

# A Crossdressed Judith Shakespeare?— Reconceptualizing the Representation of Women's Predicaments in Three Contemporary Shakespeare-related Movies

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## ABSTRACT

By taking Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare story as a point of departure, and by invoking the question of whether a crossdressed Judith Shakespeare would make it to the theater, this paper explores the social pressures on women presented in three contemporary Shakespeare-related reproductions and adaptations on screen—Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*, Andy Fickman's *She's the Man* and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*. It associates the pressures on the heroines presented in these cinematic works to Juliet Dusinberre's description of the subsuming of women in academia into "he" and her anxiety under mainstream criticism. The paper underscores the interconnection between Shakespeare's cultural potency and feminist Shakespeare criticism.

**KEY WORDS:** Shakespeare, crossdressing, women, Judith

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In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf elaborates on the loss of women's talents because of unjust social practices marginalizing women. Woolf's imaginative depiction in the book of Shakespeare's sister, who never makes it to the theater despite her love of words like her brother's, is undoubtedly a powerful image drawing attention to the hostile cultural environment restricting the development of a woman's talent. Woolf ingeniously creates a picture of Judith Shakespeare's humiliation at the theater door:

She stood at the stage door; she wanted to act, she said. Men laughed in her face. The manager—a fat loose-lipped man—guffawed. He bellowed something about poodles dancing and women acting—no woman, he said, could possibly be an actress. He hinted—you can imagine what. (51-52)

This description of Judith Shakespeare's predicament underscores the difficult situation women over the centuries, as perceived by Woolf, have always been in. By taking Woolf's Judith Shakespeare story as a point of departure, and by invoking the question of whether a crossdressed Judith Shakespeare would make it to the theater, this paper explores the social pressures on women presented in three contemporary Shakespeare-related reproductions and adaptations on screen—Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* (1996), a hip-hop version of the Bard's tragic

love story, Andy Fickman's *She's the Man* (2006), a soccer-centered adaptation of the Bard's *Twelfth Night*, and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), a modern reinvention of William Shakespeare's romantic adventure, which is praised as a "speculative fiction that remains scrupulously true to what little is known about Will and his early life and times" (Brode 239). The paper associates the pressures on the heroines presented in these works to Juliet Dusinberre's description of the subsuming of women in academia into "he" and her anxiety under mainstream Shakespeare criticism. While highlighting women's difficult situations under male-dominated culture, the paper argues for the need to reaffirm women's talent—in the fashion Woolf proposes, and to reconceptualize gender boundary, as the crossdressed heroines in the movies suggest, with more fluidity.

One of the most remarkable images of Woolf's Judith Shakespeare story is, as aforementioned, the humiliation of the young country girl by the company of players at the stage door in London. Woolf encapsulates her disdain of the theater manager in her simple description: "a fat loose-lipped man" (51)—an ugly image rich in meaning. Noticeably, Woolf writes that "men"—in its plural form, "laughed in Judith's face" (51). Then she singles this manager out as their representative. His voluminous figure implies a large body of stern attitude not easily removable. Considering English Renaissance theater culture, which forbade women to be shown on stage, the manager's large mass at the stage door suggests an adamant attitude propping up such a cultural practice that has disadvantaged women. One may probably overlook a thin man with a weak voice, but a fat man with a loud voice is remarkable, especially vis-à-vis a young country girl newly arrived in London. Moreover, his loose lips, which readily engage themselves in guffawing and bellowing at Judith, signify his indiscretion and vulgarity. He is full of words, full of obscene words, while Judith does not answer any of his humiliating

comments.

Woolf makes Judith vocal in private but quiet in public. When Judith is on the road to London, she is more musical than singing birds. “She had the quickest fancy, a gift like her brother’s, for the tune of words” (Woolf 51). Woolf suggests that in every aspect related to poetry, Judith is as promising as her brother. Nevertheless, at the stage door, her identity as a female deprives her of her access to the stage. The company of players does not care about whether she is gifted or not. They just laugh at her for being a woman wanting to act. Then the fat manager at the door zooms in big, with his loose lips that readily guffaw and bellow at Judith. His bellowing contrasts with her earlier singing. His vulgarity silences her. He makes a degrading association between poodles dancing and woman acting, and he adds that “no woman . . . could possibly be an actress” (Woolf 51). By ruling out that possibility, the manager proclaims the monopoly of theaters for his own sex in accordance with the rules of his time. In a nutshell, this ugly, repulsive man represents the English culture in Shakespeare’s time forbidding women to appear on stage and depriving them of their opportunity to develop their talents. He is fat probably because he has profited from that censorship.

Despite the fictive nature of the story, Woolf’s inference is by no means illogical. With no access to the theater, the young girl who has fled home is eventually taken in by a man. She is then impregnated. Finding herself entrapped in a pregnant woman’s body, she eventually kills herself. Judith Shakespeare’s name is, therefore, not known to the world. Woolf persuasively announces by the end of her story: “That, more or less, is how the story would run, I think, if a woman in Shakespeare’s day had had Shakespeare’s genius” (52). By delineating Judith’s frustration, Woolf explains the lesser achievement of her sex in a convincing manner. The reimagining of a suppressed Judith reveals Woolf’s own anxiety towards her own cultural

heritage, even though the condition of women in early twentieth century England appeared to have improved from the cultural milieu Woolf describes in her Judith Shakespeare story. Woolf possessed many more resources than many gifted women in earlier eras. Besides working as a writer, she was also a publisher. Just as she says in *A Room of One's Own* that independence is essential for the development of a women's talent, her own publishing house significantly offered her independence and freedom from censorship. Nevertheless, Woolf was acutely aware of the fact that women in general lack independence and freedom to develop their talents.

