

IMPOSSIBLE STANDARDS:  
WOMEN'S AGENCY IN SHAKESPEARE

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A Thesis  
Presented  
to the Faculty of  
California State University, Chico

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English

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by  
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Fall 2017

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Fall 2017

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family,

Chuy, Cindy, & Jesse.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Erin Kelly for agreeing to serve as committee chair for this thesis. Her guidance has been absolutely invaluable throughout this process and without her insightful encouragement this thesis would not have been possible. Professor Kelly's knowledge is unquestionable but it is the evident care and passion that she teaches with that served as a constant inspiration for me throughout my time in the English Master's Program. The courses I have taken with her and the opportunity to work with her on this thesis have been some of the most rewarding aspects of my graduate education.

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ABSTRACT

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Within William Shakespeare's works the women characters range from being independent and outspoken to submissive and obedient. Throughout the plays, despite their natural personalities, the women are often faced with social institutions that regulate their behavior, which generally forces them to be compliant to the men in their lives. Furthermore, even when they do conform to social standards, there is often a preconceived notion that women are inherently untrustworthy, and in some cases, ironically because of their obedient actions. Primarily, this thesis will focus on the attributes of the women in three plays; *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. In each play the women are judged based on their actions or regulated to act in a certain way based on societal standards and conceptions about women.

My first chapter examines the women in *Othello* and in particular the impossible positions Desdemona is placed in by being required to be obedient while

navigating a divided duty. This forced obedience inevitably sets her up for failure, making her obedient nature the cause of Desdemona's vulnerable situations.

In my second chapter I focus on *The Taming of the Shrew* and how the male characters dominate the play itself, forcing the women into diminished roles and a compliant nature. The only way women are given power is by acting in a socially acceptable way by exhibiting submission to their male counterparts.

The third chapter looks at *Much Ado About Nothing* and the way deception is a primary theme specifically in regards to the obsession with women's sexual fidelity. The women then are left defenseless against men's prejudices; leaving them with no other solution than to maintain patience or a good sense of wit.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Within William Shakespeare's works there is a wide range of personalities for the female characters throughout his plays. In general, though, the women tend to either fall under the category of being perceived as more outspoken or more obedient due to their interactions with other characters, specifically the men. Primarily this paper will focus on the attributes of the women in three plays; *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. In each play the women are judged based on their actions or compelled to act in a certain way based on societal standards and conceptions about women's behavior. Predominantly, the women in the plays must combat the societal perception that women are inherently untrustworthy and use their obedience or outspokenness to varying degrees of failure or success.

In *Othello* Desdemona's character is brought into question as Iago plants unfounded seeds of jealousy into Othello's estimation of her. Even though Desdemona is innocent and wishes to be obedient to Othello, the suggested perception of her outweighs her actual actions. Ayanna Thompson argues that in the play Iago realizes the importance of these perceptions as "it can prove difficult to-near impossible to escape that plot, or to recast oneself (or others) into alternative narrative structures. He who controls the storytelling controls the world in *Othello*" (3). While Thompson applies this specifically to Iago's understanding of character's motivations, this idea can be expanded and applies

to the play as a whole. Though Iago may be the only character that is totally aware of the significance, the power of perception outweighs that of the truth, which significantly places the women of the play at a disadvantage. Since duty and silent obedience are the marks of a virtuous woman, it also takes away their power to be storytellers themselves, placing Desdemona at the mercy of Iago's, or any man's for that matter, twisted portrayals. Thompson states in her interpretation that Othello's words at one point suggests, "the problem with women...is that the qualities that men most value and praise...can be the most dangerous ones" (38). What this fails to acknowledge, though, is the way in which the men play a part and have a responsibility for holding women to the impossible standards that set them up for this failure. By forcing women to be obedient to both their husbands and their fathers, it ensures a power struggle in which women cannot help but fail with one of them.

Othello is not the only one who struggles with interpreting Desdemona's character, though. Thompson says, "scholarly debates about Desdemona's character have ranged from misogynistic to recuperative... [productions of Desdemona] have fallen primarily into two camps: performances that stress Desdemona's passivity and performances that stress her strength" (90-1). While critics tend to place Desdemona in one camp or another like this, she has a little more flexibility in that she does exhibit traits of being both weak and submissive while also is admired for her strength. While this may illustrate the complexity of Desdemona's character, it seems that she is forced into being weaker, and that actually she is not strong enough to save herself and ends up not strengthened but wrongfully defeated because of her submissiveness.

The second play, *The Taming of the Shrew* it is initially suggested from the title of the play that the main issue is about a woman being properly broken into a compliant nature. This play in particular is greatly dominated by men; as Barbara Hodgdon states “there is little or no sense of women’s community within the play” (xvii). Though Hodgdon means this disconnect between the woman characters in the play, in general there is little sense of women within the play as a whole. The majority of the play is dominated by men, making a connection between the women characters hard to accomplish as well as describing the women themselves from a male vantage point rather than a feminine one. Even Katherina, the shrew herself, is overshadowed and diminished by Petruccio’s will in the play. The only time that a woman truly has a voice in the play is also problematic as it is the final act in which Katherina delivers her speech of submission.

Katherina’s speech is also problematic among critics in that it “has not only occasioned opinions ranging from praise to outrage, depending on the gender politics of a particular era, but also, through processes of metonymy, become detached from the scene of which it is a part and come to stand for the whole play” (Hodgdon 6). In general, this speech is the culminating moment of the play in which the central issue of men needing to control women is present. Though this speech can stand for the play as a whole, it is important to note the relationship between Petruccio and Katherina that led up to it. By standing on its own it is hard to note the ways in which the language works to illustrate not simply Katherina’s submission to Petruccio, but rather how she has found a way to function acceptably in society yet subtly retain some control.

In the final chapter, deception is at the heart of the play for *Much Ado About Nothing* as women are assumed to be deceitful by the men despite their actual innocence. Claire McEachern states that the title itself can be interpreted as noting, “the adverse power of communal opinion over individual identity, and the lethal seriousness of the matter of female chastity to the male imagination” (2). Similar to Iago’s idea about storytellers holding power, the power in this play lies with the men and the narrative they create about the women. On top of this, the characters are able to not only bring together Benedick and Beatrice by valuing her virtue, but able to destroy the image of Hero purely through the power of their words despite her actual innocence. Even though Hero actually emulates all of the virtues that are required for a woman, the inherent distrust in her sex leads to her undoing by the insecure men.

Despite the struggle of the women in the play being constantly judged as incapable of faithfulness, Beatrice is able to gain some semblance of power due to her witticisms. McEachern says “one of the reasons Beatrice is perceived to be ‘an excellent wife for Benedick’ is that she talks so much like the men in the play” (27). The problem with this is that Beatrice’s value of wit is compared not with her own verbal prowess, but the fact that she can emulate a man’s way of talking. While Beatrice is able to gain a stable ending she does so much like Katherina, within the accepted confines that a patriarchal society condones. Beatrice is able to retain her outspoken wit because she is a complimentary partner to Benedick; her will does not overshadow Benedick therefore she is allowed to retain her outspokenness.

In this thesis the first chapter will focus on Othello and have a primary focus on Desdemona's character throughout the play. At the beginning of the chapter Desdemona's relationship with her father Brabantio establishes Desdemona's constant struggle of being placed in impossible situations. By having to be obedient to her father as well as her husband in her life, Desdemona cannot help but fail as obedience to one means disobedience to another. The second section focuses on her marriage as she transfers over from her father's control into the possession of Othello. While Desdemona initially begins their marriage under the assumption of equal partnership, she is quickly forced into an uncomfortable sense of confused submission as Othello's jealousy distorts his perception of her. Then the relationship between Emilia and Desdemona is examined as Emilia acts as an outspoken foil to Desdemona while also pointing out the way in which women are treated as inferior to men. Finally, the chapter closes with an examination of Desdemona's death as her final act of obedience along with Emilia's final act of defiance.

The second chapter examines the women in *The Taming of the Shrew* and how they are framed in a story dominated by men and forced into obedience. The first section looks at the comparison between the sisters Katherina and Bianca. Initially the two women are seen as a foil to each other in which the men of the play praise Bianca's silent virtue while shunning Katherina's combative outspokenness. As the play progresses, Bianca's obedience comes into question and the two women seem to switch dispositions with Katherina becoming compliant. The majority of the thesis then scrutinizes the courtship and relationship between Katherina and Petruccio. The section starts with Petruccio's interest in Katherina being expressed primarily due to acquiring her wealth

before he decides to tame her into being obedient. The chapter then analyzes Petruccio's general dominance over Katherina and his eventual taming of her through both physically and mentally harassing her. Petruccio's taming of Katherina is likened to the same methods of training a hawk to be obedient, simultaneously exerting his dominance as well as creating a bond between himself and Katherina. The next section focuses on Katherina's relationship with her father Baptista who projects a shrewish behavior upon her and paints her as a tainted commodity he needs to be rid of. Finally the chapter ends with an overall perception of Katherina throughout the play culminating in her final problematic speech of submission.

Chapter three centers on Beatrice and Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* and the obsession with women's sexual fidelity throughout the play. The first section, and majority of the chapter, surveys Beatrice's connection with Benedick starting with their stated disdain but subtle affection for each other. The section then further examines Beatrice's ability to be outspoken without having the negative connotations of being a shrewish woman through her understanding and conformation to societal standards. Finally, this section concludes with Beatrice's indignation and helplessness once Hero is slandered and her appeal to Benedick for help. The next section talks about Hero's relationship with her father Leonato and her suitor Claudio and how she is a piece of property that is passed between them. In the case of her connection with Leonato, Hero's unquestioning obedience is expected while Claudio struggles to reconcile his insecurities in women's faithfulness with Hero's innocence. The final section of the chapter settles on the unwarranted shaming and death of the helpless Hero at the hands of the men.

This thesis progresses from the death of Desdemona, to the taming of Katherina, and finishes with the pairing of Beatrice with Benedick. While this may appear to be an optimistic movement from a wrongful death to a joyful marriage, even Beatrice who receives the happiest ending still must adhere to Benedick. Beatrice is not allowed to end the play as a strong independent woman, she must be married off in order for her outspokenness to be acceptable. Overall, while some of the women in these plays are outspoken and able to show some independence, they are forced to conform to societal standards of submission. The power of perception is often held by the men in the play, making them the storytellers controlling how the women must behave. The following thesis examines the ways in which women are required to be obedient, yet even when they are, the men rarely believe in their ability to remain faithful, generally placing them in inescapably losing situations.

## CHAPTER 2

### OTHELLO: IMPOSSIBLE DIVISION OF DUTY

#### Introduction

In Shakespeare's play *Othello*, Desdemona must navigate her relationships through a society in which she is required to be obedient to the men in her life. From the beginning of the play she is placed in a position in which she must both demonstrate and choose submission to either her father or husband. She is often described as divine, virtuous, and sweet because she is able to conform to the role of obedience to the men in her life. However, this obedience also places her in a vulnerable position, and she becomes overwhelmed by her submission. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona is placed in the impossible situation of being required to be obedient to multiple people. This division of duty inevitably causes her to fail, making her obligatorily obedient nature the factor placing her in perilous situations in which she cannot help but to fail.

#### Desdemona's Relationship With Brabantio

In the opening act of the play the question of Desdemona's obedience is immediately addressed and a major issue of contention, particularly for the male characters in her life. Desdemona's potential suitor Roderigo first presents the idea when he says to Brabantio, "your daughter, if you have not given her leave... hath made a gross revolt" by eloping (1.1.131-2). While the marriage itself may be shocking, the lack of her father's knowledge and consent of the match is what makes it a "gross revolt". Rodrigo's comment then first introduces the idea of a woman's obedience, specifically in this case

to her father's wishes and approval. In Garner and Sprengnether's interpretation they focus on the duties Desdemona holds and how she is expected to act within the space of Brabantio's household (174). This initial introduction by Iago and Rodrigo of Desdemona's marriage as a betrayal from her father's house reinforces their notions about the enclosure of the house and the importance of its space in requiring female characters to stay properly confined within their father's roofs. Nevertheless, the insult of Desdemona's revolt is not merely an escape from Brabantio's sphere of influence and her obligation to him, but her desire in choosing an outsider such as Othello. Once Brabantio learns with whom she has eloped, he tells Rodrigo "o, would you had had her! / Some one way, some another" even though mere lines earlier he scolded Rodrigo as being unfit for his daughter (1.1.173-4).

While Rodrigo may not be Brabantio's desired match for his daughter, he much prefers him over Othello due to the latter's skin color. It becomes more evident that Brabantio does not approve of the racial difference when he appeals to the council stating "bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be" as a warning to turn away Othello (1.2.9). Though there is an issue of Desdemona's divided duty between her father and husband, it becomes more pressing of a problem for Brabantio because of Othello's skin color. If it were a white Venetian man with whom she had run off, her movement of duty towards her husband would not have been so controversial and insulting to Brabantio. Additionally, when he receives the news she has broken this confinement, Brabantio's initial thoughts are not concerned with the happiness or state of his daughter, but rather with her deception and what is to become of his own "despised time" (1.1.159).

Brabantio's main distress is that Desdemona has committed a "treason of the blood" and even issues a warning to other fathers to "trust not your daughter's minds" (1.1.167-8).

Brabantio is bitterly grieved by Desdemona's elopement and finds her deceptive primarily because she omits the proper channels of gaining his consent (Garner & Sprengnether 218). The act itself is not the main issue of Brabantio's complaint, rather it is that she eloped without his permission, therefore committing the crime of disregarding her due obedience to him. By choosing to elope with Othello, her perceived failure in her duty as a daughter sets up that her relationship with Othello is doomed to failure, regardless of performing her duties as a wife.

Throughout the play, no matter where Desdemona's loyalties lie, she is constantly being placed in a position in which she must make a decision about to whom to adhere. This inevitably leads to the impractical task of being obedient to multiple people, placing her in a position of having to let down or betray someone. Therefore, Desdemona's supposed former obedience to Brabantio makes her betrayal all the more surprising to him, which prompts his earlier warning to other fathers, even though it is somewhat inevitable. This creates somewhat of a controversy between the expectations and beliefs in daughter's capabilities to be obedient. On the one hand, they are expected to be obedient to all of their father's wishes, yet there is an underlying distrust in their ability to actually be able to do so. This distrust further places women in an impossible position as they are forced to be obedient through the control of their fathers.

