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Sara Ben-David  
*Seton Hall University*

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Peace-weavers and the Soldiers Who Court Them:  
The Sexual Development of Women in Shakespeare's Plays

Sara Ben-David

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Department of English,  
Seton Hall University

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## Abstract

This paper moves beyond current psychoanalytic readings of the women in Shakespeare's plays as either Mother or Other to consider instead the extent to which their sexual development from girlhood into womanhood rehearses what Jacques Lacan describes as man's progression out of the Mirror Stage, through the acquisition of language and the recognition of sexual difference, and into a unified subjectivity. The author argues that Shakespeare's own understanding of sexual difference is predicated, in the case of femininity, upon the model of the feminine peace-weaver which he would have found in Greek mythology, particularly in Ovid's *Heroides*. It is with the idea of peace in mind that the author selects three of Shakespeare's most violent plays, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Henry V* for her study in this regard. The author then traces the sexual development of Kate, Juliet, and Catherine as they move from the houses of their fathers to the homes of their husbands— a move which effectively ends their dependency on their fathers and leads to their assertion of an independent selfhood in marriage. Their acquisition of language shortly after marriage introduces them, she argues, to a world of masculine violence predicated upon the much-disputed possession of the phallus. The author concludes by arguing that these women reject the existence of such a transcendental signifier in order to embrace a more pluralistic understanding of language which becomes, in the end, their greatest asset as diplomatic peace-weavers.

Although the performance of a masculine sexuality has been an acknowledged and documented difficulty in western civilization since the classical period, there is much to suggest that the pressure to perform was particularly intense during the Renaissance. As Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin note, the rise of a capitalist society during the Renaissance led to an increase in social mobility and to the steady elevation of performance over birthright (187). As a consequence, men were obliged not only to make their own fortunes, but also to prove or perform their masculinity, continuously, aggressively, and often violently. It has been argued that such endeavors toward masculine glory, enacted in Shakespeare's plays, keep women, and the feminization they represent, at a distance. Just how far at a distance Shakespeare kept women, however, has yet to be explored in any detail. Although Shakespeare's women are not usually onstage during such phallic brawls, I would caution that their physical absence should not be taken too literally—that is, women do not stand merely for absence (of the phallus). Their roles are predicated, I propose, on the far more positively defined role of the peace-weaver.

Before I explain the origins of the term “peace-weaver,” and before I expound upon my own approach to Shakespeare's plays in this regard, I wish to further clarify my position in relation to the research that has already been done on phallogentrism and women in Shakespeare. Psychoanalytic research on this topic has generally fallen into one of two camps: the first argues that women function as the Other, whom men must seek to control in order to prove their masculinity, while the second group contends that women represent the Mother, against whom men must fight. As members of the first group, for example, Howard and Rackin argue in their aforementioned book *Engendering*

*a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* that, “plays like *Richard III* and *Richard II* ... included roles for women as the objects of sexual conquest and matrimonial possession that provide the final proof of the hero's manhood” (187). Similarly, in her article on Catherine in *Henry V*, Marilyn L. Williamson argues that, “Henry's manner with Katherine is consonant with Shakespeare's total portrait of him and brings to completion tendencies which develop earlier in *Henry V*” (327). For Williamson, Catherine's character merely reflects that of Henry. One of the more recent studies in this vein is Jonathan Goldberg's “Romeo and Juliet's *Open Rs*” which argues that women in that play are purely functional: “The idealization of the lovers, to be brief, serves an ideological function. The marriage of their corpses in the eternal monuments of ‘pure gold’ attempts to perform what marriage normally aims at in comedy: to provide the bedrock of the social order. Or, to speak somewhat more exactly, the heterosexual order” (219). According to Goldberg's assessment, the speed with which Romeo is able to substitute the inaccessible Rosaline with Juliet as the object of his affections ought to deconstruct any notion of true love in favor of what he sees as the play's more pragmatic treatment of marriage as a way to foster homosocial relations among fathers, sons, and other men joined, through women, in marriage.

In the opposing camp are critics like Janet Adelman who, in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays*, argues that the men in Shakespeare's plays “from *Hamlet* to *The Tempest*” regard the maternal, feminine body as a threat to their development of a masculine selfhood. In this same vein, Katherine Eggert argues that in *Henry V* the Prologue's constant references to the womb-like and insufficient theater space represent only one of many instances in which, “the play's

action, language, and imagery are equally bent on purging England and the English of all that is feminine” (123). Valerie Traub adapts this approach with still more radical results to argue, in her article “Prince Hal’s Falstaff: Positioning Psychoanalysis and the Female Reproductive Body,” that Hal’s rejection of Falstaff, with his round belly and tendency for overindulgence, rehearses a similar rejection of the maternal, feminine body.

Although Shakespeare, we may be sure, lived in a phallogentric culture which privileged masculinity, I remain somewhat unconvinced that, because of this, we must limit our analysis of Shakespeare’s women to their roles as either Other or Mother. I wish to propose instead that the bard’s own attentions were undoubtedly split, as they are in his sonnets, between masculinity and femininity. I would, in this way, echo Ann Blake’s words of warning when she cautions against “moving between historical records and literary narratives as if between equivalents” (244). I do not, in this way, think it would be too far outside Shakespeare’s purview to offer a portrait of feminine sexuality (in relation to a masculine sexuality) that is just as complete as the one he presents of a masculine sexuality (in relation to a feminine sexuality). More specifically, I wish to argue that while Shakespeare’s men develop their masculinity through violent, phallic brawls, women are likewise engaged in a sexual development of their own – one which treats masculinity as the Other who must be controlled and as the Father who must be escaped.

