



**T.C.
YEDİTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI**

**FEMALE IDENTITY IN THE THREE PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE: OTHELLO,
ROMEO AND JULIET, AND A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to analyze the structure of female identity in Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After locating woman in the historical context of the Elizabethan period, it aims to explore the extent to which Shakespeare reflects the common beliefs about womanhood in his age and the question as to whether his female characters are conventional or unconventional according to contemporary norms. The main target of the thesis is to prove that female identity is mostly a male construct and that Shakespeare simultaneously subverts and approves the conventional norms in an ambivalent manner. This thesis includes striking examples from the plays which prove the fact that woman was seen as being subordinate and inferior to men, as reflected in the common stereotypical epithet of 'the weaker vessel'. However, at the same time, Shakespeare seems to question this assumption and to project an image of femininity which opens it to debate.

ÖZET

Tez, Shakespeare'in *Othello*, *Romeo ve Juliet* ve *Bir Yaz Gecesi Rüyası* isimli eserlerinde kadın kimliğinin oluşumunu analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kadının tarihi ortamdaki yerini belirledikten sonra, söz konusu oyunlarda Shakespeare'in çağının kadınlığa dair yaygın inanışlarını ne derece yansıttığını ve bu bağlamda kadın karakterlerinin ne derece geleneksel ya da geleneğe aykırı olduğunu incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Tezin ana gayesi, kadın kimliğinin büyük ölçüde erkek ürünü olduğunu ve Shakespeare'in iki yönlü tutumuyla devrin geleneksel modellerini aynı zamanda hem doğrulayıp hem de tersine çevirdiğini kanıtlamaktır. Tez ayrıca, Shakespeare'in kolayca bu görüşlerin destekçisi olarak değerlendirilemeyeceğine karar vermekle birlikte oyundan, Elizabeth İngilteresinde kadının bağımlı ve yetersiz bir varlık; yani dönemin en genel klişesiyle 'The Weaker Vessel' olarak görüldüğü ve bu doğrultuda kadın kimliğinin de erkeğin basit bir uzantısı olarak düşünüldüğü gerçeğini doğrulayan çarpıcı örnekler de içermektedir.

INTRODUCTION

‘Because women have not been recognized as a useful category for historical, literary, or artistic analysis in the past, their presence and their achievements have been masked by earlier scholarship and obscured in the historical record.’

(Travitsky et al, 1994: 16)

No doubt, the matter of female identity in Elizabethan society is complicated. Not because of only the complex structure of dominant patriarchy, but also due to the lack of literary source, this subject is not very easy to fully explore. In order to illuminate the structure of female identity in these plays, it is appropriate to explore the reality of women’s position in Elizabethan England firstly. And this is difficult because, alongside the lack of source, most available works (the didactic literature which was written by men and the instructive literature – conduct books – by the clergy) reflect the male point of view on women rather than their reality. It should be remembered that, though there may be a lack of information about them and women were simply represented as a male extension, the women of this time were neither invisible nor silent and their activities were crucial in forming their identity in both private and public life.

During the expression of women’s place in that era, some concepts appear as crucial determinants. Such as; patriarchy, sex, and gender. Therefore, the first part of this work gives a brief definition of these concepts and women’s lot in the family, social life, religion, and court in Shakespearean England. The second part concentrates on the women characters in the plays. The contemporary image of Queen Elizabeth and its effect are discussed through particularly focusing on *Othello*. Afterwards, it deals with a passage in *Romeo and Juliet* which reflects dark visions of female sexuality which results from Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech. And finally, it culminates in the analysis of female identity in *Romeo and Juliet* and *A midsummer Night’s Dream* – evolving from owned daughter to owned wife, subverting and confirming contemporary patriarchal values simultaneously.

PART I
WOMEN'S POSITION IN SOCIETY

1.1 THE WEAKER VESSEL GENDER, SEX, AND PATRIARCHY

Sex refers to the totality of the differences between male and female bodies. Gender refers to the cultural concepts that are based on this division between male and female, and thus to the appropriate characteristics of each – masculine and feminine. Sexuality implies erotic desires and activities and, as Valerie Traub points out, ‘Whereas anatomical sex is to a large extent natural, gender and sexuality exist primarily as constructions of particular societies.’ (Traub, 2003: 129) This means, being a woman or a man varies from culture to culture and changes in the historical chronology. In the words of Jacqueline Eales, ‘The sexual distinctions between men and women can be said to be those which are biologically determined, while differences of gender can be defined as those that are culturally constructed.’ (1998: 4)

In the broadest sense, patriarchy means the customary male dominance over women and children in the family and the general subordination of women in society. And it is a significant feature of English society between 1500 and 1800 – a dominant attitude that can be traced back to the classical age and particularly to Judaic and Christian views of women and the family. Thus, in order to fully understand the issues related to gender and sexuality during Shakespeare’s life and therefore in his plays, the apprehension of the patriarchal household should be starting point. In that era, patriarchy referred to the dominance of the father over all members of his household – not only his wife and children but also apprentices and servants. The father was like the king of the country and his success in the management of his household was regarded as the victory of a king who well ruled the realm. It is clear that early modern culture was hierarchical and, no matter their wealth or rank, women were theoretically under the rule of men. This was the case not only in daily life and social relations but also in law. Valerie Traub notes, ‘Because women generally were believed to be less rational than men, they were deemed to need male protection. Legally, a woman’s identity was subsumed under that of her male protector; as a ‘feme covert’, she had few legal or economic rights.’ (2003: 130) A striking example of this notion is emphasized in *The Taming of the Shrew* by Petruccio. Soon after their marriage, he calls his wife Katherine ‘my goods, my chattels. She is my house, / My household-stuff, my field, my barn, / My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything’ (III.iii.101 – 3) Although, the words are deliberately chosen to humiliate his newly wedded wife, yet they point to accepted social norms. Katherine herself

clearly confirms the belief in this social hierarchy when, at the very end of the play, she calls on the other women to obey their husbands:

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe,
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks, and true obedience,
Too little payment for so great a debt.

(The Taming of the Shrew, V.ii.150 – 8)

It is clear that this inferior position requires women to assume four virtues: obedience, chastity, silence, and piety. (Traub, 2003: 130) However, all contemporary women were not obedient and silent. The existence of such unconventional women, like former rebellious Katherine before her marriage with Petruccio, gave rise to epithets such as, shrew, scold, and even whore and witch. But before focusing on these insulting titles as well as the opposite necessary virtues, the biologic and religious roots of women's inferiority in that patriarchal society should be mentioned.

The cultural construction of women as the weaker vessel was the core of early modern patriarchy. In that period, women were described by male authors, doctors, and the clergy as weaker than man intellectually, physically, and morally. (Eales, 1998: 3) This notion was mainly based on both biblical teaching and contemporary medical understanding. According to medicine, in terms of the body heat and humour, men were believed to be hot and dry but women were cold and moist and this made women passive, intellectually unstable, and lower in courage. As Fletcher remarks, 'Woman was seen as a creature distinct from and inferior to man, distinguished by her lesser heat. For heat was the source of strength, whether of mind, body or moral faculties, was in this formulation what gender was all about.' (1999: xvi) In other words, the subordination of women started with the hierarchical ordering of bodies and came to an end with strongly determined gender roles. These conventional roles were mostly set out in the marriage advice books. As quoted by Fletcher, Henry Smith wrote that 'Man and wife should see themselves like the cock and the dam: the cock flyeth abroad to bring in and the dam sitteth upon the nest to keep all at home. The nature, with, and strength of the two sexes, together with God's direction, ordained this.' (*A Preparative to Marriage*, 1519:

43; Fletcher, 1999: 61) There was a firm agreement that physical capacities made this kind of order inevitable. Sir Thomas Smith also asserted that ‘Nature had forged each part to his office. The man stern, strong, bold, adventurous, negligent of his beauty and spending; the woman weak, fearful, fair, curious of her beauty and saving.’ (1999: 61-2) Fletcher points out that at the very beginning of his dissertation upon women’s diseases, John Pechy wrote a strong statement of the same opinion: ‘Kind nature had bestowed upon women a delicate and fine habit of body and designed her only for an easy life and to perform the tender offices of love. Man, by contrast, was designed more robustly, so he could protect the woman, delve and manure the earth and undergo to other toils of life.’ (Pechy, *A Genecal Treatise of the Diseases of Maids, Bigbellied Women, Childbed Women and Widows*, cited in Fletcher, 1999: 62)

At that time, menstruation was also considered both a sign and a cause of women’s inferiority and of their preordained inactive and domestic roles. Menstruation as a female quality which was given by God simultaneously proved and intensified women’s weakness, disability, and instability both physically and mentally. It was a generally accepted notion that man’s blood was hot, pure, and of high quality whilst that of woman was cold, inferior and so dirty that it had to be evacuated monthly. This notion could easily be traced in the King James Version of the Bible in which the former sinful city of Jerusalem was mentioned as a ‘filthy thing’ that was associated with a ‘menstruous woman’. (Fletcher, 1999: 63) So, it was believed that the body of woman because it contained the womb was dirtier and more vulnerable than and thus inferior to that of man. The same idea has been emphasized by Anne Laurence in the words, ‘Menstruation and the processes of reproduction were considered to be the reason for women’s inferiority, supported by the biblical view of menstruation as pollution.’ (1999: 62)

Because of the women’s supposed inferior creation, it became an axiom that their minds were also much weaker than men’s as well as their bodies in early modern period. This belief was supported by both the medical writers and the others who followed them. As Fletcher quotes: Their extra heat, explained Lemnius, made men ‘quick witted and deeper searchers out of matters and more diligent and ripe of judgement than women. ...a woman in going about affairs and making bargains hath not the like dexterity and seemliness that a man hath’ (1999: 69) This fact gave rise to the belief that women always necessitated protecting, controlling, directing, and ordering by men. Therefore, they were expected to obey and surrender to their fathers or husbands as silent, chaste, and pious daughters or wives. Their supposed lack in reason, body, and of moral sense were told them repeatedly. The men were

also instructed that they should not trust women, but should keep them under their control and suppression forever. The church was one of the most important sources of these instructions:

The fiercest denunciations of all came from the church and its ministers. From 1562 onwards the homily on marriage, read regularly in parish churches, drummed in the message that women were not rational enough to be trusted: 'the woman is a weak creature not endued with like strength and constancy of mind; therefore they be the sooner disquieted and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be, and lighter they be and more vain in their fantasies and opinions'. (Fletcher, 1999: 70)

Furthermore, the current early modern proverbs reveal women's accepted inferiority. Almost all of these proverbs about women are rashly sexist and prejudicial. Such as; 'a woman is a weathercock', 'a woman's mind and winter wind change oft' or 'a woman's mind is always mutable'. (Fletcher, 1999:71) This fact also proves that women were always considered weak creatures and this weakness was the cause of all the other qualities they were supposed to have such as, mental and emotional unstableness, being prone to moral failure, and unreliableness. Shakespeare clearly expresses this notion through the words of Hamlet who was overwhelmed by his mother's untrustworthiness and over-hasty remarriage with his uncle: 'Frailty thy name is woman' (*Hamlet*, I.ii.146)

It was another common belief that women were more lustful than men due to their weakness. In other words, women were considered more lustful than men because, on account of their supposed lack of reason, they were ruled by their lower parts rather than the upper ones by which the men were ruled. According to Helkiah Crooke quoted by Fletcher, 'that females are more wanton and petulant than males we think happeneth because of the impotency of their minds...for the imaginations of lustful women are like the imaginations of brute beasts which have no repugnancy or contradiction of reason to restrain them.' (*Microcosmographia*, 1615: 259, cited in Fletcher, 1999: 71-2) In fact, there are signs in the literature of the period that all these insulting notions and prejudices about women resulted from men's fear of women's sexuality and of losing their authority over them. Even in that era, it was a known fact that men's sexual performance was rather limited in comparison with women's multiple orgasm ability. Thus, the very essence of the matter comes to light; women should be ruled and oppressed by men because of their putative dangerous and even demonic sexual capacity. Fletcher refers to a statement made by the Elizabethan musician Thomas Wythorne that 'though they be the weaker vessels yet they will overcome two, three, or four men in the satisfying of their carnal appetites' (Fletcher, 1999: 74) Similarly, William Tyndale asserted that God had put woman under the obedience of her husband, so that he

could control 'her lusts and wanton appetite.' (W. Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, cited in, Anthony Fletcher, 1999: 74)

Moreover, it was believed that there was a certain link between womanhood, sexuality, and a certain mysterious power. (Fletcher, 1999: 75) As M.E. Weiner noted, 'Because they were ruled by their lower parts rather than their upper ones, they were seen as able to exercise magical powers in the realm of love and sexual attraction.' (1993: 253) In accordance with the belief that women were the weaker creatures, they were prone to deceive men by means of using their tongue – speech – and most importantly using their so called demonic sexuality which could easily impress them. Therefore, the supposed dangerous sexuality of women was connected to wantonness and witchcraft in the early modern mentality. Fletcher quotes:

'James I argued that women were more easily entrapped by the devil because they were frailer than men and he made explicit the connection between this frailty and their sexuality. William Perkins explained that more women than men were witches because men's resolution, in other words their reason, gave them more protection against the devil's temptations. Keith Thomas argued that witchcraft was a genuine temptation as a means of power available to the poor and vulnerable.' (Fletcher, 1999: 75)

It was a commonplace that the woman (though she was actually a weaker vessel) who rejected to obey her father or husband silently, spoke shrewishly and acted through her own agency could also possibly use her sexuality – which was probably connected to the demon and thus, mysteriously influential in controlling men – in order to break the boundaries of the male dominance and thus she deserved to be considered a whore and/or a witch.

Men's control of women's speech, an aspect of their potency, was at the heart of the early modern gender system. Speech takes us to the centre of the issue of patriarchal authority, for it proposes and initiates. Speech represents personal agency. The woman who speaks neither in reply to a man nor in submissive request acts as an independent being who may well, it is assumed, end up with another man than her husband in her bed. Thus, every incident of verbal assertiveness could awake the spectre of adultery and the dissolution of patriarchal order. (Fletcher, 1999: 12)

In particular, sexuality was a threatening tool used by women who took control over men in contradiction to the patriarchal order. The fear of female sexuality also resulted from religious doctrines along with biological facts. It was a common notion that the Fall was the most ultimate proof of women's defect and deceptive moral weakness. For instance, an Aristotelian proverb 'Women receive perfection by men' was the remarkable support of the assertion of Eve's guilt. Men had imposed this notion of gendered sinfulness on women for centuries.

Making a scapegoat of Eve because she had caused the Fall of Adam, made all women (as her daughters) guilty for the weakness of man in the face of evil. The curse laid upon Eve in the Genesis story imposed upon woman both the punishment of subjection to her husband and the pain of childbirth. Therefore, the authors of the conduct books everlastingly based their argument for household patriarchy upon women's inferiority – as evidenced by the Fall – and upon God's direction. (Fletcher, 1999: 76)

It is possible to find a lot of reflections on these common notions about women's dangerous sexuality and the importance of being chaste in Shakespearean drama. The idea that the punishment for women's lustfulness is often pregnancy and finally painful childbirth (because of the Eve's sin expressed in the story of the Fall) can be evidenced through pregnant Juliet in *Measure for Measure* who is the model due to the 'sin she carries' in collaboration with Claudio and she makes confession to the Duke on the stage: she will 'bear the shame most patiently'. (II.iii.19-20) When we look at *Hamlet*, it is clear that he condemns his mother's sensuality and lust which drive her into the overhasty marriage to his uncle who is his father's murderer at the same time:

O shame! Where is thy blush?
...
proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge
Since frost itself as actively doth burn
And reason panders will.

(*Hamlet*, III.iv.80, 84-7)

Fletcher interprets Shakespeare's portrayal of some of his leading women figures in this light. According to this view point, Lady Macbeth's sexuality is also a method of control over her husband whom she provokes and drives into murdering the king. Other striking examples of female sexuality as a source of domination are taken from *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Troilus and Cressida*, where women are presented as unnaturally holding a man captive. In addition, women not only had to be chaste but had to be seen to be chaste and silence, humility, and modesty were the signifiers that she was chaste. Fletcher notes that it was Desdemona's apparent lack of these qualities that made Othello kill Desdemona although she was in fact chaste. (Fletcher, 1999: 122)

In the light of all, it can be said that chastity, silence, and obedience appear as the trilogy of primary female virtues in Early Modern England. The notion of the mute wife is highly celebrated and Fletcher adds, 'Women's talk always threatens disorder; women's

silence thus comes to be prized to an absurd degree.’ (1999: 14) In terms of this opinion, in *The Taming of the Shrew* – before her marriage to Petruccio – the daring and shrewish Katherine and the process of taming her are rather notable. As it has been expressed above, men were nearly obsessed with a connection between shrewish or scolding attitude and sexual infidelity in that period. According to both medical and biblical teachings which collaboratively support this patriarchal mentality, woman was considered the weaker vessel that was physically and mentally unstable, unreliable, deceptive, and most remarkably prone to moral lowness. Therefore, chastity and virginity appeared highly crucial qualities for a woman as well as silence and obedience. The obvious proof of this fact can be found in *Hamlet* again. Learnes warns his sister Ophelia about Hamlet’s lustful intentions:

Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmastered importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
And keep within the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.