In fact, this fear and even sometimes hatred of women becomes an issue for not just fathers, but all the men in the play as each women character is "called a whore by the

man closest to her” at some point over the storyline (Navy 104). This distrust seems to transfer from fathers to husbands as the women shift from being a dutiful daughter to an obedient wife. This succession of distrust from father to husband is exemplified in Brabantio’s warning which later provides the proof Othello needs to begin his suspicions in Desdemona. Even though Desdemona is obedient to Othello, the fact that she did so by being disobedient to Brabantio provides Othello with justification for his jealous feelings. As a result, Desdemona’s own obedience to Othello provides him with the validation of her potential disobedience, once again placing her in an impossible situation.

In an attempt to reconcile the obedient Desdemona with the one who has rebelled against him, Brabantio goes on to claim that Desdemona must have been tricked, drugged, or enchanted to have broken her obedience to him. He claims that Othello has “practised on her with foul charms, / Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals / That weakens motion” (1.2.73-5). Rather than giving her the credit of being able to choose her own path and decisions, he first believes it must be some form of trickery, since she is not supposed to have her own agency. Desdemona’s affections for Othello are upsetting to Brabantio not because her actions themselves are abnormal, but because they are unsanctioned by him. Once again this example illustrates the position that the women are placed in; they are not supposed to have their own agency therefore all their actions are supposed to be determined by the men controlling their lives. Brabantio goes on to lament that “she is abused, stolen from me and corrupted” (1.3.61). The diction that he uses at this point is particularly poignant in showing that Desdemona is not supposed to be her own person, but an extension of Brabantio. She is stolen from him, as if she were

his possession rather than daughter, and now that she has been abused and corrupted, she is no longer of any value or worth to him. This pattern is prevalent throughout the play as Desdemona attempts to navigate her obedience and independence and ultimately ends up being devalued and discarded. This reiterates the fact that Desdemona's obedience, though supposedly being the necessary behavior of an acceptable woman, actually places her in situations she will inevitably fail leading to her downfall.

The relationship between Brabantio and Desdemona also seems to be built on a lack of understanding Desdemona's true nature. Brabantio's own projections of her behavior and his beliefs in how a daughter should act create his perception of Desdemona. When Brabantio begins to describe Desdemona he calls her "a maiden never bold, / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself" (1.3.95-7). We later see Desdemona speaking up for herself not only to her father, but in front of the council as well. This initial introduction of her actions seem to be in contrast to the portrait that her father holds of her. When asked what she wants Desdemona replies, "that I did love the Moor to live with him / My downright violence and scorn of fortunes / May trumpet to the world...Let me go with him" (1.3.249-260). She demonstrates that she is full of spirit and bold enough that in a pressure-filled instance she is the opposite of quiet. She not only acknowledges that she has willingly given up her old life under Brabantio's care, but is not afraid to own up to her fierce feelings for Othello and wish to leave with him. This brings up the question of how well Brabantio really knows his daughter since her initial personality seems to be more self-confident and outgoing than he realizes. Once Desdemona herself finally enters the scene she is questioned by Brabantio, "Do you

perceive, in all this noble company, / Where most you owe obedience?" (1.3.178-9). This statement once again places Desdemona in the position of subjugation that owes obedience to the men in her life rather than her own desires. While the main implication is for her to choose between her husband and father, the question also implies that not only does Brabantio expect obedience towards himself, but the other powerful men in their presence at that moment. Brabantio presumes she will show the most obedience to him, but also to the authority of the men on the counsel. It is never a question whether or not she is obedient, but to whom she is obedient. Her obedience is absolutely expected by both the men in her life and the society in which she is living. This creates the prevailing issue Desdemona faced and is doomed to fail by creating situations in which she doubly owes her obedience. Though her obedience is absolutely demanded, it creates an unfeasible issue that Desdemona is required to solve, making her obedience actually a detriment when she must choose.

While she does seem to speak up for herself she also seems to adhere to the demands of obedience as she perceives a "divided duty" to both Othello and Brabantio (1.3.181). When she answers she says, "And so much duty as my mother showed / To you, preferring you before her father, / So much I challenge that I may profess / Due to the Moor my lord" (1.3.186-9). This shows a continuous expectation of society that through generations of women it is expected they go from being obedient to their fathers to their husbands. It implies a provided outline for daughters to follow in the footsteps of their mother's subservience. However, this is another odd mix of Desdemona being both obedient to her husband while breaking that obedience to her father. This highlights

Desdemona's dilemma in that it is not feasible for her to honor her duty to both her father and her husband. This is further complicated by the lack of acceptance Brabantio holds not only towards the elopement, but because of Othello's race. As Othello is being described he is constantly addressed as "the Moor" even by Desdemona herself. Othello himself claimed earlier that Brabantio was affectionate and invited him to tell his stories, yet once he becomes a suitor of his daughter, all pleasantries disappeared.

Additionally, Desdemona does demonstrate some power in this scene, by having the self-confidence in denying her father and addressing the council, but she still presents herself in a subservient way. When she begins to ask the council to let her travel with Othello she opens by saying "let me find a charter in your voice / T'assist my simpleness" (1.3.246-7) While she argues what she wants to have happen, she downplays her intelligence as simpleness, enabling herself to fulfill her wishes under the guise of following the patriarchal format. By describing herself as simple, she is still able to gain their blessing through this presentation as one who is compliant and subservient to the intelligence of the men rather than totally exerting her will. This is one of the few times in the play in which Desdemona is able to exhibit some power. In this situation Desdemona is able to get her way by still complying with the social rules of male dominance. She is still exhibiting her obedience to their will, enabling her to successfully persuade them, a skill which she will later lose in her attempts to influence Othello. Soon after, Othello then remarks that the two lovers must respect and 'obey' the time, prompting their departure (1.3.301). Even though she was able to show a moment of independent freedom, she immediately must begin her obedience now to Othello instead.

From this point on Desdemona seems to lose her ability to subvert societal expectations like she does when addressing the council. Rather than functioning within the confines of her obedience she begins to address Othello as an equal, breaking the social confines which made her successful with the council. She then begins to find herself in increasingly dire situations in her relationship with Othello as he loses all trust in her and she seems to grow meeker. Finally, her words only seem to talk her into more trouble, heightening Othello's distrust, rather than out of it.

Once Desdemona has placed Othello as the primary man to whom she must owe her duty, Brabantio then disappears from the play. The next instance in which her father is mentioned is in the very last scene of the play in which Desdemona has been murdered by Othello due to her supposed unfaithfulness. Upon hearing Othello's confession, her uncle Gratiano says, "Poor Desdemona, I am glad thy father's dead; / Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief / Shore his old thread in twain" (5.2.202-4) The betrayal that her father felt was so great that Desdemona would "run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / of such a thing as [Othello], to fear" (1.2.70-1) that by the end of the play it is revealed that he has died due to her elopement with a Moor. Brabantio's comment illustrates his issues with Othello's race by dehumanizing Othello from a human to a "thing" he cannot condone marrying his daughter. In this instance, Desdemona's betrayal of her father ended in his death, and her supposed betrayal of Othello ended in her own. While obedience seems to be the trait desired as well as required of Desdemona, it proves to be more dangerous than protective for her as well as her loved ones. Overall Desdemona's relationship with Brabantio is seemingly to have been a happy one prior to

the start of the play. Once she became the dutiful wife to Othello, her obedience trapped her down a path which eventually led to not only her, but her father's demise. By having to choose between her father or her husband, Desdemona's obedience ultimately ends up causing a perilous situation in which she can not escape. By having a divided duty of obedience Desdemona is destined to fail, setting her up for a deterioration in her relationship with her father. By holding Desdemona to these standards, it forces her original defiance of Brabantio to result in him withering away and dying off screen. Furthermore, this impossible standard results in Desdemona's own vulnerability as her original defiance of Brabantio sets in motion credibility for Othello's doubt in her, eventually leading to her demise.

#### Desdemona's Marriage With Othello

After Desdemona breaks her obedience with Brabantio, his place is supplanted by Othello. While this act showed Desdemona's obedience to Othello, it also provides him a situation in which his doubts about her faithfulness are founded. After their marriage has been made public, Desdemona quickly becomes associated as another piece of Othello's property. Her identity is linked to Othello and his perceptions of her, which slowly makes her vulnerable to whatever interpretations he forms of her. When the council parts ways one senator says to Othello "Adieu, brave Moor; use Desdemona well" (1.3.292). This implies once again Desdemona's status as a possession for Othello to use. Now that their marriage has been accepted by the council, she becomes another thing to be shipped to Othello with the other items they will send with him. Furthermore, it is notable that even at this moment of acceptance a seed of doubt is placed before Othello as Brabantio warns

him, “she has deceived her father and may thee” (1.3.293-4). This quote speaks to the inherent distrust in women that is present throughout the play. No matter how obedient Desdemona is there is a constant fear of deception from her that can not be dismantled. While Desdemona does not end up deceiving him, Othello’s unproven fear of her unfaithfulness allows him to believe her disobedient and turn against her. At the moment in which their marriage has been recognized and accepted, Othello is reminded that Desdemona is a possession for his use expected to adhere to his authority. Before their marriage has truly began Desdemona’s inferiority and implied deceitfulness has already been established. By going behind Brabantio’s back, Desdemona has provided validation for Othello’s authority over her, as well as distrust in her.

Othello immediately establishes his authority saying to Iago, “my Desdemona must I leave to thee...let thy wife attend on her...Come, Desdemona, I have but an hour / Of love, of worldly matter and direction” (1.3.296-300). Honigmann points out Othello does not consult Desdemona on this arrangement or give her a chance to dispute it (158). Rather he mandates that she will be under Iago’s charge and that Emilia, who has not yet been introduced, will be attending on her for the first time. Additionally, while Honigmann focuses on his authority over Desdemona, Othello also subjugates Emilia without her consent to be Desdemona’s attendee, assuming her obedience due to his rank and the societal expectations of women’s obedience. Furthermore, Othello notes he has an hour of direction to spend with Desdemona, in which he is the one in control. This allows his speech to be framed with terms implying that he is and will continue to be the one in charge and giving her instructions to adhere to.

In spite of this, Desdemona does not immediately become completely submissive and still holds some self-assurance. When Cassio first applies to her for help she responds, “[Othello’s] bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift” (3.3.24). In this instance Desdemona feels secure enough in her own power to be able to convince Othello to be the one to bend to her will. She even places herself in a position of power as a teacher instructing and giving counsel to a student. However, this moment will begin to prey on Othello’s insecurities about her faithfulness, and she places her marriage and self at risk to his jealousy. By exerting her confidence, she questions Othello’s earlier decree against Cassio, allowing the lies about her lack of obedience to take hold of him later on.

Desdemona continues showing a sense of management by likening herself to a trainer and Othello to the tamed hawk. Desdemona uses this metaphor for training hawks to make them obedient saying, “I’ll watch him tame and talk him out of patience” (3.3.23). She sets herself in the role of the trainer and Othello as the hawk who is being deprived of sleep in order to learn obedience (Honigmann 214). Additionally, she places herself in a position of power over Othello by likening him to a beast over which she holds the authority, of his actions. Earlier in the play Othello also implies a similar reference to falconry when he says, “Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness / my speculative and offices instrument” (1.3.270-1). The diction he uses not only alludes to the blindness of the god of love, but also to the practice of falconry in which hawks were trained by having their eyes “seeled” or hooded to block their sight (Honigmann 156). Ironically, Othello uses this allusion to illustrate the way in which he claims he will not be governed by love against his duty. This early reference is in direct opposition to

Desdemona's later hawking allusion in which she places Othello in the role of being governed by his lover. Once again, she places herself in the traditionally masculine position, breaking the status quo, but ultimately endangering her relationship through her confidence. It is impossible for Desdemona to be both obedient to Othello while also mastering him. By doing this, she is violating the due submission she is supposed to show towards her husband, adding more substance to Othello's jealous ideas of her unfaithfulness.

Later on in the same scene of the play, Othello also makes a reference in which Desdemona is the one cast in the role of the hawk. In his metaphor, Othello subverts the earlier image of a governed hawk to that of a wild one, indicating the growing distrust he feels for Desdemona. As Othello's jealousy begins to take hold he says, "if I do prove her haggard, / though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings, / I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind / to prey at fortune" (3.3.264-7). This metaphor is full of imagery of a wild and untamable Desdemona whom Othello is unable to contain. At this point, when Othello was being likened to the hawk, he was blinded and being controlled, whereas Desdemona is seen as uncontrollable. While this illustrates her ability to demonstrate her independence, ultimately it is a fault against her lack of obedience to her husband. This leads to Othello deciding to let her "go to ruin" and "fend for herself...as fortune wills" (Honigmann 229). This initial reaction of Othello's does begin to develop the distrustful distance Othello feels for Desdemona and ultimately his downward spiral towards his murderous intent.

Desdemona's idea of an equal status to Othello continues as she attempts to argue on Cassio's behalf, which only serves to further put her wifely obedience to Othello in a doubtful position in his mind. As Desdemona continues to argue for Cassio's reinstatement she says, "Othello, I wonder in my soul / what you would ask me that I should deny / or stand so mamm'ring on" (3.3.68-70). By saying this it seems as if Desdemona is working off the assumption that the two of them are in a shared state of power. Desdemona is attempting to make the point that she would do anything for Othello, therefore he should do anything for her. However, rather than demonstrating an equal partnership, this statement seems to highlight Desdemona's naivety instead. She has created an illusion of equality between herself and her husband, when in reality Desdemona is expected to comply while Othello is not. Furthermore, the statement itself is still in the vein of obedience, as she can not imagine anything in which she would deny her husband. This continues when she parts from Othello saying, "Be as your fancies teach you: / Whate'er you be, I am obedient" (3.3.88-9). While this comment may hold a slightly sarcastic implication towards Othello, ultimately it still places Desdemona as inferior. By implying a mocking tone it even insinuates that Othello is not obedient to her, and ultimately that he does not really need to be. Additionally, it indicates that Desdemona is obedient as well and even places some value in being so. While Desdemona is attempting to paint compliance as an amicable trait, it only really applies to her while her husband may acceptably function outside of obedience. Through all this, Desdemona has placed herself in an impractical situation of trying to be equal to Othello while also showing him her due obedience. This contradiction between Desdemona's

subservience and equality to Othello, while in her own viewpoint faultless, furthers the mirage Iago uses to convince Othello of her untrustworthiness.

