SHAKESPEARE'S DOUBLE IMAGE: THE DUAL NATURE OF WOMEN IN THE COMEDIES

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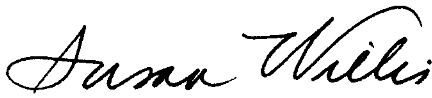

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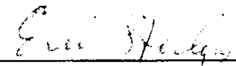

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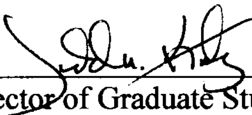

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

I. Female Characters Serve as Catalyst for Serious Themes. 1

II. The Comedies, Love, and the Family Unit 15

III. Adriana: A Woman's Plight for Love and Liberty 24

IV. Who is the Shrew? 41

V. Production: The Deciding Factor for Kate 55

VI. Isabella's Tragedy in *Measure for Measure* 68

VII. Gender, Genre, and the Comic Open Ending 82

Selected Bibliography 88

FEMALE CHARACTERS SERVE AS CATALYSTS FOR SERIOUS THEMES

William Shakespeare is known for his dramatic and dark tragedies, which question human existence and address human strife through universal themes. From these tragedies, readers often gain insight into the human condition and come away from the texts feeling as though they have learned something not only about the works and the characters but also about themselves. The comedies, on the other hand, are often read and enjoyed by readers in a different manner. Readers look to the comedies as a source of relief and entertainment from the realities of everyday life, and on the surface, they provide this welcomed escape. The comedies are fast paced and inundated with conflict, disguise, love, and mistaken identity. They are most often resolved with order in the form of happy reunions and marriages; the comedies generate laughter and provide entertainment, but they also do much more. To read the comedies as one dimensional, happy plays full of laughter and entertainment is only to scratch the surface of the purpose of these works. The comedies entertain while simultaneously questioning the same universal and serious themes as the tragedies, and in large part, the plays achieve this dualism through the female characters.

Three comedies that question serious themes through a thoughtful and possibly tragic female character are *The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew,* and *Measure for Measure*. The three plays and the women they incorporate reveal a natural progression of ideas, themes, and purposes for comic women and for the comedy itself beginning with Shakespeare's first comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*, often argued to be

pure farce, progressing to *The Shrew's* romantic farce, and ending with *Measure for Measure,* which many consider a comedy of serious ideas. *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Shrew* are slapstick farces that incorporate two bold and outspoken female characters, Adriana and Kate, who add to the comedy while also raising serious moral questions. *Measure for Measure* is a comedy of ideas with a female heroine whose portrayal lacks any comic relief, and this seriousness makes Isabella the most tragic of the three. However, many modern critics instead paint a dismal picture of Adriana's destructive jealousy, Kate's impossible personality, and Isabella's unreasonable devotion to her chastity. They see the women as absurd or unimportant, and they typically argue that the serious ideas and themes the women question are overshadowed by their comical flaws and the mistakes and misunderstandings surrounding them in the plays. There is no shortage of opinions about the comic women or about the comedies in general; however, as Adriana, Kate, and Isabella are examined closely, several important characteristics lead readers and critics to a better understanding of their purpose. The women's potential tragedy, transformation, and purpose are presented largely in their speech, actions, and the endings they face in the plays. Adriana, Kate, and Isabella evolve in a comic setting and what the women learn, like the men of the tragedies, inevitably leads them to possible tragedy.

Shakespeare creates what may be termed a "double image" with the female characters in the comedies. This double image extends not only to the women but also to the entire concept behind the comedies. The comedies are marked by pairings and doubles: there are twins (two sets in *The Comedy of Errors*), two sets of young lovers in

many of the romantic comedies, disguise (which leads to the two faces of one character), and a set of female characters often paired to reveal a stark contrast of ideas. These doubles allow the formation of comparisons between opposing ideas, characters, and actions. Several other pairs may be noticed in any of the comedies; however, the most noticeable double image is present in the comic female characters. The women of the comedies assume a dual nature because they are both comic and tragic, and the issues they address are both funny and serious. The women also often embody two entirely different sets of characteristics to readers and critics. They are either seen as autonomous, strong, and important or as dependent, weak, and insignificant. This dualistic presentation creates a relatively unbiased atmosphere for readers, which allows for an individualized experience. The divergent opinions and interpretations are striking and revealing: Shakespeare's ultimate goal appears not to present the reader with answers to the moral ideals the female characters question, but rather to force readers to see these issues and formulate their own opinions. Linda Bamber argues of the comedies' seriousness and dualistic nature:

> What the comedies offer to "the world outside literature" is an alternative to seriousness that is yet not frivolous; it is a way of "placing" serious concerns that depends upon our taking things seriously in the first place. What is offered is a *relationship* between the moral mode and the conventional mode, between the mode in which we face our conflicts squarely and the mode in which all dualities – moral, aesthetic, and intellectual– may be blithely dismissed. (123)

The comedies give readers a chance to make the text, and the production for which the text is meant, an interactive event. There is no voice in the text urging readers to feel one way or another about the characters or the moral ideals the plays question. The comedies

offer open readings, allowing readers to discover their own moral, aesthetic, and intellectual beliefs. The serious and dualistic nature of the comedies is best when closely examined instead of "blithely dismissed" as Linda Bamber suggests.

The main concern of the comedies is the relationship in its various forms. Relationships between siblings, young lovers, and married couples establish the foundation for the expression of serious themes and ideas. The themes addressed by *The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of The Shrew, and Measure for Measure* are remarkably similar to each other and to the themes found in the tragedies. If the themes and the important issues addressed were plucked from the plays, it becomes impossible to distinguish which belongs to the comedies and which to the tragedies. The main difference between the issues raised by the tragedies and those of the comedies is that the tragedies tend to address the extreme and extraordinary occurrences of life while the comedies focus on the common, everyday struggles of mankind. However, when critics and readers carefully examine the comedies and the tragedies together, the lasting effects and feeling evoked are also surprisingly similar: all of William Shakespeare's plays confront critics and readers with difficult questions, many of which are unanswerable or answerable only in terms of individual beliefs, morals, and knowledge. Three major themes found in *The Errors, The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* are transformation, reality versus fantasy, and love and the bond of marriage. These issues are serious, and they transcend time and genre through universality. These themes are not limited to a particular time, place, or people, and it is this timelessness which creates changing interpretations and lasting lessons from all of the plays.

The theme of transformation is presented in each of these plays by contrasting two distinctly different types of transformations or changes. *The Errors, The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* confront the reader with transformations that are either superficial or life-altering changes to the self. The exterior disguises and mistaken identities of the two sets of twins in *The Errors*, Sly the tinker and Bianca's suitors in *The Shrew*, and the Duke in *Measure for Measure* are changes to the exterior character only; the disguises are simple facades and mere changes of clothing or a mistaken identity that do not constitute a true change of character or any type of personal epiphany. These types of superficial changes produce a lighter, comic reading of characters while the more serious changes to the female characters demand a close reading and a more serious examination.

The two sets of twins in *The Errors* essentially become their twin counterparts with Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse assuming the identity of their twins and experiencing their lives in Ephesus. Their mistaken identity produces comedy when Dromio of Syracuse attempts to resolve the confusing situation with Nell in the final scene when he tells his twin, "There is a fat friend at your master's house/ That kitchened me for you today at dinner./ She now shall be my sister, not my wife" (5.1.414-16). Conversely, the legitimate Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus are confronted with the chaos of having their twins present and having their actions cast as their own. Their comical exchange over the course of the play does initiate a serious examination of individual identity; however, the characters themselves do not undergo any significant change. The only change the twins encounter is the changing perception that others have of them, and with the change chiefly in the perception of others, the experience does not

produce any personal epiphany or teach the male characters any lesson. The same is true of Sly and Bianca's suitors in *The Taming of the Shrew*. In *The Shrew*, the theme of transformation is established first in Sly's frame story and then carried throughout the play on many different levels. Sly transforms from an average tinker into a wealthy lord with a procession of servants and entertainers. However dramatic Sly's change appears, he does not undergo any real transformation; instead, he easily changes in a superficial manner through clothing and other exterior materials. Sly's change resembles that of the twins in *The Errors* because his transformation exists in the perceptions of others and in the changing perception he has of himself. This pattern continues to evolve in *Measure for Measure* as the Duke assumes the disguise of a holy Friar. The Duke's religious disguise is the most controversial of the three play's disguises because he impersonates a Friar and allows others to act upon his advice and guidance, yet his change is as superficial and silly as those of Bianca's suitors: The Duke does not make any significant changes to himself; instead, he seeks to change others through the use of his disguise and his power. Angelo's "disguise" mirrors the Dukes' although his is not the literal use of religious attire. Angelo's disguise serves as figurative symbol of human frailty because he places himself on a pedestal of perfection unattainable to man. Ultimately, all of these disguises are revealed by the conclusion of the comedies.

To a larger degree, the theme of transformation is established through the female characters and the struggles they face in a comic setting. The transformations of Adriana, Katharina, and Isabella extend beyond the superficial and become changes at the most basic level through a greater understanding of the self and through an acceptance of the

reality in which women live. Their changes go a step further than the superficial changes of clothing or mistaken identity by becoming either positive or negative changes to the self, which affect their individual identity. However, not all critics agree that the female characters undergo any significant transformations to the self. For example, Linda Bamber asserts:

> The comic heroine herself avoids choice, and in imagining her the author is spared the choice between moral-realistic and comic-conventional modes. There is a second feminine privilege in comedy, the avoidance of change and development. Many would argue that change, and not the avoidance of change, is what we value in comedy; but the important changes in the comedies are collective rather than individual. (129)

All of the characters of the comedies avoid ultimate choices that endorse a moral standard; however, the female characters do make choices, many of which place them dangerously close to tragedy. For instance, Adriana chooses to demand her husband from the abbess, revealing the climax of *The Errors* and the possible loss of her marriage; Kate begins her transformation by choosing to present herself for her wedding to Petruchio; and Isabella makes the choice to go to Angelo and beg for the life of her brother. The female characters appear to be making choices, and their choices lead them to individual change. Adriana's reply when she hears the criticism from the abbess regarding her jealousy is not a collective change; it is an intimate change of the individual. It is similarly hard to see Kate or Isabella's changes as collective rather than individual. Adriana and Isabella are women who undergo negative, self-harming transformations. *The Errors* addresses the issue of transformation of the individual self with the water drop analogy, which is first introduced by Antipholus of Syracuse. He is afraid that

establishing a relationship with a twin brother will constitute some loss of his individual identity, a valid concern. However, it is Adriana who expands this important image and establishes the important theme of transformation. Adriana address the wrong Antipholus:

> For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
> A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
> And take unmingled thence that drop again
> Without addition or diminishing,
> As take from me thyself, and not me too. (2.2.128-32)

Adriana's vivid images of the water drop and the ivy vine represent a kind of transformation and loss of self that is feared by all the characters in the play; however, her images are focused specifically on the romantic bond between man and woman. Adriana is afraid of losing herself in her marriage and of being betrayed by her husband's infidelity in the form of a physical betrayal or emotional neglect. She is also afraid of being spiritually or morally corrupted by her husband as she states, "For if we two be one, and thou play false,/ I do digest the poison of thy flesh,/ Being strumpeted by thy contagion" (2.2.132-34).

However, while Adriana clearly recognizes that she is being "corrupted" by her husband's carelessness and by society's double standard, Isabella's naivety prevents her from fearing such a loss or seeing her negative transformation. Isabella is transformed from a woman following her conviction to enter the convent to a woman who is potentially the bride of the Duke. Isabella falls to the deception of male characters, and she is led astray by Angelo whom she believes is good, by her brother who ultimately begs her to exchange her chastity for his life, and by the Duke, who disguises himself as a

Friar and then allows her to participate in the "bed trick." Her transformation is not completely literal; Isabella also loses her innocence and her once untarnished view of the world, which is seen as she concedes in her final lines:

> Look, if it please you, on this man condemn'd,
> As if my Brother liv'd: I partly think
> A due Sincerity governed his Deeds
> Till he did look on me. Since it is so,
> Let him not die. My Brother had but Justice,
> In that he did the thing for which he died;
> For Angelo, his Act did not o'ertake his bad Intent,
> And must be buried but as an Intent
> That perish'd by the Way. Thoughts are no
> Subjects, Intents but merely Thoughts. (5.1.437- 45)

Isabella's new view of a corrupt society allows her to forgive Angelo for a deed that she likely would have not pardoned him for in the first act. Isabella's lines are a concession to the secular view of mercy and justice that she experiences over the course of the play. Angelo's act obviously does overtake his horrible intent since until the final scene he believes that he did sleep with Isabella. Her forgiveness for Angelo reveals a step down from the high moral ground where she once stood and her changing beliefs that greater accommodate the sins of man.

A different, more positive change is often seen by critics and readers in the transformation of Kate and Petruchio in *The Taming of The Shrew.* Petruchio and Kate are transformed from harsh, unproductive individuals into a balanced and happy married couple. Individually, Kate and Petruchio are existing on a diminished level, and they are not reaching their potential as human beings or contributing as productive members of society. With the focus so intensely set on finding a suitor for Bianca, Kate feels unloved

and unwanted, and she is neglected to some extent by her father. Kate is a broken and sad woman until her transformation occurs at the end of the play. She vocalizes her sadness in the play as she exclaims, "My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,/ Or else my heart, concealing it, will break" (4.3.77-78). Kate counters her sadness by striking out at her family and by adopting a shrewish personality, which alienates others. It takes Petruchio, a similar individual, to show Kate how to accept herself and live up to her potential. Kate's transformation is made positive and meaningful through her marriage; she is given a purpose, and to a larger extent, Kate is given a strong sense of self. Her change is positive because it brings her a happiness and inner peace through a meaningful and loving relationship. The establishment of one relationship also affords her the ability to create a meaningful relationship with her father. Kate is finally able to accept herself, and therefore she allows others access through the facade of a shrewish personality to her true feelings.

All three plays share the concept of planes or levels of reality. In *The Errors,* characters address this theme through questioning the difference between reality and dreams. The two sets of twins experience a dream-like state when their realities are transformed to accommodate the realities of their twins. Dromio of Syracuse vocalizes his growing concerns with his reality when he asks his master, "Do you know me sir? Am I Dromio? Am I your man? Am I myself?" (3.2.73). Egeon echoes this sentiment when he first sees the abbess and recognizes her as his lost wife; Egeon says, "If I dream not, thou art Emilia" (5.1.352). Like the male characters, Adriana is also struggling to accept the reality in which she lives and the discrepancies between the reality of men and the

reality of women. Her anger toward her reality is seen when she realizes her husband is not sensitive to her emotions. Adriana says, "Come, come, no longer will I be a fool,/ To put the finger in the eye and weep/ Whilst man and mater laughs my woes to scorn"(3.1.193-95). Adriana cannot understand why her husband is entitled to more freedom than she is or why her sister and the abbess believe women should be submissive to men. Her dismay is vocalized as she questions, "Why should their liberty than ours be more?" (1.2.9). However, because of gender roles her husband's erratic behavior is acceptable to society and her behavior, mainly her jealousy and outspoken personality, is not. Ironically, many readers and critics promote the same type of standards as they denounce Adriana's jealousy and even blame her for "driving" her husband to the courtesan. Adriana realizes over the course of the play that men and women do not share the same reality. She must live in a reality in which men naturally command more liberty, and Adriana's tragedy lies in her realization and acceptance of the double standard in the realities of men and women.

