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FEMALE INDIVIDUALITY IN SELECTED SHAKESPEAREAN ROMANTIC COMEDIES: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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By

KAWA OTHMAN OMER AHMED

Supervised by

ASST. PROF. Dr SHIRIN SAADULAH RASHEED

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Supervisor's Report

I certify that this dissertation entitled ''**Female Individuality in Selected Shakespearean Romantic Comedies: A Feminist Perspective**' by **Kawa Othman Omer Ahmed** was prepared under my supervision at the University of Sulaimani as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature.

Signature:

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Shireen Sadallah Rashid

Date: / / 2020

In view of the available recommendation, I forward this dissertation for debate by the Examining

Committee.

Signature:

Name:

Position: Head of English Department

Date: / / 2020

Examining Committee Report

We certify that we have read this dissertation entitled "**Female Individuality in Selected Shakespearean Romantic Comedies: A Feminist Perspective**" by **Kawa Othman Omer Ahmed**, and as the Examining Committee examined the student in its content in our opinion it is adequate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature.

Signature: Signature: Signature:

Name: **Name:**

Member Member

Signature: Signature:

Name: **Name:**

Member Member

Signature: Signature:

Name: **Name:**

Member & Supervisor Chairman

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Approved by the Council of the College of Basic Education.

Signature:

Name: Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali Qadir Othman

Position: Head of the Council of the College of Basic Education, Dean of the College

Date: / /2020

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Dedication

The current study is dedicated to my lovely wife, for her kindness , patience , and for her endless suppor. I also dedicate this dissertation to dear friends and academic staff at English Department who assisted me in my pursuit of completing the dessertation.

Abstract

The dissertation elaborates on the heroic portrayal of women in selected romantic comedies, demonstrating the extent women's verbal skills contribute to their quest for individuality. In so doing, the dissertation tries to find common patterns and similarities among various female protagonists, particularly their witty usage of persuasive language, as well as, other deceptive trickeries such as disguise, cross-dressing, and other deceptive schemes.

The first chapter of the thesis offers an introduction about the dramatist, elaborationg on multiple perspectives with regard to his works and personality. Noticeably, the dramatist in his plays covered a wide range of diverse social, religious and philosophical issues. Critics have long debated whether the playwright has been a pro- or anti-feminist. The thesis provides a concise historical overview of multiple interpretations by various feminist critics through the ages concerning the playwright's theatrical representations of women on the Elizabethan stage. Modern feminist criticism has taken diverse approaches toward Shakespeare's representations of women in his plays. Whereas some critics view the playwright's portrayal of female protagonists in his plays as pro-feminist, others view it otherwise. The thesis , particularly, offers a concise overview of multiple critical approaches to Shakespeare's texts, whether early feminists or postmodern, or even Cultural Materialism and New Historicism.

Remarkably, woman's verbal skill in romantic comedies has not received much attention from feminist critics. There are conflicting perspectives among feminist critics about how woman's verball skill in comedies should be viewed; whether it is subversive strategy, or it is merely a theratrical device. So the core issue the dissertation tries to invesitigate is the extent the female protagonist's witty use of language in the selected comedies, similar to other subversive strategies such as disguise and cross-dressing, assist the female protagonists in their quests for selfhood in the selected comedies.

The second chapter covers Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. This play is complex because it contains both romantic and tragic elements. Nonetheless, the heroine's witty speeches, and cunning role-playing change the play's tragic mood into a happy romantic ending. The dissertation focuses mainly on showing the extent verbal skill empowers the female protagonist in her quest of selfhood, elaborating on the process through which the female protagonist changes the male protagonist's false notions and misconceptions about love and marriage.

The third chapter examines the heroic portrayal of women in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. The dissertation, namely, investigates the extent verbal skill constitutes a subversive strategy against patriarchy. The heroine's journey of selfhood takes different stages. The main focus will be on showing the extent the heroin's verbal skill affects characters' opinions, correcting their false notions and misconceptions about women and courtship. Disguise and Role-playing are two other important aspects in which the study tries to investigate, and particularly the extent to which they assist the heroin in her quest of individuality. It also tries to find the symbolic role of ' Fate' or Fortuna' in the play.

The fourth chapter of the study highlights the heroic representations of women in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. It mainly traces the process through which two victimized women attain individuality in a male-dominated society. Deception and disguise are recurring motifs in this comedy. They are employed by various characters for various reasons. The study mainly traces the process through which each victimized female figure employs a specific subversive strategy in her quest of selfhood, whether the use of witty language or role-playing. The study ends with a conclusion that sums up the findings of the thesis and the final part is allocated to the references.

KeyWords: Individuality, Verbal Skill, Role-Playing, Subverssion, Empower

List of Abbreveation

MAAN : *Much ado About Nothing.*

MOV :The Merchant of Venice

TN: Twelfth Night

MAAN : Zitner, Sheldon P. *Much Ado About Nothing : The Oxford Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press Inc, New York. 1993.

TN : Bevington, David. And David Scott Kastan. *Twelfth Night*. Bantam Dell, New York, 2005.

MOV : Drakakis, John. *The Merchant of Venice.* Bloomsbury , The Arden Shakespeare. Bloomsbury Punlishing Plc. UK : London. 2010.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.Introduction

1.1. Shakespeare as a Complex Writer

William Shakespeare has always been, and still remains, the most complex and ambivalent writer of all time. Critics through the ages find it difficult to provide a concise judgment about the playwright's views with respect to woman's position and role in society. There have been conflicting perspectives with regard to the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays among feminist critics. Noticeably, the dramatist in his plays has covered a wide range of diverse social, religious and philosophical issues. One of the fundamental issues recently being debated among the critics is whether Shakespeare is pro- or anti-feminist. Feminist criticism of Shakespeare and his literary works date back to Margaret Cavendish's *Sociable Letters (* 1664), and ever since criticism about the dramatist "have taken many forms" (Dobson & Wells, 2001, p. 137). Early feminist criticism provided mixed perspectives with respect to the playwright's representations of women in his plays. For instance, critical analysis by earlier critics such as Anna Jameson's *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetic, and Historical* (1887), Helena Faucit Martin's *On Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters* (1885), and Agnes Mure MacKenzie's *Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (1924), among others, "find Shakespeare's women courageous but unwomanly when they behave unconventionally or insubordinately" (Kowaleski-Wallace 1996, p. 485). There are, nonetheless, other critics who quite openly praise Shakespeare's representation of women on the Elizabethan stage. The dramatist is basically viewed as the champion of woman's rights. " When a feminist perspective on Shakespeare began to emerge within academic literary criticism in the 1970s, it was initially informed by similar approach" (Dobson & Wells, p. 137). More recent feminist critics pay particular attention to specific aspects of Shakespeare's plays. They argue the dramatist has "explored the closeness and complexity of female friendships in his works, such as that which develops between" female characters in his romantic comedies" (Findlay & Oakley-Brown, 2014, p. 49).

Modern feminist criticism has taken diverse approaches toward Shakespeare's representations of women in his plays. Whereas some critics view the playwright's portrayal of female protagonists in his plays as pro-feminist, others view it otherwise. Most critics on both sides base their assumptions upon the broader socio-political context from which the playwright's dramas emerged. Noticeably, the dramatist lived in Elizabethan patriarchal society and his writings merely reflected the mentality of that era. Feminist critics such as Juliet Dusinberre and Germanie Greer, for instance, do not see any contradiction in Shakespeare's representations of females in his dramas, and they believe the dramatist " was voicing women's legitimate grievances and depicting their strengths, particularly against a backdrop of Elizabethan Protestant companionate marriage" (Ibid). Nonetheles, critics have long debated whether the playwright has been a pro- or anti-feminist:

> Interpreting the dramatist's attitude towards women remained a core issue for many feminist critics throughout different historical periods. Critic Piar Hidalgo in his book *Paradigms Found: Feminist, Gay, and New Historicist Readings of Shakespeare* (1987**)** outlined three common critical perspectives with regard to Shakespeare's attitudes towards women; First, those who think that Shakespeare "held very advanced ideas about woman, as shown by the bold and intelligent heroines of his comedies"; Second, those who think the playwright, regardless of his immense genius and creativity, " shared the prejudices of his time and culture about the nature of women and their position in society", and third, those who think that "Shakespeare's works are irredeemably" gender-biased and anti-feminist (Hidalgo, 2001, p.10).

New critical approaches to Shakespeare recently pave the way for more diverse and varied interpretations. Such criticism has witnessed a shift from textual analysis into the broader social and historical context of Elizabethan society. Such a shift in feminist perspective, " is chiefly due to the recent advent of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, both poststructuralist and Marxist literary-cultural critical approaches that are largely responsible for the intense politicization of current renaissance studies." (Kowaleski-Wallace, 1996, p. 486). The dramatist, as critics from New Historicism and Cultural Materialism approaches claimed, lived during the time of the Elizabethan Renaissance. It is the age of new learning, and new discoveries, or the rebirth of the 'New Man'. Shakespeare's plays, thus, must be viewed in terms of the Elizabethan Renaissance context as he has certainly been influenced by diverse

religious and philosophical ideas of that era. A specific example by New Historicists is outlined in Louis Montrose's *The Purpose of Playing: Shakespeare and the Cultural Politics of the Elizabethan Theatre* (1996). Such an example "uses Shakespeare's tragedies and histories to display 'the politics of representation' in Elizabethan times through drama's relation to authority in London, during a period of intense social change" (Richmond, 2004, p. 353). Cultural Materialists, similarly, shifts the conventional focus away from " universalism and humanism and towards a study of how Shakespeare's texts functioned in Elizabethan society to articulate specific cultural, gender " (Wolfreys, 2006, p.135), or ethnical identities. These interpretive strategies try to identify multiple forces which shaped and produced the literary texts, and consequently, representations of characters in literary works during the Elizabethan Renaissance. Nonetheless, both "New Historicism and Cultural Materialism share a focus on power and ideology and a view that writers challenge political power by exploring its representations and exposing inconsistencies" (Makaryk, 1993, p. 23).

Feminist critics find both literary approaches useful in analyzing Shakespeare's representations of female figures on the Elizabethan stage. They particularly try to investigate subversive techniques employed by victimized women, particularly in the comedies, such as disguise and cross-dressing to challenge the patriarchal system. However, there have always been tense debates among feminist critics as to whether Shakespeare's artistic representations of female figures empowered women or he simply conveyed common gender stereotypes and prejudices that existed during that age. For instance, in the late 1980s feminist critics were divided over whether the methodologies of Cultural Materialist and New Historicists should be taken seriously or should be dismissed altogether. Some feminist critics like Kathleen McLuskie, for instance, " argued that Shakespeare existed in a period of patriarchal oppressiveness and that his work gave voice to the social views of his age" (Qtd. Bradley, 2013, p. 190). There are nonetheless, other critics who express quite opposite views. Critic Carol Thomas Neely in *Constructing the Subject* (1988), for example, "questioned the Cultural Materialist and New Historicist methodologies" which are employed by critics, "arguing that these

approaches focused too much on the institutionalization of male power, that they tended to' oppress women" (Bradley, 2013, p.190). The more moderate position tries to reconcile between two conflicting views. The critic Ann Thompson, for example, in her book ' *Are There Any Women in King Lear?* (1991), attempts " to mediate" between two opposite opinions, " wondering if 'cult-historicists actively conspired to erase women from Shakespeare's plays or if they were", somehow, " detailing the extent to which Shakespeare has already done this" (Ibid. 190-91).

Controversies surrounding Shakespeare's plays are not only related to the ways issues of race, class, and gender are represented in his literary works. Critics also find it difficult to point out precisely the author's religious or philosophical views.*"* While the symbolic, thematic elements of Christianity certainly find their way into his work, Shakespeare activates these features in decidedly irreligious or ironic ways.*"* (Mallin, 2007, p. 19). Critics particularly find it difficult confirming Shakespeare's religious inclination. For instance, Gary Taylor in *Forms of Opposition: Shakespeare and Middleton*, (1994), refers to difficulty assuming the playwright's Catholic inclination " If he were one, he would have had incentives to prevent anyone from being able to prove it*"* (Mayer, 2006, p. 158). Interestingly, the author 's writings extend across a wide range of genres; such as comedy, tragedy, history plays, poetry, and even sonnets. Each of these literary genres covers diverse themes and subject matters, and each genre also deals with complex and controversial religious and political issues. The dramatist cunningly uses drama as a method "to dramatize a range of diverse and contradictory religious beliefs" (Loewenstein & Witmore. 2015,p. 156). It is to be noted that the dramatist lived through political and social changes. Critic Colin McMinn in his book *Shakespeare's Philosophy: Discovering the Meaning Behind the Plays* (2006) claims that Shakespeare's era was a 'transitional' one, " as one kind of authority (the church, monarchy) began to give way to another (science and human reason, a new social order)" (Young, 2010,p. 234). These changes certainly affected the dramatist's way of thinking as well as his writings. Consequently, Shakespeare's own personal opinions *"*are notoriously difficult to pin down" (Wells, 2009, p. 7). Even the dramatist's authorship

has been debated lately. Critic William Leahy in an article in *The Times Higher* " made it clear that he is skeptical about Shakespeare's authorship and prefers to think of Shakespeare as ''an amalgamation of authors" (Edmondson, 2013, p. 227).

Moreover, the dramatist's religious belief has also been a source of heated debates among critics. For instance, critic Maurice Hunt in his book *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* (2004) " argues for a " syncretic", and "Catholic and Protestant" Shakespeare (Klause, 2008, p. 260). Also, critic J. Mayer in his book *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (2006) casts doubt on Shakespeare's Catholicism for lack of proofs that " has to be taken for an assured sign of his Catholicism" (Mayer, 2006, p. 5). J.Mayer finally came to the conclusion that Shakespeare held a " hybrid faith" (Ibid). Ironically, judging Shakespeare's political views seem to be no less controversial than his religious views. In his plays, the dramatist presents diverse depictions of monarchs, queens, kings, rulers, and even rebels and heroes. None of his dramatic representations provide definite proof whether the dramatist has pro –or-anti-monarchy or republican inclination. Interestingly, the dramatist in his plays may have shown some signs to be sympathetic to certain aspects of Machiavelli's teachings. But even " if Shakespeare agrees with part of Machiavelli's teachings, he doesn't agree with him that it ought to be trumpeted to the world" (Spiekerman, 2001, p. 36). The dramatist, in fact, is more concerned about issues related to human beings rather than celebrating the teachings of Machiavelli. " It may be that Shakespeare's original contribution to our understanding of political power is the insight he provides into how men respond to the moral conflicts inherent in the exercise of power " (Ibid). It is to be noted that Shakespeare's Humanism exceeds far beyond any religious or political inclinations. Like many other Elizabethan writers, Shakespeare's ideas are shaped by the Renaissance and Reformation movements in Europe and England. And the dramatist in his plays tackles issues central to the Renaissance era which is exemplified in the conflicts of Human's free-will versus destiny, good versus evil, and other philosophical issues related to human existence in the universe. Overall, the dramatist celebrates human's ability to rise above his/her own limitations:

> The Renaissance, then, marks the birth of modernity in the conception of the individual. Central to this birth was a bold view of human nature that departed the medieval view: individuals in all endeavors are not constrained by a destiny imposed by God from the outside but are free to make their own destiny, guided only by the example of the past, the force of present circumstances, and the drives of their own inner nature. Set free from theology, individuals were seen as the products, and in turn the shapers, of history; their future would be the work of their own free will (Perry, 2012,p. 195).

The dramatist in his plays, at least implicitly, celebrated ideas evolved due to Renaissance Humanism. Such inspiring ideas were reflected in the manners and speeches of heroic female protagonists in romantic comedies. Unlike other Elizabethan playwrights, Shakespeare presented new types of heroic women whose wit and verbal skill debunked false claims and misconceptions about women during that era. The dramatist's humanist and feminist ideas, as we explain in the dissertation, stem from his heroic portrayal of women in his comedies. Here, women's verbal skills play an essential role in revealing the extent the dramatist projected his humanist and feminist ideas.

1.2. Women and Rhetoric Throughout Ages

Rhetorical practices throughout ages are reserved for males, and women are excluded from such innovative art. "Rhetoric as a discipline certainly flourished first during Athen's period of democratic rule" (Witte. et al. 1992, p. 70). Only males, however, are beneficiary in the use of rhetoric and dialectical skils. As many critics pointed out, " Athenian " democracy" actually enfranchised only male property owners—who were the ones primarily interested in rhetorical training" (Ibid). But that does not mean that women have not contributed to the art of rhetoric at all. In fact, there are shreds of evidence proving women's effective contribution "to the traditional Western rhetorical canon, which has been directed primarily at male speakers using the persuasive language for public purposes such as political debate or preaching" (Enos, 1996, p. 770). For instance, classical texts present two influinctial learned women who contributed to the art of rhetoric such as Diomtia and Aspasia. Nonetheless, women's contribution to the western rhetorical cannon is limited and constrained by multiple factors. "Rhetoric was

the most purely male intellectual discipline that has existed in Western culture" (Connors, 1997, p. 28).

There are many reasons why women are denied access to rhetoric. The first reason, among others, is related to the oratory nature of rhetoric. As many critics point out, "successful rhetorical discourse in an oral culture was probably not physically possible except for men, whose stronger, deeper voices could be made to carry for long-distance" (Witte. et al. 1992, p. 70). Another factor is related to power and authority inherent in dominant patriarchal social practice. The negative social attitude to women with regard to the practice of the rhetoric has a long history. Aristotle's writings on the issue of women's education, for instance, reflect the common perception which viewed woman inferior and unfit for the art of rhetoric. Aristotle in *Rhetoric* (350 B.C.E) outlines his anti-feminist perspective. One example among many assumptions in his book will provide us a glimpse at how he viewed women. He surprisingly assumes that "virtues and actions are nobler when they proceed from those who are naturally worthier, for instance, from a man rather than from a woman"(Okin, 1979,p. 92).

Even though women's social position in ancient Rome witnessed certain changes, yet they still had little influence in political debates and scarcely held positions in public life. During that era, women's education was merely in writing and reading, but " not in public speaking of any sort" (Witte. et al. 1992, p. 70). During ancient Rome, woman's position in society was constrained by multiple social, cultural, political forces. Overall, women "were not allowed to attend schools of rhetoric", but they nonetheless were "allowed to attend other literary fields regular attendees of public lectures on history, philosophy, literature, mathematics, and other subjects" (Williams, 2009, p.298). As a result, women's contribution to the art of rhetoric in Ancient Rome was very limited compared to men. After the fall of the Roman Empire, women's literary involvement, and their contribution to the art of rhetoric had not witnessed so many changes. It had also led to a decline in educational opportunities for women. Even though Christianity

had “broadened” learning opportunities for women, yet “Christian education downplayed the importance of rhetoric” (Enos, 1996, p. 770).

In Renaissance England, The teaching of Rhetoric and verbal skill reached its momentum during Queen Elizabeth’s age. Many factors contributed to the growing interest in the study of rhetoric during that era. Social and economic changes necessitated the elegant style of writing and talking. “Humanist scholars were great advocates of education” (Keenan, 2008, p.24). Education and the study of arts became the hallmark of that age :

> In England, the influence of early humanists such as Thomas More led to the founding of new grammar school up and down the country in the sixteenth century, schools which made education available to a wide range of boys, including the sons of citizens and farmers as well as members of the gentry and nobility” (Ibid).

The Queen of England had been one of the greatest advocates of learning, and she effectively contributed to bringing new changes in cultural and intellectual sectors. The Queen was an enthusiastic scholar; “trained in Latin, modern languages, rhetoric and the classics (Ibid, 25). Radical political and cultural changes in Elizabethan society, provided women with better educational opportunities for women . “Grammar school and university ways of reading altered Elizabethans to the way in which letters they received or speeches they heard employed particular techniques, opening up further possibilities for imitation and variation in their own writing” (Mack, 2002 , p. 3). The changing circumstance of women, however, was filled with paradox since only a few women received the same educational opportunities as those of men. “At the lower levels of society, girls were sometimes taught to read but not necessarily to write, and were more likely to receive instruction in practical skills such as needlework” (Keenan, 2008, p.25). There were also relatively few women who “ had access to classical learning, new discoveries, and spirit of inquiry which characterizes the humanist ‘ Renaissance’”(Ibid). So, the exclusion of women from major scientific and artistic innovations led some

feminist critics such as feminist historian Joan Kelly to "conclude that for most women there was no Renaissance" (Ibid). What is certain is that the Renaissance has radically changed people's perspective about major issues with regard to women's social status and their roles in English society. Shakespeare as one of the most innovative humanist thinker was among the few writers who advocated the humanist teaching of the Renaissance. His progressive humanist and pro-feminist views towards women are reflected in his comedies. The dramatist, wittingly, employed various dramatic techniques to deliver his feminist and humanist perspectives with regard to women's quest for selfhood.

1.3. Dramatic Techniques in Comedies

As critics point out, romantic comedies and romances particularly, "have received sustained favorable treatment at the relative expense of the histories and tragedies (Howard & O'Connor, 2005, p. 23). Such favorable treatment has to do with many factors. Artistically, romantic comedies deal with diverse themes such as courtship, marriage, and heroism. Within the Elizabethan context, romantic comedies were favored by the audience among several genres. " With its fantasy of courtship of a powerful woman and profitable marriage, such comedy was attractive to the Elizabethans" (Williamson, 1986, p. 20). Above all, romantic comedies evoked the audience's fantasy, for it portrayed an imaginative landscape where love, courtship, and travel across remote places were possible. The language of courtship common in the romantic comedies was lucrative and more appealing to the Elizabethan audience than elaborate and complicated rhetoric in tragedies. " The Elizabethan inherited a courtly love language that had been used to express and disguise social and political ambition" (Ibid: 27-28). Most importantly, romantic comedies have provided different notions concerning marriage and courtship. In such plays, young lovers join in marital union not through conventional patriarchal kinship but rather through real love, and by their own merits. " From the time of the early Tudor interlude, Fulgens and Lucres through

Shakespeare's romantic comedies, marriage for love was a metaphor for advancement by merit rather than by birth or influence" (Ibid,p. 37). Shakespeare in his romantic comedies celebrates marriage through love, where both female and male protagonists decide their own destiny free-willingly. The main plot of each romantic comedy, symbolically, concentrates on two separate journeys by both female and lovers toward self-fulfilment. Sometimes, their journey of self-hood is challenged by old patriarchal conventions and constraints, yet they finally triumph over all obstacles. The play's happy ending, through multiple weddings, signals a restoration of harmony and order to the community. Within the historical context, comedies' emphasis on the restoration of order and harmony may be contributed to ideological reasons. Marriage in romantic comedies, in other words, carries symbolic significance. The dramatist may have used drama as a means to deliver political messages in favour of the Queen's political status. "Nicholas Rowe's (1709) *Life of Shakespeare*, the first biography of the playwright", (Hackett, 2009, p. 25) makes a connection between the playwright's artistic innovation and the English monarch. To Rowe's assumption, Queen Elizabeth "had been Shakespeare's chief protector and benefactor" (Ibid, p.26). Consequently, the playwright's heroic portrayal of women (who were in fact young boys in disguise) may also allude to Queen's own dual roles, both in political and personal life. And the plays' elaborate emphasis on marriage may carry a greater political implication. During Elizabethan age, England underwent radical social and political changes. And "Elizabethan romantic comedy resolves the problem of disrupted social harmony through love and marriage, and by temporarily disrupting (gender) difference through a transfer of patriarchal power to the woman"(Qtd. Mellen, 1992, p. 39). However, there are also good reasons to assume that the playwright has used theatre as a means of bringing into focus other issues beyond politics such as the complex issue of gender in Elizabethan age. More importantly, the heroic representations of women provide credible proof about the playwright's pro-feminist and humanist perspective.

1.3.1. Subversive Techniques in Comedies

Shakespeare in his comedies used various implicit rhetorical techniques to make his messages quite illusive. The dramatis employed various rhetorical techniques such as irony, satire, and allegory to critically reflect on many controversial religious, political and gender issues. The English political system during the Elizabethan age had an ambivalent relationship with different types of artistic and literary forms of expression. "Because of its ancient associations with the Court and the central institutions of government, the English drama has behind it a long tradition of political censorship" (Stephens, 2010, p. 37). Many English playwrights used various literary techniques to evade censorship. In Elizabethan age, censorship "by all accounts, was enforced by brutal methods. Torture, mutilation, branding, or imprisonment were routinely inflicted on those whose writings displeased the Crown" (Whalen, 1994, p. 116). The state recognized the power of art, especially theatre, in shaping and reshaping the audience's opinions toward the political system. Sometimes the author's artistic message was very much in line with the state's overall political agenda. In most cases, however, the dramatist set himself up in direct opposition to the authority. Through witty usage of rhetorical techniques, Elizabethan playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe had managed to deliver their subversive messages.

There had been a tense relationship between authority and theatre at the time of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Dramatists such as Ben Jonson and Shakespeare wittingly, and through multiple subversive techniques, were able to expose " the ideological basis of the legalization of power in their plays; and that Stuart drama recognized the theatre's role in fashioning both the image of the tyrant and claims to absolute authority" (Hawkins-Dady, 2012, p. 201). The complex relationship between theater and state's authority has been thoroughly investigated in Stephen Greenblatt's *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (1988). Greenblatt has devised " a widely influential ' subversion/

containment' model of authority which posits that the monarch deliberately permits various subversive cultural practices so as to maintain control over them" (Barrol, 1994, p. 165). Recent critics, however, find in Greenblatt's perspective unredeemable flaws such as its failure to account for " the variety of populist strategies that enabled writers to stand outside the subversive-containment dynamic"(Ibid). Remarkably, neither Greenblat's ' subversion/ containment' model, nor other critical approaches by feminist critics, has sufficiently investigated those 'subversive' strategies dramatists like Shakespeare had used in his romantic comedies. For instance, women's verbal skills as an effective subversive strategies in comedies had not sufficiently been accounted for in the feminist's critique of Elizabethan plays,

1.3.2.Subverssiveness of Disguise and Cross-Dressing

Dramatic devices of disguise and cross-dressing have received conflicting responses from feminist critics. Their aspect of disguise is a common motif in most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Such significant dramatic technique is "central to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Twelfth Night* , and *The Merchant of Venic* as well as to *As You Like It*, and the device itself had been the subject of much critical debate " (Mangan, 2014 . p.222). It is to be noted that women were not allowed to act on stage during Shakespeare's time, " and female roles were enacted by young boys" (Ray,2006,p. 150). Critics disagree whether motif of disguise in romantic comedies can be interpreted as a potentially subversive device. Some feminist critics have considered cross-dressed actors on the Elizabethan stage " as an essentially subversive device" (Mangan, 2014. p.222) because it provided potentiality, on stage at least, for disrupting the conventional gender roles. These critics, thus, consider the motif of cross-dressing or disguise as a method for women's empowerment. The playwright most likely used the dramatic tecniquues of disguise and role-playing as a means to criticize the political authority, and thereby evading authority's censorship. Heroic female figures in some of Shakespeare's comedies such as Viola , Portia and Beatrice in *Twelfth Night*, *Merchant*

of Venice, and *Much Ado about Nothing* are praised by critics as champions of woman's quest for liberty and selfhood. The cross-dressing plot, as some critics view it

> can be read in a radical and liberating way as a critique of conventional Renaissance gender roles; at its most extreme it can be seen as an attempt to oppose the structures of domination inherent within patriarchy by destabilizing the very notion of gender" (Ibid).

Some critics, however, express doubt concerning the subversiveness of the dramatic motif of cross-dressing and disguise in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. They assume the dramatist had used these dramatic devices for aesthetic purpose xrather than ideological reasons.In other words, motifs of disguise and cross-dressing, "simply emphasizes the dominant gender relations and stereotypes of the Renaissance" (Ibid). In comedies, woman's cross-dressing, as some feminist critics claim, is in the " service" of traditional marriage " in which the woman will subordinate herself" (Ibid) to patriarchy .

Remarkably, Judith Butler's groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* : *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) radically changed critics' perceptions with regard to gender issues, particularly the theatrical device of disguise or cross-dressing in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Post-modern feminists, specifically, have found in the theatrical device of or cross-dressing a "confirmation of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, a theory which defines gender as " culturally-constructed performance rather than a natural and essential set of traits, different for females" (Schiffer, 2013 , p.27).The debate over the "theatrical aspect of disguise or cross-dressing" has not ceased, but rather evoked more interpretations from critics. Consequently, there has never been a common agreement among feminist critics as to whether the theatrical device of disguise in romantic comedies be considered a subversive act or not. Remarkably, woman's verbal skill in romantic comedies has not received much attention from feminist critics. There are conflicting opinions about how woman's verball skill in comedies should be viewed, whether it is subversive strategy or it is merely a theratrical element of enjoyment for the audience.

1.4. Problem under Investigation

Ironically, Woman's verbal skill in Shakespearean comedies, particularly its emancipatory potentialities for women has rarely been discussed and analyzed at length by feminist critics. Some critics have investigated certain aspects in Shakerspeare's artistic usage of language in romantic comedies. For instance, critic Karen Newman in her book *Shakespeare's Rhetoric of Comic Characters* (1985), has provided a critical analysis of the rhetorical effect of characters' soliloquies in specific comedies such as *As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing* and *Measures for Measures*. Newman in her book, however, limited the scope of her investigation solely to " analyze and compare the protagonist's soliloquies" in Shakespeare's comedies. Karen Newman's main objective, as she explained in her book, was limited " to discern shared rhetorical features:" in soliloquies " and to discover their position and function in conventional comic plot" (Newman, 2005, p. 3). Ironically, there are other rhetorical aspects neither Newman nor other critics have investigated thoroughly; such as the persuasive power of women's rhetoric by female protagonists in Shakespeare's comedies. As Karren Newman herself explained in her book, " soliloquies in the comedies have not received the attention they deserve" (Ibid). More importantly, the co-relationship that exists between rhetoric and woman's quest for individuality in Shakespeare's comedies scarcely investigated by critics.

1.4.1. Dissertation Question

In Shakespeare's romantic comedies, women could challenge male authority, and assert themselves through witty usage of language. The core question of the dissertation can be formulated as follows : to what extent women's verbal skills in the comedies contribute to their quest for individuality

1.4.2. Dissertation Objectives

Current dissertation tries to investigate the emancipatory potentialities of woman's verbal skills in selected Shakespearean Romantic Comedies such as *TN*, *MOV* and *MAAN*. Through concise critical analysis, the dissertation attempts to achieve these objectives:

. To identify the relationship between a women's verbal skills and their quest for selfhood.

. To find common patterns and personality traits among various heroic female figures in Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

. To investigate the effectiveness of women's persuasive language in changing , and correcting male lovers' gender bias and prejudice about women.

. To find out whether or not Shakespeare's heroic portrayal of women in his comedies serves the feminist agenda.

. To demonstrate the extent both women's verbal skill and cross-dressing constitute two interrelated and interconnected subversive devices in William Shakespeare's romantic comedies.

. To determine whether the heroic representations of women on the Elizabethan stage represent an allegorical figure of independent and educated women in Elizabethan age.

1.4.4. Significance of the Dissertation

The research provides a new reading of selected romantic comedies by William Shakespeare. It contributes to the body of knowledge concerning the symbolic representations of women in such comedies. Woman's rhetorical skill and cross- dressing constitute the two most important subversive strategies against patrirchy in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Ironically, Women's verbal skill has not received much attention from feminist critics. The primary focus, thus, is on women's persuasive power in

comedies, highlighting the emancipatory potentialities of such skill with regard to women's quest for individuality. By critically analyzing significant speeches and dialogues in the selected comedies, the study demonstrates the effectiveness of women's persuasive power as a subversive means against patriarchy. Thus, it is significant for mainly two reasons: firstly, it elaborates on the emancipatory potentiality of women's verbal skill in Shakespeare's comedies; and secondly, it paves the way for further research and investigations into the rhetorical style of other female protagonists in other plays, whether comedies or tragedies. Overall, the current study is important in the academic field because it asserts the dramatist's Humanist and Feminist perspectives with regard to women's quest for selfhood during the Elizabethan age. Finally, it paves the way for further research about the symbolic representations of women in either Shakespeare's plays or other playwrights in Elizabethan age.

CHAPTER TWO

2.Female Individuality in *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1599)

2.1. Theatrical Representation of Characters

The play is viewed within its historical context. The dramatist, through the heroic depiction of a female character like Portia, reflects on the changing status and roles of women in England during the Elizabethan era. " The women of Shakespeare's plays exemplify both the traditional role of the women of the Middle Ages and the changing role of the women of the Elizabethan Age of Renaissance England" (Wright, 1993, p.7). Venice's changing economic situation provides an equivalent parody of the changing circumstance in Renaissance England . These changes, remarkably, triggered a change in people's attitudes towards women. It also provided women with numerous opportunities to explore their potentialities. It "empowered many women both personally and economically, and Shakespeare foregrounds this matriarchal, financial authority and independence in Belmont", as well as in Venice (Mahon, 2002, p. 332).

Shakespeare has presented a realist picture of Venice's changing society. Interestingly, Venice's changing socio-economic situation resembles the changing socio-economic circumstance of Renaissance England. Early modern capitalism during the Renaissance brought with it enormous social and economic changes. Similar to Venice's changing economy, "England was a mercantile nation that depended upon foreign trade (Cerasano, 2004, p. 9).

The play's first Act begins with multiple economic bonds and exchange of capital. These economic dealings may include the exchange of goods, money, and Portia's fortune among male figures between Belmont and Venice. Belmont, as a typical example of old feudal-patriarchal society, is set against Venice's mercantile consumerism. " In Venice, the merchants acquired tremendous economic and political importance, in many ways threatening the power of the aristocracy. So too did the merchants in England" (Ibid). Antonio represents a new type of tradesman, " capable of

harbouring within himself the values of the aristocracy and the pragmatism of the new merchant class" (Marrapodi,1999, p.163). A parallel can be drawn between Portia and Bassanio with regard to the way their destines are interrelated and impacted by a range of new economic realities between Venice and Belmont. Bassano lacks the capital and fortune needed to court Portia. Both young lovers have to enter a complex web of economic exchanges, whether Shylock's cruel material bond with Antonio, or Portia's deceased father's strict marital Casket Scheme, in order to manage their forthcoming marriage.

Through a well-organized economic scheme, Portia's fortune will be transferred between two forms of patriarchal figures. Such a cruel economic arrangement in the play draws on real historical facts in Elizabethan England. Here, Shakespeare criticizes the controversial Elizabethan marital law, or coverture, upon which the legal status of English married women, had been regulated. Under such law, " a minor girl was under the guardianship of her father who arranged her marriage" , and then " a wife passed to the guardianship of her husband, who controlled any land, or inherited fortune, " she brought to the marriage" (Wagner, 2010, p. 21).

Portia's wit and verbal skill expose shortcomings and flaws within two different economic systems in both Venice and Belmont. In Belmont, Portia manages to change, or even manipulate the cruel terms upon which her deceased father had intended to marry her to a suitor. This is evident when she intervenes in Bassanio's choosing of the right casket. The encrypted song she plays for Bassanio contains implicit clues to guide the male lover into the right casket. To secure Bassanio's loyalty, Portia cunningly devices the ring scheme. The ' ring plot, interestingly combines Basanio's loyalty with economic promises. The trial, too, combines romance with complex economic dealings among the conflicting characters. During the trial, Portia manages revealing shortcomings and flaws within Venice's judiciary system. As a result of her wit and strong verbal skill, Shylock is forced to give up a large sum of his fortune to Jessica and Lorenzo. Moreover, Portia's success in the trial releases Antonio from the harsh economic bond. Most importantly, Portia takes control of the marital arrangement after her success in the trial

scene. The play , similar to other romantic plays, ends when female protagonists acquire more power and authority within a more humanly and harmonized society.

Within the historical context, " Portia's marital and commercial independence is not without precedents" (Mahon, 2002,p. 332). There are numerous real examples of early modern women who managed their own economic matters. Many housewives, for instance, "handled (their) own estate's maters, particularly if (their) husband(s) were away on business, or if he died before his wife" (Ibid). Most importantly, some early modern women could enter the prosperous economy as "self-made entrepreneurs, while others conducted business with the existing merchanery and became merchants themselves"(Ibid). Early modern capitalism brought with it enormous social and economic changes. In many ways, the new economic reality "empowered many women both personaly and economically" (Ibid). In reality, the playwright hasn't totally criticized the new economic reality in Venice, since it provides the heroin, or even a Jewish moneylender, to voice their concerns. He rather " criticizes the nascent corruption of capitalism that infected Renaissance Venice"(Ibid), and by implication, Elizabethan England.

2.2. Complexity of Dramatic Genre

The complexity of the play led to a wide range of interpretations.The play's mixture of tragic and romantic elements makes it difficult to define its dramatic genre, whether a comedy or a tragedy. A major complexity is related to the way the play shifts between various types of plots. Structurally, the play is built around three different types of plots. These plots include 'Love Plot', 'Bond Plot' and' the 'Trial Plot. Each has its own dramatic plotline, dramatic tension, and solution. They, nevertheless, appear neat and well organized within the major storyline of a romance. Thematically, the play covers a wide range of complex themes and controversial social, ethnic and religious issues. Some critics have labelled the play pro-feminist, while others criticize,

presumably, its anti-Semitic or anti-Feminist hidden agenda. Multiple themes such as love, forced marriage, parental right, justice, fate, and woman's quest for individuality, among many others, are recurring throughout the play. Beyond that, the play's complex context further complicates its dramatic genre:

> Shakespeare's plays have such wonderful complexities and deal with so many excruciating problems that no single approach can sound the depths of what they do profess as Marlowe's Faustus might say, but any serious and significant critical process attends to means of reading and analysis that complement other valuable approaches and contribute to a fuller, more complete and satisfying reading (Risden, 2012, p. 2).

Many critics have labeled *MOV* as a 'problem play'. The concept of 'problem play' has been coined by F.S. Boas in his book, *Shakespeare and His Predecessors* (2016). Here, the term 'problem play' is " used to encompass" some plays " which defy absorption into the traditional categories of romantic comedies, histories, tragedies, and romances" (Toole, 2005,p. 28).Critic W.H. Auden, for instance, has labelled the play as "problem play as one by Ibsen or Shaw" (Salingar, 1986, p. 19). Critic Harley Granville –Barker, on the other hand, views the play as " the simplest of the play", or as a fairy tale' that the dramatist "humanised with realistic characters" (Ibid). Some critics, however, have paid specific attention to the play's structural aspect. The play , as some critics assume, seems to be disorganized and composed of a loosely connected series of dramatic incidents. Both 'Casket' and 'Bond' plots deal with two separate events, and they appear to be unrelated, or even contradict each other. The play, contrary to expectation, begins with a romantic story, and abruptly shifts into what appears to be a tragedy. "Although both ultimately derive from folk tales, Shakespeare dramatized them in such disparate styles that they seem to compete with rather than to complement one another" (Bulman, 1991, p.1). Moreover, the two different settings in the play do not share the same economic and cultural backgrounds. It seems as if "Venice and Belmont seem to belong to different plays" (Ibid). Other critics have intensively focused on the symbolic representation of the play's main villain. To Harold Bloom, the play is "a profoundly anti-Semitic work" (Herbrechter, &Callus. 2012 , p. 47). Critics, however,

disagree on whether or not the play must be viewed anti-Semitist. There is also ambiguity surrounding the role of the play's main villain.

> Classified from its inception as a comedy, a history (story), or a " comical historic", it inspired commentators as early as the eighteenth century to regard it as a tragedy, and the Holocaust of World War 11has reinforced the idea that shylock is not only the central character of the play but its tragic hero (Quoted at : Mahon, 2002 , p. 2).

The symbolic portrayal of women in the play has been another significant issue critics recently paid much more attention. Some feminist critics praise the heroic depiction of the female protagonist in Shakespeare's play. They view "the struggle for Portia to be an individual who makes her own decisions, regardless of the influence of the patriarchal society in which she lives" (Sierra, 2013, p. 24). Nonetheless, there are other critics who minimize the role of the heroin in the play as "she is often seen both as a defender of theoretical feminism as well as one of its greatest traitors (Ibid). One of the crucial issues critics have not paid enough attention is the significance of rhetorical skill as a means of empowering women against patriarchy. As the following chapter will demonstrate, Portia's witty use of language, together with her role-playing, plays a profound role in radically changing her own destiny, as well as , restoring harmony and order to the community.

2.2.1. Significance of the Casket- Scheme

In the first scene of the play, Portia displays wit, compassion and wisdom. She expresses discontent toward her father's cruel will which has restricted her choice of the right suitor. 'I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I / dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed / by the will of a dead father' (1.2. 22-24). The speech indicates a hidden conflict between the heroine's aspiration for liberty against patriarchy represented in the cruel dominant father figure. Ironically, "Portia's father asserts his power over her from beyond the grave" (Kemp, 2010, p. 85). The heroine views the Casket Lottery to be cruel scheme for it constrains her freedom and sense of individuality. Her deceased father has totally restricted her " choice of husband". In other

words, “the will of a living daughter is curbed by the will of a dead father” (Dreher, 1986,p.129).