The lack of independence and freedom is exactly what affects women in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and in Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*. Juliet Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* and Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* are both forced to marry the men their parents have chosen for them. Not unlike Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, Juliet and Viola both want to avert the destinies prescribed by their fathers. Viola enjoys temporary freedom when she crossdresses as Thomas Kent to venture beyond the confines of her house to the other side of the river. Thomas Kent is a product of Viola's dream and "he" proves Viola's talent on stage. Nevertheless, this Thomas can only exist when Viola's parents are away in the country for three weeks, signifying the temporary absence of patriarchal control. Viola says to her nurse while they are talking about Shakespeare after they have watched his play at Whitehall: "He [Shakespeare] would give Thomas Kent the life of Viola De Lesseps's dreaming" (*Shakespeare in Love*). Her words prove her not dissimilar to Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, who also yearns to be on stage. Unlike Judith who appears in front of a stage door in her own gender identity, Viola cleverly sneaks into the theater undercover. The rules in her time forbidding women to be on stage cannot abate her craving to be in a company of players. Her admiration of Shakespeare's talent prompts her imaginative mind to invent the

fictive Thomas Kent as her alternative identity. Not unlike the Viola in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Viola De Lesseps would not have access to a new vista had she not crossdressed. Crossdressing renders both Shakespeare's Viola and Madden's Viola more freedom from restrictive social values and a new eye to understand the world beyond their prescribed spaces.

In spite of her love of poetry and of Shakespeare, Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* has to marry Lord Wessex, a man who despises poetry and theater. The relief from patriarchal control she enjoys is short. Thomas Kent's fictive identity can no longer hold when a boy sees Viola's real gender identity while peeping through a hole in a wall into the theater after which he informs the Master of the Revels about it. Even if the fictive identity of Thomas Kent remains unexposed, the three-week absence of Viola's parents will eventually end, and Viola's marriage with Lord Wessex will have to take place. From the very beginning, Viola senses that her love for Shakespeare will be doomed as reality defines her destiny. She stresses her understanding of her duty as an obedient daughter in a letter to Will: "Master Will, poet dearest to my heart, I beseech you, banish me from yours—I am to marry Lord Wessex—a daughter's duty" (*Shakespeare in Love*). Sorrowful tears roll down her cheeks while she is writing the letter. The scene appealingly manifests the subjugation of a woman's love and freedom to the pressures she feels for her duty as a daughter.

It is noteworthy that *Shakespeare in Love* stresses the great contrast between romantic love and harsh reality. The river that divides the inner city where the De Lesseps house is located and the theater area of the Liberties signify the great gap between Viola and Will. Over on the De Lesseps side, there is reality and order presided over by Viola's parents. They have chosen Lord Wessex to be Viola's husband because they desire Wessex's noble family name for their grandchildren in order to improve their low social status as

businessmen. Wessex welcomes the marriage arrangement because Viola's parents agree to finance his tobacco business in America. The marriage is a business deal and Lord Wessex spells it out to Viola when he says to her that her parents have bought him for her. The De Lesseps party, which Will intrudes into, features a luxurious hall with servants serving fancy party food and musicians playing dance music. The luxury and order in the house are sustained by its continuous stress on commercial values.

In great contrast to the De Lesseps house, the other side of the river where theaters are located is marked by chaos. There is no materialistic luxury and staying alive is a hard business. At the very beginning of the movie, we are presented with the torture of Henslowe, the owner of the Rose, by his creditors. They tie him down and put his legs over burning fire. They threaten to cut off his nose with a knife. Making money and paying debts are not easy for a theater owner and his players. Just like Henslowe, Will is in debt, too. He lies to and runs away from his creditors. But amidst this chaos and hardship, Will creates an imaginary space on stage that appeals to his audience, and his poetic power attracts Viola. For her, Will's side of the river represents freedom and romance. She crosses the river to fulfill her dreams to be in a company of players on stage.

It is noteworthy that the chaos and the imagination within the theatrical space allow Viola to experience extraordinary gender fluidity. By crossdressing as Thomas Kent, Viola bypasses the no-woman-on-stage rule to fulfill her dream, yet she retains her role as a woman in her relationship with Will to experience romance and sexual pleasure. Thomas Kent and Will kiss whenever they have a chance, and they even make love inside the theater in spite of Viola's male appearance—with a wig and mustache. Viola is Thomas Kent to the other players, but she is the beautiful De Lesseps lady to her love even when she is dressed up as a young man. These moments of fluid gender

identity are undeniably rare carefree times for Viola. The ensuing return to her fixed role with her duty as an obedient daughter is thus, by great contrast to these carefree moments, terribly tragic.

Not being able to be with the poet she loves likens Madden's Viola to the condition of Shakespeare's Juliet Capulet, who is required to marry the man her father has chosen for her against her own desire. Shakespeare's depiction of old Capulet's authority over his daughter is impressive. He flies into a fury after Juliet refuses the marriage arrangement he has made for her. He announces to her:

But fettle your fine joints against Thursday next  
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,  
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither  
Out you green-sickness carrion! Out you baggage!  
You tallow face! (*R & J*, 3.5.153-57)

Juliet kneels down to plead: "Good father, I beseech you on my knees" (*R & J*, 3.5.159). The old man replies: "Hang thee young baggage, disobedient wretch!/I tell thee what—get thee to church a Thursday/Or never after look me in the face (*R & J*, 3.5.160-62). This altercation scene underscores the absolute authority of old Capulet as a patriarch. Remarkably, he stresses his relation to his daughter: "And you be mine I'll give you to my friend;/ And you be not, hang! Beg! Starve! Die in the streets!" (*R & J*, 3.5.190-91). These words pinpoint the dependence of the daughter on the father. It is the lack of freedom and independence on Juliet's part that leads to the tragic development. She needs to escape from this absolute patriarchal control and she seeks help from Friar Laurence. When the Friar advises her to feign death by taking his potion, though she is afraid and even suspicious of his intentions, she finally



accepts his advice.