(*Hamlet*, I.iii.29-35)

So, it can be seen that because women were weak and defective creatures, they could be improved by male dominance in the limits of domestic area. It was considered necessary that women should always be under the male protection, control, and order. Patricia Crawford emphasizes, ‘Academic theories and popular beliefs both constructed woman as secondary or other in relation to man, confirming the necessity for female dependence and subjection.’ (2003: 71) However, all Elizabethan women were not conventionally silent, invisible, and imprisoned at home, of course. The exceptional ones occupied different positions in the social life, as will be seen in the study of the social conditions and related literary works analysed below.

2.1 MARRIAGE AND HOUSEHOLD ORDER WOMEN IN FAMILY

Marriage was crucial to a woman's identity in Early Modern England. The literature of middle ages had explored men's roles in society pertaining to their profession, estate or social rank, but when medieval and early modern theorists considered women they generally classified them according to their marital status; such as, virgins, wives, and widows. (Jacqueline Eales, 1998: 23) Thus, the importance of marriage in the female identity appears clearly. As Valerie Traub emphasizes, 'Although Jaques in *As You Like It* versifies the 'seven ages of man', from cradle to soldiering to senility, for women the states of life are confined to three: 'maid, wife, and widow', with each stage corresponding to woman's marital status.' (Traub, 2003: 133)

Seventeenth century writers produced an enormous literature intended to describe marriage life. Almost all of it focuses on the relationship between husband and wife from the husband's viewpoint because they were written by men. The elite women's diaries and memoirs do not always represent the experiences of the majority of the female population though they are valuable in terms of the feminine perspective they provide. In other words, there is not enough direct evidence from the illiterate female majority to describe marriage from the average woman's point of view. (Patricia Crawford, 2003: 126-7) However, it is not impossible to make decent inferences about what marriage life was like for the early modern female majority through the careful examination of these available sources.

The purpose of marriage was first, the procreation of children; second, avoiding the sin of fornication; and third, the companionship and comfort of the partners. (Anne Laurence, 1996: 41) Although the consent of both partners was essential, the family and friends might be influential in approving of or objecting to a marriage. Family disapproval was likely to cause important trouble and sometimes separation. And one of the most common reasons for objecting to a match was a noticeable difference in the social and economic status of the couple. (Laurence, 1996: 44)

Wealth and social rank also affected the marriage age for women, the number of children they were likely to bear, the size and components of their households, the range of tasks included in their daily responsibilities, and even their manner towards husbands and in-laws. (Crawford, 2003: 128) The earliest marriage age which was recognized under canon law was twelve for girls and fourteen for boys. But those marriages at such a young age were uncommon and they were peculiar to royalty and the upper nobility in terms of contracting

complicated dynastic unions to secure titles and property. The usual age for both men and women was their mid-twenties in the period 1550 – 1700. (Laurence, 1996: 45)

Child marriages had decreased among the upper ranks since preceding centuries, but brides of the nobility, gentry, and wealthy urban elite were still two to ten years younger than their counterparts among ordinary women. Although there was a ‘scatter’ around the average age at first marriage within each social group, plebeian women usually delayed wedlock until their mid-to late twenties. Moreover, the age at first marriage among labouring women was very sensitive to economic conditions, rising to new heights when times were hard. (Patricia Crawford, 2003: 128-9)

Whatever their social background, marriage was a crucial turning point in women’s life. Therefore, it is appropriate to explore the reality of some critical issues related to marriage in that era; such as, the household order, marital violence and wife beating, separation, emotions, love and affection, and maternity.

In the leading puritan clergy’s circles, there was constant talk of the godly household. For example, John Downname regarded the family as ‘a seminary of the church and commonwealth, and as a private school, wherein children and servants are fitted for public assemblies’ and William Gouge asserted, ‘A family is a little commonwealth...a school wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned.’ The most general notion of such writers was that household order was the foundation of effective government. (Fletcher, 1999: 205)

Everyone who attended church, meanwhile, was receiving the constant reiteration of the principles of husbandly authority over wives and parental authority over children and other subordinates, whether servants or apprentices, through the Homily on Obedience, which was often read on Sundays, and through sermons and catechising. The analogy that Filmer spelt out and upon which he built his political theory came easily: ‘as the father over one family so the King, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth.’ (*Other Political Writings of Sir Robert Filmer*, 1949: 63; Fletcher, 1999: 205)

From all these, it can be inferred that a man could do what he liked inside his own home because his wife was his sexual and physical property. Early Modern England was a society based on the personal relationships of dominance and submission, a society in which the use of violence was accepted as a necessary method of maintaining order in hierarchical relationships, both within and outside the household. There was a legal right which allowed husbands to use violence on their wives – besides beating children and servants if they found

it necessary – in order to bring about the correction. (Fletcher, 1999: 192) As Mary Lee Chudleigh who is the author of *The Female Advocate* (1700) concedes the female sex was made for man's 'Comfort and Benefit' and she also expresses it in her popular poem: 'Wife and Servant are the same, and differ only in the name.' (Patricia Crawford, 2003: 136)

Therefore, wife-beating continued harshly in England from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Wife-beating persisted because of its social acceptability in male circles and the neighbors, relatives, and even the court were oblivious to this fact due to the belief that it was normal and necessary. Several popular proverbs may be the proof of common wife beating, to give an example, 'A Spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree, the more they're beaten the better they be.' (Fletcher, 1999: 192) The examination about the death of the Norfolk woman Anne Gosling in 1600 also reveals this fact severely. Her family knew that her husband John beat her but they did nothing until she was knocked unconscious. (Susan Dwyer Amussen, 1998: 129)

What is interesting about the court material, which usually relates to especially severe violence, or otherwise refers to violence incidentally, is that it tells us something about normal expectations both on the part of spouses and of servants and neighbours who may have heard or even seen what was going on. In disastrously unhappy marriages among the gentry, where wives suffered a husband's continuing and brutal cruelty, servants often intervened to the extent of comforting and giving succour to the victim; though they could do nothing to halt her ill-treatment. (Anthony Fletcher, 1999: 194)

However, all early modern women were not unresponsive to this violence. According to a case in the London consistory court in 1780, Mary Emberson, who declared that her illiterate husband's success in corn trade was heavily dependent on her book-keeping skills, told of how when she sought refuge from him at night with the servants until he dragged her from the room and kicked her on the thighs. (Anna Clark, 1987: 42-3) Joanne Barrett looking for a separation from her husband in 1590 explained that he was going elsewhere for sex and was so 'fierce and cruel a man towards her that she dare not dwell with him'. (Amussen, 1998: 128) And a particular Baptist Anne Wentworth – in her *Vindication* of 1677 which justified her decision to leave her husband after the eighteenth year of their marriage – mentioned the 'unspeakable tyrannies of a hard-hearted yokefellow' who had given her 'fierce looks, bitter words, sharp tongue, and cruel usage'. (Elsbeth Graham, et al., 2005: 183, 187) Also, Lady Chudleigh (as remarked above) protested in her book that to require women to submit to men's every whim was a 'Tyranny...that extends farther than the most absolute Monarchs in the World' (Crawford, 2003: 136)

Moreover, the victims of marital violence and the women writers were not those who were reactive to the matter solely. Some clergymen also declared that they did not approve the wife beating though they were defenders of the patriarchal household order. Henry Smith, John Wing, and William Gouge can be counted amongst the writers who were emphatic in their rejection of physical correction of wives and who condemned wife-beating in England in the conduct books of the period between the 1590s and 1620s. For instance, Gouge asked: 'Can it be thought reasonable that she who is man's perpetual bedfellow, who hath power over his body, who is a joint parent of the children, a joint governor of the family, should be beaten by his hands?' (Fletcher, 1999: 199) Thus, although what happened in respectable families was being veiled in silence, there became a deliberate rhetorical displacement of family violence on to the lower classes during the eighteenth century. 'Wife beating came to be viewed as a special mark of the inferiority and animality of the poor.' (Fletcher, 1999: 201)

In that era, separation was also another hard issue because the Church of England did not recognize divorce. Only a divorce or an annulment allowed the spouses to remarry. Separation which was a procedure recognized by the Church of England permitted the parties to live apart but not to remarry. Both annulment and separation were lengthy and expensive procedures, and divorce was almost impossible for all but those who could afford a private Act of Parliament; therefore, there were 317 divorced couples by that way between 1539 and 1857 in England. (Laurence, 1996: 51) There was also an informal system of separation which resulted in the penalties, when a husband or wife simply left the marital home and then, one or both of them remarried illegally. (Eales, 1998: 68)

Joan Ramesdale of Canterbury admitted that she had remarried while her first husband was still alive and was ordered to perform penance. Katherine Moswell was prosecuted for not living with her husband was excommunicated after she did not appear in court. Walter Colton was accused of having two wives, but admitted in court to having no less than four, although two were very probably dead; he was warned not to keep company with his fourth wife and was sentenced to perform penance. (Jacqueline Eales, 1998: 68)

It clearly emerges that the early modern couples were aware of the public teachings about male authority and female subordination which were explicit in a whole range of discourses; such as, homilies and conduct books. But this does not mean that either husbands or wives were willingly able to adopt the behaviors dictated by the prescriptive literature. A lot of early modern marriages were only in certain limited ways patriarchal in practice and not each woman suffered from her husband's cruelty doubtless. In each case, there were some internal factors; such as, the hopes and desires, the strength of will and the emotional

inclinations of the partners concerned. (Fletcher, 1999: 172) Certainly there was no lack of display of love and affection by both wives and husbands among people of every social rank. It means, the subordinate role which society imposed on women did not prevent the possibility of passionate love and devotion by wives as well as husbands. For instance, 'Mary Clarke wrote to her husband Edward that she could not possibly live any longer without the sight of him that is most dear to her. Lady Appolina Hall confessed that her heart was immoderately let out upon her husband.' (Crawford, 2003: 132) Roger Hill's letter to his pregnant wife Abigail from London in May 1642 may be another example, 'There is nothing in the world that I can value equal with thee...I should be glad to see thee here as soon as thou wilt...my dear I thank thee for thy cakes. I never had better nor were any ever better accepted. I wish a happy increase of thy little great belly and that thou mayest be a happy nursing mother shall be the prayer of him that is dearest to thee.' (Fletcher: 1999: 174)

Additionally, it is appropriate to insert a data related to the issue here. Though an early modern marriage might be based on love and affection, it was also based on financial, social, and political considerations mostly. (Eales, 1998: 66) The possibility of romantic and sexual attraction was prominent in the minds of early modern women, but they were not always free to rank it first, in contrast to our era. Because wives had no legal physical and economic independence, no lawful way out of an unsatisfactory union and no career option in place of marriage. Therefore, they were more likely to feel impelled to make marriage work as a social and economic partnership, even when it was not viable as an emotional and sexual bond. (Crawford, 2003: 131)

Last but not least, another positive issue which is mostly related to marriage in early modern period as well as in our era should be mentioned here very briefly. Pregnancy and becoming a mother was one of the greatest blessings of marriage for many early modern women too. They were expected to have six or seven children during their childbearing years normally. The delivery of a child was usually marked by the ceremony of churching when the mother was joined in church by her midwife or other women who had attended the birth. In other words, childbirth was an exceptional event which was dominated by women's concerns that were the evidence of female networks of support and obligation. (Eales, 1998: 69-70) Fletcher also interprets the positive effect of being mother from a different point of view:

Wives enjoyed, as the prize earned at the conclusion of their pregnancies, an opportunity for separateness and the company of her own kind. They withdrew from their husbands two of the fruits of marriage which he most prized: her domestic labour and her sexual services. 'The immersion of the mother in a female collectivity', as Wilson puts it,

‘elegantly inverted the central feature of patriarchy, namely its basis in individual male property.’ (A.Wilson, *The Ceremony of Childbirth and its Interpretation* cited in Fildes, *Women as Mothers*: 68-107; Fletcher, 1999: 187)

Consequently, despite the admonitions by male writers that most women should marry and obey their husbands, the experience of family life was considerably varied. Throughout the period, a minority of women did not marry ever or delayed marriage in order to gain sufficient resources and there were many women who conducted sexual relationships outside the bonds of marriage as well. Though the scene seems catastrophic for the married ones, all of them did not experience the dark side of marriage definitely. It was possible to observe a lot of happy and affectionate early modern couples. Those women – maybe thousands of them – were not completely docile and passive. They exercised authority within both family and community networks. As has been remarked by Eales, ‘Women made claims to particular authority in relation to childbirth, but they also acted as marriage brokers for younger relatives, as active agents in choosing their own husbands or lovers and as advisers to their husbands. Such activities reveal some of the disparities between the exhortations of the conduct books and an individual’s responses to the practical problems of being a daughter, sister, wife or mother.’ (1998: 72)

3.1 PRACTICING PIETY WOMEN AND RELIGION

Strikingly, women were accepted to be more religious than man in that period and this was seen natural due to their physical and mental constitution which was explained formerly. Men had various explanations for that obvious piety of women. For example, Richard Hooker discussed it and tried to explain it in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Richard Sibbes believed that women's frequent death possibility in childbirth forced them into nearer communion with God. 'More scathingly, Henry Paynter attributed women's piety to their sense 'of their own imbecility and weakness' and the consequent need 'to shroud themselves under the shadow of the Almighty and to be much and often under his wing.' (Fletcher, 1999: 347)

It is a known fact that the functions of the priesthood including preaching and the administration of the sacraments were considered male occupations in the early modern period. Particularly, this led the clergy to stress the divisions between the public sphere as a male arena and private sphere as a female arena. In 1534, Tyndale wrote in his revised translation of the New Testament writings of St Paul: 'let your wives keep silence in the congregations. For it is not permitted unto them to speak: but let them be under obedience, as saith the law. If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.' (1 Corinthians, 14, cited in Eales, 1998: 86) Nevertheless, religious belief provided women some measure of public influence and it increased their personal authority both within the household and community.

Though we will specifically focus on women's individual practicing of piety and the prestige in their house and neighborhood which was gained through it, it is appropriate to insert a few words upon women's outdoor activities connected to religion here. For instance, in the 1380s female supporters were rather active amongst the Lollards who criticized the established Catholic Church and they were gradually absorbed into the Protestant movement from the 1520s onwards. Similarly, women were involved in underground Protestant circles during the reigns of Henry VIII and Mary Tudor. Female supporters helped Catholicism to survive as a considerable minority religion after the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 had outlawed the old faith. Therefore, those oppressed religious minorities and the later puritan sects which emerged in the 1560s provided much religious freedom both for the laity and women than the established Church could. (Eales, 1998: 86) A nun's life is also an example of a woman's outdoor activities gained by religion. It is clear that the convents provided a

rather respectable career which was not only related to the private observation of religious rules but also involved a variety of public functions for their residents. Some nunneries kept educational foundations for girls, others were managed as hospitals, others were regarded as sources of local charity and almsgiving, and most of them took female boarders as a resource for supplementing their finances. Nuns were responsible for the daily running of their convent and they controlled its income and property and also employed local people as servants and laborers. In 1534, there were approximately 1.900 nuns and 142 nunneries in existence in England. Between 1534 and 1540, the nunneries and monasteries were gradually closed by Henry VIII's government due to its reforming policies. Thus, the number of nuns who were dispossessed was nearly 1.600 in 1540. (Eales, 1998: 89-90)

It can be said that for many wives, religious life was an occasion which affected their daily activities, social and familial relationships and in which they lived and worked willingly. For instance, the countess of Warwick was one of those women who could set aside several hours each day for godly exercises. The practice of piety required a lengthy routine including private prayer, the reading of Scripture and / or other devotional works, long meditations on divine subjects, and the keeping of a diary to write her own's spiritual progress. Such women made a habit of rising several hours before the rest of the household in order to engage in these activities. (Crawford, 2003: 226-7)

The eulogists often stressed that godly women rose at an early hour and began the day with private prayer. Alice Lucy's 'first employment every day', so we are told, 'was her humble addresses to Almighty God in secret; her next was to read some part of God's word and of other good and profitable books'. A pattern of prayer and reading punctuated these women's days. Mary Gunter distinguished 'family duties' from 'private prayers' with her maids, beside which 'she was thrice on her knees every day before God in secret'. She also spent long hours with her Bible, reading it from cover to cover every year and nothing passages she found difficult and which she could consult about with ministers or 'other understanding Christians'. (Fletcher, 1999: 353)

In fact, piety led women in two contradictory directions. Some of them became socially isolated and fascinated in a self-absorbed quest for individual salvation. But others undertook to train their children and servants and to deputize their husbands in their absence. And some of these active ones also took role in group activities and became part of a collectivity of female friends and relations or even they became members of independent sects, such as the Lollards. (Crawford, 2003: 227) Katherine Clarke, Dorothy Shaw, Elizabeth Walker, Alice Lucy, Lady Strode, and Lady Falkland could be counted amongst those who gathered children and servants to hear the Bible and pray or to be catechized and also

deputized their husbands. Katherine Clarke 'would pray with her family morning and evening' when her husband was away and also 'in his presence, in case of his sickness and inability to perform the duty himself'. Dorothy Shaw said that during the twenty-five years of her marriage, she did not neglect to gather her family twice in a day for prayer, psalm-singing, and scripture reading when her husband was absent. Elizabeth Walker was spending much of her afternoons with the children to inculcate reading and straightforward catechism habitually. Alice Lucy was making one of the children read a passage to the others before supper, 'frequently taking occasion of instilling into them some sweet and profitable instructions'. Before bedtime, they were also coming to her to sing a psalm together. Lady Strode who took the spiritual education of servants very seriously repeated the sermons she had heard to her maidservants in her chamber and catechized them. Lady Falkland's custom was also to spend an hour with her maids in the morning praying. (Fletcher, 1999: 352)