The Taming of The Shrew is arguably Shakespeare's strongest statement about reality. This play questions the reality in which mankind lives, and to a greater extent the play questions the reality that men and women share in society and in marriage. *The Shrew* sets up three intricate planes of reality with the incorporation of the frame story. Sly's reality is skewed when he is told that the reality he is accustomed to is actually a dream and the new life of wealth and prestige is his true reality. Sly's questioning of the dream state is strikingly similar to Dromio's. Sly asks, "Do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?" (Ind. 2.69). *The Errors, The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* reveal how

easily man's reality is bent and changed. Dromio and Sly feel that they are correct in their beliefs about the realities they live; however, outsiders are easily able to place doubt in the two men. The issue raised by this discovery becomes tragic when the reader realizes that man's reality exists largely in the perception of others. Sly is quickly convinced in the induction that he is a lord; he says, "I smell sweet savors and I feel soft things,/ Upon my life, I am a lord indeed/ And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly" (Ind.2.71-73). His reality is not defined by what he feels to be true; instead he easily allows materials to sway his truth. Levels of reality also become visible in this play through the stage setup. Readers and audience members are aware that Sly looks down on stage, the stage contains the performance of the play, and the audience or readers take in the complete story that is unfolding. However, the third act is the turning point of the play and where the theme of reality is most apparent. An acknowledgment of another reality than her own is what Petruchio wants from Kate, not a concession that women are inferior to men. Petruchio asks Kate to accept that there are other realities besides her own, and he believes that to live in a peaceful and balanced union, the recognition of a partner's reality is essential. Petruchio eventually gets what he wants as Kate agrees:

> Then, God be blest, it is the blessed sun,
> But sun it is not, when you say it is not,
> And the moon changes even as your mind.
> What you will have it nam'd, even that it is,
> And so it shall be so for Katherine. (4.5.18-22)

Kate's ability to recognize and embrace her husband's reality (or any reality other than her own) is essential to the success of their marriage and her transformation. She finally understands the "lesson" that Petruchio is teaching, and she learns how to be

accommodating instead of shrewish. This new knowledge gives her the ability to function in society by conforming her attitude and language. Kate's reality is also seen in her last speech where she criticizes her past behavior and adds, "I am asham'd that women are so simple/ To offer war where they should kneel for peace" (5.2.161-62). Of course, Kate's final speech may be read as a genuine assertion of the male/female relationship or as a final ironic jab at male supremacy, but however the final lines are interpreted, Kate's perception of reality changes.

The concern with reality remains important in the later comedy *Measure for Measure*. In this comedy, the reality of a secular society is contrasted with the perceived religious and moral obligations of the spiritual world. Many of the characters in *Measure for Measure* encounter some difficulties balancing reality. Angelo's new political role becomes mingled with his strict religious views when he decides to regulate and punish the act of premarital sex. Angelo lives in two different realities; in one reality, he commands the respect of the people with his saintly values, and in the other Angelo feels weak and tempted by the evils of the world. Angelo vocalizes his struggle with temptation as he questions, "What is't I dream on?/ – Oh cunning enemy, that to catch a Saint/ With saints dost bait thy hook" (2.2.179-81). However, Angelo's less than saintly character surfaces when he makes the conscience decision to mask his true feelings: Angelo concedes, "Let's write good angel on the devil's horn/ 'Tis not the devil's crest" (2.4.16-17), revealing that he intends to project one image and embrace an entirely different one. Like Angelo, Isabella must decide how she will balance her religious beliefs and her encounter with secular society. Her reality changes significantly when she

leaves the safety of the convent to try and help her brother. However, it is the Duke who literally embodies the strained ideal that Isabella and Angelo face with his disguise. The Duke remains a member of secular society, but ironically he chooses the religious disguise of a Friar to hide behind. The Duke tampers with and changes the reality of many of the characters, and in the end, a new reality surfaces for the characters in *Measure for Measure.*

THE COMEDIES, LOVE, AND THE FAMILY UNIT

The comedies differ from the tragedies in many ways; however, the greatest difference between the two genres lies in the treatment of love and the family unit. All of William Shakespeare's plays address themes that deal with the functioning of the family unit; however, readers often overlook the thematic issues that revolve around family in the tragedies because the focus is intensely set on the struggles of the male protagonist and/or antagonist. The tragedies' exploration of the family unit reflects a darker, more dysfunctional look at how families function under extreme circumstances, and because the tragedies focus readers' attention on other themes, female characters also lose some of their prominence. However, women maintain a strong presence in both the tragedies and the comedies, but the tragedies are more often plays about masculine self-discovery and enlightenment. The comedies, on the other hand, embrace the theme of love, and female characters easily express the complex emotions of these everyday family matters. The comedies bring the issues of love, family, and marriage to the forefront by pairing off lovers, comparing siblings, and contrasting female characters. Shakespeare's treatment of relationships in *The Errors, The Shrew,* and *Measure for Measure* may be looked at as a type of evolution of many different types of relationships. The plays reveal a natural progression of ideas that questions the concepts of individual identity and the inherent differences between love and the union of marriage. In each of the plays,

readers find relationships that have the propensity to be tragic: twins are tragically separated, wife is estranged from husband, and potential lovers are thwarted by mistaken identity.

Helena insists in *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* that "love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind" (MND 1.1.234); however, many comic characters find love with a very different approach. Male and female characters find that their affections are governed by wealth, disguise or appearances, and lovers are often young and impetuous. *The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew* are comedies that explore the family unit and institution of marriage by contrasting the relationship of married couples with those of young lovers. *The Errors* and *The Shrew* extend beyond simple entertainment by seriously questioning marriage and the idea of what it takes for a couple to go beyond idolatrous love into a relationship where couples become united, in a religious sense, as one. In both of these comedies, readers encounter a young couple guilty of giving in to physical lust. For these couples, love lives in the eye, not in the heart, and therefore they marry someone whom they know in no greater depth than what is outwardly visible. In these young relationships, both the male and female characters are more comical than serious, and this type of adolescent love illuminates the idea that love, which is abrupt and based on superficial qualities, is immature, irresponsible, and perhaps incapable of being true love.

Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana and Lucentio and Bianca are characters who add to the questioning of the family unit by becoming the opposing image of the more serious issues of the married couples. Antipholus of Syracuse falls deeply in

love with Luciana the moment he sees her. His description reveals an idealistic view of romantic relationships as he attempts to woo Luciana:

> Sing, siren, for thyself, and I will dote:
> Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden hairs,
> And as a bed I'll take them, and there lie;
> And in that glorious supposition, think
> He gains by death that hath such means to die. (3.1.197-201)

Antipholus' image of love, as critic D. A. Traversi points out, is "to the excesses of sentimental passion" (66). He has just met Luciana, but he claims to love her in a deeply intimate and passionate manner. Antipholus' overwhelming and seemingly unfounded emotion is similar to Adriana's destructive jealousy. He appears irrational, and therefore his words lose some of their significance as Antipholus continues to pursue Luciana he again offers his unfounded love by telling her she is:

> My eye's clear eye, my dear heart's dearer heart,
> My food, my fortune, and my sweet hope's aim,
> My sole earth's heaven, and my heaven's claim. . . . (3.2.214-216)

This strong statement of devotion and love to a women he has only just met seems silly, and the comedy is compounded by the fact that Luciana believes that he is her sister's husband. In this passage his language becomes more developed, but as Traversi again argues, this statement "converts the true language of married love into the excess of love's idolatry . . ." (66). The relationship of Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana does not develop into marriage because the "errors of the day" remain unresolved until the last act of the play; therefore, readers do not get an opportunity to see the young couple evolve, but this presentation changes with *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Where *The Errors'* main theme deals more with the issue of individuality in relationships, *The Shrew's* central theme deals more specifically with the marriage relationship. In this play, marriage and love are contrasted; readers can clearly see the relation, while simultaneously recognizing that one does not directly constitute the other. The theme develops by contrasting the relationship of Kate and Petruchio with the relationship of Bianca and Lucentio. Readers see the expansion of Antipholus and Luciana's relationship in *The Errors* to the more developed story of Bianca's marriage to Lucentio. Like Antipholus and Luciana, Lucentio and Bianca begin their relationship by falling in love with an outward appearance or an imagined ideal. Both relationships question the concept of love at first sight and challenge the validity of the idea. However, the marriage of Lucentio and Bianca remains one of Shakespeare's strongest statements about love at first sight, leaving readers surprised by Bianca's change in attitude as *The Shrew* ends. Lucentio claims to be madly in love with Bianca after catching a glimpse of her on the streets of Padua, and he immediately forms an image of her pleasant, mild personality. Bianca does not even have to speak for Lucentio to exclaim to his servant, "But in the other's silence do I see/ Maid's mild behaviour and sobriety. Peace Tranio!" (1.1. l.61-62). Her soft, beautiful physical features lead Lucentio to believe that her attitude must match her appearance, and he falls in love with a women he really does not know. Bianca aids Lucentio in his mistaken belief that she is the ideal woman by hiding her true nature. Bianca feigns interest in her studies when her real goal is to pursue her relationship with Lucentio. She also pretends to be mild and submissive, claiming "so well I know my duty" (2.1.7), when clearly her views on marriage differ.

Bianca and Lucentio's relationship is superficial at best, and the couple is not married to each other in the sense of a marriage of the minds or souls. They barely know one another, and they base their relationship on nothing more than what may be seen with the eye. Lucentio immediately loves Bianca because of her youth and beauty, and he vows to marry her, but Tranio (and readers) are quick to question, "I pray, sir, tell me, is it possible that love should of a sudden take such hold?" (1.1.146-47). And this is the idea that Shakespeare seems to experiment with in the comedies through his presentation of the young lovers. Is it possible that Antipholus loves Luciana the moment he sees her, and is it possible that Lucentio and Bianca form some bond on a crowded street? Readers do not get an opportunity to see what becomes of Antipholus and Luciana; in the case of Lucentio and Bianca, the illusion dissipates by the final scene of the play as the once obedient Bianca mocks her new husband for betting on her duty. Ironically, the young lovers' marriage celebration at the end of the play actually honors Kate and Petruchio and denounces love based on an ideal.

Readers must also recognize that many of these lovers, especially the young lovers, begin their relationships under false pretenses. In *The Errors*, Luciana believes that Antipholus of Syracuse is actually her sister's mad husband. This type of disguise, in the form of mistaken identity, leads to confusion for the potential young couple. Antipholus of Syracuse cannot adequately convey his love to Luciana, and she cannot be open to his romantic advances. This idea expands in *The Shrew* as Lucentio disguises himself as a tutor to gain access to the fair Bianca. The young lovers must lie to their surrounding family members to pursue their relationships and cultivate their love. The disguises continue to spiral in *The Shrew* as Tranio pretends to be Lucentio and Lucentio

must find a man to pose as his father, Vincentio. The many disguises aid the young lovers in their desire to secretly wed and have their marriage accepted by Baptista. However, all of the disguises reiterate the immaturity of the young lovers and trivialize their love, ultimately making the young couples' love no more real than a "midsummer night's dream."

These questionable romantic relationships become progressively disturbing and complex from *The Errors* to the dark comedy of *Measure for Measure*. There are none of the typical young lovers in *Measure for Measure*, but there are several relationships that are dark and potentially tragic. The relationships of Isabella and the Duke and of Angelo and Mariana are the most dysfunctional and dark unions found in the comedies. In both cases, the eventual unions are brought about by trickery and deceit. Isabella believes she follows the advice of a Friar, and Mariana and Angelo's relationship is consummated by the "bed trick" arranged by the Duke. There is no indication that Angelo has any feelings for Mariana since he abandons her when her dowry is lost at sea. He only marries her because of his obligation, but Mariana genuinely loves Angelo and accepts him as a man with flaws. Mariana tell the Duke, "Oh my dear Lord, / I crave no other, nor no better Man" (5.1.418-19). Her unconditional love of Angelo is similar to the love Adriana has for Antipholus; however, both of the women are denied the same type of reciprocating feelings of love and affection. Similarly, the Duke's love of Isabella is most likely an obsession (like Angelo's) and a desire to have the seemingly unattainable and chaste maiden. All of the characters and their relationships are more serious than comical. Isabella's "marriage" to God is contrasted with her relationship with the Duke and the other romantic relationships in the play. Isabella must balance her

relationship with God and the convent with her life in a secular society and her possible marriage to the Duke at the end of the play. Claudio and Julietta's relationship is unique because the pair has committed a promise of marriage without the actual ceremony, and the couple also has a sexual relationship, which produces a child before marriage. Claudio and Julietta's relationship seems valid, but it is not in keeping with society's standard of marriage. There is no wedding ceremony for this relationship; instead they make vows and promises, which are not taken by society as a literal or acceptable form of commitment.

The presentation of the young lovers in the comedies questions the motives of family, love, and how love relates to the union of marriage. The young lovers Antipholus and Luciana, and Lucentio and Bianca appear to be in love with an ideal. The couples base their love on outward appearances without truly understanding the institution of marriage or the partner they claim to love. Marriage does not constitute love, and love cannot be captured by a simple exchange of vows. However, the married couples Egeon and Emilia, Antipholus of Ephesus and Adriana, and Kate and Petruchio offer readers a realistic glimpse into the comedy, tragedy, and common tribulations of married life. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Adriana struggles with her relationship with her husband because she has trouble separating her individual identity from her identity in marriage. Adriana also finds it difficult to control her emotions because she truly loves her husband and desperately wants his attention and affection. Adriana fears that her marriage may cause a loss of individuality, equality, and respect, and her marriage to Antipholus of Ephesus is obviously troubled. Readers learn in the final scene that his habitual absence is blamed on "Some love that drew him oft from home" (5.1.56). Many readers and critics place

blame on Adriana for driving her husband away with her jealousy and suspicions; however, Adriana's emotions are valid:

> That the suspicion is unfounded is not relevant. After all so is the suspicion of Othello or Posthumus. It is clear that Adriana's husband does visit a courtesan who is described by him to his friends as:
>
> a wench of excellent discourse,
> Pretty and witty; wild, and yet, too gentle; (III. I. 109-10)
>
> – indeed an ideal mistress. The wife pleads with the husband and her pleading contains the sharpest attack on the double standard in the whole of Shakespeare. (Singh 45)

Through the marriage of Adriana and Antipholus readers see a different type of relationship develop. Adriana and her husband have a history together and the two know each other on an intimate level. Their struggles evolve into a complex plot that questions identity, marriage, and love. As a married woman, Adriana has a different experience from Luciana, and her knowledge of love makes her views more realistic than her sister's.