In Luhrmann's cinematic reproduction of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, old Capulet is impressively profiled as a powerful and violent patriarch. Interestingly, Luhrmann makes this patriarchal figure a fat man, and he draws our attention to his voluminous body in a scene featuring him half naked in a sauna room, with droplets of sweat covering his seemingly greasy forehead, hairy chest, and his protruding belly. He is talking about beautiful women with Paris by his side. This is not an attractive image, but one that indicates vulgarity. To our great amazement, this voluminous figure is not dissimilar to that of the theater manager in Woolf's Judith Shakespeare story. Whereas the loose-lipped manager guffaws and bellows at a young country girl newly arrived in London, the fat old Capulet uses violence on his young daughter. He thrusts Juliet down onto the floor when she tells him that she thanks him for his marriage arrangement but would not accept it. When Juliet's fat old nurse quickly tries to stop his brutality towards Juliet, the old man shoves her away with one stroke of his arm. When Lady Capulet tries to stop him, too, he turns and strikes her on the face, and off the slender lady bumps onto a wall. This is a remarkable scene of home violence—a patriarch flying into fury and striking down three women.

Earlier in the movie, Luhrmann has already foreshadowed old Capulet's despotic temper. During the Capulet party, when Tybalt discovers Romeo in the Capulet house, he reports to his uncle and says he will have Romeo killed for intruding. But old Capulet says that he will not allow Tybalt to make a mutiny among his guests. When Tybalt replies that he will not leave Romeo alone, old Capulet suddenly turns towards Tybalt and strikes him hard on the face. The scene manifests that the old patriarch will not bear any defiance. He expects his orders to be obeyed without any question. That earlier scene anticipates the fury he flies into when he hears Juliet's negative answer to his

marriage arrangement for her. After he has given vent to his anger through his violence towards his daughter, the old nurse, and his wife, he storms down the wide staircase, smacking down a silver tray from an innocent servant's hands. The loud clink of the silver tray and objects on it falling down on the hard floor of the spacious Capulet hall creates a remarkable effect that not only displays the strength of old Capulet's fury, but also foreshadows the subsequent tragic development. Luhrmann's cinematic image vividly focuses on the helpless condition of the three women under a despotic patriarch. It is the command of her father that prompts the helpless daughter to seek advice from Friar Laurence. Luhrmann portrays a desperate Juliet with a pistol pointing first at her own head, then at Friar Laurence's. The only solution the Friar could come up with is for Juliet to escape by feigning death. No direct confrontation with old Capulet or even pleading to the old man has ever crossed their minds as a possible solution, manifesting their fear of the authority of the father.

The Judith Shakespeare Woolf creates shares Juliet Capulet's ill fortune when it comes to marriage. She is also required by her father to be married to a man of his choice—the son of a neighbouring wool-stapler. When the daughter says no, “she was severely beaten by her father” (Woolf 51). However, unlike old Capulet, the old Shakespeare Woolf has created attempts to appeal to his daughter after the beating. “He begged her not to shame him” (Woolf 51). And he even said that “he would give her a chain of beads or a fine petticoat” and “there were tears in his eyes” (Woolf 51). This father is obviously an even more hard to handle one than the powerful and violent Capulet. The daughter is left with no other choice but to escape from her pressure by fleeing home. The misfortune of Woolf's Judith echoes that of Shakespeare's Juliet and they demonstrate the plight of women in their own homes when they refuse to marry the men their fathers have chosen for them.

Undoubtedly, Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* is also suffering from the same plight, though she is not physically abused by her father. Her heart yearns for freedom and love, but she is under social restraints. She stresses that she understands her duty as an obedient daughter. Her journey as a crossdressed Thomas, who crosses over to the other side of the Thames in search of her dreams, offers her relief, though only temporary, from the restraints of her life as a good daughter of Sir Robert De Lesseps. The crossing of the Thames is symbolic in the movie, as the river divides the world of the rich De Lesseps household and the world of low playhouses. By crossing the wide river, the De Lesseps daughter escapes from the pressure she has in her house to experience a symbolic rebirth, though a short-lived one, into a free young man pursuing “his” dreams in a playhouse and following “his” heart’s desires.

The river that constitutes the wide gap between Viola and Will is, paradoxically, the location that allows the two of them to come together. When Will jumps into Thomas Kent’s boat to ask him about the letter he has received from Viola, he tells Thomas how much he admires Viola. This dramatic moment in the movie features Thomas changing emotionally back into Viola on her way back to the De Lesseps side of the river. Viola cannot resist her desire to know how much Will admires her. In the disguise of Thomas, she pretends that she has never seen Viola up close and she asks Will to describe his lady. After hearing Will’s poetic glorification of her own eyes, lips, breasts and voice, she is deeply moved. When Will declares that for one kiss of Viola, he would defy a thousand Wessexes, Viola can no longer hold her love for Will and she kisses him all of a sudden. Will is terribly shocked by this kiss from whom he assumed to be a man. When Viola jumps out of the boat and runs towards her own house, the shocked Will is informed by the boatman that the young man who has kissed him is a woman and that she is,

in fact, Viola De Lesseps. This dramatic river scene highlights the mysterious power of the river, which allows the two young persons to reveal the feelings in their hearts, and which allows Thomas to transform back to Viola at hearing Will's words of love. The river in *Shakespeare in Love* bears both malevolent and benevolent images.

