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“WHY DO YOU KEEP ALONE?:” ISOLATED WOMEN IN THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

by

ALEXUS LITCHFIELD

(Under the Direction of Mary Villeponteaux)

ABSTRACT

The works of William Shakespeare have been well explored, but there is a lack of criticism that examines how the depiction of women is shaped by the genre of the play. Linda Bamber is one of the few critics who have explored this connection between gender and genre. However, while she focuses on the plays' psychological dynamics, I examine the social dynamics between characters in my study of gender and genre. I suggest that, in both tragedy and comedy, isolation is a strong marker of unhappiness for Shakespeare's female characters. Examining three tragedies, I find that Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Regan, and Ophelia's growing isolation is a key factor in their tragic endings. I then demonstrate that this pattern unexpectedly occurs in the comedies *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Renaissance comedies are usually understood to end in the unification of a community, which is what makes the isolation of Katherine and Jessica so surprising. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine is an outcast who is only further isolated after marrying Petruchio. By observing the way she is dehumanized and isolated, despite her eventual acceptance of her society's cultural norms, it becomes clear that Katherine is not included in the happy, communal ending of her play. Similar to Katherine, Jessica is excluded from the community in *The Merchant of Venice*. She abandons her Jewish faith and father for a Christian husband, but she is not fully accepted in her new community. While not explicitly excluded, Jessica is also not included in the Christian community; while the Christian characters are celebrating their new marriages and/or newfound wealth at the end of the play, Jessica remains silent and is not included in their joy. Katherine and Jessica's isolation from their communities complicates the comedic endings of these plays and brings our understanding of genre and what makes a comedy a comedy into question.

INDEX WORDS: William Shakespeare, English Renaissance, Isolation, Genre, Gender, Tragedy, Comedy, Community, Female alliance, Drama

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Renaissance was a tumultuous time in English history; the official state religion changed four times and there were three different monarchs within a twelve-year period until things begin to settle down with the reign of Elizabeth I, who brought stability to both the monarchy and Church. However, Elizabeth herself inspired feelings of unease because she was a sole, woman monarch. Whether because of Elizabeth's presence or advances in science/medicine and new thoughts, discourse about gender grew in intensity. Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus describe the "Woman Question," pamphlet wars of the English Renaissance and how these pamphlets both "continued and even intensified the age-old debate about women" (20). However, while many of these pamphlets were written by men, Henderson and McManus explain that there were several women who wrote in defense of themselves and their sex, and these women "infused the controversy with passion, conviction, and a new sense of purpose" (20). Nevertheless, it was primarily men who were publishing poems, articles, pamphlets, and books, not only attacking women but also prescribing how women were expected to act. Kate Aughterson explains that a lot of these books of conduct are "structured around certain characteristics, described as ideal feminine virtues: chastity, obedience, humility and silence" ("Conduct" 68). Even some treatises that could be seen as empowering for women also prescribe severe limits. For example, Juan Luis Vives wrote a text for Mary I instructing her on how to be a good, Christian woman; he promotes education for women but always returns to ways to keep a maiden chaste; even when he begins to broach another subject, such as soberness or travel, he circles back to how said subject could affect a woman's maidenhood. Aughterson explains that there was an outpouring of thought that women should neither enter nor speak in the "public" sphere but should remain in the house under the watchful eye of their father or husband. Women were also discouraged from speaking publicly, especially on matters of religion. But as Aughterson explains,

In addition to theological bans on women speaking, the prevalence of proverbial invectives against voluble women are rife in this period. Many of these are utilized in the drama and popular festivals: the image of the shrew, the gossiping housewife and the down-trodden

husband are all utilized satirically as part of a wider concern about transgression of social and gender roles (“Writing and Speaking” 224).

Thus, women were expected to keep silent or speak only when necessary. However, as Aughterson points out, these instruction manuals on behavior were men’s thoughts on how women should act, but they were not descriptions of how women actually acted.

Contrary to what the men of the time preached, many women exercised some form of agency, including the Queen herself. And while few women could claim royal blood, women of different social levels found ways to exercise power. Bernard Capp explains that while

men ruled in early modern England, many women at all social levels also found ways to exercise agency, sometimes ... to curb the abuses of male hegemony. Female agency generally operated far more subtly, especially at the royal court, where women used their connections and proximity to the monarch to advance the interests of their families and friends (15).

So, while women were expected to be silent and obedient, sometimes they were congregating with other women and pulling strings behind the scenes. Helen Graham-Matheson talks about how female courtiers, specifically Elisabeth Parr, participated in Tudor politics through their proximity to the Queen and relationships to each other. She specifically points to how Elizabeth’s Ambassador to Madrid, Thomas Chaloner, described women from Queen Elizabeth’s Privy Chamber as “Counsielleresses” to show that “women’s informal talk was considered to have political importance,” explaining that it “seems clear that during the early Elizabethan period, female activity that has been traditionally viewed as ‘gossip’ was actually a form of political discourse, or as Chaloner would say, counsel” (33). Community is where women gained power and exercised agency.

Theatre tends to reflect the events and culture around it. While women use their communities to employ agency, the same behavior is mirrored in their fictional counterparts. Niamh J. O’Leary explains how in

early modern drama, communities of women exist both as actual, created as women come together and self-identify as like-minded group members, and as imagined or virtual, often

invoked by a single woman in a moment of need. Both effectively support female agency and pose political resistance to male tyranny (68).

She describes how women in plays often call upon other women for aid and advice, both figuratively and literally. And while this phenomenon was not restricted to one playwright, we do see it often occurring in Shakespeare's plays. Carole McKewin analyzes private conversation between women in the plays of Shakespeare to explain how these conversations "provide opportunities for self-expression, adjustment to social codes, release, relief, rebellion, and transformation" (129). She describes how in the comedies women often gather in private to express their inner thoughts while men freely express themselves in both private and public. She also briefly mentions that in the "tragedies, where the patriarchal world is more oppressive, women are sometimes able to do more, but they talk less to each other" (127). Steven Urkowitz specifically examines *Romeo and Juliet* to prove how "the politics of women's alliance became one of the subjects—closely observed, at least by" Shakespeare (22). He explains that by examining differences between Quarto 1 and 2, we can see that the relationships between Juliet, Lady Capulet, and the Nurse become more strained and less of a unified "female alliance." Urkowitz's analysis demonstrates that Shakespeare was thinking of the subject of female alliance. In fact, we can see that in many of the tragedies Shakespeare shows relationships between female characters falling apart and the negative impact of isolation on women. This contrasts with the comedies where female alliance and community, in general, is a positive end goal.

We expect comedy to end with communal harmony. Gary Day explains that the "differences between tragedy and comedy are easy to spot. Tragedy ends in death, and comedy in marriage; tragedy focuses on the high-born, and comedy on the low-born; tragedy focuses on the individual, and comedy on the community" (11). In tragedy, an individual's disintegration brings about an unhappy state to the world, while comedy is about the coming together of a community after disorder. With community being such an important aspect of life for Renaissance women, we might expect that women would find community at the end of comedy, but this is not always the case. The connection between gender and the generic conventions of comedy and tragedy has not been fully explored, and it is the subject of my thesis. Linda Bamber's *Comic Women, Tragic Men* is an early feminist work

that explores the connection between gender and genre in Shakespeare. Bamber speculates that the masculine and feminine in Shakespeare work together as a Self and Other, with the masculine operating as the Self and the feminine as the Other, and in “Shakespeare the Self is privileged in tragedy, the Other in comedy” (5). However, while she focuses on the plays’ psychological dynamics, I examine the social dynamics between characters in my study of gender and genre.