The sequence of events in the play, both structurally and thematically, is interconnected. The ‘Casket-Choosing’ test constitutes a significant part of a sequence of deceptive schemes that affect Portia’s destiny. Antonio’s lending of money from Shylock, and later on the legal case against him by the Jewish moneylender, similarly, affect Portia’s destiny. Here, fate or ‘Fortuna’ plays a significant role in changing the course of events in the play. “Portia’s husband is to be chosen by a sort of lottery in which each suitor gambles all in exchange for a chance to select the winning casket (which contains Portia’s portrait) from among three treasure chests” (Kemp, 2010 , p.85). The process through which the female protagonist alters her destiny has been demonstrated through her linguistic manipulation of the terms upon which the first test is designed. The Casket Scheme episode has its symbolic significance, for it offers Portia the first opportunity to assert her free-will against the rigid system of patriarchy. Interestingly, the heroin neither rejects the test nor totally submits to its cruel terms. In fact, she could always find a way to manipulate the situation for her own advantage. Symbolically, the ‘Casket-Choosing’ test represents a test of Portia’s free -will against her own destiny. Through wit and linguistic manipulation, Portia successfully has exercised her own will and authority over the male suitors. Ironically, the arbitrary choosing of the right Casket by a random suitor will bring the right suitor for Portia. Such a test may symbolize the unpredictable force of Fate. “It was Portia’s father who forced the casket ritual upon her” free will “as a way of directing her affairs even after his death” (Lewis, 1992, p. 41).When meeting with the Moccoran suitor, Portia refers to the way her destiny is linked with the ‘Casket- Choosing’ process:

> In terms of choice I am not solely led
> By nice direction of a maiden’s eyes
> Besides, the lot try of my destiny
> Bars me the right of voluntary choosing (2.1 13-16)

Similar to the other Shakespearean romantic comedies, Fate or ‘ Fortuna’ plays a positive role in directing the course of the heroine’s destiny. During the test, for instance,

the heroin cautions the suitors about the danger of falling for deceptive appearance. By interfering in the choosing process, Portia not only asserts her free will, but she also alters Bassano's destiny. And " it is Portia who makes clear the mortal consequences of an incorrect choice as Bassanio stands before the three chests" (Lewis, 1992, p. 41). Remarkably, the heroin's role as an agent of fate is asserted even after the Casket choosing test. During the trial, Portia provides a valid legal case on behalf of Antonio. Her legal defense would provide a symbolic reference to fate's intervention. "Antonio says, in the courtroom just before the disguised Portia saves his life: ' Fortune shows herself more kind / than is her custom' (Stagman, 2010, p.373).

Disguise and deception are two important motifs in *MOV***.** Ironically, deceitful schemes in the play are necessary means through which confusions and dramatic conflicts are resolved. Without Portia's disguise scheme, falsehood, and deception may prevail against truth and reality. Remarkably, Portia's cunning rhetorical style is a powerful deceptive tool by which she exposes and subverts the deficiencies and shortcomings inherent in the patriarchal system during the trial. The heroin demonstrates great skill in using witty language on multiple occasions. Through skilful manipulation of words, she can reveal the truth from falsehood. For instance, Portia's complaint about the cruel conditions in her father's will can be viewed as subtle criticism against patriarchy: ' The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree' (1.2. 17-18). Here, Portia implicitly expresses a hidden desire for liberty from the cruel condition imposed on her by the suppressive patriarchal figure. 'Temper' here may imply a hidden desire for liberty against the rigid 'laws' devised by the deceased father. The female protagonist seems to express feelings of despair and hopslessness against the patriarchal constraints on her free will. This is evident in her speech: 'If I live to be as old as Sibylla, I will die as chaste as Diana / unless I be obtained by the manner of my father's will' (1.2. 101-103). As a sign of defiance, the heroin indirectly interferes with Bassanio's choosing of the right casket. This becomes evident when she wittingly guides him to choose the lead Casket through an encrypted song to be sung during the choosing process.

2.2.2 Belmont versus. Venice

In the play, Belmont and Venice are presented as two lively cities where people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, whether a Jew like Shylock or a Moor like Moroccan's Prince, or even a risk-taker like Bassanio, meet and interact for different reasons. Here, Belmont's domestic world has been set in opposition to the economic world of Venice." The play registers what might be described as certain cultural anxiety about a shift in economics, a move toward capitalism and away from the landowning aristocracy" (Garber, 2004, p. 284). The two cities can be contrasted in different ways. "Venice seems masculine, competitive, and commercial, operating according to harsh laws that create and perpetuate a scarcity economy and threaten strict punishment for anyone who endangers the economic life of the city" (Cerasano, 2004, p. 83). Belmont, however, "seems contrastingly maternal, bountiful, and generous (Ibid). The contrast between the two settings may represent a symbolic difference between Portia's domestic or feminine world of Belmont against Venice's masculine or newly economic world. " To enter and exit Venice, a woman must disguise themselves as men" (Ibid). In Belmont, however, "men come to the city either as adventurers in search of marriage and wealth, or, in the case of Lorenzo, as a Christian privateer in quest of a safe harbour and a sympathetic monarch" (Ibid). So in a certain way, Belmont represents domesticity and romance, whereas Venice represents both risks and opportunities. Portia plays an essential role in interlinking and mediating between the two opposite two worlds of Belmont and Venice. Interestingly, the changing economy of both cities facilitates the changing status of the female protagonist. In Belmont, Portia cunningly plays by the rule set by her deceased, whereas in Venice she impersonates the role of a male lawyer. In other words, the changing economics of both opposite cities provides the female protagonist with perfect opportunities to play with both her gender and identity.

The realist depiction of the two opposite worlds of Venice and Belmont provides a clear parody of England's changing economy during the Renaissance- Elizabethan era.

Venice's economic status in the play, as a center of trade and transaction of goods, somehow, is similar to England's changing economy as centre of trade activities in Europe. During that era, England underwent radical economic and social changes, which ultimately triggered a radical shift in people's perspectives with respect to social issues such as marriage and courtship. Notably, the play was written and staged during religious and ethnic tensions. " If it is concerned with religious controversy and change, the play is also concerned with changes in social culture in economic structure"(Garber,2004,p.284).

The Casket -Choosing test in Belmont, together with the economic bond in Venice, indicates a radical change in the conventional model of marriage and courtship. During the Casket-Choosing scheme, Portia's fortune, or even herself, has been exchanged among multiple suitors from various cultural and economic backgrounds. In Venice, too, the economy plays an essential role in shaping relationships among the conflicting characters. " The young hero, Bassanio, is recognizable as an upwardly mobile young urbanite. He is in debt, and he sees that the best way of resolving his problems is to get" married to Portia, "a beautiful heiress, in Belmont" (Ibid). The connection between romance and economy is further asserted in later Acts of the play when Shylock will be forced by the witty jurist in the court , who is in fact a woman in disguise, to leave half of his fortune to Jessica and Lorenzo. The economical factor further plays its part even after the young lovers return to Belmont where Portia plays her last trick through the delivery and retrieval of the precious ring between Bassanio and his dear friend Antonio. Ironically, the young lover's hope of winning Portia's fortune depends on the male lover's success during the Ring Test.

2.2.3 Portia's Trick during Casket Scheme

Love and courtship constitute two central themes in *MOV*. The marital arrangement between Bassanio and Portia cannot proceed unless Antonio borrows money from Shylock. The prospect of marriage provides a better opportunity for Bassanio to rise above his humble social status. "Portia is regularly referred to as a "lady," a term applied to women of a wide range of social ranks, from the gentry through the upper aristocracy,

and she herself has at least one lady-in-waiting" (Garvin & Payne, 1980, p. 95). The Casket-Scheme, which is designed by Portia's deceased father, represents old patriarchal model of courtship compared to Venice's new model of economic exchanges. Symbolically, Portia represents a "commodity for exchange" (Janik, 2003, p.86) between two modes of economic systems. "And if Venice and Antonio represent new capitalism, Portia's Belmont looks back to the old rituals and patriarchal obligations of feudal relations" (Jacobs, 2001, p. 20). As in other romantic comedies, the heroin in the play assists the male lover to distinguish between reality and illusion. Love, however, is not projected in its idealistic image but rather in its realistic way. The Casket – Choosing scheme represents a test for the male lover to prove himself worthy as a real lover. The prize of the right choice is marriage, whereas the failure brings with it grave financial consequences. Portia's " insistence on exaggerating the consequences of a wrong choice is thoroughly in keeping with the spirit of romance, whose lovers vow either to marry one another or to die" (Lewis , 1992, p. 41).

The play specifically signals at the siginifance of language in changing openions and personalities. Parallel to Shylock's cunning scheme against Antonio in Venice, there is a witty scheme by Portia to test Bassanio in Belmont. The success of both 'Casket' and ' Bond' schemes depends on the way language is used by both Shylock and Portia in two different dramatic situations. Through his cunning verbal skill, Shylock manages to deceive Antonio into signing a dangerous contract. Portia's witty rhetoric, similarly, guides the right suitor to choose the right casket. During the process of Casket- Choosing, the heroin wittingly describes every suitor she has encountered so far in a satirical way. She describes the Neapolitan prince as ignorant; the County Palatine as melancholic; the French lord as foolish; the baron of England as uneducated; the Scottish lord as irresponsible, and the young German as an ill-tempered man. The female protagonist demonstrates a strong-willed character when it comes to taking action. To guide her favorite suitor, she indirectly interferes in the choosing process. This is evident from the discussion between Portia and Naricia in which she describes her own deceptive method to mislead the German suitor from choosing the right casket:

Nerissa.

If he should offer to choose, and choose the right
casket, you should refuse to perform your father's
will, if you should refuse to accept him.

Portia.

Therefore, for fear of the worst, I pray thee, set a
deep glass of rhenish wine on the contrary casket,
for if the devil be within and that temptation
without, I know he will choose it. I will do any
thing, Nerissa, ere I'll be married to a sponge (1.2.86-93).

Apparently, Portia has been attracted to Bassano, a young gentleman from Venice, among other suitors, and she asks the servants to treat him differently. During the 'Casket-Choosing' process, Portia implicitly expresses her love for Bassanio through a witty wordplay: ' there's something tells me—but it is not love, /I would not lose you, and you know yourself '(3.2.4-5.). Portia, however, acts in a very cautious way not to break the rule prescribed by the patriarchal father figure:

And yet a maiden hath no tongue but thought—
I would detain you here some month or two
Before you venture for me. I could teach you
How to choose right, but I am then forsworn.
So will I never be. So may you miss me (3.2.8-12).

Symbolically, the Casket-Scheme represents a crucial test for Portia to exercise her own free-will. The developing romance between Bassanio and Portia contradicts the rigid rules of patriarchy. Portia's following speech, for instance, makes an implicit association between love and her quest for selfhood:

PORTIA
.....Now he goes,
With no less presence but with more love,
Than young Alcides,when he did redeem
The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
To the sea monster. I stand for sacrifice; (3.2.53-57).

In the above speech, Portia compares Bassanio to the heroic figure of Alcides, or Hercules who saved "the Trojan maiden, Hesione, whose father, Laomedon, had offered her as a divine sacrifice to a sea monster" (Bloom, 2010 , p.19). The speech

also offers an implicit reference to Portia's own act of self-sacrifice, whether in guiding Bassanio to choose the right casket, or in impersonating the role of a male lawyer in Venice's court to save Antonio in the play's latter Act. Here, themes of sacrifice and forgiveness recur throughout the play. Portia's speech, 'I stand for sacrifice' provides implicit reference about her next courageous act during the trial. "In adopting her disguise as Balthazar, Portia sacrifices her body as Antonio offers to sacrifice his body in the bond with Shylock" (Wells, 2002, p. 67).

Portia's courageous self-sacrifice in both the Casket-choosing' scheme and the trial scenes parody similar acts by other heroines in Shakespeare's romantic comedies such as Hero's self-sacrifice in *MAAN*, when she stages her own death for the sake of altering Claudio's misconceptions and prejudice about her; or Viola's self-sacrifice in *TN*, when she disguises herself as a male courtier in Duke Orsino's court, which ultimately helps the Duke to overcome his misconceptions and prejudice about women and courtship. Portia's first act of selfhood begins once she intervenes on Bassanio's behalf by preparing a song contains implicit linguistic symbols and riddles which guides the male lover to select the lead Casket:

SINGER(sings)Tell me where is fancy bred.
Or in the heart or in the head?
How begot, how nourishèd ?
ALL. Reply, reply.
SINGER. (sings) It is engendered in the eyes,
With gazing fed, and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.
Let us all ring fancy's knell
I'll begin it.—Ding, dong, bell (3.2.63-72).

The song was mainly intended to caution Bassanio against falling for false appearance. Its lines contain implicit references about the right casket. Moreover, the structural component of the speech provides hidden clues about the 'Lead' casket. For instance, the opening lines of the song ends with "words that rhyme with the (ed)", (Mahon & Macleod, 2002, p. 290) which indirectly guides Bassanio toward the right Casket. By intervening in the 'Casket-Choosing' process, Portia has managed to change Bassanio's destiny. " If she does not teach Bassanio how to choose right, she may be

condemned to a miserable hands" (Bulman , 1991, p.86). Contrasts between deceit and discovery, or falsehood and truth recur throughout the Casket –Choosing scheme. Such a contrast is evident in Bassanio's speech when he tries his own luck;

> BASSANIO
> So may the outward shows be least themselves.
> The world is still deceived with ornament.
> In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
> But, being seasoned with a gracious voice,
> Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
> What damnèd error, but some sober brow
> Will bless it and approve it with a text,
> Hiding the grossness with fair ornament? (3.2. 73-80).

2.2.4 Shylock's Deceitful Language during 'Bond Plot'

The ' Bond Plot" constitutes another essential part of the development of the romance between Bassanio and Portia. On the one hand, the written bond provides Bassanio with necessary financial means to court Portia, while on the other hand, it causes a temporal disruption of the marriage ceremony. Here, the economy plays an essential role in uniting the two lovers. The proposed marriage, however, cannot be accomplished without Shylock's money. "Although Bassanio chooses the lead casket, his present poverty and past prodigality give reason for thinking that fortune is his principal motive in undertaking the courtship" (Bloom, 2010 , p. 36). Bassanio, unlike Orison in *Twelfth Night* is not a 'love-stricken' courtly lover, rather he is a realist and practical man who is " anxious to conduct his business and, if unsuccessful, depart" (Ibid). The initial marital arrangement in Belmont between Portia and Bassanio, ironically, is paralleled with a hasty economical deal between Shylock and Antonio. *The Merchant of Venice* tresses the need for money for multiple functions by different characters. It may function as " an emblem" of social bonds, friendship and "human ties"(Maguire, 2004, p. 148). It may also function as a tool for revenge and separation. Antonio takes the risk of signing a dangerous deal with Shylock for the sake of friendship. Portia, too, offers a large sum of money to prove her love for Bassanio once she hears about Antonio's financial trouble. Shylock, on the other hand, uses money as a tool for revenge against Antonio. After the

trial, Shylock's money has been used by the court to assist Jessica and Lorenzo in managing their future marital bond.

The initial deal between Bassanio and Shylock is contrasted against the 'romantic' deal between Portia and Bassanio. This illustrates the extent economy and romances are interlinked in the play. The initial deal, as discussed by both Bassanio and Shylock, indicates such pragmatics link between romance and trade :

> SHYLOCK
> Three thousand ducats, well.
> BASSANIO
> Ay, sir, for three months.
> SHYLOCK
> For three months, well.
> BASSANIO
> For the which, as I told you, Antonio shall be bound (1.3.1-4).

In the above exchange, both Shylock and Bassanio exemplify two pragmatic deal makers. The deal is merely related to business and profit-making than any other considerations. Antonio, however, is the main deal maker, who as Shylock describes him, has a successful business exceeded beyond Venice : 'He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis,/ another to the Indies./ ..a third at Mexico, / a fourth for England' (1.3. 17-20) . The Venetian moneylender, nonetheless, expresses doubt whether Antonio could manage repaying the loan: 'ships are but boards, sailors but men. /There be land rats and water rats, /water thieves and land thieves…/ pirates—and then there is the peril of waters, wind'(1.3.21-23). The speech, ironically, foreshadows Antonio's forthcoming misfortune when he loses his fleet at sea. Shylock provides other reasons why he mistrusts Antonio. As Shylock explains, the Venetian Merchant has insulted and humiliated the Jewish moneylender because of his religious background, and his practice of 'usury'. Shylock, nonetheless, continues dealing with both Bassanio and Antonio. He seems more concerned about profit-making than any other considerations. Venice's economic prosperity has made it possible for various characters of diverse religious and social backgrounds to interact and make business. In the play, Venice has been depicted as a metropolitan center of trade and exchange of goods. Its economic prosperity makes it

possible for a Jewish moneylender like Shylock to sign a profitable economic deal with Venetian tradesmen like Antonio. " Venice is dependent on the wealth of foreigners and that this cosmopolitan economy requires that foreigners enjoy comparable legal rights with the Venetians" (Janik, 2003, p.125). However, Shylock's legal status in Venice is not clearly clarified due to his ethnic and religious background. Such questionable legal complexity becomes apparent during the trial.

There is a contrast between two different types of economy. Belmont represents the old type of patriarchy, while Venice is a typical symbol of the newly emerged mercantile economy. Nonetheless, they both represent " two versions of capitalism" (Ibid), or two different types of patriarchy. A sudden dramatic shift from the romantic scene to money-lending scene signals a symbolic connection between Belmont's romantic world and Venice's mercantile economic system. The deal-making between Shylock and Antonio over the terms upon which the bond has been sealed signals rising tension in the play. Shylock's following speech, for instance, gives an indication of a long history of enmity between the two characters:

> SHYLOCK
> (aside)
> How like a fawning publican he looks!
> I hate him for he is a Christian,
> But more for that in low simplicity
> He lends out money gratis and brings down
> If I can catch him once upon the hip
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
> He hates our sacred nation, and he rails (1. 3. 38-45).

Shylock's sly and deceitful language during the deal-making process signals a tragedy unfolding in latter scenes The speech, to a certain degree, may provide shylock with some moral justification when he brings forward a legal case against Antonio. A parallel can be drawn between Shylock's ambivalent religious and legal situation with Barabas' similar dramatic situation in Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*:

> Both Barabas and Shylock are rich merchants capable of lending money to people at an exorbitant rate of interest. But they, at the same time suffer from a consciousness that they are disliked and

> even hated by the Christians and consequently have developed a vindictive attitude towards Christians. Both Barabas and Shylock share this trait of personality with each other. The main action of the plays is triggered off by the same reason i.e. ill-treatment by Christians (Naikar, 2005, p.355).

The tense relation between Antonio and Shylock during the deal-making process overshadows the developing romance between Portia and Bassanio. The contrast between love against hatred, or self-sacrifice against evilness recurs through the juxtaposition of 'Bond Plot' and ' Casket-Bond". During the deal-making process, Shylock has been depicted in the play as a pragmatic moneylender. Neither Bassanio, nor Antonio was aware of shylock's evil motive. The economic deal, nevertheless, gives the implication about Antonio's double standards and pretentious hypocrisy. The Venetian merchant views himself morally superior to Shylock since he does not practice usury. And he justifies his dealing with Shylock for the purpose of helping his friend Bassanio:

> Antonio:
> Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow
> By taking nor by giving of excess,
> Yet to supply the ripe wants of my friend,
> I'll break a custom (1.3.58-61).

Antonio's speech " points to a distinction between two kinds of lending: one, between friends, that incurs no financial penalty, and the other, usury proper, that allows money to breed" (De Francisci& Stamatakis, 2017, p. 84). The above speech, nonetheless, is filled with contradictions; for, on the one hand, it justifies usury for the sake of friendship, while on the other, it rejects it on the ground of good morality. Shylock slyly criticizes Antonio's contradictory moral and ethical judgments with regard to his attitude towards the practice of " usury" :

> SHYLOCK :
> (to ANTONIO)
> Well then, your bond, and let me see—But hear you,
> Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow
> Upon advantage (1.3.64-66).

In the above speech, Shylock pokes fun at Antonio's superficial pretence of morality. Ironically, the bond itself is not sealed upon moral and ethical grounds, but

rather upon economic interests. Like a Machiavellian tradesman, Antonio finds an excuse for practicing usury for supposedly a good end. Shylock finds Bassanio's urgent need for money a perfect opportunity to avenge himself against his Christian enemy. In the following lines, Shylock cunningly twists the meaning of Jacob's story from Genesis to justify his practice of 'usury':

> SHYLOCK
> When Jacob grazed his uncle Laban's sheep—
> This Jacob from our holy Abram was,
> As his wise mother wrought in his behalf,
> The third possessor, ay, he was the third (1.3.68-71).

Shylock makes an implicit association between his economic striving, and supposedly, his religious virtue. His "insistence that 'thrift is blessing' makes a clear connection between religion and profit" (Smith, 2014 , p. 22). Even though Antonio expresses discontent at Shylock's practice of usury, he nonetheless displays willingness to undergo a business deal with him:

> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
> An evil soul producing holy witness
> Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
> A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
> Oh, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! (1.3.95-99).

Antonio makes a grave mistake by signing a deal with Shylock. This is apparently due to his miscalculation and naivety. Shylock exploited Bassanio's urgent need for money to avenge himself against his Christian enemy. When the conflicting characters agree on signing the bond, Shylock implicitly provides his moral justification for whatever action he might take against Antonio:

> SHYLOCK
> ..... you have rated me
> About my moneys and my usances.
> Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
> For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
> You call me misbeliever, cutthroat dog,
> And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine—
> And all for use of that which is mine own (1.3.104-109).

It is clear that Shylock has provided a detailed description of Antonio's past insults and mistreatments. Ironically, Antonio neither denies accusations labelled against him by Shylock, nor offers an apology. His arrogance, in a way, prevents him from foreseeing what future might hold for him. The bond, in a way, provided Antonio with an opportunity to offer an apology and asks forgiveness from Shylock. Surprisingly, he reiterates his prejudice and racial bigotry against Shylock:

> ANTONIO
> I am as like to call thee so again,
> To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too.
> If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
> As to thy friends, for when did friendship take
> A breed for barren metal of his friend (1.3.125-129).

After hearing Antonio's defiant and unapologetic tone, Shylock has become more determined to avenge himself against his enemy. He slyly twists his language for the sake of luring Antonio into falling into a trap he had set for him:

> SHYLOCK
> Why, look you how you storm!
> I would be friends with you and have your love,
> Forget the shames that you have stained me with,
> Supply your present wants and take no doit
> Of usance for my moneys—and you'll not hear me!
> This is kind I offer (1.3.133-138).

Shylock's linguistic trick conceals a very dangerous condition beneath the mask of noble intention and friendship. He promised the Venetian merchant not to charge any interest at all, except 'an equal pound of (Antonio's) fair flesh, to be cut off and taken/ In what part of (his) body'(1.3.146-148). Eventually, Shylock has succeeded in tricking Antonio to sign the dangerous bond. The deal highlights Shylock's skilful use of language, particularly his deceptive and tricky wordplay. The trial brings Portia's witty use of language opposite to Shylock's deceptive language. The heroine's verbal skill in the trial will reveal Shylock's malicious scheme. Such a skilful use of language will ultimately reverse the play's course from tragedy to a romantic comedy.

2.3 Significance of the Ring-Plot

The Merchant of Venice can be viewed as one of Shakespeare's most controversial plays. Critics disagree on whether to consider the play as anti-Semitic. For instance, Harold Bloom has labeled the play as "a profoundly anti-Semitic work" (Janik, 2003, p.131). Other critics, however, viewed the play differently. Some believe the play, through the victimized character of Shylock, offers a more sympathetic image of Jews during the Elizabethan era. Recent criticism, nevertheless, searches for the tenets of feminism in the play. The play's villain, Shylock, is probably one of the most ambivalent figures in Shakespearean comedies. Such figure, "seen in a complex and ambiguous social context, is always likely to elicit more audience sympathy than an unalloyedly wicked one" (Mahon, 2002, pp. 387-388). There is also confusion whether to consider the play a comedy, tragedy or even tragic-comedy. This is mostly due to the way the play is structured around various plots.

Unlike other Shakespearean romantic comedies, there are more than two plots in *MOV*. Critics have mainly concentrated on the dramatic function of the 'Trial plot' while both ' the Ring- plot' and ' Casket- Choosing plot' have not received such attention. There is , nonetheless, a thematic and structural interrelationship among various plots in the play. As we will explain, the minor plot in the play is as important as the main plot with regard to its dramatic function, as well as, its thematic and structural significance.

The 'Ring Plot' is part of multiple plots in the play aimed at changing and reforming the male lover's personality. The plot's storyline centres around a trick by Portia, the female protagonist, to test the loyalty of the male lover. Grady (2000, p. 35). explians as follows :

> Like the trial, the ring plot is orchestrated by Portia; but while the former takes place in the male domains of law and finance and revolves around Portia's disguise than her forensic ability, the latter shifts the field to the female realm of marriage and family.

Throughout the play, Portia displays strong wit and cunning rhetorical style. During the Casket Scheme, for instance, she successfully guides Bassanio in selecting the right casket without breaking the strict rules imposed by her deceased father. Through witty and manipulative linguistic tricks, the heroin provides some basic clues about the right casket. For example, the type of music she orders to be played during the act of choosing contains riddles and puzzles which ultimately guides Bassanio to choose the right casket. During the trial, similarly, Portia wittingly manipulates and reverses Shylock's legal trick he has hatched against Antonio. Her logical reasoning and strong wit eventually saves Antonio's life.

As a romantic lover, Bassanio is a complex character. His strong wit enables him to pass successfully the 'Casket-choosing' scheme. "Whereas the first two suitors Morocco and Aragon choose by "fleshy" standards—material and social status—Bassanio realizes that choosing according to Portia's inner worth must entail risking the loss of all he owns" (Martin , 2001 , p. 12) Bassanoi's correct choosing eventually earns him both love and fortune. Despite strong wit, he nevertheless, displays some weakness of character. His spendthrift habit and lavish lifestyle causes Antonio to seal a dangerous bond with Shylock. Portia feels insecure about Bassanio's close relationship with his close friend Antonio. The developing romance between the two lovers, accordingly, "places Bassano in a situation of conflicting loyalties, which Portia must correct through the ring-test" (Ibid).

Contrary to shylock's villainous scheme, Portia's ' Ring Test' is devised to strengthen the bond of love and friendship between lovers and friends alike. Throughout the play, aspects of 'love and friendship' are contrasted against 'hatred and division'. Notably, Portia's genuine and noble attitudes are in clear contrast with shylock's cruel and vengeful character. She has balanced her genuine passions with rational judgment. This is evident during the very beginning of the play in which she cunningly delivers her strict marital condition over her future husband:

PORTIA

Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love (3.2.166-174).

Through verbal skill, the heroin displays her symbolic authority as ‘ the lord of this fair mansion, master of (her) servants, Queen o'er (her)self ’ (3.2. 168-170). Form a feminist perspective, Portia’s strict conditions during the delivery of the ring represent a symbolic transfer of power from a patriarchal father figure to an empowered female figure. Within the Elizabethan context, the heroine's dominant role during the delivery of the ring, symbolically, will represent a subversive challenge of the norms and conventions of the time. During that period, “a married woman was legally subject to her husband in all things; she could not sue, make contracts, or go to court for any reason without his approval” (Wiesner, 2000, p.37). Through the 'Ring Scheme', the heroine can reverse power relationships and bring a change in social roles between the married couple. The delivery of the heroine’s fortune is conditioned by Bassanoi’s display of true marital commitments. She “does give everything to Bassanio here, but she gives it conditionally with the ring”(Callaghan, 2016, p. 370). Bassanio faces a difficult choice between his love for Portia and his friendship with Antonio. Overall, the ‘Ring-Scheme’ is solely devised to rectify Bassanio’s hasty and irresponsible attitude in decision making by setting a dividing line between two different types of commitments.

2.3.1 Portia’s Trick on Bassanio

After the trial, Balthazar/Portia uses a sly and manipulative scheme to test Bassanio’s loyalty. To Bassanio’s amazement, She “request(s) the ring as a token of

gratitude" (Bellioti, 2012, p.72) for saving Antonio. Through witty and cunning use of rhetoric, Balthazar/Portia lures BassanIo to deliver the ring :

> I'll take this ring from you.
> Do not draw back your hand. I'll take no more,.
> And you in love shall not deny me this (4.1. 423-425).

In the above speech, Balthazar/ Portia's sly and manipulative speech resembles a kind of witty linguistic trick she has used during the trial. Her request puts BassanIo in a very difficult situation "where he will have to measure his love for Balthazar/Portia against his friendship with Antonio" (Avraham Oz, 1995, p.146). In a desperate move, Bassanio tries to dissuade Balthazar / Portia from his request. He tells her that she deserves to be offered worthier gifts than a worthless ring: 'This ring, good sir—alas, it is a trifle. / I will not shame myself to give you this' (4. 1. 426-427). The speech makes Portia more persistent in her demand. To further press Bassano, Balthazar/ Portia cunningly reiterates her demand: 'I will have nothing else but only this. And now methinks I have a mind to it' (4.1.428-429). The lawyer's sly rhetorical maneuvering causes a rift between two close friends. Antonio, on the other hand, keeps pressing Bassanio to offer the ring to the lawyer as a token of gratitude: 'let him have the ring. /Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued against your wife's commandment' (4.1. 446-448). Bassanio faces the dilemma of keeping a precious gift from his wife or giving it away for a dear friend. He finally concedes to the jurist's demand and offers him the ring. The ring is delivered through Gratiano whose ring has been taken by Nerissa through another cunning trick.

In the play, themes of self-sacrifice and loyalty recur constantly. Antonio has risked his own life for the sake of saving BassanIo's marriage. Bassanio, too, gives away the most valuable gift from his bride to Balthazar / Portia 'as a token of gratitude' for saving his dear friend. The exchange of the ring recalls the lending process between Shylock and Antonio. Here, Portia's ring plot can be viewed as a parody of Shylock's lending scheme. In both dramatic situations, however, the two friends, Bassanio and

Antonio, have followed their passion than reason. Antonio's naivety is exploited by Shylock during the trial scene. BassanIo, too, follows his passion than reason when he gives away the ring after the trial. Both friends take action without taking into consideration the legal and moral consequences of their actions. Antonio trusts Shylock's words even though there is a long history of enmity between them. Bassanio is equally naive because he was easily deceived by Balthazar/Portia's witty language. Nonetheless, Balthazar/Portia's 'Ring Scheme', unlike Shylock's villainous scheme, is meant to deliver an important moral message. It clarifies the confusing link between friendship and romance. It will also regulate the future relationship between the two young lovers.

The role of Fate or 'Fortuna' has been hinted in the play through sequence of incidents and co-incidents. In comedies, fate assists the heroine's quest for selfhood. "Fortune has been said to be the mistress of comedy, as opposed to Destiny, the mistress of tragedy" (Muir, 1986, p.177). During the 'Casket- Scheme', Portia's fortune has been determined by every suitor's selection of a specific casket. Similarly, every suitor's fortune has been affected by selecting a specific casket. " Portia must serve the will of her dead father, a servitude made concrete by the caskets that determine her fate" (Teague, 1991 , p.75). The casket test can be viewed as a scheme that tests suitors' destines. "Destiny is not fickle fortune in the play but an intentional force, and, as Nerissa tells Portia, this assures that Portia will love the man who chooses properly" (Watkins & Perry, 2009, p.36). Fate serves Bassanio among all other suitors. His wit may guide him at some stage, but the whole process depends on luck or fate. The heroine's quest for selfhood in the play seems to be in accord with the "capricious forces of Fate". There are multiple references to ' Fate' and ' Chance' in the play. " In response to Portia's despair over the terms of the will, Nerissa assures her that, since Portia's father was 'virtuous', the lottery of her hand will give Portia what she wants" (Ibid). Antonio's misfortune at the very beginning of the play is another dramatic incident that can be attributed to the force of 'Fortuna' or providence. The fate of Antonio's ships will only be clarified by Portia at the final Act when she reports to Antonio: " three of your argosies / Are richly

come to harbor suddenly" (5.1.276-77) The incident can be attributed to " divine intervention or even Portia's own association with divinity" (Cunningham. 2007,p.136).

Structurally, the ring has a symbolic significance in the play. "Like the circles they trace, rings are potential symbols of enclosure as well as cycles of commitment and exchange" (Bunker , 2014, p.151). The absence of the ring in the play symbolizes division or even betrayal, while its presence indicates connection and commitment. The plot's structure, too, is built around a neatly organized cycle of events which might be viewed as a metaphor of "life's cycle". The cycle of love story in the play begins when Portia delivers the ring to Bassano in Belmont; retrieves it in Venice; and offers it again to Bassano in Belmont through a cyclical ritual. Thematically, the ring's cycle is associated with Bassanio's character development, and by implication, the development of love relationship between the two young lovers. Both Portia and Bassanio are destined to take two separate journeys back and forth between Belmont and Venice. Portia's change of Fortune takes a dramatic turn when she leaves Belmont to Venice to save Bassanio's close friend. Bassanio's change of fate, however, 'happens when he travels from Venice to Belmont to try his luck in courting Portia. During the 'Casket- Scheme', "Bassano's successful selection of the casket and Portia's agreement ensure their marriage ; yet his development as a man worthy of so desirable a bride is still unproven" (Janik, 2003, p.92). Remarkably, Portia's final deceptive scheme in Belmont will bring the play into yet another tense dramatic climax. The play's happy ending, as in other Shakespearean comedies, is not achievable unless the male lover undergoes a radical change of character. Portia's cunning role-playing in the final act, nevertheless, will bring such a change in Bassanio's personality.

2.3.2 Portia's Witty Role-Playing

Role-playing and disguise are two important motifs in Shakespearean comedy. By using the dramatic technique of role- playing, Shakespeare problematizes the complex

relationship between truth and falsehood. In both *MAAN* and *TN* for instance, the female protagonist's role -playing enables the male protagonist to undergo radical change of personality. Portia's role- playing in *MOV*, similarly, brings a similar outcome. The easiness through which the heroine shifts her personality back and forth between Belmont and Venice asserts feminists' assumption about the artificiality and constructiveness of female identity. As some critics have suggested, the subversiveness of the heroines' role-playing in Shakespearean comedies "lies not in an attempt to usurp male power or identity, but in the denaturalizing of gender identity itself" (Grady, 2000, p. 36).

Portia's cunning role-playing, together with her manipulative rhetoric, can be viewed as an effective subversive strategy against the existing patriarchal system. Judith Butler in her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the* Subversion of Identity (1990) identifies the concept of "role play as exemplary sites of gender subversion" (Miriam, 1998,p.238). Similar to Viola in *TN* and Beatrice in *MAAN* , Portia's subversive rhetoric in *MOV* is as much as effective as her constant role-playing. There is also a strong connection between Portia's quest for selfhood and her witty use of rhetoric. Remarkably, the 'Ring Test' doesn't achieve its end without the heroine's stunning linguistic style and her deceptive role playing. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's role- playing in the play is subversive, for it brings to the stage a new model of a female character whose image, or body representation, challenges the common perception about female's gender identity during that era.

Similar to the casket-scheme, the ring -test " is necessary, for at the time of Portia's conversion, Bassanio is less than ready to assume his part as her husband: his worth and identity still being qualified by Antonio's purse and person, he has to shake off first his shadow image before he can come to his own" (Avraham, 1995, p.146). Portia's trick on Bassanio can be regarded as a play within a play. As instructed by her lady, Nerissa wittingly performs the role assigned to her. In a cunningly staged scene, she interrogates Gratiano about the missing ring she had given him before the trial. As the two women have anticipated, Gratiano can't produce the ring. Nerissa expresses anger

and frustration over her lover's irresponsible act. She claims " that Gratiano has broken its oath to her: he had promised to wear it until his death and scolds Gratiano" (Billiotti, 2012, p. 72). The young lover finds himself in a very difficult situation. Portia cunningly exploits his weakness and begins interrogating him about the missing ring:

> Now in faith, Gratiano,
> You give your wife too unkind a cause of grief.
> An 'twere to me, I should be mad at it (5. 1. 174-176).

To trick Bassanio into acknowledging his mistake, Portia slyly criticizes his irresponsible act for losing the ring. She "expresses her conviction that" her lover "would not part with his ring for all the money in the world" (Ibid). Her next witty speech ultimately forces Bassanio to confess his guilt over losing the ring:

> I gave my love a ring, and made him swear
> Never to part with it. And here he stands.
> I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it
> Nor pluck it from his finger for the wealth
> That the world masters (5. 1. 170-174).

Portia's cunning speech forces Gratiano to acknowledge Bassanio's role in breaking the oath: 'My Lord Bassanio gave his ring away / Unto the judge that begged it and indeed / Deserved it too' (5.1. 179-181). As it is expected, the shocking revelation forces Bassanio to acknowledge his own mistake: ' If I could add a lie unto a fault/ I would deny it./but you see my finger/ Hath not the ring upon it' (5.1. 187-189). Such confession, however, gives Portia a good reason to accuse Bassanio of dishonesty.

> PORTIA
>
> If you had known the virtue of the ring,
> Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
> Or your own honor to contain the ring,
> You would not then have parted with the ring.
> What man is there so much unreasonable, (5. 1. 200-205).

Eventually, Portia's strong rhetorical style forces Bassanio to express regret for his grave mistake in giving away the precious ring. To justify himself, "Bassanio explains that he did not bestow the ring on another woman, but on the distinguished judge

who saved Antonio's life"(Ibid, p.72). In a highly emotional speech, he pleads forgiveness. Portia's next trick is to force Bassanio to make a crucial concession. Through maneuvering rhetoric, she extracts a painful confession from him. This will ultimately grant Portia more power and authority over the weakened and powerless male lover. The scene in which Portia extracts a confession from Bassanio is quite similar to the trial scene in which she forced shylock to plead guilty and ask forgiveness. Bassanio, similar to Shylock, finds no other way to defend himself except asking for mercy from his witty interrogator. In a witty trick, Portia cunningly suggests that" should the jurist travel near her home she would mimic Bassanio and refuse him nothing" (Ibid, p.72). As a sign of female solidarity, "Merissa follows suit and suggests the same to Gratiano should the law clerk who has her ring wander to Belmont"(Ibid, p.72). In the meantime, Antonio feels obliged to assist his friend Bassanio. He offers his soul as forfeit for Bassanio as he had previously offered his body as forfeit during the Trial:

> ANTONIO
>
> I once did lend my body for his wealth,
> Which but for him that had your husband's ring
> Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
> My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
> Will never more break faith advisedly (5.1. 249-253).

Antonio's passionate speech reiterates themes of self-sacrifice and loyalty in the play. "By acting as Bassano's "surety," Antonio figuratively takes out a bond once again for Bassanio" (Ranson & Merrix, 1992, p.32). In a surprising move, Portia produces the missing ring and delivers it to Antonio. He then hands it to Bassanio. The shocking revelation of the missing ring by Portia recalls a previous dramatic situation in which she intentionally delays the revelation of the legal item in the written bond demanding "that Shylock exact no more nor less than one pound of flesh" (Ruoff, 1975, p. 282). In both dramatic situations, Portia intentionally delayed revealing something for a period of time. Her rhetorical maneuvering technique proves to be very effective in forcing either Shylock, as in the trial scene, or Bassanio during the ring plot, to acknowledge their wrongdoings. In the trial scene, Shylock admits his defeat after finding Portia's last-minute judicial revelation too difficult to be challenged. Bassanio, too, is getting amazed

by Portia's last-minute revelation of the missing ring. Ironically, Bassanio has become the subject of two different types of commitments from both his lover and his friend.

Ultimately, Portia has succeeded in changing Bassanio's attitude towards love and marriage. Through her tricky schemes, she can regulate her love relationship with Bassanio. So, the main purpose of the ' Ring' Scheme' was to rectify " Bassanio's earlier mistake in choosing friendship over marriage" (Dreher, 1986, p.135). After extracting a sincere confession from her future husband, Portia has symbolically gained more power and authority. The cyclical exchange of the ring, from Portia to Antonio, and then from Antonio to Bassanio symbolizes an emerging new relationship among two friends and two lovers. "Since Portia especially acknowledges the relationship between her husband and his friend, she must steer that relationship in a direction that best suits her" (Mahon & John, 2002, p.347). The final result of the 'Ring scheme' marks a symbolic victory for Portia against his remorseful lover. Bassanio's emotional confession provides a parody of Shylock's declaration of defeat after a long legal battle during the trial. In both dramatic scenes, Portia has emerged victorious from both emotional and judicial conflicts. After the trial, she lays down strict conditions on Shylock upon which he should to give away a large sum of his fortune. Similarly, Bassanio must accept Portia's conditions otherwise he won't be forgiven. The test, in fact, has taught Bassanio a very important moral message about loyalty and marital commitment. It forces him to value Portia's love over Antonio's friendship.