To this end, I must firstly return to the discussion of the peace-weaver with which I began the present study. The term “peace-weaver” or “freoðwebbe” is used in *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon texts to describe the intermediary position a woman occupied if she were given in marriage to the member of a warring tribe. Such a role was, as David

Damrosch and the other editors of the *Longman Anthology of British Literature* note, “fraught with danger, for if a truce were broken between warring groups, the woman would face tragically conflicting loyalties to husband and male kin“ (8). If a woman were afforded any degree of diplomatic freedom, therefore, it was in her, as well as her tribes’ best interests to do as this title suggests and “weave“ peace. An even earlier reference to peace, as something to be “woven,” may lie in Greek mythology in the personalities of the three Fates who controlled destiny by spinning the thread of life (which, if cut, resulted in death)– a myth that we know Shakespeare would have known from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which he read in both its original Latin and Arthur Golding’s translation (Bate xliv).<sup>1</sup> According to Jonathan Bate, Ovid’s stories were particularly useful to Shakespeare in his characterization of women: “In particular, he found in Ovid a great store of examples of female feeling – something that was notably lacking in many of his other models, such as the plays of Marlowe and the history books of Plutarch and Holinshed“ (xlv). If Shakespeare did indeed turn to Greek mythology to develop more genuinely feminine characters, then perhaps the figure of the female “peace-weaver” was one of the figures he considered in this regard. Although Penelope – whom, I would argue is western civilization’s first “peace-weaver“ – receives only a brief mention in Book XIII of Golding’s translation, it is very likely that Shakespeare knew her story from her letter to Odysseus (Letter I) in Ovid’s earlier work *Heroides*. *Heroides* was, as Bate notes, a popular text in Renaissance schools, one which students were encouraged to

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare actually makes a reference to the three Fates and their thread of life in the following lines from the Pyramus and Thisbe scene in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

Thy mantle good,  
 What, stained with blood?  
 Approach, ye furies fell.  
 O fates, come, come,  
 Cut thread and thrum,  
 Quail, crush, conclude, and quell. (V.i.271-276)



imitate in a common exercise that obliged them to “write a letter in the style of X or from the point of view of someone who has suffered Y” (xli). While writing his plays, Shakespeare may have remembered such an exercise not only as his “first steps in the art of dramatic impersonation” but also as his first experience with the precarious position of the female peace-weaver in times of war and masculine conflict (xli). It is on these grounds which I wish to argue that Shakespeare constructed the sexual development of his female characters with the model of the “peace-weaver” in mind. It is a model which, I would add, he employed in each of the genres in which he wrote, comedy, tragedy, and history, and which will, in the present study be represented by *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Henry V*.

The way in which Kate, Juliet, and Catherine arrive at such a sexual awakening is perhaps best illuminated alongside Jacques Lacan’s description of the Mirror Stage and the signification of the phallus. What Lacan calls the Mirror Stage is the moment when each of us recognizes that we contain the potential to be a unified self independent of our parents. To explain this stage, Lacan employs the metaphor of the mirror, in which the child looks in a mirror and glimpses an image of himself as this unified being for the first time. “We have only to understand the mirror stage,” Lacan explains, “as an *identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to that term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image” (2). Since the child is, however, still “sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence,” he quickly learns that the ideal image of the Mirror (alternatively referred to by Lacan as the *imago* or “ideal I”) contrasts sharply with the fragmented, dependent existence that he has experienced thus far in his parents’ care. From the apparent difference between these

dependent and potentially independent selves, a split occurs in the child's subjectivity, one which, I argue, is mirrored (pun intended) in Shakespeare's women as they attempt to mediate between the dependent life they knew in their father's house and the life they may anticipate in their husband's home. For Lacan, as is the case (I think) with Shakespeare's women, this split remains largely unresolved until the child acquires language, which "restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (2). The acquisition of language signals the end of the Mirror Stage at the same time that it introduces the phallus and sexual differentiation. The phallus, as the transcendental signifier upon which all other signifiers must depend for meaning, represents a power which both boys and girls seek but which neither will ultimately possess. According to Lacan, little boys will seek to prove they have the phallus (often through violence and aggression); while little girls, who must acknowledge their castration, will seek access to it (first through the Father and later through other men).

Although Lacan's theories have proved useful in critical analyses of men,<sup>2</sup> it must be noted that, for studies of women, the present one on femininity and peace-weaving included, a brief note on feminist revisions of Lacan is also necessary. Feminist scholars have, for example, taken particular umbrage with Lacan's assessment of women as castrated beings who are obliged to mourn the loss of the phallus and to seek access to it through a man. In this vein, Hélène Cixous argues that "woman... does not mourn, does not resign herself to loss [of the phallus]. She basically *takes up the challenge of loss* in order to go on living: she lives it, gives it life, is capable of unsparing loss" (54). A feminine understanding of language would not, in other words, concern itself with the

<sup>2</sup> Robert Appelbaum's "Standing to the Wall": The Pressures of Masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet* is a good example.

logocentric phallus but would seek, rather, to pose “plurality against unity; multitudes of meanings against single, fixed meanings; diffuseness against instrumentality; openness against closure“ (Kuhn 38). To return to the topic at hand, however: it seems to me that the very qualities which these feminists cite as indicative of a feminine language are also those of a good peace-weaver. While men go to war over the phallus, is it any wonder that women (armed with flexibility, plurality, and openness) are often the ones who step in to make the peace? This does not, in any case, seem to be a fact of nature<sup>3</sup> which has escaped Shakespeare’s attention.

To begin, I would point out that Kate’s anger, at the beginning of *The Taming of the Shrew*, stems not from some desire to perform a phallus but, rather, from her own frustrations with the Mirror Stage. Like the child in front of the mirror, Kate can only glimpse the unified self which lies somewhere beyond her father and her dependency on him. Kate describes her discontent, for example, in just such terms when she blames her father, in Act II Scene i, for the role she must play at her younger sister Bianca’s wedding: “I must dance barefoot on her wedding day./ And for your love to her lead apes in hell” (II.i.33-34).<sup>4</sup> We see, in other words, that Kate’s subjectivity is split from the start between the uncertainty of her role as the older, married sister (a role which is determined by her father and for which she can feel nothing but utter disgust) and her potential role as a bride (one which remains, like the image of the mirror, just outside of her reach).

All of this changes, of course, when Kate meets her suitor Petruccio – a man who, we may be sure, far exceeds Kate in terms of sexual maturity. Shortly after Petruccio

<sup>3</sup> Whether or not this is a “fact of nature” remains, of course, a subject of debate among social scientists. See, for example, the following article by Francis Fukuyama: “Women and the Evolution of Politics.” *Foreign Affairs* 77.5 (1998): 24-40.