I suggest that, in both tragedy and comedy, isolation is a strong marker of unhappiness for Shakespeare’s female characters. A lack or loss of female alliance/community in the tragedies leads women to their downfall. This is not an utterly surprising declaration because while isolation may not be typical in a tragedy it is also not entirely strange either. On the other hand, isolation is altogether unexpected in a comedy. Yet the link between isolation and ruin can also be seen in some of Shakespeare’s comedies, rendering some female characters’ endings problematic rather than purely comic. By examining Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Regan, and Ophelia, the correlation between isolation and tragedy can be clearly seen, especially when their isolation is compared to their male counterparts’ relationships. These female characters are increasingly isolated through the course of their plays until they all meet their untimely deaths. This pattern can also be discerned in the ending of some of Shakespeare’s comedies, such as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, where Katherine and Jessica are isolated despite having embraced the community’s values, and thus they are excluded from the communities that are brought together at the end.

CHAPTER 2

ISOLATED WOMEN OF TRAGEDY

As suggested in the introduction, tragedy is about the individual. With so much focus on an individual person and their disintegration, we might expect that all tragic characters are isolated throughout the course of their plays. For instance, in *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth is slowly divided from her husband until she is mentally and emotionally completely isolated. However, isolation is not always an assured conclusion. Whereas it's often the case that in a tragedy we can trace the progressive isolation of a female character, several men in Shakespeare's tragedies have friends and confidants. This suggests that Shakespeare was particularly attentive to the effects of isolation on women and their need for community. Two specific tragedies show this pattern to varying degrees, *The Tragedy of King Lear* and *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, with *Hamlet* presenting the most vivid contrast between a woman who becomes progressively isolated in the course of the play and a man who becomes progressively closer to a friend.

Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth*

While *Macbeth* does not show a contrast in isolation between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, it does exemplify how isolation leads to a tragic ending in the case of Lady Macbeth. Her only real connection is to her husband, Macbeth. Through her close association with him, Lady Macbeth has a fair bit of power and exercises it often. Lady Macbeth secretly uses her power to coerce Macbeth into killing Duncan, meanwhile playing the part of the docile wife in order to throw suspicion away from herself and Macbeth. She uses her power to better their position as a couple. However, when Macbeth begins to withdraw into himself, their relationship becomes strained, and she becomes unable to cope with the guilt of murder until she slips into a sleepwalking madness and dies offstage.

Nevertheless, when her relationship with Macbeth is strong, she is powerful and confident. When she is first introduced onstage, she is reading a letter from Macbeth where he addresses her as "my dearest partner of greatness" (I. v. 10-11). Macbeth seems to recognize and respect her power. He does not write her a letter of sweet nothings and poetry, but rather he relays what the witches have told him. From this, we can gather that Macbeth respects his wife. Furthermore, Lady Macbeth does not hesitate to begin planning. She wishes that Macbeth would hurry to her side that she "may pour

my spirits in thine ear / And chastise with the valor of my tongue” (I. v. 26-27). She knows Macbeth’s nature, that he is too kind and squeamish, and wants to bolster him with her own spirit. She shows a great deal of confidence in herself, believing that she has the gumption to commit murder but also that she can convince her husband to do it in her place.

However, their relationship is not unshakeable. Their relationship begins to crack after they kill Duncan. Lady Macbeth insults Macbeth’s manhood by telling him: “My hands are of your color [i.e. red with blood], but I shame / To wear a heart so white” (II. ii. 67-68). At this moment, there is not anything that she is trying to motivate Macbeth to do, so this is a flat-out insult. In later scenes, their relationship seems increasingly strained as Macbeth begins to withdraw from his wife.

Contrasting the murder of Duncan, Macbeth does not involve Lady Macbeth in any of the plans for murdering Banquo. He meets the murderers alone, and when Lady Macbeth confronts him about his fears of Banquo, he tells her to be “innocent of the knowledge” (III.ii.45). While this is not wholly negative because it can be read as Macbeth wanting to shield his wife from any more death, it does represent a shift in their relationship since he chooses not to involve her in the planning as he had done previously.

Furthermore, Macbeth’s distancing does not go unnoticed by Lady Macbeth. After Macbeth sets up the plan to kill Banquo, she sends for him and bluntly asks him, “why do you keep alone” (III.ii.8). Once again, this represents a shift in their relationship. Previously Macbeth always came to Lady Macbeth, now she has to ask for him. This is also the last time they are alone together onstage. The next time they are seen together is during the banquet where Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo; this scene goes to show how distant they are from each other. Their relationship becomes continually more strained until it seemingly breaks, leaving Lady Macbeth to deal with her guilt and anxiety alone. This becomes clear in her famous “out damned spot” speech, where she is repeatedly trying to clean a bloodspot that is not actually there. She shifts from being seemingly unphased with literal blood on her hands to frantic over an imaginary bloodspot. The main difference between these two scenes is the absence of Macbeth, as the gentlewoman at the beginning of the scene states that he has gone “into the field” (V.i.4). When they murdered Duncan, the husband and wife were together, but as their relationship becomes more strained, they stop interacting with each other. As their relationship

deteriorates, they interact less in the private sphere and more in the public, until Lady Macbeth is only interacting with servants and the doctor. In the end, she dies offstage, perhaps by suicide. Thus, Lady Macbeth becomes continually more isolated from her husband until she is entirely alone, which proves to be too much for her psyche.

Goneril and Regan from *King Lear*

Like Lady Macbeth, Goneril and Regan become increasingly isolated through the course of their play. However, their isolation is contrasted with the community that Lear, their father, builds up. We see at once how flimsy some of their familial connections are, but they also have a strong connection to each other, which seems to be their keystone. They begin the play with power, but as they use their power, they begin to lose their connections to others, thus becoming more and more isolated until finally their bond with each other is severed, and they are each on their own.

Goneril and Regan are introduced in a scene that shows their shallow connection with their father. Lear has them lavish him with promises of how much they love him, but their words are simply false flattery in order to obtain larger pieces of Lear's kingdom. It becomes clear how flimsy their connection to Lear is throughout the first scene. Lear addresses their husbands before speaking to them, and he makes it clear that he favors Cordelia over both of them. Later, once Goneril and Regan are alone, they reveal that they are well aware that Lear favors Cordelia, stating outright that "He always lov'd our sister most" (I. i. 290). Furthermore, Lear makes no attempts to hide his preference for Cordelia. When addressing the women Lear refers to their birth status, calling for "Goneril, / Our eldest-born" and later "our second daughter / Our dearest Regan" (I. i. 53-54 & 67-68). However, Lear refers to Cordelia differently; he refers to her as "our joy, / Although our last and least" (I. i. 82-83). Lear thinks of Goneril and Regan in terms of paternal duty, focusing on their birth order, but Cordelia is identified as his source of joy before her status as his youngest daughter, thus making it clear that she is favored above Goneril and Regan.

However, the relationship is not hollow just on Lear's side but on Goneril and Regan's as well. After Cordelia and Kent are banished, Goneril and Regan reveal their true feelings for Lear. Goneril plainly states that the "best and soundest of his time hath been but rash; then must we look from his age to receive not alone the imperfections of long-ingraff'd condition, but therewithal the

unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them” (I. i. 295-99). They speak comfortably to each other in prose, dropping all pretense as they discuss how Lear was always short-tempered and hasty and how he will be doubly so now that he has reached old age. They showered Lear with praise in front of him and the court but privately criticize him. Thus, the first scene reveals that their connection to Lear is strained, at best, but their connection to each other is strong.

Besides their father, Goneril and Regan are also connected to their husbands. However, they have different types of relationships. Regan and her husband, Cornwall, seem to have a symbiotic relationship. Even in their last scene together they are close, interrogating Gloucester together, and Regan helps Cornwall off the stage when he is wounded. Their relationship is not voluntarily broken, but rather Cornwall is wounded while torturing Gloucester and dies. By contrast, Goneril and her husband, Albany, have a more strained relationship that ends up falling apart. As Goneril starts to wield more power and control, Albany becomes less comfortable with her actions until the blinding of Gloucester tips him over the edge. Albany tells Goneril that she is “not worth the dust which the rude wind / Blows in your face” (IV, ii. 30-31). He tells Goneril off and stands up to her. Meanwhile Goneril plots behind his back; she begins an affair with Edmund and writes a letter to him asking him to kill Albany so that they can be together. Albany resists the previous status quo of their relationship, in which Goneril exacted control over him, and their relationship falls apart and it eventually culminates in Albany learning of her plan and rebuking her.