Structurally, both major and minor plots in *MOV* are neatly structured where every dramatic action is interconnected within a complex web. Portia's trick will be following by series of unexpected dramatic revelations. After the ' Ring Test', Portia discloses the true identities of Balthazar and her legal companion to Bassanio and Antonio. Unexpected news is also revealed to Lorenzo and Jessica about a large sum of money they inherited from the disgraced Shylock. Moreover, the return of Antonio's lost ships will bring the cycle of events into a happy ending.

Thus, the ‘Ring Plot’ constitutes a significant part of the play’s story-line. Structurally, the ring plot represents the final phase of multiple tests aimed at changing the male lover’s personality. Such minor plot is built around a neatly organized cycle of events that might be viewed as a metaphor of “life’s cycle”. The play’s love story, for instance, begins when the heroine delivers the ring to her lover in Belmont; retrieves it in Venice; and offers it again to the male lover in Belmont through a cyclical ritual. Moreover, the ring plot structurally interconnects two major plots in the play, such as the ‘ Trial Plot’ and ‘ Casket-Choosing Plot’. These interrelated plots share similar themes and events. For instance, the exchange of the ring between the two lovers parodies the lending process between Shylock and Antonio in the ‘ Trial Plot’. Here, the heroine’s ring plot can be viewed as a parody of Shylock’s lending scheme in which he lured Antonio to sign a dangerous bond. Portia’s ‘Ring scheme’, unlike Shylock’s villainous scheme, is devised for a noble cause. Similarly, a parallel can be drawn between the ‘Casket –Choosing’ plot and the 'Ring Plot'. During the ‘Casket –Choosing’ plot, the heroin successfully tested the male lover’s loyalty and secured his commitment towards future marital bond. Similar testing recurs during the ring plot. Unlike shylock’s villainous scheme, the heroine’s testing schemes are devised to strengthen the bonds of love and friendship between lovers and friends alike. Thematically, the heroine’s ring scheme is associated with male protagonist’s personality growth, and by the implication, the development of a love relationship between the two young lovers. As a result of such a scheme, the heroine can reverse power relationships and cause a change in social roles between the married couple. The easiness through which the female protagonist shifts her identity, through role-playing and disguise, reiterates basic assumptions by feminists with regard to performativity and constructiveness of woman’s gender identity. Moreover, the play’s final deceptive scheme will eventually enhance the female protagonist's sense of individuality and selfhood.

2.4 The Trial as a Test of Individuality

The trial plot, thematically and structurally, constitutes an essential component of the comedy. It interconnects both the casket plot and the bond plot. A sequence of events after both plots indicates unfolding tragedy. Salerino first reports to Solanio a rumor that Antonio's ships were sunk, loaded with the merchant's entire fortune. Shylock is angered by Jessica's elopement with Lorenzo. He, nonetheless, finds consolation in Tubal's report that Antonio's ships were wrecked. Apparently, Shylock has been more concerned about his fortune than his daughter's elopement. This brings into focus the contrast between Antonio's genuine compassion toward Bassanio, or even Portia's self-sacrifice for her lover, against Shylock's greed and lust for revenge.

Ironically, Antonio's forthcoming misfortune provides an opportunity for Portia to assert herself as an independent woman. When rumors about Antonio's misfortune reach both lovers in Belmont, Portia expresses sincere willingness to assist her lover's best friend. In a cunning trick, she disguises herself as a lawyer, and together with her disguised female companion, she sets to a journey to Venice. Portia's self-disguise, and her witty use of verbal skill, will reverse the play's tragic outcome. From a feminist perspective, Portia's self-disguise can be viewed as a means of empowerment since it provides her with the means to enter Venice's male-dominated legal system. "Disguise can provide the permission for a character to realize more fully their possibilities, and express more faithfully their true selves" (Palfrey, 2005 , p. 280). Unlike other romantic heroines in Shakespeare's comedies, Portia willingly and without any external pressure changes her identity through disguise rather than being forced to undertake it. "Whereas Viola (in *Twelfth Night*) and indeed Rosalind (in *As You Like It*) are forced to adopt a male persona for self-protection in a dangerous world, Portia's disguise is to do with the need for empowerment"(McCullough, 2005, p. 79).

The trial, similar to the casket scheme exemplifies a test for Portia to demonstrate free-will and re-assert her sense of individuality. Her "role in the judicial process" is to "deliver a message about the power of a woman" (Jurich, 1998, p.224). Through the

deceptive scheme of disguise, the heroin can challenge Venice's judicial system. The city's legal system, metaphorically, represents patriarchal constraints on women's potentialities. As the trial begins ," the heroin proves that she has more wisdom than the respected men in Venice, including even the Duke, that she is far more capable of synthesizing legal principles and moral concerns" (Ibid).

The trial scene constitutes the play's climax since it brings together the conflicting characters. Portia and Shylock represent the two main opposing sides of the conflict. Their conflict is reflected in the way they use language. To impersonate Dr. Balthazar's character, Portia must act and talk as a legal expert. Apparently, the trial has been set merely to look into the legal case raised by Shylock against Antonio. It nonetheless, does not look into the racial and religious conflict between the two conflicting characters. As the trial proceeds, Shylock becomes a target of religious and racial stigmatization. The play, through Portia's wit and witty verbal skill, exposes innate flaws within Venice\s judicial system. At the opening of the trial, for instance, a sharp contrast becomes evident between Portia's humanistic view and Duke's bias and prejudice judgment. The Duke openly expresses sympathy for Antonio against Shylock, whom he describes as: 'a stony adversary, an inhuman wretch / uncapable of pity, void and empty, From any dram of mercy' (4. 1. 2-4). The Duke's stance, legally or ethically, is far from being neutral. In a certain way, the Duke may have a reason to "condemn" Shylock, as he "has decided to insist on the fulfilment of his bind, yet the state's neutrality in the matter is suspect" (Callaghan, 2016 , p.372). Moreover, the Duke's controversial legal stance against Shylock can be viewed as a typical example of hostile sentiments and prejudice towards ethnic and religious minorities in Venice, and by implication, in Elizabethan England.

Contrary to the Duke, Portia does not express any feeling of hostility and prejudice against the Jewish moneylender. On the contrary, she tries to present himself as the rightful voice of truth and justice. Her legal proceeding is rather focused on presenting an objective and fair legal case in Venice court. The young lawyer gives Shylock "opportunity after opportunity to relent and to exercise his humanity" (Bate &

Rasmussen, 2010, p.139). As the trial proceeds, it becomes further evident that Shylock has not been viewed as a Venetian citizen, but rather as an alien figure to the community. Despite having sympathetic feeling for the Venetian merchant, the Duke can not reject Shylock's legal case. Antonio has abandoned all hope of getting released. This is evident in his desperate speech to the Duke:

> ….since he stands obdurate
> And that no lawful means can carry me
> Out of his envy's reach, I do oppose
> My patience to his fury, and am armed
> To suffer with a quietness of spirit
> The very tyranny and rage of his (4.1.7-12).

Whereas the court presents the case as if it is a mere legal dispute between two tradesmen, Antonio nevertheless tries to make the case as if it is religiously motivated. His anti-Semitist comments against Shylock are meant to prove his views. And his hostile sentiment has found a response in Graziano's most gruesome anti-Semitic comments against Shylock:

> GRAZIANO
> O, be thou damned, inexecrable dog,
> And for thy life let justice be accused!
> Thou almost makest me waver in my faith
> To hold opinion with Pythagoras
> That souls of animals infuse themselves
> Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
> Governed a wolf who, hanged for human slaughter,
> Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
> And whilst thou layest in thy unhallowed dam
> Infused itself in thee, for thy desires
> Are wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous (4.1. 127-137).

Graziano's above speech recalls a similar anti-Semitic speech before the trial. The negative imageries which are attributed to Shylock by Antonio's friends provide a typical example of relatively common prejudice by Venice's population toward stigmatized religious and ethnic minorities like Jews and others. Stigmatization of Shylock in the courtroom throws further doubt on Venice's unbiased and fair trial. As the above speech displays, " Graziano's anti-Semitism in the trial scene is a double of the anti-Semitism

that Antonio showed earlier in unrepentantly spitting at Shylock, before his life was ever threatened" (Novy, 2017, pp.22-23).

The city of Venice, besides its judicial system, is depicted in the play as the center of trade and economic exchanges. It's tolerant and Machiavellian policy has made it possible for tradesmen and dealmakers from various cultural and ethnical backgrounds to interact and engage in economic deal-making. The complex relationship between the economy and the legal system in Venice is clearly referred to in a speech between Antonio and Solanio, in which the Venetian Merchant clarifies the preference of economic factor over moral and ethical issues:

> SOLANIO. I am sure the duke
> Will never grant this forfeiture to hold.
> ANTONIO. The duke cannot deny the course of law.
> For the commodity that strangers have
> With us in Venice, if it be denied,
> Will much impeach the justice of his state,
> Since that the trade and profit of the city
> Consisteth of all nations (3.3. 24-31).

Ironically, Antonio tries to present the legal case as if it is religiously grounded while downplaying his prior racial and ethnic prejudice against Shylock. Yet, the court (at least not openly) does not make any attempt to instantly annul the legal case against Antonio. Both " Antonio and Shylock, in their different ways, have made their fortunes in commerce and are thus presumably skilled dealmakers", (Maus, 2013, p. 85), then they must be treated equally. The new economic spirit of the city necessitates fair treatment of all inhabitants, regardless of their religious and racial backgrounds. Shylock, too, at some point in the play emphasizes the role of economy over his legal demand. During the trial, for instance, he cunningly tries to make a connection between his legal right as a tradesman and Venice's Charter with regard to free trade and economic activities. This is mainly the reason why he reiterates his demand " to have the due and forfeit of (his) bond./ If (they) deny it, let the danger light / Upon (their) charter and (their) city's freedom" (4.1.36-38). According to historical records, Venice had granted foreign merchants and trade makers special economic

privileges. Among minorities,“ Jews were required to pay 100 ducats to the state in exchange of this privilege” (Kitch, 2009, p. 110). Upon such legal privilege, Shylock cunningly makes an association between his demand for a pound of flesh and his legal right within Venice’s economic Charter. As the trial proceeds, it becomes evident that the court has been merely designed to look into the economic aspect of the bond rather than the complex religious and ethnical circumstances surrounding it. The Duke’s appealing speech to Shylock to show mercy lacks any references to Shylock’s long sufferings and grievances:

> DUKE
> Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
> That thou but lead’st this fashion of thy malice
> To the last hour of act, and then ’tis thought
> Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
> Than is thy strange apparent cruelty,
> And where thou now exacts the penalty—
> Which is a pound of this poor merchant’s flesh—
> Thou wilt not only loose the forfeiture
> But—touched with human gentleness and love,—
> Forgive a moiety of the principal,
> Glancing an eye of pity on his losses (4.1.16-26).

The Duke, in the above speech, uses his legal authority to influence Shylock’s opinion. He argues “that Antonio’s case is pitiable enough to illicit a kind of response”, and “expects Shylock to act according to “human gentleness” (Callaghan, 2016, p. 372). The Duke asks Shylock to forgive Antonio on ethical ground by exhibiting “human gentleness’, while ignoring the fact that the deal itself lacks any ethical, or even legal ground, “ the bond was void as being contrary to good morals, and the judge should have refused to enforce it on this ground from the first” (Phillips, 2005, p.93). Shylock, nevertheless, is determined to receive justice in his own manner. He cunningly refers to the economic side of the legal case since any failure in executing the law would endanger Venice’s free and tolerant reputation:

> Shylock
> The pound of flesh which I demand of him
> Is dearly bought. 'Tis mine and I will have it.
> If you deny me, fie upon your law—

There is no force in the decrees of Venice.
I stand for judgment. Answer, shall I have it? (4.1. 98-103).

By constantly referring to Venice's charter, Shylock has cunningly put the Duke in a very difficult position. Even though Shylock is not a genuine citizen of Venice, yet under the city's charter he enjoys a certain degree of legal rights, namely the right of free trade and profit-making. There is a historical background to shylock's stance over his legal rights in Venice. For instance, William Thomas' book ***History of Italy*** (1549) outlines "an oft-cited account of Venice's toleration toward aliens, and it also notes the profit that accrues to the city from taxation and duties on Jewish usury" (Archer,2005, p. 43). Shakespeare, through Shylock's ambivalent legal condition, is reflecting on the complex conditions of minorities, whether Jews, Moors or Protestants in Venice or oven England itself. Remarkably, Shylock chooses only one specific law from Venice's Charter, among many others, to serve his own interest. " All he asks from the court is that his contract be upheld. This is Shylock's legal strategy, and it is an intelligent one, given the judicial context" (Holderness. 2016, p.148). Antonio, on the other hand, adopts quite a different legal strategy, making his case appear as if religiously motivated. Antonio's anti-Semitic tone is quite evident when he answers Bassanio's appeal to the Duke to annul the legal case altogether:

ANTONIO
(to BASSANIO)
I pray you, think you question with the Jew?
You may as well go stand upon the beach
And bid the main flood bate his usual height.
You may as well use question with the wolf
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb (4.1. 69-73).

The play reflects on the complex relationship between law and ethics. Antonio is legally guilty, but his noble motivation to help a friend, to certain degree, makes him morally innocent. Shylock, on the other hand, uses his loan as a villainous scheme to avenge himself against Antonio's inhuman treatments. Shylock is fully aware that Venice's court has no choice but to fulfil his legal demand. That is why he repeatedly asks the court to strictly adhere to the literal implementation of the law. Paradoxically,

"the Venetians don't know what to enjoin upon him if he won't even accept being paid back in the currency he lent" (Landreth, 2012 , p. 151). Apparently, Shylock's cunning legal strategy takes its effect upon the Duke as he neither uses his authority to acquit the defendant, nor annuls the legal case altogether. " Though he is proceeding on the basis of a law that offers universal protection, Shylock does so from the position of a stranger rather than of a citizen of Venice" (Holderness, 2016, pp.148-9). Bassanio's hopeless pledge to offer Shylock twice the money Antonio has borrowed brings no result for Shylock, who in reality seeks revenge more than anything else: ' If every ducat in six thousand ducats / Were in six parts, and every part a ducat, /I would not draw them. I would have my bond' (4.1. 86-88). Here, Shylock cunningly presents himself as the guardian of justice than someone seeking economic profit. His deceptive rhetoric has overtaken Duke's legal technicality, or Antonio and Graziano's emotional appealings. Only Portia's verbal skill could reverse the tragic course of the play as she wittingly would lure Shylock into a legal trap. Obviousely, Shylock's cunning rhetoric has set the Duke in a very difficult situation. Before letting the young lawyer takes (his) position in the court, the Duke asks Shylock once again to forgive Antonio and render him ' mercy', for which Shylock gives the most provocative answer :

> What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong?
>
> You have among you many a purchased slave,
> Which—like your asses and your dogs and mules—
> You use in abject and in slavish parts
> Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,
> "Let them be free! Marry them to your heirs! (4.1. 88-93).

To justify his legal demand, Shylock has made an association between his practice of usury, and some of the most controversial economic practices by the Christians in Venice, including inhuman practice of the slave trade. The speech, implicitly casts doubt on Venice's Machiavellian inhuman 'economic' practice overseas. Here, Shakespeare, as a great humanist criticizes many cruel practices against various ethnical and religious minorities, including Jews, during the Elizabethan era. The dramatist may also allude to some inhuman practices during the early stages of colonialism era in Europe in which

slaves from different parts of the continent were brought to England and other European states for economic profits.

The trial presents a legal dilemma faced by Venice's court with regard to a legal case raised by a Jewish money lender against a Christian Venetian citizen. The Venetian court finds it difficult to dissolve Shylock's case against the Venetian merchant. It is only Portia, disguised as a male Lawyer, who provides a neutral and objective legal proceeding in Venice's court. Remarkably, the trial will offer Portia with an opportunity to enter Venice's male-dominated institution, and demonstrate her free will. Similar to Viola and Beatrice in Shakespeare's *MAAN* and *TN*, Portia's wit and verbal skill will play a significant role in revealing truth from falsehood.

2.4.1 Portia's Linguistic Trick on Shylock

During the trial, (Portia / Balthazar) tries to win Shylock's approval through witty usage of language. Unlike the Duke's implicit religious bias, (Balthazar/ Portia) tries to distance himself from any religious and ethnic prejudice. This is evident when Portia/Balthazar calls upon both the defendant and accuser to present their cases. This is clear when he calls upon both cliamant and defendant to present their cases on equal term. "Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew' (4. 1. 169-170). The speech asserts Portia/Balthazar's neutral stance " and poised to recognize the legitimacy in each of two opposing perspectives" (Lewis, 1997, p. 76). The designated lawyer further asserts his impartiality when he addresses Shylock as someone who has a valid legal case : 'Of a strange nature is the suit you follow; / Yet in such rule that the Venetian law / Cannot impugn you as you do proceed' (4.1. 173-176). Shylock, in the meantime, is determined to have justice on his own term, which is only possible through the literal implementation of his bond. He sees no reason why he must show mercy. When requested by Portia/ Balthazar to display mercy toward the defendant, Shylock cunningly provides the most confronting question, "On what compulsion must I? tell me that ?"

(4.1. 180). In her response, Portia delivers the most appealing and humanist speech about the significance of 'mercy':

> The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
> It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
> Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest;
> It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
> 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
> The throned monarch better than his crown,
> ……..
> But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
> It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
> It is an attribute to God himself;
> And earthly power doth then show likest God's
> When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
> Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
> That, in the course of justice, none of us
> Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy; (4.1. 180-196).

In the above lines, Portia /Balthazar 's wittingly uses logical reasoning to persuade Shylock to display mercy and forgiveness towards Antonio. The speech appeals to Shylock's compassion " to put mercy above vindictive and literalist legalism" (Beiner, 1993 , p. 123) The act of forgiveness, as Portia/ Balthazar describes it, will invoke the noblest human feeling. It is not linked with earthly power, but rather it is a divine gift. Here, Portia/ Balthazar's speech is focusing on the humanist aspect of mercy, a notion which transcends religious and racial boundaries. Rhetorically, Portia /Balthazar's verbal skill makes a distinction between legal justice and moral justice, "because under justice" can anyone be " condemned, but only with mercy can anyone be saved" (Grosz, 2004, p. 12). Portia's witty speech aims at convincing Shylock to forgive Antonio, and leave behind his lust for revenge. Shylock, nevertheless, persists on implementing justice on his own term: 'My deeds upon my head! I crave the law, /The penalty and forfeit of my bond'(4.1. 202-204). After finding Shylock's unshaken legal stance, Portia /Balthazar then shifts her rhetorical strategy. He offers Shylock a large sum of money, for which Bassano expresses his sincere willingness to pay 'ten times o'er'(4.1. 208). From a legal perspective, " Shylock feels no compulsion to be merciful, (Halio, 2000, p. 16), and instead he " insists on the pound of flesh to which he is entitled" (Smith& Freeman, 2013, p. 251).

As a result of Shylock's uncompromising stance, Portia/ Balthazar shifts his legal strategy. Through tricky use of language, the young lawyer tricks Shylock into believing that he is about to fulfill his legal demand. To prove his sincerity, he rejects Bassanio's plea to the Duke to use his' authority' to 'curb this cruel devil of his will'(4.1. 213). Such a tricky response has led to much confusion among Antonio and his fellow companions:

> PORTIA
> It must not be. There is no power in Venice
> Can alter a decree establishèd.
> 'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
> And many an error by the same example
> Will rush into the state. It cannot be (4.1. 214-218).

Portia / Balthazar has presented himself as the guardian of Shylock's legal right. "All the speeches addressed to Shylock in the first instance are either direct or indirect experiments on his temper and feelings"(Jameson, 2018,p.32). Such a cunning rhetorical technique has gained Shylock's approval . In a certain way, Balthazar/ Portia has become Shylock's legal defendant, and "the personification of what he seeks: an objective, impersonal adjudicator who will bring him equality" (Belliotti, 2012,p. 49). Overwhelmed with Joy, shylock exclaims: " A Daniel come to judgment! yea, a Daniel! /O wise young judge, how I do honour thee!" (4. 1. 219-221). Both Bassanio and Antonio are astonished by Portia /Balthazar's seemingly bias legal proceeding. Eventually, Portia makes one last effort to convince Shylock to withdraw his legal case by offering him a large sum of money, while at the same time reiterating his legal demand :

> Why, this bond is forfeit!
> And lawfully by this the Jew may claim
> A pound of flesh to be by him cut off
> Nearest the merchant's heart.—Be merciful.
> Take thrice thy money (4. 1. 226-230)

Portia/ Balthazar's cunning persuasive language in the above speech offers an equivalent parody of Shylock's scheme in which he previously has lured both Bassanio and Antonio into signing the dangerous bond. Antonio's desperate appeal to the court 'To

give' its last ' judgment' (4.1.240) indicates his despair with regard to the jurist's controversial legal proceeding. Surprisingly, Balthazar/ Portia's conciliatory effort brings no result as Shylock steadfastly reiterates his previous demand: ' An oath, an oath, I have an oath in heaven. /Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? / No, not for Venice' (4. 1. 224-226). As the speech displayed, Shylock's insistence on the ' literal implementation of his bond, and his rejection of any offer in compromise, proves once again that he is only seeking revenge than achieving justice. He sly hides his evil intention by constantly referring to his legal right. He "cannot be persuaded or reconciled" (Beiner, 1993, p. 123). Eventually, Portia has succeeded in luring Shylock "into accepting her as an authoritative voice of law" (Belliotti, 2012, p. 49). He joyfully praises the jurist's seemingly supportive legal proceeding:

> SHYLOCK
> I charge you by the law,
> Whereof you are a well-deserving pillar,
> Proceed to judgment. By my soul I swear
> There is no power in the tongue of man
> To alter me. I stay here on my bond (4.1. 234-238).

The tense dramatic situation reaches its climax when Portia orders Antonio to: 'lay bare (his) bosom', for Shylock's knife (4.1.248), for which the Venetian moneylender joyfully replies: ' Ay, his breast. /So says the bond. / Doth it not, noble judge? / "Nearest his heart'(4.1. 249-251). Here Portia /Balthazar's cunning legal maneuvering aimed at luring Shylock into accepting what follows next in her legal proceeding. His next witty question, ' Are there balance here to weigh The flesh? (4.1. 252), was meant to reassure Shylock that his request will be fulfilled upon his terms. Shylock finds no obligation to provide 'some surgeon, in the on (his) charge, / to stop (Antonio's) wounds lest he do bleed to death', since it is not ' nominated bond' (4.1.254-256). This furthermore reaffirms Shylock's unyielding stance with regard to the fulfilment of his bond.

In this play, themes of love and friendship are contrasted against hatred and enmity. Whereas Shylock's evil scheme symbolizes separation and enmity, Antonio's self- sacrifice, similar to Portia's self-sacrifice, symbolizes compassion and

unity. Contrary to Shylock's cruel and inhuman stance during the trial, Antonio displays sincere willingness to sacrifice himself for his dear friend Bassanio: 'Commend me to your honorable wife./Tell her the process of Antonio's end./Say how I loved you. Speak me fair in death' (4.1. 269-271). The emotional speech causes both Bassanio and Graziano to express their noble affection for Antonio. The disguised lawyer seems to have been provoked by Bassanio's emotional speech to his dear friend: 'life itself, my wife, and all the world … / I would lose all—ay, sacrifice them all'(4.1. 281-283) , for which she gives a sarcastic reply 'Your wife would give you little thanks for that /If she were by to hear you make the offer" (4.1. 284-285). The speech, metatheatricaly, reflects on the heroin's own act of role-playing. Bassanio's display of loyalty towards his friend, somehow, is "justifiable" since it "answer the fullness of Antonio's love, sacrifice with sacrifice"(Muir, 2002,p. 83). Shylock seems unaffected by the feelings of agony and sadness expressed by Bassanio and Graziano toward Antonio, and instead demands the literal implementation of his bond. Balthazar/Portia continues pretending that he is fulfilling his demand in sentencing Antonio as the law entitles him to do so. Through witty rhetorical maneuvering, the young lawyer lures Shylock to follow through with every word he tells :

> PORTIAA.
> pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine.
> The court awards it, and the law doth give it.
> SHYLOCK.
> Most rightful judge!
> PORTIA.
> And you must cut this flesh from off his breast.
> The law allows it, and the court awards it.
> SHYLOCK. Most learnèd judge, a sentence! Come, prepare (4. 1. 295-299)

Rhetorically, Balthazar/ Portia has succeeded in giving the impression that he is on the verge of fulfilling Shylock's legal demand. The shocking revelation about 'something else' in the bond, however, will ultimately turn the events upside down. The witty lawyer, apparently, has found what can be termed as legal loopholes hidden within the written bond :

> PORTIA

The words expressly are “a pound of flesh.”
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh,
But in the cutting it if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
Are by the laws of Venice confiscate
Unto the state of Venice (4.1. 304-309)

The bond, as Portia/Balthazar wittingly explains, limits Shylock’s choices in punishing Antonio. Above all, he must cut precisely a pound of flesh, no more no less, from Antonio’s body. He must also accomplish the task at hand without even shedding a single drop of blood; otherwise, his lands and property will be confiscated by the state’s law. Balthazar/Portia’s cunning ‘literal’ interpretation of the bond leaves no choice for Shylock, but to accept its strict terms. Ironically, by delving into the legal technicality, the young lawyer has managed to turn the law against itself. Now, the Venetian moneylender faces a difficult dilemma; for “he could neither have flesh without blood nor quantify an exact pound. Both would be impossible” (Janik, 2003 , p. 88). His disparate protest, ‘Is that the law?’ (4.1.309), receives a witty answer from Portia:’ Thyself shalt see the act/ For as thou urgest justice, be assured/ Thou shalt have justice more, than thou desir’st’ (4.1. 310-112 Balthazar/Portia’s tricky language puts Shylock in a difficult legal situation, because he is neither able to continue asking for justice in his own terms, nor to withdraw the whole case altogether. In the meantime, shylock tries to bring up whatever solutions he may find to relieve himself from the charge that he must face. His suggestion to ' to take ' previous offer, 'And let the Christian go', receives a cold response from Portia/ Balthazar. In a tone filled with sarcasm, Balthazar /Portia tells Shylock that he receives nothing but the literal implementation of his bond. “When Portia herself insists on the literal interpretation, she entraps Shylock in the text and demonstrates to the court that he is the enemy of the Christians.” (De Sousa, 1999, p. 95). The most decisive moment occurs in the play when Balthazar/Portia reveals “ a secret decree presumably hidden in the archives of Venice” (Ibid). The Venetian decree, as Portia explains, lays down the harshest punishment upon foreign nationals like Shylock if they, for some reasons, threatened the life of any citizen Venice:

PORTIA
If it be proved against an alien
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any citizen,
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive
Shall seize one half his goods. The other half
Comes to the privy coffer of the state,
And the offender's life lies in the mercy
Of the Duke only 'gainst all other voice (4.1. 345-52).

Obviously, Shylock has been trapped into a legal trick, for he has demanded nothing less than the literal interpretation of his bond, and that is exactly what Portia has done in the courtroom. Upon the decree, "anyone who seeks to kill a Venetian will be sentenced to death unless given mercy by the Duke" (Grosz, 2004 , p. 12). The Venetian law clearly applies to Shylock since he threatened Antonio's life. As a result of Balthazar/ Portia's rhetorical legal maneuvering, Shylock must give up half of the property to Antonio and the other half to the state of Venice. Such a witty verbal skill brought dramatic changes in the court's legal proceeding. Symbolically, it marks a shift in the power struggle between Shylock and the young lawyer.

As a result of Portia / Balthazar's witty linguistic manoeuvring, Shylock has been weakened and disempowered, and he is no longer able to exert his power over the defendant. On the contrary, Balthazar/ Portia has asserted himself as a strong-willed character, whose wit and strong verbal skill empowered him in the courtroom. Legally, the heroin's cunning rhetorical skill turns the legal case acclaimed by Shylock against him. He cannot ask for forgiveness since he previously denied it to Antonio. He has also rejected the Duke's appeal for mercy, as he demanded legal verdict over mercy and forgiveness. However, contrary to Shylock's expectation, "the Duke pardons Shylock's life but still takes all his money for Antonio and for the state" (Grosz, 2004 , p.12). Antonio, in his part, sets two harsh conditions on Shylock. He requests the Duke to let Shylock keep half of his wealth, and let another half of his wealth to Lorenzo and Jessica after his death. Shylock, however, protests mostly against the second condition which forces Shylock to leave his own religion and get converted to Christianity. Obviously, Shylock has no choice but to express his approval. At the end of the play,

Shylock appears weak and broken. His last words to the Duke 'to give (him) leave to go from hence./ , for (he is) not wel', indicates his lost case against Antonio,

Apparently, Portia has won the legal battle after a long process of witty rhetorical manoeuvrings. Her journey to Venice, Symbolically, represents a test of 'free will' and selfhood. The happy ending of the play comes as a result of the heroine's 'self-sacrifice'. Through disguise and cunning rhetorical manoeuvrings, the heroin can challenge, and even subvert Shylock's harsh legal terms. She has not only succeeded in attaining her sense of individuality, but she also altered power relations among the conflicting characters. From a feminist and humanist perspective, the heroine's quest for individuality provides a model of a woman's struggle for selfhood and free will.

2.5. Question of Religion in the Play

There have been contradictory and even confusing critical responses with regard to Shakespeare's theatrical portrayal of Shylock's character. It is still unclear whether or not the play should be regarded as anti-Semitic. Some critics attribute the anti-Semitic tone of the play to Antonio's unpleasant treatments of Shylock during the trial, or even before that event. Critics have made association between the playwright's theatrical representations of Shylock with the negative stereotypes of Jews in western culture. These critics draw attention to dramatic representations of the contrast between good and evil in old "medieval miracle play structure: Antonio as Christ, Shylock as Antichrist, and Portia as Virgin Mary" (Gilman & Katz, 1991,p. 58). In other words, Shylock's theatrical representation combines symbolic image of "the devil" in morality play and the historical portrayal of " the bloodsucking usurer" (Ibid). Even Shylock's name, as some critics pointed out , stands for " one of the most powerful anti-Jewish stereotypes" (Lindemann & Levy 2019, p.271). Some critics, however, are more cautious in judging the dramatist as anti-Semitist. For instance critic Derek Cohen in *Shakespearean Motives*

(1988) views the play as being anti-Semitic " by an author who is not an anti-Semitic" (Cohen, 1988, p.118).

However, there are many evidences which assert Shakespeare's sympathetic to Shylock's ethinc and religious background. The playwright, through implicit references, offers a sympathetic portrait of Jews in the play. Within the context of sixteenth-century England, the play implicitly address historical grievances of jews in the early modern era. The tense relation between Antonio and Shylock , allegorically, brings on stage real historical events; such as, forced conversions and mass expulsion of Jews during the Elizabethan era. Historically, Jews were subject to multiple injustice practices in Europe throughout different ages. It is to be noted that, "the expulsion from England in 1290 was the first mass expulsion of Jews in medieval Europe" (Botticini & Eckstein, 2012, p.48).) And ever since that date Jews in Europe had experienced multiple waves of " persecutions and forced conversion to Christianity, as well as " constant threat of temporary banishments and permanent expulsions "(Ibid). As the play displays, Antonio's anti-semitic attitude toward Shylock contradicts his humanist intention to help his dear friend Bassanio. On multiple occasions, he has humiliated and harassed Shylock because of his religious background. The playwright , implicitly, casts about the faireness of legal institution of England with regard to its treatement of ethnical and religious minorities. In the play, the court is merely set to solve the economic side of the bond without delving deeper into religious and ethical disputes between the Christian tradesman and Jewish moneylender. Even during the trial, Shylock has been subjected to numerous kinds of religious and ethnicl discriminations, whether by Antonio, Gratiano, or even the Judge himself. Portia's objective and impartial legal proceedings offer Shylock numerous opportunities to present his case. Here, Venice's court has become an open forum through which the Jewish moneylender can openly address all different racial and religious grievances and discriminations he has experienced both in the courthouse and outside the court. It can be inferred that the dramatist, through the complex legal and economic status of Shylock, reflects on overall socio-economic and legal status of Jews in Elizabethan England. Historically, Jews were

associated with money lending or usury, “a profession to which Jews were drawn because they were barred from other offices in medieval and early modern Europe"(Ivic, 2017, p.125).It is doubtful whether the practice of usury was legal in Venice. Shylock has been forced into the practice of usury since he was not allowed to engage in any other economic activities except money lending. Historically, Jews in Venice “ were not allowed participation in many professions open only to citizens of Christian states, usury on the Continent was one of the few economic livelihoods left open to Jews" (Holmer, 1995, p. 34).Antonio's hypocrisy becomes evident when he criticizes Shylock for his practice of usury, even though the Venetian merchant himself signs a bond with the Jewish moneylender. Moreover, the Venetian merchant openly expresses his contempt and hatred against Shylock for racial and religious reasons. Besides the fact he is forced to do it, Shylock finds no moral and ethical wrongdoing for practicing usury since his dealing is only with Christians. " According to biblical law all usury is prohibited for Jews , except in their dealings with non –Jews" (Holmer, 1995, p. 35).

The play critically sheds light on two complex issues such as religion and ethnic identity. Ironically, Shylock has legal right to raise a case against Antonio since he failed to comply with the terms upon which the bond was signed. Nonetheless, Antonio tries everything in his power to divert the cease and makes it appear as if it is religiously motivated. Ironically, the court does not take Antonio's anti-Semitic sentiments so seriously since in Venice there is no written law to defend Jews against racial prejudice and religious bigotry. Even after the last verdict on Shylock , Antonio has not been held accountable for previous religious harassments and maltreatments against the Jewish moneylender. On multiple occasions, Shylock had complained of Antonio’s maltreatements. During the bond sealing, Shylock reminded Antonio of his previous abuses: ‘You call me misbeliever, /cutthroat dog, /And spet upon my Jewish gaberdine—/ And all for use of that which is mine own’ (1.3-107). The first meeting provided an opportunity for Antonio to admit his wrongdoings, and ask forgiveness. But this never happens, which ultimately leads Shylock to seek revenge in the near future. Even though Antonio was confronted with real evidence, he nonetheless vows to continue abusing and

harassing Shylock: ‘ I am as like to call thee so again, / To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too” (1, 3 126). The speech indicates the arrogant and inhuman side of Antonio’s character. In a way, Shylock has genuine motive to expresses his concern about the imminent threat against his religious identity. Shylock’s following speech makes a connection between his vengeful act in the future and his grievances in the past:

> I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction (3.1.53–66).

The speech gives hints about Shylock's human side. In this particular scene, Shylock appears more like a victim than a perpetrator of a crime. The speech, somehow, may provide some moral justification for his latter action against Antonio. ‘To bait fish withal, if it will feed nothing else,/ it will feed my revenge” (3.1. 35). After the trial, there are complex issues related to race and justice which are left unresolved, as it is only Shylock who receives harsh sentence, while Antonio the Christian perpetrator of racial bigotry, leaves the court unpunished. The harsh punishment laid down by the Duke against Shylock casts doubts about the faireness of Venice’s court. Ironically, the harsh sentence contradicts with what the Duke has promised earlier about Christian mercy and forgiveness. Shakespeare wittingly bringst this complex legal issue on stage to critically reflect on Elizabethan prejudice and bigotry against victimized religious minorities such as Jews like Shylock. By implication, the conflict between Shylock and Portia in Venice court sheds light on inhuman practice against victimized segments of societies such as Jews and women. Similar to other romantic comedies, the playwright made a woman an agent of change, whose wit and verbal skill exposed innate shortcomings in Venice’s judicial system, and by implication, England’s legal system. The heroin, symbolically, provides an equivalent parody of independent and free-willed women during the Renaissance England.

2.6 .Critical Overview of Chapter Two

Chapter two analyzed the heroic image of women in Shakespeare's ***MOV.*** The main emphasis has been on the emancipatory potentiality of the female protagonist's verbal skill, revealing the extent it empowered the heroin against patriarchy. The play is structured around contrasts and oppositions such as delusion versus, domestic versus urban, and love versus hatred. This chapter, namely, traced the process through which the heroine attained individuality. Such a process has begun from the play's early beginning when the heroin, through the cunning deceptive scheme, overcame multiple barriers and constraints that limited her quest for selfhood.

The play's main plot concentrates on the heroine's struggle against a ruthless patriarchal father who tries to exert total control over his daughter's destiny. Through the 'Casket Scheme', Portia's deceased father retained his authority over his daughter's will in choosing her future husband. Portia finds it difficult to reject the casket scheme altogether. She nonetheless findsd a way to change the scheme and manipulate its terms for her own advantage. The heroine's first phase of the journey toward selfhood has begum when she intervenes to assist her favorite suitor in choosing the right casket. Among a group of suitors, Portia has been attracted to a young man from Venice. Bassanio has been portrayed as a typical example of a romantic lover. Similar to other Shakespearean romantic male lovers, he is far from being perfect. Besides his noble and romantic personality, he had some character flaws. The heroin takes upon herself the task of educating and reforming the male lover. Through her wit and cunning rhetorical skill, the heroin manages to correct male lover's false opinions and misconceptions about women and courtship. By devising a symbol-loaded song, the heroin manages to guide Bassanio into choosing the right casket. Unlike other suitors, Bassanio demonstrates wit and strong-willed character during the Casket Scheme. The heroin's witty verbal skill, together with the chosen song, cautiones Bassano not to fall for false appearance. Here, language has been empowered the heroin against the cruel scheme by a patriarchal father.

From a feminist perspective, the heroine's skilful use of language constitutes a subversive act, as it challenged the conventional concepts of marriage and courtship.

The motif of journey and courtship are recurring motifs in *MOV***.** Portia's travel to Venice constitutes the second phase in Portia's quest for selfhood. In the play, the domestic world of Belmont has been set in contrast to Venice's new economic world. Interestingly, aspects of romance and courtship in the play are intertwined within a complex web of trade and economic exchanges. The play, beyond gender issue, critically reflects on other controversial issues such as religious bigotry and ethnic discrimination, and, by implication, it sheds light on the way religious and ethnic minorities were stigmatized and mistreated in Elizabethan England. The main conflict in the play develops due to religious and ethnical tensions among the conflicting characters. For instance, the Venetian Merchant used to humiliate a Jewish monelender because of his practice of usury, and his religious background. As a result, Shylock exploits Banssanio's urgent need for money to avenge himself against his Christian enemy. The cunning Venetian moneylender uses tricky persuasive language to lure his former Christian enemy into signing a dangerous deal.

Portia's second phase in her journey of selfhood begins once she decides to disguise herself as a male lawyer, and travel to Venetian court to defend her lover's friend. Ironically, Antonio's tragedy necessitates Portia's disguise as a legal expert. As with Viola in *TN*, a sudden tragic incident provides the heroin in *MOV* with an opportunity to bring a change into her current situation. Here, the heroine's quest for selfhood involves a deliberate and conscious act of self-disguise. Such a quest, similar to other heroines in other comedies, aims at restoring order and harmony to the larger community. During the trial, Portia uses wit and strong persuasive language. Venice's court designed and ruled by a strictly male community. In order to enter such a patriarchal legal system, Portia has to disguise herself as a male lawyer. From a feminist perspective, Portia's rhetorical skill, together with her bodily role-playing, can be seen as a means of empowerment, for they provide her with necessary means to enter a strictly

male-dominated legal institution. To make her message convincing in Venice's court, Portia/ Balthazar has to mimic and imitate the language of a legal expert. Noticeably, the heroine's linguistic role-playing reaffirmes the feminist's perspective concerning the performative nature of both gender and language. It also exposes the fallacy of males' superior rhetoric. Most importantly, It debunkes and falsifies misconceptions and prejudice about women being inferior and unable to produce witty speeches. By playing the role of a male lawyer, the heroin demonstrates ability to play with her own gender identity. This is in accord with Post-feminists' assumption concerning the performativity and constructiveness of women's gender identity or their linguistic style.

The heroine's legal proceeding in Venice's Court exposes some legal shortcomings in the city's judiciary system. Shylock has been subjected to multiple forms of verbal humiliation throughout the trial. The court's inhuman treatment of Shylock reflects religious misogyny and racial prejudice of the Elizabethan society against religious and ethnic minorities. The Duke himself explicitly expresses his sympathy for Antonio while at the same time denounced Shylock's personality. Apparently, the trial has been set solely to look into the bond than dwelling deep into the religious and ethnic conflicts. Unlike the Duke, Portia displays objectivity and humility in her legal proceeding. She does not hold prejudicial attitude tward Shylock. She gives both Shylock and Antonio equal opportunities to express their views freely and without any constraints.

