenarios and significant love and hate scenes, it is pointless to try to rebel, because in the end it shall fail consequentially. In the world of English, the true virtues always win and triumph in the end.



In today's society, in England, a woman is only under her father's regime until she has reached the age and time of independence, surpassing all her educational needs. Once she has the education and independence she is considered a young woman in society who is able to make her own decisions. When she decides to get married, her husband is not her keeper, he is her equal for life, however, during this time she remains a solid figure in the eyes of society as a woman who is now married. The title of just "woman" stays but that of a married woman comes later on.

For the women of Shakespeare's plays, the duty of a woman never ends while she is alive. She goes through stages in her life with being a daughter, wife, and mother. Instead of having a title as a woman, she is always wrapped up in some type of societal way of life. She goes from one relationship to the next, facing different duties and obstacles in each, but she does it willingly for herself. Essentially a woman's duty ends when she dies, because it is not until her death that she can begin her real life for herself. For the first time in her new life she is free and capable of anything, no titles attached, she is just a woman all by herself.

For the very first time a woman is alone after her death and finally rid of the labeling of virgin, wife and widow. It is not simply the man who makes her feel as though she is nothing; rather it is society, which gives man such a right to make the woman feel beneath him and accountable for a certain title. The measures that society along with religious institutions have made a woman appear beneath a man. After her death it is the first time in a woman's world that she is alone; it is a shame that it is after her death that she thinks about herself for a change, but at least it is a start.

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