<sup>4</sup> This and all other references to Shakespeare’s plays are based on the 1997 *Norton Shakespeare* edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.

arrives at Hortensio's house in Act I Scene ii, we learn, for example, that Antonio, Petruccio's father, has recently died and left Petruccio free to follow, "such winds as scatters young men throughout the world/ To seek their fortunes father than at home" (I.ii.47-48). For his own part, Petruccio declares, "I have thrust myself into this maze/ Happily to wive and thrive as best I may./ Crowns in my purse I have, and goods at home" (I.ii.52-54). Petruccio has, in any case, clearly progressed beyond that prolonged dependency on one's parent(s) with which Kate is presently grappling and which, Lacan tells us, characterizes our experience of the Mirror Stage. It is this very unity of self which, we may be sure, accounts for the obvious comfort and self-confidence that Petruccio is able to assert when he boasts that, any woman, "As old as Sibyl, and as curst and shrewd/ As Socrates' Xanthippe or a worse,/ She moves me not" (I.ii.67-69). Since his subjectivity is unified, the integrity of Petruccio's selfhood remains impregnable not only to the threat of an external "me" but also, as he proves in Act III Scene ii, to any change (no matter how drastic) in his attire. In this scene, Petruccio arrives at his wedding dressed in what can only be described as the most unseemly of ensembles: "a new hat and an old jerkin, a pair of old breeches thrice-turned, a pair of boots that have been candle-cases, one buckled, another laced, an old rusty sword ta'en out of the town armoury with a broken hilt, and shapeless, with two broken points" while riding on a horse that is equally ill-dressed for the occasion (III.ii.41-45). Like the play's one acknowledged audience member, Christopher Sly, Petruccio is dressed in a manner unbefitting a man of his social status (although for the drunken misfit Sly, outfitted in the clothes of a gentleman, the situation is reversed). Baptista, for example, expresses his particular concern with the socioeconomic implications of Petruccio's outfit when he

exclaims, “Fie, doff this habit, shame to your estate” (III.ii.93). Tranio, although himself a man in disguise, expresses a likeminded concern when he petitions Petruccio, “what occasion of import,/ Hath all so long detained you from your wife/ And sent you hither so unlike yourself?” (III.ii.95-97). Although Petruccio offers little explanation in this regard, his affirmation to marry Kate “even thus” because “To me she’s married, not unto my clothes” both confirms the unity of Petruccio’s self at the same time that it sends a clear message to Kate about the extent to which appearances may contrast with one’s innermost nature (III.ii.109, 110).

We may thus, in retrospect, begin to take Petruccio more seriously in his initial protestations that he finds Kate as “sweet as springtime flowers” (II.i.239) and, later, that he considers himself married to “this most patient, sweet, and virtuous wife” (III.iii.68). For Petruccio, Kate possesses all these qualities (if only, for the moment, deep down). Petruccio may as well have been talking about Kate, for example, when he argues during a similar speech about the persistence of the self, “For ‘tis the mind that makes the body rich,/ And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds,/ So honour peereth in the meanest habit” (IV.iii.166-168). Perhaps Petruccio recognized that Kate—however much she may have appeared as mean as the “meanest habit” and as foreboding as the “darkest clouds”— nevertheless contained the potential in her mind, the innermost depths of her being, to be the “sun” which ultimately gives way to “honour” (IV.iii.166-168).

It is, for this reason, that the threat Kate makes, in Act II Scene i, to reveal Petruccio’s true nature by holding a “glass” or mirror up to his face is, in fact, so ironic — that is, because it is Petruccio who will, in the end, hold the mirror for Kate. Petruccio mirrors, for example, the outlandishness of Kate’s earlier countenance not only

(metaphorically) through his clothes but also (literally) through his behavior during the actual wedding ceremony itself. As Gremio recounts the details of this episode to Tranio, the latter can hardly suspend his disbelief that Petruccio, or any man for that matter, could be “curster than she” (III.iii.27) – an assessment which Petruccio’s servant Curtis echoes when he hears about the couple’s ride home: “By this reckoning he is more shrew than she” (IV.i.71). In this latter scene, Grumio explains: “her horse fell and she under her horse; thou shouldst have heard in how miry a place, how she was bemoiled, how he left her with the horse upon her, how he beat me because her horse stumbled, how she waded through the dirt to pluck him off me” (IV.i.62-66). While Petruccio occupies the role of the violent aggressor, Kate is, for the first time in her life, left to fend for herself – a freedom which she uses to save Grumio from the savage beating he is receiving from Petruccio. The way Kate steps in between Petruccio and Grumio to end their quarrel suggests that Kate, now estranged from her father, has independently developed a unified sense of self, one that differentiates her from a world of masculine violence as a feminine peace-weaver.

The scene with Grumio is, moreover, not the only one in which we see Kate’s peace-weaving nature come to the surface. After verbally abusing his servants for not meeting him at the door, “You logger-headed and unpolished grooms!” (IV.i.106), Petruccio then strikes one of his servants as the latter attempts to untie Petruccio’s shoes: “Out, you rogue, you pluck my foot awry./ Take that, and mend the plucking of the other” (IV.v.128-129). The untying of Petruccio’s shoes and his violent attack on a blameless servant seem markedly reminiscent of Kate’s brutal treatment and binding of her sister Bianca in Act II Scene i. As was the case in the horse accident, however, the

role Kate chooses to play in this scene has apparently shifted from that of the aggressor to the peace-weaver whose first instinct is to reason with her husband rather than to add to his violence, “Patience, I pray you, ‘twas a fault unwilling” (IV.i.136). In a related incident, Kate chooses once again to weave peace when Petruccio throws what he claims is overcooked meat at his servants: “I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet./ The meat was well, if you were so contented“ (IV.i.149-150). Although, unlike the horse accident, Petruccio clarifies in an aside to the audience that his actions in this regard have been carefully orchestrated, we find that his plans have not “tamed“ Kate so much as they have independently awakened the peace-weaver within her. On the night she moves from the house of her father to the home of her husband, Petruccio’s servant Curtis, for example, describes Kate as “one new risen from a dream“ (IV.i.167).