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, readers see the relationship of Kate and Petruchio evolve into a loving marriage. Kate's first encounter with Petruchio does not make her fall in love with him, but he convinces Kate to marry him. Many readers are shocked when Kate, who first refers to Petruchio a "buzzard" and a "crab," actually presents herself at the church to be married. At this point, the couple shares the same relationship as the young lovers; Kate and Petruchio do not really know one another, but they both appear willing to wed. The remainder of the play follows Kate and Petruchio on their journey of discovering each other, and from this couple, readers experience the common differences between the genders and the everyday struggles and concessions that come with marriage.

There are many different themes exposed by the plots and subplots of the comedies, but perhaps the issue that all the comedies share is their concern with the concept of love. Love and the pursuit of love are the driving themes of William Shakespeare's comedies, and although many new relationships are created and estranged lovers are reunited in happy endings, the idea of love that Shakespeare questions is far from simple. The beauty of true love is seen in brief glimpses, but the notion of love is not always presented as good or as pure. Love is presented as painful, and love is often established through magic, trickery, and even deceitful lies. The comedies make two things clear: love cannot be narrowed down to one particular component, and it is discovered and embraced in many different forms. The comedies are a study of love in these various forms and a search for the defining element of true love. Through the romantic relationships of the comedies, readers face the question of whether true, mutual love and respect is possible. Readers must also question what qualities constitute true love if it does in fact exist. Can love be based on outward appearances such as the love Lucentio feels for Bianca? Or can love be cultivated by a type of "lesson" as seen in *The Shrew* and *Measure for Measure*? The comedies do not provide readers with definite answers, and the interpretations of the relationships remain as open as the endings themselves. Where the tragedies are a look at the extreme and unusual side of human life, the comedies are a picture of our everyday realities. Love and relationships are the focal points of human lives, and therefore the issue of love becomes the focus of the comedies.

ADRIANA: A WOMAN'S PLIGHT FOR LOVE AND LIBERTY

In every comedy by William Shakespeare there is an element of seriousness underlying the more obvious goal of entertainment and escape. Shakespeare's comedies offer the audience more than mere entertainment by expressing some idea of the human condition through everyday struggles and choices. Like his tragedies, his comedies also tend to include intricate plots and complex themes that are universal to mankind. *The Comedy of Errors* is no exception as it deals with the themes of human identity, individuality, time, and loss. Since *The Comedy of Errors* is accepted by most scholars as Shakespeare's first comedy, it also must be credited with beginning his experiment with feminine roles. *The Comedy of Errors* presents the reader with the outspoken female character, Adriana. Her role is vital to the play, and through her struggles the concepts of woman's role in marriage as well as society become the more serious focus of the play. Adriana is a complex character, both funny and serious, and through her speech the reader discovers her true nature and feelings regarding marriage and love. Adriana's struggle with her identity in society and within her marriage mirrors the theme of identity that the male characters face. However, not all critics recognize the more serious side to Adriana's character or the play as a whole. To these critics, the theme of identity and the issues that focus on woman's role in society and marriage are overshadowed by the play's farcical comedy. This view prompts critics to argue that Adriana is the stereotypical demanding woman whose role is to adhere to the rules of farce and simply be comical.

These critics focus on her jealousy as the flaw which overshadows her serious speech and precludes any pain she might encounter in the play.

However, other critics see a softer side to Adriana and focus more on the serious ideas she questions and the nature of her struggles with marriage, jealousy, and passivity. These critics argue that:

> The stock jealous wife of Roman comedy becomes in *The Comedy of Errors* a real woman, jealous certainly, but also agonized at the thought of her husband's forsaking her, pleading with him (as she believes; it is the wrong Antipholus, of course), confiding her anguish in her sister, eager to recover and to care for her supposedly mad husband in the last act. (Whitworth 20)

For many readers, Adriana becomes much more than a stock caricature in *The Errors*. She becomes a three-dimensional woman, a figure to whom many women can relate, and this connection leaves many readers and critics with a feeling of genuine sympathy for Adriana. Adriana's character is then read and appreciated for more than her jealousy and her contribution to the comedy; she is important to the overall thematic statement of the play, and her struggles question the traditional view of woman's role in society and in marriage.

Kenneth Muir, editor of *Shakespeare The Comedies*, agrees in his introduction that Shakespeare's comedy is dedicated to more than entertainment and laughter. Muir states, "In each of his rollicking comedies, Shakespeare integrated and subdued, rather than excluded, the darker sides of life and human nature that dominate his tragedies." It is clear that Shakespeare intends to do more than merely entertain readers with a pure farce since he begins *The Comedy of Errors* with the serious frame story of Egeon and the

loss of his son, wife, and servant at sea. The story is "subdued" just as Muir implies; its sadness does not hang over every line of the play, but it does add a dimension beyond farce. The frame neatly ties the comedy together and represents the ultimate and most unlikely reunion. Egeon and Emilia's reunion rescues Egeon from death, but it does not keep Adriana from facing tragedy. Muir also agrees Adriana's character serves as a catalyst for the introduction of serious themes, which take the play beyond pure farce: "Adriana's jealousy and her husband's roving eye enable him to introduce some serious discussions of the marriage bond" (Muir 4). D.A Traversi echoes this sentiment and feels that *The Comedy of Errors* makes a serious "statement about life- -and more especially about love and marriage as central realities in the pattern of living [. . .]" (57).

The Errors focuses on the effect of relationships on the individual, and of course, the most prominent relationship in society is the relationship created with the bond of marriage. The reader encounters four of these "marriage relationships" in the play: there is the marriage of Egeon and Emilia which has been tragically disconnected; there is the relationship of Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana which is just beginning to blossom; there is the comic relationship of Dromio and Nell from the subplot; and at the center of these relationships is the tumultuous marriage of Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus. With each of these relationships, Shakespeare makes a clear statement about the human condition as it relates to marriage and love. The reader sees the loss felt when lovers are separated, the joy of new love, the reality and comedy behind love, and the feelings of loss, insecurity, and personal pain that can result when love is in question. Through a variety of relationships, all at different stages, readers can see the challenges of

maintaining romantic relationships, and the comic and serious implications that always surround relationships.

The Comedy of Errors is a play about reconciliation of relationships and reconciliation between individuality and the bond created by relationships. All of the characters in the play have their lives turned upside down for a day as they struggle to find their individual identities and their identities in relation to one another. The potentially tragic frame story is resolved when Egeon and Emilia are reunited with their lost twin sons and twin servants, both sets of brothers are brought together, and Luciana has a prospective husband; all the "errors" of the day are resolved with one exception. Shakespeare gives readers no clear indication that Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus are happily reconciled at the end of the play. There is no one line that suggests that their marriage is safe and that the couple will live happily ever after. Adriana has grown and matured over the course of the play, and she is able to recognize her shortcomings. However, her growth is quite dismal if she realizes that she cannot retain her individuality in marriage and that her husband will not give her the equality and attention she seeks. In the midst of a comic and happy ending, Adriana remains unsure and alone: she has no reassurance, and she does not experience the same sense of unity the other characters find. This raises many questions about marriage and Adriana's character. The reader must consider there is a chance a marriage has ended, and if it has, what is Shakespeare's purpose for Adriana?

"We are, of course, [first] warned by critics not to take Adriana's troubles seriously as the play is only a comedy of errors" (Singh 46). Critics embrace this

sentiment mostly because they do not believe that the purpose of *The Errors* extends beyond simple entertainment. Critics who embrace this view do not recognize a serious aspect to Adriana's character and instead see her as an "add[ition] and interesting ingredient to the cavortings of the plot" (Pitt 77). The plot of the comedy is undeniably convoluted, but Adriana may be viewed as more of a victim of the complicated plot than an addition. She is definitely the victim of many critics who base their views on Adriana's character around plot structure. Critics feel that her serious speeches are often made comical by being directed toward the wrong persons. For example, Adriana's somber speech on the importance of marriage vows is directed to the wrong Antipholus. Critics often argue that this is clear sign that Adriana's character is not meant to be taken seriously and that the plays' major focus is comedy, not the more important themes that lie just beneath the plot. Her serious speeches are also sometimes followed by comical situations as seen when Adriana uses the metaphor comparing herself to a vine and her husband to a tree. Adriana tells her presumed husband,

> Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,
> Whose weakness, married to thy stronger state,
> Makes me with thy strength to communicate.
> If aught possess thee from me, it is dross,
> Usurping ivy, briar, or idle moss,
> Who, all for want of pruning, with intrusion
> Infect thy sap, and live on thy confusion. (2.2.165-71)

This is arguably the most important confession that Adriana makes in the play; however, the statement is not the ranting of an overly jealous wife. Here Adriana reveals her true concerns and heartbreak, further establishing the serious ideas of love, marriage, and woman's reality. The metaphor used by Adriana is a testament to her feelings about her

marriage and her fears about how marriage is affecting her. In many ways, her statement is an assertion of what all the characters in the play fear: a loss of self and a contamination of the self because of relationships. The description of marriage should be beautiful and desirable, but here Adriana gives an account of marriage that is ugly and negative. She compares herself to a vine that is not self-sustaining because she feels weak and burdensome; her connection to her husband is negative and one-sided. However, Adriana's concerns are directly followed by a bawdy exchange between Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant Dromio, making many critics believe that this quick transition serves as a distraction from Adriana's speech, and it does to some extent. However, these critics overlook the fact that Adriana has no idea her husband has a twin brother and that she directs her feelings to the wrong man.

Critics who agree that Adriana's character should not be taken seriously also find another reason to defer attention away from her solemn speeches and feelings by focusing on her jealousy as the flaw that leads to her misfortunes. This view conveniently makes Adriana, not her husband, responsible for any negative events or any possible tragedies in the play. Critics then take her normal jealous feelings to the extreme, arguing that Adriana's "special trait is jealousy, so much so that she is virtually a portrait of the disease" (Pitt 77). With the focus intently set on Adriana's jealousy, she is viewed entirely as comical, which obfuscates the debate over the more serious themes she may signify. Of course, Adriana's jealousy is not as extreme as Pitt would have readers believe, and if she is a "portrait" of anything, it is pain. Her pain is apparent as she waits for her husband to come home from dinner, when she debates the nature of her marriage,

and even in her jealousy. However, many critics see her honest concerns about her marriage and her husband's infidelity as comical given that "such introspection and self-discovery is not the stuff of comedy" (Pitt 80). Adriana represents this introspection and self-discovery that Pitt claims is not a component of comedy when she looks critically at her marriage and at herself. Adriana's transformation is seen when she hears the criticism from the Abbess and recognizes her jealousy. Unlike her husband or the other characters in the play, Adriana is willing to admit the burden she places on the relationship with her husband and assume partial responsibility.

Sadly, critics such as Pitt embrace "the pitiless attitudes that Shakespeare might, had he so desired, have taken over from his classical original" by relying on the hope that readers will see Adriana's jealousy as baseless and feel no sympathy for her when she locks her true husband out, driving him to the courtesan (Traversi 63). These critics then hope that readers will combine the elements (quick transitions from Adriana's serious speeches and her jealousy) into a belief that Shakespeare's portrayal of women in the comedies indicates that he shares his contemporaries' views on the place of woman in society and therefore depicts Adriana as an overly jealous and outrageous woman who must accept that her natural place is below her husband. Critic Harold F. Brooks points out that:

> Adriana's envy of a husband's status contravenes principles of order that for Shakespeare and orthodox Elizabethans extended through the whole cosmos. The status of husband, and of wife, Kate's lines in *The Shrew* imply, are related to their places in this hierarchical order:
> Such duty as the subject owes the prince
> Even such a woman oweth to her husband. (Brooks 84)

This assessment of the views of the time is accurate; however, there is no indication

Shakespeare shared these views and uses Adriana (or any other comic female) to support such beliefs. The view that women are in some way inferior to men is especially hard for the twentieth-century American woman to embrace, and it is equally hard to believe that a female critic would view Adriana's character this way. Although some critics feel no sympathy for Adriana and believe that she causes her own misfortunes, the modern woman has a great deal in common with Adriana. Critic Hugh Richmond recognizes the close connection between Adriana and the modern woman: "In all these misunderstandings Adriana is the figure most obviously relevant to the experience of modern American women. She is intense, committed, and intellectually active. . . her vision of marital communion includes our modern expectation of psychological compatibility. . ." (55). This bond between women and Adriana is likely to make many female readers sympathize with a woman emotionally neglected by her husband. Although Adriana may initially be overcome with jealousy and anger, she genuinely desires to repair her marriage and please her husband. When Adriana believes her husband to be ill, she demands that the abbess let him come home although she is still angry with him. Adriana insists,

> I will attend my husband, be his nurse,
> Diet his sickness, for it is my office,
> And will have no attorney but myself,
> And therefore let me have him home with me. (5.1.98-101)

While female readers are likely to see a caring and devoted wife, they may view Antipholus of Ephesus as the stereotypical ". . . inattentive husband, whose response to marital drift is to placate his wife with costly trinkets . . ." (Candido 211). Many women will understand Adriana's dilemma of identity lost in marriage or "identity lost for

relationship's sake" (Brooks 22). In today's modern society, women struggle to balance the position of wife and mother, often losing themselves somewhere in the process. It seems Shakespeare understood this concept with his portrayal of Adriana.

Ironically, the idea that readers should feel little sympathy for Adriana is not the only belief that Shakespeare fails to embrace in *The Errors*. He also questions the traditional view of women in society and marriage. He does this largely by contrasting the outspoken Adriana with her overly complacent sister, Luciana. Luciana's quiet, reserved nature leads her to believe that all women should be submissive in marriage. She does not support her sister in her battle to gain liberty or respect from her husband as one might expect; instead, Adriana is condemned by her sister and the other female characters in the play for her jealousy and her liberal views. The abbess and Luciana make it clear that they believe Adriana's jealousy and views on women are morally and socially wrong. The abbess blames Adriana for driving her husband mad, and Luciana constantly reprimands her sister for wanting man's liberty. Joseph Candido agrees that "Adriana is a frequent object of others' criticism – her husband, sister, and mother-in-law are only the most vocal examples – yet despite it all she remains the most fully responsive and authentic character in the play . . ." (214).