In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, the shipwreck at the beginning of the play leaves the heroine relation-less in a remote land called Illyria. The sea that swallows the ship and its passengers bears a symbolic similarity to the river Viola De Lesseps crosses. It can be both malevolent and benevolent. Its initial image in the play is a malevolent one as it wrecks Viola's life. But it allows the heroine a brand new beginning to be free from all her old restraints. Viola can thus choose to present herself in whatever way she desires. She crossdresses as a man to get into men's company, where her wit and her poetic qualities are appreciated not just by men, but by women as well. The successfully crossdressed Viola is given the mission to woo Olivia, but she falls in love with Duke Orsino, who commands "her" to complete the mission. Shakespeare creates enormous dramatic fascination by playing up Viola's difficult situation when she finds herself in love with Orsino, who is unaware that the young man he is with is a woman, and when she has to face an Olivia madly in love with her. Everything turns up fine by the end when Viola's brother shows up to pair with Olivia, so Viola can then be married to Orsino, the man she loves. The sea that causes the shipwreck at the beginning, which then leads to Viola's crossdressing, is finally proven to be benevolent as it opens up the path to these two good matches. This sea is symbolically similar to the river in *Shakespeare in Love*, the crossing of which allows Viola to transform back and forth between her identity as Thomas Kent and Viola De Lesseps. Even though the crossdressed Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* isn't as lucky as the heroine in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, as her

existence as Thomas Kent is forced to end, her short-lived days in the playhouse are a worthy adventure because it proves that she has a talent for acting. Thomas Kent, her crossdressed identity, allows her to realize her dream.

An interesting question pops up when we put Woolf's imaginative Judith Shakespeare alongside the above discussed crossdressed women in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*: "Had Judith crossdressed as a man, would she be able to make it to the stage?" Naturally, one may dismiss this question as ludicrous. It is in fact a hypothetical question about a fictive character. In other words, this is heaping fiction upon fiction. Nevertheless, I would like to argue that this is not an impertinent question, but a thought provoking question that is still relevant to women in our own time—especially in academia.

Juliet Dusinberre writes in her Preface to the Second Edition of *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) about the academic pressures in her time on Shakespeare studies: "In the 1970s women were always subsumed into 'he'; the male pronoun was *common ground*" (Dusinberre's emphasis xii). In other words, it is not uncommon in academia then for a woman to present herself as an intellectual "he," and that is a kind of intellectual crossdressing, metaphorically speaking, in order to get by censorship. Even though in 1970s England there could no longer be a fat, loose-lipped manager who stopped women at the stage door, many women still felt sharply the domination of mainstream culture which had been largely in the hands of men and which continued to privilege men. Many aspects of culture, after all, still continue to disadvantage women. Dusinberre uses her own experience as an example to explain her pressure as a married woman with a baby in academia: "A baby makes a woman look like an amateur unless she can demonstrate that someone else is doing the domestic work. This is hardly ever said; but that it

remains true most professional women would not deny” (xiii). A man, on the contrary, does not need to worry that his fellows would doubt his professionalism simply because he has children. He can easily stand independent from his family. Even back in the Renaissance, Shakespeare, married at eighteen and with babies soon (or too soon—as generally believed) after that, made it to the stage in London anyway.

An ordinary woman in the Renaissance who didn't care for crossdressing would probably not be able to make it to the stage or anywhere else easily. Judith Shakespeare, as Woolf depicts, gets no access to the theater simply because she is a woman. Her talent, if she has any, is wasted. Viola De Lesseps in *Shakespeare in Love* must leave the stage once her real gender status is exposed. Luckily for her, as Thomas Kent she has already grasped the rare opportunity to prove her talent for acting. Only Viola who crossdresses in *Twelfth Night*, and the Viola in Fickman's modern adaptation of the play, venture very far beyond the social zone assigned to women and finally acquire what they really desire. The restrictive social pressure on women in the Renaissance is ironical with a female monarch, Queen Elizabeth, sitting on the English throne. Nevertheless, this female ruler, even though clad in pompous feminine dress, as many of her portraits manifest, had assumed the role of a male sovereign. The fact that she did not dare to venture into marriage though she did not lack suitors suggests that she had to put the interests of her country as her priority. Tradition has it that men in royal houses acquire their political interests and influence through matches with politically worthy families. Henry V, as depicted by Shakespeare's history play, legitimizes his conquest of France by marrying Princess Katherine of France. He forces the king of France to agree to name him as heir in the name of son (-in-law): “the king of France . . . shall name your highness in the form, and with this addition in French: Notre très cher filz Henry, Roy d'Angleterr,

Héritier de France” (*H5*, 5.2. 354-58). The play’s elaboration on the English king’s acquisition of inheritance right to the French throne through his French-Princess-wife’s agency provides some background information on what marriage might mean for a female sovereign or heir in the Renaissance. Marriage on the queen’s part will bring forth a husband, who will have influence upon the fate of the country. Determined to do her sovereign duties well, Queen Elizabeth had to forsake her opportunity to have a marriage. The Queen was in fact doing a job which was traditionally a man’s job.

In Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*, the old, wrinkled Queen Elizabeth apparently sympathizes with the crossdressed Viola De Lesseps. Instead of inflicting punishment on her, the Queen helps the young lady by announcing in public that Thomas Kent is a “he.” With the Queen’s words, Viola cannot be arrested by Mr. Tilney, the Master of the Revels, for having displayed herself on stage. The Queen addresses Viola as Master Kent and after looking at her, she declares, “Yes, the illusion is remarkable and your error, Mr. Tilney, is easily forgiven, but I know something of a woman in a man’s profession, yes, by God, I do know about that” (*Shakespeare in Love*). The movie’s portrayal of the old Queen’s temporary revelation of her sad feelings at this point arouses both our respect and sympathy. Not unlike Viola De Lesseps, who crossdresses as Master Kent in order to enjoy a profession exclusively for men in the Renaissance, the Queen’s role as the sovereign of England is a role played as a “political he,” which is, figuratively speaking, an alternative form of crossdressing, if not armoring, necessary for a woman’s survival in a dangerous political world. By putting the Queen’s words about “a woman in a man’s profession” alongside Dusiinberre’s words, “In the 1970s women were always subsumed into ‘he’; the male pronoun was *common* ground” (Dusiinberre’s emphasis xii), we perceive that women’s attempts to venture beyond roles and professions as traditionally prescribed have never been easy.