Goneril and Regan’s connection to each other is their strongest relationship. They often speak in prose to each other when in private, showing how they feel comfortable enough around each other to drop the pretense of court life. They also unite together against Lear stating, “let us [hit] together,” and Goneril later tells her steward, Oswald, that if Lear disagrees with her actions then, “let him to my sister, / Whose mind and mine I know in that are one” (I. ii. 3-4 & I. iii. 12-15). They conspire together and confide in one another. Their relationship with each other is their closest relationship, and it is also the last one to break. Goneril and Regan are not alone until they turn against each other. When they find out that they are both having affairs with Edmund, they become jealous of each other and withdraw. This is when they each become isolated. Regan tells Oswald, Goneril’s steward, that he should not support Goneril’s relationship with Edmund and argues that since Cornwall is dead

Edmund is “more convenient ... for my hand / Than for your lady’s” (IV. v. 31-32). She plots to have Edmund for herself behind Goneril’s back and even tries to directly interfere with Goneril’s communications to Edmund. With their relationship broken, neither of them has anyone else to rely on, so they turn against each other and die in the last act, with Goneril poisoning Regan before killing herself. In brief, Goneril and Regan consecutively lose their connections to others until their own relationship breaks, resulting in their deaths. This contrasts with Lear’s journey; Lear begins the play by banishing two of his closest confidants, Cordelia and Kent. However, as Lear progresses through the play he gains back these lost supporters, and he is rarely alone. He almost always has someone by his side. Whether it be Gloucester, Kent disguised as Caius, the Fool, or Cordelia depends on the moment, but even when Lear feels alone, he has someone helping him along. While Goneril and Regan lose their connections to other characters and die feuding with each other and isolated from everyone, Lear gains his confidants back and ultimately dies with Kent beside him.

Ophelia from *Hamlet*

Similar to *King Lear*, there is a contrast between the isolation of male and female characters in *Hamlet*. While Ophelia is systematically isolated throughout the course of the play, Hamlet gains a confidant in Horatio. Ophelia’s community is made up of her familial household, her father and brother, and her budding romance with Hamlet. Her community is made up entirely of men. Through her connection to these men, we can see how powerless Ophelia truly is and how dependent she is on her connections to them. And she loses her connection to them throughout the play.

Ophelia’s connection with her brother, Laertes, is important, but it is also the first connection that is severed. Laertes returns to Denmark for the coronation of Claudius, but as soon as he is able, he asks to leave again. When Laertes appears next, he is with Ophelia, and we get to see their relationship. However, the first words he speaks to Ophelia are: “My necessities are inbark’d. Farewell” (I.iii.1). Their relationship begins with separation; he is leaving her for France. In this scene we can see the beginning of Ophelia’s isolation, as one of her three connections is immediately severed. She is introduced in conversation with Laertes, and almost immediately, he mentions her relationship with Hamlet. From this initial introduction, we begin to think of her alongside Laertes

and Hamlet. However, we also think of her separation from them. Laertes leaves almost immediately after their connection is made known to us and Hamlet is not far behind.

We are quickly introduced to the idea that Ophelia's connection to Hamlet will be severed since Laertes immediately begins warning Ophelia about being too attached to him. He tells Ophelia to be wary of

Hamlet, and the trifling of his favor
 Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
 A violet in the youth of primy nature,
 Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting (I.iii.5-8).

He warns Ophelia that Hamlet might not always care for her and that she should not get too attached. Laertes doubles down on his warning and addresses the dangers of losing her virginity. He urges Ophelia to be wary, and tells her that

Perhaps he loves you now,
 And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
 The virtue of his will ...
 Then if he says he loves you,
 It fits your wisdom so far to believe it ...
 Then weigh what loss your honor may sustain
 If with too credent ear you list his songs,
 Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
 To his unmast' red importunity.
 Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,
 And keep you in the rear of your affection
 Out of the shot and danger of desire (I.iii.14-34).

The main danger seems to be towards Ophelia's chastity, but her feelings are also in jeopardy if Hamlet were to leave her. Not only is Laertes warning that the impermanence of Hamlet's feelings might lead to Ophelia being cast aside, but the language he uses also alludes to different forms of isolation. He repeats the words *loss* and *lose*, implying an overall sense of loss and Ophelia being

separated from parts of herself, fragmenting her when he mentions “your honor,” “credent ear,” “your heart,” and “your chaste treasure.” Furthermore, the last phrase “out of the shot and danger of desire,” suggests a kind of isolation as Laertes encourages Ophelia to distance herself from her feelings. Furthermore, this foreshadows Hamlet’s dismissal of Ophelia and the crude remarks that he will eventually make towards her. Ophelia could face serious consequences if she pursued a relationship with Hamlet and it ended badly. Laertes is warning his sister of these dangers, and through this, we can see that he does care for her. However, it is worth remembering that these are his parting words to her before he leaves for France, and they lose contact.

Laertes’ warnings are continued through the scene even after he leaves as Polonius talks with Ophelia and continues Laertes’ warnings. He also tries to get Ophelia to distance herself from Hamlet. When told that Hamlet has expressed his affections towards Ophelia, Polonius tells her: “Affection puh! You speak like a green girl / Unsifted in such perilous circumstances” (I.ii.101-102). He seems to insult Ophelia and treat her like a child. By calling her a “green girl,” he makes her out to be a naive child that he must guide. He requests that Ophelia stops talking to Hamlet, and she heeds her father, showing both her obedience to him and also how close their relationship is. By separating her from Hamlet, he seems to be strengthening their own relationship, which might have worked except for the fact that he dies. However, his efforts to separate them are undone when Claudius and Gertrude ask Ophelia to interact with Hamlet to test if his madness is the result of her scorn.

This leads into Hamlet and Ophelia’s separation. Ophelia, following her father’s orders, attempts to break her ties with Hamlet and return his things to him. Hamlet then completes the separation and confirms all that Laertes and Polonius warned Ophelia about by telling her that he never loved her and insulting her in his famous “Get thee [to] a nunn’ry” speech (III.i.120). By instructing Ophelia to go to a convent Hamlet suggests a kind of isolation by telling Ophelia to leave her home and everyone she knows behind. In this way, Hamlet severs the last of their connection; however, he does not end it there. He makes some more bawdy comments to her in the scene with the players, confirming her brother and father’s prediction about her being used for sex, which she seems to have internalized since it is reflected in the songs that she sings in later scenes. The final blow comes when he murders her father. Ophelia is left completely alone; her brother is away in France, the

man she thought loved her told her that he never did, and her father is dead. In this way, she is systematically isolated throughout the play until she goes mad and then, like Lady Macbeth, dies offstage, an apparent suicide.

Furthermore, Ophelia is helpless to stop her isolation; she lacks any kind of agency in the play, especially when compared to the men in her life. Laertes asks Claudius for his

leave and favor to return to France,

From whence though willingly I came to Denmark

... Yet now I must confess ...

My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France (I.ii.51-55).

Laertes has barely been present, but he is already leaving. Unlike Ophelia, the men have a certain freedom to go where they please and to express their thoughts. Laertes and Hamlet were both studying abroad before returning to Denmark, and Laertes is free to choose to return to France. Ophelia is stuck in Denmark; she cannot exert the same freedom as Laertes does. Ophelia's lack of power is also suggested Laertes' warning to her. Hamlet can choose to drop Ophelia in a moment with no repercussions, but it would be devastating to Ophelia. However, Laertes is not the only one who exemplifies the power that Ophelia lacks. Polonius directly tells her that men have more agency when he says of Hamlet that "with a larger teder may he walk / Than may be given to you. In few, Ophelia, / Do not believe his vows" (I.iii.123-26). He specifically points to the fact that Hamlet has more freedom than Ophelia has, and he uses this as a reason to not trust him. Jillian Luke points out that Polonius "describes Ophelia's body and will as entirely subject to his control, and makes clear that her purpose is to serve his purpose" when setting up her encounter with Hamlet in II. ii. (9). Thus, Ophelia has no agency and has to act as others direct her: her lack of agency allows her father to force her to sever her connection to Hamlet, but her lifelong dependence on men also means that, when she's cut off not only from Hamlet but also her father and brother, the isolation is particularly devastating.