As is the case in Lacan’s Mirror Stage, Kate’s sexual awakening occurs almost concurrently with her acquisition of language. Although her command of language before she meets Petruccio is undeniable, it is important to note that, for all her wit and tact when dealing with Hortensio and Gremio, Kate is nevertheless unable to communicate with her sister, the only woman with whom she has any contact. When Kate asks Bianca “Of all thy suitors here I charge thee tell/ Whom thou lov’st best” (II.i.8-9), she seems unable to interpret Bianca’s response, “Believe me, sister, of all the men alive/ I never yet beheld that special face/ Which I could fancy more than any other” (II.i.10-12) as anything but a lie. We see, however, that Kate’s linguistic rigidity is modified shortly after her marriage to Petruccio when, in Act IV Scene vi, she agrees to call the sun “the moon” and vice versa, depending upon the whimsy of her husband (IV.vi.2-8). Although Kate does ultimately give in to Petruccio’s demands, the lesson she learns here is perhaps

not the one Petruccio has in mind. John C. Bean has, like many scholars, for example, moved beyond traditional interpretations of this scene as an instance of Petruccio's "taming" of Kate and toward a consideration of the inner changes at work in Kate's own character. I would, for this reason, echo the analysis Bean offers when he posits that Kate is struck here, "by the discovery of her own imagination, for when she learns to recognize the sun for the moon and the moon for the dazzling sun she is discovering the liberating power of laughter and play" (72). At the same time, however, I would point out that Bean's argument, and those like it, remain stuck in the very type of analysis he seeks to challenge when he claims that it is Petruccio who acts as master and introduces Kate to this potential for linguistic play, since it is Petruccio who, in fact, remains linguistically rigid. What Petruccio teaches Kate is, after all, that he, as the son, controls *the* sun – that is, that he possesses the phallus, the transcendental signifier upon which all other signifiers must depend for meaning. It is Kate, meanwhile, who points out the slippage between signifiers which inevitably follows from Petruccio's logic when she responds, "Then God be blessèd, it is the blessèd sun,/ But sun it is not when you say it is not,/ And the moon changes even as your mind"(IV.vi.19-21). The fact that Kate can recognize this slippage when Petruccio cannot emphasizes, once again, the association between her husband and the sun, and between herself and the moon, which we know from *Romeo and Juliet* is "th'inconstant moon" (II.i.151). This binary is, we find, doubly appropriate for their characters when we consider the gender implications of these celestial bodies in Greek mythology, which link the sun with masculinity and the god Apollo and the moon with femininity and Apollo's twin sister Artemis.<sup>5</sup> The moon, linking linguistic plurality

<sup>5</sup> On a related note, I would also point out that marriage was understood during the Renaissance as a hermaphroditic joining of man and woman, one which is featured in at least one emblem from this period



and openness with femininity, therefore, seems indeed like the perfect symbol for the peace-weaving Kate.

We see Kate return once more, for example, to this issue of peace and femininity in her final and most famous speech. “I am ashamed,” she declares, “that women are so simple/ To offer war where they should kneel for peace,/ Or seek for rule, supremacy, and sway” (v.ii.165-167). Although the position of kneeling often suggests subservience for many scholars, there are several details in the body of Kate’s extensive argument which suggest that kneeling for peace is an honorable deed akin to that of a knight and a “duty,” which “as the subject owes the prince” (v.ii.159). While soldiers like Petruccio – who, we may recall, has “heard great ordnance in the field,/ And heaven’s artillery thunder in the skies” (i.ii.198-199)– serve the state in battle, peace-weavers like Kate have a political role of their own to play, one that Kate herself argues is particularly well-suited to the feminine body which is “soft, and weak, and smooth,/ Unapt to toil and trouble in the world” (v.ii.169-170). Moreover, the idea that women are “soft,” as opposed to masculine and rigid, once more invokes the particular flexibility with language which seems to make women such effective peace-weavers. Speaking from a position of experience, Kate declares that she once wished, “To bandy word for word and frown for frown;/ But now I see our lances are but straws,” (v.ii.174-177). While recalling the importance that words and signifiers once held for her, Kate cries out to the other women onstage to hear her story and to abandon, as she has, the phallic lance and to

as the joining of a masculine sun and feminine moon.

For more on the topic of hermaphroditism in Shakespeare, please see the following article by Jeanne Addison Roberts: “Horses and Hermaphrodites: Metamorphoses in *The Taming of the Shrew*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 34.2 (1983): 159-171.

recognize that the transcendental signifier which men claim as their right to power is, in fact, as weak as a straw.

With Kate securely positioned in the role of feminine peace-weaver (opposite the masculine soldier), the play concludes, in the grand comedic tradition, on a happy note. Balance is restored and all is, in effect, set right in the end. However, if the persistence of masculine conflict throughout history tells us anything, it's that the role of the peace-weaver is a precarious one at best and that her campaign is not always so successful— a fact for which Shakespeare accounts in his tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Although the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*, like the comedy of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is principally derived from the violence of men (we are, in the latter, laughing at Petruccio more than we are at Kate), it is the sexual development of women which lies at the heart of both of these plays. Both *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet* begin, for example, with young ladies who are only just entering the Mirror Stage but who will, by the end of both plays, have reached sexual maturity. While for Kate, this sexual awakening seems long overdue, it comes, for Juliet, a bit earlier than one would expect. We know, for example, that Juliet is a full two years younger in the play than she is in Shakespeare's primary source, Arthur Brooke's narrative poem *The Tragical Historye of Romeo and Juliet* (1562) and four years younger than she is in Matteo Bandello's novella *Giuletta e Romeo* (1554) (on which Brooke's poem was based and which, we think, Shakespeare may also have read). Juliet's extraordinarily young age, an age at which "too soon marred are those so early made," seems, in any case, to have been Shakespeare's intention— one which contributes significantly to Juliet's development as a peace-weaver (II.i.13).

Before Juliet can claim her role as a peace-weaver and reach sexual maturity, however, she must first learn to recognize herself as a unified being independent of her parents. For Juliet, this moment comes in Act I Scene iii when her mother broaches the topic of marriage by comparing Juliet, firstly, to the other “ladies of esteem” in Verona who “are made already mothers” and, secondly, to Lady Capulet herself, who was already married and had given birth to Juliet in the time that Juliet is yet “a maid” (I.iii.73, 75). We find, in this way, that Lady Capulet, who is given more lines in this scene than in any other scene in the play, performs a very critical role in her daughter’s sexual development by effectively holding a mirror up to Juliet in much the same way that Petruccio, by playing the shrew, holds a “glass“ up to Kate. She, in the same breath, introduces Juliet to her potential for subjectivity in the way she syntactically implies that “valiant Paris” is seeking “you [Juliet]” directly. Although we know, of course, that this is not, in fact, the case and that Paris is seeking Juliet’s hand in marriage through her father, Lady Capulet’s reference to Juliet as capable of eliciting the attentions of a third party remains a point that is nevertheless worth noting because it implies, at the very least, a future selfhood independent of her parents (II.i.76).

From the story that the Nurse tells earlier in this scene, we find that this is, in fact, not the first time Juliet has grappled with the idea of selfhood or sexuality:

...Nay, by th’ rood,  
 She could have run and waddled all about,  
 For even the day before, she broke her brow,  
 And then my husband – God be with his soul,  
 A was a merry man! – took up the child.

‘Yea,’ quoth he, ‘dost thou fall upon thy face?’

Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,

Wilt thou, Jule?<sup>7</sup> And, by my halidom,

The pretty wretch left crying and said ‘Ay.’ (I.iii.38-46)

Although Lady Capulet bids the Nurse to cease her storytelling and to remain focused on the matter at hand (Juliet’s marriage), the Nurse persists in referring to this story three more times before the scene is over (I.iii.50, 52-53, 56-59). Like many of the moments where Shakespeare bids us laugh, however, the Nurse’s comedic and persistent retelling of this episode gives us cause for further examination. In his article on gender and patriarchy in *Romeo and Juliet*, Thomas Moisan suggests that this story is quite telling indeed: “With the aural association of ‘Ay’ and ‘I’ intoned in the Nurse’s monologue, an association to which Juliet is not insensitive, the scene builds the suggestion that within the patriarchal world of Verona women define themselves, their ‘I,’ in the very voicing by which they assent to their sexual role” (193). If Juliet’s “Ay” really does, as Moisan suggests, represent an attempt at subjectivity (her “I”), one which is infinitely bound up in her sexual role (“falling into line with an arranged marriage”), then it is clearly a role for which crying Juliet is not yet fully prepared.

We may, in light of this, interpret Juliet’s ambivalent response to the news of Paris’s proposal as her attempt to remain steady and not risk falling again: “I’ll look to like, if looking liking move;/ But no more deep will I endart mine eye/ Than your consent gives strength to make it fly” (I.iii.99-101). Juliet seems, in other words, perfectly situated in the Mirror Stage: perpetually suspended between a self which depends upon her mother’s consent and one which would, if she were the unified self of her ideal “I,”

allow her to more definitively express her indifference to Paris's advances. Like the child, who sits gazing at the unified self he sees on the other side of the mirror, Juliet can only "look to like;" she cannot yet *like* (or *dislike*) for herself.

The fact that Juliet cannot yet communicate her own content or discontent has, of course, a lot to do with language and sexual maturity – the two things which, Lacan tells us, lie beyond the Mirror Stage. It seems fitting, in this way, that Lady Capulet should describe Paris as a "volume" or "precious book of love" where Juliet will "find delight writ there with beauty's pen" (I.iii.83, 89, 84). This early introduction of the phallic pen aside, there are some interesting connections to be made between this initial introduction to language and what I would like to call the "language-learning scene" of Act I Scene v – by the end of which Juliet will have a sufficient enough command of language and sexuality to "kiss by th' book" (I.v.108).

In this first exchange between the lovers, Romeo takes the role of a pilgrim or, rather, his "lips, two blushing pilgrims" while Juliet assumes that of the saint (the subject of her pilgrim's devotion) (I.v.92). As Romeo begins to bend language to suit his pleasure, Juliet reveals that she is, at least at first, far more rigid in her understanding of language and of their respective roles. Juliet tells Romeo, for example, that he is "wrong" to suppose that a pilgrim would show his devotion to a saint by kissing her and that, clearly, "palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss" (I.v.97). Although Romeo cannot deny that Juliet is, in fact, correct, he chooses not to concede the point but rather to abandon logic altogether and petition Juliet to simply "let lips do what hands do" – to which he adds the obviously disagreeable alternative "lest faith turn to despair" (I.v.100, 101). While, for Romeo, the concession Juliet finally makes in allowing him to kiss her, confirms his

possession of the transcendental signifier; it signifies, for Juliet, the acknowledgement of a certain playfulness or slippage in language. Hence, like Kate, who ultimately recognizes that the sun may be called the moon and vice versa, Juliet similarly acknowledges that there is a certain flexibility in language which sometimes allows lips to stand in for hands. As was the case with Kate, moreover, Juliet's introduction to language and all its flexibility is clearly aligned with the dawning of her sexual awakening.

It is with this very flexibility in mind that Juliet begins her monologue in the balcony scene – a scene which opens with Juliet's affirmation of herself as a subject "Ay me" (II.i.66), and continues with her famous plea to Romeo: "Deny thy father and refuse thy name,/ Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,/ And I'll no longer be a Capulet. (II.i.76-78). As many critics have already noted, the injunction Juliet makes for Romeo to throw off the name of his father is a revolutionary suggestion for several reasons. Although I would, for example, echo the astute observations of Cristina León Alfar when she argues that, "Juliet challenges patrilineal preeminence in her desire to reject the names of Montague and Capulet," I would, at the same time, also add that the position Juliet takes here is not so much that of anarchist as that of peace-weaver (128). Her chief objective, in inviting Romeo to throw off that name which represents such a significant obstacle to their love, is after all one of peace. If Juliet is, in fact, opposing patrilineal authority, she is doing so linguistically by challenging the very existence of the transcendental signifier (through which men claim power). She arrives at this latter point, for example, when she asks, "What's Montague? It is nor hand, nor foot,/ Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part/ Belonging to a man" (II.i.82-84). While claiming an even more

extensive knowledge of the body than she had in Act I, Juliet argues that names and words, which seem so important to the masculine logos, are not really important from the perspective of a more open, flexible femininity.

What is perhaps even more impressive, however, is that Romeo acknowledges such linguistic freedom by agreeing to be “new baptized./ Henceforth I never will be Romeo“ (II.i.93-94). We may be sure, from the way Romeo thus so willingly gives up his claim to the phallus, that he has clearly not yet reached his sexual maturity – a fact which is emphasized elsewhere in this scene and the rest of the play by the persistent associations we find between him and the moon. In Act I Scene i, for example, Romeo is not even present at the phallic brawl between the Montague’s servants Samson and Gregory and the Capulet men Abraham and Tybalt. While Tybalt, the most enraged of the men, proves his worth as a man by declaring that he hates the word peace “As I hate hell, all Montagues, and thee [Benvolio],“ Romeo is plagued by a more feminine concern with love, or rather, lost love (I.i.64). While sunk in this melancholy state, Romeo lives in perpetual darkness. We know, from the conversation Lord Montague has with Benvolio, that Romeo, upon the first signs of dawn, “Away from light steals home my heavy son,/ And private in his chamber pens himself,/ Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out“ (I.i.130-132). He is also, and perhaps because of his contempt for the sun, associated with the feminine moon because he has a small frame and has recently grown pale. Upon seeing Romeo in Act II Scene iii, for example, Mercutio declares that Romeo is, “Without his roe, like a dried herring. O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishied!” (II.iii.33-34). Although the reference Mercutio later makes in this scene to Romeo’s “slop“ or loose breeches is clearly an insult meant to emphasize his significant weight loss, the

suggestion that Romeo's pants are too big for him would seem also to suggest that he has not yet reached sexual adulthood. I would, in this way, argue that Mercutio's use of the word "conceive" when he asks, "Can you not conceive?" is a pun which signifies not only "to understand" (as it is annotated in the *Norton Shakespeare*) but also "to impregnate" (II.iii.43). We begin, in any case, to take Romeo at his word when he claims, "Tut, I have lost myself. I am not here" because, unlike Juliet, Romeo cannot yet "conceive" a sexually mature self (I.i.190).