Portia's legal strategy bases on using witty juridical tricks and rhetorical manoeuvring. She begins her first legal proceeding by appealing to Shylock's humanistic compassion. Her long speech about the significance of human mercy is one of the most effective and appealing speeches in the courthouse. The speech intends to awaken Shylock's sense of humanity toward Antonio. Shylock nonetheless remains resolute in rejecting both Portia and Duke's appeal to forgive Antonio. Portia then twists the tone of her language by pretending as if she is siding with Shylock's legal inquiry against Antonio. During the trial, Shylock appears determined to have justice on his own term,

which is only possible through the literal implementation of his bond. By displaying the willingness to execute the bond, Portia gains Shylock's confidence.

The heroine's rhetorical manoeuvring proves to be very effective during the legal proceeding, for it gives Shylock the illusion that he is siding with his legal case against Antonio. Apparently, Shylock had been seeking revenge than achieving justice. He slyly hides his evil intention by constantly referring to the implementation of his bond. Through skillful use of rhetoric, Portia /Balthazar manages to lure Shylock into accepting what follows next in hs legal proceeding. His constant references to the bond are meant to reassure Shylock that his legal request will be fulfilled upon his terms. The young lawyer's legal proceedings relies on juristical tricks and rhetorical manoeuvring. The tense dramatic situation reaches its climax when Portia /Balthazar orders Antonio to comply with Shylock's legal demand. The Venetian merchant expresses sincere willingness to die for the sake of his dear friend. In the play, themes of love and friendship are contrasted against hatred and enmity. Whereas Shylock's evil scheme represents the force of separation and enmity, Antonio's self-sacrifice represents the power of compassion and unity. Rhetorically, Portia succeeds in giving the impression that she is on the verge of fulfilling Shylock's legal demand. By delving deeper into legal technicality, the young lawyer eventually manages to turn the law against itself. The witty lawyer, for instance, finds what can be termed as legal loopholes hidden within the written bond. As Portia/Balthazar wittingly explains, the bond has given Shylock limited choices in his legal demand. He has to cut from Antonio's body precisely a pound of flesh, and without shedding a single drop of blood. If he fails to do so, his fortune and property will be confiscated by Venetrian court. Remarkably, Balthazar/Portia's cunning 'literal' interpretation of the bond lefts no choice for Shylock, but to accept its strict terms. The most decisive moment arrived when Balthazar exposes further shocking revelation. This is related to a secret law hidden in Venice's charter. Accordingly, Venice's law has laid down one of the harshest punishments for any foreigner who might threaten the life of a Christian citizen.

Rhetorically, the heroin's verbal skill turns the law against itself. Shylock looses the legal case against Antonio due to Portia's wit and linguistic maneuvering. After the trial, Shylock appears weakened and devastated. Such a change, symbolically, marks a shift in power struggle between Shylock and the young lawyer. Overall, Witty verbal skill provides Portia with power and status in Venice's court. As a strong-willed female, she is able to transcend both her gender and social limitations. From a feminist perspective, both disguise and verbal skills constitutes two effective means of empowerment for a victimized woman like Portia, for they assisted her in her quest for selfhood.

The ring- plot constitutes the final phase in Portia's journey for selfhood. This plot, thematically and structurally, connects with two other plots in the play. It is related to Portia's attempt to educate and reform the male lover. For instance, the heroine's trick to deliver and restore the ring aimed at teaching Bassanio a moral lesson about marital commitment and self-sacrifice. As a result of Portia's ring-plot, Bassanio acknowledges hisown mistake and asks forgiveness. Similar to other romantic comedies, the heroine's quest for selfhood contributes to the restoration of order and harmony to the community where a group of young lovers are united in multiple joyful weddings.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Female Individuality in *Twelfth Night* (1601-1602)

3.1Cross-Dressed Women During the Elizabethans Era

The play deals with many controversial issues related to the changing status and role of women during the Elizabethan age. The phenomenon of 'Cross-dressed' women, for instance, had become a subject of heated debate during Shakespeare's time. It was both a" real-life social phenomenon in Renaissance England as well as a theatrical practice" (Wells & Alexander, 2001, p. 7 -8). In Elizabethan society, social roles were mostly defined by the way people dressed and behaved. This was also in the issue of gender roles as women and men were distinguished through a set of a prescribed set of social codes and symbols associated with costumes and dress. Any break of this well-organized system of prescribed social codes had been viewed as a challenge to the state's status quo. This is the main reason why the phenomenon of 'Cross-Dressing' had become such a debated issue during the Elizabethan era. This phenomenon noticeably received conflicting responses from both religious and political elites. It was mostly viewed as "a threat to the normative religious and social order of hierarchy, male privilege, and female subordination" (Lynch, 2003, p. 115).

During Shakespeare's time, there had been a growing concern about the way society was changing, particularly the changing status and roles of women. Such anxiety and fear had been reflected in the writings and pamphlets by both religious and political elites. Cross-dressed women were constantly stigmatized by religious authorities and were subject to negative labelling in sermons and religious books. These "unruly women", as the zealous religious viewed them, were the "creator of chaos" and " a threat to social stability"(Collins &Kinney, 1987, p. 225). Religious figures through ceremonies and written pamphlets warned against women wearing male's attire. John Louis Vives, a zealous of female virtue, warned against women dressing in man's clothing:"a woman shall not put on mans apparell: for so to do is abhominable afore god" (Ibid).

Interestingly, the phenomenon of cross-dressed women produced conflicting views among the intellectual and literary elites. Although some progressive writers viewed such a phenomenon positively, yet the general mood was against it. Many writers openly expressed fear that such subversive social acts by women might cause a disruption of the fixed gender roles in society. Philp Stubbes, for instance, in his declaration *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1538), among many other writings, attacked women in men's attire: " It is verie hard to know who is noble, who is worshipful, who is a gentleman" (Linley . 2015, p. 117). According to Philip Stubbes, women who "wore the attire of men violated the prrovitional order of society*"* (Lynch, 2003, p. 115). This phenomenon, in one way or another, found its way in Elizabethan plays. There is a strong indication that Shakespeare had viewed such a phenomenon positively, and he even celebrated the emancipatory potentialities of such an act for women in general. He artistically reflected on the phenomenon of crossed-dressed women in his romantic comedies, such as *Twelfth Night, As You Like Ii, The Merchant Of Venice* and others. Feminist critics recently express conflicting opinions with regard to the trope of cross-crossing in Elizabethan plays, whether or not it empowers women. Whereas some critics view women's cross-dressing on the Elizabethan stage as a subversive act, others view it as nothing more than a theatrical device within the dramatic convention of romantic comedy. Those who argue in support of crossed-dressed women on Elizabethan theatre, particularly Shakespearean comedies, claim that such theatrical phenomenon in fact empowered women. They claim the cross-dressing act " allow the heroine a new kind of freedom to act, and (paradoxically) to become herself more fully"(Mangan, 2014, p.222). However, there are other feminist critics who on the contrary view such act no more than a theatrical technique used by the dramatists for artistic and aesthetic purposes. The figure of a Cross-dressed woman, as they view it, "simply emphasizes the dominant gender relations and stereotypes of the Renaissance"(Ibid).

Most critics, however, have downplayed and paid less attention to the allegorical representation of cross-dressed women on the Elizabethan stage, particularly

Shakespearean Romantic Comedies. More importantly, the correlation between woman's witty usage of verbal skill and disguise has received no much attention. Shakespeare, in in romantic omedies, used disguised actors or cross-dressed women,(-normally played by young boys-), on stage to show the extent such artistic act provided women with the liberty to express themselves. The dramatist, in fact, had drawn on real-life examples of cross-dressed women, making them a true example of empowered women on stage. Theatricaly, the dramatist celebrates the emancipatory potentialities of the trope of cross-dressed women in his comedies as much as he celebrates the emancipatory potentialities of women's strong verbal skills.

3.1.1 . Cross-Dressed Women in *Twelfth Night*

Theatrically, *TN* deals with the real-life phenomenon of cross-dressed women in the Elizabethan era. It is to be noted that the play constantly alludes to the image of ' Crossed –Dressed' women , or ' Body Transformation'. The image of ' body transformation' is drawn from earlier trope or dramatic techniques known to the Elizabethan earlier writers. Such image, somehow, is drawn from the motif of ' body transformation, or 'the 'metamorphic image' in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (8AD) "Shakespeare was most Ovidian at the beginning and at the end of his career" (Bate & Golding, 2000, P.43). The dramatist on numerous occasions in both comedies and tragedies directly alludes to Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. "In perhaps the most self-consciously literary moment in all Shakespeare, a copy of Ovid's book is actually brought on stage in Act Four of Titus and used as a plot device for the revelation of the nature of the crime which has been committed" (Ibid,44).

Notably, the trope of body transformation recurs constantly in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. In the *TN,* for instance, Viola willingly and deliberately transforms herself into another character. A similar transformation of character recurs, too, in both *MOV* , in which Portia transforms herself to a lawyer, and in *As YouLike It* in which

Rosalind impersonates the role of a magician. In *Midsummer Night's Dream*, similarly, the motif of body transformation occurs constantly. In the play, " the metamorphic power of the flower ' love-in-idleness' is Olivia" (Wells & Dobson, 2001, p.334).

The most obvious reference to Ovid, as well as the metamorphic images associated with it, is referred to by Touchstone *in AYLI:* "am here with thee and thy goats, as the most capricious poet, honest Ovid, was among the Goths'(3. 3). Interestingly, "Shakespeare frequently referred to the stories in the *Metamorphoses* as parallels or paradigms for emotional turmoil of his characters" (Ibid). In the beginning of *TN* , Duke Orsino " compares himself to Actaeon, ' turned into a hart" (Kinny, 2012, p. 527). Such imagery, too, reflects on the "emotional turmoil" of Orsino. Various characters in *TN*, symbolically, underwent a process of character transformation. Both Malvolio and Sir Andrew undergo a change of personality due to their delusions about the prospect of marrying Lady Olivia. Olivia and Orsino, too, undergo a different type of personality transformation. Both are deluded because of their false perspectives about love and courtship. Unlike deluded lovers, Viola's personality change happens when she willingly changes her own character than as a result of ' emotional turmoil'. Here, the female protagonist's body transformation, or metamorphoses, provides a different meaning. With the heroine, body transformation is associated with her quest for selfhood. Viola in *TN*, consciously and deliberately, undergoes a change of personality. In other words, she plays with her own gender identity. Similar to her strong persuasive language, disguise empowers Viola in the *TN*, as it provides her with an opportunity to enter a space strictly limited for males.

Through the heroic portrayal of women on stage, Shakespeare celebrated the emancipatory potentialities of women's cross-dressing in the Elizabethan era. Unlike religious and secular figures, the dramatist in *TN* found the act of cross-dressing to be liberating for women. The dramatist's progressive opinion about crossed –dressed women in his time was in line with the Humanist's perspective about Man's limitless

potentialities in deciding his own destiny. Interestingly, the playwright had chosen witty and strong-willed female figures to deliver his humanist and feminist message.

3.2. Courtly Convention as Object of Satire

The play reflects on important themes such as idealistic love and courtly romance. While the play may appear to celebrate such ideals, yet it nevertheless reflects critically on the pursuit of such ideals. The play, in fact, satirically ridicules the idea of excessive love and misconception about romance. Similar to Shakespeare's *AYLI* , this play exposes the flaws and shortcomings inherent in the ideals associated with courtly and chivalric conventions in the Elizabethan age :

> By the time of Shakespeare and Cervantes four hundred years later both courtly love and chivalry were such well-worn conventions that they have become objects of gentle satire. Some of Shakespeare's comedies ridicule the extravagance of courtly love conventions of sighing lovers and disdainful mistress (which by then had begun to merge into the pastoral tradition, as the Renaissance poets elaborated a new fantasy about amorous shepherds and shepherdesses based on Virgil's *Eclogues* (Antony , 2009, p. 318).

During the Elizabethan age, the dramatic genres of romance and comedy underwent radical changes. New Elements such as burlesque, satire, and parody entered the dramatic genre of romantic plays. Similar elements found their way in Elizabethan love sonnets such as love sonnets by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. "Early English sonnets explored courtly love and other amorous themes, but Elizabethan poets reacted against this trend by writing anti-love sonnets that complained of courtly pretence and the fickleness of lovers" (Wagner, 2010, p.139). Satire and parody constitute essential elements in Elizabethan literary genres. Such elements recur in Marlowe's ' *A Passionate Shepherd to His Love'*. Nonetheless, satire and parody had become more common in plays than in any other literary genre. "Shakespeare himself enjoyed writing parodies " (Highet, 2015, p.123). Falstaff, a fictional character in some of the Shakespearean plays, represents a satirical image of a comic Knight. The new style of writing comedies had become a prime source of entertainment for Elizabethan

spectators, especially the way chivalric hero or even chivalric heroine being ridiculed and made the subject of humour. This is evident in the comical representations of male and female lovers in Shakespearean romantic comedies.

Like the other two romantic comedies, the play explores various forms of love and lovers in complex dramatic situations. Instead of providing an idealized image of courtly love, the play provides a satirical image of romance and romantic lovers. In the play, the self-deluded male protagonist has false notions of love and courtship. The heroine takes upon herself the task of reforming a self-deluded male lover who holds false notions and misconceptions about women and romance. Through witty usage of language, Viola, tries to falsify and debunks Duke Orsino's false ideas and attitude toward love and courtship. The Duke's melancholic character and his excessive sentimentality are satirically criticized in the play. Through disguise and witty language, the heroine tries to educate and reform the love-sickened male lover. This would be evident during subsequent meetings between Viola, and male protagonist.

3.2.1. **Orsino as Example of Courtly Lover**

Duke Orsino in the play exemplifies a melancholic and self-indulgent lover who grieves excessively over the lack of response from his lady. The Duke's courtly manners and his rhetorical style are subject to satire and parody through the heroine's cunning and subversive linguistic style. 'Love' as the main theme of the play is satirically parodied than to be idealized. Excessive passion is portrayed as dangerous, irrational, and delusive. The male lover's courtly manners, particularly his love rhetoric, are satirically ridiculed through the heroine's witty usage of language. Duke Orsino unrealistic views about love and romance. The Duke has chosen to isolate himself from the outside world due to his excessive love for Countess Olivia. He asks Cesario/ Viola to woo Olivia for him because he can't communicate directly with his lover. He expresses his agony and despair through melancholic speeches. The following speech, for instance, provides an image of a melancholic and self-indulgent romantic lover:

ORSINO

If music be the food of love, play on;
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken, and so die.
That strain again! it had a dying fall:
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before (1.1.1-8).

As the above speech displays, Duke Orsino symbolizes a typical example of a Petrarchan lover who laments himself over an indifferent lover. Here, love is equated with suffering and death. " Orsino's desire to be fed by the music to the point where he becomes sick can be interpreted as an expression merely of self-indulgence" (Warren & Wells, 1998, p. 26). Apparently, the Duke is more obsessed with the idea of love itself than the object of his affection. Ironically, the Duke's linguistic expression to describe his state of love is quite unromantic. In his poetic imagery, he compares himself to " Actaeon, turned into a stag and pursued by the hounds of his desire" (Nevo, 2013, p.202). The Duke seemingly has been attracted to the idealistic image of his lady. When describing the object of his love, the Duke paints quite an unrealistic image of his lady as cruel and indifferent to his suffering. His unrealistic description of love is further displayed in a speech in which he complains about Olivia's affectionate dedication for her dead brother:

Orsino:
O, she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother,
How will she love, when the rich golden shaft
Hath kill'd the flock of all affections else
That live in her; when liver, brain and heart,
These sovereign thrones, are all supplied, and fill'd
Her sweet perfections with one self king!
Away before me to sweet beds of flowers:
Love-thoughts lie rich when canopied with bowers (1.2.32-40).

The above lines provide an image of Duke Orsino not only as a "fickle and self-indulgent egoistical man" (Atkin, 2008, p. 20), but as someone who is deluded by the idea of romantic love. Like Courtly lover, he considers romance to be equated with pain and suffering. The Duke's unbnormal state of love provides a satiric image of courtly

love convention in which a courtly lover finds joy in his own suffering and agony. Moreover, Orsino's love rhetoric displays characteristics consistent with courtly and chivalric love conventions. These characteristics may include, among others; display of sentimental passion, humility, and courtesy towards the courtly lady. A parallel can be drawn between Orsino and other love-stricken lovers in Shakespeare's other romantic comedies. For instance, Silvius' mistaken compassion for the disguised Rosalind in *As You Like It*, resembles Orsino's love-sickness for Olivia in *TN*. The play's early speech, for instance, " opens with Orsino on stage playing Silvius's role of a Petrarchan lover" (Betteridge, 2005,p. 84). Interestingly, the Duke's inability to communicate with his lady provides Cesario / Viola with an opportunity to play the role of 'love messenger'.

Satire and parody are common tropes in Elizabethan plays, particularly comedies. The chivalric and courtly traditions are so often targets of satire and parody in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. The playwright in his sonnets and plays uses parody and satire to criticize the chivalric and courtly conventions. The most famous example of a satirical sonnet, among many others, is "Shakespeare's "Sonnet 130" ("*My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing Like the Sun*"), where the persona endows his beloved with all kinds of characteristics that go against Petrarchan conventions of beauty" (Korkut, 2009, p.40). The playwright has used a similar sarcastic tone in criticizing courtly and pastoral love traditions. In *AYLI*, for instance, the playwright criticizes the romantic image of a courtly and chivalric lover through the satiric portrayal of the male lover in the play. In *TN*, similarly, the playwright pokes fun at courtly-love tradition through the sarcastic portrayal of a self-deluding male lover. As a typical example of a courtly lover, Duke Orsino's speeches are directed at absent female lover. The Duke has failed in establishing a real contact with Lady Olivia and as a result of that, he asks Viola, who was impersonated as Cesario, to court his lady on his behalf: 'Get thee to yond same sovereign cruelty / Tell her my love, more noble than the world' (2.4.80-81). The Duke's highly elaborate and artificial language tends to portray Olvia either as an idealized feminine or as " cruel" and merciless lady. Interestingly, the Duke's romantic

speeches mostly focuses on romanticizing the physical outlook of Lady Olivia. This is also a common feature in courtly-love tradition. Instead of praising a woman's real personality, a chivalric lover merely values the physical characteristics of the object of his desire. Psychologically speaking, there are elements of obsession and possession in Orsino's courtly love rhetoric. The courtly lover's relation to his female object centers around dominance and subjection rather than an equal partnership. By " producing" an ideal of a beloved woman", the courtly lover " can love his love object as he loves himself and affirms his control over her" (Rosen, 2003, p.51).

Feminist critics have recently paid special attention to the way the concepts of ' love' and ' romance' are constructed and woven into the system of language. "From the conventions of courtly love derive modern Western notions of romantic love" (D'Aragona, 2010, p.6). Courtly love rhetoric is based on unrealistic assumptions about woman and it implicitly reinforces male dominance over women. "Many feminists have been critical of the way language is constructed and have argued that language is 'man-made' in that, through language men have been able to dominate knowledge production in the arts and in culture in general" (Letherby, 2003,p. 30). These critics are highly critical of the way women represented in the rhetoric of courtly love. The main theme of courtly love, as feminist critics pointed out, " is the convention of the inferiority of the lover to his mistress—or, more properly, to the Mistress"(Casselman, 2008, p.246). Courtly love rhetoric, accordingly, asserts men's dominance over women by assuming, for example, that women are weak and fragile individuals. From a feminist perspective, Lady Olivia has no real presence in Orsino's romantic rhetoric except through his linguistic imagery. Such linguistic imagery tends to idealize or romanticize the female lover's feminine outlook. As a typical example of a courtly lover, Duke Orsino in his poetic imagery tries to portray Olivia as an unattainable romantic feminine image. The Duke, nonetheless, is the one who paints and controls the imagery. Accordingly, "the courtly lover might be slave to his mistress", but the male lover in such a case is the "master of his text" (Bates, 2007, p.7).

3.3. Viola's 'Role-Playing' in Orsino's Court

Viola's role-playing is an effective method through which she can educate Duke Orsino about courtship, and temper his excessive love-sickness. Like Rosalind in *As You Like It*,|"the disguise permits" Viola "to educate " the male lover in *Twelfth Night* (Novy, 2017, p. 38). Role-playing, in many ways, empowers the female protagonist as "she can move freely within the male open spaces*"*(Langland & Gove, 1983, p.46). From a feminist perspective, the heroine's role-playing is subversive, for it reveals the constructiveness and performativity of gender identities and social roles. Gender, as Judith Butler describes it in her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), "is not simply a cultural construct but also a type of performance centred on the assumptions and display of specific signs and on the ritualized reiteration of a certain repertoire of conventional acts" (Cavallaro, 2011, p. 94). By impersonating the role of a male page, the heroine in the play challenges society's false notions and misconceptions about women's status and roles in Illyria's male-dominated society. To succeed in playing her new role, the heroine must mimic and imitate the appropriate manners and linguistic style associated with courtly lover's manners and rhetorical style. When meeting Orsino, Viola displays enormous ability in coining and composing elegant courtly speeches. Her verbal skill attracts Orsino's attention, and he discloses his secret passion for Olivia.

In Duke Orsino's court, Viola's persuasive verbal skill attracts the attention of the surrounding characters. Valentine praises Viola'/ Cesario's witty personality, for (he) has gained Orsino's confidence: ' If the duke continue these favours towards you,/Cesario, you are like to be much advanced: / he hath known you but three days, and already you are no stranger' (1.4.1-4). Duke Orsino, similarly, reaffirms Viola/ Cesario's unique personality: ' Cesario, /Thou know'st no less but all; I have unclasp'd /To thee the book even of my secret soul'(1.4. 12-14). The young courtier wittingly makes enquiry into Orsino's state of love, whether or not his affection for Lady Olivia is genuine, or

consistent : “you call in question the continuance of his love / is he inconstant, sir, in his favors? (1.4.6-7). As “ a satiric figure for inconsistency, self-delusion, and exhibitionism, Orsino enjoys the pose of frustrated, melancholy lover”
(Sondgras, 2008, P.9), and sorrowful figure.

Due to her witty rhetoric, Viola manages to establish close relationship with Orsino, and gain his confidence. Viola meets regularly with the male protagonist in order to teach him how to temper his excessive passion for the object of his love. During subsequent meetings, the Duke discloses to Cesario/ Viola his passionate agony and melancholic feelings for Lady Olivia. A typical example of a melancholic lover, Orsino blames his absent lover for causing his continuous misery. Instead of direct contact with his Lady, the Duke finds emotional comfort in listening to sentimental songs :

ORSINO
That old and antique song we heard last night.
Methought it did relieve my passion much,
More than light airs and recollected terms ,
Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times (2.4.3-6).

As the above speech demonstrates, the Duke finds comfort through total solitude and excessive sentimentality, which are typical personality traits of a melancholic lover. “It has been pointed out by cynical critics that Orsino is in love, not so much with Olivia as with the state of being in love itself” (Ray, 2007, p. 46). The play, through Duke’s display of melancholic solitude, provides a satiric image of a courtly lover. The Duke is so obsessed about the idea of love that he praises himself on being the true example of the love of all time:

ORSINO

... ‘I am, all true lovers are,
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else
Save in the constant image of the creature
That is beloved (2.4.16-20) .

Duke Orsino in the above speech is depicted “ as the ideal example of the Petrarchan lover*”* (Ibid, 88). Through witty use of language, Viola tries to gain Orsino’s trust. The disguised courtier gradually develops some affection for the Duke.

Apparently, she has been attracted to Duke's noble and compassionate personality. Through a sequence of witty speeches, the heroin implicitly expresses her hidden affection. Her cunning use of language assists her in delivering her affection without even disclosing her real personality. In the following exchange, for instance, Viola implicitly confesses her hidden love for Duke Orsino through witty wordplay:

ORSINO.
Thou dost speak masterly.
My life upon 't, young though thou art, thine eye
Hath stay'd upon some favor that it loves. Hath it not, boy?
VIOLA. A little, by your favor
ORSINO. What kind of woman is't?
VIOLA. Of your complexion
ORSINO. She is not worth thee, then. What years, i' faith?
VIOLA. About your years, my lord (2.4.23-29).

Remarkably, Viola/ Cesario's witty use of language encourages Orsino to deliver more romantic speeches. " A large part of attraction Orsino feels for Viola is due to her impressive, sensitive and intelligent use of language" (Atkin, 2008, p. 23). Apparently, Duke Orsino holds unrealistic and self- centered conception of love. To Orsino, as the following speech indicates, man's affection is permanent and genuine, unlike a woman's affection which is temporal and inconsistent:

ORSINO
Let still the woman take
An elder than herself. So wears she to him,
So sways she level in her husband's heart.
For, boy, however we do praise ourselves,
Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,
More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn
Than women's are (2.4.29-35).

The above speech provides some insight into Orsino's gender-biased attitudes toward women in general. His unrealistic image of women is based on appearance than reality. This is further asserted in another speech by Orsino:

ORSINO
.. let thy love be younger than thyself,
Or thy affection cannot hold the bent.
For women are as roses, whose fair flower
Being once displayed, doth fall that very hour (2.4.34-36-39).

The speech, interestingly, reveals Orsino's false notions and misconceptions about women and courtship. In his description, the Duke provides a poetic imagery of women than paining a realistic picture. To Orsino, women's love is transient and inconsistent. The speech, nevertheless, presents woman as the object of male's desire. There is an element of dominance or obsession in Duke's speech. Feminist critics have criticized "the representation of woman as spectacle — body to be looked at" and to be viewed as an "object of desire" (Finney, 1989, p.91). Paradoxically, the Duke's speeches about love and women's affection are unrealistic in a sense it is filled with contradictions. In a previous speech, for instance, Orsino proudly praises his own love as :' Unstaid and skittish in all motions,' (2.4.18) ; yet in latter speech, he proves otherwise,: 'Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm,/ More longing, wavering, sooner lost and worn,/ Than women's are'(2.4. 33-35). As the dialogue between the Duke and young courtier proceeds, Viola wittingly challenges Orsino's gender-biased attitudes towards women. To Orsino, women 's love is neither permanent nor consistent. Viola's cunning reply, however, is satiric in its intent: ' And so they are. Alas, that they are so, / To die even when they to perfection grow! (2.4.40-41). The speech is ironically self-reflexive, for it implicitly reflects on Viola's own affection for Orsino. Paradoxically, it is Orsino's affection, not Viola, which proves to be temporal, and inconsistent. In the final Act, specifically, Orsino unexpectedly shifts his affection from Olivia to his page once he discovers her true identity.

3.3.1. The Impact of Viola's Verbal Skill

Viola/ Cesario 's consequent meetings with Duke Orsino, particularly her verbal skill, has huge impact on Orsino's personality. The more the two characters engage in witty speeches, the more Orsino is getting attracted to the mysterious page. During her second meeting with Orsino, Cesario/Viola tries to dissuade him from pursuing someone

who shows no affection for him. The Duke, however, insists on delivering his 'love messages' to Olivia:

ORSINO

Tell her, my love, more noble than the world,
Prizes not quantity of dirty lands;
The parts that fortune hath bestow'd upon her,
Tell her, I hold as giddily as fortune (2.4.81-84).

In the above speech, Duke Orsino has asked Cesario/Viola to woo a distant lady for his own sake. Similar to previous speeches, the Duke is more concerned with describing his own state of love than directly establishing real communication with his lady. Here, the Duke's courtly language, stylistically at least, is compatible with "the tradition of a Petrarchan lover, (which) regards Olivia as the very epitome of perfection"(Ray, 2006,p.88). Moreover, the Duke's ' love rhetoric' paints an idealistic image of the object of the courtly lady. Women in such idealistic representation, according to a feminist perspective, have no real presence, but an image to be possessed and worshiped by the courtly lover. Noticeably, " the courtly lover does not love an actual woman, but rather a feminine ideal that crystallizes his dream of being in love" (Sicker, 2017, p.32). Ironically, Viola has been left with no choice but to comply with Orsino's request to woo Olivia, otherwise, she loses the opportunity to prolong her stay at Duke's court.

Viola's deceptive tricks to change Orsino's opinions with regard to women and love depend on her witty wordplay and role-playing. Through logical reasoning, Viola tries to convince Orsino that Olivia, like anyone else, has her own feelings, and above all, has her own free and independent individuality. Viola's witty hypothetical question, ' if Olivia ' cannot love' the Duke, has been received with anger and disbelief by Orsino:' I cannot be so answer'd' (2.4. 87). Apparently, Orsino's prejudices and misconceptions about women have deluded him from accepting the reality that Olivia, as a free individual, can have a real say in whom she accepts as her lover. Viola wittingly triers to

challenge and falsify Orsino's unrealistic and arrogant notions abvout women through skilful use of language, and logical reasoning:

VIOLA
Sooth, but you must.
Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,
Hath for your love a great a pang of heart
As you have for Olivia: you cannot love her;
You tell her so; must she not then be answer'd? (2.4.88-92).

Viola's witty speech is deceptive and tricky in its intent, for she indirectly tells the duke about her own hidden love. Ironically, Viola herself is the person who ' *hath*' for ' Orsino' ' a great a pang of heart' / As he has 'for Olivia'(2.4.89-90).Through witty use of rhetoric, Viola " tries to educate Orsino to take women's feelings seriously" (Novy, 2017, p. 39). To further influence Orsino's opinion, Cesario/Viola tells the duke that a woman's love is no less sincere than man's love. Orsino, nevertheless, remains persistent in his beliefs, and proudly describes the uniqueness of his passion that no women ever had:

ORSINO
There is no woman's sides
Can bide the beating of so strong a passion
As love doth give my heart; no woman's heart
So big, to hold so much, they lack retention
Alas, their love may be call'd appetite,
No motion of the liver, but the palate,
That suffer surfeit, cloyment and revolt;
But mine is all as hungry as the sea,
And can digest as much. Make no compare
Between that love a woman can bear me
And that I owe Olivia (2.4.93-102).

In the above speech, Duke Orsino has made a comparison between his own compassion and Olivia. The speech reflects Orsino's false notions and misconceptions about women in general. He describes women's love to be less genuine and less sincere. As a typical example of a self-obsessed and self-deluded lover, the Duke believes his compassionate feeling is more genuine, somehow more superior, than women's affection. The Duke "cannot think any woman can ever love as intensely as he

does"(Ray,2006, p.65). Remarkably, Orsino's anti-feminist view echoes similar ideas and opinions by writers and philosophers in the Renaissance-era :

> Orsino echoes Montaigne's declaration that women are temperamentally unsuited to the demands of constant affection.....The duke is speaking of the female incapacity to sustain proper friendship. His general disparagement of the female ability to show enduring affection in general follows Montaigne's exclusion of women from philia (Schalkwyk, 2018, p.65).

Viola's verbal skill has enabled Orsino to express himself freely. Her rhetorical strategy is not only meant to convince Orsino to leave his prior prejudice about women, but also to draw his attention towards her own affection for him. Through another sequence of witty speeches, Viola tries to challenge and falsify Orsino's prejudice and misconceptions about love and women. To repudiate Orsino's anti-feminist views, Viola wittingly narrates a story about a love-stricken woman whose love has not been answered:

> Viola
> ... what love women to men may owe:
> In faith, they are as true of heart as we.
> My father had a daughter loved a man,
> As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,
> I should your lordship (2.4.105-109).

Cesario/ Viola's witty narrative, implicitly, gives hints about her own affection for Orsino. The love-stricken woman is no one else but Viola herself. The narrative also, in a certain way, provides a parody of Orsino's own lovesickness for Lady Olivia. The witty narrative arouses curiosity in Orsino, and he expresses willingness to know more about the unknown love-stricken woman*: 'And what's her history?(2.4.110)',* for which Cesario/Viola gives more witty description:

> VIOLA
> A blank, my lord. She never told her love,
> But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,
> Feed on her damask cheek: she pined in thought,
> And with a green and yellow melancholy
> She sat like patience on a monument,
> Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?
> We men may say more, swear more: but indeed
> Our shows are more than will; for still we prove
> Much in our vows, but little in our lover (2.4.111-118).

In the above speech, Viola wittingly has described her own love situation, which is no less sincere and no less genuine than Orsino's affection for Olivia. The speech, once again, provides a parody of Orsino's love-sickness. The witty speech, from a feminist perspective, is subversive, for it falsifies false notions and misconceptions about women and their feelings. Witty speeches empowers Viola since it provided her with an opportunity to express her affection for the person she loves freely. Her verbal skill, symbolically, assists her in her quest for selfhood. Eventually, the subsequent witty exchanges between the two characters would bring a radical change in Orsino's personality. This becomes quite evident in the play's final Act when Orsino leaves behind his previous prejudice and misconceptions about women. Not only that, he will knowledge Viola's hidden affection for him.

3.4. Viola's Role-Playing in Olivia's Household

After leaving Orsino's court, Viola must play another role in front of Lady Olivia. Disguise and role-playing are two effective means through which Viola acquires a new identity and even new social status in both Orsino's court and Lady Olivia's household. As with Orsino, Viola demonstrates great skill in impersonating the role of a witty and cunning courtier in Olivia's household. The meeting proves to be another test for Viola to prove herself as a free and independent individual. As with Duke Orsino, "Viola also helps to bring about changes in Olivia by her presence, by her personality" (Krakauer, 1984, p.105). When reaching Olivia's house, she demonstrates great skill in delivering witty speeches. The heroine's verbal skill attracts Lady Olivia's attention. When questioned by Olivia about her identity, Cesario/ Viola cunningly replies: 'I am a gentleman'(1.5.274). Olivia's confusion about Viola / Cesario's double identity reaffirmed in a soliloquy : 'I'll be sworn thou art;/ Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit, '(1.5. 286-7). Olivia's speech reaffirms Viola's masterful disguise and witty verbal skill. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's multiple acts of role-playing is significant, for they assert the notion of fragmented and decentred nature of women's

gender identity. This is in accord with Judith Butler's theoretical assumption on gender identity as a performance act rather than natural quality.“ Using gender identity as her focus, Butler argues that because identity is actualized as it is performed, rather than being caused by inner essence identity is open to disruption.” (Diprose, 2002, p. 67).Such disruption, interestingly, is possible through repetitive acts of role-playing or linguistic performances. By implication, Viola's multiple theatrical role-playing, particularly the variation in her linguistic style, constitutes subversive acts, for they repudiate the uniqueness of male's courtly rhetoric. She is, in fact, on multiple occasions, proves that she can produce courtly speeches as elegant and effective as male courtly lovers. Critic Cathrine Belsey reflected on the significance of Viola's linguistic style. When Viola “ speaks as Cesario, she is “ neither Viola nor Cesario, but a speaker who at this moment occupies a place which is not precisely masculine or feminine” (Sinfield, 1992, P.58). The heroine's mistaken 'gender identity' will become a source of confusion and misunderstandings among various characters in the play. Olivia's steward, Malvolio, does not provide a definite description of Viola/ Cesario's personality once he meets him:

> Malvolio.
>
> Not yet old enough for a man, nor young
> enough for a boy; as a squash is before 'tis a peascod,
> or a cooling when 'tis almost an apple: 'tis with him
> in standing water, between boy and man. He is very
> well-favoured and he speaks very shrewishly; one
> would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him (1.5.153-159).

Malvolio's above speech implicitly reflects on Viola's complex identity. “Because her disguise as Cesario is sustained throughout most of the play, her “masculinity” and “femininity” are simultaneous and inseparable” (Callaghan, 2016, p.305). Orsino, too, has been confused about Viola / Cesario's gender identity during the first meeting:

> ORSINO
>
> That say thou art a man. Diana's lip
> Is not more smooth and rubious. Thy small pipe
> Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
> And all is semblative a woman's part.
> I know thy constellation is right apt (1. 4.31-35).

Viola's deceptive role-playing, as the above speech indicates, has complicated characters' responses about her gender identity. As with Duke Orsino, the disguised courtier demonstrates enormous verbal skills when conversing with Lady Olivia. This is evident when she begins wooing the Countess. Her wooing rhetoric soon attracts the Countess's attention. During the wooing scene," Olivia is introduced as a Petrarchan mistress whose beauty purges 'the air of pestilence' but who cruelly rejects Orsino's love" (Findlay, 2010, p. 310). Lady Olivia has chosen total isolation from the outside world due to her excessive sadness for the loss of her beloved brother. The Countess' voluntary isolation and self-imposed exile may provide a satiric parody of Orsino's self-imposed isolation in his court. As with Orsino, Viola takes upon herself the task of persuading Olivia to leave her solitude behind. During her subsequent meetings with the Countess, Viola / Cesario successfully imitates and mimics the linguistic style of a courtly lover. This is due to her skilful usage of witty speeches. The dialogue between the two characters "offers a great variety in poetic style, for we have prose, blank verse, and couplets, all in the same scene" (Ray, 2007, p.70). Cesario/Viola's linguistic role-playing, moreover, is as effective as her self-disguise. The following exchange, for instance, gives implicit hints about Viola's/ Cesario skilful use of language:

> Most radiant, exquisite and unmatchable beauty—I pray you, tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her. I would be loath to cast away my speech, for besides that it is excellently well penned, I have taken great pains to con it. Good beauties, let me sustain no scorn. I am very comptible, even to the least sinister usage (1.5.166-172).

In the above speech, Viola uses highly elaborate speech in praising Olivia's beauty. Her usage of courtly linguistic style, ironically, parodies Orsino's highly embellished and elaborate rhetorical style. Parody has received a lot of attention from postmodern feminists for its subversive potential. " Feminist theorists working in a variety of disciplines have turned to gender parody as a critical tool and a promising means of initiating change in" " gender roles" (Robertson, 1996, p.10). Viola/ Cesario's enacting of the male persona offers a parodic potential, for it satirically mimics and imitates the Duke's manners and rhetorical style. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's verbal mimicry, or linguistic parody of male lover's courtly rhetoric has

empowered the heroine, since it provides her with effective means to falsify and subvert the myth about the uniqueness and superiority of males' courtly love rhetoric. As the dialogue proceeds between Olivia and Cesario/ Viola, Olivia enquires about the mysterious messenger's identity, which triggers a witty response from the young courtier. The next exchange of speeches, for instance, reflect on themes of mistaken identity and role-playing:

Olivia
Are you a comedian?
VIOLA
No, my profound heart.
And yet, by the very fangs of malice I swear,
I am not that I play (11.5.178-181).

The above exchange implicitly reflects on Viola's deceptive character. Her speech " im not what I play" (1.5.180) is ironic in its intent, for it implicitly refers to the heroine's self-conscious act of role-playing. In other words, the heroin has total liberty to freely reflect on her own acting or role-playing. Such self-reflexivity indicates the performative nature of gender identity. When Olivia inquires furthermore about Olivia's real message, she receives more confusing reply from Cesario/ Viola :

OLIVIA
Where lies your text?
VIOLA In Orsino's bosom.
OLIVIA
In his bosom? In what chapter of his bosom?
VIOLA
To answer by the method, in the first of his heart.
OLIVIA
O, I have read it; it is heresy. Have you no more
to say? (1.5.216-224).

The above speech reiterates the significance of the motifs of deception and role-playing in the play. Olivia's playful and sarcastic answers give the implication that she has not taken Orsino's affection so seriously. She nonetheless has become anxious to know more about the messenger's real personality. It seems she is drawn to Orsino's witty messenger rather than the Duke himself. Olivia, too, has proven to be masterful in composing witty speeches . After gaining her confidence, Cesario/Viola asks Olivia to reveal her 'veiled' face': 'Good madam, let me see your face' (1.5.225), for which Olivia

sarcastically replies: 'Have you any commission from your lord to ne— gotiate with my face?(1.5.226-7). The speech reiterates the motifs of disguise and mistaken identity. Metaphorically, Oilivia's hidden face symbolizes disguise and deception. Drawing on feminist criticism, Olivia's manner and appearance are compatible with the feminine image associated with the Elizabethan Petrarchan courtly mistress.

During the Elizabethan age, women's manners and appearances were constrained by a rigid set of patriarchal values and norms. In such a patriarchal society, a woman was required to enact and masquerade a certain type of feminine persona other than her real self. Femininity, as postmodern feminists explained, "is not an essence; it is a representation. As such, it is a constructed identity— constructed by the male subject— and the representation does not contain or account for female desire" (Leonard, 1993, p.87). Accordingly, Olivia in her self-chosen solitude and loneliness has chosen a nun-like living style. The Countess has isolated herself from the outside world "for seven years, as part of her mourning for her dead brother" (Bloom & Loos, 2008 , p. 17). As a result of her self-imposed isolation, Olivia has chosen to enact and masquerade a feminine image other than her true self. Her mourning to a dead brother, nonetheless, IS carried to the extreme. There is a remarkable similarity between Orsino's extreme state of love-sickness and Olivia's extreme indulgence in mourning. Both have chosen to isolate themselves, and they hold unrealistic views about romance and courtship. " Orsino was simply acting according to the conventions of more popular Courtly tradition" (Lebbady, 2009, p. 74). Similarly, Olivia displays the personality traits of a Petrarchan courtly mistress to be wooed and praised by a romantic lover. Similar to Orsino, Olivia holds unrealistic views about love and courtship. However, both Orsino and Olivia will realize their own mistakes and reach a state of self-realization at the play's ending. This is basically due to Cesario/ Viola's cunning role-playing and rhetorical skill.