Like the abbess and Luciana, critics also find it easy to condemn Adriana for her exposed emotions and liberal views. Pitt states, "[Adriana] is jealous of men's liberty compared with the servitude of women, and is therefore clearly revealed as unnatural" (78). When she is introduced to readers, Adriana is jealous of her husband and unhappy about the status of her marriage. She questions, "Why should their liberty than ours be

more" (2.1.10). Adriana cannot understand why she should not be given the same freedoms as her husband; however, her sister confidently answers, "Because their business still lies out o'door" (1.2.11). Luciana seems perfect; she is sensible and completely rational, and although Luciana speaks several beautiful lines regarding self-harming jealousy, the importance of temperament, and woman's need for a submissive nature, she is tedious. Her idealistic views on marriage are based on nothing more than what she has been programmed to believe by society; she has no experience with marriage nor can she conceive the reality behind relationships. Adriana realistically describes her sister's situation when she says,

> Patience unmoved! No marvel though she pause.
> They can be meek that have no other cause.
> A wretched soul, bruised with adversity,
> We bid be quiet when we hear it cry.
> But were we burdened with like weight of pain,
> As much or more we should ourselves complain.
> So thou, that hast no unkind mate to grieve thee . . . . (2.1.32-38)

However, while critics condemn Adriana, they often praise Luciana for her consistent mood and rational mind; however, she is also vulnerable under scrutiny for being too submissive and complacent, but she is hardly perfect as she advises the wrong Antipholus to "Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty; /Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger" (3.2..11-12). The "patient, sober figure of Luciana" advises Antipholus to lie and to deceive her own sister. Because readers lack an opportunity to see Luciana after her marriage to Antipholous of Syracuse, it unclear if she is masking some of her true feelings about other issues, such as her beliefs regarding female liberty and obedience. This idea is not as strange as some critics might argue since in his next comedy, *The*

Taming of the Shrew, Shakespeare presents readers with Bianca, a female character who hides her true feelings under a cloak of obedience and modesty. Luciana and Bianca are similar characters although their presentations are different. Luciana is clearly more intellectually developed while Bianca is self-absorbed. Luciana's line, "Ere I learn to love,/ I'll practice to obey" (2.1.29), is strikingly similar to Bianca's claim, "I know my duty to my elders" (2.1.7). A pattern is established, much like the comparison of Kate and Bianca, where Adriana's portrayal is negative and Luciana's positive, creating a dual image of the good/bad image of woman. In this way, Luciana becomes more than a mere foil and balancing agent for Adriana's character: Luciana is the opposing voice for all the untraditional views and beliefs that Adriana embodies. She is the voice of the era and an echo of society's view of woman's role in marriage. Her temperament should be even and flawless although her male counterparts may fluctuate. Shakespeare's dualistic portrayal of female characters with opposing personalities and beliefs offers readers two equally different ideals on women and their roles in society. Readers decide which character they relate to and which set of beliefs they choose to embrace.

Adriana's speeches, which deal with serious issues, serve to refocus readers on the thematic aspects of the play. Adriana refocuses the comedy back to the serious theme of identity when she echoes the words of Antipholus of Syracuse, comparing her love and relationship with her husband to a drop of water. The second use of the metaphor by Adriana reiterates the theme of identity that the male characters struggle with in the play, but to a larger degree her statement merges the idea that all the characters are mindful of the importance of relationships regardless of gender. This connection also suggests that

Adriana is as thoughtful and significant as her male counterparts. She is as capable as the men although she is denied their same freedom by society. Although there is a connection between the experiences of the characters, Adriana's struggle with her identity is distinctly different from the struggles of the male characters who retain an individual identity in marriage but have problems with individuality in other relationships. Antipholus of Syracuses' lines do not yet include a concern for his identity in a romantic relationship; he states:

> I to the world am like a drop of water
> That in the ocean seeks another drop,
> Who, falling there to find his fellow forth,
> Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself:
> So I to find a mother and a brother,
> In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself. (1.2.35-40)

While the central focus of the men is relationships created by bonds other than marriage, Adriana focuses solely on her husband and the relationship she considers the most important, her marriage. The male characters place a clear boundary between individual identity and their identity in relationships, but Adriana see herself completely in the context of her marriage. She says of their relationship, "For if we two be one, and thou play false, / I do digest the poison of thy flesh, / Being strumpeted by thy contagion" (2.2.145-47). Adriana embraces the traditional religious view that marriage unites two individuals into one soul, and she desperately wants her husband to treat their union as important. She asks the wrong Antipholus:

> How comes it now, my husband, O how comes it
> That thou art then estranged from thyself?
> Thy 'self' I call it, being strange to me
> That, undividable, incorporate,
> Am better than thy dear self's better part.

Ah, do not tear away thyself from me. . . . (2.2.122-27)

Adriana is worried about her husband's health because he (the wrong Antipholus) is acting strangely. She sees his ill health and mental anguish as affecting her person just as she believes his infidelity would corrupt her as well. She measures her existence in the context of her marriage, and she feels that all of her troubles would disappear if he simply gave her "a sunny look" (2.1.100). However, there is no indication that Adriana will get the happy ending she desires after she mistakenly locks her husband out and he goes to the courtesan. There is no one line in the text that lets readers believe that Adriana and her husband will reconcile at the end of the play, but there are indications that their marriage may be in more trouble. Critic Joseph Candido, citing the work of Alexander Leggatt, agrees that *The Errors* provides no marital closure for Adriana and Antipholus:

> It is frequently observed that the last act of *The Comedy of Errors*, while suggesting some degree of familial reorientation and renewal, stops short of a full affirmation of marital harmony. This is essentially the view of Alexander Leggatt, who, in an allusive and sensitive essay on the play, points out that there is no explicit reconciliation between Adriana and her husband, leaving the final state of their marriage "an open question." For Leggatt the idea of reconciliation in marriage is not utterly dismissed "but it is quietly placed in the background, and no great hopes are pinned on it." This is true enough, for at the end of the play we have no actual nuptial rite or even the symbolic evocation of one as we sometimes do in Shakespeare. Instead the emphasis here is on the unification of an old family (even its younger members are old enough to have grown apart) rather than on the earnest hope for beginning a new one. (Candido 219, citing Leggatt)

Beyond not providing Adriana with any closure, the play also does not provide any clear answers for the midday meal that Adriana shares with the wrong husband. The text is ambiguous, but it is possible for the reader to assume that Adriana, mistaking her husband for his twin brother, becomes intimate with the wrong man. The encounter

between Adriana and Antipholus of Syracuse is perceived differently by readers; some may see no possibility of Antipholus of Syracuse succumbing to Adriana's advances, while others will see a man willing to take advantage of his mistaken identity and the ensuing confusion in Ephesus. However, the aside by Adriana's mistaken husband, Antipholus of Syracuse, makes many readers and critics concerned that the midday meal turned into something more intimate for the pair. He questions as Adriana pleads with him, believing he is the man she loves,

> To me she speaks; she moves me for her theme.
> What, was I married to her in my dream?
> Or sleep I now, and think I hear all this?
> What error drives our eyes and ears amiss?
> Until I know this sure uncertainty,
> *I'll entertain the offered fallacy.* (2.2.184-89 emphasis mine)

It is dangerous for Antipholus of Syracuse to "entertain" Adriana's plans for their midday meal because clearly she intends to use the meal with her husband to reconnect with him on an intimate and possibly physical level. She tells the household, "Husband, I'll dine above with you today, / And shrive you of a thousand idle pranks," further indicating that she intends for their dinner to be alone and intimate (2.2.210-11). And, again, Antipholus of Syracuse makes readers question his intentions and how far he is willing to go to accommodate Adriana's wishes as he questions in the aside,

> Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell?
> Sleeping or waking? Mad or well advised?
> Known unto these, and to myself disguised?
> I'll say as they say, and persever so,
> And in this mist at all adventures go. (2.2.215-19)

These lines, especially the last two lines in both sets, suggest that Antipholus might succumb to Adriana's physical advances. Critic Harold Brooks agrees that this encounter

in the play is serious and has the possibility to be tragic for Adriana and her marriage: "With love and marriage conceived in the human terms as they are in Shakespeare's comedy, a seduced Adriana would be tragic not comic" (18). There is little comical about deceiving Adriana and allowing her to sleep with a man who is not her husband because readers are made aware of Adriana's heartfelt concerns regarding adultery. She is not only jealous of her husband's liberty as a man, but she also wants to uphold the sacred bond of marriage. Adriana feels her husband's betrayal would leave her "stained" and "strumpeted by [his] contagion" (2.2.45). Adriana appears genuinely concerned for the moral and religious values she upholds.

It is also important to remember that there is no indication at the end of *The Comedy of Errors* that Adriana and her husband are reconciled. Readers are left with the ultimate decision about how the events of the play leave the relationship of Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus. Not only do readers have to consider that Adriana has unknowingly betrayed her husband with his brother, but readers must also decide what occurs between Antipholus of Ephesus and the courtesan, a woman he describes as ". . . a wench of excellent discourse, / Pretty and witty; wild, and yet, too, gentle" (3.1.110-11). Readers know that when Adriana locks her true husband out, he runs directly to the courtesan, adding to the strain on his marriage. Antipholus realizes that this will upset his already jealous wife and admits, "This jest shall cost me some expense," referring to the chain that he plans to give the courtesan and the trouble it will cause at home (3.1.125). Readers do not know what happens with the courtesan any more than they know what happens during the midday meal; however, the encounters have the potential to go

tragically wrong for the married couple. Antipholus' visit to the courtesan first appears more like a plan for revenge, and he does not seem to have any ill intentions. However, his comment at the end of the play often gets a great deal of attention from readers, critics, and producers.

Adriana is the only character in the play who reaches a personal epiphany when she admits to the abbess that her jealousy is harmful by replying, "She did betray me to my own reproof" (5.1.90). Critic D. A. Traversi recognizes the transformation that Adriana undergoes over the course of the play by seeing that she is a jealous woman, but throughout the course of the play she realizes her shortcoming and truly changes: "Adriana, in turn, confirms her awakening to reality by taking the rebuke [from the abbess] in good part" (64). Readers see Adriana's jealousy throughout the play, but she clearly loves her husband, and her acceptance of the abbess's criticism reveals her new recognition of her shortcomings. The same transformation cannot be seen in the two sets of twins. There is not a moment in which the male characters reach a personal epiphany as Adriana does; Antipholus of Ephesus does not appear to see the problems in his marriage, and there is no indication that he will give his wife the equality or attention she seeks. Throughout the majority of the play, Antipholus of Ephesus' only concern is the gold chain and the bag of ducats. His character is not as developed as Adriana's, and he appears rather two-dimensional.

Critics and readers who see Adriana and the play itself as more than mindless entertainment believe that Adriana's character reveals the comedy's major theme, which addresses individual identity in the context of relationships. Beyond the theme of identity

the reader sees the male characters struggle with, the difficult existence women often lead when faced with their individual identity and identity in marriage is simultaneously present throughout the text through Adriana. The image of the water drop conveys the difficulty of balancing both a sense of self and maintaining a strong marriage bond. Woman's struggles with identity are compounded by being paired with the traditional views of woman in marriage represented by Luciana and the notion that perhaps women should forgo their individual identity when they enter into marriage while men are allowed to retain an identity outside their marriage. Adriana is overlooked by her husband, abused by her sister and the abbess, yet still finds the courage to admit her faults and grow from her experience. Adriana encounters tragedy in *The Comedy of Errors,* but her growth and perseverance make her the most in-depth character in the play.

WHO IS THE SHREW?

From *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare progresses to the romantic farce of *The Taming of The Shrew*. Critics often disagree on the order of composition for these two plays, with most adamantly arguing that *The Errors*, Shakespeare's shortest play, was the first comedy composed. Many critics support this argument since Shakespeare based a great deal of the play on his classical predecessors and also observes the traditional unity of time, place, and action. Because the two comedies share so many common elements, both stylistically and with regards to character development, it is also likely that *The Errors* and *The Shrew* were written within close proximity of one another. Critic T.S. Dorsch points out in his introduction:

> The closest affinities, for action and characters, lie between *Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Both plays devise farcical settings for the expression of Pauline principles requiring a wife to subjugate herself to her husband – principles expressed in *Errors* by Luciana and (less directly) by the Abbess, and in *The Shrew* by Katherina in her final speech. (3)

However, the development of the themes and the overall plot structure are more complex in *The Shrew*, suggesting a progression and growth from *The Errors* to *The Shrew*. *The Errors* deals with individuality in relationships while *The Shrew* narrows that focus to the relationship of marriage. The frame stories also suggest a close connection between *The Errors* and *The Shrew*; however, where the potentially tragic frame story of Egeon in *The Errors* is a complete story in itself, Sly's frame story is incomplete and truly merges with the ideas, themes, and concepts that *The Shrew* embodies, again revealing a growth in

play structure. Sly's frame story is also unique because it does not provide readers with any conclusion. In *The Errors*, readers see the neat conclusion of the frame when Egeon and Emilia reunite, but the frame of *The Shrew* leaves readers with an open statement, which also suggests an evolution of ideas for comic action and endings.

The Shrew addresses two main themes: the theme of love and the theme of reality. The theme of love is established by depicting a couple struggling to balance love, obedience, and respect in marriage, and like *The Comedy of Errors*, the central heroine struggles with her role in society and in marriage. Kate's portrayal is strikingly similar to the picture Shakespeare paints of Adriana: both women are loud, outspoken, and somewhat ostracized from their more conventional communities. Both of the women are independent and strong-willed, and they feel that they have been overlooked by society, especially the male members of society. Adriana believes her husband neglects her and that his love is waning, and Kate believes that no man loves her, not even her own father. They both feel they are at war with their society, and it is this feeling of inadequacy that leads to the inner turmoil they face and their defensive and rather overbearing personalities. *The Taming of the Shrew* also provides readers with a look at the reality women face through the marriage of Kate and Petruchio, and the pseudo-marriage of Bianca and Lucentio.

Kate's potential tragedy arises when her change over the course of the play is closely examined by readers and critics. There is a clear difference between the Kate who bursts into the first scene of *The Shrew* and the woman who eloquently delivers the soliloquy in the final lines of the play. The question for readers and critics is what exactly

happens to Kate, and is her change positive or negative? If Kate is truly a woman broken by Petruchio and a male-dominated society, as some critics would have readers believe, then Kate becomes a tragic female character. However, if Kate finds a balance in her life and love through the acceptance of the merged realities of herself and her husband, Kate becomes a comic character with serious attributes. The key difference that defines Kate as a more comic character and Adriana and Isabella as more tragic female characters is the endings that the women face. Adriana is not given a closing speech or a voice in the final lines of *The Errors* to convey her thoughts. She is silenced, much like Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, as the other characters unite in newfound, joyful relationships. The ending for Kate is much different, and whether her final speech is a comic jest to her husband or a diatribe to women like her sister who do not understand the significance of marriage, she does have a voice. Kate's eventual acceptance of Petruchio's reality in 3.1, her final soliloquy, and the marriage celebration of the final scene are the deciding factors that lead many readers and critics to believe that Kate's change is positive.