The question of Desdemona's obedience or lack thereof becomes more prevalent as Iago is able to trick Othello into greater jealousy. Unlike earlier in the play when Desdemona was able to work the Senate in her favor, she is completely unaware of Iago's vendetta against her, leaving her vulnerable to his slandering. After Iago has suggested Desdemona's infidelity, Othello laments to himself, "O curse of marriage / That we can call these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites" (3.3.272-4). In this quote Othello refers to the fact that women are the property of their husbands. However, there is still a latent fear that women cannot be trusted, even though they are supposed to be compliant. Iago himself even submits to his own fears about the rumors of Emilia's infidelity saying, "I know not if't be true, / but I for mere suspicion in that kind / will do as if for surety" (1.3.387-9). Despite the obedience and faithfulness Emilia shows towards Iago, he assumes her disloyalty as a sure thing. This fear about women's treacherous natures allows Iago's lies and deceptions against Desdemona to prey on Othello's unrealized uneasiness without any actual proof against her. Just as earlier in the play when Brabantio struggled with the expectations of a daughter being obedient yet unable to do so, Othello faces this same issue with his wife. Having the knowledge that Desdemona did in fact fail to meet the dutiful expectations she owed to Brabantio enhances his fears she will do the same to him. This becomes a major conflict for Desdemona since she is beholden to Othello, yet he believes her to be obedient less and less from this point forward in the play. Furthermore, as Othello begins to find

Desdemona more dishonest, she eventually loses her self-confident voice and becomes more submissive to him.

As the play progresses, Desdemona seems to have little control of her perception in the eyes of Othello. When she does speak up or champion Cassio's reinstatement it only serves as proof of her supposed infidelity, and when she is meek it works to make her seem all the more deceptive and treacherous. Towards the end of the play as Othello has been convinced of her infidelity and lashes out, Desdemona becomes more unsure and says, "I hope my noble lord esteems me honest" (4.2.66). The clever jests and mutual trust Desdemona shared with Othello have been replaced with timid and short replies. Othello himself becomes very antagonistic towards Desdemona saying she as honest as a, "weed / who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet...would thou hadst ne'er / been born!" (4.2.67-70). Othello's comment verifies his belief in her deceptive nature likening Desdemona to a weed trying to pass itself off as a flower, which turns into an emotional outburst against her life.

Desdemona becomes stuck in a losing situation as all her attempts to placate Othello only causes his jealousy and abuse towards her to increase. When Iago first is able to work him into a state of jealousy, Othello threatens to tear Desdemona to pieces and says "damn her, lewd minx" and plans to find "swift means of death / for the fair devil" (3.3.478-81). Othello immediately believes the worst of his wife as well as has an immediately violent reaction to an unfounded rumor. So far, Desdemona herself has done nothing indicative of being unfaithful to Othello; rather it is only Iago's lies and his own lack of trust in her to cause this reaction. Once again, it seems as if the double standard

on the nature of women places Desdemona in an impossible situation. Whether Desdemona is being outspoken or docile, both attitudes provoke an extremely violent reaction from Othello due to his uncertainty to correctly interpret her actions.

When Iago is able to successfully stage a conversation in which Cassio appears to be talking about his affair with Desdemona, Othello becomes caught between these contradictory images of her as innocent and guilty. In response Othello says, “Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned...O, / the world hath not a sweeter creature: she might lie by / an emperor’s side and command him tasks” (4.1.178-82). On the one hand, Othello holds murderous intent and, on the other, praises her as sweet and enticing. It is an interesting description because he claims she holds enough power to command an emperor to her will, when she has been unsuccessful and only agitated Othello with her attempts to win her arguments for Cassio. This is another instance in which it seems to illustrate the constant opposition Desdemona faces of being outspoken or more obedient. This is also echoed when he says, “Hang her, I do but say what she is...she will sing the savageness out of a bear!” (4.1.184-6). Once again, Othello is battling with the side of obedience he knows of Desdemona versus the side of deception Iago has convinced him to believe. This is also ironic as she has been unintentionally fostering a savageness in Othello as he becomes much more violent and angry with her rather than eliminating it. This back and forth between trust and doubt has been a constant issue regarding Desdemona since the beginning of the play. Since first establishing her deception of Brabantio, it has been reiterated throughout the play that “she did deceive her father” and therefore the obedience she shows to the men is uncertain (3.3.208).

As Othello's doubts about Desdemona grow so do his violent tendencies towards her, quite literally at times beating or harassing her into submissive behavior. When Lodovico arrives, he inadvertently provokes Othello when Desdemona answers his inquiries about Othello's division from Cassio. Throughout the scene, Othello answers with cryptic and increasingly antagonized responses saying, "I am glad...to see you mad....Devil!" before losing his composure and finally striking Desdemona (4.1.237-9). Throughout this exchange a confused Desdemona often responds to each of Othello's remarks with a questioning "My lord?" (4.1.227). While it is proper for wives to call their husbands my lord, it is as if they are saying "my master" as they are acknowledging their superiority. In this instance Desdemona tries to appease Othello's anger as she loses her voice and can only defer to his control. Furthermore, by striking her within the presence of onlookers, including her cousin, he has publicly humiliated and degraded her even though she was obedient and yielding to him. Despite Desdemona's adherence to wifely duties it is still not enough to protect her from Othello's insecurity about her faithfulness.

While Desdemona comments she does not deserve such treatment, she does not make a scene of protestation and adheres to Othello's demand to leave. After doing so Lodovico remarks, "truly, an obedient lady. / I de beseech your lordship, call her back" (4.1.247-8). Lodovico recognizes and even admires Desdemona's obedience in this moment and finds this to be a good demonstration of exhibiting her wifely duty towards Othello. However, when Othello calls her back he instead mocks Lodovico's statement saying "she can turn, and turn, and yet go on / And turn again...and she's obedient: as you say, obedient, / Very obedient" (4.1.253-6). As Honigmann points out, the repetitive

use of “turn” implies his believed fickleness in her and a “turn i’th’ bed” suggests her duplicity and unfaithfulness through her affair with Cassio. Othello also corrupts Lodovico’s meaning of Desdemona’s obedience to being sexually compliant as well. In Othello’s misconceived viewpoint, Desdemona has failed in her duty to be amenable and faithful to him, therefore he twists the implications of her description. DusiBerre makes the argument in her book that Desdemona’s obedience in this scene actually shows some defiance against Othello. She claims Desdemona’s “submission passes judgement on him...her behaviour is independent of her husband’s judgement of her” (DusiBerre 91). However, earlier in the play Desdemona was able to and did stand up for herself both in seriousness and in jest. While it is suggested that the unkindness that Othello shows cannot taint her character, therefore she does not react, it is slightly out of line with her earlier actions. Rather, the more that Othello seems to scorn her, the more she loses her confidence in their relationship and herself. Overall, she bears this berating in silence and leaves when dismissed again, becoming more pliant to Othello’s commands and insults. By doing this, Desdemona begins to retreat into her obedience in the hopes of placating Othello but it only has the opposite effect, setting her up for her eventual failure.

#### Desdemona’s Companionship With Emilia

As Desdemona progressively loses her relationship with Othello, she grows in companionship with Emilia, who acts somewhat as a foil to her character throughout the play. At the start of the play, Desdemona has a slightly more outspoken nature and feels on an equal footing and even questions Othello at times, while Emilia is generally more unquestioning and does Iago’s bidding. By the end of the play, their roles switch as

Emilia openly defies her husband and Desdemona is the one showing a dutiful devotion to her husband. This switch between the two women further illustrates that the obedience both of them show to their husbands ends up providing no protection. The first time that they are seen interacting with each other is as Iago insults his wife and women in general. In this scene Emilia is generally quiet, slightly protesting against his claims, yet it is Desdemona who stands up for her, sparring with Iago and saying, “do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy / husband” (2.1.162-3). This advice is the opposite of how the women in the play are portrayed as supposed to be acting regarding their husbands. Even though Desdemona is protesting somewhat in jest she still has the self-confidence to feel secure in arguing with Iago about women’s actions and even sexual implications. Emilia is generally overshadowed in this scene, playing the part of the obedient wife and being more submissive to Iago’s sexist remarks. Despite Emilia’s submissive nature throughout the text to Iago, it still is not enough to protect her in the end when she is placed in the impossible situation of choosing her obedience to her husband or her friend.

Later on, it is revealed that Iago has instructed Emilia to steal the handkerchief that Othello gave to Desdemona as a token of his love. During her short soliloquy she says, “but [Desdemona] so loves the token...I’ll have the work taken out / And give’t Iago: what he will do with it / Heaven knows, not I, / I nothing, but to please his fantasy” (3.3.295-303). Emilia wrestles with loyalty to her friend and to her husband in this instance and in the end favors Iago. While Emilia talks about copying the embroidery and then giving the handkerchief to Iago, ultimately she ends up immediately turning it over to him. Within the confines of their patriarchal society Emilia appears to make the

right choice in showing her principal obedience to her husband. This does not grant her any more favor with Iago though, making her obedience unrewarding to herself and ending up placing Desdemona in more danger. Granted, it is implied that she does not know Iago's darker schemes, but she still chooses to knowingly cause her friend some grief by stealing a prized possession of hers. Navy also notes in her book that this is the only soliloquy by a woman in this play, and it ends with a more oppressed and obedient version of Emilia (108). It is unclear what exactly Emilia's motives are, but it is apparent that she chooses to follow the traditional role of pleasing her husband's fancy rather than assisting Desdemona. However, it is still clear that a friendship has developed between the two women since she hesitates, knowing Desdemona cherishes the handkerchief. She does even petition to have him return it to her, "if it be not for some purpose of import... poor lady, she'll run mad / When she shall lack it" (3.3.320-2). Though she attempts to find Iago's means, she is easily dissuaded without any answers to his intents and leaves at his command to stay out of it. Even though she is uneasy with the arrangement, she still carries out her husband's bidding. Emilia is placed in the unfortunate situation of being caught between a loyalty towards Desdemona and Iago and chooses to remain obedient to Iago.

At this point in the story Emilia is still more beholden to Iago, but there is a growing fondness between herself and Desdemona that continues to strengthen. After Othello makes his first jealous confrontation with Desdemona about the lost handkerchief, Emilia counsels, "'Tis not a year or two shows us a man. / They are all but stomachs, and we all but food: / They eat us hungerly, and when they are full / They belch

us” (3.4.104-7). This is the first time that Emilia speaks more aggressively about the relationship between men and women. She is both comforting and warning Desdemona by blaming Othello’s behavior on the nature of men rather than a fault of hers. This is also the first moment of outspokenness about the role of women being at the mercy of men to grind up their wives and spit them out however they see fit. From this point forward in the play, the two women’s relationships with men seem to flip. Desdemona begins to appear more naive about marriage and yields to Othello while Emilia begins to seem more worldly in her knowledge and critical against Iago. Despite their different approaches, neither woman is able to successfully defend themselves from their husband’s vengeance. She again stands up for Desdemona later against the claims of her unfaithfulness and laments, “hath she forsook so many noble matches, / Her father, and her country, and her friends / To be called whore” (4.2.126-8). Dusinberre notes in her book that the insult of “whore” holds the connotations of lower class, and by calling Desdemona such a name, Othello is “casting aspersions on her morals” and degrading her societal standing (52). This makes Emilia indignant not only at the accusation, but at all that Desdemona has given up for a man who is mistreating and besmirching her name. She recognizes the unfairness of Desdemona’s situation in which she has chosen Othello over her father and country, yet he still questions her devotion, prompting Emilia to become more outspoken in her defense.

Towards the end of the play, Desdemona seeks council about marital relationships and women’s unfaithfulness, exposing herself with an innocent naivety whereas Emilia is more pragmatic and blunt. When Desdemona expresses the thought that she does not

believe a woman would be unfaithful for anything Emilia responds, “by my troth, I think I should...for / all the whole world? Uds pity, who would not make / her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I / should venture purgatory for’t” (4.3.70-6). Emilia is quick to answer that of course there are unfaithful women and that with the right circumstances even she would prove unfaithful for something so great as the whole world. Emilia’s point seems to highlight the ridiculous nature of expectations on women to be so perfect in regards to their husbands. Emilia has a better understanding of women’s roles in the world which then gives her “a clearer knowledge of the way she is deprived of rights in that world” (Navy 88). Though Navy’s interpretation of Emilia is able to illustrate Emilia’s knowledge of her world, it fails to note the way in which she tries to subvert this knowledge to her benefit in her guidance of Desdemona. In this particular hypothetical situation, she argues it would actually be a greater injury to her husband not to make him a cuckold if the outcome would profit him. In other words, she is attempting to advise Desdemona that obedience is not always the best answer. This shows the submission that Desdemona’s character has undergone as she has gone from a daughter revolting from her father’s rule, to a wife shocked a woman could ever be disobedient to her husband.

In this scene, Desdemona is embodying the ideal wife in that she cannot even contemplate being unfaithful while Emilia looks at the situation in a more practical matter. As Desdemona continues to protest there are no such women, Emilia goes even a step farther saying, “but I do think it is their husbands’ faults / If wives do fall...Let husbands know / their wives have sense like them...the ills we do, their ills instruct us

so” (4.3.85-102). Emilia’s diction of “instructing” women recalls Desdemona’s earlier metaphor in which Desdemona was the teacher. As the play has progressed, it is Emilia who is now instructing Desdemona as she becomes more submissive. Additionally, Emilia is not only defending women, but placing the blame on men, claiming their mistreatment is what leads to unfaithful wives. She takes the stance that men are really no different than women and have the same urges, therefore making it unfair to be punished or slandered for the same action purely because of their sex. Emilia is disputing the judgement against women that if they were to lose their purity, it becomes irrecoverable for a woman, therefore making them damaged goods (Dusinberre 55). Dusinberre’s point further applies not just to women’s impurity, but in the case of Desdemona, the rumor and belief of the loss of purity itself is just as damaging as its actual loss. This only furthers Emilia’s point about the harsh standards women are forced to follow in comparison to the lack of judgement against men. At this point, Emilia is the only character to have so openly questioned the standards placed on women to be compliant and subject to ridicule for their mistakes. While she has grown more vocal in support of her independence, Desdemona responds with the hope she will be able to learn to avoid bad behavior. By the end of the play, the two have shifted in their marital relationships, setting up Desdemona as innocent and obedient and Emilia as savvy and independent. Despite these changes in their temperament, both women are still forced to work within divided duties of obedience in which they both end up in fatal conditions.