Tradition leaves strong imprints on culture.

Dusinberre vividly describes the burden of tradition when she was taking Shakespeare classes as a student. She felt the pressure of having to ask the right kind of questions, but she wanted to relate her own identity as a woman to what she was doing—"I wanted to ask those questions from my own particular perspectives, not from the impersonal ones which I had been trained to adopt" (xii). Obviously, the heavy load of Shakespeare studies done in the past, which has mainly been in the hands of male critics, has a huge influence on what can be conceptualized as the right kind of questions or issues in the academy. Alan Sinfield analyzes in an essay in *Political Shakespeare* that questions on Shakespeare in the General Certificate of Education, a secondary-level academic qualification examination in Britain, always lead students to conceptualize Shakespeare's plays in terms of mainstream interpretations. Such an analysis pinpoints that freedom of interpretation is, in fact, rather limited, as there are institutional and cultural forces that restrict it. All kinds of cultural practices, regardless of how insignificant they may seem, can affect our perspectives and understanding of Shakespeare's works. The truckloads of interpretations done by male Shakespeareans or male-centered Shakespeareans over the centuries have become a heavy burden and pressure for a woman attempting to reread Shakespeare in alternative perspectives that can be related to herself.

A brief review of criticism on Shakespeare's history plays can prove that wanting to ask questions from a woman's perspective requires courage. Tradition has it that these plays are about men's endeavors. It is obvious enough for many critics since the ten plays employ the names of English kings as their titles. The dominant critical approaches for these plays, especially before the 1970s, focused on the kings and on big issues such as theology. E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) is a good



example. It integrates the theological perspective and cultural background of Renaissance England to highlight the theme of providence in Shakespeare's works. Ernst Kantorowicz's *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957) is another outstanding masterpiece drawing attention to theological issues and the character of kings. Lily B. Campbell's *Shakespeare's "Histories:" Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (1947) argues that this group of plays, which sets forth the great political problem of the Elizabethan era, is meant to show a "moral universe" in which "the wages of sin is death" (307). In a similar fashion, G. Wilson Knight's *Shakespeare and Religion: Essays of Forty Years* (1986) looks into the Bard's Christian virtue. He argues in his essays that Shakespeare is a "Christian patriot" (235). These are just a few examples of traditional critical approaches out of truckloads of Shakespearean criticism stacked up in most established libraries with a history. There is no doubt that the large production of such criticism can intimidate a woman, who wants to relate the Bard's works to herself, just like Dusinberre, and who wishes to ask questions from a woman's perspective—questions which may seem irrelevant, inappropriate and insignificant. Jeanne Addison Roberts wisely observes that "probably all feminist critics, but indubitably all of a certain age, are hampered in their efforts by the immasculation ensured by readings of Shakespeare shaped by generations of male critics, male teachers, and patriarchal values" (14-15).

In the aforementioned *Shakespeare and Religion: Essays of Forty Years*, Knight states that "[m]y collection shows how I have been for forty years laboring to liberate the Ariel powers, the spirit-powers, of Shakesperian drama for our use" (8). "For whose use?"—is a question that we can readily ask today. However, this probably wouldn't have been so without the toil and sweat of predecessor feminist Shakespearean scholars. John Crawford, author of *The Learning, Wit, and Wisdom of Shakespeare's Renaissance Women*

(1997), writes that: “The intellectual freedom of women in modern Western society is the result of the slow growth of centuries” (17). The process is slow, I do agree. When one compares Dusiinberre’s description of the kind of intellectual pressure women were under in 1970s England with the English academic world marginalizing women, which Woolf depicts in *A Room of One’s Own*, her 1929 book, one would realize that even though more and more women had opportunities to have university education over the years, and even though women were granted suffrage in England in 1928, the overall intellectual atmosphere had improved very slowly for women. Obviously, a woman in Dusiinberre’s 1970s England still needed a room of “her” own, figuratively speaking, a room in which she could read and reread great literary works without having to bear great pressure from tradition, a room in which she could choose not to intellectually crossdress as a “he.” Crawford’s observation about the slow growth of intellectual freedom of women is thus rather correct. Nevertheless, Crawford’s use of the word “growth” is problematic. The word “growth” implies a natural process. The intellectual freedom of women is not acquired without sweat. Women over the centuries have been toiling against odds to make improvements possible.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is a solid example of such toils. The work is an appeal for a woman’s right to have education back in the eighteenth century—a right that the younger generation of our era has taken for granted. The book begins with Wollstonecraft’s letter to M. Telletrand-Perigord, a French diplomat who submitted a report on public education to the Constituent Assembly. Telletrand-Perigord’s report did not extend to women’s education. Wollstonecraft persuasively argues for the need to educate women: “Contending for the rights of woman, my main argument is built on this simple principle, that if she be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of

knowledge and virtue” (2). Wollstonecraft stresses by the end of her letter that her demand is “JUSTICE for one half of the human race” (Wollstonecraft’s stress 4). The lack of such justice is felt by Woolf even in her time. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf points out the sexist practices of academia which privilege men and disadvantage women. In her imaginative story of Judith Shakespeare, the young girl is not given a chance to have formal education. She has to learn reading and writing by herself in secret, but household chores often demand her attention and care. It is obvious that the kind of justice Wollstonecraft demands has not come without the toil and sweat of our predecessors.