The frames of *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Shrew* serve as reflections of the central plot of the comedy. However, the frame story in *The Shrew* is quite different from the obviously serious and potentially tragic story of Egeon in *The Errors*. Sly's situation is hilarious, but readers should be careful not to dismiss the frame as simply a comic mirror to the play. The two frames are included in the plays to remind readers of the serious themes the plays are addressing, and, while Sly's situation is not one of life and death, his story still focuses readers on the underlying themes of social/class distinction, materialism, reality, and the marriage relationship. These are themes readers see echoed

by the characters in the main plot of the play, and like the play, Sly's induction resembles a lesson. The frame also establishes the link between dream imagery and reality with which the play experiments. The frame story of Sly drunk and then transported into an altered reality may be considered a dark reflection of the human condition, which is often measured by superficial standards. In these ways, the frame is exactly like the play it surrounds; each is funny, outrageous, and entertaining, but what lies just beneath the surface is Shakespeare's scrutiny of the human condition as it relates to love and reality.

Sly's experience is closely connected to the experience Kate encounters in the main plot of the play because for both characters reality is changing. The theme of reality in the induction is carried over into the play by Kate when she embraces Petruchio's claim that Vincentio is actually a young, beautiful woman. Kate even goes a step further to comically describe the old Vincentio as a "young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet" (4.5.36). Petruchio is trying to get Kate to submit to his game and essentially to his reality; Kate does submit, but she also retains her personality and her creative wit. Of course, Sly does not find it so difficult to embrace his new reality, which transforms him from a poor tinker to a wealthy lord. Sly quickly abandons all doubts and accepts, "I am a lord indeed / And not a tinker nor Christopher Sly" (Ind.2.72-73). Critic Marjorie B. Garber points out the similarities of their changes as she argues that "The content of the dream, like the content of the play-within-a-play, can be measured against the play of which it is a part: in just this way, commentators remark the similarity in theme between Sly's change from beggar to lord and Kate's from shrew to wife" (7). The frame provides a starting point for the events that are about to unfold by giving readers a

glimpse into what the play itself is about.

Just as critics find excuses for ignoring the serious ideas and themes questioned by Adriana, they also find reasons why Kate's character should be read only as the typical farcical woman. However, whereas Adriana's jealousy is seen as her harmful flaw, it is Kate's shrewish and explosive personality critics see as her flaw. Adriana is vocal and opinionated, but Kate is the extreme manifestation of the loud, unruly woman. Beyond her harsh attitude, Kate is also the most physical of the comic heroines. In act two, scene one, shortly after readers are introduced to Kate, she strikes her sister because, as Kate claims, "Her silence flouts me" (2.1.34). Immediately following her encounter with her sister, Kate meets Petruchio and also lashes out at him. Kate is not only physically violent, but also verbally abusive. The physical and verbal abuse, characteristic of the slapstick style of farce, coupled with her shrewish personality, leads many readers and critics to believe that Kate should be interpreted and appreciated more for her comic attributes and less for her serious undertones. However, this wild Kate does not last long when she meets her match in the equally ostentatious Petruchio. Petruchio accurately describes the nature of their relationships when he says, "And where two raging fires meet together / They do consume the thing that feeds their fury" (2.1.132-33). Kate and Petruchio are two forces that meet together and thus tame each other. Kate slowly exchanges her shrewish personality into a socially acceptable and more feminine voice.

Kate's extreme personality change concerns many readers, and on the other end of this argument, readers see in the text a woman who is stripped of her freedom and her individuality in *The Shrew*. These readers and critics largely ignore the farce of the play

and instead focus on Kate's character as dark and tragic. This argument is supported by establishing Kate's relationship with her father and her husband as negative and harmful. Readers are immediately aware of Baptista's favoritism to his younger daughter, Bianca. Kate's relationship with her father causes her great emotional pain, which she vocalizes in the first act of the play. The relationship between fathers and daughters is important in many of Shakespeare's plays. Critic Marianne L. Novy agrees that "Father are clearly important in *The Shrew*. The word 'father' appears fifty-four times – more often than in any other Shakespearean play except *King Lear* and *Henry VI, Part III*" (21). However, Kate does not have a close relationship with her father, at least not as close as that of her younger sister. While Baptista tries to find the perfect match for Bianca, Kate feels he is simply pawning her off on the first man who agrees to take her. She asks her father, "I pray you, sir, is it your will / To make a stale of me amongst these mates?" (1.1.61-62). Kate is hurt by the way her father treats her as compared to the way he dotes on her sister. Readers see Kate's insecurity in the next scene when she fights with her sister; Baptista again sides with Bianca, causing Kate to question,

> What, will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see
> She is your treasure, she must have a husband;
> I must dance bare-foot on her wedding-day,
> And for your love to her lead apes in hell.
> Talk not to me; I will go sit and weep,
> Till I can find occasion of revenge. (2.1.38-43)

Kate's shrewish and isolating personality results directly from her feelings of insecurity. She feels neglected by her father, and this lack of acceptance creates her harsh personality. Her way to combat these feelings is to be mean, and, as she admits, to seek

revenge. Critics who argue that Kate is tragically stripped of her personality often overlook her deep sadness as the play opens. She is not a happy person; she is sad and virtually incapable of expressing her emotions in a productive manner. However, this deficiency changes over the course of the play, as readers see from her final speech.

Petruchio's treatment of Kate is a source of problems for many critics. Petruchio is introduced to readers as a man who will do virtually anything to get money. Petruchio also equates his happiness with money in the first act when he openly declares, "I come to wive it wealthily in Padua; / If wealthily, then happily in Padua" (1.2.75-76). This statement by Petruchio immediately makes readers question his character and his motives. Readers will hardly believe that Kate and Petruchio are happily wedded in the final act if they see his actions as a simple ploy for wealth. For many readers, this negative introduction to Petruchio's character is compounded by his continual reference to Kate as an animal. Critic Jeanne Addison Roberts offers her opinion of the animal imagery Petruchio uses to describe his wife: Throughout act 4 Petruchio continues to speak of his wife as "an animal, explicitly as a falcon (4.1.190-96), and to treat her accordingly. I have never found these scenes very funny" (61). Critic Coppelia Kahn agrees that Petruchio's treatment of Kate is cruel and also asserts that Kate is treated as property: "His role as property owner is the model for his role as husband; Kate, for him, is a thing. Or at least she will become a thing when he has wrenched unquestioning obedience from her, when she no longer has mind or will of her own" (Kahn 45-46).

However, critics who argue that Petruchio's harsh verbal treatment of Kate is destructive, mean, and harmful take him too seriously and often overlook the other side of

his character. To view Petruchio as a one-dimensional character who sets out to marry Kate for her money, break her spirit, and then display his accomplishments in the final scene, is to ignore large sections of the text and Petruchio's intentions. The play's title, which includes the suggestive word "taming," immediately gives readers a preconceived idea of Petruchio's treatment of Kate. This term is in turn carried over into the text, and readers first see Petruchio's actions and words as designed to make Kate submit to his natural masculine rule. However, Petruchio's language is simply too varied, changing from negative to reaffirming, to claim that he is only marrying for money or he intends to break Kate's spirit. In his most infamous lines, Petruchio claims of his new marriage and wife,

> I will be master of what is mine own,
> She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
> My household stuff, my field, my barn,
> My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything. (3.2.229-32)

Examined alone these lines convey a disturbing image of woman's role in marriage to modern readers. However, readers must look at the entire text to discover that Petruchio attempts to help his wife by ridding her of her contempt of others, her materialism, and a self-harming personality. Critic Marianne L. Novy refers to Petruchio's verbal treatment of Kate as a type of game, pointing out that Petruchio has deliberately set out to "sabotage" the traditional wedding ritual (16). In this way, his speech becomes nothing more than wordplay:

> This speech again shows the coalescence of the role of player and patriarch, For the terms in which he declares ownership – the objects into which he transforms her – are extravagant enough to be a parody of patriarchal attitudes. The climactic phrase – "my anything" – declares the

> infinite malleability of identity within his world. Whether this hyperbole is a play or domestic tyranny, his pretense of defending Kate from the attacks of the wedding guests is a more obvious invention. (17)

Novy's observation seems accurate, and later in the text readers are given a more clear indication of what Petruchio is actually trying to achieve. Like Kate, Petruchio's tone is changing, and here his crude use of animal imagery and his language that equates Kate with property is replaced with a beautiful explanation of relationships and material wealth:

> To me she's married, not unto my clothes.
> Could I repair what she will wear in me
> As I can change these poor accoutrements,
> 'Twere well for Kate and better for myself. (3.2.117-20)

Again, Petruchio offers Kate a genuine view on the ideals he feels are important:

> 'Tis the mind that makes the body rich,
> And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds
> So honor peereth in the meanest habit. (4.3.171-73)

It is very unlikely from these descriptions that Petruchio truly embraces the harsh view of women or love of money he supports in public. Petruchio's loud, harsh character is nothing more than a facade. Coppelia Kahn argues it is "impossible that Shakespeare meant us to accept Petruchio's speech uncritically: [he conveys] the most shamelessly blunt statement of the relationship between men, women, and property to be found in the literature of this period" (46). However, *The Taming of the Shrew* asks readers to do just that – look realistically at one of the absurd doctrines society embraces. Petruchio's speech is not meant to be taken seriously but to be seen as humorous and, finally, absurd. These dehumanizing statements are not Petruchio's true feelings, as readers later see by the play's dramatic ending. Kahn is closer to the purpose of *The Shrew* when she claims

of Petruchio's dehumanization of women and his use of crude animal imagery, "I would suggest [it] was meant to shock Shakespeare's audience" (47). This is what Petruchio was and still is to readers, a shock. However, his public parading and verbal abuse are nothing more than a joke meant to poke fun at Petruchio, and to a larger degree, his character is used to belittle all who support any element of the fallacy that women are subordinate to man.

Just as Shakespeare uses Petruchio to question the accepted dogma of his time, he also creates a female foil for Kate, Bianca, who works in a similar way. Bianca is, in essence, everything Kate is not: she is obedient, admired by the men of Padua for her physical beauty, and adored by her doting father. She is at first glance the perfect daughter and potential wife; however, as the play progresses, readers see that the juxtaposition of the two women reveals a different type of shrew. Like Luciana, Bianca is praised for her meekness and for her willingness to conform to accepted social norms. However, these attributes do not maintain dominance throughout *The Shrew* – neither does Bianca's perfect disposition. A more realistic portrayal of Bianca is uncovered in the final scene as she reveals some of her true feelings about woman's place in society and in marriage. Although Bianca asserts earlier in the play "So well I know my duty to my elders" (2.1.7) to anger her sister and impress her suitors, it is clear that she feels no such duty to her new husband. After Bianca refuses to answer her husband when he seeks her presence, she taunts Lucentio for believing in her loyalty, saying of his wager, "The more fool you for laying on my duty" (5.2.129). And readers are often fooled into believing that Bianca is a quiet, submissive young lady. The established pattern of

Bianca as the paradigm for women and Kate as the undesirable shrew collapses by the final scene and is ultimately exposed as untrue. Simultaneously, the concepts of the silent submissive woman and marriage based on superficiality are condemned. While Kate's self-awareness allows her to become an improved human being, Bianca is just beginning her journey. Although she appears to be the picture of obedience, she is not, and she has no idea what it takes to achieve a successful marriage. She is what one could expect from a married Luciana: nothing more than talk and empty platitudes regarding marriage with no real concept of the true experience.

Kate's final speech is best read as a cumulative, building expression of themes and ideas for *The Shrew*. Kate's speech and dramatic gesture of placing her hand beneath her husband's foot then becomes not an act of female submission to a male figure, but rather a public display of a private contract. She and Petruchio have reached an agreement which allows equality and balance in marriage. Kate's final display is a playful tribute to her husband and their shared reality, but it is also a warning or lesson to women, like Bianca, who have yet to discover the true unity of marriage:

> She speaks of marriage as an affectionate contract – a relationship in which both partners have a role to play. Assuming men's greater physical strength (and no other inherent superiority), she contrasts the roles in an hierarchical way, but the rules also relate husbands and wives to each other in mutual need and interdependence.
>
> Meanwhile, Kate preaches some of the virtues traditionally praised and fostered in women – peace, service, love, obedience, flexibility, and sense of one's own limitations – and reconciles them with self-assertion; she holds the center stage while preaching humility. Thus her speech, like the quite different apologies she and Lucentio make to Vincentio, has a tone of triumph. Her energetic resilience helps distance the threatening elements of compulsion in Petruchio's past behavior. (Novy 24)

Petruchio's past behavior is not threatening at this point, and the facade he once embraced to demonstrate the absurdity of the male ego is no more real than Bianca's display of etiquette and obedience. The double standard between the sexes is crushed by *The Shrew*. The comparison between the marriages of Kate and Petruchio and of Bianca and Lucentio, along with the final speech, suggests a positive interpretation of Kate and Petruchio individually and as a married couple. Kate and Petruchio's relationship is arguably the most successful and intimate of all the male/female relationships in the comedies. The pair appears to have achieved the vision of true love that all of the comedies question and examine. Their relationship is complete and based on more than the superficial sense of sight or any other outward display. Kate and Petruchio's realities are merged, and their love is built on an intimate knowledge of one another. As the play ends, Petruchio confirms their bond, saying aloud, "Come, Kate, we'll tobed"(5.2.184).

The arguments that reductively label Kate as purely comical or as tragic diminish by the final scene. The most realistic and supportable argument leads readers and critics to the conclusion that Kate is neither extreme: Kate is certainly not a purely farcical character who serves only as entertainment, and she is not a tragic heroine broken by the events of the play. Kate's true nature lies somewhere in the middle. She is entertaining and on the verge of tragedy as the play opens because her life seems meaningless and empty. She is changed by Petruchio's questionable method of game playing and reverse psychology; however, she is also changed from within. She realizes her potential over the course of the play by seeing her faults, much as Adriana understands the Abbess's rebuke regarding her jealousy, and she willingly abandons an isolated reality for a balanced and

mutually loving marriage. Kate's transformation, then, must be positive to coincide with the ending result of the play.

However, Kate's transformation distinctly differs from the changes of Adriana and Isabella. Kate's marriage to Petruchio gives her the ability to express her emotions in a productive and effective manner. Throughout the play, Kate explodes when she is hurt or angry, but in the final scene, she uses acceptable language to convey her feelings. Kate's new knowledge appears when the widow refers to her as shrewish, and Kate overlooks her remark as a "very mean meaning" (5.2.31). Kate also learns to relinquish some of her superficial interests in outward appearances and material possessions. In act four, scene three, Kate is troubled by what she will wear to the celebration of her sister's marriage, and Petruchio has a tailor come in, although he has more in mind than fitting Kate for a new dress. Kate pleads with him to let her wear the cap she likes, insisting, "This doth fit the time, / And gentlewomen wear such caps as these" (4.3.69-70). However, Petruchio wants Kate to appreciate her internal value rather than her external value, and by the end of the play, she reaches this realization. Her new lack of concern with materialism is seen when Petruchio commands, "Off with that bauble!" (5.2.122), and Kate slings the fashionable cap to the floor.