#### Desdemona’s Death

In the final act of the play, Othello has decided to go through with his plan to murder Desdemona for her unfaithfulness. As Othello is preparing himself, he uses a metaphor saying, “put out the light, and then put out the light” (5.2.7). This image is also reminiscent of the first act of the play as Brabantio calls out “give me a taper...light, I say, light” when he learns of Desdemona’s disappearance (1.1.142). Just as Brabantio lost Desdemona with a lack of knowledge where the light was, Othello will now lose her by putting it out himself. At this point, Othello has taken over Brabantio’s situation; therefore, despite Desdemona’s obedience to Othello, her earlier betrayal against Brabantio seems to parallel her supposed current duplicity. Throughout their confrontation, Desdemona tries to plead and appeal to Othello about her innocence, but Othello either refuses to listen to her or misconstrues her actions. After he attacks her, she laments, “O falsely, falsely murdered...a guiltless death I die” (5.2.115-121). At this moment, Desdemona recognizes the great wrong that has been done to her and has the opportunity to revenge herself upon her murderer. However, rather than confess Othello’s crimes, she answer Emilia’s inquiry with “nobody. I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord- O, farewell” (5.2.123-4). Instead of telling the truth or getting retribution for Othello, she chooses rather to protect him and place the blame on herself. Furthermore, her last words are an attempt to place herself in the well wishes of Othello; one final act of submission to the man that murdered her. This final act does cast Desdemona in an epitome of innocence by protecting Othello even at her own cost, yet ultimately there is little gained from her self-sacrifice. While it may be interpreted as a divine moment of selflessness, in reality Desdemona has been made a victim by a society

obsessed with knowing about and controlling her, especially sexually (Navy 119). Navy's interpretation can be furthered as not only has Desdemona been victimized by the men, but her own retreat into obedience has caused her to lose the former self-confidence. This loss of conviction, which had enabled her to escape from the Senate earlier, finds her vulnerable to Othello's murderous jealousy enabling her demise.

This final act of protection is immediately eliminated as Othello confesses his crime and even insults her for lying. Emilia then comes to her defense, "O, the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil!...Thou dost belie her, and thou art a devil...O, she was heavenly true!" (5.2.128-133). With the demise of Desdemona, Emilia then finds the power to guard her reputation and speak up against Othello as the true wrongdoer. She repeatedly calls him a devil, emphasizing an imagery that continues to dehumanize Othello. She even goes so far as to call their marriage a "filthy bargain" and tells Othello he was unworthy to have her (5.2.153). When Othello even draws his sword on her, she stands firm and refuses to be silent about his transgression against Desdemona. Emilia continues to show her independence when she refuses to listen to Iago's commands for silence saying, "I will not charm my tongue, I am bound to speak... 'Tis proper I obey him-but not now" (5.2.180-94). Emilia recognizes the societal propriety to obey her husband but instead refuses to do so and favors her companionship with Desdemona instead. This is another instance in which a woman is forced to choose between her divided duties, yet despite Emilia's choice to choose independence from her husband in favor of her friend, eventually the outcome is the same as Desdemona's.

Furthermore, Emilia notes that she is “bound” to speak, creating a divided duty, much like Desdemona’s early in the play, in which she chooses to prioritize her friend over her husband. She has progressed from passively listening to Iago’s crude and insulting remarks and heeding his demands to saying, “I will speak as liberal as the north. / Let heaven and men and devils, let them all, / All, all cry shame against me, yet I’ll speak” (5.2.218-20). In her critique, Ziegler makes the claim that there is not a female heroine who explores their own feelings and motivations “making choices and taking actions that will affect others and shape the course of her own life and of the play” (96). Though Emilia does technically become a casualty of Iago’s, she does express her feelings earlier when counseling Desdemona as well as at the pivotal moment in the play in which she is the one to expose all the men’s villainy. Emilia’s death does not totally cast her in a subsidiary role; rather, she dies standing up for both her friend and herself against a roomful of judgmental men. Emilia makes the decision to be outspoken despite the societal confines of obedience she has been forced to work within. As she dies she claims that her soul finds bliss by speaking out the truth and her thoughts (5.2.248). Through her death, she is able to find a sense of triumph and purpose defying her husband, whereas Desdemona dies wronged by being obedient to hers.

Overall, the women in this play exhibit both moments of outspokenness and obedience within their relationships with each other and the men. However, both end up resulting in their demise at the hands of their husbands. As Dolan notes, “Desdemona’s diminution in the course of the play marks her inability to sustain her robust engagement with life in a culture which associates female agency with sin” (97). In addition to

Dolan's statement, even when Desdemona sacrifices her agency, she is still diminished under Othello's doubt and anger placing her in an impossible situation to be successful. On the other hand, Emilia is able to take an opposite course to Desdemona's innocent submission yet, despite her moment of independent power, still ultimately dies at the hands of her husband as well. Throughout the play as a whole despite the women's actions and best intentions they are obliged to be obedient to multiple people, setting them up for an unavoidable failure.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE TAMING OF THE SHREW: DIMINISHED ROLES

Introduction

In Shakespeare's play *The Taming of The Shrew*, Katherina is presented as an obstacle that the men in her life must overcome. From the start of the play, she is already in contention with her father as well as her sister's suitors. Throughout the play, Katherina must learn that outspokenness in women is punished while obedience is either taught or beat into the women as the pinnacle of virtue for a wife. This becomes problematic as the play is framed primarily from the men's point of view, the majority of speeches in the play are dominated by men, and Katherina is often overshadowed. The play itself is framed by the deception of Christopher Sly in which it is a troupe of men that play out the story. Furthermore, even Sly's "wife" is played by the boy Bartholomew and is taught by the lord to act dutiful in order to successfully portray a wife. The role of a women is actually being supplanted by a boy and is followed by men acting out a play in which they reinforce the concept that virtuous women are obedient. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, the male characters dominate the play, force the women into diminished roles, and promote a compliant nature for them. The only way that woman are able to hold some semblance of power is through their submission to men and display of obedience as the ultimate womanly virtue.

Katherina's Opposition With Bianca

From the beginning of the play, it is clear that Bianca and Katherina are supposed to be opposites in many ways, particularly that Bianca is obedient and that Katherina is a shrew. Oftentimes, Bianca is even described or exalted through the insults being used to describe Katherina. Rovine points out that of the three suitors at the beginning of the play, each one finds himself attracted to Bianca's modest silence and repelled by Katherina's outspokenness (39). For example, at the start of the play Katherina is described as "stark mad or wonderful froward" with Bianca's silence exhibiting "maids' mild behaviour and sobriety" (1.1.69-71). The idea of a woman being silent is considered a virtue, casting Bianca in a pleasing light while depicting Katherina as a curst shrew for speaking her mind. As Rovine states, the suitors all prefer the "quiet, demure Bianca to the outspoken, and by their standards, unfeminine Kate" (40). Not only is Katherina unwanted because she is not obedient, but she is further shunned and considered unfeminine altogether for her shrewishness. By not exhibiting the desired qualities of a woman, Katherina becomes shunned and even detested for her actions, especially in comparison to Bianca. This comparison between the two sisters is continued throughout as the other male characters talk about them and their reputations with "the one as famous for a scolding tongue / as is the other for beauteous modesty" (1.2.253-4). Generally, when either sister is being described, it is by one of the male characters in the play, and they often focus on Katherina's lashing words whereas Bianca is praised for her silent beauty. By doing this, it reinforces the power men's perceptions and dictations hold over the proper behavior for women's actions.

Bianca also seems to embrace and promote herself in a role of obedience, behaving in the ideal way at the beginning of the play. Bianca even seems to point this out to Katherina when they are quarreling saying, “wrong me not, nor wrong yourself / to make a bondmaid and a slave of me...what you will command me will I do, / so well I know my duty to my elders” (2.1.2-7). Bianca tries to use her obedience to appeal to Katherina, stating that she will willingly follow her commands and does not need to be forced to do so. Bianca’s advocacy to be a dutiful woman only seems to serve to anger Katherina more who says, “her silence flouts me, and I’ll be revenged” (2.1.29). Once again, the image of a silent woman is mentioned in connection with the idea of a virtue of a model woman. In this case, Katherina recognizes this notion and finds Bianca’s embracing it to be vexing and contrasting to her own actions early in the play. This failure of Bianca’s obedience to protect her recalls the similar failure of Desdemona’s submissiveness. Just as Desdemona’s obedience served to provoke Othello, Bianca’s willing obedience only seems to provoke Katherina into torturing Bianca more.

Once Katherina is married off to Petruccio, a shift begins between the two sisters as Bianca displays more outspokenness and independence while Katherina is tamed in obedience to her husband. At the moment when Petruccio is about to meet Katherina for the first time, he alludes to the idea of posting banns to announce their intended marriage. Hodgdon says that, “banns are never posted for Katherina’s wedding, and Bianca elopes: neither conforms to customary practices” (203). This is an early indicator that even though Bianca is presented as the desired obedient woman, she actually ends up not being such a foil to Katherina’s independence. The initial difference comes from the fact that

Bianca is better able to outwardly exhibit her obedience, therefore adhering to the socially acceptable behavior at which Katherina fails. Bianca is still dominated by her father's command, but she is also able to maintain an outwardly compliant nature, therefore making her desirable compared to Katherina's outwardly aggressive and contradictory nature. In fact, both daughters have similar engagements, as Baptista sets up both marriages without the consent of his daughters. Surprisingly, Katherina is the daughter who accepts her father's arrangement and marries Petruccio while Bianca thwarts Baptista's plans and gets married to a different man without her father's consent.

Before Bianca elopes, she still exhibits signs earlier in the play that she echoes some of Katherina's independent behavior. When Hortensio and Lucentio quarrel with each other to set Bianca's study times she says, "you do me double wrong / to strive for that which resteth in my choice...I'll not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times / but learn my lessons as I please myself" (3.1.17-20). By declining to be ruled by either man, Bianca echoes Katherina's earlier statement in which she also declined to be told what to do on certain hours. Bianca further morphs into Katherina's character when Petruccio leaves with Katherina and Bianca then physically does place herself as a mock bride in the wedding reception.

Finally by the end of the play, their roles have totally switched in the eyes of everyone, including the men who previously preferred Bianca, as Katherina wins the obedience wager. As Pitt states, "there is a pleasant irony, in that the faultless Bianca exhibits alarmingly shrewish tendencies" (98). Katherina the shrew ends up being the most obedient to her husband whereas Bianca not only disobeys, but even chides her

husband as “the more fool you for laying on my duty” (5.2.135). The play ends the same way as it begins with the two sisters as opposites in their behaviors, yet their roles have switched to illustrate Katherina as the tamed obedient woman compared to Bianca’s candid independence. In the end, though, Katherina gives her speech of submission and Bianca ultimately still gets shamed by the final speech in the eyes of the men. Neither woman is able to successfully establish their independence outright and are forced into the semblance of an obedient woman. Similar to Desdemona, both Bianca and Katherina become stuck in an impossible situation between retaining their independence and being submissive to the men.

#### Katherina’s Courtship And Marriage With Petruccio

Throughout the courtship, marriage, and taming of Katherina, Petruccio largely commands the action, not only dominating Katherina in the play, but in the text itself as his lines and words overshadow her. By the end of the play, Katherina learns to use this overshadowing to her advantage, allowing her outward relationship with Petruccio to make her appear subordinate while retaining a subtle sense of control behind the facade. When Petruccio is first introduced to the idea of Katherina, he is undeterred by Hortensio’s warning of her shrewishness so long as she comes from a family that can provide wealth. When Hortensio states he would not marry her for “a mine of gold” Petruccio responds, “thou knows not gold’s effect...I will board her though she chide as loud / as thunder” (1.2.91-5). This language is indicative of a “naval metaphor for going aboard a hostile enemy vessel” (Hodgdon 181). Before the two have even met, Petruccio is already speaking with implications of preparing for a conflict. Yet, while the language

creates the image of a battle, it also creates a sense of Petruccio's thrill in taking on Katherina. Additionally, in this initial introduction of Petruccio's character, he already talks about Katherina more as a commodity for him to win rather than a person. Despite the warnings against her character, the main appeal of Katherina as a potential source of wealth seems to trump any disagreeable personality traits she has.

His primary interest in Katherina continues to seem questionable as he claims to hold no cares about her rumored unsavory behavior so long as the marriage proves financially beneficial for him. In his initial conversation with Baptista, Petruccio asks, "if I get your daughter's love, / What dowry shall I have with her to wife?" (2.1.118-9). As Petruccio gains Baptista's approval to woo Katherina he begins to make the arrangement sound more like a business transaction in which he wants to be assured of a profitable outcome. While Petruccio seems mostly inclined towards Katherina due to the promise of wealth, Hodgdon notes, "Petruccio's offer of all his lands and leases is an unusually generous response to Baptista's guarantee" (199). Though his initial reactions towards the potential marriage seem superficial, his return offer seems to imply that he is not completely motivated by a selfish greed. In fact, Petruccio is already financially stable since he has inherited his father's fortune; therefore even though he is motivated by Katherina's wealth, this offer implies he is not completely domineering. Throughout Petruccio's relationship with Katherina this sense of opposition is constantly present as he can be both abusive and caring towards her though the play.

Before meeting Katherina, Petruccio is informed by Hortensio and the other men of her unpleasantness and warned against pursuing her. After these multiple men have

advised him about Katherina's ill temper he replies, "I know she is an irksome brawling scold. / If that be all, masters, I hear no harm" (1.2.186-7). Petruccio acknowledges that Katherina is disagreeable to everyone yet seems not to care and finds her behavior unproblematic to him. Petruccio even somewhat discredits Gremio's negativity towards Katherina, claiming her complaints are nothing compared to such sounds as lion's roars or thunder. Petruccio discounts the men's warnings saying, "do you tell me of a woman's tongue, / that gives not half so great a blow to hear / As will a chestnut in a farmer's fire?" (1.2.206-8). Hodgdon argues that by listing such "fearsome noises" it deflates the image of a woman's voice to the small sound of a roasting chestnut (187). While this note recognizes that Petruccio's comparison makes women's voices inferior, it also implies a tolerance that the other men in the play lack for a woman's outspokenness. Petruccio may be belittling Katherina's antagonistic manner of speaking, but by doing so he humanizes her from the devil the other men make her out to be. While in *Othello* the idea of a devil is often associated with a dehumanized Othello because of his despised skin color, Katherina is demonized in a similar way because of her deplorable shrewishness. Petruccio points out that the other men hate and even fear Katherina's sharp speech, yet he sees it as a minor nuisance and an easily overcome obstacle. Once again, Petruccio seems to straddle between an expected dominance over Katherina and a patience for her blunt spirit. While initially Katherina does not seem to recognize Petruccio's subtle appreciation for her sharp witticisms, she later is able to understand she can retain this power so long as she does not overtly oppose him.