Critics have rendered various interpretations with regard to Olivia's character. Richard . A. Levin, in his book**,** *Love and Society in Shakespearean comedy* : *A Study of Dramatic Form and Content* (1985), reads "Olivia unsympathetically as a selfish and

arrogant character who fails to learn very much through the play" (Findlay, 2010, p.310). The countess's self-chosen isolation, nonetheless, can be attributed to her desire for liberty and selfhood. Her voluntary solitude is, somehow, can be viewed as an a method through which she has escaped the rigid patriarchal society, and thereby "protect her own independence" (Ibid.). Her strong-willed character is demonstrated through her rejection of Orsino's love offer. It is Cesario/Viola's witty speeches which bring about a radical change in Olivia's personality. When conversing with Cesario/ Viola, the Countess behaves and talks as an independent woman. Symbolically, the Countess's " decision to remove her veil and reveal her face to Viola is symbolic of her will to live and love again." (Garden, 2014, p.140). Ironically though, Olivia soon falls a victim for Cesario/Viola's deceptive masculine appearance: 'Ourselves we do not owe/ What is decreed, must be; and be this so!*'*(1.5. 305-6). Obviously, Cesario/ Viola's wooing rhetoric has left a strong impact on Olivia's personality. She finds Cesario/ Viola's character quite amusing and enjoys his witty speeches. As the dialogue proceeds, Viola/Cesario tries to test whether or not Olivia has any affection for Orsino. When Viola begins wooing Olivia on behalf of Orsino, the Countesse sarcastically tells Viola that she is " out of" his master's instructed " text". To Viola's amazement, Olivia appears to be more intelligent than she has expected. This is evident during an exchange of speech in which sarcastically answers Viola's rrequest to unveil her face: 'Look you, sir, such a one I was this present. Is 't not well done?'(1.5.229-230). The sarcastic speech, symbolically, provides a hint about the artificiality of Olivia's feminine image, or her superficial personality. Cesario/Viola finds Olivia's reply quite amusing, and he tries to provoke her into further speeches. As the following lines displays, Viola demonstrates enormous skill in composing courtly speeches:

> VIOLA.
> Tis beauty truly blent,
> whose red and white.
> Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
> Lady, you are the cruel'st she alive.
> If you will lead these graces to the grave.
> And leave the world no copy (1. 5. 234-238).

Similar to the linguistic style of a courtly lover, Cesario / Viola has used embellished and elaborate language in praising Lady Olivia's physical outlook. Ironically, the heroine's linguistic mimicry of a courtly lover parodies Oriono's highly embellished and elaborate rhetorical style. Such linguistic mastery, once again, proves Viola's sense of selfhood. Remarkably, Viola/ Cesario's wooing speech has drawn Olivia's attention. In her reply, Olivia provides yet a more amusing sarcastic reply:

> OLIVIA O, sir, I will not be so hard-hearted! I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It shall be inventoried, and every particle and utensil labeled to my will: as, item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me? (1.5.239-244).

Olivia's speech is sarcastic in its intent for it, in a humorous way, reflects on Olivia's own constructed feminine image. It also provides hints about the kind of superficial life she is living in her court. Paradoxically, Duke Orsino has been solely attracted to Olivia's feminine image than her real personality. This is reflected in Orsino's passionate and romantic courtly speeches. In her attempt to influence Olivia's opinion, Cesario/Viola urges Olivia to answer Orsino's love request: ' My lord and master loves you. / Oh, such love. Could be but recompensed though you were crowned' (1.5. 247-248). In her reply, Olivia wittingly questions Orsino's affection: ' How does he love me?'(1.5.249), for which Cesario/ Viola gives a passionate description of Duke's compassionate affection: 'With adoration, /with fertile tears, /With groans that thunder love, /with sighs of fire' (1.5.250-251). The speech, however, has no effect whatsoever upon Olivia's opinion. As proof of her strong-willed character, Olivia reasserts her rejection of Orsino's affection by telling Viola that she ' cannot love him'. Of course, she praises the duke's 'virtuous' and 'noble' character, and she values his ' fresh' and 'stainless youth. , 'but yet (she) cannot love him'(1.5.257). The latter reply gives insight into Olivia's strong personality and her sense of independence, as she openly refuses Orsino's love offer. However, Cesario/ Viola persists in his request that Orsino's affection must be answered. To further influence Olivia's opinion, Cesario /Viola changes (his) linguistic style. He blames Olivia for being cruel and indifferent

towards Orsino's sincere love. In a witty linguistic word-play, Cesario/ Viola verbally impersonates Orsino's personality:

> VIOLA
> If I did love you in my master's flame,
> With such a suffering, such a deadly life,
> In your denial I woud find no sense,
> I would not understand it' (1.5. 259-261).

Cesario/ Viola's linguistic role-playing, however, has little impact on Olivia. Remarkably, Cesario/ Viola's compassionate speech, with its appealing force resembles Orsino's courtly speeches:

> Courtly love is characterized not only by the lover's appeals to the lady for mercy and the lady's rejection of those appeals but, more generally, by the lover's attempt to serve and please the lady through his actions and the lady's testsand even torments of the lover (Sullivan, 2005, p.175).

As a result of Cesario/ Viola's compassionate speeches, Olivia has become confused about Cesario's real personality. And the more (he) speaks, the more she gets attracted to his passionate witty speeches. Viola's verbal skill, particularly her linguistic mimicry of courtly lover's rhetoric, is quite evident in the way she appeals to Olivia's feeling:

> VIOLA
> Make me a willow cabin at your gate
> And call upon my soul within the house.
> Write loyal cantons of contemned love
> And sing them loud even in the dead of night.
> Halloo your name to the reverberate hills
> And make the babbling gossip of the air
> Cry out "Olivia!" Oh, you should not rest
> Between the elements of air and earth,
> But you should pity me (1.5.263-271).

By imitating and mimicking the persona of a 'courtly lover', Cesario/ Viola has managed to test whether or not Olivia has any affection for Orsino. Ironically, his witty and highly elaborate rhetoric is more powerful and compassionate than Orsino's speeches." Even though she is only expressing what she would do were she wooing Olivia, there is more life and emotion in this speech than in all Orsino's stale and unconvincing declarations of love" (Atkin, 2008, pp.38- 9). Viola's masterful mimicry of the linguistic style of courtly lover's speech has revealed it's artificial and performative

nature. This is in accord with postmodern feminists' assumption, particularly Judith Butler's groundbreaking theory of the " performativity of gender", which does not only " theorize gender as a fluid and changing category," but it also " aims to uncover the ways in which language use contributes to the construction of gender" (Alvanoudi, 2014, p.33).

Cesario/Viola on different occasions demonstrates that she can produce more affectionate and appealing speeches than Orsino. Viola's wooing speeches strengthen the intimacy between Olivia and the messenger rather than bringing Orsino and Olivia closer together. As a result of Cesario/Viola's appealing speeches, Olivia falls in love with the messenger. Countess Olivia faces a dilemma between her sudden affection for the young Courtier and her current situation, particularly her self-chosen isolation from the outside world. The Countesse' state of confusion and her sudden change of character is reflected in the following soliloquy:

OLIVIA
... How now?
Even so quickly may one catch the plague?
Methinks I feel this youth's perfections
With an invisible and subtle stealth
To creep in at mine eyes (1.5.289-293).

Olivia's soliloquy indicates a change in her personality. Viola's wooing rhetoric has produced an unexpected result, for it has reversed one state of deception into another. Paradoxically, the Countess has fallen in love with Orsino's messenger, who is, in fact, a woman in disguise. Olivia's state of delusion is reflected in her speech, 'Even so quickly may one catch the plague? (1.5.290). 'Love' in such speech, similar to Orsino's courtly speeches, is associated with sickness and plague. There has been recurrent references to sickness and malady in Orsino's courtly speeches. Noticeably, "Lovesickness, or love melancholia, thought to be a potentially fatal illness in medieval and early modern culture is often figured as a communicable disease, one caused by pathogenic rays transmitted between eyes" (Chalk & Johnson, 2010, p.183). In the play, young lovers' delusions or love-sickness are associated with excessive sentimentality or uncontrolled

affection. Lovers' extreme compassion is associated with madness or irrationality. It is the heroine's task to raise young lovers' awareness about the danger of falling into excessive passion or irrational compassion. Balancing reason with passion, in fact, is one of the crucial messages the play tries to deliver. This manifests itself in the play's ending when young lovers, after going through multiple states of delusion and confusion, reach a state of self-realization.

As with Orsino, Cesario/Viola tries to correct Olivia's negative perception of love and marriage. But Olivia has already developed a strong affection for Cesario/ Viola himself. Olivia has fallen in love with the masculine outlook of Cesario/Viola, as much as Orsino has fallen in love with the feminine image of the Countesse. Here, the theme of false appearance versus reality is apparent. After the meeting, Olivia tries to find a way to make Viola visit her again. She asks her steward, Malvolio, to deliver a ring to Cesario/ Viola. This indicates a change in Olivia's character, particulary her attitude towards love and courtship. This will be evident when she mistakenly falls in love with Viola's twin brother Sebastian.

3.4.1. Viola's Witty Persuassive Language

During the second meeting with Olivia, Cesario/Viola once again impersonates the role of a courtier in front of Olivia. Similar to the previous meeting, he delivers Orsino's love message. Olivia, however, persists in refusing the Duke's courtship. She asks him 'never speak again of him'. Nonetheless, she expresses willingness to be courted by the messenger himself:

> OLIVIA
> But, would you undertake another suit,
> I had rather hear you to solicit that
> Than music from the sphere (3.1. 108-110).

Throughout the play, themes of deception and mistaken identity recur constantly. The play, in comic ways, shows the extent excessive passion makes characters to act

blindly and foolishly. Olivia has been deluded by Viola's disguise as much as Duke Orsino had been deluded by Olivia's physical feminine outlook. Olivia's sending of Malvolio after Cesario in the first meeting provides a mocking allusion of Orsino's sending of Cesario to woo Olivia. Furthermore, Malvolio's delusion in the subplot about the prospect of courting Olivia may also provide a satiric parody of Orsino's delusion about Countess Olivia, or even Countess's delusion about the disguised Viola.

Overall, the play draws a distinction between two opposite kinds of love such as false love against true love. Young lovers must go through a radical change in personality in order to reach a true state of love. Olivia's change of character is reflected in a sudden shift in her linguistic style after falling in love with Cesario/Viola. The Countess's state of delusion resembles Orsino's delusion about Countess Olivia herself. Delusion and disguise are two important motifs running throughout the play. The passionate state of love felt by Olivia causes her to act in foolish manners. In Shakespeare's comedies, love so often makes characters to behave awkwardly. In *Venus and Adonis*, for instance, Shakespeare " explores the power of Eros (Love) to make humans and gods behave foolishly. This is, of course, a theme that runs through many of Shakespeare's dramatic comedies as well" (Schoenfeldt, 2010, p. 24). In *TN*, similarly, both Orsino and Olivia have fallen victims for 'false love'. Contrary to Olivia and Orsino, Viola/ Cesario consciously chooses 'true love' against 'false love'. In the play, Orsino's delusion about love has been associated with 'sickness' and ' death'. In a speech with Curio, the Duke compares his passionate love for Olivia in an unromantic way :

ORSINO

Oh, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence.
That instant was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me (1. 1. 18-22).

Olivia, too, describes her sudden affection for Viola with almost similar imagery: If one should be a prey, how much the better/To fall before the lion than the wolf! (3.1.128-9). Blind love has made Ol ivia to be drawn emotionally towards Viola,

who is, in fact, a woman in disguise. Even though Viola's witty speeches enable Olivia to leave her current self-isolated lifestyle behind, yet she has fallen in love with the wrong character. The scene in which Olivia begins wooing Cesario creates a surprising reversal in the whole dramatic situation as the main wooer becomes the object of wooing. Cesario/Viola is getting confused by Olivia's wooing speeches. The Countess's wooing speeches provide a satiric parody of Orsino's courtly speeches for an unattainable lady. Unlike Olivia, however, Viola remains self-conscious about her own act of role-playing. There are various dramatic situations in which Viola self-consciously reflects on her own deceptive e role-playing. After leaving Olivia's household, for instance, Viola in a long soliloquy reflects on her own conscious and deliberate act of role-playing :

VIOLA

Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness,
Wherein the pregnant enemy does much.
How easy is it for the proper false
In women's waxen hearts to set their forms!
Alas, our frailty is the cause, not we,
For such as we are made of, such we be.
How will this fadge? My master loves her dearly,
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him,
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man, (2.3. 27-36).

In the above speech, Viola feels confused and bewildered over the outcome of her own deceptive role-playing. Disguise, ironically, has brought unexpected result; Olivia has fallen in love with Orsino's messenger rather than a love-stricken Duke. Here, the dramatic scene reiterates the themes of mistaken identity and role-playing. From a feminist perspective, Viola's conscious reflection upon her own role-playing demonstrates the heroine's sense of individuality, as it reiterates her ability to distinguish between false compassion and true love. As with Orsino, Cesario/ Viola tries to caution Olivia against false love and deceptive affection. In the following speeche, the young courtier cautions Olivia against falling for false appearances:

OLIVIA
I prithee, tell me what thou thinkest of me.
VIOLA
That you do think you are not what you are.
OLIVIAIf
I think so, I think the same of you.

VIOLA
Then think you right: I am not what I am.
OLIVIAI
would you were as I would have you be! (3.1. 138-142).

Viola, even without disclosing her true character, gives some hints about her own deceptive outlook. The heroine once again has consciously reflected upon her own act of role-playing. Yet, the overall intent of her witty speeches is to awaken Olivia from her state of delusion. The above speech, furthermore, reflects on themes of disguise, mistaken identity, and role-playing. Olivia's 'lovesickness' resembles Orsino's similar situation during the consequent meetings. The Countess's compassionate speech in the following lines, with its sentimental appeal, is quite similar to Orsino's 'wooing' speeches:

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.
Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,
For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause,
But rather reason thus with reason fetter,
Love sought is good, but given unsought is better (3.1.149-156).

Olivia's sudden 'lovesickness' has created unpredictable reversal in the whole dramatic situation where roles are reversed dramatically. In a way, Olivia has taken the role of a wooer of Cesario/Viola rather than the other way around. This also reiterates the performative and constructive nature of Olivia's previous identity. The Countess appears to be unaware of the fact that she is mistakenly wooing a woman. Paradoxically, both Olivia and Orsino have fallen victim to false physical appearances of the objects of their desire. Even though Viola can't openly reveal her disguised character, she nonetheless cautions Olivia against falling for her false appearance. This is evident in the following speech in which Viola answers Olivia's last sentimental and appealing speech:

VIOLA
By innocence I swear, and by my youth
I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
And that no woman has, nor never none
Shall mistress be of it, save I alone.
And so adieu, good madam. Nevermore
Will I my master's tears to you deplore (3.1. 157-162).

The speech gives hints about Cesario/ Viola's deceptive role-playing. As a result of Cesario/ Viola's witty speeches, Olivia has begun reflecting critically on her own previous attitude towards courtship and love. The following lines, for instance, display the extent to which Olivia has changed ever since she has met the mysterious courtier:

> OLIVIA
> I have said much unto a heart of stone
> And laid mine honour too unchary on't.
> There's something in me that reproves my fault;
> But such a headstrong potent fault it is,
> That it but mocks reproof (3.4.203-7).

The Countess's sentimental speech shows her despair ad disappointment at Cesario/ Viola's lack o response. Before leaving the Countess, Viola reminds Olivia about Orsino's love situation, whose agony is no less painful than that of Olivia herself: 'With the same 'havior that your passion bears / Goes on my master's grief' (3.4. 208-9). Viola's speech implies a similarity between Orsino's lovesickness and Olivia's delusion about Viola's personality.

3.5. Significance of the Minor-Plot

The insertion of a sub-plot within the major plot is a common dramatic motif in the Shakespearean romantic comedy. *TN*, for instance, contains multiple plots and diverse dramatic incidents. The play's minor plot functions as a ' play within a play'. The subplot contains many metatheatrical aspects such as' play within a play', asides, and role-playing. These metatheatrical features have important dramatic functions. Whereas the major plot deals with "serious and intense romantic love inherited from the medieval courtly tradition, the sub-plot is entirely comic and even farcical in tone" (Ray, 2006, p.157). Both plots, however, share similar themes such as mistaken identity, self-deception, disguise, and courtship. They even share a similar dramatic structure. "It is convenient to discuss the play in terms of main plot and subplot, romance and comedy; and the characters of the comic subplot do constitute a distinct society within the

play" (Carneage & Houlahan, 2014, p.17). Similar to other romantic comedies, the play's major plot mainly deals with the development of a love relationship between two main protagonists, whereas the sub-plot deals with a comic scheme set by a group of low-ranked characters against the main villain.

The theatrical device of 'play within a play' is a common dramatic feature in Shakespearean romantic comedies. In *TN* there is a parodic relation between the major plot and subplot. The sub-plot presents a scene that can be termed a ' play within a play'. Such theatrical device is expressed through minor play within the original play. In this minor play, a group of minor characters plays a deceptive trick on the play's main villain. The trick is planned by Maria, a witty female protagonist, to expose the villain's false manners and attitudes.

3.5.1. Maria's Trick on Malvolio

Maria's playful deceptive scheme in the sub-plot against Malvolio, the play's main villain, signals a shift from romance to comedy. Such a dramatic shift is marked by a change in the linguistic style from "verse to prose". Comic characters in comedies mostly talk in " prose" (Caenegie & Houlahan, 2014, p.17), unlike essential characters who mostly deliver speeches in verse. The major plot deals with two developing love stories among young lovers, whereas the subplot deals with a less serious issue. The seriousness of the love stories among the conflicting young lovers in the major plot in the play is contrasted against the trivial and comic situation of the comic characters in the minor plot. "Shakespeare has created a group of downstairs roisterers whose antics parallel, mimic, or mingle with those of the upstairs aristocracy" (Shurgot & Owens, 1998, p.144).

The play's sub-plot, significantly, serves multiple dramatic functions. Above all, it theatrically reflects on the contrasts between falsehoods versus truth, appearance versus. reality, and self-delusion versus self-realization. Malvolio's false manners and his

delusion about the prospect of marrying Olivia, the Lady of the household, is a satiric parody of Orsino's delusive affection for Lady Olivia. It also parodies Olivia's self-delusion about Cesario, who is, in fact, a woman in disguise. In other words, Malvolio's delusive affection for Lady Olivia can be considered as the satirical equivalent of Orsino's 'love-sickness', as well as, Lady Olivia's own delusion about Viola/ Cesario. These false and deceptive love situations in the play are contrasted against Viola's sincere love for Orsino and Sebastian's growing affection for Olivia, or even the growing romance between Sir Toby and Maria. Noticeably, a parallel can be drawn between the two female protagonists in both plots. Viola and Maria, in the play's major-and-subplots, share personality traits and characteristics. Both heroines are intelligent and skillful in using witty speeches, and they both employ deception and trickeries for the sake of revealing the truth from falsehood.

The play's sub-plot presents a group of minor characters whose roles are merely meant to provide some comic relief. Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are depicted in the subplot as two comic figures in the subplot. "Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew, though they belong to the aristocracy, cannot be taken seriously for, Sir Toby does not have a serious attitude and Sir Andrew is a fool" (Ray, 2006, p. 157). Other marginal figures in the sub-plot such as Maria, Malvolio, Feste, and Fabian, do not belong to aristocracy and "are not nobly born" (Ibid). Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch share similar personality traits. They are typical prototypes of comic figures common in the Elizabethan comedies. They "can be seen as a classic comic pairing: fat and thin, witty and foolish, joker and straight man"(Carnegie & Houlahan, 2014, p.17). Malvolio, on the other hand, represents a typical embodiment of 'comic villain" in the play. His arrogant attitudes and rigid assertion of authority in Olivia's household is in clear contrast with Maria's tolerant and fun-loving personality. " He fantasizes himself as contentedly wed to Oliver for three months. He intends to use his power as the Countess's husband to command staff members and to demoralize Sir Toby for merry-making" (Snodgrass, 2008, p.5). Contrary to Malvolio, Maria is morally and intellectually superior to other comic characters. Her wit and cunning rhetoric ultimately

enable her to rise above her modest social class. Similar to Viola in the main plot, Maria plays two different roles; one as a servant, and another as a trickster.“ It is Maria’s literacy skills, however, that ultimately characterize her as a witty and resourceful servant worthy of reward via marriage” (Dowd, 2009, p. 40) Notably, Maria's role-playing in the subplot proves to be as effective as Viola's disguise in the main plot.

In Olivia’s household, Maria is given liberty to express her opinions openly without being punished. She frequently speaks “on behalf of Olivia, who has declared that she will not admit any suitors for seven years since she is mourning her dead brother”(Novy, 2017, p. 132) Maria's strong rhetoric is proven during her witty dialogues either with Malvolio or with both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Through witty speeches, Maria can deliver her covert critiques against the characters’ wrongdoings. Sir Toby Belch finds Maria’s witty speeches amusing. He admires her quick wit and cunning speeches. She nonetheless expresses discontent about both characters’ ill-mannered attitudes. Her criticism, however, is mostly directed against Sir Andrew’s foolish attitude in Lady Olivia’s household. There is nonetheless a hidden affection between Maria and Sir Toby Belch. The following speech, for instance, provides hints about Maria’s leading role in Countess Olivia’s household:

> MARIA.
> Ay, but you must confine yourself within
> the modest limits of order.
> SIR TOBY BELCH.
> Confine? I’ll confine myself no finer than I am.
> These clothes are good enough to drink in, and
> so be these boots too. An they be not, let them
> hang themselves in their own straps (1.3. 8-13).

Similar to Viola's role-playing in the main plot, Maria can easily shift social roles. Role-playing and disguise, from a feminist perspective, can be viewed as effective strategies against patriarchy as they provide means for the victimized women to alter and transform their personas as well as their social classes. By implication, Maria's deceptive scheme against Malvolio can be considered as an equivalent parody of Viola’s multiple

disguises in the major plot. To cure Orsino of his excessive ‘lovesickness’, Viola has disguised herself as a male page by the name of Cesario. Furthermore, Viola’s disguise enables Olivia to leave her unrealistic delusion about love. At the play's final Act, both Orsino and Olivia acknowledge their past mistakes and ultimately reconcile their differences. Similarly, Maria’s high moral standards and her witty character make her quite unique among the surrounding characters. She relentlessly instructs others to behave in proper manners in Countess Olivia’s household. Her criticism mostly targeted Sir Andrew Aguecheek 's rude and uncivil manner in Lady Olivia's household. Sir Toby has tricked Sir Andrew Aguecheek into believing that he is a favorite suitor to Lady Olivia. In a certain way, Maria and Sir Toby share some personality traits. A strong affection develops between the two witty characters, which ultimately ends with a happy marriage. Sir Andrew, contrary to Maria, is an illiterate and shallow character whose sole interest lies in merry-making and drinking. He foolishly fancies that he has all the potentialities and means to marry Lady: 'I would I had bestowed that time in the tongues / that I have in fencing, dancing, and bear-baiting. / O, had I but followed the arts!' (1. 3. 90-2). This comic character, ironically, can be considered as an equivalent parody of Malvolio's self-delusion about Lady Olivia. Maria constantly criticizes Sir Andrew Aguecheek’s ignorance and ill-mannered personality. This is apparent in the following speech in which Maria sarcastically mocks Sir Andrew’s shallow manners:

> SIR ANDREW.
> Good Mistress Accost, I desire better acquaintance
> MARIA.
> My name is Mary, sir.
> SIR ANDREW. Good Mistress Mary Accost (1.3. 51-4).

Sir Andrew has confused the term ‘accost’ for Maria’s name. It clearly displays his ignorance and lack of knowledge about the prescribed norms and codes of courtship. Similar to Malvolio, Sir Andrew is a self-deluded character whose prospect of marrying Olivia ends tragically. Both Malvolio and Sir Andrew represent a satirical parody of ill-mannered courtiers. Sir Toby wittingly exploits Sir Andrew’s ignorance and amuses himself by tricking the courtier into believing that he is a perfect suitor for his niece Lady

Olivia. He has taken from Sir Andrew ‘some two thousand strong, or so’ (3.2. 53-4) . The most amusing moment occurs in the play's final Act when Sir Toby tricks Sir Andrew into challenging Cesario/Viola. Sir Toby’s wit and playful manners make him a perfect match for Maria. He praises Maria’s witty character as ‘ Penthesilea’ and ‘a beagle true bred’. Their union in a happy marriage constitutes a significant part of multiple weddings at the play's ending.

3.5.2. Aspect of ‘ Play within a Play’

The conflict in the play’s subplot arises because of the power struggle between Malvolio and Maria in Lady Olivia’s household. Olivia’s steward is a power seeker, and he tries desperately to overtake Lady Olivia’s household, while Maria courageously resists the steward’s lust for power. The following lines, for instance, underlines Malvolio’s authoritative role in Lady Olivia’s household:

> MALVOLIO.
> Mistress Mary, if you prized my lady’s
> favour at anything more than contempt,
> you would not give means for this uncivil rule.
> She shall know of it, by this hand (2 . 3.119-122).

Maria finds Malvolio’s shallow manners and his pretense of authority in Olivia’s household unbearable. She displays a strong-willed character when she decides to challenge Malvolio in front of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew*:*

> MARIA.
> .. If I do not gull him into a nayword
> and make him a common recreation,
> do not think I have wit enough to lie
> straight in my bed. I know I can do it (2 . 3. 133-136).

Maria plans to avenge himself against Malvolio by tricking him into believing that he is the favourite match for Olivia. Her staged deceptive scheme, which can be viewed as 'a play within a play', aims at bringing Malvolio to disclose his malicious scheme to overtake Olivia's household. Both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew joyfully join

Maria's deceptive scheme against Olivia's Steward. This is evident in the following exchange in which Maria and two other courtiers mockingly criticize Malvolio's reserved and seemingly 'puritanical' manners:

> MARIA.
> The devil a puritan that he is, or anything
> constantly, but a time-pleaser; an affectioned
> ass that cons state without book and utters
> it by great swarths; the best persuaded
> of himself, so crammed, as he thinks,
> with excellencies, that it is his grounds
> of faith that all that look on him love him.
> And on that vice in him will my revenge
> find notable cause to work (2 . 3. 146-154).

Malvolio's Puritanism, as described mockingly by Maria and others, has invoked different interpretations from critics. Probably, the dramatist has presented such comical figure to satirically allude to certain norms and manners by the Puritans during the Elizabethan era. In this respect, the comical depiction of Malvolio's excessive pretense of virtue on stage is meant to make "the Puritan(s) detestable and ridiculous" (Walsh, 2016, p. 97). Moreover, Maria's reference to Malvolio's Puritanism may also allude to the theme of 'excess' in the play. A Similarity can be drawn between Malvolio's arrogant hypocrisy, particularly his excessive pretense of piety and virtue in the sub-plot, and Orsino's excessive display of sentimentality in the main plot. Parallel to Viola's attempt to temper Orsino's excessive passion, Maria in the minor plot undertakes the task of tempering the excess in Malvolio's rigid manners. Significantly, the theme of excess versus confinement recurs in most of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. In ***AYLI*** (1601-1602), for instance, Rosalind plays an essential role in changing Orlando's personality. "Through linguistic grappling, Rosalind hopes not to kill Orlando's *love* for her but to temper its excess" (Hunt, 2008, p. 21). ***TN***, similarly, addresses the theme of excess versus confinement through constant contrasts among the conflicting characters. Maria's trick in the play is set to disclose Malvolio's excessive lust for power, namely his evil intention to take charge of Olivia's household. The deceptive scene, ironically, provides a parody of the main plot in which (Viola / Cesario) tricks Orsino

to reveal his ‘excessive’ desire for Olivia. The relationship between Maria and Malvolio does not end up so much romantic as it is the case with Viola and Orsino. In the play’s major plot, Viola / Cesario is ‘‘attending and ultimately curing her beloved's love-sickness” (Schiffer, 2013, p. 8). Contrary to Viola, Maria executes her deceptive scheme in order to punish, and eventually reform Malvolio’s personality. The scene in which Maria tricks Malvolio contains many metatheatrical elements such as; asides, role-playing, disguise, mimicry, and ‘play-within-the-play’:

> the play within the play is often used as a form of irony and can be disguised as a simple performance within the play itself, a character masquerading as another character, a character pretending to be out of his mind, or a complex fusion of theatrical realities” (Fischer, and Greiner, 2007, p.15).

Maria’s act of individuality begins when she takes upon herself the task of restoring order and harmony to Olivia’s household. By forging Lady Olivia's handwriting, Maria proves her independent and strong-willed personality. Her impersonification of Lady Olivia’s personality, implicitly, alludes to Viola’s disguise in Orsino’s court. To execute the staged trick, Maria writes an anonymous love letter and leaves it “on the garden path for Malvolio to find” (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 4). She then asks Sir Toby, Fabian, and Sir Andrew to hide and monitor Malvolio’s trivial manners once he discovers the anonymous love letter. In the letter, Malvolio has been instructed to wear “yellow hose and tie his garters around his knees” (Ibid, 5). The purpose of the witty trick is to expose the steward’s arrogant and “his egotistical posturing” (Snodgrass, 2008, p. 4). After finding the letter, Malvolio discloses his evil intention to overtake Olivia’s household. In a soliloquy, he naively refers to a real-life incident in which a steward married his Lady: ‘ There is example for’t. The lady of the Strachy / married the yeoman of the wardrobe’ (2. 5.38-9). As the speech demonstrates, Malvolio has been deluded by the prospect of marrying Lady Olivia. Apparently, “he misunderstands the structure of the English peerage, wrongly anticipating that marriage to a countess would make him a count” (Garber, 2004, p. 529). Maria’s trickery, as she has planned, will ultimately force Malvolio to express his evil scheme to overtake Olivia’s household. Through a staged

deceptive scene, Maria has instructed a group of conspirators such as Feste, Sir Toby, and Sir Tony Belch to hide and witness how Malvolio behaves as he appears in front of Olivia; 'dressed in yellow stockings' and ' cross-gartrered' (2.5. 150-1). The self-deluded steward performs what the letter has instructed him to do so. He smiles when he sets his eyes on Lady Olivia and acts the way the letter had instructed him to do so. He even recites specific lines within the anonymous love letter: 'some are born great, some achieve greatness, and / some have greatness thrust upon them' (2 . 5. 142-3.). Malvolio unknowingly discloses his evil intention in front a group of Maria and her fellow plotters :

> MALVOLIO.
> Tis but fortune, all is fortune Maria
> Once told me she did affect me, and
> I have heard herself come thus near,
> that, should she fancy, it should be
> one of my complexion. Besides, she
> uses me with a more exalted respect
> than anyone else that follows her.
> What should I think on't? (2 . 5. 23-30.).

The play's most humorous scene occurs when a group of conspirators, led by Maria, watches closely as the deluded Stewart reflects on his ambition to overtake Lady Olivia's household. Such a scene can be viewed as a 'play within a play'. The metatheatrical feature of such a scene is quite evident through a sequence of humorous speech exchanges among the plotters:

> SIR ANDREW.
> (aside) Fie on him, Jezebel!
> FABIAN.
> (aside) O, peace! Now he's deeply in.
> Look how imagination blows him.
> MALVOLIO.
> Having been three months married
> to her, sitting in my state
> SIR TOBY BELCH.
> (aside) O, for a stone-bow, to hit him
> in the eye!
> MALVOLIO.
> Calling my officers about me, in my

Branched velvet gown, having come from
a daybed, where I have left Olivia sleeping—
SIR TOBY BELCH.
(aside) Fire and brimstone!
FABIAN. (aside) O, peace, peace! (2 . 5. 40-50).

The plotters' first trick on Malvolio contains many ironic asides and humorous exchanges, either between Sir Belch and Fabian or between Sir Toby and Maria. Such humorous scenes reflect satirically on main themes and motifs in the major plot such as; mistaken identity, and self-delusion, and disguise. Here, Maria's staged trick on Malvolio can be considered as an equivalent parody of Viola's deceptive tricks on both Duke Orsino and Lady Olivia.

The play reaches a tense moment when Malvolio appears in front of Lady Olivia dressed awkwardly and recites lines from the anonymous letter. Lady Olivia has been puzzled by Malvolio's strange outlook and couldn't comprehend his strange utterances. She asks Maria to care for the confused Steward. Maria cunningly uses this opportunity to further torment the deluded steward. Her next trick aims to bring Malvolio into confessing his wrongdoings. Maria once again instructs Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and Feste once again join her in yet another deceptive trick on Malvolio. Sir Toby suggests to Maria "to have Malvolio bound and locked in a dark room" (Bloom, 2008, p.12-3). Symbolically, the darkroom refers to Malvolio's self-deluding personality. The plotters try to justify their actions by alleging "Malvolio is possessed by demons and needs an exorcism" (Minigan, 2006, p. 20).

The staged scene in which characters perform an exorcism on Malvolio is another 'play within a play'. Such a staged scene, moreover, parodies another scene in the main plot in which Viola tries to cure Orsino of excessive 'love-sickness'. "After the conspirators have massed suitable 'evidence' for Malvolio's possession, the stage is set for the *exorcist* to appear" (Kallendorf , 2003, p.34). Through a pre-arranged trick, Maria divides roles among her fellow plotters. Feste, disguised as Sir Tubas, or 'the priest', begins interrogating and performing an exorcism on Malvolio. Malvolio's forced

imprisonment in a dark room provides a satiric parody of Duke Orsino's self-imposed exile from society, or even Olivia's self-imposed isolation for seven years due to her excessive grief for a dead brother. Similar to the previous deceptive scheme, Maria's second deceptive scheme against Malvolio contains many metatheatrical elements such as asides, role-playing, mimicry, and the 'play-within-the-play'. This is evident through several exchanges of speeches among the conspirators who perform the mocking act of exorcism:

> FESTE (as Sir Topas). (disguising his voice)
> What ho, I say! Peace in this prison!
> SIR TOBY BELCH.
> The knave counterfeits well. A good knave.
> MALVOLIO.
> (from within) Who calls there?
> FOOL.
> Sir Topas the curate, who comes
> to visit Malvolio the lunatic.
> MALVOLIO .Sir Topas, Sir Topas,
> good Sir Topas, go to my lady
> FOOL.
> Out, hyperbolical fiend! How vexest thou
> this man! Talkest thou nothing but of ladies?
> SIR TOBY BELC
> (aside) Well said, Master Parson (4.2.19- 28).

During the act of exorcism, the plotters press Malvolio to confess his previous mistakes and wrongdoings. Feste, disguised as Sir Tobas, presses Malvolio to confess his sins otherwise he would be kept locked inside the darkroom. The plotters' stages performance is mainely meant to trick Malvolio into confessing his wrongdoings in Lady Olivia's household. Their cunning role-playing, in fact, creates a situation as if "Malvolio is possessed by demons and needs an exorcism" (Minigan, 2006, p. 20). No matter what Malvolio says, the conspirators take Malvolio's words as proofs to condemn him."Ironically, his refusal only corroborates their accusations"(Kallendorf, 2003, p. 34). To further humiliate Malvolio, Feste and other plotters questions the steward's state of mind 'But tell me true, are you not mad indeed, or do you but counterfeit? (4.2.114-5), for which the steward replies, ' Believe me, I am not; I tell thee true' (4. 2.116) .In a mocking tone, Feste orders the imprisoned Malvolio to "leave thy vain bibble-babble'.(4. 2. 96-7). The speech is satiric in its intent, for it ridicules " Malvolio's

supposedly exaggerated behaviour and language" (Elam, 2008, p. 308). The scene of exorcism, with its sarcastic and comic nature, provides a satiric parody of Viola's witty trick to cure both Olivia and Orsino of their state of 'love-sicknesses'. A parallel can be drawn between Malvolio's state of delusion and Orsino's self- imposed exile in his court, or even Olivia's self- imposed isolation in excessive grief for a dead brother. After the scene of exorcism, Malvolio's fate is left up to Lady Olivia.
The Countess expresses admiration for Maria's witty the scheme, while at the same time expresses her concern about Malvolio's state of mind :

> OLIVIA.
> Alas, Malvolio, this is not my writing,
> Though, I confess, much like the character.
> But out of question, 'tis Maria's hand.
> And now I do bethink me, it was she
> First told me thou wast mad (5.1.345-349).

Ironically, the revelation of Maria's trick on Malvolio happens at a time most dramatic confusion and conflicts in the main plot are getting resolved. Like a typical example of antagonists in Elizabethan plays, Malvolio is portrayed as an element of disruption and discord against the play's romantic atmosphere. His degradation signals a new beginning in the play as the conflicting young lovers reconcile among themselves. After the trickery scene, Malvolio appears weak and confused. Lady Olivia has taken Maria's trick on Malvolio less seriously and she even expresses admiration for her witty trick. This angers Malvolio and his threatening speech: 'I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you' (5.1.378), indicates his discontent at Lady Olivia's indifference to his suffering. Contrary to Malvolio's degradation at the end of the play, Viola and Maria gain higher social status through two happy marriages. Duke Orsino is united with Viola after the confusion about the twin brother, Sebastian, and Viola is clarified at the play's final Act. Maria, too, secures a higher social position in Olivia's household by marrying Sir Toby.

By impersonating Lady Olivia's character, Maria has symbolically challenged society's conventional prejudice and misconceptions about women's gender roles in society. In a way, both Viola's cross-dressing in the main plot and Maria's deceptive

role-playing in the subplot constituted two effective subversive strategies for both victimized women against Illyria's patriarchal society. From a feminist perspective, Maria's role-playing in the subplot empowers her since her acting theatrically challenged and debunks false notions and misconceptions about women in Illyria's male-dominated community. Indeed, Maria's cunning role-playing empowers her as much as other deceptive tricks like disguise and cross-dressing empowers Viola in the main plot. The happy romantic ending in the play, through multiple marriages among the conflicting young lovers in both sub-and main-plots, in fact, signals the restoration of order and harmony to Illyria's community. Both Orsino and Olivia reconcile their differences after the discovery of the twin sister and brother, Sebastian and Viola. Noticeably, both female protagonists in the play's sub-and main plot have contributed to a romantic happy ending.

Thus, the play's minor-plot has a significant dramatic function. Such a plot, metatheatricaly, reflected on the main themes and dramatic actions of the major plot. The dramatist successfully blended both humour and seriousness through two parallel and co-related plots. Whereas the main plot deals with a serious love story, the sub-plot deals with less serious issues. Both plots, nonetheless, tackle almost similar themes and motifs such as romantic love, courtship, mistaken identity, role-playing, and disguise. Moreover, Maria's staged deceptive scheme in the sub-plot, which can be viewed as 'a play within a play', aimed at revealing the villain's arrogant and ill-mannered attitude. Maria's trick on Malvolio provides a satirical parody of Viola's tricky role-playing in the major plot.

3.6. Fate and Female Individuality in the Play

Fate and human agency are two crucial aspects of Shakespearean plays. These two aspects, nonetheless, are represented differently in both tragedy and comedy. In Classic tragedy, 'Fate' or ' Fortuna' operate in contrast to the protagonist's free-will. A similar pattern can be found in the Elizabethan tragedy. In Shakespearean tragedy,

particularly, there is a contrast between the tragic heroes' free will and Fate. In *Macbeth*, for instance, the disruption of the natural order results due to the tragic hero's excessive desire for power and authority. In most tragedies, "the tragic resolution may and often does involve the downfall and destruction of the tragic hero" (Williams, 2012, p.127). In *King Lear*, for instance, " the disturbance of the natural order brought about by Lear's division of his kingdom, and the parallel disruption he creates within his own family" (Bain & Amy, 2015, p.198), are the reasons behind the play's tragic ending. Notably, Elizabethan dramatists held conventional medieval beliefs about the hierarchical order of the universe. "Because of an Elizabethan worldview that viewed all the elements of the universe as connected in a rigid hierarchical system, this disruption of the human social order actually affects the entire universe" (Chemers, 2010, p. 41). In classical plays, the hero's tragic flaw, or Hamartia , leads to the disruption of the natural order. The dialectical relationship between Human Agency and 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' differs in both comedies and tragedies. "In tragedy, fate is not an arbitrary person – it is we who are responsible, and we bring our fate upon ourselves" (Auden, and Kirsch, 2002, p. 24). In comedy, however, "if fate is to appear comic, it must be arbitrary and appear to behave like a person, and the people who are subject to fate should not be responsible for what occurs" (Ibid). In ***TN***, 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' functions on multiple levels and manifests itself through different incidents and co-incidents in the play.