By the same token, the new critical perspectives of our time, which allow, relatively speaking, more intellectual freedom for women, and which render it not inappropriate for feminist concerns to attract critical attention, have not come easily. As aforementioned, cultural practices over the centuries constitute huge influence and pressure. Feminist Shakespeare criticism has been finding new pathways by probing into theories from other schools and other fields, such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies. New ideas derived from deconstruction, postmodernism and postcolonial discourses that legitimize the right of minorities to utter alternative perspectives are useful resources. Moreover, the rather successful New Historicist and Cultural Materialist approaches, which highlight the political aspect of literature and culture, have become a source of inspiration.

Counter forces, nonetheless, are great. There are skeptical comments about the recent trend for literature scholars to politicize literature and to emphasize institutional power. Frank Lentricchia, for instance, remarks that such viewpoints are “paranoiac” (242). When feminist Shakespeareans first began their work back in the 1970s, the majority of their projects were devoted to the study of fictive female figures in Shakespeare’s works. Juliet

Dusinberre's book, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* is a good example. Nevertheless, studies of this kind can be attacked with the charge that they have virtually confused fictive women with real figures. Walter Cohen, for instance, points out the limitations of politically oriented approaches used by New Historicist and Feminist Shakespeareans in his article, "Political Criticism of Shakespeare." According to Cohen, "[i]n psychological feminism the analogous difficulty may lie in the relative indifference to the works of Cixous, Irigary, Kriesteva, and Lacan. . . . Whatever the relative merits of competing psychological paradigms, the absence of the French psychoanalytical tradition increases the danger of seeing Shakespeare's characters in unmediated fashion as real people" (24). In other words, Cohen finds feminist criticism unsatisfactory because of its lack of theoretical basis in the big tradition of psychoanalysis, proving to us that it is not really easy for feminist critics to borrow theoretical perspectives from other fields. They can readily be attacked for their lack of understanding of the whole big tradition.

After all, what Cohen calls "the danger of seeing Shakespeare's characters in unmediated fashion as real people" (24) isn't really as dangerous as not being aware of the fact that Shakespeare's characters can be transferred from the realms of aesthetics to the culturally real—with their potent impact. A well known historical incident back in the Renaissance about one of Shakespeare's plays can explain this viewpoint. After the staging of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Earl of Essex incited the people to revolt against Queen Elizabeth. It was believed that the Earl successfully related himself to the sympathetic image of the deposed king, Richard II, to incite the people. Queen Elizabeth was later reported to have said, "I am Richard II. know ye not that?" (Montrose, *Purpose* 79). Both the Earl and the Queen's attempts to appropriate the image of Richard II for their own purposes prove such a

fictive character on stage can be politically potent and may be used for contradictory political purposes. In view of the play's influence in the revolt incident and the nature of the play as a history play that is supposedly based on history, we can logically infer that the Shakespearean character under contention is a fictive creation that possesses political potency. Not unlike what Essex had done with Shakespeare's Richard II, the Queen's attempt was to identify herself with the dramatic representation of Richard II in order to acquire her people's support. It is an attempt to transfer the fictive in Shakespeare's play into a source of political power. In a nutshell, this incident manifests that the real and the fictive can interfuse. The influence of a stage character can transcend the bounds of the fictive into the politically real.

This viewpoint renders it not inappropriate to study Shakespeare's fictive characters, women or men, as if they are real people. It would be absurd to believe that many feminist Shakespeareans have mistakenly treated fictive women as real persons in an unmediated fashion. Shakespeare's plays, unlike fictions which claim they depict reality, often reveal the fictive nature of the plays themselves. The chorus Shakespeare employs in many plays, for instance, reminds the audience/reader of the fictive nature of the plays. The beginning of *Romeo and Juliet* exemplifies this: the chorus announces that the story about Romeo and Juliet "Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage/The which, if you with patient ears allow,/what here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend" (*R&J*, 1.1.12-14). It is absolutely impossible for any critic to overlook the obvious mediation of the stage, and thus, the fictive nature of the Bard's plays. It is, therefore, a misconception to say that feminist critics who study female characters with great enthusiasm are in any danger of, to use Cohen's words, "seeing Shakespeare's characters in unmediated fashion as real people" (24). If this appears so, it must be because their keen awareness of the potent influence of these characters on real people has prompted them

to study and analyze Shakespeare's characters with serious attitudes.

Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps explain how influential Shakespeare's fictive characters can be in real life: in countless nineteenth-century debates on the nature of women, "Shakespeare's women were often discussed alongside historical figures, with the fictional characters given equal weight and often even prominence over actual women" (4). It is my contention that this is not confusion but recognition of the diffusion of influence. Shakespeare does indeed have an influence on our conceptualization of women. In *Hamlet*, his depiction of a frail Ophelia who cannot bear the death of her father by the hands of her love is impressive. Ophelia's eventual drowning in water arouses our sympathy. Equally helpless is Gertrude when she confronts a demanding mad son and a calculating Claudius. Hamlet's words: "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (*Hamlet* 1.2.146) has become one of the most resonant quotes from Shakespeare. The Bard's iconic status as the national poet of England empowers the statement. This weak image of women can be influential in culture when it is repeatedly reproduced on stage, in movies and in classrooms. From a descriptive statement about a particular character in a single play, the statement has been seemingly transformed into, as a result of continuous reproductions, a description with universality that enters into our cultural repertoire. It can be readily picked up to define women. The defense for men who appropriate this line is: "It is from Shakespeare so it must be universally true."

Nevertheless, Shakespeare has also created many witty and powerful women in his plays that contradict with Hamlet's conceptualization of women as frail. The crossdressed Viola in the aforementioned *Twelfth Night* is a good example. Whereas Ophelia drowns in a river, she survives the fury of sea. Remarkably, by the end of the play after Viola's real gender status is revealed, Duke Orsino still addresses Viola, who is in man's attire, by the masculine

name she has invented for herself. He says, “Cesario, come;/For so you shall be while you are a man;/But when in other habits you are seen,/Orsino’s mistress, and his fancy’s queen” (*Twelfth Night* 5.1.384-87). Orsino’s words recognize Viola as a versatile woman capable of playing both man and woman. The makeup, breast binding, costume, and tutorial on male thoughts, manners, and body language by Viola’s male friend in Fickman’s *She’s the Man* render Viola’s successful crossdressing amazingly credible to the audience.