This remains the case, moreover, in the balcony scene. From his state of sexual confusion, Romeo, for example, compares Juliet with the masculine sun instead of the feminine moon when he cries out, "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?/ It is the east and Juliet is the sun./ Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon" (II.i.44-46). Although Romeo's metaphor here makes for some very beautiful poetic language, the sun is clearly not the appropriate celestial body with which he ought to describe Juliet. We may recall, from Act I Scene iii, that Juliet was born, according to the Nurse (who swears she can calculate Juliet's age "unto an hour"), on Lammas Eve "at night" (I.iii.12, 19). Although Juliet does not hear Romeo's romantic overtures about her sun-like qualities, she does hear him when he tries to claim the moon for himself. When Romeo attempts to swear by the moon, "yonder blessèd moon," Juliet, (who we know is able to recognize inconsistencies) entreats Romeo not to swear by the moon, "th'inconstant moon" (II.i.149, 151). At first, she bids him to swear "by thy gracious self" – a self which, we may be sure, is not as stable as Juliet thinks it is (II.i.155). The fact that she changes her mind, however, and resolves instead to have Romeo "not swear at all," only further emphasizes that, of the two lovers, she is clearly the more sexually mature. I think



Moisan says it best, however, when he argues that the concern Juliet voices about the sincerity of Romeo's proposal reveals "a well-informed skepticism about lovers" (194). To this, I would simply add that the way Juliet is able to throw off girlish modesty "farewell, compliment" and pointedly ask Romeo "Dost thou love me?" provides yet another example of Juliet's incredible sexual maturity (n.i.131, 132).

Although Romeo is, in comparison with Juliet, sexually immature at the time of the balcony scene, he does not remain so for the duration of the play. After Tybalt kills Mercutio, Romeo is suddenly awakened to his masculinity and cries out, "O sweet Juliet,/ Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,/ And in my temper softened valour's steel" (III.i.108-110). Although Romeo is wrong to blame Juliet for his effeminacy, the change which comes over him is, in any case, a significant one because, shortly after his outburst, Romeo kills Tybalt and effectively enters himself into the world of masculine violence which has existed around him all this time. While for Romeo this event signals sexual maturity, it presents, for Juliet, the first challenge to her role as a peace-weaver. When Juliet hears the news of Tybalt's death, she is torn between worrying about Romeo as her now-banished husband and cursing him as the villain who killed her kinsman. She laments the difficulty of her position, "Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name/ When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?" (III.ii.98-99). When Juliet curses her tongue, she curses not only the organ which gives her the ability to curse or defend her husband, she curses the very organ which gives her access to language, the only weapon of the diplomatic peace-weaver. It is at this moment, therefore, that Juliet's age becomes important since it is because of her age that she has never made a full transition

from the house of her father to the house of her husband. As long as she is stuck in the former, she cannot weave peace.

We see Juliet begin to struggle with her role as peace-weaver, for example, on the morning after her wedding. At first, she employs her linguistic faculties to entreat Romeo to stay when she argues, “It is not yet near day./ It was the nightingale, and not the lark./ That pierced the fear-full hollow of thine ear” (III.v.1-3). It is Romeo who must remind Juliet of the danger which awaits him if he does as she asks: “Let me be ta’en, let me be put to death./ I am content, so thou wilt have it so” (III.v.17-18); only then does Juliet alter her position and claim, “Hie hence, be gone, away./ It is the lark that sings so out of tune” (III.v.26-27).

The fact that Juliet remains under her father’s roof and influence, and the challenges that this position presents to her role as peace-weaver, do, however, begin to reassert themselves when her father arranges Juliet’s marriage to Paris. Although she falls back on language to negotiate her resistance, her efforts are ultimately to no avail. Lord Capulet, it seems, sees right through Juliet’s carefully chosen words: “How, how, how, how— chopped logic? What is this?/ ‘Proud,’ and ‘I thank you,’ and ‘I thank you not,’/ Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no prouds” (III.v.149-151). Juliet, proven a failed peace-weaver, then turns to Friar Lawrence – who, we know from his performance of the marriage rite, stands for peace and the desire “to turn your households’ rancour to pure love” (II.ii.92). However much Friar Lawrence is, exempt from the masculine world of violence as a man of the cloth, the solution he offers Juliet is not one which a feminine peace-weaver would offer. Since he is, after all, still a man, Lawrence persists in thinking as one and suggests that Juliet effectively fake what is perhaps the only truly absolute

signifier (death) by drinking a benign poison which will make her appear dead and leave her free to run away with Romeo. Juliet's false signifier, like the transcendental signifier of the phallus, is ultimately proven ineffective when Romeo, hearing only of Juliet's death, rehearses the suicide that Juliet suffers (only this time, for real) by drinking a fatal poison and dying in the Capulet tomb. When Juliet awakens and cries out, "I do remember well where I should be,/ And there I am" she finds that Romeo is, as was frequently the case during the balcony scene, not occupying the role he should be (v.iii.149-150). Juliet, defeated by the only true absolute signifier of death, takes Romeo's dagger and stabs herself. Her final words, "O happy dagger,/ This is thy sheath!" suggest that Juliet's death by a phallic instrument of war is a fitting one since it was the masculine call to violence which she ultimately could not defeat (v.iii.168-169). Coppelia Kahn says it best, I think, when she describes this scene:

The blood-spattered entrance to this tomb that has been figured as a womb recalls both a defloration or initiation into sexuality, and a birth. Juliet's wedding bed is her grave, as premonitions had warned her, and three young men, two of them her bridegrooms, all killed as a result of the feud, share it with her. The birth that takes place in this "womb" is perversely a birth into death, a stifling return to the womb of the fathers, not the second birth of adolescence, the birth of an adult self, which the lovers strove for. (18-19)

Although Juliet does not survive her peace-weaving campaign, she is, in effect, able to achieve in death what she does not in life – that is, to end the feud between the Montagues and Capulets. It seems appropriate, therefore, that Lord Capulet should offer his hand "as his daughter's jointure" to Lord Montague as a token of peace (v.iii.296).