3.6.1.**Macrocosm and Microcosm Formula**

Generally, Shakespeare's plays reflect on philosophical and cosmological ideas prevalent during the Renaissance era. "The Renaissance inherited from the Middle Ages a theory of cosmos that had its origins in ancient principle of the universe" (Wells, 2009, p.11). The most common ancient principles " were the chain of being and the macrocosm/microcosm analogy" (Ibid) . According to such a principle, every single item is part of a larger system in the cosmos, and each item represents a symbolic image of

such a system. The same principle has been applied to the complex relationship between Humans and the larger Universe. Accordingly, “an individual human was often imagined as a 'little world' (microcosm) reflecting the larger world of the cosmos (macrocosm). It was thought that there were analogies and correspondences between the two” (Bladen, 2011, p.7). Such a cosmological view had shaped Elizabethan thinking during the Renaissance era. Shakespeare in his plays, through a complex web of symbolic references, had reflected on the macrocosm/microcosm analogy. And his plays must be viewed “in terms of in the microcosm and macrocosm formula” (Plaisier, 2012, p.34).

In Shakespeare’s plays, whether comedy or tragedy, the plotline is constructed around the cyclical pattern of conflict and resolution. In comedies, any disruption in the natural order has to be followed by a miraculous resolution at the play’s ending. Multiple weddings at the play’s ending mark a restoration of order and harmony after a temporal state of disorder and disarray. The concept of harmony draws its symbolic significance from the cosmological analogy of the macrocosm/microcosm. Such an "analogy held that a set of identical laws operated throughout the universe: bodies families, states, the cosmos itself were all framed to the same universal laws of being” (Wells, 2009, p. 11). Sir Toby Belch’s speech in the play, for instance, " our lives consist (ing) of the four elements’” (2.3.9) (Ibid), offers a clear reference to such cosmological analogy. In Tragedy, on the other hand, it is the tragic hero’s uncalculated action which causes the disruption of order and harmony. “ As in Christian mythology, the cause of (any) disruption of nature’s harmony” (is) “ human wickedness” (Ibid, 11-2). In Shakespeare’s great tragedies such as *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, the natural order is disrupted as a result of the tragic hero’s uncalculated action. In such tragedies, human agency is set against the capricious forces of Nature or *Fate*’. Here, the tragic hero has a “free-will but a fatal flaw causes” (King, And Sarah King 2002, p. 74) his tragic downfall.

3.6.2. The Cyclic Pattern of Events

Unlike tragedy, Fate and human agency in comedy are complementary rather than conflicting with each other. 'Fate' or 'Fortuna' directly assists, or even necessitates, the heroine's quest for self-realization in Shakespearean comedies. Allegorically, the female protagonists in comedies somehow act as an agent of 'Fate'. In *TN*, there exists some sort of correlation between the heroine's quest for selfhood and Fate's unpredictable and capricious force. For instance, the sequence incidents of loss and the reunification of the twin brother and sister, Viola and Sebastian, highlight the role of Fate in the play. Here, the motif of the 'Sea' carries symbolic implications of loss and self-discovery. It can be viewed as a symbol of Fate's uncontrolled and unpredictable force in the play which miraculously brings the identical twins together, as it earlier separated them. Moreover, the shipwreck incident which changes Viola's destiny also entails a journey of selfhood. " The journey in water entails deaths and rebirth as well as the stripping off the mask of a persona and the discovering of the real self" (Auden, 2002,p. 26). Noticeably, the tragic event of the shipwreck event positively affects the final outcome of the play.

In *TN*, the cyclic pattern of events and dramatic incidents are compatible with the female protagonist's course of action. Throughout various dramatic situations, numerous characters make clear references to 'Fate' or 'Fortuna'. Fate's sudden twist of events brings unexpected outcome to Olivia and Viola's relationship when Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, accidentally appears and joins Olivia in a happy marriage. Here, the loss and unification of Sebastian and Viola, like two missing halves, is signaled in the play as a sign of divine intervention. Each twin has to undergo a journey of self-discovery separately in order to reach a state of self-realization. Ironically, the twin's unification affects the densities of the conflicting characters. " The lovers in fact in a situation beyond the control of any individual; only a benevolent ***Fate***, by bringing the twins together can solve their problems" (Wells, 2015, p. 253). Noticeably, the cyclic pattern of the "benevolent fate" in *TN* is in accord with the cyclic sequence of incidents in

the plot structure. This is evident through ‘a cycle of changes’ in characters’ personalities as they encounter a series of dramatic incidents and co-incidents. Interestingly, most incidents and dramatic events in *TN* are interrelated and interconnected in a logical sequence. For instance, the final twist in the play’s major plot provides a logical solution for a sequence of incidents and co-incidents. Such a dramatic twist happens when the twin brother and sister, Sebastian and Viola, accidentally meet each other. Here, the separated twins represent “two halves of a whole” (Sullivan & Pagès, 2016, p.234). Antonio exclaims at the striking similarity between the twin brother and sister: “ An apple cleft in two” (5. 1. 223). It seems the world of the play “is comprised of halves seeking other halves” (Ibid). Each of these two halves makes his / her journey separately, and the cyclical journey of each of the two missing halves will be completed in the final Act as they get united as one completed whole.

The motif of the journey is a common motif of Shakespearean romantic comedies. Rosalind’s journey from Court to the Forest of Arden in *AYLI* symbolically reflects on themes of self-discovery and selfhood. The Motif of the journey is also apparent in *MOV*. Portia’s journey back and forth between Venice and Belmont in *MAAN*. It is reflected in the manners young lovers go through the cyclic pattern of deceit and reconciliation. Such a pattern is also related to aspects of self-discovery and self-hood, particularly with regard to young lovers’ transformation from deception into self-awareness. The plot’s cyclical pattern, interestingly, can be traced in both Shakespearean tragedy and Comedy:

> The idea of 'tragedy' here seems indebted to the overarching scheme of the medieval English cycle plays, in which human failure and death are ultimately to be understood as a part of a larger cosmic plan aimed at eventual restoration of order and harmony (McEachem, 2013, p. 51).

Shakespeare in his plays draws on Classic and Renaissance ideas. Classic thinkers, particularly, “ held a mystical vision of the cosmic cycle”, and they view “ the universe passed from the rule of love to the rule of strife and back again, so that although ‘things never cease from continual shifting” (Salingar, 1974, p.133). In tragedies, the

‘cycle of changes’ in the protagonist’s ‘fortune’ deviates from ‘strife-reconciliation' pattern, common in comedies. Hero’s tragic downfall in tragedies follows a sudden rise of power. A quite opposite’ cyclical pattern’ is to be found in *TN*, where the conflicting young lovers reach reconciliation after temporary disputes and confusion. A collective weddings in the play's ending signals the restoration of order and harmony in the play.

There is, somehow, a correlation between ‘the heroine's quest for selfhood and Fate’ s unpredictable force in Shakespeare’s romantic comedies. ‘Fortuna’ in comedies does not only “ follow a cycle, like Nature”, but it appears that it “ cannot complete her cycle without the disguise, either” (Ibid, p. 25). Interestingly, Viola’s disguise in in the play occurs as a result of sudden misfortune. In comedies, the heroine has been rescued from subsequent confusions by a sudden twist of events, particularly at the play’s ending. Here “ the idea of ‘fortune’ touches a wide span of meanings: haphazard, chance, accident, coincidence, luck, wealth, the unpredictable, adversity, the force of circumstance, even fate” (Ibid, p.129). Fate in comedies, particularly in *TN***,** presents itself in the form of ‘ chance’ or coincidence’. The dichotomy of fate and chance is more obvious in the opening lines *TN*, in which Viola attributes her own miraculous survival to a twist of *Fate*, or ‘Perchance’:

> VIOLA.
> And what should I do in Illyria?
> My brother he is in Elysium.
> Perchance he is not drown’d.—
> What think you, sailors?
> CAPTAIN.
> It is perchance that you yourself were saved.
> VIOLA.
> O, my poor brother!
> And so perchance may he be. (1.2.3-8)

In the above speech, ‘Fate’ or ‘Fortuna’ is depicted as an uncontrollable and unpredictable force that moves the events of the play. Even though the play offers no clear references to any supernatural forces, it nevertheless contains numerous incidents and coincidences which give indications about the role of ‘Fate’ or even ‘Divine

Intervention' such as "shipwreck, twins, disguises, exile, and magical resolution" (Jan & Firdaus, 2003, p.150). The incident of the shipwreck which resulted in the separation of the twin brother and sister has been attributed to the capricious force of *'Fortune'* or 'Chance'. "The words "perchance", "fate" and "fortune" are reiterated frequently in the play to suggest the capricious nature of life" (Ibid, p.141). Although 'Fortuna' or 'Perchance' brings about multiple states of confusions and misunderstandings, yet ironically it assists in bringing the romantic happy ending:

> The world of *Twelfth Night* is governed by chance and fortune. It is by chance that Viola survives the shipwreck. The same is true of Sebastian. They happen to be identical twins. It is also just by chance that Antonio comes to rescue Cesario in the duel under the impression of Sebastian, and Andrew Aguecheek strikes Sebastian under the impression of Cesario. All this can be attributed to chance (Ibid, p.141).

Characters on multiple occasions in the play refer to the benevolent role of Fortune or Fate. In a comic scene which parodies Orsino and Olivia's states of confusion in the main plot, Malvolio in the sub-plot attributes his 'self-deluded' love situation to Fortune : 'Tis but fortune, all is fortune. / Maria once told me she did affect me, / and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy' (2.5.18-20). The linking of 'Fortune' or 'Fate' and deception is also implicated in Countess Olivia's confused state of mind after falling in love with Cesario/ Viola. In the following soliloquy, Olivia attributes her mistaken love for Oresino's messenger to the capricious force of Fate:

> OLIVIA
> I do I know not what and fear to find
> Mine eye too great a flatterer for my mind.
> Fate, show thy force. Ourselves we do not owe.
> What is decreed must be, and be this so (1.5. 303-6).

Fate in *TN* necessitates, or even assists, the female protagonist's act of disguise. As critics point out, the "convention of linking disguise and 'Fortune' came ultimately from classical comedy. But in the Elizabethan theatre, it seems to have been Shakespeare, more than anyone else, who reintroduced it to the stage" (Salingar, 1974, p.26). A link between disguise and fate can be inferred in Viola's speech when she reveals her true identity to both Orsino and Olivia:

VIOLA
If nothing lets to make us happy both
But this my masculine usurp'd attire,
Do not embrace me till each circumstance
Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump
That I am Viola (5.1.249-252).

Viola's disguise in the play, similar to Portia and Rosalind's acts of disguises in *AYLI* and *MOV***,** plays a crucial role in bringing deluded lovers into a state of self-realization. Not only does Viola's disguise correct Orsino and Olivia 's misconceptions about love and courtship, but it also contributes to the restoration of order and harmony to Illyria's community. Sebastian and Viola miraculously find each other by a strange coincidence. "The pattern of coincidences" takes different forms in Shakespeare's comedies such as the reunification "of two pairs of twin brothers, lords, and servants" (Penda, 2016, p. 222). In romantic comedies, the pattern of coincidence' is apparent where disguise is also a common motif. Sebastian's following speech to Olivia, after the major confusions are resolved, is significant for it implicitly refers to the complex the relation between ' Fate' and disguise :

SEBASTIAN to OLIVIA:
…., lady, you have been mistook:
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived,
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man (5.1. 259-263).

Sebastian in the above speech refers to benevolent forces beyond the characters' comprehension. 'Nature' produces a similar effect as Fate and they are almost identical. Duke Orsino exclaims once he encounters the two identical twins: 'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,/ A natural perspective, that is and is not!'(5.1.215-216). Whereas " Fortune (coincidence) does not appear to be a direct agent in producing the happy ending of a comedy, its place is taken by conscious deception or trickery involving some form of disguise as a necessary means" (Salinger, 1974, p. 25). Ironically, the happy ending is not possible without the female protagonist's role-playing and verbal skill. In other words, "misfortune produces disguise, and disguise the

return of prosperity" (Ibid). Here, the female protagonist's quest for selfhood does not only defuse and rectify lovers' follies and misconceptions, but it also contributes to the community's common good.

So, fate and human agency are two crucial aspects of Shakespearean plays. These two aspects are represented differently in both tragedy and comedy. Unlike tragedies, fate and human agency in comedies complete each other. In comedies, Fate or Fortuna functions as an invisible 'arbitrary' agent, assisting the heroin in achieving selfhood. In ***TN ,*** particularly, Fate manifests itself through multiple incidents and coincides. There is also a complementary and correlative relation between Fate's unpredicted force and the female protagonist's quest for selfhood. Ironically, the happy ending is not possible in the play without the female protagonist's physical and verbal trickeries. In other words, fate necessitates disguise, and this also assists in the restoration of order and harmony to the larger community.

3.7. Revelation of Mistaken Identities

Similar to the other romantic comedies, major dramatic confusions in ***TN*** are resolved as a result of the revelation of truth from falsehood. Viola's disguise has already led to multiple states of confusion among various conflicting characters. A turning point in the play, however, happens when Orsino and Olivia meet each other in front of Olivia's house. During their direct encounter, Olivia openly rejects Orsino's compassionate wooing speech. Neither Orsino, nor Viola has any knowledge about the developing romantic relationship between Sebastian and Olivia. Noticeably, there are many dramatic incidents and co-incidents, particularly in Act Four, which brought young lovers into multiple states of confusion. During the last meeting, Olivia mistook Cesario/Viola for Sebastian whom she has married hastily after knowing him for a short period of time. Orsino has no knowledge of Olivia's sudden affection for his

page. Viola, too, has no knowledge about Sebastian's arrival in Illyria, or even his meeting with Lady Olivia. The Duke is enraged because of Olivia's swift change of affection for his page. His sentimental and appealing speech does not attract Countess Olivia's attention. She describes Orsino's speech as*:* ' the old tune, ../ It is as fat and fulsome to mine ear /As howling after music' (5.1.105-7). The tense dramatic scene draws on significant themes in the play such as disguise, mistaken identity, and false love. Orsino's mistaken affection for Olivia parodies the confusing state by Olivia herself about Viola's character. The Duke finds Olivia's unpleasant manners confusing. "She treats (him) more harshly than she did her own servant Feste: she is curt, vulgar, brutal and rude"(Taylor, 1985, p.92).Ultimately, Olivia's cruel treatement leads Orsino to reconsider his affection for Olivia. The Duke "realizes that he " is getting nowhere in his courtship of Countess Olivia, it is another of those fruitless courtly-love fantasies of the pursuit of the beautiful but unobtainable lady" (Bevington, 2009, p.78). As the following speech displays, Orsino expresses a sense of despair and helplessness at Olivia's indifferent attitude towards his compassionate and appealing speeches:

> Orsino
> What, to perverseness? you uncivil lady,
> To whose ingrate and unauspicious altars
> My soul the faithfull'st offerings hath breathed out
> That e'er devotion tender'd! What shall I do? (5.1.110-113).

Obviously, Orsino's appealing speech has little effect on Olivia's opinion. He blames his lady for taking another lover and thereby threatens to disrupt the developing love relationship between the two lovers: 'I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love / To spite a raven's heart within a dove' (5.1.128-9). Orsino's ' un-courtly tone' is in stark contrast with his early compassionate and romantic speeches. The same can be said about Olivia, whose rude manners and aggressive tone of speech is in contrast with her ' courtly speeches for Cesario/ Viola. Viola has become confused about the conflict between Olivia and Orsino. She has fallen victim to their misconceptions and conflicting desires. The easiness through which Olivia had changed her affection underscores the fact that her excessive passion for Viola was inconstant and transient.

Similarly, Orsino's lovesickness for Olivia proves to be temporal and inconsistent. The crucial moment arrives when Viola decides to choose between the two conflicting characters. Her courageous decision to join Orsino: 'And I, most jocund, apt, and willingly,/ To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die' (5.1. 130-1), proves that her love for Orsino has been genuine and sincere from the very beginning. Orsino's speech: 'sacrifice the lamb' carries symbolic meaning. The symbol of " lamb is very important in Christian iconography and can already be found in early Christian catacombs as a symbol of Christ and his sacrifice" (Impelluso 2004, p. 247).

Symbolically, Viola's heroic act of self-sacrifice can be viewed as an act of selfhood because she consciously and deliberately decides her own destiny. Contrary to Orsino and Olivia's changeable and inconsistent personalities, Viola remains loyal and consistent in her love for the person she loved. Her display of consistency falsifies Orsino's gender-biased claim which he made about women in the early scenes of the play.Woman's self-sacrifice is a common motif in Shakespeare's romantic comedy. Viola's self-sacrifice in the play assists self-deluded lovers like Orsino and Olivia to aknowledge their own mistakes, and reach a state of self-realization. Viola's courageous act recalls similar act by Hero in ***MAAN***. Hero's self-sacrifice, through a deceptive 'death scene', enables Claudio to overcome his previous misjudgment and misconceptions about his lover. Woman's self-sacrifice is also a common motif in ***M OV.*** Portia's self-sacrifice during the trial for the sake of saving Antonio resembles Viola's act self –sacrifice to cure Orsino of his love-sickness. Overall, women's act of self-sacrifice in comedy enables male lovers to reach a state of self-realization.

By demonstrating consistency in her love, Viola has proved that she indeed possesses a strong-willed personality. Shocked and bewildered, Lady Olivia tries to dissuade Viola/ Cesario from joining Orsino. This is reflected in the tense exchange between Olivia and Viola after she has chosen to join Orsino:

OLIVIA

Where goes Cesario?
VIOLA
After him I love
More than I love these eyes, more than my life,
More, by all mores, than e'er I shall love wife.
If I do feign, you witnesses above,
Punish my life for tainting of my love! (5.1. 132-6).

In the above speech, Viola has asserted her own individuality through a deliberate and conscious decision to join Orsino whom she loves. Nonetheless, Cesario/ Viola's decision to join Orsino brings the play into the climax. Olivia has been enraged at the apparent betrayal by Viola, and desperately tries to persuade her to leave Orsino and join her. Orsino, having no knowledge of any of the meetings between Viola's twin brother and Olivia, has become furious when Olivia calls Viola her 'husband'. In the midst of confusion, Viola stays persistent and faithful in her affection for Orsino. The confusion over Viola's mistaken identity reaches its highest point when a priest confirms the marriage ceremony between Olivia and Viola: 'A contract of eternal bond of love, / Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands' (5.1. 154-5). As a result, Orsino denounces Cesario as a "dissembling cub" for her supposed treachery. Subsequent unexplained incidents cause more confusions and delusions about Viola's mistaken identity. Sir Andrew and Sir Toby enter the scene, and they mistake Viola for Sebastian. They accuse Viola of causing injuries to both of them. Olivia, as much as Viola and Orsino, is bewildered by such accusation and asks Sir Andrew an explanation. Sir Andrew's reply, even without knowing the truth, carries an inference about Viola's deceptive character: 'The Count's gentleman, one Cesario. /We took him for a coward, / but he's the very devil incardinate' (5.1. 178-180).

The play reaches a turning point when various characters come forward to lay charges against Viola. Shocked and amazed, Viola struggles to find a way to save herself over various confusions about her mistaken identity. The dramatic situation reflects on themes of mistaken identity, delusion, and false appearance. Sebastian's sudden appearance, which can be interpreted as a symbol of divine intervention in the play brings the tense and confusing dramatic scene into its climax. Orsino's speech after seeing

Sebastian implies symbolic meaning about the role of fate or providence: ‘ One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons/ A natural perspective, that is and is not!’ (5.1.215-6). Remarkably, the reunion between Viola and her twin brother causes a radical shift in the play’s storyline, revealing mistaken identities and causing radical transformations of the conflicting characters. Both Sebastian and Viola are astonished at each other's likeness. Sebastian is confused about Viola’s gender identity and asks explanation: ‘I never had a brother; / Nor can there be that deity in my nature,/ Of here and everywhere. I had a sister,’(5.1. 226-8). In her reply, Viola provides the whole story of her missing twin brother, as well as her own deliberate act of self-disguise. She tells Sebastian that she could prove her true ‘ female identity’ if they go together to the captain who rescued her. “ He has her female clothes but is locked up in a prison because of a quarrel with Malvolio” (Yates , 1988, p.11).

The revelation of the twin’s mistaken identities makes it possible for Olivia and Orsino to shift their affections from one object of desire to another. Orsino eventually realizes that he has fallen in love with the wrong person. Consequently, he confesses his love for the woman he should have paid attention to from the very beginning:

> ORSINO (to VIVIA).
> Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times
> Thou never shouldst love woman like to me.
> VIOLA
> And all those sayings will I overswear;
> And those swearings keep as true in soul
> As doth that orbèd continent the fire
> That severs day from night (5.1.267-272).

The above speech gives a clear indication of Orsino's change of personality. Through witty language, Viola has succeeded in correcting Duke Orsino’s false notion and gender-biased views about women. The Duke eventually has come to realize that women’s affection, as with Viola’s love situation, is as genuine and sincere as men’s affection. Overall, the heroine’s masterful rhetorical skill has proved to be an effective tool for empowerment. It enabled the female protagonist to rise above her humble social class and join the nobility. This manifests itself at the play's ending when

Duke Orsino proposes to marry Viola. Moreover, Viola's subsequent witty exchanges with both young lovers, Orsino and Olivia, have brought about gradual changes in their personalities. A change in their perspectives towards love and courtship is quite evident in the play's ending when both Orsino and Olivia are getting united with the twin sister and brother in two happy marriages. A collective marriage ceremony among the conflicting lovers marks a shift from multiple confusions into romantic festivity. Multiple weddings, moreover, denote reconciliation among the conflicting lovers, and the creation of a new community where women acquire more power and higher social status. Similar to the other romantic comedies, the heroine's quest for selfhood contributes to the restoration of harmony and order to the larger community.

3.8. Critical Overview of Chapter Three

The main plot in *TN* centers around developing a love relationship between Viola and Orsino, two male and male protagonists. Duke Orsino has been depicted as a typical example of a romantic courtly lover. Such a romantic figure holds false opinions and unrealistic notions about women. So, the heroin takes upon herself the task of correcting Orsino's false opinions and misconceptions about women and courtship. Orsino lacks a strong will to communicate and deliver his love for Lady Olivia. It is the reason he requests Cesario/ Viola to deliver his love message to Lady Olivia and woo her on his behalf. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's self-disguise as a male courtier in Duke Orsino's court constitutes a subversive act, for it challenges common perception about gender roles in Illyria's male-dominated society.

As with Orsino, Viola's meetings with Olivia highlights themes of mistaken identity and false love. During the first meeting, Viola's cunning verbal skill has a huge impact on Olivia's personality. Interestingly, the Countess shares significant personality traits with Orsino. Both characters have chosen total isolation from the outside world, and

both hold unrealistic views about romance and courtship. By imitating and mimicking the persona of a 'courtly lover', Cesario/ Viola has managed to test whether or not Lady Olivia has any affection for Duke Orsino. Ironically, Viola/ Cesario's witty and highly elaborate rhetoric in Olivia's household has proven to be more powerful and compassionate than Orsino's romantic speeches. As a result of Viola's verbal skill, the Countess has fallen in love with Duke Orsino's love messenger, who is in a fact a woman in disguise. In a dramatic turn of events, the Countess has begun wooing Duke Orsino's love messenger. Noticeably, the wooing scene resembles another scene in which Viola / Cesario had mimicked the linguistic style of a male lover. Ironically, the wooing scenes in the play provides a parody of Orsino's romantic love rhetoric. Notably, the rhetoric of romantic love is concerned with idealizing and romanticizing the feminine image of a woman rather than valuing her true personality. Interestingly, Viola's linguistic mimicry of courtly lover's speeches in front of Lady Olivia parodied Orsino's romantic love rhetoric. Her linguistic role-playing, by implication, has provided a satirical parody of the Elizabethan courtly love convention which valued women's physical beauty rather than her true personality.

As a result of Viola's witty rhetorical skill, both Orsino and Olivia have realized their own mistakes in pursuing unrealistic love. After subsequent meetings, Olivia underwent a dramatic personality change. Apparently, Olivia's strong persuasive language has affected Olivia's self-centeredness and emotional indifference toward love and courtship. Sebastian's appearance causes a dramatic twist of events. Olivia accidentally has mistaken Sebastian for Viola and instantly falls in love with him. Orsino, similarly, realizes that he has fallen in love with the wrong person. By demonstrating consistency in her love, Viola proves to Orsino her true affection for him. The Duke eventually acknowledges his own mistakes and asked Viola to join him in a happy marriage. Olivia, too, undergoes a radical change of personality as she finds true love in Sebastian. A collective marriage ceremony among the conflicting lovers signals a shift from multiple confusions into romantic festivity. Noticeably, multiple weddings denotes

reconciliation among the conflicting lovers. More importantly, it signals the creation of a new community where women acquire more authority and secure higher social status.

Viola's masterful use of verbal skills have proved to be an effective tool for empowerment. It enables deluded young lovers to overcome their own weakness and reach a state of self-realization. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's verbal skill has proven an effective means of empowerment for it provided her with the possibility to shift social and gender roles. Through witty speeches, Viola has managed to correct Orsino's false opinion and gender-biased notions about women and courtship. Her persuasive language, similarly, brings a dramatic change in Countess Olivia's personality. Theatrically, Viola's masterful mimicry of the male courtier's linguistic style has revealed the constructiveness and performative nature of the rhetoric of Courtly Love. This is in accord with the postmodern feminist' assumption, especially Judith Butler's groundbreaking theory of the 'performativity of gender', which asserts the performative and constructive nature of gender identities and linguistic styles.

Fate or 'Divine Intervention' in the play has been presented as a determining factor in resolving major dramatic confusion and misunderstandings among young lovers. Fate manifes itself through multiple incidents and coincidences in the play. There is somehow complementary and correlative relation between Fate's unpredicted force and the female protagonist's quest for selfhood. Ironically, fate necessitates disguise, and this ultimately contributes to the restoration of order and harmony to the larger community. There are multiple incidents and co-incidents that can be attributed to the role of Fate such as Viola's loss after the shipwreck, and Sebastian's sudden appearance at the play's ending. Sebastian's sudden appearance can be viewed as a symbolic indication of the role of divine intervention. A turning point occurrs in the play when young lovers meet each other accidentally. The revelation of the twin's mistaken identities makes it possible for Olivia and Orsino to shift their affections from one object of affection to another.

Noticeably, the play's happy ending would not have been possible without Viola's linguistic and bodily role-playing. The heroine's witty speeches enables self-deluded lovers like Orsino and Olivia to acknowledge their own mistakes and reach self-realization. Happy multiple marriages at the play's ending signal the restoration of order and harmony to Illyria's community. Here, the female protagonist's quest for selfhood contributes to bringing such a happy romantic ending. In other words, a woman's quest for selfhood is part of a collective work. From a feminist perspective, Viola's verbal skill can be viewed as an effective means of empowerment, since it provides her with a new identity and higher social status in Illyria's male-dominated society.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Females' Quest for Individuality in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-1599)

4.1.Symbolic Representations of Women

Similar to the other romantic comedies, *MAAN* must be viewed within its complex historical context. The dramatist's portrayal of heroic female figures on the Elizabethan stage is drawn as allegorical representations figures of real-life individuals during the Elizabethan age. As an independent and strong-willed woman, Beatrice in the play has challenged social constraints and inequality in Messina's male –dominated society. Through skilful use of wordplay, she pokes fun at the custom of the arranged marriage between Claudio and Hero. Such a marital scheme has been orchestrated by stronger patriarchal figures like Don Pedro and Leonato. From a feminist perspective, Beatrice symbolizes a free-willed and independent woman who defies conventional expectations of the woman's role in her patriarchal society. The playwright, through the theatrical representation of a strong-willed and witty woman like Beatrice, has celebrated the emergence of New Renaissance women. In the play, Hero and Beatrice are presented as two opposite female characters. Whereas Hero's personality fits well into the conventional role of Elizabethan woman by being silent and weak; Beatrice's personality, on the other hand, contradicts the conventional stereotypical image of an obedient and disciplined woman.

Stigmatization of talkative and free-spirited women has a long history in western culture. The dramatist through two contradictory women has presented satirical representations of two negative images of women common during the early modern England. Interestingly, "Early modern society divided women into two categories: those who are silent (and therefore desirable) and those who are talkative (and therefore unmarriageable)" (Maguire, 2004 , p. 78). Fear about women's chastity is deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture. Such culture usually values women's physical outlook rather than her true value as a free human being. In a society like Messina where a woman's chastity

and virtue are of high value rather than her true personality, Beatrice has become a subject of misogyny and stigmatization. She has been labelled as defiant, and stigmatized with undesirable qualities such as 'Lady Disdain' and 'Lady Tongue'. Such negative imageries of talkative women can provide a mocking parody of Elizabethan's misogynistic image of the " 'shrew" or "scold", the talkative " (Hidalgo, 2001, p. 25). Contrary to Beatrice's rebellious personality Hero's character in the play has been depicted as the true emblem of chastity, purity, and as the true embodiment of feminine ideals. She, symbolically, "reflects the ideal Renaissance virtues of silence, obedience, and chastity in a woman" (Bloom & Cornelius. 2010, p.7).

Hero's character represents a victimized woman who desperately tries to conform to women's conventional domestic role in Messina's patriarchal society. To fit into the role of conventional gender roles, women in Messina's male-dominated society have to act and talk according to certain codes of conduct, and strict social regulations. Fears and anxiety about women's chastity are deeply rooted in western culture. "Social historians have struggled to account for this pronounced anxiety about female infidelity and the widespread demonizing of women in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries" (Keenan. 2008, p. 20). Excessive anxiety or social paranoia about women's infidelity finds a voice in Claudio's obsession about Hero's chastity. After Don John's malicious scheme, Hero falls victim to male characters' prejudice and misjudgement. Claudio's judgment of Hero has been unsteady, and changed according to his visual perception of Hero. Economic considerations also play a role in judging women's personalities in Messina's patriarchy. Within the Renaissance England context, women's virtue or even lack of virtue depended upon " various forms of patriarchal inheritance" or property exchange. In England, which has been " a society based on various forms of patriarchal inheritance (that is, inheritance from fathers and through men), the assumption that women were ' naturally' lusty was especially troubling and seems to have contributed to a virtual paranoia about female adultery" (Keenan, 2008, p.19).

The marriage scheme, which has been orchestrated by stronger patriarchal figures in Messina's society such Don Pedro and Leonato, symbolizes property exchange

between two different patriarchal communities. Leonato's speech to Claudio: 'Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes'(2.1. 296-7), gives an implication about the connection that existed between the conventional marriage and the patriarchal inheritance. Claudio's perception of Hero has changed radically after Don John's plot. This has been evident in Claudio's humiliating speech to Leonato 'There Leonato, take her back again. Give not this rotten orange to your friend' (4.1.31-32). Claudio's speech reflects social anxiety or paranoia about women's chastity. Social paranoia about woman's body is related to the historical position of women in Elizabethan society. In such kind of patriarchal society, economic factor plays its role in regulating gender relationship, particularly with regard to marriage and courtship. So, "the only way that men could be sure that they were passing on wealth to their children was if their wives were" loyal and chaste. (Keenan, 200, p. 19-20). It also explains "why female chastity was so highly prized and adulterous women were stigmatized" (Ibid).

Woman's chastity in Messina's society is associated with women's physical image than anything else. Don John's malicious scheme to disrupt the arranged marriage needed nothing more than a mere distortion of Hero's chaste image. To restore that pure and chaste image, Hero must enact the death scene. Her theatrical death scene is meant to restore her pure and chaste image. The main purpose behind her symbolic role-playing is to awaken Claudio from his false delusion. By staging the death scene, Hero in fact tries to correct the male lover's false perception about women. Remarkably, Hero's courageous act parodies the process through which Beatrice corrects Benedict's false perception about marriage and women. Both female protagonists' quest for individuality, ultimately, contributes to the restoration of order and harmony to the society.

4.2 Women's Social Position in Messina

The play deals with courtship and romance, and it is structured around two parallel plots. The first plot centers around " the serious (potentially tragic) plot of

Claudio and Hero", whereas the second plot centers around " the comic plot of Beatrice and Benedict" (Green, 2004, p. 23). The play's storyline, noticeably, is built around multiple contrasts and oppositions such as the domestic world versus the chivalric world, love versus division, and truth versus illusion. Sir Leonato's domestic community is set in contrast against Don Pedro's chivalric community." The two plots provide contrasting perspectives on the nature of love" (Bevington& Kastan 2009, p. 9). In Messina's male-dominated society, patriarchal figures from both communities, such as Don Pedro and Sir Leonato try to exert their authority over young people's choices.

Marriage and courtship are employed by two opposite communities as an effective means of securing social and economic alliances. Most conflicts arise when stronger patriarchal figures from both opposite communities try to unite young people together in semi-arranged marriages. Deception and trickeries are recurring motifs, and they are used for different reasons. Don John, the play's main villain, tries to disrupt the forged unions among young people through multiple tricks and deceptive schemes. The play is distinctive for the way language is used by both male and female characters. "***Much Ado*** excels in combative wit and in swift, colloquial prose" (Ibid, p.7). It also differs from many other romantic comedies "in that it features no journey of the lovers, no heroine disguised as a man, no envious court or city contrasted with an idealized landscape of the artist's imagination. Instead, the prevailing motif is that of the mask" (Ibid, p.7).

Similar to the other comedies, the play's primary plot is centered around women's struggle for selfhood against society's pressure for confinement. Female characters take a leading role in changing events and correcting male lovers' perspectives about women and courtship. Hero and Beatrice, as two essential female protagonists, represent two opposite personalities in Messina's community. Women in such a patriarchal society have little power and few opportunities. Contrary to Heroine's submissive and silent character, Beatrice is lively and talkative. She possesses the most charming, somehow, most provocative and wittiest rhetorical style. She is particularly skilful in the use of

satire and puns. Throughout the play, Beatrice resists being confined into the traditional woman role in Messina's community. Her puns and satire target Messina's patriarchal norms in respect to conventional marriage and courtship. Through the witty use of language, she can hide the critical intent of her speeches. Critics pointed out at subversive possibilities of satire and humour in literary texts: "although satire and humor are not subversive or inherently liberating, and indeed may be used to reinforce the established order", yet authors throughout different ages "have often relied on their radical possibilities " (Shaffer, 2011,p. 1140).

Feminist critics, particularly, pay special attention to the way satire and humour are used by woman as a powerful and effective means. Such subversive has proved to be an effective tool "to challenge the status quo and dismantle hierarchies while avoiding a direct, full-frontal attack" (Ibid). Satire and Irony are recurring rhetorical devices in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. In *MAAN,* for instance, the dramatist "plays with language so often and so variously that the entire play can be read and heard as brilliant repartee: witty punning, elaboration of common places, highly figured verbal structures " (Mowat & Werstine. 1995, p. 21). Interestingly, every essential character in the play "has his or her own way of playing with, elaborating, or misusing language" (Ibid). Rhetorical features such as satire and puns are effective means through which the main female protagonist criticizes the follies and weakness of male characters. Beatrice courageously criticizes the follies and vices of men. Her sharp wit and her free-spirited nature have drawn Sir Leonato and Sir Pedro's attention. As a result of her wit and verbal skill, Beatrice has been the target of men's verbal attack. She has been criticized by stronger male characters as "shrewish", or "curst" because of her "sharp tongue" (Ibid).

4.2.1 Beatrice's Subversive Rhetoric

Beatrice's witty exchange of words with the messenger offers a clear example of her unique personality. Through the subtle use of humour and satire, she criticizes false manners and attitudes associated with courtly and chivalric convention. She begins her speech by asking the messenger whether " Signior Mountanto returned from the battlefield or no?' (1.1.29-30). The speech is satiric in its intent, for it gives Benedict undesirable personality traits such as " coward", " weak" or even feminine characteristics. When the messenger tries to defend Benedict's reputation, Beatrice provides a more provocative reply: 'I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed?' (1.1.40-2). Apparently, Beatrice's humorous wordplay is meant to provoke the messenger into a dialogue with her. When the messenger praises Benedict that he "hath done good service, lady,in these wars", (1.1.46), Beatrice sarcastically replies that he " is a very valiant trencher –man: he hath an / excellent stomatch" (1.1.50-51). The sarcastic speech provokes the messenger to proceed in his conversation with Beatrice. The following sequence of speeches, for instance, proves Beatrice's mastery of witty rhetoric:

> MESSENGER.
> And (Benedick is) a good soldier too, lady.
> BEATRICE. And a good soldier to a lady: but what is he
> to a lord?
> MESSENGER.
> A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed
> with all honourable virtues.
> BEATRICE.
> It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed
> man, but for the stuffing,—well, we are all mortal (1.1. 51-57).

Beatrice expresses disdains at Benedict's chivalric manners through puns and sarcasm, and by implication, she criticizes Messina's costumes and convention associated with chivalry. From a feminist perspective, Beatrice's speeches are subversive for they satirically criticize the patriarchal tenets inherent in the conventions of chivalry such as false pretense of courage and pride. Her sharp wit and her free-spirited nature have drawn Sir Leonato and Sir Pedro's attention. " The functions of wordplay obviously lie in a

display of wit, in showing a mastery of language and in the creation of an atmosphere of humour and playfulness" (Zirker & Froemel, 2015 , p. 47). Leonato acknowledges Beatrice's distinguished character when he tells the messenger about the: 'kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedict and her' (1.1 58-59).Thus, " the messenger gets to know that Beatrice is licensed to speak as she does" (Ibid, p. 51). In a satirical speech, Beatrice , reaffirms a long verbal feud between the two characters, as she recalls the 'last conflict' in which she overcame Benedict's verbal power: 'four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man. governed with one' (1.1.62-64). Beatrice's subversive language will be more evident during a witty exchange of speeches with Benedict.

Conventions of chivalric and courtly ideals are not celebrated in *MAAN*. The satirical treatment of the courtly tradition is mostly reflected in Beatrice's humorous and sarcastic verbal attack against male courtiers in Messina's male-dominated society. Critics have drawn attention to semi-proximity relations between "humorous treatment of courtly life, especially the refined rhetorical style of most outspoken characters in *Much ado*" (Kusmier, 2010, p. 49.), with the detailed descriptions of the ideal manners and linguistic style of courtiers in Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528). Critics particularly pay attention to the witty exchanges between the most outspoken and wittiest characters in *MAAN*, particularly between Beatrice and Benedict. Their "|eloquent and witty dialogues, for instance, along with the practical jokes are often interpreted as offspring of Castiglione's art of conversation" (Ibid). Beatrice's witty and free-spirited nature are further proven during a tense exchange of witty speeches with Benedict in which she sarcastically criticizes the courtier's chivalry and courtly manners:

> BENEDICT.
> I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And
> I would I could find in my heart that I had not a
> hard heart, for, truly I love none.
> BEATRICE.
> A dear happiness to women. They would
> else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I
> thank God and my cold blood I am of your humour
> for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow
> than a man swear he loves me .

BENEDICT
God keep your ladyship still in that mind!
so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate
scratched face.
BEATRICE
Scratching could not make it worse, an
'twere such a face as yours were.
BENEDICT
Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.
BEATRICE A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of
yours.
BENEDICT
I would my horse had the speed of your
tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your
way, i' God's name; I have done.
BEATRICE. You always end with a jade's trick: I know
you of old (1.1.121-141).

During the exchange of speeches, the female protagonist demonstrates enormous skill in composing witty sarcastic speeches. Her verbal attack, especially the heavy use of puns and irony, targets the male courtier's arrogant and deceptive conduct. "What all of these puns have in common is their provocative quality" (Zirker, 2015,p. 52). Nonetheless, the overall intent of her speeches is to ridicule and poke fun at Benedict's chivalric manners. Apparently, there is some kind of hidden intimacy between the two rivals. Their intimacy, however, is only expressed through witty and sarcastic speeches. Both characters, nonetheless, display enormous skill in the coining and delivery of witty expressions. Whereas Benedict's verbal satire targets Beatrice's talkative personality, Beatrice mocks and criticizes the courtier's chivalric and courtly manners. Noticeably, the linguistic 'merry war' between the two conflicting characters discloses significant tenets about their personalities. Both characters, through the use of wordplay, display hostility towards weddings and courtship. Nonetheless, there is a hidden affection between the two characters, despite their apparent feud. Although courteous and brave, Benedict lacks free will to express his true affection for Beatrice. This is probably related to his excessive prive, or even arrogance. He is somehow caught between his obligations towards Don Pedro's chivaleric community and his romantic affection for Beatrice. To overcome such dilemma, Benedict must go through a testing process, or rather learning process, in order to qualify as a perfect match

for his lady. Beatrice, too, has some personality flaws. Despite her strong-willed character, she holds unrealistic views towards love and wedding. This is reflected in her reserved manners and unfriendly attitude towards Benedict. Both characters at some stage of the play need some assistance in order to overcome their own weakness. Don Pedro‘s cunning double tricks, which is orchestrated collectively, contribute to bringing the two lovers closer together.