Even though Fickman’s modern Viola in *She’s the Man* proves herself as capable as male players on the soccer field, the movie echoes the unjust treatment of women not dissimilar to the old practice of stage exclusion of women that is elaborated in Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*. In *She’s the Man*, Viola crossdresses not for the sake of playing on stage, but for the sake of playing in men’s soccer games. She makes up her mind to crossdress after she is humiliated by her boyfriend and her coach, both of whom refuse to recognize her skill in soccer. In the movie, Illyria is changed from an isolated island in the original Shakespearean play to a high school in our era. The movie reproduces the romances of the original play. Duke Orsino, the leader of the Illyria soccer team, is in love with Olivia, a beauty at the school, who doesn’t care for him. The crossdressed Viola, who pretends to be her twin brother, Sebastian, becomes Duke Orsino’s roommate. At Duke’s request, she attempts to help him acquire Olivia’s love, but she falls in love with Duke. The movie captures the very spirit of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. It highlights Viola’s intimate relationship with Duke and her plight when she finds herself, crossdressed, unable to declare her love to Duke.

The modern background Fickman adopts converts Shakespeare’s age-old plot into a modern story, which appears not only plausible, but fascinatingly relevant to our own lives. We cannot help but feel inspired when we see Viola finally succeed in the game, proving herself as capable as male

soccer players. She beats her boyfriend and her old coach who have refused to recognize her ability. This feminist theme adds a new dimension to the original plot. The movie conveys a strong message: the weaker vessel, after all, isn't really that weak. But when she is entangled in a women's body and thus, in the social conceptualization of woman as the weaker sex, her talents would have no chance to be developed. The crossdressed Viola learns lots of skills from Duke. She wouldn't have any opportunity to learn such skills had she not crossdressed.

Although the movie allows Viola to succeed in her endeavor, it reveals that even in today's world, women are still plagued by sexual discrimination and social restraints. Viola strives against great pressures from a body of women of whom her mother is the representative. They expect her to dress and behave in socially acceptable ways—with ladylike manners. A kissing booth scene, which puts Olivia, the beauty at Illyria, at a booth in a charity fair to be kissed by men who make donations for charity, highlights women's status as objects of men's desire. The movie creates a comical yet gross image of both young and old men lining up outside of the booth waiting for their chances to kiss a beautiful lady. It is the expectation of society in general of women as soft, sweet and desirable that restricts Viola from asserting herself as a capable soccer player. Viola would have no cause to crossdress had women been equal to men in the movie.

After all the trouble Viola has gone through, her final success in the soccer game is inspiring. Both this modern Viola and the one in the original *Twelfth Night* are indeed opposites of the weak women in *Hamlet*. However, it seems that this brave versatile heroine, Viola, hasn't been as often reproduced as the frail Ophelia or Gertrude, resulting in Shakespeare's description of the frail women in *Hamlet* leaving stronger imprints in culture than that of a courageous heroine in his *Twelfth Night*. Reproductions of Shakespeare, thus



seen, significantly influence our understanding of Shakespeare.

The word “reproductions” signifies the existence of forces of mediation: criticism, reinterpretations in classrooms, in film and on stage. Stage productions in the past have been an important factor that leads to the neglect or marginalization of female characters in Shakespeare. According to Irene G. Dash, the “complexity” of Shakespeare’s women can be altered by the stage: “On the stage, lines are cut, scenes transposed, or in some cases, chunks of texts are added. The woman characters are then reduced to simpler dimensions, conforming to preconceived notions about women’s behavior” (18). With a similar argument, John Crawford states that “the stage had much to do with the negative attitude towards Shakespeare’s women, so it had much to do with the critical change in their favor” (366). In other words, we are under the influence of interpretations and reproductions which have guided, or even limited, our understanding of Shakespeare’s fictive creations. As Montrose informs us, “not only the poet but also the critic exist in history . . . the texts of each are inscriptions of history” (“Professing” 24). Traditional interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays, as Roberts pinpoints, are infused with “universal” values that are “axiomatically male values” (14). The Bard’s works can be used by critics to consolidate ideologies favoring men. Such axiomatically male interpretations should not be taken as authentically Shakespearean. They are simply reproductions by critics.

In *The Weyward Sisters: Shakespeare and Feminist Politics* (1994), Jyotsna Singh points out that new perspectives in recent decades have helped feminists to “recognize the power of systems of representation, which authorize certain kinds of knowledge, while repressing and marginalizing alien discourses and modes of knowledge” (7). By recognizing the power of systems of representation, by being aware of the cultural effect of reproductions, we can get a better picture of why certain aspects of

Shakespeare gain access more readily than others into our cultural repertoire. When a Chinese critic says that “Shakespeare has become a Chinese institution” (Zhang 175), he naturally instigates alarm for people who are aware of culture’s potent influence about which aspects of Shakespeare have been integrated into our culture. Whose representations, reinterpretations and reproductions of Shakespeare have we institutionalized? Critics in recent decades have ventured far to uncover possible alternative readings of Shakespeare’s plays. Many of them have successfully proven that the inherently multi-vocal nature of the Bard’s plays renders alternative readings not impossible. Rereading Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, for instance, by focusing on Caliban as a colonized subject abused by Prospero renders Shakespeare’s play rich in postcolonial consciousness. However, disagreement based on the reason of anachronism is loud, too. Undoubtedly, Shakespeare has become a site for interpretive contention. His cultural potency renders interpretations of his works significant in culture. It is thus important for those of us who are not content with the productions of interpretations disadvantaging women, such as those that help to make Hamlet’s conceptualization of woman as frail look like a universal truth, to produce alternative reinterpretations. In a nutshell, to get away from the domination of traditional interpretations marginalizing women, feminist Shakespeareans have to engage themselves in reinterpretations and reproductions.