Kate grows in a productive manner from the play, but what do Adriana and Isabella gain from the struggles they face? Adriana, perhaps, gains a greater self-awareness, but it does not appear to benefit her or push her toward a positive new existence. It is also difficult to see Isabella as growing in a positive way from her struggles in *Measure for Measure* when she loses her naivety and a quiet life at the

convent. Neither *The Errors* nor *Measure for Measure* leaves the reader with the same sense of intrigue and empowerment often exhibited by Kate's final speech. Kate can now use her wit and knowledge to her advantage instead of to her detriment, and, unlike Adriana and Isabella, Kate commands her destiny and her life with her final speech. So, who is the real shrew of *The Taming of the Shrew*? From the play, Shakespeare suggests that the real shrews are those (such as Bianca) who embrace superficiality, those unwilling to compromise, and those unaware of the real nature of marriage.

PRODUCTION: THE DECIDING FACTOR FOR KATE

The Taming of the Shrew is arguably Shakespeare's comedy most open to varying interpretations because the text simply does not provide the reader with the complete motivation behind Kate's character. One of the biggest questions surrounding this play is the degree to which Kate is "tamed" by her husband; is it Shakespeare's intent for the reader to see how a woman may be changed to meet society's standards, or is it a play that questions the institution of marriage by showing Kate's transformation as positive? Simply reading the text may not provide a definite answer for the reader. Some readers will believe the text reveals a woman broken by society and forced to conform to her husband's demands. Others will see Kate and Petruchio's relationship as loving and based on mutual respect. These readers see Petruchio's game of reverse psychology as giving Kate inner peace and contentment, which allows the couple to achieve harmony and happiness in marriage. Where interpretations are allowed to differ in textual readings, productions must answer these questions. The context of Kate and Petruchio's relationship must be established, and the degree to which Kate is tamed must be clear. The overall style of each production and each individual production choice contributes to the interpretation of Kate's character and how Kate and Petruchio's relationship is perceived. Three productions that reveal the possible range of interpretations of Kate's character are Franco Zeffirelli, Jonathan Miller, and William Ball's productions of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Kate's transformation and the true nature of her marriage are

established largely through the delivery of her final speech and the overall mood established by the production.

Franco Zeffirelli's 1967 film production features Elizabeth Taylor as Kate. The first glimpse of Kate is simply her large, blue eye that devilishly peeks through the second story shutters of her father's house. Even from this limited view of the eye, it is clear that Kate is wild. This suspicion is confirmed as she bounds onto the balcony, revealing her long flowing black hair, which is completely disheveled. Her stunning blue eyes and wild black hair also make her look like a madwoman, and her actions reveal her volatile nature. She screams and sneers at the men below and eventually bursts through the shutters, hurling a stool onto the street below. Her dress incorporates colors as contrasting and unpleasant as her attitude. The dress is striped red, white, and a dark green, with a low bustier-style top. Her movements are bold and violent. Kate appears to be physically strong and potentially dangerous. Her voice is harsh, and clearly she is a boisterous woman. Her high position on the balcony immediately suggests that her sense of self cannot be reached by the men below. The first impression of Kate in this production is startling and the most dramatic of the three productions. Zeffirelli's Kate is untamed, wild, and the most physical of the actresses. She is the epitome of the shrew role in every aspect, from the wild hair and eyes, the shrill voice and unbending attitude; with each facial expression and movement Elizabeth Taylor consumes the role of the shrew. Critic Graham Holderness describes Elizabeth Taylor as an actress who "communicates a fierce energy of sexual attraction, not a sullen force of hostile resistance" (70). Kate never appears "hostile" or unhappy; instead she gives every

indication she is enjoying herself. Zeffirelli's production addresses the concept of Kate's "taming" by presenting her as happy with her shrewish personality, and in this production she adapts easily to her marriage. She does learn to control her personality, but she is never tamed. In fact, this production is the only one of the three that presents the possibility that Petruchio is the one whose wild and unruly nature is tamed by Kate.

The British Broadcasting Corporation's 1980 made-for-television *Shrew*, produced and directed by Jonathan Miller, takes a different direction with its production. The atmosphere of the production is not festive as are the Zeffirelli and Ball productions. It is the least comical of the three productions because it downplays the comic verbal exchanges and slapstick style of farce. Instead, this production embraces a somber tone and focuses more on the serious ideas and themes in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The production's style carries over into the interpretation of Kate's character and her change at the end of the play. When the audience first sees Kate, played by Sarah Badel, she is in the street in front of her father's house, and it is hard to believe that she is the shrew of Padua. Nothing about her physical appearance makes her look wild or shrewish, and her outward appearance is nothing like the Kate the audience first meets in the Zeffirelli production. She appears to be in her late thirties; her dress, looks, and speech make her seem reserved. She has light brown hair with soft curls visible in her bangs. Her hair is neatly arranged and tightly fastened in a braided bun. Her features are delicate; her cheekbones, chin, and eyes are all understated. She has pale skin with little makeup, and her dress is a light, pleasing color that makes her look very feminine. She is presented as "plain Kate"; nothing is remarkable about her except her shrewish personality. It is

several minutes after Kate appears on screen before the audience sees her hostility. Her eyes dart back and forth, casting disapproving glances on her father and her sister's suitors. Her tone is sharp and angry, but her physical assaults are not as dramatic as those in the other two productions. Kate is rough with Hortensio and belligerent to the other men. She also throws an apple at her father and the other men in the street and then pushes a dwarf down in the street. She is somewhat physical, but not in comparison with Zeffirelli production or the commedia style of William Ball's production. Instead, the BBC Kate appears sad, and her words are more thoughtful. Her emotions are like those of a young child who is jealous of her sister and hurt by her father's rejection. She is "constantly at the mercy of violent throes of infantile emotion, often completely possessed by passions . . ." (Holderness 107).

Jonathan Miller's BBC production addresses Kate's taming in a different way than the other two since it focuses very little on the comic aspects of the play. Graham Holderness points out the type of production Miller intends:

> It was from the outset fundamental to Miller's conception of the play that it is not a farce but a serious comedy. This entails, in his view, an understanding of the play as a direct address to serious moral problems of actual living, which could only be properly enacted through a medium of psychological realism. (106)

Kate's taming is a serious issue in this production, and her transformation at the end of the play is the most dramatic of the three. Kate desperately needs to find emotional stability in her life, and she does over the course of the play. It is her emotional healing that makes her change positive in this production. Kate is able to escape the label society gives her as "the shrew" by reconciling with her father and finding emotional harmony.

Kate's emotions are tamed by Petruchio, and he gives her a sense of happiness and saves her from a life of isolation and misery.

William Ball's commedia production of *The Taming of the Shrew* is distinctly different from the previous productions because of its traditional Italian comedic style. The production embraces the slapstick comedy of farce, and it is the most humorous of the three productions. It is also important that this production is a taping of an actual stage performance in front of a live audience. The audience becomes a part of this production because it is live and because the acting company responds to the events on stage. Laughter, sighs, and comic sounds accompany the dramatic physical actions of the actors. This type of interaction is not present in the other two productions, and these commedia elements contribute to a different presentation of Kate. When Kate first appears on stage, she has hands dramatically placed on hips. She is strikingly beautiful and young, and her dress accentuates her physical beauty. The dress is white with a red stripe that spirals around the skirt. The sleeves are slightly belled at the shoulder and tight at the forearm. The top of the dress is a bustier style like those of the other two productions, but it has a more dramatic, plunging neckline. Kate's hair is not wild when she first appears on stage; instead it is bound up in a large headdress that is red and white like her dress. It has one single feather in the front and ties with a large, red ribbon at the nape of the neck.

William Ball's production plays on the farcical comedy of *The Taming of the Shrew* and focuses more on the initial physical attraction of Kate and Petruchio than the other two productions. There is an immediate physical attraction apparent in this

production that is not present in the other productions. Kate and Petruchio instantly have a fondness of each other, but it is based on outward appearances. Over the course of the play, the relationship progresses to a point where Kate and Petruchio truly understand and respect one another. This production choice emphasizes the idea that marriage and true love cannot be achieved by the eye. This concept becomes more potent as the audience sees the comparison of this relationship with Lucentio and Bianca's relationship, which does not progress beyond physical attraction in the play.

Casting and the overall tone of the production have a great effect on the overall interpretation of Kate's character, but it is the last scene of the play that truly reveals the extent of her change. In all three productions, Kate gains some control over her shrewish personality, but each woman's change is distinctive. The Kate in the Zeffirelli production is quite happy and changes very little over the course of the production. On the other hand, the Kate presented in the BBC's production is miserable and emotionally destroyed at the beginning of the production but progresses to a point of reconciliation with her family and emotional harmony. The Ball production provides a combination of Kate's happiness and a sense of unity at the end of the play. Each embraces unique production choices, and therefore the Kate at the end of each production is significantly different. Production choices, casting, and Kate's interaction with Petruchio all contribute to this overall assessment of her character, and all these choices culminate at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew* with Kate's final speech. The final scenes of the Zeffirelli, Ball, and Miller productions are all set at the home of Baptista to celebrate the marriage of Lucentio and Bianca; however, each production handles this

scene differently.

The Zeffirelli production has the final scene in keeping with the festive tone of the overall production. The huge banquet is crowded and loud, and the men and women dance, drink, and dine in celebration of the marriage of Lucentio and Bianca. The scene is not intimate, and the family is separated by the long tables and the large, loud crowd. Everything about the scene is rich and fancy. The guests are in the finest clothes – the men have on their finest garments and the women have on beautiful dresses and ornate jewelry. The room where the final dinner is held is equally ornate, decorated with red and gold tapestries covering the back wall. There are several large, fancy tables in the room where they dine, which are covered in white lace tablecloths. There is fruit, food, and large candelabras on each of the tables. Baptista sits in the middle seat at the largest table in this scene, Kate is positioned far away from her father, and the production provides no sense of harmony between father and daughter. Kate is somewhat mad at her husband, and there is a progressing tension between the two because of Petruchio's drunken state.

This is the only production in which Kate is the first woman to rise from the table and call for the other ladies to withdraw. Kate has not lost her shrewish and bold personality, and the relationship between Kate and Petruchio has not progressed as much as the other two productions at this point. Also, it is important to notice that this is the only production in which Petruchio is hesitant even to agree to the bet. This emphasizes that in this production the two have the least amount of trust for one another. A young servant is sent to fetch each of the wives, and most of the crowd gathers to see what will

transpire. When Petruchio sends for Kate, he stands from his bench placed in front of the head table. Grumio is hesitant to go and get Kate, and the crowd begins to laugh because they all believe Kate will not come. All gasp when they see Kate appear from a parted crowd, dragging the other two wives with her. A fire is visibly burning in the background, symbolizing the passionate Kate's personality. There are large, standing candelabras on each side of Kate, and she stomps in the room and slings the two women aside as she begins giving her final speech. The large room falls silent. This is the only production in which Kate does not address one particular person but instead addresses all the women of the party who have gathered, scared, behind her. The camera zooms out, capturing the immensity of the room and the large crowd that Kate addresses. Kate stands front and center on the tile floor and delivers her lines with a patronizing and angry tone. She eventually approaches one of the tables and kneels to her husband and then sits on a bench continuing to address crowd. Kate then stands again, grabbing Bianca and Hortensio's wife and brings them up front and forces them to the floor. As Kate delivers her final line she joins the two women kneeling on the floor and extends her hand to her husband. His response is to rise from his bench and take her hand so she will stand with him. They passionately kiss and the crowd applauds. Zeffirelli's production incorporates a formal, uninviting final scene that places Kate in the center of attention – not the reunion of families. Kate commands the final scene, which is as elaborate as her personality, and although she demonstrates a new mastery of language, Kate remains wild and untamed.

All appears to have worked out for the couple, and Petruchio turns to speak with

Baptista and the other men. However, as he turns his back, Kate disappears into the crowd. Petruchio desperately looks for her as he struggles to find her through the large crowd, but Kate is gone, and the large doors shut, ending the production. Ironically, the film begins with a comic chase, and "it ends with Petruchio still chasing an irrepressibly escaping Kate . . ." (Holderness 57). This ending tends to leave the audience feeling as though Kate has not changed. She is a happy woman in the first encounter with Petruchio, and she remains happy throughout the production. Kate's content nature is seen as she runs and frolics through her father's house, falling into a loft of wool, and when she is wet, cold, and tired Kate smiles while lying on the bed when Petruchio leaves the room, believing she is asleep. Zeffirelli's Kate is a confident woman, and there is no real need for her to change. Instead, in this production, it is Petruchio who needs stability and change in his life. He finds happiness in his marriage with Kate, and it is Kate who teaches him how to find happiness in life.

The final scene of the BBC production is different in many ways, and it may be described as being "transformed by Miller into a model of social unity and domestic harmony" (Holderness 115). It is much more intimate and quiet (as is the overall production). The light in this scene is warm, and a rich orange glow comes from the small candlelit table. A small crowd clamors in the eating hall in celebration of the marriage of Luciento and Bianca. The room incorporates arched doorways, and the doors that surround the room are closed off by iron bars. Where the Zeffirelli production has many tables, this production uses a single table that seats only the immediate family. The table is covered in fine food, and two candles are lit on the table, providing light for

the scene. All sit down together to dine, and all are having a good time talking and laughing. Petruchio and Kate are much more united than the couple in the Zeffirelli production. Kate has on a beautiful white dress and matching white cap. When the men bet on their wives, it is a comical game in which Petruchio is eager to participate. In this production, Petruchio is the most confident that Kate will come when he sends for her. A few moments pass after he sends for Kate, and then we see her father rise at the end of the table. All is hushed, and then Kate appears at the door, quiet and obedient. Petruchio commands her again to go and fetch the wives of Lucentio and Hortensio. She obeys and comes back with the other men's wives trailing behind her. She removes her cap at her husband's request and calmly drops it on the floor. The other two women return to sit at the table and Kate remains standing. She begins to give her final speech as the camera zooms out to capture the small room where they have gathered to eat. This is the only production in which Kate takes her seat by her husband to give the majority of her final speech. She places her right hand on the table as she addresses first Hortensio's wife and then her sister, Bianca. The camera cuts to a shot where Bianca's back is to the camera, and we see Kate seated across the table. Her speech is serious, and all listen in silence to her criticism of the other wives. Her tone is sharp and serious: "Kate's closing speech of submission is delivered in this production as the expression of a new-found and hard-won serenity, the philosophy of a woman who is at peace with her husband and herself" (Holderness 117).

Kate's call for the women in the BBC version to place their hands under their husband's feet is the least dramatic of the three productions. She is seated at the table,

and she does not get up. Kate simply places her hand on top of her husband's and gives him an approving smile. Seated, they embrace at the table and share a long passionate kiss. Like the commedia production, the BBC ends *The Taming of the Shrew* with the cast singing in harmony. Song lyrics are passed out to all the family, and they all join together to sing. Of the three, this production focuses more on the reunion of family and in particular on Kate's reunion with her father. This reunion is complete at the end as Baptista rises and goes to stand behind his daughter, who sits singing at the table. He places his hand on her shoulder, and she reaches up to cover his hand with hers.