Her madness can be directly tied to her losses — her father's death and her separation from Hamlet — through the songs she sings in Act IV. Some of the songs she sings directly reference death. She sings: "He is dead and gone, lady, / ... At his head a grass-green turf, / At his heels a

stone” and later follows it with “White his shroud as the mountain snow,” presumably referring to a funeral shroud (IV. v. 29-31 & 36). Both of these melodies refer to death, and she later directly refers to her father’s death before exiting. The repetition of the word *gone* suggests a feeling of isolation as it reminds the reader that both Ophelia’s father and brother are gone, and she is alone. In this way we can see that Polonius’ death is weighing on Ophelia even in her madness. Along the same line of thinking, we can also see the effect her separation from Hamlet has on her; she sings a few songs about love. She sings: “Larded all with sweet flowers, / Which bewept to the ground did not go / With true-love showers,” and she later continues “To-morrow is Saint Valentine’s day, / ... And I a maid at your window, / To be your Valentine” before singing, “Before you tumbled me, / You promis’d me to wed” (IV. v. 38-40, 48-51, & 62-63). All of these songs circle around the idea of love or failed love, which references her failed love with Hamlet. The specific phrase “Which bewept to the ground did not go / With true-love showers” is particularly noteworthy because it marks when Ophelia begins to allude to not being loved (IV. v. 39-40). Shakespeare is bringing in feelings of exclusion and abandonment as the person goes into the ground without tears from loved ones. Carol Neely discusses Ophelia’s madness and how Ophelia’s “alienated speech” characterizes her as truly mad versus Hamlet’s feigned madness (325). However, while Neely briefly mentions Ophelia being alienated, she focuses more on Ophelia’s madness as a whole and how it contrasts with Hamlet and less on why Ophelia goes mad. With these songs, we can see how much Ophelia’s losses have impacted her. She slowly loses everyone who is important to her, until she is completely isolated and powerless to do anything about it.

Furthermore, Ophelia’s isolation contrasts with Hamlet’s community. While Ophelia is isolated, Hamlet has Horatio as a friend throughout the play. From the beginning of the play, Hamlet addresses Horatio as “my good friend” (I.ii.163). Then when Hamlet escapes from the ship to England and makes his way back to Denmark, he writes to Horatio to meet him. Even when Hamlet is dying at the end of the play, his last words are to Horatio. Therefore, Hamlet has a confidant in Horatio throughout the play; meanwhile, Ophelia ends up alone.

Overall, male tragic heroes are seldom if ever alone and alienated from everyone at the end of the play. This is where *Macbeth* seems to be an exception; both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are left

isolated at the end of the play. While Macbeth does have some tenuous connections, evidenced by his reliance on Seyton towards the end of the play, he ultimately dies being hated by everyone.

Contrasting with Macbeth, Lear and Hamlet have confidants and friends that help them faithfully.

This ultimately brings more attention to the isolation that the women face in *King Lear* and *Hamlet* and brings focus to the devastating effects that isolation has on these female characters. As previously shown by Steven Urkowitz, Shakespeare seems to have been interested in women's alliances and the effects on women of losing alliances—and these tragedies confirm that. This pattern can also be observed in some of Shakespeare's comedies, where we see how some of the women are isolated, suggesting that they haven't really experienced the traditional "happy ending" of comedy.

CHAPTER 3

THE ISOLATED KATHERINE IN *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

Katherine the Shrew

Unlike previously discussed characters, Katherine is isolated from the beginning; she has no real community. The men of her city cannot stand her because she is a “shrew.” According to Frances Dolan, a shrew is normally a woman that talks too loud or fiercely or who refuses to submit to a man (9). The men of the play describe Katherine as a “fiend of hell” or a “stark mad” wench (I.i.87 & 69). They want nothing to do with her and vehemently reject Baptista’s offer to marry her. Hortensio tells Petruchio that he can help Petruchio obtain a wife that is wealthy, but he warns that she

is intolerable curst

And shroud and froward, so beyond all measure,

That were my state far worsen than it is,

I would not wed her for a mine of gold (I.ii.85-92).

Even when Hortensio is trying to pawn her off so he can have the chance to marry Bianca, he cannot help but describe her negatively. There is no real love lost between Katherine and the men of Padua, so she has no sense of community with them. The only real connection she could possibly have, then, is within her family unit. However, we quickly learn that she is alone there as well.

One would think that Baptista and Katherine have a somewhat close relationship, based on the fact that he wants her to get married before Bianca. However, when the way Baptista talks to his daughters is analyzed, it becomes clear that his plan to find a husband for his elder daughter first is not motivated by affection for Katherine. Clearly, he favors Bianca. In the play’s first scene, Baptista tells Bianca to go inside, saying “Good Bianca, / For I will love thee ne’er less, my girl” (I.i.76-77). He never calls Katherine good or says the word *love* anywhere near her. He tells Hortensio and Gremio that Bianca takes delight in “music, instruments, and poetry, / Schoolmasters will I keep within my house, / Fit to instruct her youth” (I.i.92-95). He later tacks on Katherine almost as an afterthought, but his main focus for the tutors seems to be Bianca. Even when Petruchio arrives to “woo” Katherine, Petruchio asks “Have you not a daughter / Call’d Katherina, fair and virtuous?” and Baptista responds with “I have a daughter, sir, call’d Katherina” (II.i.42-43 & 45). He cannot even say

anything positive about Katherine when she has someone coming to woo her. Even Hortensio was able to describe Katherine as “young and beauteous / Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman,” but her own father cannot seem to speak positively of her (I.ii.86-87). He does not even seem to be insisting Katherine get married first for her own sake because when he suggests it to Gremio and Hortensio she questions: “I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?” (I.i.57-58). She does not agree with Baptista’s decision to marry her off first, so we know that he is not making this decision for her. This is further exemplified in the conversation Baptista has with Gremio and Tranio after Petruchio tells them that Katherine has agreed to marry him. Baptista tells them “now I play a merchant’s part, / And venture madly on a desperate mart” (II.i.326-327). He characterizes Katherine as a commodity that he needed to offload. It can be inferred that the decision to marry off Katherine before Bianca was a clever plan in order to actually get Katherine married; he made the marriage of the desirable Bianca contingent on the marriage of the undesirable Katherine. Thus, the relationship between Baptista and Katherine is strained at best.

This leaves Bianca as Katherine’s last chance for a connection. However, it quickly becomes apparent that they are not close. Katherine appears to hold a great deal of resentment toward Bianca. She takes every opportunity to lash out at her, literally and figuratively. The first interaction we get between the sisters is Katherine flippantly calling Bianca “a pretty peat” and Bianca replying that Katherine should be “content . . . in my discontent” (I.i.78 & 80). Their relationship comes off as strained right away, which makes sense given the situation Baptista has put them in. However, their strained relationship continues throughout the play. The next time the two appear, Katherine is tormenting Bianca and has to be stopped by Baptista. It is never directly stated why Katherine seems to detest Bianca so much. However, the scene where Katherine has Bianca tied up gives us some insight. Katherine demands that Bianca tells her which suitor she prefers and when Baptista interrupts them and orders Katherine to explain herself, Katherine states that Bianca’s “silence flouts me” (II.i.29). This could allude to Katherine wanting Bianca to actually say something true to herself rather than just saying what she thinks people want to hear. Based on Bianca’s actions and words later in the play, we can see that she is not quite the perfect lady that she appears to be at the beginning of the play, and possibly her sister recognizes this. By the end of the play Bianca is starting to act

“shrew-ish” according to the standards of her community. She rebukes Petruchio, asking “Am I your bird,” refuses to come when Lucentio calls for her, and then she reprimands her husband when she learns that he bet on her being obedient to him (V.ii.46). Therefore, we see that Bianca is not as perfect as she wants others to believe. Despite the way the sisters’ roles are reversed in the final scene with Katherine being the obedient wife, Bianca still has a female ally—the Widow—while Katherine does not. So, it is clear to see that there is no real relationship between the two sisters, and Katherine is entirely on her own. Her shrew behavior keeps her isolated from the other characters of the play and sets her up for an unhappy ending.