Petruccio is able to acknowledge that Katherina is a strong woman, but rather than trying to accept her shrewish ways, he sees it as an exciting challenge to tame her. He admits to his own determination in winning her saying, “I am as peremptory as she proud-minded...and so she yields to me, / for I am rough and woo not like a babe” (2.1.130-6). Petruccio’s statement seems to set the two up as equally opposing forces, yet in the end his determination and “rough” wooing will trump her proud-mindedness. Furthermore, when Petruccio hears of Katherina hitting Hortensio with the lute he says, “it is a lusty wench; / I love her ten times more than e’er I did. / O, how I long to have some chat with her” (2.1.158-160). Rather than fearing her wrath, Petruccio welcomes the opportunity to challenge her and even seems to admire her feistiness. He seems to eagerly anticipate her opposition, almost as if it will bring him more satisfaction to win a difficult woman to adhere to his will. Petruccio’s goal is to force Katherina into a diminished role from her spirited nature to be compliant to his will, and he admits that his methods will be rough in order to discipline her into becoming obedient.

When Petruccio and Katherina finally do meet and talk with each other they seem to be well matched in their wits and are equally capable of keeping up with the sparring wordplay. Hodgdon notes that throughout their first conversation, “one speaker [builds] on the words of the other, [creating] a sense of intimacy between the pair as they try on various verbal styles” (204). Not only is a sense of intimacy created, but it also illustrates an acceptable compatibility between Katherina and Petruccio. This initial connection establishes a way in which Katherina may retain her verbal dominance so long as she works with Petruccio rather than against him. Throughout the conversation, control of the

exchange seems to pass back and forth between the two, illustrating this intimacy as they are both comparable to the other's wit. This is the first time that Petruccio puts his wooing methods into action by using an offhand compliment saying, "twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen, / And now I find report a very liar, / For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous" (2.1.245-7). This is another way in which Petruccio exhibits a contradictory nature, in that even his wooing methods are purposefully conflicting.

Even though Petruccio seems to appreciate some of Katerina's independence, his overall goal is still to stifle her outspokenness and tame her. Hodgdon also remarks that throughout this conversation the two "throw around 'figures of speech'" and that "generally, Petruccio will overcome Katherina with rhetorical tricks" (182). Though Petruccio does indeed seem to prevail over Katherina, partially it seems as if he only does so once he sets "all this chat aside" to speak plainly about his intentions and the other men reenter the scene. When Petruccio and Katherina are playing off of each other's words, they seem evenly matched rather than Petruccio being able to overpower her. However, when he sets aside the witticisms he is able to conquer her when he openly claims:

I am born to tame you, Kate,

And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate

Conformable as other household Kates.

Here comes your father. Never make denial:

I must and will have Katherine to my wife. (2.1.278-82)

In a way, although Petruccio is able to slip in one last pun of wild Kate as a wildcat, he does not allow Katherina a chance to respond before he breaks their verbal banter into a plainer way of speaking. Although Petruccio may have been the first one to end their banter, Katherina still loses her voice when Baptista and the crowd of men return. Even though Katherina shows her displeasure at being promised to Petruccio, Baptista chooses to believe Petruccio's excuse that she is only pretending to be against the match. Baptista then officially allows the match while Katherina is reduced to silence for the rest of the scene. Overall, though there is an intimacy and connection established between Katherina and Petruccio, by the end of the scene Petruccio has dominated her not necessarily through his verbal sparring, but through her lack of voice with her father. At this point in the play, Katherina unsuccessfully attempts to retain her outwardly shrewish behavior against Petruccio, Baptista, and the other men which ends in her forced disappearance as the men overpower her.

Once the wedding day comes, Petruccio is late to arrive and makes a mockery of the ceremony, creating a sense of humiliation for Katherina and focus on him, which ultimately takes away from Katherina's ability to speak out. When Petruccio does not show up to the wedding, Katherina cries "now must the world point at poor Katherine / and say, 'Lo, there is mad Petruccio's wife, / If it would please him come and marry her'" (3.2.18-20). By not showing up Petruccio adds insult to injury as the man she does not even want to marry disgraces her, especially by appearing ridiculous when he does arrive and wounding her pride. The wedding procession itself also helps to change people's perceptions of Katherina because of Petruccio's outlandish actions. In particular,

Gremio changes saying, “he’s a devil, a very fiend...she’s a lamb, a dove, a fool, to him” (3.2. 154-6). By acting a fool himself, Petruccio is able to change some social perspectives on his wife by forcing her into the role of a patient wife who is stuck with an outlandish husband. As Rovine notes, it is as if Petruccio has taken on Katherina’s “railing role” himself, making Katherina appear quieter in comparison (40). Similar to the idea of Emilia instructing Desdemona, Petruccio becomes Katherina’s teacher instructing her how to modify her behavior. Gremio earlier in the play was harsh on Katherina, but by seeing her wed to Petruccio changed his perception of her, without her actually changing her harsh ways yet.

After the two are married, Katherina attempts to continue her independence by wanting to stay for their bridal dinner against Petruccio’s insistence on their departure. Katherina states, “I will not go today, / No, nor tomorrow-not till I please myself...I see a woman may be made a fool / if she had not a spirit to resist” (3.2.209-222). This statement becomes ironic as Petruccio, having earlier embarrassed her at their wedding, has already made her look slightly foolish; ultimately, she is unable to resist his command. When Petruccio denies her, he uses strong and possessive language saying:

I will be master of what is mine own.

She is my goods...my horse, my ox, my ass, my anything,

And here she stands. Touch her whoever dare,

I’ll bring mine action on the proudest he

That stops my way in Padua. (3.2.230-236)

Petruccio places Katherina in comparison to goods, making her a possession that he owns and is in control of. He also acts similar to Katherina's earlier abuse to Bianca, threatening physical harm to any that defy him. By doing this, Petruccio uses his actions to demonstrate the irrationality of Katherina's own violent behavior. Furthermore, not only is Petruccio objectifying her, but also further degrading her by dehumanizing her by comparing her to animals. When Katherina attempts to publicly retain her independence and defy Petruccio, he uses his harshest language and dehumanizes her into being inferior. Petruccio's possessive language forces Katherina to submit into acting in a social acceptable way by consenting to his will and demonstrating obedience.

Once Petruccio successfully gets Katherina to leave, the taming of her shrewishness into obedience really begins as the two go on a physical journey to Petruccio's home. Grumio recounts Katherina's sufferings on the voyage, "how she was bemoiled, how he left her with the horse unto her...how she prayed that never prayed before" (4.1.67-71). Though this taming method happens off scene, through Grumio's recounting it is clear that Katherina has undergone a significant physical strife as well as a mental one. At the end of Grumio's tale, Petruccio's steward Curtis comments, "by this reckoning he is more shrew than she" (4.1.76). Hodgdon points out that this post-wedding journey in which Petruccio is quarrelsome, angry, and violent is a prominent feature in folklore taming stories (244). Petruccio is utilizing a traditional method of taming by using a long hard journey to initially break Katherina's spirit until she is reliant and obedient to him. Furthermore, while Petruccio does receive some negative feedback for being so harsh on his wife, by the end of the play he is praised for breaking his wife

and acting “more shrew” than her. While Katherina is condemned for her shrewish behavior, it is accepted and later even praised for Petruccio as long as he was successfully able to beat the idea of obedience into her.

Petruccio later goes on in a soliloquy in which he likens his taming methods to that of training a hawk, again animalizing Katherina and emphasizing her obedience as a necessary task. Petruccio starts this extended metaphor of Katherina as a hawk by saying:

Thus have I politicly begun my reign...

And till she stoop she must not be full-gorged...

Another way I have to man my haggard,

To make her come and know her keeper's call

That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites

That bate, and beat, and will not be obedient (4.1.177-185).

Throughout the metaphor it is clear that Petruccio places himself in a position of power as he is “reigning” over Katherina in his place as her tamer. Just as Desdemona placed herself in a position of power as a way of creating authority over Othello, Petruccio uses the hawking metaphor as a way to illustrate his right to govern and control Katherina's behaviors and actions. Hodgdon notes that this method of withholding both food and sleep is in line with traditional wife taming tales and also parallels a falconer's means of training a hawk (251). She goes on to explain that “such strategies were a means not just of dominating a wild, rebellious creature (invariably identified as feminine) but also of distinguishing oneself from other men” (Hodgdon 251). This no doubt is a successful strategy that Petruccio uses as Katherina does indeed become obedient, and Petruccio is

held in high regard amongst the other men as they both praise and want to learn his ways. Bean notes that this metaphor works within the traditional confines of a taming tale as “in most of them the taming proceeds by the husbands’ reducing the wife psychologically to the status of an animal” (67).

While this is a successful method, on the other hand, Petruccio seems to exhibit a greater sense of caring towards Katherina as well than just psychologically dominating her. During his soliloquy he says:

All is done in revered care of her...  
 that is a way to kill a wife with kindness,  
 and thus I’ll curb her mad and headstrong humour.  
 He that knows better how to tame a shrew,  
 now let him speak; ’tis charity to show (4.1.193-200).

Since Petruccio is on his own when he delivers this speech, it seems a more genuine expression of feeling towards Katherina’s well being. Petruccio truly seems to believe that it would be for Katherina’s benefit to encompass an attitude of obedience, and suggests if there was a better method, he would utilize that instead. Petruccio’s reduction of Katherina to a hawk does dehumanize her, but it also simultaneously subtly teaches her how to properly retain her power. Katherina is allowed to retain her shrewd wit so long as she knows her “keeper’s call” and remains outwardly obedient to Petruccio. While this may demonstrate Petruccio’s care for Katherina, it is still problematic that he wants to change her into an obedient wife because that is what is held as the pinnacle of virtue for women.

As Petruccio goes forward with his taming methods he insists on being thanked and fully supported, even when saying outlandish things, as a show of her obedience to him becoming a part of her nature. On their journey back to Katherina's home, Petruccio tests her obedience to him by calling the sun the moon and stating that it should be to her whatever he calls it, due to his dominance as husband. After an initial hesitancy Katherina says:

Be it moon or sun or what you please,  
 And if you please to call it a rush-candle,  
 Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me...  
 What you will have it named, even that it is,  
 And so shall be so for Katherine (4.5.13-23)

At this point, it appears as if their relationship has reaching a turning point in which Katherina begins to accept Petruccio. The diction that Katherina uses here emphasizes that she will advocate what Petruccio "pleases" and "vows" she will hold the same views. She begins to understand that Petruccio's will needs to be outwardly paralleled and reflected in her own actions and mannerisms in social settings. While Katherina may not be completely obedient to Petruccio, she seems to understand the game better of needing to adhere to him to eventually get what she wants.

Immediately following this exchange, the two even work together in a collaborative sparring against Vincentio that is similar to their wordplay earlier in the play against each other. During this jesting, though, Hodgdon argues that Katherina, "goes one up on Petruccio...by bringing their relationship into play, Katherina inverts the

roles which Petruccio has so painstakingly set up. This small linguistic victory may be seen as a first sign that Katherina can give as well as take a taming” (281). Though Petruccio’s taming appears to be working and making Katherina an obedient wife, she also seems to understand that she can still be outspoken and witty so long as she does not oppose Petruccio. As Pitt notes, it is impossible to truly decipher Katherina’s true intentions or innermost thoughts because she is never given a soliloquy. Pitt acknowledges that, “it is true that her character does change radically during the course of the play, but we observe it externally, through the comments of other characters” (96). This suggests that Katherina’s later transformation at the end of the play may in fact be her going along with expectations and really being more ironic rather than genuine. Katherina is able to find power in choosing to accept a partnership with Petruccio in which she may retain her wit so long as publicly she appears to encompass the virtue of being an obedient wife.

#### Katherina’s Relationship With Baptista

Petruccio is able to admire Katherina’s verbal prowess and provide her the opportunity to retain her identity under the guise of outward obedience whereas Baptista only sees her as a burden. When Katherina is first seen in the play, she is introduced as an obstacle that her sister’s suitors must overcome and her father must get rid of. Baptista uses Bianca’s appeal in an attempt to pawn off his eldest daughter and states that either suitor holds his permission to court Katherina prompting her sarcastic remark, “I pray you, sir, is it your will / to make a stale of me amongst these mates?” (1.1.57-8). As Hodgdon’s points out, there are several implications in this response, with “stale”

working to mean “lower-class prostitute, laughing-stock, and stalemate in chess” (163). This initial response is the first time that Katherina speaks in the play, and it sets up her relationship with her father; including her disgust at being devalued by being used for his own means without regard to what she may desire. Furthermore, while it does demonstrate Katherina’s “shrewishness” through her sarcastic and biting nature, it also notes, despite her distaste, that Baptista’s will holds power over her. Though Katherina may lash out and deter the suitors courtship of her, she is still beholden to Baptista’s wishes and must put up with being offered to the suitors.

When the two do interact with each other, it often results in Baptista projecting a shrewish behavior onto her, or Katherina herself seeming to bitterly act out because she is not meeting the societal standards of a woman’s proper actions. For example, when Baptista catches Katherina attacking Bianca he scolds her, “how now, dame, whence grows this insolence...for shame, thou hilding of a devilish spirit / why dost thou wrong her that did ne’er wrong thee?” (2.1.23-4). While Katherina is the one instigating the fight, Baptista enters the scene calling her good for nothing baggage while also implying Bianca’s perfect behavior towards Katherina. Partially due to her father’s reactions, Katherina seems to hold a bitterness towards Bianca and continues to place herself in the role of victimizing Bianca in front of him. She accuses Baptista that Bianca “is your treasure, she must have a husband, / I must dance barefoot on her wedding day / and, for your love to her, lead apes in hell” (2.1.32-4). In Katherina’s view, Bianca is the clear favorite of Baptista, and she sees herself as being sacrificed for her sister’s benefit, causing her to lash out. Pitt comments that throughout the plot that Katherina’s, “interests

are secondary to those of her painfully insipid younger sister Bianca...there is the sense that despite her bravado [Katherina] is merely a pawn” (96). Despite this, Baptista has already proclaimed that Bianca cannot marry before Katherina. Therefore, Katherina’s supposition of being the unmarried elder sister is merely a disdainful scenario that will not come to fruition, and she is being made into a priority. Baptista sees himself as a victim due to Katherina’s actions saying, “was ever gentleman thus grieved as I” (2.1.37). Baptista finds the trouble of his daughters also reflecting upon his own standing and sees himself as a sufferer just as much as his daughters. These frustrations and misunderstood actions continue to perpetuate a vicious circle of disappointment as Baptista continues to berate his daughter and Katherina continues to openly disobey him and act out.