William Ball's production has some similarities and differences with the other two productions. The final scene is the most dramatic, comical, and loving of the three. The stage has a couple of small tables or benches but does not use food as do the other two productions. Instead, small gold goblets are placed in front of the actors who are seated to signify a meal. This is the only production in which all the actors are uniformly dressed in red and white costumes. Petruchio is not at a table in the final scene but instead picks up a stool and places it at the right front of the stage. He takes a seat on the stool, rubbing his hair in distress. This is not the confident Petruchio the audience sees in the BBC production; instead Ball's production shows him as the most concerned of the three men when waiting for Kate to appear. Grumio is hilarious in this scene as he marches off like a soldier being sent into battle. When Kate appears on center stage Petruchio is shocked. Kate is smiling, which signifies to the audience that she is well aware of the game they are playing. Like the BBC production, Kate withdraws when "commanded" and returns with the wives of Lucentio and Hortensio. In all three

productions, Kate removes her cap when her husband tell her to, but in the commedia production every movement is dramatic, and Kate lifts the cap off her head, turns and slings it down on the stage. This is the only production in which Bianca takes up the cap and presents it to Lucentio, symbolizing her lack of obedience.

In her final speech, Kate goes to stand behind her husband with her arms lovingly on his shoulders. She slowly walks to each person on stage, addressing him or her directly; she also addresses the audience directly. Her final speech is presented as a lesson. She wants all to find the happiness and understanding that she has discovered over the course of the play. Kate also goes over to her father who is seated on the left side of the stage, and grabs his hand, bringing it in to her chest. This symbolizes, to a lesser degree than the BBC production, the reunion of Kate and her father. Her final call for the wives to place their hands under their husband's foot is the most dramatic of the three productions. Kate vividly lifts her right hand out in front of her and walks down the middle of the stage. She then turns to her husband and flings her entire body upon the floor directly in front of her husband. He slowly kneels and grabs her hand, gently kissing her fingers. The camera focuses tight in on their faces, and the love they feel for one another is visible. The married couple rises together and they kiss passionately. In Ball's production, Kate turns to the audience and winks after the final speech and kiss, indicating to the audience that Kate willingly participates in Petruchio's game. Clearly, Kate understands what Petruchio wants her to learn about marriage and obedience in marriage, and Kate is willing to play along with Petruchio's game and gives in to his demands. This production presents Kate somewhere in the middle of the other two

productions. The ending is comic like the Zeffirelli production, but the marriage is much stronger. Neither Kate nor Petruchio appears tamed at the end of the Ball production, but they do appear to share the most genuine love. She is changed, but not to the extent that Kate is changed in the other productions. She changes in a positive way by learning to compromise and accept love as it is offered. She finds love in her marriage and reconciles with her father. She learns to bend her shrewish personality to accommodate others, which allows her to form meaningful relationships. Bells chime at the end of this production, signifying the marriage of Kate and Petruchio, and, like the BBC production, all join together and sing.

The overall interpretation of Kate is greatly affected by the style of each play. The Zeffirelli and Ball productions begin with a festive atmosphere, and Kate's role becomes equally dramatic and animated. In these two productions, the women are similar; they are strong, their movements dramatic, and the endings are less serious. The tone of the productions is lighthearted, and the overall message is to find contentment in life and marriage. The BBC production is distinctly different from the other two productions because of its intimate nature, serious tone, and lack of farce. Kate's character is serious, and her transformation at the end of the play is astonishing. Each production reveals a unique woman with different strengths and weaknesses. The end result of each production is a culmination of all the production choices, and the message of each is unique.

ISABELLA'S TRAGEDY IN *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*

William Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* is typically labeled a tragicomedy; more recently, critics have assigned it the term "problem play" because of the inherent difficulties in reconciling its tragic and comic aspects. There is something unique and unusual about *Measure for Measure* that critics and readers have been trying to pinpoint for decades, and although many of Shakespeare's comedies include tragic characteristics, this play stands at an irreconcilable impasse. *Measure for Measure* addresses a wide range of themes, emotions, and ideas that are simultaneously tragic and comic, funny and deeply disturbing. Lawrence J. Ross argues the play is a "tragedy betrayed"; that is, the initial action and the climax of the plot indicate that the end will be tragic resulting in deaths, not weddings and reconciliation (20). Many readers expect a tragic ending because of Claudio's impending death, Angelo's tyrannical new laws, and Isabella's potential corruption at the hands of the male characters.

Problems arise when readers try to reconcile the comic and tragic aspects of the play in their entirety; it is difficult to laugh when it is obvious that dark and very serious ideals are being questioned. The answers in this play are not clear, and the characters make it no easier for the reader. The characters are more than a flat, two-dimensional creation of the author; they are complex because of their human qualities, which are both endearing and abhorrent. However, much of the play's tragic nature is manifested through the treatment of Isabella. Shakespeare's double image is present in

Measure for Measure only with regards to the dualistic interpretations of Isabella's character. Isabella's dual nature is not formed from the chasm between tragedy and comedy because her character has no comic traits. However, Isabella is a woman being affected by opposing extremes. Isabella's struggles in the play and her reactions to these struggles create two different perceptions or two different interpretations of her character for readers and critics. To some, Isabella is the picture of virtue and morality while others adamantly argue that she is a self-righteous prude. Some see her as the driving force of the themes and plot of the play while others consider her less important. This is the double image as it exists for Isabella; she is a woman, as she claims, at war between will and will not. Critics and readers find two completely different Isabellas in the same text because Shakespeare's ultimate goal is not to present the reader with answers to the moral ideals Isabella questions; instead, he challenges readers to see these issues and formulate their own opinions.

Isabella's new beliefs at the end of the play regarding mercy, justice, and forgiveness reveal that she changes over the course of the play, but the argument lies in whether the change is positive or destructive. The plot of *Measure for Measure* centers around Isabella; she is the play's major concern and the character who ends the comedy and begins the tragedy. She is initially a resolved woman who adheres strictly to her ideals and beliefs. Of course, she is not without flaw, but over the course of the play her character is diminished and changed in a negative manner through the manipulations of the male characters. Isabella, more than any of Shakespeare's comic women, is powerless and changed by the events of the play. Her beliefs are destroyed, as is her

character from all angles. She is a victim of the plot, society, and the men who surround her, and if anyone is "betrayed," as Ross claims, by the events of the play, that person is Isabella. Isabella is the main tragic ingredient of *Measure for Measure*: her character and the themes she addresses are the greatest source of the tragic problem within this comic play.

There is little comedy in Isabella's portrayal in *Measure for Measure* since the comic expectation of her character goes unfulfilled. Other female characters, such as Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors* or Kate in *The Taming of the Shrew,* are easily recognizable as women who have both tragic and comic features; however, it is difficult to uncover anything comic in Isabella. Isabella's character is complex; she is a woman, yet she has sworn an allegiance to God that exceeds her earthly concerns. She begins the play about to enter a convent and become the bride of God and ends the play by possibly becoming the bride of the Duke. Isabella's character is serious, as are her values and the themes she raises of chastity, mercy, and woman's place in society and within the context of law.

Isabella's serious traits are compounded by juxtaposing her with three other women, Mariana, Julietta, and Mistress Overdone, who are perceived as less serious because of their less rigid moral standards. This arrangement also establishes a spectrum of women in which Isabella is one extreme. Mistress Overdone represents the harlots and prostitutes in the society, Mariana and Juliet the somewhat promiscuous medium, and Isabella the nun. The three other women together form the foil for Isabella's character. These various levels of contradictions to Isabella's personality and beliefs create a much

more intricate comparison than those of *The Errors* and *The Shrew*. The women's greatest difference is their beliefs regarding chastity. Isabella believes only in absolute chastity while Mariana, Juliet, and Mistress Overdone embrace a less strict view of their sexuality. Mariana and Juliet believe that the promise of marriage is a sufficient reason to engage in an intimate relationship, but Isabella demands the formal, recognized and religious ceremony. Mariana is the most difficult of the counterparts to interpret because she shares some common traits with Isabella. Like Isabella, Mariana considers marriage an important bond that should be respected, and she believes in the verbal contract she enters into with Angelo. She feels that her verbal agreement with Angelo constituted a sacred relationship, and when she is betrayed by Angelo, she participates in the bed trick, forcing him to fulfill his promise. The four women offer the reader a look into different relationships and varying degrees of moral obligations and dilemmas.

Isabella's strict religious beliefs and vow of chastity are often perceived as rigidity, something negative plaguing her character from which she is freed over the course of the play by her male counterparts. Critics who seek to diminish Isabella's important and tragic role in the play cite her rigidity as a flaw and thus see her loss of chastity and her strict moral code at the end of the play as a form of growth. This view is not, however, the most thoughtful way to interpret Isabella's character; her induction into a secular society is not a positive change since the male characters strip Isabella of her strong beliefs and her ambition to enter the convent.

Isabella must make several difficult decisions in the play, and her responses form her character, which many critics focus on as revealing her cold and selfish nature.

Isabella is faced with the choice of sacrificing her virginity for the life of her brother and with an ironic situation at the end of the play when she must decide whether to afford Angelo the mercy she was denied and the mercy that she believes that her brother was denied. Isabella's cold nature is first cited when she asks for more severe restriction in the convent and later in her encounter with Angelo when she must plead for her brother's life. She is in a precarious situation because her brother Claudio has engaged in premarital sex, a deed which Isabella finds immoral, yet Isabella does not want the brother she loves to die. Her dilemma is vocalized when she states to Angelo,

> There is a vice that most I do abhor,
> And most desire should meet the blow of Justice;
> For which I would not plead, but that I must,
> For which I must not plead, but that I am
> At war, 'twixt will and will not. (2.2.30-4)

Isabella faces an internal struggle between her love of her brother and her loyalty to her religious and moral beliefs. When Angelo refuses her plea to save her brother's life, Isabella concedes, an act that inspires criticism from critics and Lucio, who persists: "Kneel down before him, hang upon his gown./ You are too cold" (2.2.45-6). Isabella's concession is not cold, but reflective of her understanding and agreement with Angelo's judicial decision. She agrees with Angelo's punishment because she sees her brother's actions as immoral, and she willingly accepts the dreadful situation because it is in keeping with her moral and religious beliefs. At this point of the play, Isabella reacts only in terms of the spiritual world, relating her beliefs in a secular society to the convent. She sees her brother's life as expendable to uphold the morality of her religious beliefs. The punishment is setting an example for society that she agrees with although she

wishes the life of her brother could be spared. Isabella does not give up too easily because she takes the advice of Lucio and returns to Angelo to beg for her brother's life. These actions are not those of a cold and uncaring woman; instead, they are actions that reveal a sister's true love and desperation.

The act that critics and readers should focus on as cold is Angelo's betrayal when he offers the exchange of Isabella's chastity for the life of her brother. Of course, this proposal insults Isabella, and she instantly vows she will not accept; however, despite the insidious offer, critics still fault Isabella for not considering Angelo's proposal to save her brother. Critics and even her own brother are asking Isabella for her chastity, which she cannot give because of her religious beliefs. Critics who see Isabella's actions as cold fail to see the other side of her character and how the male characters of the play lead her from her religious beliefs into a secular society. However, critic R.W. Chambers sees a more logical interpretation of Isabella's character and her refusal of Angelo and her brother:

> Isabel then, as Shakespeare sees her and asks us to see her, would frankly, joyously, give her life to save Claudio: and "*greater love hath no man than this*." And now Claudio is asking for what she cannot give, and she bursts out in agony. Have the critics never seen a human soul or a human body in the extremity of torment? Physical torture Isabel thinks she could have stood without flinching. She has said so to Angelo:
>
> The impression of keen whips I'ld wear as rubies,
> And strip myself to death, as to a bed
> That longing have been sick for, ere I'ld yield
> My body up to shame.
>
> To suppose that Shakespeare gave these burning words to Isabel so that we should perceive her to be selfish and cold, is to suppose that he did not know his job. The honour of her family and her religion are more to her than mere life, her own or Claudio's. (108-109)

The interpretation of Isabella's character as selfish and cold results directly from her unwavering devotion to her vow of chastity and her aspiration to become a nun. Critics reconcile the tragedy she faces in the play by labeling her a prude or by claiming she is extreme in her vow of chastity. Her denial of Angelo's offer is based on her belief that it would condemn her soul to hell; also, giving in to Angelo would make her guilty of the same crime her brother faces punishment for, and she would ultimately be rewarding Angelo's evil and hypocrisy. Isabella's belief that her soul and chastity are one is seen when she states to Angelo, "Better it were a brother died at once/ Than that a sister, by redeeming him,/ Should die for ever" (2.4.108-10). Many critics fault Isabella for her chastity, but one critic who shares a more realistic point of view argues that "absolute chastity is seen in a great deal of Renaissance literature as an absolute value" (Geckle 6). Readers during the Renaissance would not have looked at Isabella's refusal through twenty-first-century eyes and interpreted her behavior as cold and rigid. The new modern view was certainly not Shakespeare's intent for Isabella's character, and those who see her chastity as excessive must first look at other works of the time and how Renaissance readers would have felt regarding female chastity. George Geckle argues that other "contemporary defenses of such chastity can be found in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Defence of Good Women* (1540), Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, 1561) . . . and in poems such as *The Faerie Queene* and *Comus*" (7).

Some critics go a step further and suggest that Isabella's chastity is a form of power that she uses in society as a means of control. Barbara J. Baines argues this play "clearly aligns chastity and power" through Isabella's character (79). This is an ironic

comment since Isabella's chastity affords her no power throughout the play; in fact, it relinquishes her of it since the male characters set out to destroy her chaste lifestyle. Her goal as the play opens is to become a nun, an occupation that demands chastity and in a social context grants her no power. She cannot save her brother, she is unaware that the Friar she trusts is really the Duke, and she believes until the very end of the play all her efforts to save her brother are in vain. Critics such as Baines attempt unsuccessfully to make this attribute negative by claiming that it is pride or desire for power that makes her cling to her chastity. From this point of view, her chastity becomes something that Isabella needs to be saved from in the play. Isabella's vocation or vow of chastity grants her no power; instead, it makes her a target of others and an object of desire. Also, none of the men in the play respect her or her commitment to the convent. Everyone in the play, with the exception of Isabella herself, finds some means of using her chastity for a personal gain. Isabella is burdened with her vows as soon as she steps outside the convent. Baines also argues, "Isabella's identification of her self exclusively with her chastity not only precludes mercy and compassion for her brother but also blinds her to her own passion, her desire for revenge against perfidious Angelo" (85). This argument lacks merit because it overlooks the nature and motivations of Isabella's character. Isabella feels compassion for her brother, and she is willing to give her life in exchange for her brother's life. Isabella tells Claudio, "O, were it but my life, I'd throw it down / For your deliverance as frankly as / a pin" (3.2.105-106).