What is perhaps even more fitting is that the play ends not only with the promise of a statue erected in Juliet's honor (v.iii.298) and with the Prince's declaration that the play was the story "of Juliet and her Romeo" (v.iii.309) but also with the knowledge that the names Montague and Capulet will, as Juliet had once hoped, soon cease to exist.

Still, the sexual development of women into peace-weavers does not always end as tragically as it does in the case of Juliet; nor, however, is it always at the heart of comedy as it is in the case of Kate. About seven years after writing *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592) and about four years after *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), Shakespeare would write *Henry V* (1599), the final installment of a tetralogy about one of England's most beloved kings. Often referred to as Shakespeare's "war play," *Henry V* is, like *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*, a play fraught with masculine violence. The play opens, for example, with a description of the "warlike Harry" who will "assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,/ Leased in like hounds, should famine, sword, and fire/ Crouch for employment" (I.i.5-7). Shortly after the Prologue, we learn that Henry has, in fact, only recently matured into this soldierly, masculine role. For those members of Shakespeare's audience who did not see *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV*, the Archbishop of Canterbury recalls, for example, that Henry reached this level of sexual maturity after the death of his father: "The breath no sooner left his father's body/ But that his wildness, mortified in him,/ Seemed to die too" (I.i.26-28). Although the change Henry undergoes in his progression from Hal into Harry is both sudden and substantial, Shakespeare goes to great lengths to make us understand that this change is not so much a transformation as it is a natural awakening to duty. It becomes, for instance, one of the first issues to be addressed in the play and one of the first (as well as the most frequent) issues to be

discussed among the characters. For Bishop Ely, the build-up of Henry's masculine energies is akin to that of the strawberry which grows, unseen, underground and whose "wholesome berries thrive and ripen best/ Neighbour'd by fruit of a baser quality;/ And so the Prince obscured his contemplation/ Under the veil of wildness" (I.i.62-65). The supposition that Henry's change is easily reconciled to nature is one which we find likewise reiterated among the French when the Constable warns the Dauphin not to underestimate Henry's resolve. His previous "folly" was, he explains, a "coat" which hid Henry's discretion, "As gardeners do with ordure hide those roots/ That shall first spring and be most delicate" (II.iv.39-40).

While Henry spends the rest of the play leading the masculine call to arms, women and femininity seem markedly absent, except in the references frequently and derogatorily made about the French as an effeminate people. This latter point seems especially clear, for example, when the Dauphin notes, in Act III Scene v, that even the French women have lost all confidence in the masculinity of their men and, "plainly say/ Our mettle is bred out, and they will give/ Their bodies to the lust of the English youth" (III.v.28-30). As many scholars have already pointed out, the play seems, in any case, to encode the English people and language as masculine and those of the French as feminine. Where critics such as Katherine Eggert and others contend, however, that the linguistic and cultural distribution of these gendered binaries point to the play's underlying desire for "gender purification...of sifting all that is female out of England and recording it as French," I would argue that *Henry V* seems, like *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*, intent on integrating rather than defeating a feminine politics (125).

At the heart of this critical debate about masculinity and femininity is, of course, the relationship between Henry and Catherine. Beginning with Samuel Johnson, who once famously declared that, “the poet’s matter failed him in the fifth act, and he was glad to fill it up with whatever he could get,” critics have had trouble reconciling Catherine’s appearance at the end of the play with the rest of the action (qtd. in Walter xxviii). In his more recently published article, “Katherine of France as Victim and Bride,” Lance Wilcox seems equally unable to explain the motivation behind Shakespeare’s creation of Princess Catherine, a character who, Wilcox argues, possesses “little of the grand or heroic,” and who is, “practically the stereotype of an Englishman’s fantasy of a French debutante” (62). For many critics, Wilcox included, Catherine is merely another victim for Henry to conquer; while, for others, she seems to have an even less assertive sense of self and merely completes Henry’s progression from Hal into Harry. In this latter vein, Marilyn L. Williamson argues that Catherine’s interaction with Henry simply repeats “a basic pattern in Henry’s behavior that reaches back to his madcap days” (327). Rather than a victim, or a mirror for Henry, however, it seems to me much more likely that Catherine is, like Kate and Juliet, yet another girl who blossoms into womanhood to teach us that feminine peace-weaving is just as important to the political process as masculine war.

We find, for example, that Catherine’s entrance onstage does not coincide as neatly with Henry’s violent speech at Harfleur as scholars like Wilcox would lead us to believe:

Henry stands at the gates of Harfleur, indulging in his obscene rhapsody on the impaling of infants and the hot and forcing violation of virgin daughters, and then

– enter Katherine! At a moment when the most militant Englishman must ache at the ravages to be visited on the French by Henry’s soldiers, Shakespeare presents us with this image of Gallic femininity and concern for the citizenry of France and provides a potential concrete instance of the sordid violence Henry portrays. (66)

Although Catherine does, in fact, enter onstage shortly after Henry’s Harfleur speech, her entrance does not occur at quite the moment Wilcox describes. Rather than a moment of heightened hostility, Catherine’s entrance is more precisely preceded by the French Governor’s humble surrender and call for peace: “We yield our town and lives to thy soft mercy./ Enter our gates, dispose of us and ours,/ For we no longer are defensible” (III.iii.125-127). The mention of a “soft mercy” would indeed seem like the more appropriate signal for the appearance of Catherine – who, we may be sure, has what Kate refers to as the “soft” body of a woman (*Taming* V.ii.169-170).