4.3. Don Pedro’s Deceptive Schemes

In Messina’s patriarchal society, marriage constitutes an effective means through which the community tries to secure social and economic alliances. Claudio has fallen in love with Leonato’s daughter after his first meeting with her. He was attracted to Hero’s pure and physical beauty. Unlike Benedict’s talkative and lively personality, Claudio has a bashful and reserved personality. He finds difficulty to communicate with the lady he loves. Hero, too, is a shy and reserved character who can’t express herself freely. Both characters try to live up to society’s expectations. As obedient characters, they talk and behave according to the set of values and norms of Messina’s male-dominated society. In such a society, a woman’s value is defined in terms of the display of honour and virtue. “Claudio is also bound by traditional notions of honour” (Bate, 2009, p. 2).

Both Claudio and Hero are depicted as typical examples of tragic romantic characters common in both Shakespearean tragedy and comedy. “ The pair do not know each other intimately, and the love that they feel for each other is one based on a sense of a affinity which is formed at a distance” (Mangan, 2014, p. 195). Both characters, however, will easily fall victim for deceptive schemes and trickeries by other dominant male figures such as Don Pedro , Leonato and even the villainy of Don John . Don Pedro’s first deceptive plot aims at bringing Hero and Claudio closer together. Claudio judges Hero’s personality merely upon her physical outlook rather than her true character. There is no real communication between both characters due to

Claudio's lack of strong will. During a meeting with Benedict, Claudio describes Hero's physical beauty rather than her real personality. To him, Hero is 'such a Jewel' (1.1.177), and 'the sweetest lady that ever' (he) looked on'(1.1.183), for which Benedict gives a sarcastic answer: ' I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter' (1.1.184-5).

There is an apparent contrast between two male courtiers in the play. Benedict, who prides himself on choosing being single, sarcastically reflects at Claudio's sudden change of character: 'Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again?' (1.1. .189-193). To Benedict, Claudio has broken the bond of male friendship for a marital bond. The contrast between the masculine world of courtiers against the domestic world of femininity is demonstrated in a sarcastic speech by Benedict, in which he pokes fun at Claudio's sudden switch of allegiance to woman's affection: ' I have known when there was no, /music with him but the drum and the fife, / and now had he/rather hear the tabor and the pipe' (2.3.13-5). Claudio's lack of free will leads Don Perdro to intervene through a deceptive trick. Such a dramatic situation parodies similar dramatic incident in ***TN*** in which Viola, disguised as Cesario, woos Lady Olivia on behalf of love-sickened Duke Orsino. Both Orsino and Claudio lack free will to directly communicate with the object of their affection. The following speech by Claudio, for instance, reflects on the dilemma of a person who is divided between two conflicting desires:

CLAUDIO.

I looked upon her with a soldier's eye,
That liked but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.
But now I am returned and that war thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying I liked her ere I went to wars (1.1.287-294).

Apparently, Claudio's misconception about love prevents him from making direct contact with the object of his affection. His "speech suggests a disjunction between reason and feeling. Whereas " 'thoughts' have to do with 'war', 'feeling' has to do with

desire ” (Lenz & Neely. 1980, p. 82). Ironically, Benedict can’t express his feeling for Beatrice directly for fear of being stigmatized by his male community as weak person. He considers the allegiance for male community more valuable and worthy than submitting to his growing affection for Beatrice. Unlike Benedict and Beatrice, Claudio and Hero willingly let stronger patriarchal figures to decide their destinies. Claudio asks Don Pedro to intervene on his behalf to bring him closer to Hero. Within the Elizabethan context, Claudio can be viewed as a typical example of a romantic courtier. He acts upon certain rituals and costumes associated with courtly conventions such as the display of modesty, humility, and courtesy towards the object of his affection. Don Pedro, on the other hand, exemplifies a father- figure within the chivalric ‘masculine’ community. Leonato is another patriarchal figure within Messina’s domestic community. Don Pedro displays willingness to fulfil his patriarchal role by assisting the young courtier to court Hero: ‘If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,/And I will break with her and with her father’ (1.1.297-8). Ironically, Claudio lacks the witty linguistic style possessed by Don Pedro . "Claudio needs the approval and acceptance of Benedict and Don Pedro, his surrogate father, before he dares to admit to his feeling" (Cieślak, 2019, p.140). To Claudio, courtship and romance are merely part of social rituals that must be administrated within the community. Similar to Hero, the young courtier eventually let stronger patriarchal figures in the community to determine his destiny. “ Claudio is from the aristocracy of the sword, and wishes that language would be nothing but a reliable means to achieve an end ”(Hall, 1995, p.187).

4.3.1 Social Event of Masked Ball

Don Pedro's plot to unite Hero and Claudio centers around a deceptive scheme to be executed during a ‘Masked Ball’. The social event of the ' Masquerade Ball ' has to be arranged for the purpose of uniting Claudio and Hero. Leonato is pleased with the prospect of uniting Hero with Claudio in a conventional marriage. In such an event, the masked Prince will woo Hero in Claudio’s name. If the deceptive scheme succeeds Don

Pedro will ask Hero's hand from Hero's father. The plan has to be kept secret from Hero. Interestingly, the trick is part of multiple deceptive schemes to be executed for the purpose of bringing young lovers closer together. Disguise and role-playing are recurring motifs during the event of the Masquerade Ball. Notably, Don Pedro's deceptive plan relies on disguise and trickery. This is evident in Don Pedro's following speech in which he expresses his willingness to assist Claudio in courting Hero:

> DON PEDRO.
> I will assume thy part in some disguise
> And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
> An in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
> And take her hearing prisoner with the force (1. 1. 316-319).

During the Masquerade Ball, Don Pedro's witty speech draws Hero's attention. The deceptive scene reiterates the significance of rhetoric as an effective tool for deception and trickery. Here, " Don Pedro simply assumes the transferability of the woman conquered in verbal engagement" (Ibid, p. 186). Similar to other deceptive schemes in the play, Don Pedro's proxy wooing of Hero constitutes 'a play within a play'. Dramatic confusions occur in the play due to misunderstandings and lack of effective communications among characters from both communities. For instance, Leonato receives the news about the courtship of Hero through Antonio, whose servant overheard a conversation between the Prince and Claudio. The servant, however, misreports the piece of information, and this will lead Leonato to believe that Don Pedro will woo Hero for himself. Leonato seems pleased with the news, and asks Antonio and others to prepare Hero for such happy occasion. Similar to Claudio's indecisive and weak personality, Hero has let others to decide her destiny. Confusions arise when Don John has been notified about the intended scheme through Boracio. He vows to disrupt the arranged marriage at any cost. Contrary to Don Pedro's courtly and noble scheme, Don John's evil scheme aims at disrupting the newly established romantic relationship between the two young lovers. Whereas Don John tries to exploit the arranged marriage to avenge himself against his half brother Don Pedro, both Leonato and the Prince use the scheme to strengthen the bonds of allegiance between two different communities.

Ironically , Hero and Claudio fall victims of deception and trickery from two different groups, and for different reasons. The semi-arranged marriage, symbolically, denotes the exchange of power and property between two different forms of patriarchal authorities, or "social codes":

> The two social codes remain separate, and one of the primary motivations in *Much Ado* is to combine the two codes into a more comprehensive aristocratic deal, not to test either code, or to measure one code against the other. The need to combine the two codes without ethical exploration of either, symbolized and actualized in the play by the marriages between members of the two separate aristocratic groups whom the two codes represent" (Muir, 1979,p. 52).

During the event of the 'Mask Ball', Hero is tricked into mistaking Don Pedro for Claudio. A parallel can be drawn between Claudio and Hero. Hero's weakness and lack of free-will prevent her from expressing her views freely about the arranged marriage. She represents a typical example of an obedient woman who desperately tries to fit into the stereotypical role of a married woman in Messina's male-dominated society. During the wooing scene, Hero was required to play a conventional role of a young lady to be wooed and courted by a gentleman. In Messina's patriarchal society, women are constantly instructed by dominant figures to behave in proper manners and respectful manners, and display courtesy and humbleness whenever courted by a proper gentleman. Whereas Hero displays willingness to comply with social convention, Beatrice, nonetheless, expresses disdain at social conventions with regard to courtship and marriage. This is evident in Beatrice's reply to Antonio's instruction to Hero with regard to the forthcoming marriage ceremony:

> ANTONIO (to HERO):
> Well, niece, I trust you
> will be ruled by your father.
> BEATRICE
> Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make
> curtsy and say,"Father, as it please you." But yet for
> all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or
> else make another curtsy and say,
> "Father, as it please me " (2.1.49-55).

Beatrice's sarcastic speech, tough implicitly, targets Messina's male-dominated society which does not allow women to express themselves freely. Hero, as a typical example of an obedient woman, "reflects the ideal Renaissance virtues of silence, obedience, and chastity in a woman" (Bloom & Cornelius , 2010,p.7). Theatrically, Don Pedro's wooing of Herro at the event of 'Masquerade Ball', represents a satirical parody of courtly conventions in which a romantic courtier woos his courtly lady. The wooing scene resembles Viola's wooing of Olivia on behalf of Duke Orsino in ***TN***. The performative act of the 'Masquerade Ball' is significant in many different ways. In such a staged scene, every individual must behave according to certain codes of manners and play by specific rules. "Indeed, dressing appears no less performative and ceremonial than dancing itself; and both of these stylized endeavors function as metonymies of courtship"(Hubert, 1991,p.18.) The ceremonial act of courtship can be viewed as a social performative act in which women and men display learned rituals related to specific gender roles within the aristocratic society like Messina's patriarchal society. Duritng the courtship ritual, Hero has been instructed to perform certain role assigned to aristocratic women. When the Masked Ball begins, both Don Pedro and Hero talk in a manner that is quite consistent with the performance and rituals of the convention of courtship in Messina's society. Such kind of courtly ritual is most evident in the following exchange of speech between Don Pedro and hero:

HERO.
So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say
nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially
when I walk away.
DON PEDRO
With me in your company?
HERO
I may say so when I please.
DON PEDRO
And when please you to say so?
HERO
When I like your favor, for God defend the lute
should be like the case! (2.1. 86-93).

The 'Masqurade Ball', interestingly, has exposed a hidden conflict between two competing forces. Whereas Don Pedro tries to bring Hero and Claudio united in a semi-

arranged marriage, Don John, on the other hand, attempts to disrupt the scheme altogether. Borachio has previously overheard the conversation between Claudio and Don Pedro, and he reports back to Don John. The conspirators try to exploit Claudio's weakness. During the 'Masked Ball' event , Don John and his fellow plotters slyly ask the disguised courtier if he was Benedict", and the young courtier pretendsthat he is, "and was shocked when" they told, "him that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself "(Crane & Walker, 2005, p. 28). Disguise and deception in this scene, ironically, have exposed personality flaws and weakness in Hero and Claudio's personalities. " Naturally Hero does not see through Don Pedro's disguise, because she isn't very intelligent" (Swinden ,1973, p.5). The same can be said about Claudio who easily has fallen into the traps set by Don John. Beatrice and Benedict, on the contrary, "are both intelligent, and that explains why they do see through each other " (Ibid, p.6). Eventually, Don John's trick leads to a temporal disruption of the joyful atmosphere that existed during the Dancing Ball ceremony. Claudio has been enraged by Don Pedro's supposedly betrayal and promises to abandon the marriage plan altogether:

> CLAUDIO .
> Friendship is constant in all other things
> Save in the office and affairs of love.
> Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues.
> Let every eye nogetiate for itself,
> And trust no agent, for beauty is a witch
> Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.
> This is an accident of hourly proof,
> Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, therefore, Hero (2.1. 176-183).

Claudio's above speech displays a significant aspect of Claudio's personality. His hasty decision indicates that his passion for Hero is inconsistent. It appears that he has made his decision to marry Hero based on passion rather than logic and reason. The scene brings into focus the significant role language plays in both convincing and misleading characters. Don Pedro's powerful wooing rhetoric, temporarily at least, has succeeded in bringing Claudio and Hero closer. " Don Pedro simply assumes the transferability of the woman conquered in verbal engagement" (Hall, 1995,p. 186). Don John's deceptive language also plays its part in changing dramatic events and

altering characters' opinions. The easiness trough which characters shift roles and personalities in the 'Masked-Ball' event underscores the fact that social roles and identities in Messina's society are not fixed and changeable. Moreover, the 'wooing scene' during the ' Dancing Ball", moreover, foreshadows a similar scene in which Claudio will be tricked into mistaking Margaret for Hero. Similar to Hero, Claudio remains passive and totally inactive throughout the 'Dancing Ball' event. His weakness lies in his inability to use strong rhetoric; the kind of language used by Don Pedro, or even Beatrice. Claudio on more than one occasion falls a victim to deceptive schemes and trickeries. His weakness, somehow, is due to his inability to express himself verbally, especially with his future bride.

During the 'Dance Ball', Beatrice emerges as a wittiest and most outspoken character among other characters. She asserts her free-will through witty linguistic wordplay. Similar to female protagonists in ***TN*** and ***MOV***, Beatrice hides the subversive intent of her speech through the humorous use of satire and puns. Benedict finds her cunning wordplay challenging, but at the same time amusing. Both characters, nonetheless, communicate their feelings through the playful use of language. Unlike Hero's reserved and bashfulness, Beatrice is talkative and lively during the dance event, and she rightfully distinguishes truth from falsehood. In a playful way." Benedict goes to Beatrice in disguise, telling her that some unknown individual has slandered her" (Bloom, & Cornelius, 2010, p. 7). Ironically, Beatrice has not deceived by "Benedict's trick and turns on him, insulting Benedict directly to his face while forcing him to pretend he is someone else" (Ibid, p.7-8). A playful comment by Beatrice about the masked Benedict ;*"..,* he is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool, only his gift is in devising impossible slander' (2.1.137-8) , is satiric in its intent, for it pokes fun at Benedict's personality. The satirical comment is in stark contrast to Hero's polite reply to the masked Prince when he tries to court her. After the 'Masqurade Ball', Benedict has become furious because of Beatrice's unfriendly treatment. When Don Pedro asks Benedict about his meeting with Beatrice, he humorously replies: " O, she misused me past the endurance of a block!"(2.1.238-9). Beatrice, too, displays a lively and humorous

side of character when talking about Benedict's personality. In the following exchange, Beatrice cunningly comments on her tense relationship with Benedict:

> DON PEDRO (to BEATRICE)
> Come, lady, come, you have lost
> the heart of Signior Benedick
> BEATRICE .
> Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I
> gave him use for it, a double heart for his single
> one. Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice.
> Therefore your Grace may well say I have lost it (2.1.L.273-279).

After the 'Masked Ball' event, Don Pedro intervenes to solve the confusion that resulted from Don John's trickery, and initiates reconciliation between two lovers by disclosing the real motive behind his disguise. The developing romance between Beatrice and Benedict runs parallel to the arranged marriage between Claudio and Hero. Apparently, there is some affection between Beatrice and Benedict. Unlike Hero and Claudio's lack of direct communication, Beatrice and Benedict communicate their feelings through witty and sarcastic speeches. Their witty usage of language adds more stress to an already tense relationship. They nonetheless express their passionate hidden affection for each other through witty linguistic wordplay. Beatrice's witty speech, "coupled with her earlier line of ' I know you of old', suggests some type of past relationship between those two that went awry" (Ibid). They can't publicly and openly confess their true affection for each other because of social norms and moral constraints. Psychologically speaking, both Benedict and Beatrice are using witty wordplay as a covert means to channel their emotional attachment to each other.

Similar to Viola in ***T N*** and Portia in ***MOV***, Beatrice hides the subversive intent of her speech through the cunning use of humour and puns. The playful manners of her speeches, interestingly, "reduce the impact of serious messages and appeals and serve to create an atmosphere of leisure, humour, and playfulness" (Zirker, 2015, p.52). Messina's male-dominated community views her character as a rebellious figure who challenges current norms and conventions. Witty rhetoric provides Beatrice power and authority. It

is through provocative and manipulative rhetoric that Beatrice keeps her presence noticeable and gets her voice heard. From a feminist perspective, Beatrice represents a rebellious figure who constantly challenges the community's expectation about woman's conventional role in society. In her speech exchange with Leonato, for instance, she satirically ridicules and pokes fun at Messina's rigid costumes and manners which privileges males over females:

> LEONATO .
> Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.
> BEATRICE .
> Not till God make men of some other metal
> than earth.Would it not grieve a woman to be
> overmastered with apiece of valiant dust? To make
> an account of her life to a clodof wayward marl?
> No, uncle, I'll none. Adam's sons are my brethren,
> and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred (2.1.56-63).

Beatrice's speech is a subtle critique of gender-role conventions in Messina's male-dominated society. In such a patriarchal society, Marriage constitutes the only means of woman's fulfilment. Women like Hero and Beatrice are not accepted within the community unless they enter the conventional bondage of marriage. In a patriarchal society like Messina, married women must display silence, modesty, chastity, humbleness, and courtesy. These are characteristics that Beatrice detested and mocked in her satirical speeches. Messina's male-dominated community has a low opinion of independent and free-spirited women like Beatrice. For this reason, her character has been constantly stigmatized and misjudged by stronger male figures. Throughout the play, Beatrice openly criticizes the conventional role of a married woman in her society. Her subversive humor and sarcasm targeted the conventional wedding and courtship ceremony. This is quite evident in Beatrice' speech to Hero at a time she is instructed by Leonato about the proper manners and attitudes during the courtship ceremony:

> Beatrice . For hear me, Hero, wooing, wedding, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace. The first suit is hotand hasty like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly modest as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster till he sink into his grave (2.1.70-77).

The speech demonstrates Beatrice's skilful of language. Through puns and irony, she pokes fun at manners and costumes associated with conventional marriage. The satiric intent of the speech is quite evident as it makes an implicit association between a conventional wedding and tragedy. Ironically, the speech foreshadows a tragic incident to be administrated by Don John and his fellow plotters against the newly -married couple, Hero and Claudio. Disguise and deception during the Mask Ball reveal important aspects of Claudio and Hero's personalities. Claudio's confusion about the masked Prince during the 'Masquerade Ball' foreshadows another deceptive trick in which the courtier mistakes Margaret for Hero. Moreover, the dramatic motif of deception during the 'Masquerade Ball' serves many dramatic functions:

> ..for the purpose of the plot, Hero must mistake Don Pedro for Claudio. For rather different purposes, and rather more sophisticated ones, Benedick and Beatrice must see through each other's disguises; because when they have done so, they each – Benedick especially – run into another disguise, the verbal one which both stimulates and perplexes feeling (Swinden, 1973, p.5)

Claudio's confusion triggers Don Pedro once again to intervene on his behalf. The Prince willingly rushes to offer his assistance: ' Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, /and fair Hero is won. I have broke with her father, /and his good will obtained' (2.1.295-7). Even after major confusions have been resolved, Claudio and Hero let stronger patriarchal figures to decide their destinies. Hero remains silent even after the 'Dancing Ball'. She is symbolically treated like a property to be exchanged among stronger male figures like Don Pedro and Leonato. This is particularly evident once Leonato offers his daughter to the young courtier: 'Count, take of me my daughter, /and with her my fortunes' (2.1.299-300). Similarly, Claudio remains silent and displays total obedience during the final arrangement of the wedding ceremony. Beatrice sarcastically asks Claudio to express himself infront of his bride, for which he replies: 'Silence is the perfectest herald of joy / I were but little happy if I could say how much' (2.1.303-4). Obviously, Hero's beauty and her ' gentleness' are valued mostly by Claudio than anything else. As a romantic courtier, Claudio romanticizes the image of Hero as an emblem of beauty': 'Lady, as you are mine, I am yours: /I give away myself for you and dote upon the exchange' (2.1.305-6). Here, Claudio's blind affection for Hero resembles

Orsino's love-sickness for Olivia in *TN*. The motif of 'love-sickness' is also apparent in *MAAN*, particularly Claudio's passionate affection for Hero at the play's early beginning. "Although the courtly love tradition might seem to offer evidence of respect and even worship of women" (Pérez, 2002, p. 378), but the reality might prove otherwise. In fact, "the exaltation of the female lover by a courtier does not reflect a higher evaluation" (D'Aragona, 2007, p. 6) of her, but rather a total subjugation to the male lover. From a feminist perspective, the male courtier idealizes the image of his lover as an image to be possessed rather than to be valued as an equal partner. During the semi-arranged marriage, Hero remains speechless as she was praised by Claudio. "She speaks not an audible word in reply to her lover's proposal", (Bloom, 2010, p.278). Beatrice takes this opportunity to intervene on behalf of her cousin. She sarcastically urges Hero to "Speak ..or if (she) cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, / and let not him speak neither'(2.1.307-9). Hero's bashfulness, similar to Claudio, prevents her from expressing herself. Ironically, It is Beatrice, nor Hero, who answers Claudio's praising speech: ' My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart' (2.1.315). As a strong-willed character, Beatrice exploits the happy occasion to poke fun at the hasty marital arrangement by Don Pedro and Leonato:

> BEATRICE .
> Good Lord for alliance! Thus goes everyone
> to the world but I, and I am sunburnt.
> I may sit in a corner and cry,
> "Heigh-ho for a husband! (2.1.315-7).

Beatrice's sarcastic comment provokes Don Pedro to engage in a witty exchange of speeches with Her. His playful suggestion to "get" Beatrice a husband, receives a mocking reply from her: 'I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you?" (2.1.319-320). Here, Beatrice's verbal skill overpowers Don Pedro's sarcastic speeches about her personality. The Prince, nonetheless, finds amusement in Beatrice's witty sarcastic speeches. He openly praises her intellect and strong personality. In the following speech, for instance, Beatrice prides herself for her ability to speak her mind freely without fear being stigmatized by the surrounding male characters:

DON PEDRO.
Will you have me, lady?
BEATRICE.
No, my lord, unless I might have another for
working days.Your Grace is too costly to wear
every day. But I beseech your Grace pardon me. I
was born to speak all mirth and no matter (2.1.323-327).

Apparently, the marital arrangement between Claudio and Hero has succeeded in securing a temporal union between the two different communities. It nevertheless fails to secure a permanent bond of loyalty between Hero and Claudio. Despite Don Pedro's reconciling effort, the young courtier has not yet overcome his doubt and fear with regard to marriage and courtship. His weakness of character triggers Don John to devise yet another deceptive plot to disrupt the wedding ceremony.

4.3.2. Don Pedro's Tricks on Beatrice and Benedick

Similar to the previous tricks played on Claudio and Hero, patriarchal figures like Don Pedro and Leonato set up double deceptive schemes to bring Beatrice and Benedick in a semi-arranged marriage. The tricky schemes, similar to previous tricks, rely on deception and role-playing. Deception and disguise are recurrent motifs in Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. In comedies, young lovers must go through states of confusion in order to reach a state of self-realization. However, "self-discovery through romantic love produces a happier outcome than in classic tragedy" (Conard, 2004, p.258). In *MAAN* **,** aspects of deception and disguise play crucial roles in revealing truth from falsehood. Yong lovers go through a state of confusion and deception in order to reach a state of self-realization. After every deceptive scheme in the play, deluded characters critically reflect on their own weakness and shortcomings which is an essential part of the process of self-realization. Portia's deceptive acts in *MOV* will assist Bassanio to overcome his own weakness. In the *TN*, too, Viola's deceptive disguise would assist Orsino, the self-deluded lover, to reach self-awareness. In *MAAN*, similarly, the act of "deception brings a sparring couple to the truth about their love" (Ibid).

Beatrice and Benedick had been attracted to each other because they shared similar personality traits. They "openly express satisfaction with single life. Neither seeks marriage at the play's beginning, and both fear that marriage may diminish their personal agency and autonomy" (Bunker, 2014, p.179). Benedict mockingly criticized Claudio's change of character ever since he had fallen in love with Hero. He even sarcastically criticized Don Pedro for wooing Hero for Claudio. Beatrice, too, through the cunning use of language, delivered her criticism at marriage and courtship*:* 'Just, if he send me no husband, / for the which blessing I am / at him upon my knees every morning and evening' (2.1.26-8). Regardless of their witty personalities, Beatrice and Benedick have some weakness or personality flaws. Both are stubborn and prideful. They particularly hold unrealistic views about romance and courtship. Benedict's following speech offers an unrealistic image of his favourite bride:

> BENEDICKT.
> One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace (2.3.27-30).

Benedict's satirical speech about marriage, and his praise of single life resembles Beatrice's speech in which she praised singlehood:

> No, but to the gate, and there will the devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say, " Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven; Here's no place for you maids." So deliver I up my apes, and away to Saint Peter for the heavens. He shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long (2.1.42-48).

Both young lovers, however, are unable to share their feelings except through linguistic wordplay. It seems "only Beatrice is a genuine critic of society — Benedict's satirical remarks are often made to get attention" (Bloom, 1988 , p. 87). Both young lovers are in need of some sort of "outside intervention" (Crane& Walker, 2005, p.12) in order to overcome their pride and stubbornness. They must undergo a radical change of personality in order to reach self-realization. To bring both lovers closer, Don Pedro

arranged two deceptive schemes to be executed by two groups of characters. Both deceptive schemes rely on deception and trickeries. Nonetheless, the purpose of both tricks is to unite both young lovers in semi-arranged marriage. In Messina's patriarchal society, marriage is a method through which stronger male figures try to get young lovers confined into assigned roles. In a way "marriage is no longer the the fulfilment of wishes, but a means of regulating society " (Williamson, 1986, p.21) In the following exchange, for instance, the two patriarchal figures mockingly discuss the similarity between the two lovers, and how a deceptive plan might help to bring the two lovers closer together:

> DON PEDRO
> She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.
> LEONATO
> Oh, by no means. She mocks all her wooers out of suit.
> DON PEDRO
> She were an excellent wife for Benedick.
> LEONATO
> O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week
> married, they would talk themselves mad (2.1. 344-350).

As with the other two comedies, language in ***MAAN*** plays an essential role in revealing falsehood from reality. Variation in linguistic styles in Messina's community is closely related to characters' social classes. The aristocratic class in Messina's community, for instance, distinguishes itself from the less privileged class through its unique linguistic style and distinctive social manners:

> ***Ado*** is marked particularly by the in-joke and double-entendre, never by raucous humor or outright bawdy punning. It is a language that has been appropriated by a privileged group of people, so that they can demonstrate to each other their confederacy – that they can understand each other across great distances " (Muir, 1979, p. 55).

Noticeably, every deceptive trick in *MAAN*, whether designed for a noble or evil cause, is accomplished collectively. Don Pedro's double tricks constitute 'a play within a play', for it brings about a situation in which male and female protagonists reflect upon their own personal flaws and shortcomings. To accomplish the intended tricks on both young lovers, Don Pedro instructs two different groups of characters to play specific roles

in front of Benedick and Beatrice separately. In his speech with Claudio, Don Pedro outlines his reasons for tricking Beatrice and Benedick:

> DON PEDRO (to CLAUDIO)
> ...I will in the interim
> undertake one of Hercules' labors, which is to bring
> Signor Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into
> a mountain of affection th' one with th' other.
> I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not but to
> fashion it, if you three will but minister such
> assistance as I shall give you direction (2.1. 360-6).

As the above speech displays, Don Pedro plays the leading role in managing both tricks. The first trick has been arranged for the purpose of bringing Beatrice into confessing her love for Benedict. To accomplish the intended plan, the Prince had instructed a group of characters such as Leonato, Claudio and others to collectively play assigned roles in front of Benedict. The group intentionally let Benedict overhears speeches about Beatrice's hidden affection. In a theatrical scene, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio had begun discussing Beatrice's affection for Beatrice, while at the same time criticizing Benedict's proud and stubborn personality. In the following speech, for instance, the plotters deceptively describe Beatrice's love-sickness in a very dramatic way:

> LEONATO
> ....she is beginning to write to him, for
> she'll be up twenty times a night,
> and there will she sit in her smock till
> she have writ a sheet of paper. (2.3. 134-337).

The plotters' cunning speech have drawn Benedick's attention. He anxiously follows up what they had said about Beatrice's affection. To further attract his attention, they describe Benedick's lack of response: '..down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses: "O sweet Benedict!' (2.3.150-2).The young courtier has been amazed by what he had heard. The group of plotters cunningly put all the blame on the puzzled courtier for not responding to Beatrice's love:

CLAUDIO
To what end? He would make but a sport of it
and torment the poor lady worse.
DON PEDRO
An he should, it were an alms to hang him.
She's an excellent sweet lady and, out of all suspicion,
she is virtuous.
CLAUDIO
And she is exceeding wise.
DON PEDRO
In every thing but in loving Benedick (.2.3.159-165).

Here, the tricky language used by the plotters has a major impact on Benedict's personality. Like other Shakespeare's comedies, trickery and deception in this play were employed to enable deluded lovers to reach self-realization. Don Pedro discloses his ultimate intention in tricking Benedickt , which is to make him 'examine himself, and to see how much/ he is unworthy to have so good a lady' (2-3. 206-7). The trick eventually causes Benedict to critically reflect upon himself. :' This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero' .(2.3.218-220). Unlike his previous attitude, Benedict seems to be more willing to openly declare his love for Beatrice. A change in Benedict's personality is evident through his speech in which he contradicts his previous praise of singlehood: "the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married" (2.3.239-241).

After playing the trick on Benedict, Don Pedro and his fellow plotters play another deceptive trick on Beatrice. The trick can also be viewed as 'a play within a play' as there is a group of players who play a minor play and perform specific roles within the original play. Through a metatheatrical scene, the prince prepares the stage for a group of female characters to play specific roles in front of Beatrice. The new trick, similar to the previous one on Benedict, aims at enabling the stubborn female lover to confess her love for Benedict. Such a trick is also collectively performed. The success of the scheme, nonetheless, relies on the way language is used by the selected characters. This is quite evident in Don Pedro's aside to Leonato in which he outlines a deceptive plan to bring a group of female characters to play specific roles in front of Beatrice:

DON PEDRO *(aside to* LEONATO*).*
Let there be the same net
spread for her, and that must your daughter and her
gentlewomen carry. The sport will be when they
hold one an opinion of another's dotage, and no
such matter. That's the scene that I would see,
which will be merely a dumb show. Let us send her
to call him in to dinner (2.3. 211-7).

To accomplish the deceptive trick on Beatrice, the prince has instructed Ursula and Hero to play deceptive roles in front of Beatrice. Similar to the previous trick on Benedict, both female plotters intentionally let Beatrice overhear speeches about Benedict's genuine affection for Beatrice, while at the same time criticize Beatrice's pride and stubbornness. Hero in this dramatic situation, unlike previous scenes, is talkative and joyful. She finds liberty and power in females' companionship. In the play, women's companionship is contrasted against males' rivalry. In a theatrical scene, Hero, Ursula, and Margaret begin discussing Benedict's genuine affection for Beatrice, while at the same time criticizing Beatrice's proud and stubborn character. In the following lines, for instance, Hero criticizes Beatrice's proud and selfish personality:

HERO

...Nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice.
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprizing what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak. She cannot love
Nor take no shape nor project of affection
She is so self-endeared (3.1.49-56).

Beatrice has been amazed by what the two females have disclosed about Benedict's sincere affection for her. Once again, language has played an essential role in changing the characters' perspectives. The two female conspirators then cunningly shift their linguistic style and begin praising the noble and gentle side of Benedict's personality. 'I never yet saw man,/ How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured'(3.1.59-60).To further influence Beatrice's opinion towards Benedict, Hero

wittingly tells her female companion that she would caution Benedict from pursuing a hopeless love since Beatrice does not value his sincere love:

HERO
.... I will go to Benedick
And counsel him to fight against his passion;
And truly I'll devise some honest slanders
To stain my cousin with. One doth not know
How much an ill word may empoison liking (3.1. 82-86).

Beatrice eventually falls into the trap of believing conspirators' speeches about Benedict. The trick, similar to Don Pedro's trick on Benedict, causes Beatrice to acknowledge her own mistakes and shortcomings. This is quite evident in the following soliloquy by Beatrice in which she critically reflects upon herself:

BEATRICE . *(coming forward)*
What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu! (3.1.107-9).

This speech gives an indication of Beatrice's change of personality as she has expressed remorse and regret for not responding to Benedict's previous romantic gestures. Like Benedict's last soliloquy, the speech gives indications that there will be some form of reconciliation between the two conflicted characters. A change in perspectives by both young lovers happens due to the acts of deception and trickery by Don Pedro and his fellow plotters.

4.4. Hero's Victimization by Patriarchy

A major dramatic shift occurs in *MAAN* when Don John, with a group of fellow conspirators such as Conrad and Borachio, set up a plan to disrupt the wedding ceremony between Claudio and Hero. Don John in the play exemplifies the typical antagonist common in Shakespearean comedies. Contrary to Don Pedro's conciliatory attitude, Don

John aimed to sow seeds of division and discord among young lovers. He had previously tricked Claudio into believing that Don Pedro had wooed Hero for himself during the 'Masquerade Ball' event. In a quite similar trick, Don John conspires with Boraccio and Margaret to trick Claudio into believing that Hero is disloyal (Marchitello & Tribble, 2017, p.387).

Don John's motive is not quite clear in the play and he may act out of jealousy against his half brother, Don Pedro. Similar to other deceptive tricks in the play, Don John's second trick on Claudio is collectively performed by a group of plotters. The scene in which he executes the trick can be viewed as a typical form of 'a play within a play'. "The play within the play is often used as a form of irony and can be disguised as a simple performance within the play itself" (Fischer, 2007, p.15). To accomplish the tricky plot, Don John instructs a group of characters to perform a deceptive scene in front of Claudio. The plotters cunningly set up a very well constructed deceptive scene on the night of the wedding. It aims at tricking Claudio into believing his beloved Hero is disloyal. On the night of the wedding, Margaret and Borachio would appear at Hero's chamber, giving the impression that Hero is having an affair with another man. Language in such a deceptive scene is used as a tool of deceit and manipulation. Don John in the following exchange, for instance, slyly tricks Claudio into mistaking Hero being disloyal:

> DON JOHN
> I came hither to tell you; and, circumstances
> shortened, for she has been too long
> a-talking of, the lady is disloyal.
> CLAUDIO
> Who, Hero?
> DON JOHN. Even she: Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every
> man's Hero.
> CLAUDIO
> Disloyal?
> DON JOHN
> The word is too good to paint out her
> wickedness. I could say she were worse. Think you
> of a worse title, and I will fit her to it (3. 2. 103-5).

Don John's cunning speech has aroused doubt and uncertainty in Claudio's mind. The tricky scene in the play parallels a similar scene in *MOV*, in which Shylock cunningly lures Antonio into signing a dangerous bond. Here, Don John slyly exploits Claudio's naivety and weakness of character. To lure Claudio into the trap, Don John promises to provide credible evidence about Hero's treachery: 'you shall see (Hero's) chamber window entered, even the night before her wedding day' (3. 2.107-8). Interestingly, Don John's linguistic manipulation relies on deceptive visual imagery than providing real tangible proofs. In the following speech, Don John promised to show Claudio a scene about Hero's supposedly betrayal:

> DOM JOHN
> If you dare not trust that you see, confess
> not that you know. If you will follow me, I will
> show you enough, and when you have seen more
> and heard more, proceed accordingly (3. 2. 113-6).

Apparently, Don John has exploited Claudio's weakness. The young courtier, like Orsino in *TN* has been merely attracted to the physical beauty of his lady than her real personality. His early judgment of Hero, in other words, has been based on passion than reason. In a way, he loved "Hero as an image to be possessed rather than as a person to be explored" (Irvine, 2012, p.50). Due to his deceptive language, Don John eventually has succeeded in persuading both Claudio and Don Pedro to witness Hero's supposed disloyalty the night before the wedding. Without questioning the reliability of Don John's claim, Claudio threatens to shame Hero if he sees what Don John had promises to show:

> CLAUDIO
> If I see anything tonight why I should not
> marry her, tomorrow in the congregation, where I
> should wed, there will I shame her (3. 2. 117-9).

As previously planned, a group of plotters stages the promised scene in front of Claudio and Don Pedro the night before the wedding. By showing the deceptive show, the image of pure and innocent Hero disappears, and instead, the image of a 'corrupted' and sinful lady takes its place in Claudio's mind. In other words, " It is not so much on Claudio's eyes, however, as on his mind's eye that Don John practices deceit" (Bloom &

Cornelius , 2010, p. 234). The play reaches tense moment when Claudio is presented with a deluded image of Hero. When the young courtier sees the vision of a woman conversing with a stranger, he exclaims: “O mischief strangely thwarting!” (3.2.126). The deluding scene has its immediate impact on Claudio’s opinion of Hero. As a result of the deceptive trick, Hero’s pure and idealistic image has been distorted in Claudio’s imagination, and instead, a “betraying” and “ witchlike” image takes its place (Ibid).To further influence Claudio’s opinion, Don John cunningly comments on the staged scene: ‘O plague right well prevented!/So will you say when you /have seen the sequel’ (3.2.127-8).

After witnessing the staged scene, Claudio angrily threatens “ to shame” Hero during the wedding congregation. "That same night, Boracio is apprehended by the watchman of Leonato’s house who has overheard him bragging to another man about the (evil) deed” (Courtni, 1993, p.104). The plotters’ confessions would not be taken seriously by Leonato. When Dogberry, the watchman, asks Leonato to examine the two suspicious persons, he receives only a cold reply : ‘Take their examination yourself and bring it me./ I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you’ (3.5. 47-8). Leonato’s failure to examine the confession by Borachio and other plotters on the same night of Hero’s wedding brings the play to the edge of tragedy. The play’s tense dramatic situation occurs when Claudio confronts Leonato about supposedly disloyal Hero:

> CLAUDIO
> There, Leonato, take her back again.
> Give not this rotten orange to your friend.
> She’s but the sign and semblance of her honor.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here! (4.1.31-4).

Claudio’s shaming of Hero marks a turning point in the play. The romantic atmosphere of the early scene has been altered with a grave tragic situation. Some critics claime that the tragic scene “violates the comic mood of the rest of the play” (Bloom & Cornelius, 2010 , p. 234). The tragic scene in which Claudio challenges Hero parodies the previous scene in which Leonato zealously offers Hero’s hand to Claudio. In both dramatic situations, Hero has been treated as men's personal property to be exchanged

among stronger male figures. As a woman, Hero is bound by strict social norms and conventions of Messina's male-dominated society. "Just as in reality, women of Shakespeare's dramas have been bound to rules and conventions of the patriarchal Elizabethan era" (Ekici, 2009,p. 3). Women's roles in this kind of society are constrained by multiple social and economic constraints. Unmarried women were viewed as "the property of their fathers and handed over to their future husbands through marriage" (Ibid). During the marital arrangement, Hero remained silent and hadn't expressed any discontent against the scheme. Even after she was challenged by Claudio about her supposedly betrayal, Hero appears powerless and has no opinion about her own destiny. Leonato has been appalled by Claudio's accusation and demands proof. The young courtier remains resolute in his conviction that Hero is disloyal and must be punished. When the victimized Hero tries to defend herself, Claudio challenges her and openly accuses her of disloyalty:

> CLAUDIO
> You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
> As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown.
> But you are more intemperate in your blood
> Than Venus, or those pampered animals
> That rage in savage sensuality (4. 1.58-62).

The speech reflects on the contrast between truth and reality. It symbolically implies that Claudio's hasty judgment has not based on reason but rather on false perception. His judgement, moreover, changes according to his perception of what he sees right or wrong. In other words, he was merely attracted to his lady's physical image than her true personality. "The description he gives of Hero is based on the paradoxical contrast between what she seems and what he knows she is " (Newman, 2005, p.114). Eventually, Don John has succeeded in separating the two young lovers through deception and trickery. Gradually,Claudio's accusation of Hero develops into collective judgment. Don Pedro follows Claudio in disgracing the victimized Hero. As a symbol of the patriarchal alliance, the Prince re-affirms Claudio's accusation: 'Upon mine honor,../Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night /Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window' (4.1.88-91.). Don John cunningly tries to exploit the divisions within the

community for his own advantage. His sly and deceptive rhetoric adds further doubts about Hero's loyalty: 'There is not chastity enough in language,/ Without offense, to utter them' (4.1. 102-3*)*. As a result of John's slander, Hero becomes an object of community's hatred and prejudice. From a feminist perspective, Hero embodies a victimized woman by a male-dominated community. The female protagonist's malady in the play is quite similar to Desdemona's tragic situation in *Othello*. Both plays explore the issue of female victimization in two different patriarchal communities. A major "similarity between *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing* is the role of the villain in both plays" (Girard, 1991, p. 291.) Claudio and Othello in both plays had fallen victims of two malicious deceptive schemes by almost two similar villains. Claudio's paradoxical dilemma, similar to Othello, stems from his misjudgment of reality. A common motif in both plays is the contrast between reality and illusion.