Their relationship continues to be complicated as Baptista himself generates a contradictory relationship with his daughters. When Petruccio comes to court Katherina, Baptista tells him, “when the special things is well obtained / that is, her love, for that is all in all” (2.1.127-8). This seems to be much more caring concerning Katherina’s happiness than before when he offered her up to Bianca’s suitors by actually being concerned with Petruccio winning her love. Even though he shows some worry about her feelings, Hodgdon points out that Baptista’s guarantee of a dowery of 20,000 crowns is a substantial amount of money, leaving the implication that he is willing to part with such an exorbitant amount in order to be rid of Katherina (199). Despite his initial terms that Petruccio must win her love, Baptista ends up giving his consent without regard to Katherina’s feelings to a complete stranger. This prompts a sarcastic remark from Katherina who says, “call you me daughter? Now I promise you / you have showed a

tender father regard / to wish me wed to one half lunatic” (2.1.288-90). Even at this comment, it seems that Baptista chooses to protect his own interests and allows the engagement to stand, even against Katherina’s opposition. While there are hints of Baptista’s care for Katherina, they generally are trumped by what is most beneficial for him.

Furthermore, this is opposite to Bianca who in turn is promised a jointure upon her marriage by the suitors, setting her up as a desirable bride, whereas Katherina needs to be made into a beneficial deal for the men to accept her. Despite his favoritism towards Bianca, Baptista still does ultimately decide upon her marriage and gives away her hand without her consent to the highest bidder saying, ‘on the Sunday following shall Bianca / be bride to you, if you make this assurance; ‘if not, to Signor Gremio” (2.1.397-9). In this situation, the idea of who Bianca would prefer is not even broached, and once again Baptista decides on a groom for his daughter based on monetary value. Whether it is Katherina or Bianca, his daughters end up being used by him as a commodity in which he judges them by how they can bring a profit.

Interestingly between the two daughters, Katherina the shrew actually ends up showing more obedience to Baptista than Bianca does. Even though she opposes the match, Katherina goes through with marrying Petruccio saying, “I must forsooth be forced / to give my hand opposed against my heart / unto a mad brain rudesby full of spleen” (3.2.8-10). Regardless of the fact that she does not love Petruccio and he acts with rude manners, she adheres to her father’s command of the engagement. When Katherina is being taken away, Baptista makes minimal protestations to having them stay.

Ultimately, he allows them to leave and then turns his attentions to Bianca, having her actually supplant the place of Katherina and play the part of the bride at the dinner.

Despite Bianca's outwardly appearing compliant nature, she ends up being far more rebellious and elopes without Baptista's permission. When Baptista finds that Bianca is married he says "have you married my / daughter without asking my good will?" (5.1.123-4). While not much is made of this scene, it seems that he is a little more concerned with the potential loss of his property and the promised dowry for Bianca rather than the loss of his daughter. Hodgdon notes that "early modern England equated such an elopement with abduction, property theft against the woman's father" (278).

Once again, the women in this play are placed in the position of being mere possessions for the men to pass around and profit from. Additionally, while Baptista demonstrates an obvious displeasure, it seems to be relatively quickly resolved with Vincentio's promise to fully pay the promised dowry. Being outspoken or obedient to Brabantio ends up holding little difference in the perception that Katherina and Bianca are ultimately still both treated as monetary commodities. However, by choosing to appear obedient, Bianca is able to subtly achieve her desired husband whereas Katherina's actual obedience forces her to marry Petruccio against her protestations. This illustrates the way in which the women are only allowed a semblance of power so long as they appear to conform to the virtue of being an obedient woman.

#### The Overall Perception Of Katherina

Throughout the entirety of the play, Katerina is often described, mostly by men, in derogatory or insulting ways, illustrating the importance the society places on an obedient

woman. Along with constantly comparing her to a “fiend” and “devil,” the male characters seem to see Katherina as a piece of Baptista’s goods that has become unwanted. A majority of the language revolves around derogatory allusions, such as comparing her to cattle and talking about her as a piece of unwanted property that, “is so curst and shrewd” that Baptista needs to “rid his hands of her” (1.1.179-80). When Hortensio tries to warn Petruccio away from courting Katherina he says:

Her only fault- and that is faults enough  
is that she is intolerable curst,  
and shrewd and froward so beyond all measure  
that, were my state far worsen than it is,

I would not wed her for a mine of gold (1.2.87-90).

In this quote, Hortensio does acknowledge that Katherina only has one fault, but the fact that she is blunt and quarrelsome rather than being docile and dutiful makes her absolutely undesirable. Furthermore, the notion of Katherina’s worth being linked to a monetary value is again alluded to. Hortensio’s statement then even devalues her further by stating any financial gain she would provide for a husband is not worth her lack of obedience. Once again, the idea is present that due to her shrewish nature, all of Katherina’s appealing qualities are irrelevant due to her “intolerably curst” nature.

The men in the play are the primary characters that pass judgment on Katherina, but the female characters, Bianca and the Widow, also contribute to the negative perception of Katherina’s attitude. When Petruccio marries Katherina while acting and dressing outlandishly, Bianca comments, “that being mad herself, she’s madly

mated” (3.2.245). Bianca holds the same opinion as the men in the play and, due to Katherina’s ill-temperament, finds Petruccio’s unorthodox behavior a fitting outcome. Bianca herself is assisting the men in forcing women into diminished roles by reasserting the men’s assessment of Katherina and illustrating her own compliant nature by doing so. Furthermore, the Widow also insults Katherina telling her, “your husband, being troubled with a shrew, / measures my husband’s sorrow by his woe: / and now you know my meaning” (5.2.29-31). Ironically, the Widow is relatively blunt herself, yet she earned that independence through her first marriage and judges Katherina based on her reputation as a shrew.

The final speech given by Katherina is problematic; since she is performing it in front of the entire cast of characters, the sincerity of her words cannot be proven. Katherina appears to have been truly tamed by Petruccio, chiding the other women that “thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / thy head, thy sovereign: one that cares for thee / and for thy maintenance” (5.2.152-4). This sentiment is repeatedly stated throughout the speech, illustrating either her newfound obedience to her husband or creating a sense of overkill and suggesting a hint of irony in her words. As Bean notes, there seem to be two ways in which her final speech is interpreted; either the speech is ironic and retains her “psychological independence from the ‘duped’ Petruccio” or “Kate is tamed through the reductive procedure of rollicking, old-fashioned farce” (65). While both interpretations can be argued, there seems to be a middle ground between Katherina being either totally submissive or sarcastic. Earlier in the play, Katherina decides to engage in wordplay again with Petruccio, and though she appears to be acting in

accordance with being dutiful to Petruccio, the two actually work together as partners. It is significant to note that Katherina's "sense of fun throughout the road scene becomes increasingly apparent" as she engages in puns and even the sexual humor of Vincentio being mocked as a woman along with Petruccio (Bean 73). Rather than fighting against him, Katherina begins to see how the two can be a match, so when she delivers her final speech of submission, it is another instance of her partnership, rather than submission.

Katherina seems to even be making fun of herself by saying "when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour, and not obedient to his honest will, / what is she but a foul contending rebel / and graceless traitor to her loving lord?" (5.2.163-6). By exhibiting those traits herself earlier in the play, it is as if now she can laugh at herself with the added benefit of placing Bianca and the Widow as the shrewish wives. Though some of the language is problematic, such as Katherina claiming that women are "bound to serve, love and obey," it actually works to point out that Katherina has finally understood how the game works; she can have her independence so long as she appears obedient (5.2.170). Katherina is able to learn to work within the confines of her marriage to Petruccio, holding on to her outspokenness so long as she demonstrates obedience to Petruccio. By the end of her speech, Petruccio and Katherina kiss, confirming a partnership, and Petruccio says to the other men, "we three are married, but you two are sped. / 'twas I won the wager, though you hit the white" (5.2.191-2). Though this sounds like a victory speech only for Petruccio, it really illustrates the partnership gained between him and Katherina. Of the three couples, only Petruccio and Katherina have

gained a true understanding of each other and have found a common ground in which their relationship will work together.

Overall, rather than Katherina being an obstacle that Petruccio is successfully able to overcome, she is able to learn and create a sense of partnership between them.

Katherina is able to mask her outspokenness in ways that portray her as an obedient wife and place her in a position of potential future happiness. In some versions the play ends though being once again framed by Christopher Sly as he says “I know now how to tame a shrew...to my wife presently, /and tame her, too, and if she anger me” (McDonald and Orlin 172). By ending on this note, it serves as a reminder that the whole play has been framed by men who now know how to proper tame and train their wives in the correct behavior. Even though Katherina is able to find a small semblance of control, she must do so by acting in the socially accepted way of wifely obedience. In the end, Katherina has still been forced into a diminished capacity of submission.

## CHAPTER 4

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING: DECEPTION AND DISTRUST

Introduction

In Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, the primary female character of Beatrice is outspoken and overall seems to achieve the most happiness when compared with a murdered Desdemona and a tamed Katherina. However, though she may hold a more advantageous ending, Beatrice still struggles with her independence and the social acceptance of a woman who is outspoken. In order for Beatrice to exhibit her independence she must do it through a comical or good-natured witticism in order not to be deemed a shrew. In the case of *Much Ado*, the obsession with women's sexual fidelity is established early on with a consistent presence of jokes or references to the idea of cuckolds and women's deceit. This becomes particularly important for Hero as she complies with the rules of obedience yet is still in danger from the men's interest in her sexual fidelity. In her short essay, Jeanne Addison Roberts notes that "almost without exception Shakespeare's 'unruly' women end up either ruled or dead. The great independent-minded female heroes of the comedies-Kate, Portia, Beatrice...after exercising their power subside happily into wives" (104). While Beatrice and Hero do reach happy ends, it is only achieved through linking themselves with men and having Hero's name restored. Within *Much Ado*, the notion of deception is prevalent throughout the story, often with the implication women use deception to hide their sexual infidelity.

Similar to Desdemona's plight in *Othello*, this inherent distrust of women leaves them defenseless against the ill-conceived prejudices of men despite their innocence with only their humor and wit or patience to preserve them.

### Beatrice and her relationship with Benedick

Throughout the play, there is a subtle contradiction in the way that both Beatrice and Benedick portray themselves as stringently against marriage with no interest in the opposite sex. However, both characters sometimes act, speak, or are portrayed by others in ways that suggest they are not completely honest in their anti-love claims. For example, towards the beginning of the play Beatrice herself jokes that Benedick had challenged the love god Cupid, which McEachern states "suggests that Benedick had either sought to enter the contest of love (i.e. become a lover), or, on the contrary, sought to fight against...the bird-like Love" (151). While it is possible that it does illustrate Benedick rejecting love, there is also the chance of becoming a lover by entering into Cupid's realm. In addition, this also illustrates that Beatrice is thinking about the notion of love and Benedick, and though the line may be delivered as a snide remark, she is imagining a situation in which Benedick is in the company of love.

This is not the only time that Beatrice insults Benedick, while also suggesting her suppressed interest in him. When the two are first seen together, Beatrice immediately casts an insult at Benedick saying "I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor / Benedick; nobody marks you" (1.1.110-11). While trying to hurt Benedick, Beatrice's claim that no one notices him ironically illustrates that Beatrice herself is paying attention and listening to him. This scene sparks the beginning of Beatrice's sparring with

Benedick and shapes the idea that the two are a match for one another with their compatible wit. Leonato himself describes their bickering as a kind of “merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. / They never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them” (1.1.58-9). Rather than interpreting their comments as actual insults, Leonato describes their bickering as a “merry war” in which both enjoy showing off.

Though the two of them often fight, they need each other in order to feed off of their comments in order to showcase their own wit. While Benedick insults Beatrice claiming he is well loved by all but “Lady Disdain,” he also claims not to love any women (1.1.112). Beatrice uses his remarks as an opportunity to insult him, calling this “a dear happiness to women” but also to agree with him saying, “I am of your humour for that: / I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow, than a man / swear he loves me” (1.1.122-6). Simultaneously, Beatrice is able to continue insulting Benedick while also likening herself to him and agreeing with his stance. Along with their comparable wit, this exchange shows their matching thought processes and demeanors. Furthermore, the end of this first encounter finishes as Benedick leaves and Beatrice says, “you always end with a jade’s trick; I know you / of old” (1.1.138-9). McEachern notes that this is the first implication that there is a history between the two and that “there is a suggestion...of such premature abdications on Benedick’s part” (158). This has greater implications to their relationship as a whole, particularly with the idea that Beatrice has become more sharp towards Benedick because of a past transgression against her. Furthermore, it allows for their later romance to seem more plausible if this past experience had made them both bitter, but potentially left them with unresolved true feeling for each other.

Later on in the play at the masked ball, the idea that Beatrice and Benedick not only had a former connection, but a possible romantic one at that is hinted at again. When Don Pedro says to Beatrice that she has lost Benedick she responds:

Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I  
gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one.  
Marry once before he won it of me with false dice;  
therefore your grace may well say I have lost it (2.1.255-8).

Beatrice's response suggests that the two were exchanging hearts with one another, suggesting a past disappointment that held a romantic element between the two of them. Additionally, Beatrice states that she gave "a double heart," implying that Benedick took not only his own heart, but hers as well with "false dice" connecting to the earlier implication that he had in some way previously transgressed against her. McEachern comments that this then "would make Benedick and Beatrice's history analogous to Claudio and Hero's in consisting of an initial setback followed by a reaffirmation" (McEachern 195).