In addition, religious sympathies provided the basis for fellowship between women of different social ranks. Elizabeth Walker who was the wife of a clergyman shared pious interests with her aristocratic neighbor, the countess of Warwick. Sarah Henry regarded the religious affinities as a bridge between her and her social superiors as well. Similarly, a mistress and her maid broke the social barriers between them through the time of their pious conversation within a household. Lady Elizabeth Brooke, when she discussed spiritual matters with a maidservant, 'required her for that time, to forget that she was a servant'. (Crawford, 2003: 229)

It is also notable that a woman could challenge the authority of her husband if they differed in religious belief. The priests advised those wives to act in religious matters without their husband's agreement or knowledge if it was necessary. Theologians and theoreticians mostly accepted that women should obey their husbands as long as their commands did not conflict with those of God. 'This challenge to patriarchal authority was reinforced by the opposition to Charles I and his execution in 1649, for if a tyrannical king could be deposed so too could a tyrannical husband.' (Jacqueline Eales, 1998: 111) Therefore, it was even possible to observe the examples of both men and women deserting spouses and taking new ones for religious causes in that period. But it should be remembered that this was not a new departure actually. As we stated formerly, informal separation and remarriage were not unfamiliar, but here the justification of such behavior by reference to religious belief was the new one. (Eales, 1998: 95-6)

To sum up, it can be said that the expression of spiritual beliefs through family or relative duties was perhaps the commonest type of female activism and freedom in that time,

though the household piety could (at least in theory) be reconciled to the accepted passive feminine virtues approved by men. Through the attendance at weekday lectures and sermons, enforcement of strict Sabbath observance, charitable activities among pious friends and relations, and the financial support for the churches and convents, the regime of piety extended beyond the household to the neighborhood largely. It is also a known fact that some women went beyond personal and household piety to express their dissatisfaction with the established church by creating or joining to form separate groups and sects. 'From the earliest days of Christianity, women had been prominent in religious reform movements. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they were persecuted as sectaries and separatists.' (Patricia Crawford, 2003: 230)

4.1 LITERACY, EDUCATION, AND WORK WOMEN IN SOCIAL LIFE

In the words of Lawrence Stone, in England, the stable growth of literacy rates and increase of the number of grammar schools in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be considered a kind of ‘educational revolution’ (Eales, 1998: 35) And this revolution was formed by humanist and Renaissance ideas about learning which supported that boys should be fully prepared for their future roles both as the masters of their own households and administrators and citizens of the state. Humanist writers also suggested better educational condition for girls but though this advice affected the education of women in court groups, it did not make much impact on the content of girls’ education widely. It could be also asserted that even elite women were generally excluded from the new humanist learning. As quoted by Jacqueline Eales, ‘Linda Pollock notes that the upbringing of elite girls continued to be largely aimed at producing ‘adult women who were deferential to men’, but who were also capable of independent action if occasion arose.’ (Eales, 1998: 35) Therefore, before exploring the girls’ condition, it seems useful to mention the boys’ education in order to understand briefly the difference in schooling and educational opportunities for the two sexes.

The matter of education was ineluctably gendered, though most girls also attend the school. Essentially, male education was academic but female one was not. Claver Morris’s explanations upon the education of his son and daughter in the late seventeenth century well illustrate the point. ‘Betty went to school from seven to thirteen, learning first violin and singing lessons and later writing, French, dancing and violin. William by contrast was at grammar school from eight to eighteen, first by the day and then, from thirteen, as a boarder. In his teens his father paid for extra tuition that he received outside the classical curriculum in writing, arithmetic and drawing.’ (Fletcher, 1999: 298)

The new grammar schools which expanded across the whole country between 1560 and 1660 were confined to boys and their curriculum was based firmly on the classics. Those institutions were also religious foundations; thus, their statutes insisted upon daily prayers and attendance of the scholars at church under the eye of the master. Afterwards, between 1660 and 1800, the number of those schools which offered an exclusively classical curriculum decreased due to the fact that classical curriculum was unrealistic for most boys and in no satisfactory way prepared them for earning a living. In the new schools which were set up in place of the grammar schools in that period, the traditional stress on Latin and Greek was normally combined with English and the curriculum began to include other subjects; such as,

geography, navigation, mathematics, the modern languages and other such branches of literature and education. Here it is remarkable that Latin, which was always taught to boys through the classical curriculum between 1600 and 1800, ‘became firmly installed as the male elite’s secret language, a language all of its own, a language that could be displayed as a mark of learning, of superiority, of class and gender difference at the dinner table, on the quarter sessions bench and in those final bastions of male privilege the Houses of Lords and Commons’. (Fletcher, 1999: 299-300)

On the other hand, the education of women was quite different from that of men and educational writers paid little attention to a curriculum for girls. They believed that girls could not be taught as boys could. Fletcher remarks, ‘It was assumed that the developmental stages of the young male provided a basis for a rigorous academic curriculum that was inapplicable to the female mind.’ (Fletcher, 1999: 365) In other words, girls were regarded by nature as unreasonable and uneducable in that period. There was also a dislike of intellectual women because any kind of academic education was seen threatening to a woman’s modesty. As we expressed, the central theme of female gender construction was humility and obedience; therefore, moulding and repression was the essence of female training. Young girls’ training was mostly based on virtue and piety and it aimed to prepare them as decent and obedient wives.

Though the girls attended the petty or dame schools – where elementary reading and writing was taught – as well as boys, those schools did not teach the academic curriculum which was available for boys in the grammar schools. The girls mostly studied the Bible and the devotional works, psalm-singing, romances, drama, music, singing, dancing, writing, accounts, embroidery, housewifery, cookery, painting, ornamentation, and needlework. ‘The classics and sciences, on the other hand, should be avoided at all costs because of the danger of pedantry and prescription in a woman...of her exchanging the graces of imagination for the severity and preciseness of a scholar.’ (Vivien Jones, 1990: 104-6) John Evelyn’s eulogy on his daughter Susannah at her marriage summarizes this fact efficiently.

She is a good child, religious, discreet, ingenious and qualified with all the ornaments of her sex. She has a peculiar talent in design, as painting in oil and miniature, and an extraordinary genius for whatever hands can do with a needle. She has the French tongue, has read most of the Greek and Roman authors, using her talents with great modesty; exquisitely shaped and of an agreeable countenance. (Fletcher, 1999: 372)

Also, girls from wealthier families were taught either by tutors or governesses at home usually but the daughters of poor families were sent to other households to finish their education. Eales comments, 'Girls from aristocratic and gentry backgrounds would be taught skills relevant to their station in life while girls from poorer families were sent away from home as servants or apprenticed to learn either a trade or more commonly housewifery.' (Eales, 1998: 39) Nevertheless, a small group of young women who were mostly from noble families were taught according to a classical curriculum including Latin, Greek, and also French in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through the expertise of tutors at home. (Fletcher 1999: 367)

Bathsua Makin, Elizabeth Elstob, and Mary Astell could be counted amongst those exceptionally well educated women and those who criticized the English educational system and thus, who might be regarded as pioneers of the feminist thought, after the Restoration,. They mainly argued that women had to the capacity to benefit from academic training, condemned the social education which was imposed upon them and insisted that they were being denied the chance of personal development through intellectual enquiry. (Fletcher, 1999: 365) It is known that English women wrote very few printed books before the middle of the seventeenth century. Until 1600, most women whose works were printed translated the works written by men; such as, Lady Margaret Beaufort, Margaret Roper, Lady Ann Bacon, Mary Sidney, or Margaret Tyler. (Eales, 1998: 16, 43)

However, there is a remarkable work which was accepted as the first defence of women that was produced by an unidentified writer known as Jane Anger whose personality and even gender have been debated. Her book, written in 1589, bore the title, '*Her Protection for Women. To Defend Them Against the Scandalous Reportes of a Late Surfeiting Lover, and all other like Venerians that Complaine so to Bee Overcloyed with Womens Kindnesse*'. The book illuminates the nature of female identity in that time. It can be sensed that a feminine work which threatened the male dominance necessitated a pseudonym at that time; thus, the work indicates that the capabilities of a woman that went beyond the norms deemed socially appropriate. This means, female identity seems to assume duality: the overt fulfilling of a restrictive function dictated by the patriarchy and a subtle self-realization which was often reactive to the socio-cultural current. In this defence, Anger's style is noticeable because it is different from that of a contemporary male writer's. While the courtly prose of these male writers; such as, John Lyly, is flowery, ornamented and highly verbose, an early modern woman writer practicing rhetoric in a complex but subtle manner shows her economical, sparse, and intelligent style. It should be also considered that she argued against a

misogynistic text entitled *His Surfeit in Love* by Thomas Boke, indeed an entire tradition. The publishing environment in which her book was printed is described by Linda Vecchi in the following words: ‘early modern printing houses in England and Europe produced a considerable number of pamphlets and essays written against or in favour of women, the majority authored by men’. (2004: 63) Furthermore, it is remarkable that in such a suppressive era for women, Anger incorporates a broad framework of reference from Hesiod, Tibullus and Socrates to biblical analysis in order to support her discourse. Indeed, her bold retelling of the Genesis story may be regarded as predecessor of feminism. Anger also subverts a conventional patriarchal view that a woman’s identity is merely an extension of a man’s due to the issue that the woman was made from Adam’s rib, through arguing that women are more excellent than men due to the fact that God cleansed the filthy clay he formed Adam from by transforming it into flesh. Thus, on account of the belief that Eve was made from the purified flesh, the proxy women are – in fundamental essence – superior to and purer than men. (Vecchi, 2004: 63)

There were some prominent ones amongst the women writers who published their works after 1640s too. For instance, Bathsua Makin was the first Englishwoman who published an admitted analysis of the benefits of improved education for women along with a practical programme of schooling. She was the governess of Charles I’s daughter Elizabeth in the 1640s and then set up a school for girls outside London. In 1673, she mentioned the school in her essay titled *Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* which was dedicated to the future Queen Mary. Makin criticized the barbarous custom which handled women as being inferior that it was generally accepted that women did not have the enough reason as men did have; therefore, they were unable to benefit from education. ‘She called for a competent number of schools to be set up for girls and scorned those in existence, because for the most party they taught housewifery and little more. She cited examples of learned women from the Bible, classical history and recent times.’ (Eales, 1998: 44) Makin proposed that women should be taught arts and languages. Therefore, their time would be better employed than in dressing their hair and adorning their bodies while neglecting their souls. ‘She argued that her scheme would allow women who worked as servants to choose better placements while married women would be of use to their husbands in their trades and better able to raise their children by good example. Widows would be able to understand and manage their own affairs.’ (Eales, 1998: 45) But interestingly, she emphasized that her aim was not to equalize women to men for they were the weaker sex, despite the fact that they were capable of the impressions of great things. The curriculum she created for her school

included dancing, music, singing, writing, keeping accounts, Latin, French, Hebrew and Greek, English grammar, astronomy, geography, arithmetic, history, experimental philosophy, natural history, painting, preserving, pastry-making, and cookery. (Eales, 1998: 45)

Another significant woman writer Mary Astell supported Makin through her writings at the end of the century. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), she argued that women were as capable of learning as men and they should be enabled to instruct their own sex at least. ‘Her plans, she reassuringly wrote, did not extend to pretending that women should teach in Church or usurp authority, but only that women should be allowed to understand their own duties and not take them on trust from others.’ (Eales, 1998: 45) It is also notable that the playwright Aphra Behn became the first Englishwoman who can be described as a professional author in the 1680s. (Eales, 1998: 43)

In the light of all, it can be said that there was an obvious need for improved education for girls of all social classes even at the end of the seventeenth century. ‘There had been a marked increase in the general level of literacy amongst women between 1500 and 1700, and in the formal educational provision available to girls of all classes. Starting from a lower base, the levels of female literacy increased at a faster rate than those of men, but nevertheless remained markedly lower.’ (Eales, 1998: 46) However, despite the suppressive factors and all restrictions on them, early modern women were not visible only in literature and in the increasing rates of literacy but also in the different spheres of social life.

The issue of work was gendered and classified as well as the matter of education in that period. Being the weaker vessel was counted and counted catastrophically against women. Men defined work as requiring physical and mental strength but they defined women as primarily reproductive beings who were prone to idleness and an easy life. They were generally supposed to work in the house; so, the ‘work’ was for men and the ‘duty’ for women. (Fletcher, 1999: 224) The 1571 Norwich census of the poor is rather illuminating in this respect. Thomas Frances was recorded as ‘a smith and boatman’ and John Yonges was recorded as ‘cordwainer, journeyman and now a waterman’ but wives were mentioned as women ‘that spin white warp’, ‘that knit and wash and help others’ or ‘that sew and make bone lace’. (Michael Roberts, 1985: 132-3) It seems that most of the work women did was considered of minor importance and it was not graced with any labels.

The common assumption which was supported by conduct book writers was that women’s labor was primarily essential to the household economy. For an ordinary early modern woman of England, the day began with sweeping, cleaning, and making the fire. Then, the children had to be dressed, given breakfast and got off to school. Cooking and

preparing more food for a husband who was about to go to work took up the morning; knitting, spinning, washing, and scouring the afternoon. Afterwards, children and husband needed further attention. The nights were interrupted by a child crying for the breast and sex. Women also helped on the farm, in the shop or in the unskilled or semi-skilled parts of their husband's craft. In addition, it was believed that women were naturally apt to make some simple herbal medicines and heal people; thus, some of them worked as herbalists and healers in their neighborhood. (Fletcher, 1999: 229-35)

Nevertheless, women's exhausting labor was actually undeniable in the early modern economy. While the wives of gentry were busy about their homes, managing their servants and taking their own part in household activities and affairs, the others fulfilled some roles out of doors. There were many poor women who worked in farm, manufacture of textiles, and petty retail trades such as the production of food and drink. Some of them who produced nourishment and textile products sold their wools, clothes, laces, butter, cheese, milk, chickens, pigs, wines, beers, cookies, and all manner of corns etc. in the market independently. But most women who were in the service of the landlords, wealthy householders, tradesmen, and craftsmen as harvester, servant, and apprentice could claim lower wages than their male counterparts. A minority of elite wives, widows, and spinsters also employed their own shops, farms, and agricultural lands, as long as they took permission of their husbands or relatives. Furthermore, some middle class women appeared as alehouse keepers, nurses, and nuns – as it was stated formerly. (Eales, 1998: 76-81)

In addition, women performed other services which were more particularly associated with their sex; such as, prostitution, wet-nursing, and midwifery. As Eales notes that, 'In towns such as London or York certain areas were notorious as the centres of bawdy houses, but prostitution was not solely an urban phenomenon. In rural areas it was associated with tippling houses, often run by women, and some prostitutes were migrants who travelled from parish to parish in search of custom' (1998: 81) Wet-nurses were employed by the wealthier families. They generally looked after the babies whose mothers had died or abandoned them. They mostly lived in the parishes around London in order to look after children from the city and wet-nursing was a relatively well paid occupation.

The midwives operated both in towns and rural areas. And midwifery was probably the most profitable one amongst the other well paid female works; dairying and wet-nursing. The midwives were licensed by the Church of England. However, many women who worked as midwives were unlicensed, either because of the cost or because they were not members of the established Church. Some women who acted informally helped to the childbirth of friends

and neighbors without any payment. Others accepted payment but continued to do that work as a secondary employment and some had an extensive clientele. The professional midwives were often married to clerics, physicians, or lawyers.

If midwives were generally well regarded by the mothers they delivered, their expertise was also recognized in other areas. They and other matrons (respectable married women with children), were employed, for example, in witchcraft cases to search the bodies of the accused for evidence of the witch's mark. They were also brought in to decide whether a woman was pregnant, in cases where she pleaded 'the belly' in order to escape capital punishment, or if a widow was pregnant by her late husband, which could affect the inheritance of an estate. (Eales, 1998: 83)

In cases of infanticide, midwives and the other women could be wanted to declare their opinion about the accused that had recently given birth. They might also find themselves asked to judge male potency or female virginity when wives demanded to cancel their marriage on account of non-consummation. 'The most notorious case in which this occurred was the divorce of Frances Howard from the Earl of Essex when two midwives and four matrons were selected to examine the countess and they concluded that she was a virgin without any physical deformity that would render copulation impossible.' (Eales, 1998: 83-4) Nevertheless, although midwives were often respected for their practical skill and experience, they were despised for being uneducated and insufficient. And in place of establishing a formal school to educate them academically, the man-midwives were trained and they came into the field in 1650s. Thus, a working area – strikingly the most profitable one – for women was eroded by men. (Fletcher, 1999: 238)

As it has appeared in this chapter, the economic position of women was always inferior to that of men in early modern period. The general notion was that the outdoor activities were appropriate for men and the indoor ones were appropriate for women. Women's work mostly comprised everything which was left after men, along with the drudgery of household though they were not completely invisible in social life. Yet it may be asserted that the theory and the practice diverged once again and that it was possible to observe many women who were active in different spheres; such as, literature, medicine, trades, and crafts. Though some women might be exceptionally well educated whilst the majority of were neglected in terms of education.