Isabella's journey begins when Lucio suddenly appears at the convent and calls her away to come to her brother's aid, and she embraces her brother's fault and agrees to

help him although she believes his deed to be immoral. The actions she takes over the course of the play to help her brother exceed what most would do in her place. She returns to Angelo to beg for her brother's life although in her heart she sees the need to punish his act, she remains outside the convent in order to continue helping her brother by aiding the Friar in the bed trick, and she confronts Angelo at the end of play although she knows that it is unlikely others will believe her. As for the issue of revenge, the trait is simply not applicable to her character because of her virtue and grace; to have her calling for revenge would be out of character and context. Even when Isabel informs the Duke of Angelo's misdeeds, she does not seek revenge; she instead seeks a type of justice that will be administered by a lawful body. She is also not blind to the real truth behind Angelo's character or her passion for justice as she adamantly exclaims that he is a "murderer," "adulterous thief," "hypocrite," and a "virgin-violator" (5.1.39-41). Her words are impassioned as are her beliefs regarding Angelo's immorality. However, revenge is wasted on Isabel because her religious beliefs do not support such concepts; instead, Isabel grants mercy and forgiveness.

Two of Isabella's actions reveal that her virtue and grace diminish over the course of the play. Isabella's desperation to save her brother manifests itself in the form of the bed trick, which she agrees to participate in although it conflicts with her moral beliefs. She is tricked by the Duke because of his religious disguise and the mistaken belief that the advice is morally just. The participation in the trick presents a new set of problems for Isabella. She is not only over-stepping her moral boundary, but she is also betraying her gender by compromising Mariana, who is blinded by her love of Angelo. The "bed

trick," as it has been labeled by critics, is a tangible piece of evidence that demonstrates Isabella's moral decline. Her involvement is the turning point of the play, and from this point, Isabella is no longer capable of reaching a comic ending because her character is compromised. This desperation and decline are compounded by the fact that Isabella believes she is acting under the moral advisement of the Friar. Of course, the trick is not the modest idea of a Friar but the idea of the Duke, who is most likely not concerned with the moral implications. The Duke is either unaware or unconcerned with how his plans to "help" everyone in the play will affect Isabella.

The end of the play also demonstrates the change that Isabella's belief system has undergone. She grants mercy to Angelo because his sin was only intent or *thought* and not the act itself; this action reveals her decline from the higher moral ground where she once stood. She now understands and is willing to submit to the differences between human laws and divine law and to grant Angelo the mercy he may deserve in a secular society but not in her previous world of the convent. Her mercy and compassion are positive attributes, but they are not learned over the course of the play. Isabella has compassion for her brother and Mariana, so it is reasonable for her to have compassion for Angelo. Each is guilty of a moral sin she believes is wrong, but she still affords them help and compassion.

Isabella's change involves not the mercy she grants but her transformation from the mentality of a spiritual to a secular society. She is hurt and helpless in the final scene by the actions of the men that surround her. She has been betrayed by Angelo, her brother, and the Duke. The play forces her to see that not all people are as good and moral as she strives to be. To have her seduced by Angelo would leave the play

irreconcilably tragic, but the lesson she learns from Angelo's request is still disturbing. Baines's description of Isabella provides a revealing look into the true nature of her change over the course of the play. There are two Isabellas: one who begins the play wanting to save her brother's life while also understanding the magnitude of his sin and another woman at the end of the play who sees the sin but chooses to forgive it because of a newfound understanding of secular society.

Through these difficult choices, Isabella's character addresses the underlying themes of the play. Her struggles look at the concept of the woman's role in the context of the law, female sexuality, and social subjugation. Isabella is subject to two different types of justice or law in the play. Because of her beliefs, she is subject to the divine laws of God, and as a member of society, she is subject to human law. As a woman, Isabella is also subjected to a male-dominated world, and while it is true that all the characters are puppets in the Duke's plan, Isabella is a true testament to the masculine control this play presents. Ironically, the only male character who has any reverence for Isabella or her vocation is Lucio. Lucio appears totally depraved and lacking any sound moral judgment; however, he finds a reverence for Isabella that the other male character do not. The other men see Isabella's beauty and devotion to the convent and immediately set out to destroy it by seducing her or using her (in Claudio's case).

As the title implies, there is an underlying theme that questions "measure" in the play and human's inability to recognize extremes. Virtually all of the characters are taking extreme measures in the play: the Duke is pretending to be a Friar, Angelo is extreme in his misguided desire to be virtuous and just, and Isabella is also often

described as extreme in her devotion to the nunnery and her vow of chastity. These elements are contrasted with the subplots' opposing extremes as presented by Lucio, Mistress Overdone, Elbow, and Froth; and, while the subplot is a direct reflection of the same issues, it is approached in a completely different and bawdy manner. The extremes of virtue and chastity are countered by the extremes of promiscuity and immorality. There are several references in the subplot regarding the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, and in act one scene two a gentlemen accuses Lucio of being bald or "pil'd" (1.2.37) due to a syphilis infection. There are also several indications that Mistress Overdone is running a whorehouse, and when Escalus questions the clown about her past husbands, he tells Escalus she has had nine husbands, "Over-done by the last" (2.1.213). Ironically, the only characters who are in the middle of these extremes, Claudio and Julietta, are being condemned for their actions. The three layers of this play present readers with a clear look into human extremism. However, whether Isabella is viewed as extreme or not, she is the only character who is stripped of her beliefs by the Duke's plan. Where Angelo's true nature is simply revealed, Isabella's nature is changed. Isabella's negative transformation begins with her agreement to participate in the bed trick under the pseudo-Friar's command and culminates with her new view of mercy and justice at the end of the play.

The critics who disapprove of Isabella or those who try to diminish her importance in the play see a woman who needs mending because she is self-righteous and extreme in her chastity. Critic Hugh Richmond brings together this cynical view of Isabella's character, arguing, "[Isabella's] mind has a certain harsh vigor and she can be

trained to react discriminatingly. But her personality is potentially as neurotically destructive as Katharina's. She presents merely the raw material of a gifted personality" (154). And this is the unfortunate argument made against many of the female heroines in the comedies: the women (Adriana, Kate, and Isabella) do not conform to the standards of a male-dominated society and are thus interpreted as neurotic. Their personalities are strong as are their opinions, and many view these attributes as problematic. Isabella and the other heroines have in common a strong independence and devotion to their beliefs, which may be frightening or foreign to those who have stereotypical ideas of how women should feel and act. Isabella has decided she will live her earthly life without men, and because many critics cannot understand her decision, they interpret her chastity and strong religious ideals are corrupt or comical. Isabella's drastic change over the course of the play is not positive or productive; instead, it creates a sad image of a woman who has to face the realities of a corrupt society. In the process, she loses her innocence, not in the physical loss of her chastity but in the form of her naivety. She is forced to see her powerlessness when she cannot save her brother; she sees her brother's frailty when he begs her to sacrifice her body for his life; she realizes the Friar she trusted is really the Duke disguised; and she learns that Angelo cannot live up to his name, "angel," or his impeccable reputation for virtue. These hard lessons would be productive or beneficial to Isabella if she learns a lesson and grows from the experience, but there is no evidence that she reaches an epiphany. Instead, it is more logical to argue that she loses the high moral ideals she clings to at the beginning of the play. The Duke experiments, Angelo is revealed, and Isabella falls from a state of grace over the course of the play. Her

precarious placement between the divergent institutions of God and man, divine and earthly law, and masculine and feminine gender roles creates Isabella's tragedy. Isabella will not return to the convent at the end of the play because her character has been tainted by an introduction to the outside world – a secular society. Ironically, one of Isabella's final remarks to the Duke is "I do, my Lord" (5.1.392), suggesting she will marry the Duke and conform to the society outside the convent.

GENDER, GENRE, AND THE COMIC OPEN ENDING

The comic open ending provides Shakespeare's comedies with the possibility for tragedy, especially for the female characters. Open endings or endings without definite conclusions are not anomalies in any of Shakespeare's comedies, and the lack of detailed paths for characters provide readers and/or producers with great flexibility with regard to character interpretation and portrayal. Individual opinions regarding the overall tone of the plays, their purposes, and the motivations of the characters can be supported by the text, and the endings are consequently perceived differently to coincide with individual analysis. Producers can use the open endings to their advantage by choosing endings for individual productions and better establishing overall tone and purpose. The endings of *The Errors*, *The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* also support the characteristic double image projected throughout the comedies by leaving readers with one final dualistic expression of the plays and the characters. Although these comic endings provide some sense of closure with the pairing of lovers and happy reunions, they may remain frustrating for readers. Little in the comedies is conclusive; characters are not assured of identity or gender: death itself is not even final.

Most of these unresolved endings directly affect the female characters, and they face complicated and problematic situations as the comedies close. *The Errors, The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* are comedies that incorporate open endings for the heroines, Adriana, Kate, and Isabella. The unresolved ending leaves the final

conclusions about the characters and the comedies' ultimate purpose in the hands of readers, and they take the plays beyond simple farce by making readers consider that there are possible consequences and tragedy for the female characters. The unresolved ending provides the perfect conclusion to a comedy that remains open, in every sense of the word, to interpretation, twists, turns, and variable outcomes.

The close connection between comic women and open endings may exist because the women appear as the voice of the themes of the comedies, and providing definite answers to the serious question they pose would essentially endorse one particular view. The unresolved ending leaves the final conclusions about the characters and the comedies' ultimate purpose in the hands of readers, and the endings that Adriana, Kate, and Isabella face also push the plays beyond simple farce by making readers consider that there is some propensity for tragedy and consequences.

When compared, the endings of *The Errors*, *The Shrew*, and *Measure for Measure* make a strong statement regarding the overall purpose of the comic women. *The Errors* and *Measure for Measure* suggest tragic futures for Adriana and Isabella by reducing the women's involvement in the final scene. The once vocal female characters are virtually silenced as the other characters reconcile in satisfying, happy endings or a newly established order. *The Errors*, which previously focused attention on Adriana's marriage to Antipholus, now turns to address the reunion of family, not the reunion of Adriana's marriage. Readers see the happy reunions of siblings and parents restore a sense of order at the end of the play; however, while the twins and lovers have reunited, Adriana is left with no definite answers. She may be a woman who has slept with her husband's brother

and her sister's new love interest. She also may be forced to give up her quest for liberty in marriage and bow to the traditional ideals imposed on women. Adriana must also accept that her husband went to the courtesan when she mistakenly locked him out of their home. Many of the avenues possible for Adriana's character are quite alarming and perhaps may even be seen as demeaning to women today.

In production, Adriana is typically either embraced by her husband or left alone on stage as other characters celebrate. However, the text of *The Errors* does not give readers one specific conclusion for the play as it relates to Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus, and it is this lack of a concrete conclusion which leads many readers and critics to further question Adriana's character. The male characters do not face the same type of open or potentially tragic endings. Antipholus of Ephesus has found happy reunions at the end of *The Errors* as he reunites with his lost father, twin brother, and servant. His family, outside the relationship with his wife, is happily reunited. The same is true of Antipholus of Syracuse because he also reunites with his lost mother, father, twin brother, and servant. He also has a potential bride in Adriana's sister, Luciana. There are many new relationships created for the male characters, but there is no new relationship for Adriana.

A similar type of open ending is seen in *Measure for Measure* because it is unclear if Isabella will accept the Duke's marriage proposal or return to the life she planned in the convent. Isabella does not speak for the final one hundred lines of the play; therefore readers cannot know her true feelings about the proposal or the unfolding endings. Order appears to be restored for Angelo and Mariana, who wed in the final scene. The Duke unmasks, resuming his position, and Claudio is saved from execution and may return to

Julietta. However, what order does Isabella find in the final scene? She discovers her brother lives – a happy moment, but Isabella must choose between the Duke and the convent. Isabella has no order or definite path, and readers can only speculate on what will become of her.

Although the final scene of *The Taming of the Shrew* is typically debated by critics as either revealing a positive or negative transformation of Kate, it certainly incorporates a much different ending for the heroine. Unlike the silenced Adriana and Isabella, Kate remains in character by commanding the final scene with a powerful soliloquy. However, Kate is not simply a comic character, and her role remains Shakespeare's strongest statement about the role of woman in society and marriage.

As critic D.A. Traversi argues, the comedies are chiefly a "statement about life – and more especially about love and marriage as central realities in the pattern of living," and as love becomes the main focus of the comedies, women inevitably become the embodiment of the major themes. The women serve as the emotional and serious voice of the comedies, and their roles drive the plots and the underlying questions behind the tragic nature of female existence. The struggles and the realizations the women face produce possible tragedies whether the comedies are funny and entertaining such as *The Comedy of Errors* or more dark and disturbing such as *Measure for Measure*. Adriana, Kate, and Isabella represent the evolution of Shakespeare's comic women, each revealing unique aspects of woman's struggles with relationships, individuality, and emotion.

Ironically, Adriana, Kate, and Isabella all speak of the human heart, making a

clear connection between human emotion, the heart, and the voice or tongue. Adriana's jealousy and anger toward her absent husband is seen throughout *The Errors*, and in act four, scene two, her harsh diatribe to Antipholus comes to a close as she admits, "My heart prays for him, though my tongue do curse" (4.2.23-37). Adriana now expresses the idea that her actions and words are not the true feelings of her heart. This concession also reveals a type of growth in Adriana's character since she recognizes the truth of her situation and her actions. Kate also expresses her anger and pain through her sharp words and physical actions. Kate says, "My tongue will tell the anger of my heart/ Or else my heart concealing it will break" (4.3.83-84). Kate's admission reveals that she cannot be a happy woman who is broken by Petruchio and the events of *The Shrew* as some critics would have readers believe. Adriana and Kate are women who must express their emotions whether it is in a productive manner or not; however, it is Isabella who suggests that the human heart leads to truth. She encourages Angelo to look inside for truth as she tells him, "Go to your bosom,/ knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know" (2.2.137-38). Throughout *Measure for Measure* the characters look for truth or the correct path: they look to the laws of a secular society, to the teaching of their faith, and to the Duke, but Isabella suggests that answers lie within the human heart. The emotion of the women brings an element of softness into Shakespeare's comedies, allowing the plays to make a connection with female readers.

The comedies offer readers something beyond the darkness and confounding endings of the tragedies; however, the comedies are not simply an escape into a imaginary world of happy characters distracted and then reunited. The comedies provide a different

way to look at the universal themes that all of William Shakespeare's plays address through accessible, everyday situations and common dilemmas of both men and women. Still, it is the themes of love and the balancing of relationships that pervade the comedies, and the women, such as Adriana, Kate, and Isabella, provide a natural outlet for these emotional themes. The tragic men such as King Lear, Hamlet, and Othello may inspire readers with their inner reflections and their falls from a heroic to a tragic existence, but the comic women show readers the comedy and tragedy behind love. The presentation differs, but the "lesson" is no less serious: hopefully readers will come away from the comedies with their minds racing, contemplating their own lives and the standards that society continues to impose on both men and women in the modern world.

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