Even as Benedick seems to rail against women as a whole or the idea of marriage in particular, he still seems to be obsessed with talking about the subject and exhibits a similar treatment of Beatrice. When Claudio asks about Hero he says to Benedick "is she not a modest young lady?" to which Benedick replies:

do you question me as an honest man should  
do, for my simple true judgement? Or would you have  
me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant

to their sex. (1.1.157-61)

At this point, Benedick is clearly talking about women in general and the idea of women's modesty itself being ridiculous. However, soon after he does bring Beatrice back into the conversation saying, "there's her cousin, an she were not / possessed with a fury, exceed her as much in beauty as / the first of May doth the last of December" (1.1.180-2). Benedick's comment does liken Beatrice to a tormenting creature, but he also couples it with a compliment that suggests he finds her a physically attractive, beautiful woman. Furthermore, as McEachern notes the harpy is an avenging Greek goddess that punishes wrong (161). Combining the earlier implication that Benedick may have failed Beatrice in some way earlier in their relationship, the image of the harpy may be the way he sees Beatrice punishing him for the wrongs he may have done to her in the past.

As Claudio begins to confess that he loves Hero, Benedick then brings up the issue that women in general are understood to be unfaithful, therefore undermining the sanctity of marriage. Benedick continues to rail against marriage claiming, "I will have a recheat winded in my / forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick" if he were to marry (1.1.225-6). This evokes a hunting imagery of blowing "on the (cuckold's) horn which will grow on Benedick's forehead if he marries" (McEachern 164). This is just one of the many times in which jokes or references to infidelity, specifically women's infidelity, are made and used as an excuse against their sex. Benedick refuses to "entrust [his] manhood to the unverifiable quantity of female chastity" suggesting that there is no easy way to secure or prove that women will stay faithful to one man (McEachern 164).

While this comment is not aimed at any specific women, it is an idea that is socially accepted and underlying throughout the whole play that Beatrice and Hero are forced to deal with.

Later on, Benedick then does become more specific in targeting Beatrice as an unsuitable partner. After Beatrice insults him at the ball, Benedick says “I would / not marry her though she were endowed with all that / Adam had left him before he transgressed” (2.1.229-31). Just as Beatrice did earlier in the play, Benedick now is the one who issues an insult while also imagining her as a marriage partner. In spite of his insult that he would not marry Beatrice even though she may possess some desirable qualities, he is still associating her with the idea of Paradise. Both Benedick and Beatrice behind their insults show a common interest for each other as a potential romantic partner. Furthermore, along with the allusion to Adam, Benedick also likens Beatrice to other famous female figures that paint her with shrewish characteristics. He calls her “Lady Tongue”, a harpy, and compares her to the goddess of discord Ate which joins her with “other female figure of dissent with misleadingly pleasant appearance” (McEachern 193). Once again, though on the surface his comments are meant to insult Beatrice, both the image of the harpy and the goddess “combines an alluring female appearance with danger” which once again has Benedick noticing Beatrice’s beauty (McEachern 194). Furthermore, while McEachern notes that these mythical figures also illustrate Beatrice’s beauty; by comparing her to such powerful creatures, Benedick then applies that power to Beatrice’s wit. It is when Beatrice turns her insults on Benedick, breaking the role of a

woman as submissive, that their relationship fails to acknowledge their affectionate feelings towards each other.

For her own part, Beatrice seems very aware of the customs in which she is supposed to be confined as a woman and resents them. When Leonato tells Beatrice that he wants to see her with a husband she responds, “would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered / with a piece of valiant dust? To make an / account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? (2.1.53-5). Beatrice resents the idea of being overmastered by a man, and as McEachern notes, “an early modern woman was supposed to acknowledge a husband as her master” (McEachern 180). Beatrice acknowledges the role she is supposed to play as a woman and objects to the idea that men are much more than the dust God supposedly made them from. While she is very outspoken and often criticizes the institution of marriage, “Beatrice’s primary identity is not as a shrew but as a woman whose wit is enjoyed by her family and friends...she has a sense of the expected power relations in marriage...and wants to avoid them” (Navy 79). Beatrice differs from Katherina in this way through the perception the other characters have of her. Her outspokenness is paired with an element of humor rather than violence, allowing her to have more positive quarrels with men. By the end of the play, though, this independence cannot last and power is restored as Beatrice and Benedick are coupled off despite both of their protestations. While Beatrice’s wit may be accepted more than Katherina’s, she still cannot end up happily unmarried but rather needs to be tied to the authority Benedick holds as a man.

While Beatrice and Benedick are set up as clashing forces to one another, it stems from the fact that they come from the opposing sex. Both Beatrice and Benedick are described as being of a merry disposition and when Beatrice is described as being rarely melancholy, McEachern notes this also likens her to be “like Benedick, to be either sanguine by nature...this marks her off from Kate the Shrew as less violent and more witty and amenable” (178). Beatrice shares the same general personality that Benedick does, as a merry and lively character that matches the other’s wit. Furthermore, Beatrice is one of the few women in Shakespeare’s play who is able to exhibit such wit without being in the disguise of a man. While Portia is able to stand in court and take the place of a man in *The Merchant of Venice*, she must do so disguised as one. Dusinger notes that this allows Benedick and Beatrice to “speak more alike...because Beatrice never looks like a man, so Shakespeare can afford to have her...talk and think like one (251). However, even though Beatrice is able to do this and become more compatible with Benedick, she is still prohibited from taking the same actions as a man, leaving her slightly subordinate to Benedick.

Though there are suggestions of a prior connection, the manipulation of Beatrice and Benedick’s courtship begins at the masked ball at the hands of Don Pedro. The plot begins when Don Pedro designates himself as match maker and says to Hero, “I will teach you how to humour your cousin / that she shall fall in love with Benedick...in despite of his quick wit and his / queasy stomach, [Benedick] shall fall in love with Beatrice” (1.2.351-5). The problem with Don Pedro’s statement is that he is the one who is the driving force behind initiating and manufacturing the idea of Benedick and Beatrice

as interested lovers. Despite both of their protestations, Don Pedro decides that the two are a match and plans to turn them against their own natures. For Stephen Greenblatt this is a signal that Beatrice and Benedick are “tricked into marriage against their hearts...that pressure finally prevails. Marriage is a social conspiracy” (Greenblatt 1412). While Don Pedro’s meddling does in fact generate the plot that will eventually bring Beatrice and Benedick together, both of them have already indicated a subtle preferment for the other as a partner. The conspirator’s subterfuge then enables Beatrice and Benedick to allow their buried feelings to come forth rather than their hearts to be totally tricked by social pressures into a forced marriage.

Overall, even though both Beatrice and Benedick protest against the opposing sex, they are actually very similar and complement each other as a couple. While Greenblatt seems to think that the two fall to the pressure placed on them by others to get married, both characters seem to be tricked not into loving, but tricked more into being honest with themselves. For example, during Benedick’s soliloquy, unprovoked by any other character, McEachern notes, “despite his professed disdain for marriage, Benedick apparently finds it difficult to lay the fascinating subject to rest, his criteria here recall Beatrice’s at 2.1.13-15” (McEachern 206). Both Beatrice and Benedick, even when out of all other company, continue to contemplate the idea of marriage under the guise of insulting it. McEachern’s note also points out that as both Benedick and Beatrice contemplate the criteria they would need in a partner their language is very similar.

The one problematic point in which Greenblatt’s argument applies is after Don Pedro and the men mislead Benedick and Beatrice has still not been tricked yet. Don

Pedro says, “let there be the / same net spread for her...the sport will be when / they hold one an opinion of another’s dotage, and no / such matter” (2.3.206-10). This does seem to speak to Greenblatt’s reservations that their love is an artifice, as even Don Pedro notes that it is of “no such matter”. In spite of that, in another soliloquy Benedick does talk about Beatrice’s qualities saying, “the lady is fair/ - ’tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous - / ’tis so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me....for I will be horribly / in love with her” (2.3.222-7). Though this soliloquy is inspired by overhearing the schemer’s praise of Beatrice, he contrives these opinions of Beatrice on his own to fit the list of qualifications he desires in a match. He even inverts his own words to suit his new purpose saying “when I / said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live / till I were married” (2.3.233-5).

In the scheme for both Beatrice and Benedick, the traps set by the tricksters are carried out with similar means in order to inspire love in the two. Both Benedick and Beatrice are portrayed in a similar way as prey that is being fished for, “much as Benedick’s gullers describe him as prey in the previous scene, Beatrice is imagined here as a fish about to be caught” (McEachern 221). And furthermore, McEachern notes that both are baited in the same way, “like Benedick’s gullers, Hero and Ursula solicit the intellectual vanity of their prey to the cause of loving” (McEachern 226). There is a slight difference, though, in the way the two are tricked in that for Benedick they focus more on Beatrice’s virtue whereas for Beatrice they focus on her prideful nature. In order to trick Benedick, they paint Beatrice positively saying, “she is an excellent sweet lady, and, out of all suspicion, / she is virtuous” as well as wise to where the Prince himself would have

her if she fancied him (2.3.157-8). The men focus on building up the character of Beatrice not only as desirable to other men, but more importantly that her virtue is intact. This speaks to the underlying fear of the men throughout the play that women's decency is rarely trusted while being greatly desired.

On the other hand, Hero and Ursula set up Beatrice to fall in their trap by likening Beatrice's actions "as coy and wild / as haggards of the rock" (3.1.35-6). Rather than the focus on Benedick's good graces, it is their commentary and judgement on Beatrice's actions that become a primary focus. When Ursula asks if Benedick is not good enough for Beatrice, Hero replies that he is but "Nature never framed a woman's heart / of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice. / Disdain and Scorn ride sparkling in her eyes... she cannot love, / nor take no shape nor project of affection, / she is so self-endear'd" (3.1.49-56). Hero attacks Beatrice's mannerisms, even using the imagery of Disdain, which recalls Benedick calling Beatrice Lady Disdain as well. Hero assaults Beatrice's pride by calling her self-centered and incapable of affection towards others in an attempt to shame her former coldness towards Benedick. This is similar to Bianca's assistance of the men in *The Taming of the Shrew* into forcing women into diminished roles through her harsh criticism of Katherina. Hero is making a similar move using the standards of women's obedience and patience in order to shame Beatrice into admitting her feelings for Benedick.

Hero and Ursula's tactic of making Beatrice out to be overtly scornful then allows Beatrice to feel ashamed that she is condemned with such a description. This prompts Beatrice's soliloquy in which she says:

contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu;

No glory lives behind the back of such.

And Benedick, love on, I will requite thee,

taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.

If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee. (3.1.109-13)

The first issue that Beatrice addresses is the way in which Hero has portrayed her and wishes to change the perception of herself. Furthermore, she is the one that brings up taming language about herself. This is slightly an inverse from the plot of other plays in that rather than being tamed by someone else, specifically a man, Beatrice sees herself as the one doing the taming. Rather than submitting to another's rule, she is the one taking up the challenge of managing herself. This allows Beatrice to hold on to more independent power compared to the brutal taming of Katherina in *Taming of the Shrew*. Overall, though, it is still problematic that Beatrice's shaming targets the idea that she must be tamed and change her nature or that her fidelity has to be beyond question with the men.

Throughout the play, women are subtly, and even outrightly, degraded or constantly questioned about their fidelity. Beatrice is the only one to note the unfair standards that place women as inferior to men and shows her frustration at the patriarchy. After Hero's slander, Beatrice goes on her rant of "O, that I were a man...O God, that I / were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace" (4.1.302-5). Again, this idea of male superiority is prevalent and that women are stuck in a submissive role is made implicit since Beatrice is rendered useless in a women's role. Beatrice's comment directly

addresses the lack of power she is forced to feel, simply because she does not have the same right as a man to challenge Claudio for his slander. Beatrice continues this tirade saying, “but manhood is melted into curtsies, valour into / compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, / and trim ones, too...I cannot be a man / with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving” (4.1.315-21). She laments the position that she has been put in simply by being a woman instead of a man. She compares the way in which men’s traits are diminished into what is acceptable behavior for a woman. Men are allowed to have valor, take action, and speak out while women are forced into silent curtsies and good manners. Beatrice realizes the plight of women that happens in each play as none of the female characters are able to successfully work on the same plane as the men, so they are stuck grieving or being diminished as women.

Beatrice’s speech becomes a crucial moment for Beatrice and Benedick’s relationship as it marks Benedick’s loyalties. At this point, Benedick must make a decision about his feelings for Beatrice in comparison with his relationship with Claudio and Don Pedro. When he decides to challenge Claudio on Beatrice’s behalf, this “switch of allegiance from the word of his male companions to a woman’s belief is a defining moment for Benedick” (McEachern 277). This seems to be one of the few times throughout all the plays in which a woman is able to affect the men in her life. However, despite this moment marking a positive progression for Beatrice and Benedick’s relationship, Beatrice is still powerless to affect any change for Hero and is forced to rely on Benedick.

At the play's end, Beatrice and Benedick are forced to finally come to terms outright about their feelings for each other. While they initially try to deny their affections, there is proof that the two really do love each other as Benedick says, "here's our own hands against our / hearts" (5.4.91-2). Taking the time to write down their affections for the other without the encouragement of anyone else provides legitimacy that their feelings for each other are real. Marianne Navy notes that at this time when Beatrice and Benedick are promising to join in marriage, "those who like can see hints that Beatrice is going to keep on talking and will not really have to make an account of her life to Benedick" (79). But, at this moment when it seems as if the two are on equal ground, Leonato ends their witticisms saying to Beatrice, "Peace! I will stop your mouth" followed by the stage direction that he hands her to Benedick (5.4.97). Leonato does indeed stop Beatrice's mouth as she has no more lines after this point. It also subtly acts as a reminder of the idea that women are supposed to be silent, especially to their husbands now she is with Benedick. Furthermore, the stage direction reinforces the idea of women as property that passes from father to husband. As McEachern notes "in handing Beatrice over to Benedick (as Leonato is entitled to do, being both her uncle and guardian) he will silence her merely by getting her a husband" (McEachern 316). While Beatrice's voice is taken over by Brabantio's, she still had more choice over her husband compared with Hero or Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*. However, despite choosing Benedick, Leonato ultimately still mandates the match, taking away some of that power of choice. Additionally, the play ends with Benedick saying, "Prince, thou are sad-get thee a wife, get thee a wife! / there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with

horn” (5.4.121-2). Despite the happy pairings, the underlying issues from the beginning of the play of women being subordinate and untrustworthy are still hinted at. First off, Benedick’s reference to a horn-tipped staff implies a cuckold joke, alluding to the idea of wives’ infidelity to their husbands. Secondly, the image also places women in a subordinate position to men as the walking staff for a man, putting women in their place as support for their husbands.