Gaslighting: Isolating Katherine from Reality

It only gets worse for Katherine as Petruchio enters her life. Since Petruchio meets Katherine with the intention of getting a wife, one would hope that he would bring an opportunity for connection. Still, it quickly becomes apparent that Katherine will remain isolated, even in her marriage. Not only will she remain detached, but Petruchio isolates her even further by repeatedly lying to her to separate her from reality. Petruchio clearly lays out his plan before he even meets Katherine, saying that if she

rail[s], why then I’ll tell her plain

She sings as sweetly as a nightingale;

Say that she frown, I’ll say she looks as clear

As morning roses newly wash’d with dew (II.i.170-173).

By lying to her in this way, he plans to “woo” her and make it seem that he is in love with her despite not knowing her at all. And he carries out this plan initially when he encounters Katherine. When they meet Petruchio insists on calling her Kate, even when she tells him that everyone calls her Katherine, which they do. He exclaims that she lies and is “call’d plain Kate, / And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst; / But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom” (II.i.185-187). And while certain parts of his statement are somewhat true, i.e. “the curst,” the vast majority of his proclamation is false because no one calls her Kate; everyone calls her Katherine, and she is certainly not being complimented by people in the way he describes. By arguing with Katherine in this way Petruchio is attempting to gaslight her. Cynthia Stark describes gaslighting as “a form of wrongful manipulation

and, indeed, a form of emotional abuse,” which she explains is different from disagreements in that gaslighting is a manipulation to try and get the target to “suppress or doubt her justifiable judgments about facts or values” (221 & 224). By telling Katherine that people speak positively about her when she knows they do not, Petruchio demands that she suppress her own justifiable judgment of the facts. Their back and forth eventually culminates with Petruchio once again lying to Katherine by telling her that Baptista has already consented to their marriage even though Baptista told Petruchio that Katherine had to love Petruchio first. The only difference is that Katherine does not actually know that this one is a lie. However, she does know Petruchio is lying when he tells Baptista and the other men that they “have ‘greed so well together / That upon Sunday is the wedding-day” (II.i.207-8). They have not agreed with each other at all, and Katherine certainly did not agree to marry Petruchio. Nonetheless, the men believe Petruchio, not Katherine, and preparations for their wedding begin. Even later when Katherine continues to deny wanting to marry Petruchio and calls him a lunatic, she is ignored in favor of Petruchio’s story that she is merely shy about her true feelings. With one conversation Petruchio is able to deny Katherine’s entire reality and make it seem that she is actually the liar. His gaslighting continues to their wedding, for example, when he forces her to leave before the wedding feast by pretending that he is protecting her from enemies, but it is not until they are married and at Petruchio’s home that Katherine’s real nightmare begins.

When Katherine arrives at her new home, Petruchio puts his true plan into place, breaking her. One of Petruchio’s servants, Curtis describes how Petruchio “rails, and swears, and rates, that she [Katherine], poor soul, / Knows not which way to stand, to look, to speak, / And sits as one new risen from a dream” (IV.i.184-86). Petruchio rants and raves so that Katherine is denied everything: food, sleep, even a moment of quiet. The way Curtis describes her state as dream-like makes it seem that Petruchio is beginning to get his way and Katherine is starting to separate from reality. He basically tortures her but makes it seem as if he is simply trying to care for her. He does this with the intention of making her seem crazy to speak against him while also whittling her down so that she will do anything to get food or rest. This persists for the entire time Katherine is there until they leave to go visit her father. Then Petruchio employs a new tactic on their journey there. While they are traveling during the day Petruchio exclaims, “how bright and goodly shines the moon!” When Katherine

informs him that it is the sun that is shining not the moon, he responds, “I say it is the moon that shines so bright” (IV. v. 2-4). They bicker back and forth for a while with Petruchio getting more incensed until he eventually gets Katherine to cave and agree with whatever he says. She tells Petruchio that “What you will have it nam’d, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine,” and so she pledges to accept his version of reality no matter what (IV.v.21-22). This is a victorious moment for Petruchio because he has managed to break Katherine down enough that she will agree with him even if it is incredibly, blatantly wrong. Thus, he is able to divorce her from reality and make her completely dependent on him.

Katherine Separated from Her Identity

Petruchio is not only trying to gaslight Katherine so that she denies her own reality; he also dehumanizes her in a further attempt to break her down and separate her from her own identity. It begins with him calling her Kate against her wishes. This renaming might seem meaningless; maybe he is just giving her a nickname as her soon-to-be-husband. However, it lets us know Petruchio’s true intentions. He wants to transform Katherine the shrew into Kate, Petruchio’s wife/puppet. He makes it clear to everyone, including Katherine, that he does not really view her as a person but as something to be broken down and rebuilt. He tells Katherine at the end of their first meeting that he was “born to tame you, Kate, / And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate / Comfortable as other household Kates” (II.i.276-78). The specific uses of the words *wild* and *household* are indicative of pets as if he has found a wild cat to bring home and make a house cat. A couple of lines after this he tells Katherine to never “make denial; / I must and will have Katherine to my wife” (II.i.279-80). This particular statement is aggressive and speaks to Petruchio overriding Katherine’s will with his own.

This dehumanization of Katherine does not end with their first meeting but continues to their married life at home. Petruchio soliloquizes his thoughts about Katherine and plans to break her down further by comparing his actions to falconry practices. He explains that his falcon, i.e. Katherine,

now is sharp and passing empty,
 And till she stoop, she must not be full-gorg’d ...
 Another way I have to man my haggard,
 To make her come, and know her keeper’s call,

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

That bate and beat and will not be obedient (IV.i.190-196).

Through Petruchio's falconry metaphor, we can see that he views Katherine in the same way he views an unruly pet that must be trained and tamed. He refers to her as a falcon at least three times in this one soliloquy and directly mentions taming her several times. Dolan explains that falconry was often used as a metaphor for shrew taming, as it is here (304 & 306). Petruchio completely dehumanizes her in an effort to wear her down and take away her identity so that he can mold her as he wishes.

Through his efforts, Katherine is destroyed and replaced by Kate; he takes away everything that made her "Katherine" and leaves only the elements that he finds suitable, i.e. obedience and modesty. We know that Katherine has become Kate by the end of the sun versus moon argument when she begins to agree with Petruchio; her name is even changed to Kate in stage directions at the beginning of the scene where the argument takes place and oscillates between Katherine and Kate thereafter. And one might think that now that Katherine is Kate she might be able to achieve a somewhat happy ending, but this could not be farther from the truth.

Kate is Still an Outsider

With Katherine fully transformed into Kate, she has become everything a woman "should be," at least in the eyes of a man. She is obedient to her husband, quiet, and even-tempered. However, she is still isolated; even when she is no longer a shrew the other women still do not accept her, and she is set apart from them. When they are all gathered together in the final scene, Hortensio's wife, the Widow, cannot help but make a comment against Kate; she states that "He that is giddy thinks the world turns round" and explains to Kate that she means since Petruchio is "troubled with a shrew, / [he] Measures my [i.e. the Widow's] husband's sorrow by his woe" (V.ii.20 & 28-29). While Kate is no longer a shrew, so the Widow's comment does not hold any real significance for her, this statement still speaks to the distance between Kate and the women around her. She is still the butt of the joke and considered an outsider among them.

Even when Kate proves that she is no longer a shrew and is now a respectable woman, she is still ostracized by the other women. When the husbands make their bet and call upon their wives, Kate is the only one to come when she is called, thus separating her from the other women. Furthermore,

when Kate retrieves the other women and then is made to take her hat off and stomp on it, they are shocked by her. They both make remarks against Kate's actions and the idea that they should ever be expected to act in such a way. In addition to this, Kate is further separated from Bianca and the Widow with her final monologue. Petruchio makes Kate speak against the other women and tell them what their duty is to their husbands. When Petruchio orders Kate to speak, the Widow speaks against them both, saying "you're mocking; we will have no telling," and when Petruchio insists Kate will speak, the Widow firmly states "She shall not" (V.ii.132 & 134). In this way, Petruchio plays Kate against the other women, making the other women look bad and most likely making them resent Kate. Thus, Kate is still isolated from the other women by the end of the play.