5.1 WOMEN IN COURT REIGN OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

Queen Elizabeth and her elderly sister Queen Mary were the striking examples of powerful female monarchs. However, they – particularly Elizabeth – were neither alone nor subject to men in the rule of realm. There were many women politicians who were from noble families and who worked for them. Eales points out that, ‘The reigns of the Tudor and Stuart queens in England should thus properly be seen as an extension of the political activities of aristocratic and gentry women within their own family networks, in which blood ties and patronage links were all important to the exercise and accumulation of power.’ (1998: 53)

During the reigns of both Mary and Elizabeth the impact of female courtiers increased when women from aristocratic and gentry families replaced male officials as the monarch’s personal attendants in the royal household. Yet there was a separation between membership of the household and the great offices of state that remained in the male preservation. In Elizabeth’s reign the ladies of the Privy Chamber were mainly from families who had blood relationships with the Tudors; such as, Howards, Careys, Radcliffes, and Knollys. It was known that Elizabeth avoided discussing business with the ladies of her household in order to prevent political factions. Also, she certainly punished independent enterprises by those women if she disapproved of them. In 1562, she placed the two long serving members of her household – Catherine Asteley and Dorothy Bradbelte – under house arrest because they had reported her marriage plans to the King of Sweden. (Eales, 1998: 53)

However, there were many women courtiers – her ladies-in-waiting – who were used by Elizabeth for political purposes too. For instance,

In 1559 Mary Sidney, the sister of Lord Robert Dudley, was used by Elizabeth as a go-between in her marriage negotiations with Archduke Charles of Austria. Elizabeth also allowed the Ladies of the Privy Chamber to press the suits of male relatives and confidants. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester was thus able to make use of his sister and other female associates in the Privy Chamber, including Blanche Parry and Dorothy Bradbelte, as a route of access to the queen...In the second part of Elizabeth’s reign Mary, Lady Scudamore acted as a point of contact in Elizabeth’s household for the Sidneys, and for the earls of Shrewsbury and Rutland. (John Murphy, *The Illusion of Decline: The Privy Chamber, 1547-1558*; Eales, 1998: 54)

It seems that female courtiers operated as intelligence gatherers and messengers between the queen and neighbor earls, kings, and the other nobility though some of them became traitors and were punished, as stated above. After Elizabeth’s death, such close lines of

communication between female courtiers and the monarch were closed off and new royal households were set up for Anne of Denmark and Henrietta Maria who were the queens of James I and Charles I but most of those new women courtiers were also politically ambitious. (Jacqueline Eales, 1998: 54)

In addition, during the reigns of both Elizabeth and Mary there was some propaganda against their dominance because they were 'the weaker vessel'. Actually, their sex was covered and the religious reasons lied under those attempts. For example, at the end of Queen Mary's reign (1558) John Knox published '*The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*' which included the fullest statement of the arguments against female rulers in the period. The most severe condemnations of Mary Tudor came from protestant exiles such as Knox, John Ponet, and Christopher Goodman who regarded her as a catholic tyrant. Similarly, the most hateful attacks on Elizabeth came from the catholic exiles; such as, William Allen who hoped to have her replaced with a catholic queen through a coalition between the papacy and major European powers of Spain and France. But the most hostile and the most well known attack on Mary Tudor due to her sex was the one that came from Knox. He asserted that in comparison with men, women were not created in the image of God, and thus they were not only subject to their husbands but to all men. That was necessary because they were naturally the weaker vessel naturally and experience had shown them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking the spirit of counsel and 'regiment'. Eales draws attention to the view of Knox that women were seen as being 'unfit for public office' in all ages, though 'he agreed that women could inherit private possessions from their fathers, but not that they could inherit public offices.' (1998: 48-9)

On the other hand, fears and suspicions about female rulers were balanced by the accepted contemporary arguments that both queens had legitimate claims to the English monarchy. Another protestant Marian exile John Aylmer wrote the earliest reply to Knox in his work titled *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects Against the Late Blown Blaste Concerning the Government of Women* (1559) He defended that Elizabeth's inheritance of the throne was God's will. He also added that the government of a woman was not unnatural and cited examples of earlier women rulers but he agreed that the rule of men was preferable to that of women due to the fact that he was working within a traditional patriarchal framework. Richard Bertie who was another Marian exile wrote a manuscript defending Elizabeth nearly at the same time. In 1590s, an English Catholic called Lord Henry Howard also wrote a manuscript in favor of Elizabeth and against Knox:

Mary had been treated as illegitimate by Henry VIII between 1533 and 1544, but her accession in 1553 she found strong support from both the Catholic and Protestant aristocracy and gentry in England who wanted to see the principle of inheritance upheld. Elizabeth was similarly supported throughout her reign by both Catholic and Protestant nobles and gentry, despite her Protestant Settlement of the Church. Even if the establishment of the Tudor royal dynasty in 1485 had been accomplished by conquest, all of the Tudor monarchs relied on the argument of legitimate inheritance as the foundation of their claims to the throne. (Eales, 1998: 50)

Moreover, though Elizabeth's reign was seen as the golden age of England afterwards, at the beginning of her reign she was exposed to the attacks by patriarchal mentality because of her sex – as it has been stated above. But she also tried to defend herself and relatively succeeded it. It was asserted that she was an inexperienced young woman who would be guided by male advisers, whether by her privy counselors or the man she chose to marry. But progressively she came to see herself as an extraordinary woman, matchless and unique.

She was a Protestant, and chose not to take a husband to share her rule, Elizabeth was the first English queen to confront head-on all the paradoxes created for the English Church and State by an independent female monarch. Although her pioneer role provoked tension with male counselors, who continually urged her to marry and bear an heir, the novelty of her situation gave Elizabeth the opportunity to experiment, to forge an individual solution to the problems of female power. (Patricia Crawford, 2003: 354)

In a masculine sphere like the battlefield, Elizabeth portrayed herself as repressing her female aspect and assuming male qualities. In 1588 – just prior to the Armada crisis – she said ‘I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a King of England too...Rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field.’ to the troops at Tilbury. (Anthony Fletcher, 1999: 80) On this occasion, she dramatized much male persona through her visual imagery appeared in armor and helmet and rode on a charger. In general – without surrendering her femininity – she emphasized the mental and physical qualities she shared with her father Henry VIII, such as her bravery and her linguistic mastery.

She also skillfully capitalized on her feminine characteristics to achieve some political goals. As a sixteenth-century ruler, her reign witnessed very few executions and, in fact, the queen agonized over those which she was obliged to approve. Elizabeth's mild and merciful rule towards her political rivals – in contrast to the cruel policies of her father and sister – was regarded as an expression of her feminine compassion. Crawford points to other feminine

traits of Elizabeth which helped to promote her image as an efficient ruler: ‘The queen’s legendary meanness was represented as the frugality of the conventional housewife applied on a national scale. Elizabeth carefully deployed her alleged vanity, sexual jealousy, and passionate temper to manage her councilors and suitors.’ (2003: 356)

Last but not least, a crucial point related to the Queen should be clarified here in terms of fully understand the garden imagery in *Othello* which would be explored in the second part of this work. The fertile female image of Elizabeth, though she did not produce an heir like her sister, probably gave rise to this metaphor in the literature and drama of that period and also in the early modern people’s mind. The well-tended garden came to represent the ‘feminine’ fertility of the state presided over by the Queen I. For a twenty first century audience, it may be hard to grasp that a region of space could have such wide ranging implications but it seems that the early modern appreciation of a garden (both inside and outside the dramatic arena) was rather different. Elizabeth herself was identified with the garden’s magnificence in various ways. For instance, George Peele wrote a piece entitled *The Gardener’s Speech* about the preparation for a royal visit to Theobalds in 1585 and he associated the Queen’s virtues with garden properties. ‘I framed a maze, not of hyssop and thyme, but that which maketh time itself wither with wondering; all the Virtues, all the Graces, all the Muses winding and wreathing about Your Majesty.’ (Peele, 1874; *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Robert Greene and George Peele*, 2009: 578-9)

Besides, the fertility of Elizabeth - her responsibility as the mother which would deliver the nation from the barren reign of Mary (who produced no heirs) - was displayed at her 1559 coronation procession through a garden image. It is not very hard to guess that ‘with the remembrance of Mary’s entry lingering in their minds, the people must have been particularly affected by the entertainment’ (J.F. Leisher, 1987: 45) because the staged events were indeed symbolic depictions with a clear purpose; therefore, Elizabeth also stopped to admire the central part of this spectacle which was described by Raphael Holinshed at length:

in the same pageaunt was advaunced two hylles or mountaynes of convenient heyghte. The one of them beyng on the North syde of the same pageaunt, was made cragged, barreyn, and stonye, in the whiche was erected one tree, artificiallye made, all withered and deadde, with braunches accordinglye. And under the same tree at the foote thereof, sate one in homely and rude apparell cokedlye, and in mournynge maner... written in Laten and Englyshe...*Ruinosa Respublica*, A decayed common weale. And uppon the same withered tree were fixed certayne Tables, wherein were written proper sentences, expressing the causes of the decaye of a commonweale (Raphael Holinshed; J.F. Leisher, 1987 : 45)

A clear visual connection had been made between the body of Mary Tudor and the dried up garden. The image of the dried tree demonstrably implied the absence of fertility and prospect in the old pre-Elizabethan (as the context intimated) state. The ‘certayne tables’ contained socio-political and philosophical treatises on the failure of the Commonwealth. This decayed body was also juxtaposed neatly with a beautiful and fresh body, which was connected to Elizabeth (and thus to her own body) in order to indicate the fertility of the (female) body of the new state in comparison with the old.

[...] The other hylle on the South syde was made fayre, freshe, grene, and beawtiffull, the grounde thereof full of flowres and beawtie, and on the same was erected also one tree very freshe and fayre, undre the whiche, stode uprighte one freshe personage well apparaylled and appoynted, whose name also was written bothe in Englyshe and in Laten, whiche was, ***Respublica bene instituta***. A florishyng common weale. And uppon the same tree also, were fixed certayne Tables conteyning sentences, which expressed the causes of a flourishing commonweale (Raphael Holinshed; J.F. Leisher, 1987 : 45-6)

Thus, standing in stark contrast to the other hill, the flourishing English garden, flowering and fresh (and implicitly Protestant) was put forward as a symbol of the prosperous Elizabethan nation. As it is so clearly linked to Elizabeth in comparison with Mary’s barren reign, a woman’s identity is inextricably linked to fertility. Moreover, as James J. Yoch Jr. comments, ‘Many Renaissance English pageants related landscapes to power’ (1985: 194) Therefore, it can be suggested that not only the ultimate statement about Elizabethan England was being made, but also a reinforcing of a common stereotype: women’s power relied on their aptitude to bear fruit.

At this point, it may be also important to note that the contemporary understanding of such design depended on an early modern ability to ‘read’ a living image which was perhaps peculiar to their era. Indeed, such an understanding was nurtured by their culture, as demonstrated by Elizabeth’s coronation entry, which was ‘not an empty stage or a blank page, but a palimpsestic conglomeration of landscape and monuments inscribed and re-inscribed with the ‘texts’ of historical association, communal memory and accumulated civic pride and idealism’ (Hester Lees-Jeffries, 2007: 66) The theatre also made use of such images. This was a technique, closely related to the mechanics of the Elizabethan theatre, which involved the representation of the external world by means of image and device incorporating emblems and symbols. It seems that the line between theatre and reality was ultimately blended through

the use of this technique. Hence, the connection made between the body, garden, and womanhood used in heraldry, landscape, and pageantry, as demonstrated above, is significant for understanding Elizabethan attitudes to gender.

PART II
WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE:
OTHELLO
ROMEO AND JULIET
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

1.2 WILDERNESS AND SEXUALITY THE UNWEEDED GARDEN OF *OTHELLO*

There are plenty of garden-like spaces in Shakespeare's plays, both symbolically and literally, such as the rose garden which literally creates the divisive symbols for the houses of York and Lancaster in the *Henry VI* plays or the magical forests of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which is a space closely related to female identity and which had also a peculiar resonance with an early modern audience, as it was stated in the former chapter. It can be suggested that the appearance of a garden or some garden properties in Shakespeare has some wider implications about the identity of early modern women. Therefore, it can be said that the garden is used as an image to make a social comment about the importance of a woman's fertility; however, when this is juxtaposed with a woman's sexuality, this ripe garden turns into a fearful, wild, and unseemly thing, specifically in *Othello*.

In *Othello*, there are several moments where the body and the garden, most particularly the sexual body, are linked. Since the tragedy of the play revolves around Iago's deception regarding Desdemona's questionable sexuality, it would be pertinent to review not only the comments which relate to her, but his view of sexuality in general. In Iago's mind, female identity is inextricably linked with sexuality and Desdemona's character is entirely determined by her sexual fidelity. Furthermore, the remarkable fact is not only Desdemona's sexual identity distorted by false impressions, but how it is viewed and shaped by others.

Indeed, sexuality is the most shadowy and unknown aspect of human beings; thus, before exploring the comment this makes on Desdemona's identity, the nature of sexuality in the play should be outlined at first as a whole – particularly from the point of view of Iago because it is Iago's view of Desdemona through the association he makes with the body-garden parallelism which acts as the shaping force in the creation of Desdemona's identity. In other words, it is his illusion of Desdemona, created through his machinations, eventually overriding her true personality in *Othello's* mind, which fashions the identity of Desdemona in the play:

Virtue? A fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus. Our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that is we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many, either to have it sterile with idleness or manured with industry – why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our will.

(*Othello*, I.iii, 319-326)

Iago's initial ruminations on the garden are not overtly concerning gender, yet regarded as essential. Sexuality is associated with the garden, but the fertility we might expect is subverted; the body is inevitably sullied as it is subject to our own will, our 'carnal stings', our 'unbitted lusts', as he enthuses later (330-331) There is little faith in a human personality to make morally decent choices concerning sexuality. For example, the plants he chooses are not 'virtuous' roses; instead Iago utilizes the image of plants to emphasize his dark view of human choice which is often tied up with physicality. For example, nettle is a nightmare plant, biblically renowned for its hellish nature. In Hosea, God promises to fill Israel's treasure rooms with nettles as a punishment: 'The pleasant places for their silver, nettles shall possess them' (Hosea, 9.6) The idea of nettles deliberately planted is also a curious one. Nettles usually grow in abandoned places and they flourish where other plants will not. Thus, the garden Iago describes is already an unsettled place due to the wordplays he is happily toying with, and it later becomes one where unpleasant and untameable plants, which are unusual to plant by choice in the first place, bloom. In the previous chapter, it has been shown that the garden identified with the body was a culturally produced space relating to the fertility of the nation presided by Elizabeth – and also of the common women. But here this depiction of the garden implicitly promotes some disturbing ideas about female sexuality.

Iago's perception of the body (actually, the concept of the body which has begun to emerge in the play) is cleverly and effectively depicted as problematic; thus, it could be argued that these issues are founded heavily on the concerns regarding women's sexual identity. According to Iago, women are the catalysts urging perversion and he conjoins sexual acts with an unnatural imagery; such as 'the beast with two backs' (I.i.116) He also obsessively claims, 'Lechery, by this hand: an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts' (II.ii.255) When the position of latter quote was considered in the context of the play, it can be seen that the mere presence of a spirited woman who has conversed freely with men has caused Iago to regard her as a sexually independent, indeed wanton, woman.

Similarly, if we return to his garden image, it can be seen that the conventional image of the garden as a place of beauty and health is distorted. Therefore, the feminine body-garden is no longer an innocent and a natural creation but a wanton and devious creature whose sexual identity is shameful and unnatural. For instance, even the lures of female garden might be pharmaceutically forceful on account of a common belief in that time. The nettles were known as a powerful aphrodisiac, as John Gerard wrote: 'the seed of nettle stirreth up lust, especially drunk with cute' (Gerard, 1633; *Plant Poisons in Shakespeare*, 1970: 82) Also,

according to Gerard, wild lettuce was a sedative altering both mind and body. Thus, within the garden/body, it could be possible to find a mixture of abnormality and unpleasantness with a sexuality which will seduce men medically. Furthermore, Iago thinks that only available resolution for garden is to 'manure' it with 'industry' which suggests that sexual intimacy will ripen it through sullyng. (317)

Though it can be said that conflict between the traditional and the perverted through the distorted associations of garden symbolism related to the feminine body creates a compelling tension, there is one more traditional aspect which Shakespeare experiments with in *Othello*. The female identity is a curious paradox in that time, as it was explored in the first part of this work. Women are dangerous because of their supposed sexual independence and yet curiously static at the same time due to the fact that they were seen as an only extension of the men. This can be seen most clearly in the case of Desdemona who is like the gardens of civic pageants and magnificent Renaissance homes for *Othello*. It is Desdemona herself who is the contested space. The play's events develop around her and are imposed on her; then, she becomes much like a garden, with her purpose (like Elizabeth as the mother of the nation's garden) to bear fruit: 'the purchase made, the fruits are to ensue/ That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you' (II.iii.9-10) Her handkerchief is 'Spotted with strawberries' (III.iii.436) and her hand 'argues fruitfulness and liberal heart' (III.iv.34)

Ultimately, Desdemona's body and sexuality which were initially celebrated when they were purchased and thus easily controlled becomes as questionable as the imaginary garden Iago has described earlier. Through his ruminations on the evils of the garden (which might be also enjoyable and useful for its fruitfulness conventionally) he portrays it as souring and producing weeds due to an implied wildness of sexual spirit. Thus, he depicts Othello's relationship with Desdemona as souring, in accordance with the idea that the woman is like an inactive body to be feasted upon: 'The food that to [Othello] now is as luscious as locusts shall be to him shortly as acerb as coloquintida' (I.iii.337-8) Finally, the properties of a tamed, beautiful garden – amongst them, the rose is most emblematic - are not seen in Desdemona anymore. Instead, Othello sees her face 'grim' and murmurs 'Patience, thou young and rose-lipp'd cherubin' (IV.ii.62-3) Here the mention of the rose may imply the virtue Desdemona has lost according to him. Indeed, just before killing her, he admits: 'When I have pluck'd thy rose,/ I cannot give it vital growth again./ It must needs wither' (V.ii.13-15) This is both an acknowledgement of Desdemona's approaching death, and also her function as a static, fertile image; perhaps a blank plate onto which he can paint designs. Since she is stained, Desdemona can never be a rose once more; her body can never be a flourishing garden again.