From this scene (Act III Scene iv), we learn that the girlish Catherine is apparently not as sexually mature as her intended bridegroom. While in *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet is equipped with the linguistic faculties and sexual maturity to act as a peace-weaver long before Romeo even acknowledges the masculine call to battle, the situation seems, in *Henry V*, to be reversed. While Henry, having reached sexual maturity, has been fighting a war with France, Catherine has remained in her parents’ care – a fact which is, we may be sure, subject to change for the first time when she is offered to Henry in marriage at the start of Act III (III.0.28-33). Although Henry, at first, refuses King Charles’s offer, the French defeat at Harfleur makes a marriage in the name of peace seem inevitable, and Catherine begins, in Act III Scene iv, to plan accordingly by asking her gentlewoman Alice to teach her English. Since we know, both historically

and in Shakespeare's source for the play *The Famous Histories of Henry the Fifth* (1598), that Catherine spoke fluent English, this scene is apparently Shakespeare's invention. As scholars continue to debate Shakespeare's motivation for this change, I would put forth that Shakespeare's intention here is to cast Catherine, as he does Kate and Juliet, in the proactive and characteristically feminine role of the peace-weaver because, like Kate and Juliet, Catherine awakens to this role through an introduction to masculine language – one which occurs concurrently with her own sexual maturation into femininity. It seems, in this way, fitting that Catherine's first English lesson should be dedicated to the names of body parts. Although Catherine is clearly girlish in the maidenly blushes that she lets slip at the sound of words like "foot" and "cown [a mistake for gown]," which, to her ears recall the sexually explicit French words "foutre" (meaning "fuck") and "con" (meaning "cunt"),<sup>6</sup> the very fact that she recognizes sexual import of these words suggests, as Brownell Salomon so astutely notes, that she is approaching sexual maturity (355). Since these words spell, in Catherine's own language (a language which is encoded throughout the play as feminine) a sexual awakening, it seems doubly appropriate that they should, in English (the language encoded as masculine), introduce her to the masculine world of violence – a point on which Katherine Eggert shrewdly elaborates in the following:

...The words she learns echo, either directly or indirectly, earlier language pertaining to the invasion of her country. The word *hand* recalls the 'bloody hand' and 'foul hand' of English soldiery with which Henry has just threatened Harfleur; she also learns *fingers*, *nails*, *arm*, and *elbow*, words that serve to give an image to that hand its full shape and extension. She learns neck, a word

<sup>6</sup> This is pointed out in a footnote in the *Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al.



reminiscent of the throats Pistol and Nym longed to cut (2.1.22, 92); *chin*, which reminds us of the barely bearded chins of those who followed Henry to France; and *foot*, another echo of Pistol and Nym's contentious exchange ("they fore-foot to me give' [2.1.67]). And, as C. L. Barber and Richard Wheeler remark, the foot and count that so embarrass her invoke for us both the besieged walls of France's violated cities, and the soon-to-be-won Princess herself. Even the mistakes Katharine makes serve to substitute military terms for the words she is supposed to be learning. Instead of *nails* she says *mails*; instead of *elbow*, *bilbow* – which can refer either to a type of sword, or to iron fetters. (124)

While Eggert argues that the implicit violence in these words points to the "upcoming part" Catherine will play "in Henry's project of conquest," I would alternatively argue that they anticipate and prepare her for the intermediary role she will play as a peace-weaver. I must also note that Catherine is, in this scene, perfectly situated in the Mirror Stage, gazing ahead at a(n) (English) self independent of her parents, she remains, at least for the duration of the language-learning scene, dependent on her (French) parents.

The potential for independent selfhood which we see in Catherine's assertive desire to seek English lessons does, in fact, come to fruition in the final scene of the play. Henry, ever the representative figure of masculine violence, presents himself to Catherine in the guise of the plain soldier – a character whose popularity was, as Jorgensen notes in his article on this scene, rapidly rising in popularity in Elizabethan England at the time Shakespeare wrote his play (186). Jorgensen describes, for example, how, "contempt was reserved for the sham warrior; and the courtier, no longer the knightly hero of

Castiglione, became generally a typed figure of dandyism, appropriately serving as a despicable antagonist for the noble soldier” (186). It is perhaps, as a result of these changing attitudes toward the courtier, that Shakespeare has England’s much-loved monarch begin his entreaty to Catherine: “Will you vouchsafe to teach a soldier terms/ Such as will enter at a lady’s ear/ And plead his love-suit to her gentle heart?” (v.ii.99-101). Although, as Catherine admits, her linguistic faculties are not yet sharp enough to respond to his majesty in kind, Catherine is nevertheless able to effectively play her part as the feminine peace-weaver. The Princess does not, for example, encourage Henry’s advances outright but uses the little English she does know to ask him, “Is it possible dat I sould love de *ennemi* of France?” (v.ii.163). Once Henry communicates his response in the negative in both English and French, Catherine seems convinced that, “*sauf votre honneur, le francais que vous parlez, il est meilleur que l’anglais lequel je parle*” (v.ii.178-179). Since French is encoded throughout the play as the feminine language of peace, and English as the masculine language of violence, we may assume, by a careful extension of the Princess’s remark, that Henry speaks the language of a peace-weaver better than she understands the language of violence – a fact which we find confirmed elsewhere in the play. At the same time that Henry plans his attack, during Act I Scene ii, he expresses concern about leaving England unprotected in his and his army’s absence. It is perhaps with a similar split interest in mind that Henry says to Catherine, “a good heart, Kate, is the sun and the moon – or rather the sun and not the moon, for it shines bright and never changes, but keeps his course truly” (v.ii.156-159). The sun and the moon seem to have all the same meanings and gender implications that they do in both

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Greenblatt and the other editors of *The Norton Shakespeare* offer the following translation of this line: “Saving your honor, the French you speak is better than the English I speak.”

*The Taming of the Shrew* and *Romeo and Juliet*—those which associate the sun with man and his constancy and the moon with woman and what is generally regarded as her inconstancy (but which may alternatively be considered her plurality and her greatest asset as a peace-weaver). It would seem, therefore, that from the mouth of England's most beloved king, we have the acknowledgement (although somewhat unconsciously given) that the peace-weaver plays just as significant a role as that of the soldier.

In Shakespeare's history play *Henry V*, we find, therefore, an appropriate balance between peace-weaving and violence—the lack of which, Shakespeare tells us, can sometimes be a source of comedy (as it is in *The Taming of the Shrew*) or, if left unresolved, can become a source of tragedy (as in the case of *Romeo and Juliet*). In any case, the role of the peace-weaver is always encoded as feminine, as it is in the Greek myths that Shakespeare probably read, and is, for this reason, infinitely bound up in the sexual development of Shakespeare's women. At the time their plays open, Kate, Juliet, and Catherine are at a critical stage in this development, caught between their dependency on their fathers and the potential for an independent selfhood which they can only glimpse and which, Lacan tells us, is characteristic of the Mirror Stage. Once they are married and no longer dependent on their fathers, these women experience a sexual awakening which coincides with their acquisition of masculine language — an event which effectively ends the confusion of Mirror Stage and introduces them to a world of masculine violence, predicated upon the much-disputed possession of the phallus. Armed with a pluralistic understanding of language, however, Shakespeare's women go on to face this world as peace-weavers — what is, for him, the most feminine of roles.

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