Kate's final monologue is often debated; critics discuss whether it should be taken at face value or not. And it is the decision on whether to read Kate's final speech as tongue-in-cheek or straightforward that many critics use to argue whether the play endorses or subverts the era's demand for wifely submission. Laura Kolb explains that more contemporary scholarship reads the final monologue as "an ironic performance of some kind" before explaining that she reads it closer to a "sign of subjugation, as Katherine conceals her inmost self from both a cruel abuser and the community that has sanctioned his abuse" (133). Alexander Leggatt views the taming of Katherine as a game and demonstrates how her final speech is simply her playing her part in the game. He explains that Katherine is having fun in her monologue and the "fact that Katherine relishes her speech as a performance does not necessarily mean she is ironic or insincere. She is simply enjoying herself. Her submission to her husband is not something to be admitted with shame; or rationalized, but celebrated - particularly in the presence of women who have just failed the test she has so triumphantly passed" (61). On the other hand, Emily Detmer explicates historical definitions of domestic violence and argues that what Petruchio does to Katherine is domestic violence despite the fact he never physically hits her. She specifically argues against readings like Leggatt's, stating that "Although Kate's final speech is her longest, it does not necessarily reflect her own thoughts, desires, and wishes ... she denies her own feelings in order to bond with her abuser. Her surrender and obedience signify her emotional bondage as a survival strategy; she aims to please because her life depends on it" (289). Of course, since this is a play, there are many ways that actors can interpret and perform the script. While

one actress may perform the scene with a smile and wink, one may play it with sobering seriousness. Penny Gay analyzes several different plays from the 1940s-80s with vastly different performances; however, she concludes that all the versions ultimately end with a re-enforcement of patriarchal society. Several other critics, such as Amy L. Smith and Martha Andresen-Thom, also discuss how different interpretations of the endings either reaffirm the patriarchal society of the play or break it.

Regardless of the way Kate's final speech is read, it ultimately suggests an unhappy ending for her. If her monologue is read and interpreted as straight-forward that means Petruchio broke her, and like an animal, she was tamed. However, if Kate's final monologue is read as impertinent, her ending still is not "happy." Maybe Petruchio has not "tamed" her and she is still Katherine underneath the Kate persona. This would mean she is still having to put on a persona in order to survive, as Detmer suggests. Nevertheless, whether Kate is truly broken or merely acting, she is still isolated at the end of the play. After Kate has given her speech, the other women are silent; we are left with their earlier objections to Kate. Therefore, Kate remains isolated from the other women.

Conclusion

Overall, we see Katherine's situation somehow go from bad to worse as she is stripped of her identity and completely isolated from the other characters of the play. Even when she is meant to reach her "happy ending" by no longer being a shrew, she is still alienated, which calls into question the comedy of the ending. She is subjugated by her husband and pitted against the other women, so she has no way to find agency or power through the community that Bianca and the Widow create. On top of the ambiguity of her final monologue and seclusion from the other women, Katherine's "happiness" is only further questioned when one considers John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed*, the sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew*. John Fletcher was the successor to Shakespeare and collaborated with him on several plays. In *The Tamer Tamed*, the audience is told that Katherine and Petruchio were never happy and fought until her death. This supposed marital strife between them only furthers the idea that Katherine is left out of the happy, communal ending that is typical of comedies. She is left broken and powerless with a future discordant marriage.

CHAPTER 4

THE ISOLATION OF JESSICA IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

Introduction

Like *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice* is considered to be one of Shakespeare's problematic plays. While both of these plays have controversial plots and characterizations, they both also have women who are isolated and thus call into question whether the play truly ends happily for them. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Jessica is a Jewish woman who elopes with Lorenzo, a Christian man, and converts to Christianity. On the surface, it appears as if everything goes right for her; she escapes from an overbearing father, converts to the "correct" religion, and begins a happy marriage. However, when her interactions with the other characters, especially in the final scene, are more closely analyzed it becomes apparent that Jessica is not set up for happiness in the same way the other characters are.

Jessica and Shylock

At the beginning of the play, Jessica only has three real connections to people: Shylock, Launcelot, and Lorenzo. Her connection to Launcelot is immediately severed as he leaves her household to serve Bassanio and her relationship with Lorenzo is a secret, which leaves her father, Shylock. Jessica's isolation is apparent from the moment she first appears on stage when she is distinguished from her father. Shylock is characterized negatively and stereotypically as money-hungry and Christian-hating, yet Jessica is described as wholly opposite from him. Launcelot Gobbo calls Jessica a most "beautiful pagan, most sweet Jessica," and cannot help but cry when he says goodbye to her on leaving Shylock's service (II.iii.11). This directly contradicts his reactions to Shylock, whom he cannot seem to get away from fast enough. These contrasting opinions are later repeated by Salerio who tells Shylock that there "is more difference between thy flesh and hers than between jet and ivory, more between your bloods than there is between red wine and Rhenish" (III.i.39-42). Jessica is never described negatively by the Christian characters, which sets her apart from both her father and the rest of the Jewish characters, at least in the views of the Christian characters.

Despite the way the Christian characters distinguish Jessica from Shylock, a closer inspection makes it clear that they still hold her at a distance. Moreover, the distinction that the Christians make between Jessica and Shylock is mirrored in the actual gulf between father and daughter. Both characters do show some affection for each other, but their connection to each other is strained and only becomes more so as the play progresses and neither character is able to agree with the other's actions. When Jessica first appears, she is distressed by her feelings towards her father, exclaiming,

what heinous sin is it in me
 To be ashamed to be my father's child!
 But though I am a daughter to his blood,
 I am not to his manners (II.iii.16-19).

She does appear to have some feelings towards Shylock, as evidenced by her discomfort with her dislike of him; however, she also recognizes the divide between them. But Jessica's tenuous feelings are not one-sided; her father is similarly ambivalent in his feelings about her. He does show affection towards her. Firstly, he trusts her to look after his home and money as he gives her his keys and instructions to watch the home as he leaves to eat with Antonio and Bassanio. The fact he trusts her with his possessions shows that he has some love towards her since he is characterized as being stingy. He also later in the play shows some concern for Jessica. While the trial is going on, both Bassanio and Gratiano make remarks about sacrificing their wives in order to save Antonio and Shylock comments to himself: "These be the Christian husbands. / I have a daughter-" (IV.i.294-95). This suggests that Shylock does worry that Jessica married an, apparently, unreliable Christian.

The relationship between Jessica and Shylock only becomes more strained as the play progresses. As Jessica makes her plan to elope with Lorenzo, she says "Farewell, and if my fortune be not crossed, / I have a father, you a daughter, lost" (II.v.57). This encapsulates Jessica's plans to cut ties with Shylock and distance herself from him. However, it is not until she actually elopes and steals Shylock's money that their relationship is truly at the point of no return. After Jessica and Lorenzo have eloped, Solanio explains how Shylock went around Venice shouting

My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
 Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!

Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!
 A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
 Of double ducats, stol'n from me by my daughter!
 And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
 Stol'n by my daughter! Justice! find the girl,
 She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats (II.viii.14-22).

While the speech begins with Shylock talking about Jessica and his money equally, it quickly changes to show what he is truly worried about, his money. We can see the shift in Shylock's feelings about her in the course of this speech, as he moves from exclaiming "my daughter" in the first line to describing his stolen wealth, in detail, and how Jessica was the one that stole it. By the end of the speech, he is entirely focused on his wealth and calls her "the girl" rather than "my daughter." Their changed relationship is later emphasized as Shylock tells Tubal that he wishes Jessica "were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hears'd at my foot, and the ducats in her coffin!" (III.i.87-90). He once again puts his missing wealth over Jessica but now adds his hostile wish that she were dead. In this way, Jessica becomes distant from her father and loses her relationship with him. However, she does not just lose her father but her religion as well.