Actually, in such a play where Iago's initial vision of the body (and implicitly feminine body) is so dark, catastrophic, sullied, and indeed misogynistic, it seems inevitable that the garden can not survive; it could only wither.

The former tangible garden staged in *Henry VI* has become a garden of the mind in *Hamlet* and *Othello* and its function as an image of feminine fertility has become problematic. Also, this shift in treatment is not merely confined to drama. It pervades Shakespeare's writing, particularly the Sonnets. It is notable that the Sonnets were not published until 1609 – after *Othello* – though they were written over a long period of time. In Sonnet 16, the garden image is utilized favourably: 'many maiden gardens, yet unset,/ With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers' (William Shakespeare, 1997: 6-7) On the other hand, Sonnet 69, though addressed to his friend, emphasizes the relationship between the beautiful aspects of a garden and its unpleasant, wild elements: 'To thy fair flower add the rank smell of weeds' (12) These might be symbols of the conflict between outwardly faultless appearance and depreciated internal qualities, which, even when they do not directly refer to femininity, yet evoke images of the garden that were commonly associated with fertility hence woman.

Increasingly, the deceptiveness of beauty corresponds with a certain depiction of gardens. The way that the sweeter flowers mask the weeds in Sonnet 69 turns into the total degradation of pleasant garden elements in Sonnet 94: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds' (14) This means that everything which grows is undesirable in essence and the weeds are simply more appreciated because they exhibit no pretence, as the sexually degraded garden Iago depicts. Furthermore, the garden might be again aligned with a concept of femininity summarized by Elizabeth I through a convertible disintegration of the garden as a symbol of national pride as her reign proceeded. This is articulated by Katherine Duncan-Jones in her edition of the Sonnets used here. She notes the equation of the garden with Elizabeth I's problematic female identity which is functioning as a strong ruler but not fulfilling the role of fertile life-giver: 'Since the Tudor emblem was a rose, there may...be a reminiscence of the widespread desire, in the first half of her reign, that Elizabeth I should marry and reproduce. The memory of the dead queen and the dead dynasty was fresh at the time of Q's publication' (*Sonnets*, 1997: 112)

2.2 'I NOTHING, BUT TO PLEASE HIS FANTASY'

THE WOMAN AS A MALE CREATION

As it has been shown, the exchanging of women and gardens, and the comment this makes about their function and identity – as a fertile life-giver – was a popular contemporary trope. Also, it was common that a tendency for such images of women was governed by men, as we will go on to explore with reference to Shakespeare. It was Iago who created the garden image in *Othello* and Othello who continued it. Indeed, much of Desdemona's identity is shaped not through her own actions, but through the male speculation concerning her. Perhaps it is merely the nature of theatre that a character is established in the mind of the audience not due to what he/she has to say only, but by what others have to say about him/her. Moreover, the identity of the theatre at that time was male-centric. Players were all male and it had the effect of limiting the number of female characters (in *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, there are over twenty male named characters but only four females). Thus, inevitably, female identity was a metatheatrically male creation as women were played by men; so, a brief overview of this practice would be pertinent before exploring the literary conception of the women in these three plays.

As women were banned from the professional stage, could male players hope to cross gender with any sense of realism? Indeed, this question refers not to the only accurate portrayal of female characters, but also in convincing the audience in the wider sense that they were actors appropriate for such a role and this appropriating is not how a male actor would approach creating a female identity, but how a female actor would seek to depict Juliet, Hermia, and so on. Primarily, the early modern tendency not to separate boy from girl in terms of clothing until a certain age is worth noting. As Stephen Orgel comments,

Elizabethan children of both sexes were dressed in skirts until the age of seven or so; the 'breeching' of boys was the formal move out of the common gender of childhood, which was both female in appearance and largely controlled by women, and into the world of men. This event was traditionally the occasion for a significant ceremony. (Orgel, 1996: 15)

When a young man played a young girl on stage, there was a level of natural inclination; a shared 'gender of childhood'. In terms of women in the theatre, Brown and Parolin write insightfully that the position of the female actor was actually more complex than it was commonly regarded. Though they were forbidden from the public stage, female performers

were present in everyday life: ‘while women were never members of professional troupes, they had long appeared as players in a variety of arenas, and at every level of society’ (Brown and Parolin, 2008: 1). This fluidity of female performance had an important effect on the ability of playwrights to create female characters which male players could enact, for their tendency was intensified due to a frequent level of observation in a variety of places: ‘In the alternative playing areas of the street, alehouse, market square, parish green, manorhouse and court, women could be found performing; connecting these places were female spectators, patrons, and traveling entertainers’ Furthermore, such observation imbued them with a ‘cultural knowledge about female playing’ which the ‘spectator, actor or playwright carried to the “all-male” stage’. (Brown and Parolin, 2008: 1)

Indeed, Lesley Wade Soule takes this argument a step further and postulates that culturally knowing was essential, and that the Elizabethan actor was in fact a kind of anti-character: the metatheatrical connotations were so great that part of the audience’s pleasure would be in the ‘simultaneous awareness of woman character and boy actor’ (Soule, 2000 : 136) Therefore, the pleasure of fantasy (which resulted from the boy actor who performed a female character) becomes dominant and the woman in a play becomes at once a literary, literal, and expected construct. Soule adds that deception was integral to the fun of the performance: ‘Spectators enjoyed being aware of the actor’s cleverness at disguise and his inclination to deceive, which in itself may have created some degree of association of the boy actor with women.’ (Soule, 2000: 136)

Therefore, a female character on an early modern stage at once brings a weight of association which complicates her identity. Before her, there was a male actor (commonly a young one who is aware of how a woman would behave both theatrically and metatheatrically through observational experience) necessarily taking part in a deception which both delights and fulfils the audiences’ expectations of a woman’s nature. When this is combined with the literary condition in which the character may already find herself before she is seen for the first time, because of the fact that she have been often talked about by male characters before her entrance and therefore her identity has been already composed in part, it becomes evident that (due to many social and pragmatic factors) Shakespearean female identity is substantially – though it may not be largely – a planned male construct.

In Shakespeare, another literary example of this fact is the character of Rosaline in *Romeo and Juliet*. Though she is Romeo’s love before Juliet (also his primary motivation for

attending the Capulet ball) and a notable portion of the text is devoted to her, she never actually appears in the play. Thus, she may be hardly considered a major character. She is, however, the reason for the melancholy which destroys Romeo; for he is out of her favour (the reason for his humour; 'black and portentous' [I.i, 132] which we learn before being introduced to him for the first time) He gives a praising description of her character which appears the reason for his desperate attraction at first; she is 'fair' (197), 'she hath Dian's wit' (200), 'in strong proof of chastity well arm'd' and 'rich in beauty' (201, 206) Nevertheless, as his lamentations progress, it seems that it is chastity which so enslaved him: 'She hath forsworn to love' (214) Therefore, her reluctance to be wooed is not the matter making Romeo desperate, but rather, her reluctance to surrender to him sexually. It is clear that Rosaline's identity is determined by her sexual inclination because she is presented through only Romeo's love – she is revealed as dictated by a sexual impulse.

The situation of desperate rejected love would also be familiar to an early modern audience in its similarity of the Petrarchan ideal undertaken by many contemporary English poets; such as, Samuel Daniel. Thus, Rosaline also takes her part in the traditional literature. Her identity becomes a construct of not only Romeo's making, but also that of a literary tradition. Romeo has declared himself as the despairing Petrarchan lover (as Terence Spencer states 'creating poetical and pitiful phrases in honour of the chaste and unattainable Rosaline' [1967: 11]) and therefore Rosaline is imprisoned into the position of the conventional Petrarchan object; a cold, chaste, rejecter of love – as compounded by Romeo's description of her.

Some critics have argued that such contemporary courtly positioning provides the woman some power, particularly in the monarchical context, as 'Elizabeth I's presence on the throne raises such important questions about the relationship between power and courtship' (Ilona Bell, 1998: 136) Moreover – while discussing the poetry of Samuel Daniel – Bell goes on to argue that such positioning indeed exploration of the conflicting contemporary sexual matters. 'How can patriarchy, which subordinates women to men, coexist with courtship which gives a mistress power over the man who woos her? Conversely, how can Elizabethan men, living in a patriarchal society which gives them power over women, submit themselves to female sovereignty?' (Bell, 1998: 136) In this work, it would be argued that the female identity in such situations is shaped by the male who gains his power from the patriarchal

society. The woman is not really equipped with power, as it is not she who has a voice and actually it is not her; rather than man's image of her which is powerful.

Shakespeare's exclusion of Rosaline from the play enforces this visual, object-centric relationship. She is kept away from us like from Romeo. Thus, we are forced to interact with her only as the composition he has designed for us. Though this is certainly beneficial to the play – Spencer concurs that to show us Rosaline would be to 'involve us too strongly in Romeo's emotions', and thus 'appropriate artistic tact' dictated that the affair must be related to the second hand (Spencer, 1967: 12) – it, at the same time, exposes to debate the conventional feminine identity approved by love poetry. The woman's function is becoming a love object; therefore, it is not she herself who is valued, but rather the male view of her.

Indeed, it is not only her existence through the eyes of Romeo that the audiences are aware of. Benvolio also values her on account of only her physical appearance (which, as the audiences never meet her, leaves them with an impression of womanly insignificance) He instructs Romeo to forget her by 'giving liberty unto thine eyes;/ Examine other beauties' (I.i, 218) Though such a statement is again a classic conventional lover's trope (the woman's appearance is enough to enslave), it again reinforces the sense of a woman's identity which primarily relied on her visual effect – perhaps the aesthetic side of her being would create a basis on which a man may project his opinions (which have a little foundation in reality) Actually, the Chorus comments sardonically on the changeability of such visually-founded loves, after Romeo's first encounter with Juliet: 'Now Romeo is beloved and loves again/ Alike betwitchèd by the charm of looks' (II.i, 6-7) Female identity is generally formulated by other characters who tend to be men. But we begin to see that there are several determined criterias which can influence the nature of this pattern.

For example, a woman with pale skin, dark eyes and dark hair is viewed as attractive conventionally – the dark lady in Shakespeare's own sonnets, or in the Petrarchan notion – Mercutio regards Rosaline's appearance as demonstrative of her unappealing character: she is a 'pale hard-hearted wench', and her looks (the basis on which her character is founded) are dangerous weapons against Romeo who is 'stabbed with a white wench's black eye' (II.iv, 4, 14) Notably, Mercutio's relationship with Rosaline (and women in general, as it will be discussed shortly) is a bit problematic. In his opinion, their identities are changeable, in other words, though in II.iv Mercutio condemns Rosaline through her physically determined identity, in II.i he considers her identity an incitement. For Mercutio, she exists only in order

to 'conjure him' (Romeo). Thus, it becomes the description of Rosaline's appearance by which he 'conjures' Romeo:

I conjure thee by Rosaline's bright eyes,
By her high forehead and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg and quivering thigh
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie,
That in thy likeness thou appear to us!

(Romeo and Juliet, II.i, 16-20)

In this way, as female identity is a product of male desire, Rosaline's identity exists only as an extension of Romeo's.

3.2 QUEEN MAB DECEPTIVE SEXUALITY, PRIZED VIRGINITY AND FEMALE CUNNING

Mercutio's attitude towards women in general is also valuable while considering the nature of female identity in *Romeo and Juliet*. For instance, his Queen Mab speech in I.iv is based on a woman who is a product of the imagination: the 'fairies midwife' (54) He clearly utilizes her in an attempt to persuade Romeo that his rejected lover status (and thus, Rosaline herself) results from Mab's trick. Though the speech may be a fantasy, his problematic vision of women is crucial in further complicating the identity of women promoted by the play. One can reach to some resemblance between Mercutio's descent from pompous, fairy nonsense into dark chaos related to the nightmarish view of feminine sexuality and Iago's similar view which is picked up by Othello later. Thus, all these three characters show a fear of feminine sexuality as has been explored in the first part. David Farley-Hills also points that this fear expresses itself 'through the imagery of revulsion' which is related to 'the more potent antagonism in the nature of feminine sexuality itself' (1990: 117)

As it was explored through the image of the garden in early modern culture, women's identities are often inextricably tied to their reproductive capabilities. However, the fear of women's sexual lures causes characters like Iago who compounds women's identity with cunning wantonness; thus, corrupts the garden image with the claims of sexual perversion. If one argues, as this work does, that female identity is mostly a male construct in Shakespeare, it can be inferred that the fear of a woman's sexual identity dominates their construction from the expressed sexual revulsion by the related male characters. Therefore, Mercutio's speech is a remarkable example of this. The conflicted psychology which underpins Iago's images of sexual perversion ['in all things nature tends;/ Fie, we may smell in such a will most rank,/ Foul disproportion; thoughts unnatural' (III.iii, 234-236)] can also be seen in Mercutio's image of herpes which springs immediately from innocent fairy love: 'ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,/ Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues' (I.iv, 75-6) It seems that all heterosexual intimacy is contaminated; lover's lips with plague-filled blisters and sweetmeats on the breath (which refers to, in common contemporary language, a disease of cold sores resulting from performing oral sex).

Even Mab, whose occupation as a midwife might be commonly associated with matronliness, diligence, pragmatism and a hardy constitution – definitely asexual and motherly traits – is reduced to 'the hag'. On one hand, she is the midwife of dreams delivering men's flights of fancy, on the other; she punishes maids for being too prone to pleasure, as in

the words: 'Because their breathes with sweetmeats tainted are.' (I.iv, 76) Again, one can note the uneasy relationship between the woman as motherly life-giver and sexual deviant in the mind of a Shakespeare character, such as Mercutio. Thus, the tendency for the discordant identity imposed upon the female by the male is summarized by Mercutio here. In addition, one can even note a comment regarding female identity in terms of the appropriation of a traditionally male practice; the hag who 'presses' (I.iv, 93) – it may also refer to contemporary regional consideration of the appropriation of the throne which was a conventionally male space by a confident female.

To 'press' was a term which had notorious and familiar sensual implications for an early modern audience. Furthermore, the term was specifically gendered. For example, to be pressed – according to Wendy Wall – was to 'undergo the 'press' of the male body during intercourse' and thus 'play the ladies part' (Wall, 1993: 219) Moreover, the development of the early modern printing press added different aspects of the meaning of this image. The woman also functioned as a product to be branded and as a blank canvas on which a male image/construct could be projected. 'When a man pressed a maid in sixteenth-century England, then, he both copied himself by impregnating her and set an indelible mark on her internal physiognomy' (Caroline Bicks, 2003: 60) Thus, the image includes several ideas relating to the female identity which have been already mentioned. It seems that the woman was regarded as a fertile space – like a garden – to be penetrated by a man. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the views of woman as an object which only exists as an extension of the male identity (Rosaline according to Romeo and also Mercutio's underlying arguments emphasized above) strengthen this notion as well. Like Capulet has intimated earlier, men are makers of women and female ability (and identity) is determined through the practicality of the choices men make for women: 'too soon marr'd are those so early made' (I.ii, 13)

In addition, the identity of a woman dictated by her virginal status becomes an important consideration in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is a status valuable to Capulet and he does not wish Juliet to part from it too quickly. Here is again a reference to the fruits of the feminine garden image; she is to ripen further. 'Let two more summers wither in their pride,/ Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride' (I.ii, 10-11) It can be interfered that the virginity was highly crucial to the female identity from Shakespeare's female characters, who often assume an object-status onto which male fantasy can be projected – as it was already stressed through a reference to Laertes who warns her sister Ophelia against Hamlet's sexual demands in the first part. If we return to the garden image once again; virginity is often symbolized as an unplucked flower waiting to be picked and this is parallel with the notion that man

permanently alters the blank canvas of the woman by 'pressing'. So, this recalls the virginal flower altered/made by the male usage; the 'little western flower' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. 'Before, milk-white; now, purple with love's wound' (II.1, 165-167). It seems that most attitudes towards a woman's identity are determined by a man's practices rather than her own and virginity also becomes the ultimate prize because it is the most adaptable product with which man works.

However, when we return to Mercutio, we see a complicating of this virginal prize and indeed a further attempt to sully female identity. The fear he expresses through the 'hag' midwife who takes on a male function as the person who 'presses' has other implications. If Rosaline (and later Juliet) is the most desirable female to Romeo due to her chastity and virginity (and thus, her ability to be formed; her canvas as the most blank one onto which he is to project his own desires) then how is this desirability affected by the fact that most virginal maids are already pressed? Notably, it is a known fact that midwives were often called upon to test virginity and in fact, this was a practice which was confirmed by the canon law.