#### Hero’s relationship with Leonato and Claudio

The relationship between Hero and her father immediately starts off establishing her obedience and submission to his will. Leonato immediately and unquestioningly takes control of Hero’s love life saying, “I will acquaint my daughter withal, that / she may be the better prepared for an answer, if / peradventure this be true” (1.2.19-21). Before consulting Hero, Leonato has unilaterally decided that Hero will accept the Prince’s proposal and goes to make sure not of her feelings, but that she acts the correct way. Antonio also reiterates this idea that Hero must be ruled by her father, leaving Beatrice as the only one who tries to exert an independence for Hero. Beatrice concedes:

It is my cousin’s duty to make  
 curtsy, and say, ‘Father, as it please you.’ But yet for  
 all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else  
 make another curtsy, and say, ‘Father, as it please me’ (2.1.46-9).

Beatrice recognizes the fact that it is Hero’s duty to obey her father but tries to suggest there is another option for her if she does not like her suitor. While women were expected to obey their fathers, the women in Shakespeare’s plays such as “Portia, Viola, and

Beatrice are women set free from their fathers, and their voice is that of the adult world, where Hero is still a child” (Dusinberre 96). However, since it is Hero who is the subject, this moment of suggested independence is soon overpowered, and Leonato regains his control, reiterating his demand that Hero answer the Prince’s proposal in the proper way. Furthermore, Hero does not have any lines in this scene to show either a negative or even positive response to the idea of marrying Don Pedro. Beatrice’s comment then acts as a fleeting remark from the lone voice suggesting freedom for Hero’s choices which is quickly overruled by the men.

From the beginning of the play, Claudio and Hero’s relationship is prone to its own issues of trust as Claudio is easily deceived and swayed about his perceptions of her. Though Claudio seems infatuated, calling her “the sweetest lady that ever I looked on,” he desperately craves Don Pedro’s approval of her that she is a proper match (1.1.178). When Don Pedro does give his blessing, they note the criteria that makes her worthy includes her wealth and her honourable reputation. The concept of her decency is a prime issue as, “Claudio’s need for corroboration of Hero’s universal desirability will turn out to be closely coupled with fear of her faithlessness” (McEachern 160). While McEachern makes Claudio’s fears the focus, it is present throughout the play that women’s unfaithfulness is believed to be an innate vice not only for Hero specifically, but as a perception believed for women in general. This lack of faith is what enables the later shaming plot to be successful against Hero due to Claudio’s tendency to jump to negative conclusions about her.

Claudio's distrust is set up in the initial wooing of Hero as Claudio is swayed with no true evidence to think ill of Hero and of his friend. As Don Pedro plans to act as Claudio and woo Hero, "the scheme represents the first instance of several in the play where a man takes (or is thought to take) Claudio's place with respect to Hero" (McEachern 170). This interchangeability illustrates the general fear of a revolving number of men being able to either take the place of a woman's husband or having the ability to pass her off. This general social concept of women is definitely present within Claudio's insecurity and primes him to be immediately convinced of Don Pedro, and especially Hero's, betrayal of him. Furthermore, Claudio seems not to judge Don Pedro as harshly but focuses on Hero saying, "trust no agent; for Beauty is a witch / against whose charms faith melteth into blood" (2.1.164-5). Rather than placing the blame on Don Pedro, he likens Hero's beauty to witchcraft overpowering him rather than it being an outcome of Don Pedro's duplicity.

Additionally, Hero is set up as a commodity to be traded between the men as they decide her engagement for her. Borachio also emphasizes this as he "either mishears Don Pedro's plan, or renders in its most callous form by implying that Don Pedro will 'obtain' Hero and then transfer her to Claudio's ownership" (McEachern 176). The diction that Borachio uses highlights Hero's status as an object or a prize that Don Pedro can win and then bestow upon whomever he likes. In fact, his language is repeated by Leonato as he tells Claudio, "take of me my daughter, and with her / my fortunes. His grace hath made the match, and all / grace say amen to it" (2.1.277-9). By packaging Claudio's obtainment

of Hero with the obtainment of Leonato's fortunes, it combines the two together, creating the image of Hero as a possession.

### Hero's shaming and death

Earlier in the play, Leonato fears that Beatrice's sharp tongue will leave her without a husband. Dusinger explains that "defying one set of standards for women, wit inevitably suggests defiance of another-the witty woman is often accused of loose living...the assumption is that in women modesty and wit are incompatible" (227-8). Ironically in the case of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the exact opposite turns out to be true as the outspoken Beatrice is beyond reproof through the play while the silent and obedient Hero is the one accused of infidelity. Despite Hero's actions as an obedient and virtuous woman, she is still at the mercy of the men's perceptions and beliefs in women's innate infidelity.

In order to cause havoc, Don John and Borachio decide to target Hero and play off the fear of women being inconstant to slander her in the eyes of the men. With the staging of Hero's unfaithfulness, Borachio notes the plan has, "proof enough to misuse the prince, to vex / Claudio, to undo Hero and kill Leonato" (2.2.25-6). This list emphasizes the degree to which Borachio sees each person being affected by the plot, with Leonato suffering the worst fate. By making Leonato's fate the most extreme it emphasizes Leonato's power over Hero, "as if to underscore the degree to which the assault on Hero's honour is an attack on male identity, Borachio considers the effects of the slander to be more lethal to the aged Leonato than to his daughter or the others abused" (McEachern 202). Similar to *The Taming of the Shrew*, this outlook places the

men at the center of the issue rather than Hero who is the one being targeted for slander. Without realizing it Hero is forced to deal with the deception and cruelty the men plan against her without any defenses available to her.

Having Claudio fall so quickly into doubt about Hero early on sets up Don John's second attempt as likely to succeed without much resistance from Claudio. Claudio's insecurity is apparent when he says, "if I see anything tonight why I should not / marry her, tomorrow in the congregation where I / should wed, there will I shame her" which is then compounded by the idea of an overall male insecurity as Don Pedro joins in saying, "as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will / join with thee to disgrace her" (3.2.111-5). Without any actual proof, both Claudio and Don Pedro immediately are primed to believe that she is guilty. Claudio in particular has already plotted his revenge against her, underscoring his doubt about Hero's faithfulness.

When it comes time for the wedding to take place, Claudio's vindictiveness allows the ceremony to carry on, ensuring Hero will be slandered at the most embarrassing time. Continuing with the idea of Hero being a possession, Claudio says, "there, Leonato, take her back again. / Give not this rotten orange to your friend; / she's but the sign and semblance of her honour" (4.1.29-31). As McEachern notes, oranges had imagery associated with prostitution and deception, painting Hero as damaged goods that Leonato is trying to pawn off on Claudio (258). All of Claudio's issues surround the idea of Hero's honor, yet when he shames her, he also shames Leonato, as she belongs to him. Claudio uses the obedience and proper demeanor Hero exhibits and distorts her actions as

merely a “sign and semblance” of her honor, highlighting his belief in her inherent deception.

As Claudio continues to publicly humiliate Hero, his own conflicting emotions between interpreting her astonishment and his belief that she is guilty reflects on men’s conflicting conceptions of women as a whole. For example he says, “behold how like a maid she blushes here! / O, what authority and show of truth / can cunning sin cover itself withal...her blush is guiltiness, not modesty” (4.1.29-40). Hero is forced to suffer from Claudio’s belittlement of her character with only her own patience as a defense.

Ironically, all the signs of Hero’s innocence are interpreted as proof of her infidelity by Claudio. Similar to Othello’s interpretations of Desdemona, Claudio misconstrues Hero’s reactions due to his distrust in the ability of women to remain faithful. Later on, the Friar argues against Claudio that Hero’s blush does indeed reflect her innocent embarrassment instead of admitted guilt. McEachern notes that “Claudio and the Friar’s contrasting readings of Hero’s blush reflect its identity as a complex sign in Elizabethan moral physiognomy: index of shame and innocence alike” (258). The distrust in women is so ingrained in the men that “proof” of innocence and guilt are almost impossible to truly and clearly distinguish from each other, so Claudio chooses to believe the lies of another man over the protesting action of Hero.

Even though Hero is innocent, she is left alone and defenseless as the men gang up on her because she has no men left who are willing to stand up for her. Even Don Pedro feels “dishonored that have gone about / to link my dear friend to a common stale” (4.1.63-4). All the men that have gone about to make the connection between Hero

and Claudio abandon and slander her when she needs support the most. Even her father deserts her as Claudio invokes Leonato to use his power to make her answer him to which Leonato responds, “I charge thee do so, as thou art my child” (4.1.76). From this point onwards he no longer trusts Hero and instead listens to the unproven allegations that Claudio places on her. Leonato misinterprets Hero’s actions as well and, rather than protecting his own daughter, shuns her. In fact, Leonato’s reaction is indeed violent as he believes death is the deserved action for her shame saying:

Do not live, Hero; do not ope thine eyes!  
 For did I think thou wouldst not quickly die,  
 thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,  
 myself would on the rearward of reproaches  
 strike at thy life. (4.1.123-7)

Leonato unquestioningly believes in Hero’s guilt and that her shame should be so great as to prohibit her from recovering. Rather than trying to defend his daughter, it takes only the claims of Claudio for Leonato to not only turn on his daughter, but threaten to kill her himself should she dare to live with after being so publicly shamed for. This transforms into Leonato regretting not the implications on his daughter, but rather the implications on himself saying he wish he could claim that, “this shame derives itself from unknown loins. / But mine, and mine I love, and mine I praised, / and mine that I was proud on- mine so much / that I myself was to myself not mine” (4.1.135-8). It is ridiculously overt the amount of times that Leonato says “mine” and makes reference to himself in this lament. At this point though he speaking about Hero, Leonato’s thought are all about

himself and the reflection her action will have on him. He is so self-centered in this moment that Hero's ruin becomes his own.

Once the Friar claims that Hero is in fact innocent, he is able to convince the others to fake her death in order to restore her name and standing with Claudio and Don Pedro. As the Friar suggests they fake Hero's death, he describes an idea that Claudio will begin to imagine her "more moving, delicate and full of life, / into the eye and prospect of his soul / than when she lived indeed" (4.1.223-230). The Friar's goal is to kill Hero in an attempt to make her reborn as an even more exemplary maid for Claudio than she had been in their actual time spent together. By having her die at the shame of being wrongly slandered, she will appear to rise to a high level of glory in Claudio's eye, when in reality she is the same innocent woman as before. Through all the wrong that has been done to Hero the best advice that the Friar can then give her is, "die to live. This wedding day / perhaps is but prolonged. Have patience and endure" (4.1.253-4). Though she has just had a massive wrong done to her character, because she is a woman she is powerless to do anything other than to continue exhibiting the characteristic patience expected from her.

Finally, when Hero has been resurrected from her death she is able to shed the slander that was brought against her and is once again acceptable since she has been proven chaste. When Hero is revealed again at the end she says, "one Hero died defiled, but I do live, / and surely as I live, I am a maid" (5.4.63-4). Even at her rebirth as she has already been proven innocent, it is made clear that she is a new Hero, free and unquestionably pure beyond all doubt. At the final moment of the play the main issue still

centers around women's fidelity and the fact that Hero had to die, "whiles her slander lived" even though it was untrue and unfounded (5.4.65). Until the men in the play could feel secure about her virtue, Hero was still in danger despite her innocence.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Balthasar sings the song "sigh no more" that recognizes that the men can be in the wrong, but women's best defense is to have good sense and be merry (2.3.60). While the song is about how men can be foolish, it places the responsibility then on the women to simply have a good sense of humor. All the women in these plays are forced to either deal with foolish, quarrelsome, or belittling men whom they must overcome with good sense and patience. While both Beatrice and Hero end up married to the man of their choice, both are still sexualized at points by their husbands and Hero is let down and slandered by Claudio's failures. Overall, the idea of women's deceptive nature, particularly in the case of Hero, places the women at risk with no other defense than their own restraint and wit.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Over the course of these three plays the women in *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Much Ado About Nothing* are all forced to deal with the issue of deception from other characters as well as the prejudice that women are inherently deceitful. Women's behavior and virtue become a critical point of contention and an object of obsession for the men. In the case of Desdemona and Hero, their husband's obsessions with their sexual fidelity lead both Othello and Claudio to mistakenly slander and murder their wives due to their belief in women's inherent deceit. Even though both women epitomize the societal values of obedience and fidelity, they are still placed in impossible situations because of the men's mistaken interpretations.

While their innocence cannot save them from their original downfall, it does enable them, if only momentarily in Desdemona's case, to return from the grave. In order for Hero's reputation to be salvaged, the old Hero must die so a new Hero, beyond any question of impurity, may be reborn and therefore worthy of Claudio's love again. Likewise, Desdemona's final faithfulness to Othello enables her to be restored as the epitome of obedience and once again pure for her husband. While their submissiveness is able to grant them a momentary rebirth, neither woman's obedience is able to protect or save them from their initial demise.

On the other hand, the women who are more outspoken such as Beatrice, Katherina, and Emilia do not always end up much better off than their obedient counterparts. Beatrice ends up achieving the most favorable ending yet is still powerless as the virtuous Hero is forced to suffer, leaving Beatrice to only watch and despair that since she is a woman she can do nothing to help. Emilia suffers the same fate as the devoted Desdemona and Hero, Katherina is forced to suffer through a brutal taming and even Beatrice is stifled into the confining rules for women. Despite all these outcomes, each of these women still seem to gain a small sense of power that Desdemona, Hero, and Bianca lack. Emilia starts off as an obedient, battered, wife to Iago and transforms by the end of the play into being outspoken and defiant towards him. Though her outspokenness ultimately ends lethally for her, she is the one who enables Desdemona's reputation to be restored and Iago's villainy to come to light with her confession. For Katherina, even though she gives her final speech of submission, she is able to subtly find a niche in which she is able to create a partnership with Petruccio rather than be totally dominated by him. Finally, similar to Katherina, Beatrice is able to retain the influence of her wit by finding a complementary male partner to marry in Benedick.

On the whole, each play presents its problems for both the obedient and outspoken women in the plays. The women are either forced into situations where their divided duty ensures their failure, mandated to behave in a compliant and social acceptable subservient to men, or left defenseless to the prejudicial belief women are inherently dishonest. While both obedient and outspoken women suffer throughout the plays, the women who attempt to strictly adhere to being obedient and to demonstrating

virtuous subservience tend to end up less favorably than their outspoken counterparts.

Overall, though still subjected to the same patriarchal struggles the women who were able to be more outspoken ended with either a lesser punishment, a sense of triumph, or finding a small semblance of power in which they can safely operate within the confines of being a woman.

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