Jessica and the Christian World

When Jessica elopes with Lorenzo, she also converts to Christianity, thus abandoning her ties with the Jewish community. However, she is an outsider in the Christian community as well. While the Christian characters talked positively about Jessica before she converts, their comments start to shift more negatively as the play progresses. This becomes apparent from the beginning of her elopement. Gratiano and Salerio begin the scene by announcing that Lorenzo is late before they begin to talk about how fickle love is and how appetite does not last. Gratiano comments that all "things that are, / Are with more spirit chased than enjoy'd" (II. v. 12-13). This brings Lorenzo's love for Jessica into question as Gratiano suggests that Lorenzo might have enjoyed the pursuit of Jessica more than he will actually enjoy having her. This does not bode well and immediately attaches negative connotations to Lorenzo and Jessica's elopement. Her initial entrance into Christian society is already

fraught with doubts. She has to run away disguised as a boy during the night right after her soon-to-be-husband's friends have questioned love and commitment.

Nevertheless, Jessica's alienation does not stop there. After she elopes with Lorenzo, they head to Belmont where Jessica is again shown to be an outsider. Paul Gaudet analyzes how the scene is made ambiguous by the lack of stage directions and how they can be staged differently depending on how one views Jessica. When they arrive in Belmont, Gratiano announces them, but Gaudet points out that although "three characters enter, only Lorenzo and Salerio are welcomed verbally" ("Lorenzo's 'Infidel'" 282). He brings up the fact that Jessica is not verbally welcomed immediately as the other characters are, and he questions how this exclusion of Jessica might be staged, but he does not specifically attach it to her conversion or past status as Jewish. However, I believe that her exclusion does have to do with her status as a convert. When Gratiano announces them, he asks "who comes here? Lorenzo and his infidel? / What, and my old Venetian friend Salerio?" (Shakespeare III. ii. 218-19). Jessica is neither welcomed as Gaudet points out nor announced by name. She is instead identified as an infidel, connecting her to the religion and community she gave up and establishing her as different from everyone else. It separates her from everyone else and makes it clear that even though Jessica has converted to Christianity, she is not a part of their community. Jessica is then ignored in the text for about 20 lines before Gratiano tells Nerissa to "cheer yond stranger, bid her welcome" (Shakespeare III. ii. 237). Twenty lines pass before Jessica is welcomed, and she is still not mentioned by name, which is odd because Gratiano helped her and Lorenzo elope, so he knows her name. The refusal to speak Jessica's name further isolates her and does not allow her to have an identity outside of "stranger" and "infidel," which identify her as an outsider.

However, Gratiano is not the only one who isolates Jessica. After everyone has left Belmont except for Launcelot, Jessica, and Lorenzo, Launcelot continues the tradition of segregating Jessica and specifically points out Judaism as the reason for her not being accepted. Launcelot tells Jessica, "truly I think you are damn'd" before telling her that her only hope is if she were "not the Jew's daughter" (III. v. 5-6 & 12). He basically tells her that she is in a hopeless situation; she will never be truly saved in the eyes of Christianity because she was born and raised Jewish. Jessica tries to rebuke Launcelot's assumptions by stating that Lorenzo has saved her by making her a Christian, but he turns

this into a joke by stating that the “making of Christians will raise the price of hogs” (III. v. 23-24). Launcelot completely dismisses her belief that being converted has saved her. He makes it obvious that her conversion is not taken seriously. The exclusion of Jessica from the Christian community by one who once sang her praises and seemed her friend confirms the fact that Jessica is seen as an interloper. Although this banter between Jessica and Launcelot is meant to be comic, a serious point is being raised. I believe that this scene is critical in understanding how Jessica is excluded from the Christian community. If Launcelot and Jessica are read as teasing each other, their teasing still holds some tension because it exemplifies real, historical thinking about Jewish converts. Critics such as James Shapiro examine historical examples of Jewish identity and antisemitism, and as Shapiro explains, many Jewish people converted to Christianity or pretended to be Christian in order to escape persecution before and during the English Renaissance (14). Jewish people were not trusted, and the discussion between Launcelot and Jessica at the least hints at the suspicion towards Jewish converts. On the other hand, Lindsay Kaplan argues that Jessica would have been an example of a successful conversion based on the fact that she was a woman and that she married a Christian man. She explains that medieval and renaissance sources would point to a Jewish woman not being considered as undeniably Jewish as a man, therefore, allowing a more thorough conversion (16-17). However, I believe the fact that Launcelot even brings Jessica’s conversion and heritage into question is evidence enough that there may be some doubt or subtle apprehension about her conversion. And thus, we can see that Jessica is not fully accepted in the Christian community of the other characters.

Jessica and Lorenzo

This leaves Lorenzo as Jessica’s last connection, and while their relationship seems happy in the beginning, there is tension between them towards the end of the play. The final act of the play begins with a discussion between Jessica and Lorenzo. This interlude is often read as playful banter between lovers, but the classical allusions that they make throughout the beginning speak to a more tense confrontation. They allude to Troilus and Cressida, Thisby and Pyramus, Dido and Aeneas, and Medea and Jason. All of these classical allusions are instances of betrayed or tragic lovers, and it is odd that playful banter would include such serious allusions. By focusing on the first 24 lines and the allusions, the playful banter seems to reveal some underlying tension in Lorenzo and Jessica’s

relationship. Lorenzo, who is Jessica's only real connection to Christian society, begins with an allusion to Troilus and Cressida. He links it to the peaceful scenery around them and describes how Troilus "mounted the Troyan walls, / And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents/ Where Cressid lay that night" (V. i. 4-6). In the story of Troilus and Cressida, Cressida betrays Troilus by taking on a new lover. Lorenzo sets up this allusion by first mentioning Troilus and making him appear more innocent by pining away for Cressid, who is betraying him. He ends the allusion with Cressid and makes her appear more deviant and sexual with the specific image of where she "lay that night" (V. i. 4-6). Jessica counters him by alluding to Thisby and Pyramus. This allusion is more tragic and less about betrayal. It sets the lovers up together, unlike Troilus and Cressida. However, Jessica specifically only mentions Thisby, so she is defending the female perspective. Jessica describes how Thisby "saw the lion's shadow ere himself, / And ran dismayed away" (V. i. 8-9). Jessica does not allude to the couple's suicide but rather to Thisby's fearful flight beforehand. By focusing on Thisby and on the actions before Pyramus kills himself, Jessica is bringing in female innocence and disagreeing with Lorenzo's interpretation of women. Lorenzo continues by mentioning Dido and Aeneas. He details how Dido "waft her love / To come again to Carthage" and return to her (V. i. 11-12). By focusing on Dido, Lorenzo, like Jessica, focuses on the feminine, but unlike Jessica, he does not portray the feminine in a positive light. He focuses on Dido as a hindrance to Aeneas, as one who is trying to hold Aeneas back from his destiny. In this way, Lorenzo contradicts Jessica's point by portraying the feminine as negative. Jessica then references the story where Medea uses her magical knowledge to make Jason's father, Aeson, young again, so in her allusion, Jessica directly references an instance where Medea is exerting her power over a man. She is pointing out that some women have power and can choose to use it for good. Paul Gaudet examines this specific discussion between Lorenzo and Jessica, but he explains how each allusion is a struggle for power with Jessica ultimately rebelling against Lorenzo's bid for dominant, male power over her ("Intertextuality and Status" 4-5). And while I agree with Gaudet's reading about the struggle between Jessica and Lorenzo, I believe that the interlude is less of an all-out power struggle and more of a struggle over interpreting men and women as innocent or blame-worthy. Furthermore, their "banter" is just one part of a larger problem,

Jessica's continued isolation. Their back and forth ultimately leads to a strained relationship between the two, and it does not end with the classical allusions.