This official permission by the courts which allowed midwives to explore an area possessed by men 'complicated men's positions as explorers and owners of the female bodies they married and hoped to mark as their own'. And by drawing attention to the Queen Mab image – which probably would capture the attention of early modern men who positioned midwives as 'indelibly deflowering virgin bodies' - Shakespeare further illuminates the static, male-constructed identity of the female as one to be possessed (Bicks, 2003: 61). Marie Loughlin's deductions clarify the impact virginity had on female identity and most importantly, the fact that it became a social construct and instrument controlled by men. She makes a comment which illuminates Mercutio's anxiety about Queen Mab's function – to press maids. It was the intactness of the hymen which allowed the female's identity to be dominated by the male. If the hymen was broken, the structure of the woman would be complicated. 'The hymen itself seems to be the perfect sign of this particular feminine role... because it is that membrane which so often creates the virginal body as a luminal structure.' (Loughlin, 1997: 28)

Furthermore, an overriding male awareness of the potential for a woman to be sexually deceptive due to the desirability of her 'chaste treasure' is often imposed on female identity. Actually, the essence of the matter is the easiness with which a woman can pretend to be innocent while engaging in devious or sordid activity and this corresponds with the image Iago shares with Roderigo:

IAGO

Didst thou not see her paddle with the palm of his hand? didst not mark that?

RODERIGO

Yes, that I did; but that was but courtesy.

IAGO

Lechery, by this hand; an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts. They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together. Villanous thoughts, Roderigo! when these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the master and main exercise, the incorporate conclusion, Pish!

(Othello, II.i, 240-248)

Though Roderigo feels that Desdemona shakes hands with Cassio because of only politeness, Iago subverts this gesture into wantonness. In his eyes, an innocent meeting of hands can become an intimate touch and even – according to him – their breath mingle in the air carnally. In this case, it is clear that Desdemona is innocent. Nonetheless, it is a cultural fear that such overtly innocent feminine behaviour cannot always be regarded as sincere as it appears and thus an inherent mistrust of the deceptive quality in female identity is repeated.

Similarly, the ability for men to be deceived is expressed by Mercutio. While Mab is going mad with rage and examining the maids' confidential parts which absolutely should be reserved for their husbands, the men cannot be considered wise. They sleep so soundly because she 'gallops o'er a courtier's nose' and 'driveth o'er a soldier's neck' without waking them (I.iv, 77, 82) Also it is not possible only for the wife to deceive her husband (as Desdemona with Othello) or the virgin maid to deceive her husband (she may have been already pressed by Mab), but it is also possible for the midwife, who according to canon law, is at liberty to 'press' the maid and consequently commit deception on the husband. While 'the midwife was central to the production and presentation of patriarchal lineage', Queen Mab and 'her human counterparts' proved that deceptions were possible; therefore, Bicks comments that a man could not really be sure that his bride to be was actually a virgin or not. She expresses his dilemma by posing the following question, 'How do you know if a girl is a virginal maid, or, rather, a sexually experienced woman? And is she still a maid if this experience lies outside the realm of heterosexual intercourse?' (Caroline Bicks, 2003: 62)

Because women are shown to be deceptive even in the most innocent of arenas, a question instantly appears here. Since boys performed the part of women, there was an

element of deception that was inevitably linked to their appearance on stage. The question could be asked as to whether this affected their use of language. For instance, Juliet attempts first to deceive herself that things are not what they seem in order to make an unacceptable act acceptable: ‘That which we call a rose/ By any other word would smell as sweet./ So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,/ Retain that dear perfection which he owes/ Without that title’ (II.ii, 43-7) and afterwards, to Romeo, ‘It was the nightingale, and not the lark,/ That pierced the fear-full hollow of thine ear’ and ‘Yon light is not daylight; I know it’ (III.v, 2-3, 12)

No matter whether the cause is noble or necessary, artful deception is shown to be an essential part of female character. As Juliet tells her mother ‘I never shall be satisfied/ With Romeo till I behold him, dead’ (III.v. 94-95) and her father ‘I am ever ruled by you’ (IV.ii. 22) Also, Desdemona deceives her father in order to marry Othello and Brabantio warns him that this is an essential characteristic of hers: ‘Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:/ She has deceived her father, and may thee’ (I.iii. 288-9) In addition, Iago reminds Othello, ‘She did deceive her father, marrying you’ (III.iii.205) though Othello shows no tendency to believe that she is capable of adultery. Furthermore, although Desdemona is not guilty of adultery, she is shown as being deceptive through her pretence that she has not lost her handkerchief. She laments to Emilia; ‘Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?’ (III.iv. 19), but denies this to Othello repeatedly:

OTHELLO

I have a salt and sorry rheum offends me;
Lend me thy handkerchief.

DESDEMONA

Here, my lord.

OTHELLO

That which I gave you.

DESDEMONA

I have it not about me.

OTHELLO

Not?

DESDEMONA

No, faith, my lord.

OTHELLO
Is't lost? is't gone? speak, is it out o' the way?

DESDEMONA
Heaven bless us!

OTHELLO
Say you?

DESDEMONA
It is not lost; but what an if it were?

OTHELLO
How!

DESDEMONA
I say, it is not lost.

OTHELLO
Fetch't, let me see't.

DESDEMONA
Why, so I can, sir, but I will not now.

(*Othello*, III.iv. 52-86)

Desdemona may be fearful and perhaps this excuses her deception in terms of the audience; however, she has just reassured Emilia that Othello has significant virtuous qualities ('I think the sun where he was born/ Drew all such [jealous] humors from him' [30-31]) Perhaps, she may be deceiving herself as well as others. Nevertheless, Shakespeare emphasizes the fact through the repetition of 'lost'. Desdemona has admitted the handkerchief is 'lost' but when Othello asks her directly, she denies it. His repetition of her earlier words stresses that a deception – no matter how well-intentioned – has undoubtedly occurred.

This idea of sexuality which is connected with loss may also be seen in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is perhaps intensified by the fact that Juliet who is arguably too young to fully appreciate sexuality (as it is articulated in the discussions of I.iii) is the eternal child who dies tragically soon after the loss of her virginity – indeed a fundamental part of her status. Therefore, she dies in an in-betweenness state. She is neither a pure daughter nor a fully developed wife yet. Her identity is oddly compromised and Romeo's perception of womanhood and fertility disintegrates with it. While he is entering into Juliet's tomb, he describes a terrifying vision with strong connotations of the vagina and womb:

Thou detestable maw, thou womb of death,
Gorged with the dearest morsel of the earth,
Thus I enforce thy rotten jaws to open,
And, in despite, I'll cram thee with more food!

(*Romeo and Juliet*, V.iii, 45-9)

On one hand, he describes the cave which is his and Juliet's final resting place. On the other, one could argue that his vision is tainted through the loss of Juliet's transformation to woman. Because he has lost the ability to enjoy her new identity occurred by their act, and thus womanhood has almost become the fact which has destroyed her; rendered her an eternal child. The blood spilt around the entrance to the tomb – noted by the Friar (140-141) becomes an image of a broken hymen because their first sexual encounter has now become their last. Due to the fact that Juliet's development has been cruelly stopped, it is perverted and thus the sacred opening to the tomb has degenerated into foul sordidness. So, it is arguably the ultimate subversion and comment on female identity that if women exist to create life, birth has become death with Juliet's death.

Therefore, we begin to see that a broken hymen, loss of chastity, or the smallest deception can complicate the feminine status to such a degree that it becomes troubling. In both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, these create the unruly garden; the bed of sexual perversion, which produces a wild feminine identity that is unable to be formed by man. The ability and willingness of female identity to be shaped by male desires, as Emilia suggests when she remarks that 'I nothing, but to please his fantasy' is central to the structure of many of the societies Shakespeare depicts. Also, Sampson's equation of power with sexual domination over women in *Romeo and Juliet* is a good example of this: 'women, being the/ weaker vessels, are ever thrust to the wall. Therefore/ I will push Montague's men from the wall and thrust his maids to the wall' (I.i, 14-17) When this relationship falls into disharmony, usually in the minds of the men, the tragedy ensues. Othello's suspicion of Desdemona's infidelity is the most obvious example of this. Also, another valuable one is Capulet's anger resulting from Juliet's reluctance to be matched – indeed, to be created by his will.

4.2 THE CHANGEABILITY OF THE FEMALE AGENCY APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR AND APPROPRIATION OF MALE VOLITION

As it has been explored, it seems that certain traits were contemporarily associated with female identity. However, it is not right to suggest that Shakespeare fully adopts the normative attitude. In fact, as Louis Adrian Montrose remarks, the journeys which female characters in Shakespearean drama undertake (particularly romantic heroines) are mostly extreme. Indeed, the lengths to which they go and the situations which they navigate stand in stark opposition to the domestic sphere which early modern women often (but not always) found themselves restricted; therefore, it could be argued that Shakespeare's view of female identity is deeply ambiguous because he simultaneously endorses and subverts any contemporary accepted notion of female identity. Montrose argues, there is a valuable polarity of ideology in Shakespearean drama: 'Our recognition that Shakespeare's dramatic discourse is traversed by multiple and potentially contradictory ideological positions may also helpfully complicate our response' (Montrose, 1996: 113) At the very least, he portrays varying degrees of stereotype in the female characters and this fact suggests that female identity is not as static as some of the imagery or views invented by his male characters would imply.

Undoubtedly, such variance of character and both confirmation and rejection of early modern patriarchy can be found in *Romeo and Juliet*. For example, the Nurse and Lady Capulet symbolize the submissive, male-dominated female identity we might expect. Though the Nurse helps Juliet in her forbidden marriage to exiled Romeo, she supports Capulet's decision about Juliet finally. Thus, Juliet is merchandise once more. Though there is 'no honesty in men; all perjured,/ All forsworn, all naught, all dissemblers' (III. ii, 86-7), Juliet should marry Paris yet. Because it is better to be married with someone she does not love, than not at all: 'I think it best you married with the County./ ... Romeo's a dishclout to him' (III.v. 217-219) Implicitly, it seems that Juliet's identity must be tied to a man. According to the Nurse, for Juliet, there is no necessity for remaining married to Romeo when he is unavailable: 'Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were,/ As living here and you no use of him' (224-225).

Lady Capulet also intensifies the Nurse's view of female identity. She often functions as only a messenger of her husband. While we are bearing in mind that we have already encountered Capulet and Paris discussing Juliet, we first meet Lady Capulet passing the news of Paris's interest to Juliet in accordance with her husband's order. She takes his part when Juliet quite desperately looks for her help: 'O, sweet my mother cast me not away'. She

appears as almost an extension of her husband at this point. She shows little motherly inclination of her own, but only enforces his attempts to dominate Juliet through anger: 'Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word./ Do as though wilt, for I have done with thee' (202-3) The remark that she will 'speak not a word' also repeats her submission to her husband's will, and thus the elision of her identity with his. This means that she has no words of her own, for he has spoken all that is necessary before he exits. After his leaving, she has no individual feeling or idea and shortly leaves after him.

Although Capulet shows some concern for Juliet when Paris wishes to marry her despite her very young age, he soon returns to the patriarchal role demanded by the society and uses his daughter to satisfy his own wishes without taking her wishes into consideration. Juliet's defiance is more real. His bitter reaction to her failure in obeying his will again indicates the uniqueness of her confidence. His rage is excessive and fierce, it grows with her requests and finally ends in the ultimatum, 'Out you baggage!.../ get thee to church o' Thursday,/ Or never after look me in the face' (III.v, 156-162). Despite such a confirmation of male power, Juliet's refusals to accept the submissive identity which society and her family try to bestow upon her are real.

Therefore, it can be argued that a rebellion against a conventional female identity requires the appropriation of conventionally male characteristics. For example, while Romeo can be depicted as the symbol of tolerance, emotion and melancholy because of his lamentations for Rosaline, Juliet shows a more masculine restraint. The pompous oaths Romeo swears are also impractical and unnecessarily sentimental. 'swear not by the moon, th'inconstant moon,/ That monthly changes in her circled orb' (II.ii, 109-110). Displaying little girlish tendency for impulsiveness, Juliet does not esteem conventional wooing, but constancy and stability; Romeo should not swear by the moon in case his 'love prove likewise variable' (II.ii, 111).

Juliet displays a strength of character which recognizes the importance of will and action over pompous language and this power make her implore Romeo not to 'swear at all' (113) or if he will continue, she asks him, 'if thou wilt, swear by thy gracious self,/ Which is the god of my idolatry,/ And I'll believe thee' (114-115). Similarly, when a challenging and traumatic situation arises, she strengthens herself and does not tolerate the excessive emotion by which Romeo is overwhelmed. Notably, in this case, it is Romeo who assumes the conventional female identity. He considers suicide and weeps unrestrainedly and this makes the Friar to scold; 'Art thou a man? Thy form cries out thou art./ Thy tears are womanish' (III.iii, 109-110) and the Nurse to order him; 'Stand up stand up; stand, and you be a man'

(88) Though the Nurse says how Juliet is 'blubbing', nonetheless, Juliet displays more manly courage than Romeo when we see her. She controls herself to stop crying in grief over Tybalt's death by using her reason; 'That villain cousin would have killed my husband,/ Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring' (III.ii, 101-2).

5.2 FEMALE AS POSSESSION FROM DAUGHTER TO WIFE

Does being married make Romeo and Juliet more capable of changing their traditional roles? What does being a wife actually mean in this context? Undoubtedly, it speeds the tragedy because it renders Romeo and Juliet even more strongly unable to dream a life without each other. Wives are always shown as existing to please their husbands. Emilia exists to fulfill Iago's will ('I nothing, but to please his fantasy') and Desdemona pleads Othello for the position of Cassio – however misguidedly – with only the intention of serving him. When Othello replies that he will 'deny [Desdemona] nothing' (III.iii, 76) she rejects his suggestion of considering her and instead argues that her interests are only an extension of his:

Why, this is not a boon;
'Tis as I should entreat you wear your gloves,
Or feed on nourishing dishes, or keep you warm,
Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit
To your own person

(*Othello*, III.iii, 76-80)

It is clear that the implications of appropriate wifely behavior are crucial for the consideration of female identity, particularly in the context of Elizabethan England. And some inferences about this matter may be made from the appearance of the wife in Shakespeare. Arguably, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has the most central implication of the idea of marriage and thus connections can be drawn between this and some of the notions which are already discussed with the reference to *Romeo and Juliet*. The patriarchal society Capulet intends to reinforce through matching Juliet with Paris is of course the world which can be seen in the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The household itself could be seen as a model of the Elizabethan social hierarchy where Theseus functions as the male dominant force. He wants to get female obedience from his wife and submissiveness from the other youngsters.

This transition of female identity – from submissive daughter to submissive wife – which Capulet tries to enforce in *Romeo and Juliet* is also initially emphasized in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For instance, Egeus makes a visible effort when he explains that Hermia's choice for marriage is not same with his. Though Hermia loves Lysander [According to her father, she has been 'bewitch'd' by him (I.i, 27)] her wishes do not seem

worthy of consideration. His will is absolute – underlining the argument that female identity is frequently regarded only as an extension of the male – and despite her wishes, he demands to practise what he sees as his right. And Theseus supports him too:

EGEUS

I beg the ancient privilege of Athens,
As she is mine, I may dispose of her:
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS

What say you, Hermia? be advised fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god;
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, I.i, 41-52)

Female identity again becomes inextricably bound up with the custom and ownership. Furthermore, Theseus's argument relies on the notion that female identity is determined by the patriarch; he who 'composed [her] beauties'. As Queen Mab was shown to inspire fear through her appropriation of the male 'press', here the idea of the woman as a blank canvas to be pressed or 'imprinted' upon is similarly propounded. Indeed, the shock provoked through a woman's disobedience is so great that it seems unbelievable to the patriarch that she could have been in possession of her faculties and acting as an agent to her own will; therefore, witchcraft is also hinted. According to the father, Lysander has 'bewitch'd' Hermia and 'stolen the impression of her fantasy' (27, 32), as in *Othello*, he has 'enchanted' Desdemona, he has 'practised on her with foul charms' and 'Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals/ That weaken motion' (I.ii, 63, 73-75)

It seems that the opening of '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*'; the marriage of Theseus and Hippolita is also highly significant because it displays the signals of canonical subordination of the female and her passions to the male. However, the attitude of Elizabethan-Jacobean writers concerning marriage and the status of women was not uniform and presented more diversity than was generally assumed.