Compared to the heavy load of traditional Shakespeare criticism, the new voices in this century from feminist critics are still relatively weak. Nevertheless, our awareness about the influence of culture manifests that since women have been discursively shaped, they can be discursively reshaped. Peter Erickson offers a soothing viewpoint when he declares that rewriting the Renaissance or rewriting Shakespeare is the rewriting of

ourselves (3). Montrose suggests that even in seemingly apolitical works there exists a cultural power that can be politically useful (“Eliza” 112). In a similar fashion, Roberts claims that “we are in the process of trying to reimagine Shakespeare even as we work at the larger enterprises of rewriting the Renaissance, reshaping family life, and restructuring political and economic realities (15). Such notions tell us that it is not impossible for us to reshape women’s image and position in society through cultural practices. As aforementioned, back in Renaissance England, the Earl of Essex and Queen Elizabeth’s contention to identify themselves with the sympathetic Richard II in Shakespeare’s play already manifested that Shakespeare’s cultural potency can be appropriated for contradictory purposes—to incite rebellion and to calm dissidents. The anecdote can be considered enlightening for feminist Shakespeareans: How do we appropriate Shakespeare for our own use?

In the films discussed above, we see adaptations and reinventions of Shakespeare with new images and new focuses, which can inspire new interpretations. When we put the plight of Luhrmann’s Juliet and Madden’s Viola alongside each other, we realize that the two heroines draw attention to the pressure women can be under as dutiful daughters. The paper has discussed these two women together with Woolf’s Judith Shakespeare to show that when it comes to marriage arrangement, the duty of an obedient daughter can be suffocating. The paper has also called attention to the restrictive social expectations of women in Fickman’s *She’s the Man*. Moreover, by contrasting the development of Fickman’s Viola to the loss of Judith Shakespeare’s talent, the paper stresses that Viola would not have access to a new vista had she not crossdressed. Crossdressing, which allows gender-boundary crossing for the Violas in Shakespeare’s original *Twelfth Night*, Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love*, and Fickman’s *She’s the Man*, becomes a source of empowerment that offers the heroines more freedom from restrictive social values to venture beyond

women's prescribed spaces. However, crossdressing isn't an easy task. It is, in fact, difficult for women to venture into professions and arenas traditionally prescribed for men. Madden's depiction of the Queen's temporary revelation of her sorrow as a woman in a man's profession is impressive. Dusinger's description about women in academia being subsumed into "he" is indicative of the limited freedom and opportunity for women even in 1970s England. By highlighting women's predicaments in these Shakespeare-related cinematic productions, and by relating them to Dusinger's description of her own difficult situation, and to the pressure on feminist Shakespeareans in academia from the heavy load of male-centered criticism, the paper argues for the need to reaffirm women's talents—in the fashion Woolf proposes, by not ignoring the fact that women have been given less opportunity than men throughout the ages. The paper also proposes that the reconceptualization of gender boundary, as the crossdressed heroines in the movies suggest, with more fluidity is beneficial to the development of women's talents. The success of Madden's Viola on stage and the triumph of Fickman's Viola in men's soccer games both affirm women's talents. These modern Shakespeare-related works are inspiring reproductions which can affect our conceptualization of Shakespeare and of ourselves.

Let me conclude by getting back to the fictive question which has initiated our discussion: Would Judith Shakespeare make it to the stage had she crossdressed like Viola in *Twelfth Night*? This hypothetical question about a fictive character, as aforementioned, should not be dismissed as a ludicrous question that heaps fiction upon fiction. After our discussion about women's predicaments, the question justifies itself as a thought provoking question that is still relevant to women in our own time.

Allow me to suggest an answer to the question by pulling in what seems to many people an unconvincing supposition. The new candidate in 2004 for

Shakespeare authorship, as presented by Robin Williams, is Mary Sidney, sister to Sir Phillip Sidney. Though this is, as all other candidates are, speculative, the claim for a female candidate against all the other earlier male candidates is indeed a difference that is inspiring, especially for women who seek not to be subsumed into a “he” in academia.

Now my answer to the question is: yes, she might, and perhaps she had.

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# 女扮男裝的朱蒂絲·莎士比亞？—— 重省三部莎翁電影中 所呈現之女性困境

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## 摘 要

本文藉由維吉尼亞·吳爾夫 (Virginia Woolf) 所杜撰的朱蒂絲·莎士比亞 (Judith Shakespeare) 之故事情節為起點，進而提出「如果這位莎士比亞的妹妹改以女扮男裝的姿態出現在劇院門口，其是否會在劇場成名」的這樣一個問題，來探討當代三部與莎翁有關的電影——巴茲·魯爾曼 (Baz Luhrmann) 的《羅密歐與朱麗葉》(William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*)、安迪·費克曼 (Andy Fickman) 的《足球尤物》(*She's the Man*)，以及約翰·麥登 (John Madden) 的《莎翁情史》(*Shakespeare in Love*)，旨在分析電影中所呈現的女性角色如何因性別的因素而導致其遭遇各種困境。

本文將這三部電影與朱麗葉·狄森伯 (Juliet Dusinberre) 形容的「將女人歸屬於男性」的學術界景象以及其對於主流批評所產生的焦慮相連結。本文嘗試突顯莎翁所具有之文化力量以及其與女性主義莎學批評間之相關性。

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**關鍵詞：**莎士比亞、女扮男裝、女性、朱蒂絲·莎士比亞、維吉尼亞·吳爾夫、朱麗葉·狄森伯、羅密歐與朱麗葉、足球尤物、莎翁情史