Lorenzo references Jessica directly and shifts away from the classical allusions to make the sparring match more personal. He brings in the situation surrounding their elopement when he describes how Jessica stole “from the wealthy Jew, / And with an unthrift love did run from Venice” (V. i. 15-16). He puts all of the blame for stealing from Shylock onto Jessica and plays on any possible guilt she may feel for betraying her father. He moves their repartee into the personal realm. It is at this point that the tension behind their banter begins to shift to the forefront. They no longer veil their disagreement in allusions and instead make pointed assertions about each other. Jessica continues Lorenzo's personal allusions but turns them on him. She does not attempt to disprove his allusion to her theft, but she does implicate him as well. She describes how “young Lorenzo [did] swear he lov'd her well, / Stealing her soul with many vows of faith, / And ne'er a true one” (V. i. 18-20). The “vows of faith” could refer to vows Lorenzo made to Jessica as a lover, and her description of them as not being true could point to either Lorenzo breaking these vows or Jessica feeling as if he is not holding to them properly. Moreover, a more literal interpretation of these vows also reveals tension between Jessica and her new religion. When Jessica marries Lorenzo, she converts to Christianity from Judaism, so these “vows of faith” that were not true could be promises about what Christianity is like. Jessica as a convert would still be ostracized from the Christian community and many would still be suspicious of her as evidenced by Tamar Herzig's examination of the life of the Christian convert Sister Margherita. Herzig analyzes Sister Margherita's life and explains how the Sister went from a Jewish girl to a converted nun before her mental health began to deteriorate due to the strains of her conversion and life in the convent, and she was accused of demonic possession. Herzig argues that the “anxiety provoked by suspicions that a formerly Jewish nun reverted to Judaism was so profound, that it led to the condemnation to death of the only known Jew ever to be burned at the stake as a witch in the Italian peninsula” (470). By looking at the real-life of Sister Margherita and other Jewish converts, it can be inferred that Christianity might not be a positive experience for Jessica. This could then extend to Lorenzo “stealing her soul” because he would be stealing her soul from Judaism with his promises of Christian life. She asserts that Lorenzo is just as

guilty as she is because, while she may have stolen material goods, he stole her immortal soul into a religion that isolates and damns her. Lorenzo brings the personal allusions into the present and directly reproves Jessica's previous allusion. He describes how "pretty Jessica (like a little shrow) / Slander[ed] her love, and he forgave" her for it (V. i. 21-22). He is directly referencing Jessica's previous allusion to him and denying any claim that she was misled about what her life as a convert would be by calling it slander. He comes off vaguely insulting and threatening by referring to her as a shrow, which is another spelling of shrew. This leaves the interlude and their relationship with a sense of unease because Jessica never gets to verbally react to it because they are interrupted by a messenger. Thus, we are left with a disturbing interlude that brings the certainty of their relationship into question. Jessica abandons her father and religion in favor of a strained marriage and a Christian community that does not entirely accept her.

Conclusion

All of the alienating behavior that Jessica experiences ultimately culminates in the interlude between her and Lorenzo, where Gratiano and Salerio's comments about love being fickle seem to come true. Jessica is then completely isolated. She has left the Jewish community for a Christian community that will not accept her, and there is tension between her and her husband, who is her only remaining relationship. She is alone, and her situation seems unlikely to get better. Her last line is melancholic and speaks to her isolation as she states: "I am never merry when I hear sweet music" (V. i. 69). She is directly referencing the music they are listening to. However, the "sweet music" could also allude to the happy closure that the other couples reach, but that she will be unable to enjoy. She is then silent through the rest of the scene as the other characters come together and resolve any lingering tension between them, such as Portia and Nerissa's ring plot. The only positive event that happens to her in the final act is Portia presenting the dowry they forced Shylock to give up. Her only opportunity for positive closure comes from her father's ruin, which makes the whole ordeal bittersweet at best; perhaps this explains her lack of response to her newfound wealth. Lorenzo responds to the news joyfully, telling Portia "you drop manna in the way / Of starved people," so he has no issue with taking from Shylock once again (V.i.294-295). However, Jessica is silent as she has been for the last 200 lines. In contrast to Jessica's isolation, Portia is shown with a strong alliance

with Nerissa; it is noteworthy that the two other women of the play are united together. Portia and Nerissa back each other throughout the play, and in the final scene they reconcile with their husbands who gave away their rings. Jessica, however, is left in silence and a state of uncertainty in her relationship.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The English Renaissance was a time of swift change, as new ideas of religion, power, and gender began to circulate. There was an outpouring of pamphlets and conduct books, many of which prescribed severe limits on women's agency. However, critics such as Bernard Capp and Helen Graham-Matheson discuss how women actually exercised power through their connections with other women. This real-life behavior is then mirrored in the theatre of the time. Steven Urkowitz discusses changes made to *Romeo and Juliet* between Quarto 1 and 2, and thus demonstrates that Shakespeare was aware of and thinking about the effects community and isolation had on women, especially in his tragedies. When examining tragedies such as *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*, it becomes clear that a lack of community and female alliance leads women to their downfalls. This pattern can also be observed in some of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*.

When studying the effects of isolation on women in the tragedies a contrast between the downfall of the men and women can be observed. While many women lose their connections to the other characters and become isolated, their male counterparts often have friends and alliances up to the end. This contrast can be seen in the characters of *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. In these tragedies the men are not isolated like the women are but are either surrounded with friends as Lear is or have trusted confidants as Hamlet does. In *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan lose their connections to other characters in their pursuit of power until their relationship with each other breaks as well, and they are left without each other, or anyone, to confide in; as a result Goneril kills Regan before dying herself. Ophelia's isolation in *Hamlet* is more unfortunate. Ophelia is powerless as she follows the advice of her father and brother, which causes her to not only lose her relationship with Hamlet but also her connection to them. This leaves her alone and powerless until she is driven mad with grief and apparently takes her own life. *Macbeth*, however, is a partial exception to this contrast. Macbeth does lose his relationships with the important people in his life, as Lady Macbeth does, but he chooses to reject her, and he is not entirely alone at the end. Macbeth does somewhat rely on Seyton towards the end of the play, and he is surrounded by soldiers and servants. However, it is worthwhile to remember that Macbeth's isolation is different to Lady Macbeth's because her only real connection is to

Macbeth himself, and when she loses her bond to him, she is left without any support to deal with her guilt. Her offstage death and its uncertain circumstances highlight her loneliness. Overall, isolation leads all of these women to their unhappy fates, and this pattern can also be seen in some of the comedies.

Renaissance comedies are usually focused on community, and it is important for the structure of the play that it ends in unity. The communities find harmony through the acceptance of the social order, so it is relatively common for men who go against this order to be excluded from the communal harmony at the end, such as Malvolio from *Twelfth Night* and Don John from *Much Ado About Nothing*. However, Katherine and Jessica accept the dominant values of the community by the end of the play, and yet they are still excluded. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine is an outcast from the beginning of the play, but she is only further isolated once she marries Petruchio. He continually gaslights and de-humanizes her until she is completely broken down, swearing to agree with him no matter what. It is at this point that Katherine completely transforms into Petruchio's Kate, and she is no longer herself but rather the version of her that Petruchio wants. She is then once again isolated from the other women as she is made to speak against them, thus denying her of any chance of agency. Jessica's isolation in *The Merchant of Venice* is more subtle than Katherine's. She abandons the Jewish community and her Jewish father in favor of the Christian community and a Christian husband. However, she is not fully accepted into her newfound religion and its community. There are subtle mentions of her otherness as she is referred to as Lorenzo's infidel and "yond stranger" (III. ii. 237). There is even some unease in her marriage, as banter at the beginning of the last act reveals some differences in opinion between her and her husband. She is ultimately left in a place of uncertainty as the other characters come together, but she is silent at the end of the last act. The common thread that connects these women is their lack of alliances with other women at the end of the plays. Bianca and the Widow are allied, as are Portia and Nerissa. However, Katherine and Jessica are not part of these alliances, and so they are excluded from the communal harmony the other characters experience. Thus, isolation is not only a strong marker for tragedy, but can also cause misery for women in Shakespeare's comedies.

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