Kathleen Davies' work, 'Continuity and Change in Literary Advice on Marriage' particularly enlightens on the possible diversity in what is commonly regarded as strict social material:

In recent years social historians have questioned the use of such sources as direct evidence of attitudes and behaviour, and have mounted a sustained attack on the theory that their contents can be taken at face value. Demographic studies show that literary sources have only a limited use in social history since the patterns of behaviour which they describe may be highly unrepresentative. [...] Even among Puritan families there seems to have been a greater diversity of structure and behaviour than the texts suggest. (Davies, 1981: 59)

Davies goes on to warn against any inclination to read sameness into the various published marriage texts and she concludes that this is a Protestant movement:

As far as printed, and therefore popularly available, works on marriage and family life are concerned, I would question whether the stress on domesticity is in fact so very new or so peculiar to Protestants. (Davies, 1981: 60)

While the notion that a woman's identity was largely determined by her husband if she was married is supported by some scholars, such as Amy Louise Erickson who argued that 'under common law a woman's legal identity during marriage was eclipsed – literally covered – by her husband' (Erickson, 1993: 54), the others, such as L. A. Montrose take care to point out that there was no sameness in practice. In fact, Shakespeare's often seemingly contradictory messages – simultaneously displaying both conformity and rebellion – may actually suggest that the theatre participated in the contemporary discourse concerning marriage: 'What literary scholars have sometimes represented as the Elizabethan-Jacobean view of marriage is rather the printed heritage of the dominant position in what appears to have been a lively and ongoing debate' (Montrose, 1996: 114)

A treatise entitled *Of Domesticall Duties* by William Gouge sheds some light on this debate. Section 11, 'Of the reasons why wives' duties are first taught' increases the complexity of the female role in contemporary society. As a wife, her identity seems necessarily simultaneously divided. While it is always clear that she exists for her husband, at the same time she is both superior and inferior. For example, while she is subordinate, she is at once the ultimate, original subordinate and the most valued: 'First, of all other inferiours in a family, wives are far the most excellent, and therefore to be placed in the first rank. Secondly, wives were the first to whom subjection was enjoined: before there was child or servant in the world, it was said to her, *thy desire shall be subject to thine husband*' (Gouge, 2006: 16) However, while Gouge pioneers the man dominant force, there are still contradictions within the work which create a sense of uneasiness – as a gesturing towards the

lack of sameness Davies explains. For example, Gouge places emphasis on the necessity for mutuality, 'the mutually provident care of husband and wife,' and the shared duties 'common duties as mutually respect the husband and wife, and are to be performed of each to other' (Gouge, 2006: 61)

Therefore, it appears that though Elizabethan culture supported a hierarchy of male-oriented dominance (particularly in marriage), there were areas in which this ideology contradicted itself and thus, the levels causing the submissiveness deemed appropriate for a wife were complex and unstable. This is further evidenced by a rising concern related to the period of 1560-1640 during which historians have noted 'an intense preoccupation with women who are a visible threat to the patriarchal system' (David Underdown, 1985: 119) Again, as it was discussed in the first part, it can be seen that female identity was a cause of intense anxiety, perhaps due to Elizabeth I's assumption of the throne. When we consider the fact that submissiveness was nonetheless crucial to the domestic hierarchy, though it might be a bit problematic, the cause of this fear is clear. Along with the permanent fear of women's speech and sexuality expressed formerly, Underdown concurs that with the rise of Elizabeth a fear of a new type of woman developed. Her existence allowed women to assume a new, dominant identity: the 'rebellious woman' (Underdown, 1985: 119)

Titania is arguably the symbol of this rebellious woman. The disharmony of the balance of power in her relationship with Oberon – in terms of the conventional standards – is obvious from the beginning yet. This can be even felt through the adjectival description: While Oberon is 'jealous' (II.i, 61), Titania is 'proud' (II.i, 60). Furthermore, Titania does not perform her wifely duties; her encounters with Oberon are brief, 'now they never meet' (28) and matrimonial duties are firmly avoided for Titania who has 'forsworn his bed and company' (62) Titania's dismissal of conventional wifely duties and appropriation of an arguably male position of power can be explained by the fact that the fairies represent an existence which is alien to that of mankind. Therefore, the fairies' world stands in contrast, perhaps, as a challenge to the traditional culture of the Elizabethan World. As Lenker says,

...such comedies often represent the law of the father – a political system, as we have seen, that excludes rather than includes those opposing patriarchal will. The task of such a comedy becomes to establish an authority that 'overrules' this restrictive law. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fairy world of Oberon and Titania represents this counterculture (L.T. Lenker, 2001: 148)

Subversiveness therefore becomes closely bound up with female identity; the dissimilarity of traditional gender stereotypes in the fairy counterculture allows a harmonious balance to be restored when the lovers eventually return from the woods.

6.2 FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AND THE ASSUMPTION OF MALE POWER THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCE

What models have Helena and Hermia for appropriate behaviour? It is important to pay attention to this point that mothers are demonstrably absent in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Both women have no mothers but fathers (as Desdemona). Therefore, that female identity is shaped by male intention is felt more deeply because fathers are the *makers* of their daughters – supported by Theseus's earlier comment that Hermia was 'composed' by Egeus. In fact, the only real biological mother in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the votaress mentioned by Titania. But again, there is no example of a pure feminine family relationship because the votaress gave birth to a boy. However, Titania's description of the pregnant votaress gives strength to the notion of the fairy counterculture. While Theseus's description dismisses the role of the mother, regarding the daughter as the father's, Titania's depiction of pregnancy is wholly feminine and she never mentions the father's role; even ignores the intercourse: 'we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive/ And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind' (II.i, 128-9); (Montrose, 2004: 481 ff.).

Titania also focuses on the bodily experience of motherhood and the physical nature of the maternal bond – how the 'womb' was 'rich with [her] young squire' (131). Titania has chosen the changeling boy despite 'jealous' Oberon and this case also intensifies her connection with the 'rebellious woman'. She, like Hermia, has attempted to form herself according to her own desires, not to those imposed on her by a dominant male. In Titania's case, this has led her to take the place of the deceased mother for the sake of the loyalty to her female companion.

Nonetheless, Titania functions as the most maternal character though she is a substitute mother and her devotion to the changeling boy conflicts with Oberon's desires for her. This fact reveals that female identity must be confined to one sphere in male eyes: as Hermia could no longer function as Egeus's daughter and another man's lover (when the lover was out of the father's control), Titania also cannot function as a mother and as Oberon's wife. The notions of loyalty, when they are divided, are viewed by Shakespeare's male characters as a threat for an easily controlled and stable female identity. Thus, Oberon who is 'fell and wrath' (II.i, 20) attempts to take the changeling boy as his own in order to relieve the perceived threat:

Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy

(*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.i, 21-27)

Notably, Titania's attachment to the boy is a symbol of the strength of feminine loyalty. She becomes mother to him due to his being a souvenir from his mother for whom she possessed strong feelings: 'she, being mortal, of that boy did die;/ And for her sake do I rear up her boy,/ And for her sake I will not part with him.' (135-137) However, women's ability to have relationships independent from men – and therefore possess an identity separate from male extension – is continually complicated by male interference. Juliet and Lady Capulet are unable to interact unless Capulet allows them. Desdemona and Emilia's relationship is perverted due to Iago's pressures, which causes Emilia to steal her mistress' handkerchief. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia and Helena are estranged from each other because of their love for Lysander and Demetrius. And Louis Montrose argues that this is the case even where Titania and her votaress friend are separated due to the birth of her son:

What Oberon accomplishes by substituting Bottom for the boy is to break Titania's solemn vow. As in the case of the Amazons, or of Hermia and Helena, the play again enacts a male disruption of an intimate bond between women: first by the boy, and then by the man. It is as if, in order to be freed and enfranchised from the prison of the womb, the male child must *kill* his mother' (Montrose, 2004: 490)

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Theseus initially subverts traditional male dominance by granting Hermia a day to consider her feelings. Therefore, the play develops from the basis of the defiance between parent and child; such as, the male child who killed his mother through his birth and the daughter who escapes from her father and take refuge into the woods. The wild of the woods and the magic of the fairyland provide an appropriate base for an exploration of the female who is independent from male dominance. Simultaneously, in the play, Theseus can also be seen as an initiator of the theme of male dominance in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through his acquisition of Hippolyta – many critics (particularly Montrose) have noted his appropriation of the Amazon queen as crucial in providing an introduction to the play's focus which is on marriage as an institution that determines female identity according to patriarchal norms. It seems that such patriarchal considerations are ingrained in

the women who are reluctant to embrace their liberation even in the woods which offer them the freedom of choice. For instance, Hermia enforces her own chastity and good breeding by resisting Lysander at first. He fashions the wood as a wedding bed by ‘One turf’ that will serve as ‘pillow for us both;/ One heart, one bed, two bosoms and one troth’. But she gently rejects him: ‘Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,/ Lie further off yet, do not lie so near’ (II.ii, 47-50)

The idea of marriage and appropriate feminine behaviour is essential at this point. The similar figures of Oberon and Theseus appear; both powerful rulers overpower their women by subduing them to their wills. Theseus may be slightly threatened by the possible closeness of the Amazons; thus he wishes to speed up his wedding and its consummation and Oberon wishes to establish his authority over the wayward Titania who has ‘forsovern’ his bed. Nonetheless, there is a demonstration of female strength and solidarity which complicates their attempts to dominate. Here it can be proposed that Shakespeare evokes the spirit of the rebellious woman, perhaps an image of Elizabeth I herself, in the two groups of women – Hippolyta the exotic, alien Amazons and Titania and her votaress – who powerfully oppose Theseus and Oberon who closely resemble each other.

In fact, Theseus overcomes a culturally known model of female independence by his attempts to subdue an Amazon bride and thus, this can be seen as the ultimate attempt at affirming social male-dominated convention. Their rejection of male alliance and matrimony was well known to a sixteenth century audience and thus an assertion of dominance over such figures of matriarchy and female autonomy, along with the separation of the Amazon sorority, is a powerful affirmation of male dictatorship over female identity. However, Montrose notes that Shakespeare’s audience who would be familiar with the story of Theseus and Hippolyta would have known that in the actual story, their relationship ended in disaster.

Theseus’s courtship of Phaedra led to Hippolyta’s death. However, in some versions, this is not before Hippolyta stormed into the wedding of Phaedra and Theseus and plundered Athens with a revenging band of Amazons. The various – all doomed – versions of the myth would be familiar to an Elizabethan audience. Thus, Shakespeare shows that Theseus’s attempts at male sovereignty, as dramatized in the play, are all futile. The issue is further complicated by the lovers’ entrance into the subversive fairies’ world in the woods.

It is also notable that the rather close relationship between Titania and the votaress, Hippolyta and the Amazons, and Hermia and Helena can be considered a common

contemporary threat for the male dominance as a similar contemporary anxiety concerning the midwives and their knowledge about sexuality. The wood recalling the image of the garden and its connotations of untamed sexuality also bring together the fact of female companionship. It was the place Hermia often reminds Helena where once they 'Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,/ Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet' (I.i, 215-216). Their mutual experiences and secrets which are inextricably bound up with feminine friendship and the female body make this relationship quite exclusive. Later, when Helena suspects that enchanted men are tricking her by their love declarations, it is Hermia's supposed betrayal which chiefly wounds her. Indeed, much of her speech is directed at Hermia, and she stresses the strength of their bond through nostalgic references which isolate and dismiss the men. The girls have a tangible history together and it is that which Hermia evokes. She mentions their 'school-days' friendship, childhood innocence' and signifies their bond through the continual repetition of 'both' and 'our'.

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
Have with our needles created both one flower,
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
As if our hands, our sides, voices and minds,
Had been incorporate.

(A Midsummer Night's Dream, III.ii, 202-208)

Standing in stark contrast to the notion that female identity exists only as an extension of the male, it appears that by means of the strength of their mutual experiences and their intimate understanding of one another's development, female identity is, in fact, more fundamentally tied to female friends and associates than male relatives or husbands.

This exclusive understanding also extends to sexual growth and experience which may again cause contemporary fears of female appropriation of a part and knowledge which should be only male. Helena goes on to strengthen her argument through a reference made to their shared experiences in early life, with implicit sexual overtones. She and Hermia 'grew together/ Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,/ But yet an union in partition' (III.ii, 208-210). Helena's anxiety for Hermia's alleged betrayal is greater because of their mutual experience, implicitly sexual in its growth. And it is clear that this mutual fact again points out the inability for a man to 'own' this part of female identity. It is entirely female and thus, it can be shared by a female companion – in the same way that a midwife could possess intimate knowledge of the female body before a male would encounter it by matrimony. The cherry is

also a strong image for intensifying this aspect of Helena's argument because it was commonly used to imply lips or vagina at that time.

Moreover, a further issue is hinted in a similar way that (before a father or husband) the midwife might know whether the woman was a virgin or not – a fact considered crucial to her feminine identity and worth. So, here it is implicit that only Helena and Hermia have knowledge of each other's sexual status. Thus, the female identity becomes a powerful – arguably fearful - mystery determined by the strength of sisterly connections. The 'one cushion', on which both Helena and Hermia have sat, also overpowers the earlier attempt made by Lysander to share 'One turf' with Hermia in the counterculture of the woods, as Titania and the votaress's relationship has superseded her marriage to Oberon. Titania and the votaress both taking a parental role with the changeling boy have almost recreated the mother/father duality, just as Helena's remembrance of her intimacy with Hermia refers back and supersedes Lysander's attempts to reach Hermia.

However, one could also view the disintegration of the relationship between Helena and Hermia as a signifier that eventually a choice must be made between this conflicting relationship between female confidant and male master. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare depicts that there are exclusive remembrances and intimate knowledge to which only female companions have access to. At the same time, the ability of feminine desire to overpower all of these is also portrayed. The transition from innocent daughter to sexually aware wife is certainly enough to overpower her loyalty to her father – as Shakespeare displays repeatedly by Hermia, Egeus and Lysander, Desdemona, Brabantio and Othello, and Juliet, Capulet and Romeo – and it is also enough to overthrow the bonds of sisterhood.

For example, Hermia reminds Helena their mutual past, but also requires her secrecy (for she may be deceitful, if it is necessary) in order that she may flee with Lysander. At this point, the remembrance of 'the wood, where often you and I/ Upon faint primrose-beds were wont to lie,/ Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,' is only a way to an end, for it is where 'my Lysander and myself shall meet' (I.i, 214-217). It could be argued that heterosexual desire introduces a cunning facet of female identity. Hermia's mention about their girlhood days could be a clever, emotional entrapment inciting Helena's loyalty. Furthermore, it is also almost a nostalgic goodbye to their sisterhood, as she has implicitly decided on Lysander – over her father, over Athens, but also over Helena. The relationships are shown as essentially conflicting, and now new friends are to be made. 'And thence from

Athens turn away our eyes,/ To seek new friends and stranger companies' (I.i, 218-219). Helena also breaks Hermia's confidence immediately in order to increase her chances in luring Demetrius. The pair's 'sister's vows' and 'school-days friendships' (III.ii,198, 202) are shown to be invalid in the face of potential sexual satisfaction.

Similarly, Titania quickly dismisses her maternal role when she is overwhelmed by the desire for Bottom. Though, arguably, the circumstances are different because she has been bewitched by Oberon's potion, nonetheless the desire and the mementos of her relationship with the votaress cannot continue. Her relationship with the changeling boy is immediately ignored in order to be interested in her newfound passion and lust. Oberon's demonstration of his sovereignty through the practicing of the potion takes on darker and more serious implications of male power when he describes the extent of Titania's subjugation before the second application. The willfulness she has showed is completely abolished. While she is desperate, Oberon is triumphant; scorning and teasing her in his 'pleasure'. Due to her 'dotage', she begs for Oberon's 'patience' and hands over the changeling boy without hesitation (IV.i, 54, 44, 55) Titania's behavior is like the desperation Helena displays without any magical interference. The suggestion that men are able to enslave women through stratagems or love, and make them renounce their free will, their loyalties to one another, and their own spirited identities, is thus reinforced. Therefore, the counterculture of the forest which perhaps promised an exploration of matriarchy at first, actually results in the confirmation of patriarchy at the conclusion: 'The threat to patriarchy – suppressed in the city – is quelled even in the more permissive world of the forest. Primordial memories of the Faerie Queene as Great Mother or Triple Hecate and of Midsummer's Eve as the occasion for Bacchalian fertility rites are evoked and suppressed. The forest trope allows the idea of matriarchy to surface but ends by denying it.' (Jeanne Addison Roberts, 1994: 45)

7.2 FEMALE LOYALTY AND THE SHAPING OF IDENTITY THROUGH DEPENDENCY

The loyalty or changeability which is present in female identity provides much stimulus in Shakespeare's comedies or tragedies. As just discussed, the divided loyalties of the women of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide comment about the nature of patriarchal society. On one hand, it can be undermined and threatened through a woman's assertion of herself and rejection of male control through strong friendship with another woman; on the other, a woman's readiness to embrace heterosexual desire can conflict with sisterly ties and furthermore, lead to her necessary obedience which ultimately confirms a male superiority over independent female identity.

In *Othello*, the topic of potential female changeability is introduced immediately. Desdemona has – according to a point of view – betrayed her father and this was a harder situation for Elizabethan society than modern twenty first century culture might allow. There was not only a strong sense of loyalty demanded from a woman but due to her limited social status, a sense of debt. As Theseus stated that, for Egeus, a daughter was indebted to her father and essentially owned by him; the father was responsible for her very existence in society's view because he had 'composed' her. Also, Brabantio's outrage that results from Desdemona's marriage and his refusal to believe that she has acted through her own will imply the depth of this assumed debt to one's father. It is unthinkable that she would have made a choice which was his to make because of her being tied to her father's identity.

However, Desdemona knows exactly what she needs to say and there is little reluctance or hesitation about her questioned obedience. She separates her identity into parts, each tied to a man to whom she agrees that she owes obedience. But her loyalty to Brabantio is lacking because she owes her father obedience for only a part of her developing identity (her 'life and education') while she is in debt to her husband for the entire identity of womanhood at which she feels she has now arrived. This case is signified by the terms with which she describes her debt to Othello and she does not have to quantify it overtly:

but here's my husband,
And so much duty as my mother show'd
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.

(*Othello*, I.iii, 183-187)

Though it may be arguable that this transference of loyalties implies the fact of women's changeability previously discussed, Desdemona remains fiercely loyal to Othello. Her debt of obedience to him is a quality she believes and upholds until the end. Though her immediate anxiety about the lost handkerchief signals that she actually fears that Othello may be jealous, she is rather inflexible in her refusal to confirm such a view in front of Emilia and repeats that he is 'made of no such baseness/As jealous creatures are' and 'the sun where he was born/Drew all such humours from him' (III.iv, 23-4, 26-7)

Even after a demonstration of jealousy from Othello which causes Emilia to exclaim 'Is not this man jealous?' Desdemona refuses to confirm or even directly acknowledge this. She merely comments; 'I ne'er saw this before' and directs the blame at herself; 'Sure there's some wonder in this handkerchief' (III.iv, 94-95). Such a reluctance to attribute blame on her husband is further supported in Desdemona's brief soliloquy in IV.ii. Though Othello has considered her the 'cunning whore of Venice' (89) she does not question the appropriateness of such a term, but only what she can have done to deserve it. Most pertinently, Desdemona's faith in Othello is so unshakable that she even affirms the correctness of his addressing her by such terms: ''Tis meet that I should be used so, very meet' (107) This tendency to blindly take her husband's part also occurs in Emilia. Her quiet acceptance of Iago's treatment of her which often makes her silent is a kind of complicity. Furthermore, at the end, she refuses to accept Iago's real face despite her own knowledge of his deceit regarding the handkerchief; she simply states: 'He says thou told'st him that his wife was false./ I know thou didst not' (V.ii, 172-173). Thus, such a characteristic can be seen as a component of female loyalty and the marital bond can be so strong that it necessitates a sharing of identity which culminates in the female appropriation of her husband's guilt.

Nonetheless, it is this common preconception emphasized by Brabantio: 'Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:/ She has deceived her father, and may thee' (I.iii, 288-289) and by Iago: 'She did deceive her father, marrying you' (III.iii, 206) which provokes the tragedy. To an early modern audience who is familiar with the promotion of such stereotypes dictating women's changeable loyalties, Othello's dilemma would have been even more approvable. It was not only his insecurities manipulated by Iago, which intensified Othello's willingness to believe his deception but moreover, the fact that he would have to combat a rooted cultural attitude concerning the fickleness attributed to female identity in order to retain his faith in Desdemona.

However, it is not only towards Othello that Desdemona displays unwavering loyalty, the friendship between herself and Emilia is depicted by Shakespeare as one that is based on mutual trust and understanding. Desdemona even defends Emilia against Iago's teasing – notably opposing her own earlier statements about the obedience demanded by a husband – and she advises Emilia: 'Do not learn of him, Emilia, though he be thy husband' (II.i, 158-159) But again, it can be seen that conflict between female confidants and loyalty to one's husband. Despite Emilia's evident love for Desdemona, when an opportunity for her to fulfil Iago's desire to possess the handkerchief becomes available, she chooses to take it. Though it could be considered that she did not know Iago's plans for the handkerchief, nonetheless, a clear choice has been made. Emilia chooses to satisfy Iago, even when it means injuring Desdemona. She is well aware of that the loss of the handkerchief will affect her deeply even before conversing with Iago, as she meditates on how Desdemona 'reserves [the handkerchief] evermore about her/To kiss and talk to' (III.iii, 297-298).

Emilia does make some effort to investigate Iago's intentions and asks: 'What will you do with't, that you have been so earnest/ To have me filch it?' (316-317) When his reply is rude and not clear, she appears to regret her decision: 'If it be not for some purpose of import,/ Give't me again. Poor lady she'll run mad/ When she shall lack it.' (319-321) However, her attempts to resist her husband are relatively trivial. At his first dismissal of her, she submits without a word, as the case later in IV.ii. Iago's command 'Go to' appears to demand unquestioning loyalty from Emilia, even if it means abandoning Desdemona. Both in terms of dropping her handkerchief in III.iii or literally in IV.ii, she leaves her alone with Othello when she is overtly distressed and in the need of support. However, the matrimonial loyalty which seems essential to female identity is complicated by Shakespeare in the 'willow' scene of IV.iii. The scene is also notable as a rare moment of female intimacy that the audience is privy to and it is described by a critic as 'perhaps [Shakespeare's] greatest intimate dialogue between women' which reveals the relative isolation of the women; 'alone in a military camp where masculine conceptions of honour define what a woman is' (Carole McKewin, 1983: 128). In this scene, Emilia's attitude towards fidelity conflicts with the unshakable loyalty to Iago which she has previously demonstrated. This case does not only question how firmly her identity is tied to Iago's (a bond which has seemed steady up to now) but also her bond with Desdemona who is horrified by her revelations.

Emilia's pragmatic and affirmative response to Desdemona's disbelieving question about infidelity – 'Dost thou in conscience think.../ That there be women do abuse their

husbands/ In such gross kind?’ – simultaneously unveils an independence of spirit and a dependence. Emilia jokes that she would not commit such an act by Desdemona’s ‘heavenly light’ but that she ‘might do’t as well i’th dark’ (IV.iii, 63-65) Her logical reasoning that ‘The world’s a huge thing; it is a great price for a small vice’ complicates the stereotype that women are supposed to possess a rigid female identity. The response of Desdemona to Emilia reflects a different interpretation of woman’s individuality, and with such a variance of interpretation Shakespeare challenges and undercuts the stereotype. Both women are far more complex than a whore/virgin stereotype may allow, largely due to the nature of their relationships with each other and their husbands. Shakespeare also comments on the complexity of human identity – not just female – within this scene. The only deduction that can be truly inferred about identity, Emilia indicates, is its potential for fickleness. Emilia could see the potential to be unfaithful and Othello’s mind is poisoned to such an extent that women, in Desdemona’s person, turn from a ‘fair warrior’ to a ‘fair devil’ (II.i, 173, III.iii, 479)

However, Emilia’s response could be seen less as an independent viewpoint but also as inextricably bound up with Iago. Her reasoning behind a woman’s infidelity is as a reaction to a husband’s defects. Her words actually support the notion that a woman’s identity is shaped by her patriarch again. She comments that ‘I do think it is their husbands’ faults/ If wives do fall’ (IV.iii, 82-83). Then she proposes an argument that a woman’s abilities are measurable to a man’s:

Let husbands know
 Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell
 And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
 As husbands have...

... have not we affections,
 Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
 Then let them use us well: else let them know,
 The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

(*Othello*, IV.iii, 89-99)

The multi-faceted nature of identity is again stressed. Both men and women share a variety of tastes, particularly in terms of the sensual ones and thus, tendency cannot be predicted or stereotyped due to his or her ability to identify possible choices. ‘See and smell/

And have palates both for sweet and sour' (90-91) While this again seems to demonstrate a loyalty and shared identity between womankind – eliding their desires and capabilities and setting them against the men's – it also arguably confirms patriarchal dominance.

As the 'revenge' Emilia says has been provoked and therefore only exists due to male treatment; so, the comparison again illustrates a need for female identity to be dominated by male behaviour. Emilia also indicates the necessary passiveness of the female with 'let them use us well' and conveys the fundamental loyalty a wife feels for her husband by illustrating the dependence of even female 'ills' on the male acting: 'The ills we do, their ills instruct us so'. Moreover, it can be arguable that such a speech from Emilia only demonstrates the truth of her closing statement. Such bitterness and cynicism concerning male/female relations has been evidenced already in Iago's sexual mistrust and his treatment of Emilia. For instance, his unprompted malice can be clearly felt when Emilia offers the 'thing' she has for him: 'You have a thing for me? It is a common thing' (III.iii, 303-304) Thus it appears that his 'ills' have instructed hers and it can be deduced that the sexual attitude displayed by Emilia is not an innate component of her identity, but rather the identity she has been forced to assume due to Iago's own inclination and dominance.

Similarly, Desdemona's complete innocence can be seen as an echo of Othello's earlier views. His first descriptions of Desdemona, for example, often painted an excessively innocent picture of her, focusing on her almost otherworldly purity. The words and expressions used during their courtship can be considered pure and innocent, almost divine. For example, Othello refers to her as 'my soul's joy' (II.i, 176) 'my fair warrior' (173) 'my gentle love' (II.iii, 231) and afterwards, he laments how her name – now besmirched – was once 'fresh/ As Dian's visage' (Diana is the goddess who was eternally chaste and virginal) (III.iii, 386-387)

Furthermore, in the play, there is another woman who is similar to Rosaline. She appears less frequently (though Rosaline does not appear at all) than she is spoken about: Bianca. Though Emilia and Desdemona demonstrate a constant loyalty, Bianca, who does not even have the status of a married woman, displays the greatest amount of loyalty and she mostly admits her dependence on Cassio. For instance, she finds the time meaningless when he is not with her:

What, keep a week away? seven days and nights?
Eight score eight hours? and lovers' absent hours,
More tedious than the dial eight score times?
O weary reckoning!

(*Othello*, III. iv, 166-169)

However, Cassio does not seem very eager to be with her and he has no wish for the general to 'see me womaned' (189). Despite his apparent neglecting her – he has not visited her for some time, to the extent that she has now come to find him, and she believes that Desdemona's handkerchief may be a love memento taken from another woman – she still obeys his commands: 'I must be circumstanced' (III. iv, 195). Shakespeare also indicates the level of her loyalty due to the amount of her questions – the three consecutive questions in the passage above. 'Is't come to this?' (177), 'Leave you? Wherefore?' (186), and 'Why, I pray you?' (188).

Indeed, the questions constitute the huge part of her talking that reveals her dependency and furthermore, a lack of independent status. She relies entirely on a man to provide her with answers and thus an identity. Despite his failing to answer many of her questions satisfactorily or at all [He largely ignores her first questions, and avoids specific answers in the case of the others; for example, he answers: 'Not that I love you not' (189)], yet she follows his orders. Arguably, she feels an amount of affection for him which motivates her. However, as it had been supposed, she is also heavily reliant on Cassio for a sense of purpose and thus, any task he can endow her with (no matter how it may be unsatisfactory) is preferable.

Shakespeare may have had a dramatic purpose while he is creating this lack of identity related to Bianca. However, this is valuable in terms of evaluating the position of female identity. Some critics have argued that Bianca is little more than a mirror reflecting social attitude and the position of women in the world of the play. Maynard Mack describes Bianca as a 'mirror' in this way: 'At the point when, in *Othello's* mental imagery, Desdemona becomes the soliciting whore... Bianca enters in the flesh... flourishes the magic handkerchief which is now 'the subject of jealous bickering' (Mack, 1960: 30). Bianca, though she shares the same dependencies with the other women, it seems that she acts as an opposite; partly in the terms by which she is described. In other words, Bianca (particularly when she functions as a 'mirror' or, as the printing press earlier mentioned, a blank canvas on which many things are imprinted) is permanently shaped by the comments the others make about her.

For example, shortly after her first appearance where she has shown herself to be heavily reliant on and affectionate of Cassio (it can be hardly said that there is a sexual reference in her words and behavior) Iago describes her by heavily carnal terms: 'It is a creature/ That dotes on Cassio; as 'tis the strumpet's plague/ To beguile many and be beguil'd by one' (IV.i, 93-5) Once more, Shakespeare shows the disparity between reality and stereotype in order to subtly undermine convention. Iago's representation of Bianca and our experience of her are not similar or identical; thus, it seems that it can only be a traditional attitude towards courtesans which directs Iago's view. Again, Bianca's lack of identity makes her a space onto which male opinions can be projected. Therefore, her status as a 'mirror' is reinforced. It also appears that it is Iago's own tendency for cynical assumption which influences his perception of Bianca. After all, though Iago is a man who supposes himself quite experienced in these matters 'I know our country disposition well' (III.iii, 203) an audience is likely to make more reliable decisions regarding Bianca's identity based on a more tangible source. Also, though Othello may consider Iago 'honest', the audience is again well aware of the fact that his actions do not confirm his opinion.

Cassio is the character who has the most significant relationship with Bianca and therefore it is his opinion that may offer the most reliable perception. The disparity between the terms with which he considers her when she is absent and when she is present is most clear proof of his view. If her identity is like a mirror and also relies on her relationship(s) with men, such an inconsistency makes Bianca's personality complicated and uncertain. Her dependency causes her to exist as an object to be used for men's will – not very much according to her own will. For instance, when it is useful for Cassio to comfort her with terms of affection; such as, 'sweet love' (III.iv, 165), she temporarily becomes an object of affection but when it is useful for Cassio to appear indifferent to her, she becomes merely a sexual liaison: 'I marry [Bianca]! What? A customer! (IV.i, 117) His reasons for such treatment of her could vary. He may be embarrassed for his continued arrangement with her, his affection may be genuine but afterwards it makes him embarrassed, or he may simply utilise her when she is useful. Nonetheless, what is likely apparent is that her dependency reaches to such an extent that he is able to create an identity for her which is changeable according to his will.

All of these do not mean that Bianca is a symbol of female identity without complexity. Though these aspects of her character may be puzzling, nevertheless Shakespeare connects her with a level of independence. Cassio mentions that he was 'coming to [her] house' (153) which indicates that she has achieved a level of self-sufficiency. She is economically free and

apparently governed by neither husband nor father – the two central figures determining a woman’s status usually. Such relative liberation perhaps affords Bianca the courage to refute Emilia’s insult: ‘O, fie upon thee, strumpet!’ by ‘I am no strumpet, but of life as honest/ As you that thus abuse me’ (V.i, 121-123) Bianca who is neither a daughter nor a wife; thus, a woman with no status in such a patriarchal society, nonetheless, is aware of not having the inferior and scorned status of a prostitute.

In addition, Emilia’s sarcastic reaction to Bianca illuminates an interesting fact regarding women’s relations to each other. If a woman is not married, but she can be alone with a man at her house – as we realize through Bianca’s declaration that she and Cassio dined at her house ‘He supped at my house’ (119) – she is regarded as a whore. Indeed, it is generally assumed that Bianca is probably a courtesan. Nevertheless, the inclination for most of the characters in the play to draw this conclusion also discusses the place of women in such societies. As Edward Pechter deduces: ‘to suggest that an autonomous, sexually active woman is necessarily a whore, selling her desires for bread and clothes, does not follow... draw[ing] our attention to the way belief rests on and is shaped by cultural clutter’ (Petcher, 1998: 369-370)

CONCLUSION

SHAKESPEARE'S AMBIVALENCE

This exploration has shown that female identity in Shakespearean drama is inevitably shaped by cultural convention. In this respect, the plays can provide valuable understanding of the role of women in society through both enforcing stereotypes and challenging them. Though it is generally considered that women's identities were shaped by men and they were imprisoned in the domestic sphere, women were not unaffected by social changes (most remarkably by the accession of an overtly multi-talented woman to the British throne) and they attempted to question the patriarchy which would restrict them – demonstrated by an increase in literacy and the appearance of the first defence of women by Jane Anger along with her followers.

Perceptions of women were also inevitably shaped by cultural stimuli resulted from the beginning of a new era of plenty and prosperity under Elizabeth's rule, in other words, a 'fecund' era. Therefore, as the garden imagery abounded in heraldry and pageantry, the female identity became more closely connected with woman fertility. It was perhaps Elizabeth's reluctance to marry and thus produce an heir that caused a tension developing between that celebration of fecundity and a growing fear concerning women's sexuality. And as a result of this tension, there occurred an image of garden which degenerated into the untamed chaos of Iago's vision in *Othello*. In other words, female identity was still that which could be created; as a garden was a passive space into which men could enter; so, the woman as an object of male fantasy abounded in Shakespearean drama. This was made even more obvious by the fact that women were portrayed by men on the stage; women in drama literally were male creations and their identity was inextricably connected to their male counterparts. The presence of women as an extension of men was also apparent in some characters such as, Rosaline and Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet* and Bianca in *Othello*. They were largely or completely unseen and they became projections whose identity revealed more about the men who described them than anything else. In particular, Queen Mab could be seen as not only a reflection of Mercutio's troubled attitude towards female sexuality but society in general. Mercutio's choice of the term 'press' is therefore crucial in contemporary meaning and when it is explored, it illuminates a fear concerning female appropriation of male sexual knowledge and practice.

An anxiety concerning female confidants – presumably results from the shared knowledge of virginity or fidelity – pervades to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Mothers are largely absent or agents of the father's will; therefore, the daughter is the property of the father. Patriarchal control is often exercised rigidly but it can be threatened by close female friendships or heterosexual desire. The father is able to pass the daughter to a lover who is chosen by himself (as in the case of Egeus and Hermia) but if a woman acts according to her own will and chooses female intimacy over her husband or a husband over a father, a discomfort related to a female's fickle loyalty is often intensely expressed by the injured party.

Thus, independent will becomes crucial. Women frequently display willingness to allow their identities to be shaped by their patriarchs – from their language to their behaviour and to the acts they undertake. However, Shakespeare subtly questions such patriarchal dominance by creating some unconventional female characters or rather by imbuing some female characters with moments of self-confidence and assertiveness such as, Juliet's assuming more masculine traits than Romeo, Emilia's sexual awareness, Desdemona's determined attempts in the face of Othello to reinstate Cassio, Titania's initial refusal to part with the changeling boy, and Hermia's plan to flee with Lysander.

Therefore, it can be said that though female identities are largely shaped through male desire, Shakespeare promotes the ability for change by offering us glimpses of his female characters' self awareness and independent thoughts. Desdemona knows that she is 'guiltless' and Bianca knows she is 'no strumpet'. Consequently, Allan Bloom's deduction may indeed supply the most pertinent conclusion for this study, 'Shakespeare's women have a range and diversity that make us forget the constrained and constructed women of Romantics. The total distinction between men and women and their roles is not present in Shakespeare, and women are capable of assuming male disguise in order to perform the male deeds that men are frequently unable to perform for themselves. Shakespeare is never a sucker for theory, and this communicates itself to his audiences...Shakespeare was able to choose what he wanted from his own times and mold it to his purposes.' (Bloom, 2000: 5-6, 21) and, in his world, though women may not be sure what they are without men, they know what they are not.

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