Don John temporarily has managed to disrupt the marriage ceremony. Hero has been devastated by what she heard from her accusers, and falls unconscious. A change in the heroin's fortune hints a forthcoming tragedy to unfold. Tragedy in romantic comedies, however, could only be averted once the heroin takes a drastic action to change her own destiny. Portia's multiple deceptive schemes in *MOV*, and Viola's similar tricks in *TN* had lead to a radical change in male lovers' personalities. The heroines' courageous actions in both comedies, eventually, had contributed to the restoration of order and harmony to both communities. The play's tragic outcome in *MAAN*, similarly, can only be averted once the victimized female protagonist takes a drastic action to prove her own innocence. A major turning point in the play's storyline happens when the heroin agrees to feign her own death in front of her male accuser. By feigning her own death, the Heron would prove her sense of individuality.

4.5. Friar France's Noble Scheme

After Claudio's false accusation, Hero has been faced with the difficult task of asserting her innocence. Hero's misfortune caused a stark division within Messina's

society. Leonato has been enraged by Claudio's shaming of Hero. He denounces Hero' supposedly immoral act: 'Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes,/ For, did I think thou wouldst not quickly die' (4.1. 123-4). Leonato's speech reflects a deep division within Leonato's household. To Messina's patriarchal society, Hero has broken the community's codes of honour and morality, and she must be punished accordingly.

Fear and doubt about woman's infidelity are deeply rooted in Elizabethan patriarchal conventions. Messina's patriarchal society, which is a symbolic representation of the Elizabethan society, considers "husband's honor" to be dependent on the wife's chastity" (Gajowski 1992, p. 65). The play, through the symbolic representations of Hero and Beatrice, draws on a long tradition of suspecting woman's honor and chastity. A society like Messina uses every suppressive means to enforce social conformity and contain any subversive female voice. Beatrice is stigmatized because of her rebellious and challenging attitudes towards her community. Hero, similarly, has been victimized by Messina's male-dominated community because they viewed her as someone who broke the social code of honour and chastity. Her victimization underscores common misconceptions in Messina's male-dominated society about women. Such a patriarchal society considers woman weak, inferior, and more broadly, vulnerable. Beatrice has been victimized for almost similar reason. She has become a subject of linguistic humiliation because of her talkative and free-spirited personality. Both female figures, however, choose to resist social pressure through two different subversive means. Whereas Beatrice has chosen direct verbal confrontation with opposite male figures, Hero, on the other hand, would choose a rather different subversive strategy to challenge her male accusers. Her forthcoming action depends on whether or not she would be able to change Claudio's misconception about her personality.

Remarkabely, Hero's tragic misfortune has affected the developing romance between Beatrice and Benedict. Don Pedro's 'double' deceptive schemes, though indirectly, had already enabled both lovers to express their true feelings for each other. Benedict underwent a change of personality after he heard Don Pedro and Claudio talking about Beatrice's hidden passion for him. Beatrice, too, underwent a change of

character when she heard female plotters talking about Benedict's genuine passion for her. Both characters eventually showed indications of being in love with each other. Claudio's shaming of Hero, ironically, happened at a time when both Benedict and Beatrice were more willing to confess their love for each other.

Unlike Hero's accusers, Beatrice finds the accusation against her niece baseless and unjust. The conflict, ironically, provides an opportunity for Benedict and Beatrice to get closer, and stand against Hero's accusers. Benedickt, particulary, tries to take this opportunity to prove his sincere love for Beatrice. On the other hand, Beatrice, tries to use Hero's misfortune to test Benedickt's affection for her, whether genuine or not. Friar Francis's intervention to rescue Hero marks a shift in the tragic course of the play. The Friar's intervention can, somehow, can be viewed as an indication of ' Divine Intervention'. In comedies, a tragic situation so often changes to a happy ending due to outside intervention. The holy man's intervention to assist Hero in the play, together with the arrest of the conspirators the night before the wedding and their confessions, changes the plot line from tragedy to romantic comedy. The arrest of the conspirators may also give some indication about ' divine intervention' in the play. After they confess, major confussions about Hero are resolved. Unlike tragedies, "in comedies, any misunderstandings are finally resolved" (Christofides, 2012,p.7), so often through an unexpected event, either unexpected incident or co-incident. In most cases, a happy "closure explicitly depends on divine intervention" (Ibid). In the *TN*, the outside intervention is hinted through various incidents and co-incidents, whether the heavy storm which separates the twin brothers, or even their sudden reunion in the final Act. Similarly, an 'outside intervention' in *MOV* plays an essential role in bringing the happy ending. In the play, the destiny of Antonio's missing ships is not disclosed until the final Act when the heroin "reveals a letter reporting to Antonio, revealing their whereabouts" (Cunningham, 2006, p.136). Such happy news may indicate " divine intervention or even Portia's own association with divinity" (Ibid).

Friar France's plot to assist Hero against male accusers also relies on a deceptive scheme to be executed collectively. Hero stands alone against her male accusers. The

community has already delivered its harsh judgment on her personality. Leonato's speech, 'death is the fairest cover for her shame' (4.1.115), reflects the patriarchal mentality which judges women's personalities upon false notions and misconceptions. As the friar suggested, Hero must stage her own death in front of her male accuser in order to instigate pity and sorrow in him. Unlike Don John's malicious trick, the Friar's plot is designed for a noble cause, which is to restore Hero's injured honour. The overall purpose is to make Claudio regret his accusation and get united with Hero. The Friar's sympathetic words indicate both hope and optimism:

> FRIAR FRANCIS
> I have marked
> A thousand blushing apparitions
> To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames
> In angel whiteness beat away those blushes,
> And in her eye there hath appeared a fire
> To burn the errors that these princes hold
> Against her maiden truth. Call me a fool (4.1.123-4).

The speech reflects on the contrast between appearance and reality, or deception versus truth. Here, the Friar warns Leonato and others not to judge hastily, but rather " to look past the face and find the inner character" (Knapp, 2015, p. 7). To accomplish the plan, the Friar asks Leonato to declare his daughter's death and ' Let her awhile be secretly kept in. / And publish it that she is dead indeed' (4.1. 203-4). Hero's courageous act of self'-sacrifice, as the Friar hoped, would result in a "greater birth" (4.1.224), transforming her lover's accusation into forgiveness:

> FRIAR FRANCIS
> She dying, as it must so be maintained,
> Upon the instant that she was accused,
> Shall be lamented, pitied and excused
> Of every hearer. ……..
> ……
> So will it fare with Claudio.
> When he shall hear she died upon his words,
> The idea of her life shall sweetly creep
> Into his study of imagination, (4. 1. 214-225).

Ironically, the Friar's plan relies on deception to reveal the truth from Claudio's shaming of Hero. As in other deceptive tricks in the play, Friar France's trick is to be

performed collectively. Hero is presented as the symbol of virtue or sacrifice against the forces of evilness. By demonstrating a strong-willed character, Hero would not only prove her innocence, but her action would also contribute to the restoration of harmony and reconciliation to the conflicting community. Don John's evil scheme has already succeeded in dividing Masina's community into two opposite groups. Hero's tragedy, ironically, has already brought Benedict and Beatrice together. As strong- willed character, Beatrice has succeeded in changing Benedict's personality. He is more willing to cooperate against Hero's accusers. To prove his love for Beatrice, he expresses willingness to challenge his former male friends:

> BENEDICK
> Signior Leonato, let the friar advise you:
> And though you know my inwardness and love
> Is very much unto the Prince and Claudio,
> Yet, by mine honor, I will deal in this
> As secretly and justly as your soul
> Should with your body (4.1. 244-9).

The speech shows the extent Benedict's personality has changed due to his passionate affection for Beatrice. He clearly has chosen love over friendship. The play reaches its climax when Leonato and Friar France cooperate among themselves to stage Hero's deceptive scheme against Hero's accusers.

4.5.1. Hero's Self-Sacrifice against Patriarchy

In this play, Friar France's noble scheme to bring peace and harmony is set in contrast against Don John's evil scheme to sow seeds of division and disarray. Friar France's speech to Hero "die to live" (4.1. 253-4), carries symbolic meaning, for it suggests a process of transformation, or revival of a new Hero. Death in the play, metaphorically at least, has been associated with revival and rebirth. Hero willingly accepted Friar France's scheme to stage her own death since it is the only way she could assert her innocence. If the trick succeeds, she can then restore her injured honour and get

united with Claudio, but if it fails, she must then spend the rest of her life in a monastery as a nun. There is a striking similarity between Friar France's trick and Don John's deceptive scheme with regard to the way Hero's image is manipulated for different purposes. Don John had previously manipulated Hero's image for evil purposes. Through a deceptive schemew, Margaret's image was manipulated to give impression about Hero's betrayal. Such deceptive representation of Margaret's image "had replaced the image of Hero as chaste Dian with that of her as temperate Venus" (Bloom& Cornelius, 2010, p.241). Friar France's deceptive trick, similarly , uses Hero's image for affecting Claudio's opinion. In such a trick, however, the function of the staged deceptive scene is reversed. As Friar France had explained, Hero's death scene will cause Claudio to "see" her "angel whiteness" (Ibid).In other words, the Friar acts to bring back the pure and virtuous image of Hero into Claudio's mind.

Symbolically, Hero's sacrifice in the play carries religious implications. "Although Hero certainly does not 'represent' the figure of Christ, her actual innocence, betrayal and public humiliation all recall something of his sufferings" (Green,2004,p.10). Contrary to the evil trick by the play's villain, Friar Plan's deceptive scheme has been employed for a noble purpose. " It is a man of God-the Friar- who devises a plan in which she must die to live,a process which brings to mind Christ's resurrection" (Ibid).There is a striking parallel between Hero's victimization in ***MAAN***, and Juliet's similar dramatic situation in *Romeo and Juliet*. Both female protagonists have been victimized by two different forms of patriarchal societies:

> In each of the two plays.., the heroines experience a form of symbolic death, but it is an ordeal that they both have to undergo in order to have at least the prospect of a new life. And it is the two friars—Lawrence and Francis –who oversee these mysterious, quasi-magical rites. Of course, it is significant that the attempt to resurrect Juliet fails, whereas Hero successfully passes through the ritual of death and rebirth, but this is not a reflection on the relative moral worth of the two Franciscans, rather it is a consequence of the different narrative trajectories of tragedy and romantic-comedy (Bloom, 209, p.69).

Similar to other staged deceptive schemes in the play, Hero's staged 'Death Scene' is another form of 'a play within a play', for it relies on a group of players to play assigned roles. In such a scene, Leonato, Beatrice and Benedict agreed to keep the plan

secret from both Don Pedro and Claudio. The play reaches its tense moment when Leonato challenges Claudio and Don Pedro over Hero's 'supposedly' death:

LEONATO.

I say thou hast belied mine innocent child.
Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart,
And she lies buried with her ancestors,
Oh, in a tomb where never scandal slept
Save this of hers, framed by thy villainy (5.1.67-71).

Leonato's emotional speech, however, has little impact on Claudio's opinion. The young courtier persists that his accusation against Leonato's daughter 'was true and very full of proof' (5.1.105). Leonato has not taken the confessions by Boraccio and other conspirators so seriously the night before Hero's wedding. And Hero's male accusers appear "unaffected by" the news of Hero's death "until Borachio testifies to" her "innocence" in the final scenes of the play" (Neely,1985, p.52).

4.5.2. Women's Solidarity against Male Dominance

Hero's misfortune has negatively affected the close relationship between Claudio and Benedict. The incident, on the contrary, has brought the Beatrice and Benedict closer. The tragic incident, in a certain way, has provided Benedict with an opportunity to demonstrate his love for Beatrice. The scene in which Beatrice confronts Hero's accusers demonstrates women's solidarity against males' oppressive attitudes towards victimizes females. Beatrice's following speech, for instance, offers subtle criticism of Messina's patriarchal society which privileges males over females:

BEATRICE
Princes and counties! Surely, a princely testimony,
a goodly count, Count Comfect, a sweet
gallant, surely! Oh, that I were a man for his sake! Or
that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!
But manhood is melted into curtsies, valor into
compliment, and men are only turned into tongue,
and trim ones too (4.1.353-4).

In the above speech, Beatrice expresses her dissatisfaction against the unjust treatment of women by Messina's patriarchal society. Claudio's " outburst against Hero has exposed the potential for cruelty and violence in Messina's masculine order" (Bloom& Cornelius, 2010, p.241). Accordingly, Hero's courageous stance presents a symbolic challenge against Messina's male-dominated society. A bond of solidarity has already been established between Benedict and Beatrice against Don Pedro and Hero. To test Benedict's love, Beatrice demands that he must avenge those who had shamed and dishonoured her niece. Through witty linguistic maneuvering, Beatrice ultimately succeeds in persuading Benedict into challenging Claudio. This is evident in the following speech, in which Beatrice successfully persuades Benedict to challenge his former friend in a duel:

> BEATRICE
> You have stayed me in a happy hour.
> I was about to protest I loved you.
> BENEDICK
> And do it with all thy heart.
> BEATRICE
> I love you with so much of my heart that
> none is left to protest.
> BENEDICK
> Come, bid me do anything for thee.
> BEATRICE
> Kill Claudio (4.1.283-9).

The exchange indicates a radical shift in Beatrice and Benedict's relationship. Both lovers no longer engage in linguistic "merry war" or "skirmish of wit" anymore. Their speeches rather filled with passion and sentimentality. Beatrice cunningly tries to test Benedict's affection for her. Her request for Benedict " to kill Claudio", in a way, marks a turning point in their relationship. As a result of Beatrice's request, Benedict has been set in a difficult situation. He has to choose between his affection for Beatrice and his loyalty to his best friend Claudio. Beatrice's request, in a certain way, parodies similar dramatic situations in *Macbeth* in which " Lady Macbeth urged her husband to kill King Duncan" (Leithart, 1996, p. 279). Both female characters

in these two different plays use strong persuasive rhetoric as an effective tool for persuasion. There is a striking difference between the two female characters in both plays. Contrary to Lady Macbeth's malicious scheme, Beatrice's sole motive is to save her niece's slandered reputation. Lady Macbeth's motive, on the other hand, is merely a quest for power. As a result of Beatrice's persuasive rhetoric, Benedict demonstrates his willingness to challenge Claudio to a duel :

> BENEDICK *(aside to* CLAUDIO*)*
>
> You are a villain. I jest not.
> I will make it good how you dare, with what you
> dare, and when you dare. Do me right, or I will
> protest your cowardice. You have killed a sweet
> lady, and her death shall fall heavy on
> you. Let me hear from you (5.1.143-148).

Don Pedro and Claudio express disbelief at Benedict's sudden change of personality. It seems Beatrice has succeeded in creating a stark division among former male allies. Benedict, in other words, has chosen love over male comradeship. Symbolically, he has broken the terms of loyalty to male comradeship for his affection for Beatrice. Feminists are critical of the values embodied in male comradeship associated with courtly and chivalrous conventions such as codes of honor, courage and male comradeship. Such conventions " have come under fierce attack from feminists, who revealed it as part and parcel of patriarchal suppression of women" (Droeber, 2005, p. 67). Further evidence about Benedict's radical change of character is demonstrated when the young courtier openly accuses Don Pedro of Hero's misfortune: 'Your brother the bastard is fled from Messina / You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady' (5.1. 186-7). Claudio and Don Pedro, interestingly, do not take Benedict's challenging speech so seriously until Dogberry and other watchmen deliver their shocking confessions. The plotters' confessions move the play into a turning point as Claudio and Don Pedro acknowledge their wrongdoing in shaming Hero.

4.6. Revelation of Truth from Falsehood

Borachio's confession in front of Don Pedro and Claudio marks a major turning point in the play. Interestingly, the apprehension of the conspirators are carried out by Verges and dogberry, "most inarticulate, and inefficient officers of the law" (Payne, 2004, p.47). The message behind such a dramatic incident is clear: "only providential grace could for such bunglers discovering the truth that vindicates Hero and assure the happy marriage to conclude the comedy " (Ibid).The revelation of truth, furthermore, signals a drastic change in the play's storyline from tragedy into a romantic ending. The following exchanges between Don Pedro and Dogberry's group of watchmen, for instance, are mainly meant to provide comic relief, as well as, preparing the audience for a romantic outcome:

> DON PEDRO
> Officers, what offense have these men done?
> DOGBERRY
> Marry, sir, they have committed false report;
> moreover, they have spoken untruths;
> secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they
> have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust
> things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.
> DON PEDRO
> First, I ask thee what they have done; thirdly,
> I ask thee what's their offense; sixth and lastly, why
> they are committed; and, to conclude, what you lay
> to their charge (5.1. 209-218).

Noticeably, the revelation of Don John's scheme occurs at a time when preparations are underway to bring Hero staging her own death in front of Claudio. The staged 'death scene', as Friar France hoped, will cause Claudio to regret his wrongdoings against Hero. The plotters' confessions, nonetheless, have an immediate impact on both Don Pedro and Claudio. They express their sincere regret in front of Leonato. Leonatp takes that opportunity to lay down his strict conditions on Claudio.

The revelation of truth from falsehood gives some indication about a forthcoming romantic ending. In romantic comedies, young lovers' misfortune turns into a happy occasion so often through a sudden revelation or unexpected dramatic change of event. In

this respect, the happy ending happens when the Heroin's missing twin appears suddenly, leading to the revelation of truth from falsehood. Similarly, in *MOV*, too, a dramatic revelation turns the play's tragic outcome into a romantic comedy. The last report about the revival of Antonio's ships is delayed until the final Act of the play. The sudden happy occasion "might adumbrate divine intervention or even Portia's own association with divinity" (Cunningham, 2006, p. 136) . A sudden dramatic shift in comedies, somehow, gives an implicit indication about the role of fate or divine intervention. Similarly, " characters of *Much Ado* are saved from a tragic outcome by a chance occurrence" (Kirszner & Mandell, 1996, p.303).

In Shakespearean romantic comedies, fate or providence assists the female protagonist in her quest for selfhood. Whereas " Fortune (coincidence) does not appear to be a direct agent in producing the happy ending of a comedy, its place is taken by conscious deception or trickery involving some form of disguise as a necessary means" (Salingar, 1974, p.25). As with Portia and Viola, Hero's deceptive act is assisted by the capricious force of fate or divine intervention. The happy ending is not possible without the female protagonist's deceptive act. Similar to Viola and Portia in two other comedies, Hero's quest for selfhood does not only defuse and rectify follies and misconceptions by the deluded young lovers, but it also contributes to the restoration of order and harmony to the community.

Significantly, the conspirators' confession in front of Don Pedro and Claudio marks the play's turning point. The confession causes Claudio to reflect on his own attitude toward Hero. When he first hears about the plotters' confessions, he exclaims, "Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear / In the rare semblance that I loved it first' (5.1.245-6). Paradoxically, Claudio's new vision of Hero is in stark contrast with his previous judgment in which he denounced Hero' supposedly unchaste character: ' you are more intemperate in your blood/ Than Venus, or those pampered animals/ That rage in savage sensuality '(4.1.58-60). Leonato in the previous Act has ignored a piece of valuable information from Dogberry and his watchmen, who overheard Borachio bragging about his trick on Don Pedro and Claudio. Borachio's speech to Don Pedro

‘What your wisdom could not discover/, these shallow fools have brought to light’ (5.1.227-9), offers a humorous parody of many dramatic situations in the play in which confusions and conflicts are caused by simple misunderstanding. Moreover, the revelation of the truth about Hero’s innocence happens at the same time other confusions are cleared up in the play. Margaret is forgiven for any wrongdoing against Hero as she lacked knowledge about Don John’s malicious scheme. Similarly, the confusion surrounding the relationship between Benedict and Claudio eventually is resolved before Hero’s deceptive staged scene. As a result of Borachio's confession, Leonato presses the two courtiers, Don Pedro and Claudio, to acknowledge their wrongdoings. Their sincere feeling of remorse marks transition from guilt to penitence. Claudio expresses sincere willingness to undergo any punishment imposed on him to in order to be forgiven. This is evident in his appealing speech to Leonatto:

> Choose your revenge yourself.
> Impose me to what penance your invention
> Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
> But in mistaking (5.1.266-9).

Leonato in his response demands that Claudio must fulfil certain conditions in order to be forgiven. He must first write an epitaph about Hero's innocence and hang it upon Hero’s tomb. The young courtier has to read the epitaph loudly and repeats the same ritual annually. Moreover, he must also agree to marry Leonato’s niece who is “Almost the copy of (his) child that's dead”(5.1.283).To prove his sincerity, the young courtier promises Leonato that he would marry Hero’s niece no matter how he looks. “I’ll hold my mind were she an Ethiope’ (5.4.38).

4.7. The Effect of the Final Trick

The plotters execute their final trick on Claudio in two stages. As planned earlier, Claudio must enter the tomb where Hero’s supposedly dead body is lying. He should hang on Hero’s tomb an epitaph in which he denounces his former judgment, and express

sincere remorse. The second phase of the trick is intended to reunite the young lovers together in a happy marriage. The final trick, similar to previous plots, has been set to be performed collectively. In such a trick, a group of characters such as; Antonio, Leonato, Beatrice, Ursula, Hero, and Margaret cooperate among themselves in staging the final deceptive scene. Hero and other waiting women, including Beatrice and Ursula will appear masked in front of Benedict and Claudio. Such a deceptive scheme, as pre-directed by Leonato and Antonio, aims at uniting conflicting young lovers together through multiple wedding ceremonies. Before the trick, Benedict expresses his willingness to marry Beatrice. His sudden change of personality happes due to Beatrice's strong-willed character, particularly her powerful rhetorical skill. Both Claudio and Benedict have already reconciled their differences, but neither is aware of the next trick.

As Friar France has anticipated, Hero's 'death scene' invoked fear and sympathy in Claudio once staged in front of Claudio. As he enters the church where Hero's supposedly tomb lying, the young courtier demonstrated a sincere willingness to denounce his former attitudes, particularly his prejudice and misjudgement against Hero. In a speech full of grief and sadness, Claudio reads out the epitaph and hangs it on Hero's tomb. The epitaph centers around Hero's innocence, and her eternal revival in Claudio's passionate verse:

> CLAUDIO
> Done to death by slanderous tongues
> Was the Hero that here lies.
> Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
> Gives her fame which never dies.
> So the life that died with shame
> Lives in death with glorious fame (5.3.3-8).

In Shakespearean comedies, there comes a moment when the conflicting characters, including the main protagonists, realize their mistakes and wrongdoings. Claudio's show of remorse and his willingness to fulfil Leonato's conditions provides a unique occasion for the conflicting characters to critically reflect on themselves. Hero's role-playing in itself constitutes an act of individuality for it causes Claudio to denounce his previous misjudgement and misconception. As Friar France predicts, Hero's feigned

death has eventually altered Claudio's corrupted image of Hero a 'thousand innocent shames / In angel whiteness beat away those blushes' (4.1.160-1). Remarkably, neither Don Pedro nor Claudio is aware of Friar France and Leonato's final trick. Unlike Don John's malicious scheme, the final trick is executed for the purpose of revealing truth from falsehood. The concept of 'Death', as mentioned in Fria France's speech, carries multiple meanings as it denotes new beginning or new life. The motif of 'mock-death' in Shakespearean plays serves multiple dramatic functions. In two different plays *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*, for instance, the heroine's "mock death", as directed by the Friar, will ultimately "lead to the guilt, penitence, and forgiveness" (Neely, 1985, p.52). Similar motif is also present in *The Winter's Tale*. In this play, the heroine's feigning of her own death leads to "penitence, transformation, and full reconciliation" (Ibid). The same motif recurs in this play, and it has both transformative and catharsis effects on the conflicting characters. Its transformative effect is apparent in Claudio's personality as he openly renounces his previous misjudgement and prejudices against Hero. The same deceptive act by the heroin, ultimately, brings the restoration of harmony, healing, and reconciliation to Messina's community.

4.8. Restoration of Order and Harmony

The play's final deceptive scheme, unlike Don John's evil scheme, has been performed for the purpose of uniting lovers in happy marriages. To execute the deceptive plot, Leonato asked a group of female characters, including Beatrice, Hero, Margaret, and Ursula, to appear veiled in front of male lovers. Contrary to previous deceptive tricks, a group of female characters would undertake the leading role in performing the latest trick on male characters. The new deceptive trick, in a way, parodies the 'The Masked Ball' in Act 11. Such a trick, interestingly, can also be viewed as a' play within a play' as a group of characters perform specific roles within the original play.

In comedies, the female protagonist's quest for individuality is part of a collective work than individualistic. In *MOV*, for instance, female characters stand together in their quests towards fulfilment. Their quests for selfhood ultimately lead to the restoration of harmony and order to the community. Similarly, in *TN*, the reunion of the twin brother and sister, Viola and Sebastian bring the conflicting characters into reconciliation. In *MAAN*, too, the collaboration between two main female protagonists, Hero and Beatrice will assist in solving major conflicts among the conflicting characters.

The tricky' Masked Scene', similar to 'The Masked Ball', reflects on themes of delusion, disguise, mistaken identity, and role-playing. Symbolically, the purpose of the final trick is to awaken the deluded male lovers from their misconceptions and false notions about their female partners. In the final trick, female solidarity overcomes hatred, greed and male rivalry. This marks a symbolic shift in power relations in the play as women play the leading role in changing male lovers' perspectives with regard to courtship and marriage. Before a group of masked female characters enters the stage, Benedict has revealed his genuine intention to get united with Beatrice 'in the state of honorable marriage' (5.4.30). This marks a radical change in the courtier's personality. Leonato and Friar France display a willingness to assist him in getting united with Beatrice. A witty and humorous exchange of speeches between Claudio and Benedict occur before the masked ladies enter the stage. This signals the end of a feud between the two formerly close friends. When Claudio meets the masked lady in front of him, he reiterates his genuine intention to marry her : 'Give me your hand before this holy friar. /I am your husband if you like of me' (5.4.58-9). The dramatic situation reaches its climax when Hero reveals her true identity. Hero's compassionate reply indicates the significance of role-playing : 'And when I lived, I was your other wife, /And when you loved, you were my other husband' (5.4.60-1) , and she unmasks.

Claudio has been shocked by what he had seen, and exclaims "Another Hero!" (5.4.62). Here, the motifs of death and rebirth are repeated. Hero's unmasking denotes her new revival in front of Claudio. This is evident in her speech to Claudio once she

reveals her true character: ‘ One Hero died defiled, but I do live,/ And surely as I live, I am a maid’!(5.4.63-4). It also denotes Hero’s self-realization. As a magician , she successfully plays with her own image. In other words, she is no longer weak, powerless, and vulnerable; rather, strong, determined and free-willed character. More importantly, Hero’s deceptive trick generates Claudio’s self-awakening and ultimately his self-realization. The new outcome of Hero’s last heroic trick eventually brings the conflicting characters from both families into real reconciliation. Beatrice’s wit and strong-willed character also contributes to bringing a radical change in male characters’ personalities.

As with two other comedies, the play ends when all confusions and misunderstanding are desolved. Patrirchal figures such as Don Pedro and Leonato celebrate the happy occasion as young lovers are getting reunited. The last humorous witty exchange between Benedict and Beatrice brings the play into its romantic enclosure. Both Benedict and Beatrice still need some assistance to overcome their own pride. Claudio provides a piece of a poem “written” by Benedict’s which proves his love to Beatrice. Hero, too, provides a piece of a poem ‘stol'n from (Beatrice’s) pocket,/ Containing her affection unto Benedick’ (5.4.89-90). Benedict humorously tries to clarify his new attitude towards marriage. He tells Don Pedro that he has taken his decision on his own, without taking into consideration what others think or say about him. ‘I do purpose to marry, / I will think nothing to any purpose. / that the world can say against it’ (5.4.104-6). This speech marks a radical shift in Benedickt’s personality since he has chosen true affection over rigid rules of patriarchal comradeship. Such a change would not have been possible without Beatrice’s wit and strong personality, particularly her witty use of verbal skill. He even humorously proposes to Don Pedro to leave the single life behind and get married. A sudden revelation defuses major confusion in the play, and ultimately causes the community to reconcile among themselves. A message arrives at the exact same time as Messina’s new community begins celebrating the newly married couples. Don John, the main villain of the play, has been apprehended while he was trying to flee Messina.

4.9. Critical Overview of Chapter Four

Much Ado About Nothing traced the process through which two victimized women attained individuality. The focus has been on the emancipatory potentiality of woman's verbal skill with respect to their quest for selfhood. The play has been structured around contrasts and oppositions such as delusion versus reality love versus hatred, and domestic versus urban. In this play, Don Pedro's chivalric community has been set in contrast to Leonato's domestic world. In Messina's male-dominated society, patriarchal figures such as Don Pedro and Leonato try to impose their authority over young people's choices in marriage. In such a patriarchal community, marriage and courtship are used by stronger patriarchal figures as an effective means of securing social and economic alliances between two different communities. These patriarchal figures use various tricks and deceptive schemes in order to unite young people from both communities in s semi-arranged marriages.

The play's plot has been structured around women's struggle for selfhood. Hero and Beatrice, as two main female protagonists in the play, represent two victimized women. These two female protagonists are very different from one another. Hero represents the stereotypical obedient and virtuous woman. Beatrice, on the contrary, symbolizes a typical example of rebellious and free-willed character. Whereas Beatrice employes witty verbal skills to confront the strict social constraints of her society, Hero has displayed a willingness to get confined into the conventional role of submissive and obedient women in her society. From a feminist perspective, both hero and Beatrice represented two different models of women. The contrast between these two female characters has become apparent during multiple deceptive plots and tricks in the play's main and sub-plots.

Women's verbal skills in this comedy constitute an effective subversive strategy against patriarchy. Witty use of language provids Beatrice with power and aunique social position within Messina's male-dominated society. It is through provocative and

manipulative rhetoric that Beatrice keeps her presence noticeable and makes her voice heard. Messina's male-dominated community views her character as a rebellious figure who challenges current norms and conventions. From a feminist perspective, Beatrice represents a rebellious figure who constantly challenges the community's expectation about woman's conventional role in society. During marital arrangements by Don Pedro and Leonato, Beatrice uses satire and humor in her subtle attacks on society's tradition with respect to courtship and marriage. She nonetheless hides the sarcastic intent of her witty speeches through witty use of humor and sarcasm. Patriarchal figures have acknowledged Beatrice's witty personality. In a way, Beatrice represents a subversive figure within the well-organized patriarchal community. Marriage constitutes the only means of woman's fulfillment in a patriarchal society like Messina. Women like Hero and Beatrice can be viewed as typical examples of victimized women of Elizabethan age. They are not accepted within the patriarchal community unless they entere the conventional bondage of marriage. In a patriarchal society like Messina, woman has to display silence, chastity, humbleness, and virtue. These are characteristics that Beatrice detests and mocks continuously through witty satirical speeches. Stronger patriarchal figures from both communities collaborate with each other to bring young lovers into semi-arranged marriages. Unlike Hero's reserved and silent character, Beatrice openly criticizes the conventional role of a married woman in her society. Her subversive humor and sarcasm particularly targets conventional wedding and courtship ceremony. There are numerous tense, yet humorous exchanges of speeches between Beatrice and stronger patriarchal figures with respect to marriage and courtship. The heroin poks fun at Don Pedro's trick to unite Hero and Claudio in semi-arranged marriage. Her witty speeches are mostly sarcastic in their intent as they poke fun at society's convention with regard to the roles and status of women in her society. The play through Beatrice's subversive verbal power offers a subtle critique of gender-role conventions in Elizabethan's male-dominated society.

The contrast between the two main female protagonists is evident during the Dancing Ball event. The social event marks the first collective scheme by patriarchal

figures like Don Pedro and to unite young lovers in a semi-arranged marriage. The trick is part of multiple schemes by stronger male figures to unite young lovers in semi-arranged marriages. The social event has exposed significant aspects of two male protagonists. Claudio and Benedict's are different from one another in many ways. Benedict's talkative and strong-willed personality in the play has been set in opposition to Claudio's weak and reserved personality. Claudio lacks the strong will to directly confess his love for Hero. He asks Don Pedro to woo Hero on his behalf. The young courtier acts according to the codes of manners and conventions of courtly-chivalric ideals. The play, through the satiric representation of Claudio, delivers subtle critique at the Elizabethan convention of the chivalric hero and courtly lover.

During the first marital arrangement, Hero remains silent and inactive and left everything to be decided by stronger patriarchal figures. Unlike Hero's reserved and bashfulness, Beatrice is talkative and lively during the dance event, and she rightfully distinguishes truth from falsehood. Her witty verbal skill can be viewed as a subversive strategy against male-dominated patriarchy which has suppressed women from expressing their opinions freely. Don Pedro and Leonato's next scheme aims to bring Beatrice and Benedict closer. A parallel can be drawn between Beatrice and Benedict. They openly praise single life, and they expresse disdain at the courtship ceremony and marital arrangement at the play's beginning. Both characters, interestingly, are attracted to each other because they share similar personality traits. They both express disdain at marriage and courtship for fear it might diminish their personal liberty and freedom. Nonetheless, these two young lovers are unable to express their feelings for each other except through linguistic wordplay. During their meeting, Beatrice use her cunning and witty speeches to criticize Benedict's prideful, somehow, anti-feminist views about women. Apparently, Benedict is attracted to Beatrice's wit and her independent personality. Both characters, nonetheless, have some weaknesses in their personalities. They are stubborn and prideful. They particularly hold unrealistic views about romance and courtship. Don Pedro, together with two se lected groups of characters, arrange two deceptive plots to trick both Benedict and Beatrice into confessing their love

for each other. Unlike Don John's evil scheme to separate Hero from Claudio, Don Pedro's double schemes have been arranged for a noble cause.

In Messina's male-dominated society, Marriage has been used by patriarchal figures as a method to get young lovers confined into assigned roles as prescribed by society. To bring Beatrice and Benedict to confess their love for each other, the prince instructs two groups of characters to collectively play assigned roles in front of both young lovers. Language in such scenes is used as an effective method to reveal the truth from falsehoods. The first group intentionally let Benedict overhear speeches about Beatrice's hidden affection. In a theatrical scene, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio hadvebegun discussing Beatrice's affection for Beatrice, while at the same time criticized Benedict's proud and stubborn personality. A similar trick has been played on Beatrice through a group of female players such as Hero, Margaret, and Ursula. Don Pedro's double tricks on Beatrice and Benedict can be viewed as a ' play within a play'. The dramatic motif of 'Play within a play' recurrs also in *TN*. Maria's deceptive scene to trick Malvolio, the play's main villain, is a typical example of ' a play within a play'. In such a scene, Maria tricks Malvolio into revealing his evil intention to overtake Lady Olivia's household. The similar dramatic motif of 'Play within a Play' re-occurred in *MOV*. Portia uses the Ring-Plot to test her lover's loyalty and sincerity toward marriage in the play. Overall, the sub-plot in the selected comedies reveals women's strong-willed character and their witty verbal skill in their quest for selfhood.

The villain's deceptive scheme in *MAAN* relies on deception and disguise. Together with a group of conspirators, he has set up a deceptive scheme to trick Claudio into mistaking Hero being disloyal. Language in such a scene has been used as a tool of deceit and manipulation. The staged scene in which Don John tricked Claudio can also be viewed as a typical example of 'a play within a play'. The play reaches its climax when Claudio mercilessly confronted Hero and accused her of being disloyal. From a feminist perspective, Hero embodies a victimized woman by a male-dominated society. In a society like Messina where a woman's chastity and virtue were of

high value rather than her true personality, Hero has become a subject of misogyny and stigmatization. According to Messina's male-dominated society, Heroin has violated the code of honor and morality.

Fear and doubt about woman's infidelity are deeply rooted in Elizabethan patriarchal conventions. Messina's society, which is a symbolic representation of the Elizabethan patriarchal system, views the husband's virtue and honor to be determined by the wife's chastity. Excessive anxiety or social paranoia about women's infidelity reflected in Claudio's obsession with Hero's chastity. Apparently, he is merely attracted to Hero's physical beauty than her real personality. The tragic incident of Hero's shaming has revealed the dark and cruel side of Messina's male-dominated society, while at the same time it provides victimized women like Hero and Beatrice an opportunity to assert their own individuality. Hero's quest for individuality has begun once she accepted Friar France's plan, the holly man, to stage her own death in front of her accusers. Friar France's plot relies on another deceptive scheme to be executed collectively. Hero, nonetheless, has taken the leading role in executing such a deceptive scheme. As the friar suggested, she has to stage her own death in front of her male accuser in order to instigate pity and sympathy in him. Unlike Don John's malicious trick, the Friar's plot is designed for a noble cause. Friar France's scheme relies on deception and trickery. The main purpose of this scheme , however, is to reveal false appearance from reality and deception from truth.

Through the symbolic representations of Hero and Beatrice, the play reflects on a long tradition of suspicion and doubt about woman's honor and chastity. A society like Messina tries desperately to enforce social conformity and contain any subversive female voices. Beatrice and Hero are subjects of two different forms of maltreatment and stigmatizations. Beatrice has been subjected to harsh linguistic humiliation because of her talkative and free-spirited personality. Hero, on the other hand, has been victimized by Messina's male-dominated community because of doubt and suspicion about her chastity. Beatrice and Hero's victimization underscores common misconceptions in Elizabethan

society about women which viewed them inferior, and more broadly, emotionally vulnerable. Both female figures, however, have chosen to resist the social pressure through two different subversive means. Whereas Beatrice has chosen direct verbal confrontation against opposite male figures, Hero, on the other hand, has chosen a rather different subversive strategy to challenge patriarchy. By feigning his own death, Hero symbolically subverted and challenged society's misconceptions about her personality. The deceptive act has empowered Hero since it has altered the stereotypical image upon which her character stigmatized and misjudged.

Irronically, Hero's tragic misfortune has affected the developing romance between Beatrice and Benedict. The conflict, in fact, provides an opportunity for both young lovers to get closer, and stand against Hero's accusers. Unlike Hero's accusers, Beatrice finds the accusation against her niece baseless and unjust. As a symbol of female solidarity against the cruelty of Messina's male-dominated society, Beatrice displays strength and strong-willed personality. Through her witty verbal skill, Beatrice criticizes Messina's male-dominated society which unjustly mistreateswomen. Beatrice's display of solidarity with Hero asserts female allegiance against Male's ill-treatment of women. The scene in which Beatrice confronts Hero's accusers demonstrated women's solidarity against males' oppressive attitudes towards victimized females. A bond of solidarity has already been established between Benedict and Beatrice against Don Pedro and Claudio. To test Benedict's love, Beatrice demands that Benedict should avenge those who shamed and dishonoured her niece. Through tricky rhetorical manoeuvring, she convinces Benedict to confront his former friends. Benedict faces a difficult dilemma between his love for Beatrice and his allegiance towards his courtier friends. Eventually, the young courtier displays willingness to challenge his former friends. Symbolically, he has broken the terms of loyalty to male comradeship for love.

Similar to other comedies, 'Fate' or 'Divine Intervention' in ***MAAN*** plays essential role in causing dramatic shifts in the course of young lovers' destines. Friar France's intervention to rescue Hero, as well as, the plotters' confessions about their roles in

shaming Hero, have provided implicit hints about the role of fate or divine intervention in the play. A major shift in the play, however, occurs when Hero willingly accepts staging her own death infront of her accusers. Theatrically, the 'death scene', is another form of 'a play within a play. Hero in such a scene can be viewed as a symbol of women's self-sacrifice and virtue against males' oppressive rulling and stigmatization. Moreover, Hero's feigning of her own death carries symbolic meaning, for it implies a process of character transformation or revival of a new personality. As a result of Hero's bravery and strong-willed characters, Claudio undergoes a change of personality.

The final trick in the play has been set by Leonato and Friar France to bring the conflicting characters into reconciliation and harmony. A group of masked female characters stages the final trick on a group of male lovers. The primary purpose of the masked scene is to enable deluded male lovers to reach self-realization. The scene in which Hero unveils her face, symbolically, indicates Claudio's self-awakening. Similarly, the scene in which Beatrice unveils her own face marks Benedick's self-realization. Beatrice's verbal skill, particularly, enables Benedict to overcome his own misconceptions and prejudice about women and courtship. Claudio, too, demonstrates sincere willingness to value Hero's true personality and leave behind his false opinions and misconceptions. Female protagonists' quest of individuality in *Much Ado About Nothing* , in other words, contributes to the restoration of harmony and order to the community.

Conclusion

After a critical analysis of selected romantic comedies, the dissertation concludes that Shakespeare's representation of women in romantic comedies serves the feminist agenda. This is evident in the heroic portrayal of women in such comedies. The study, specifically, highlights the emancipatory potentiality of women's verbal skills with regard to their quest for selfhood. Female protagonists in the comedies shared significant characteristics and personality traits such as their witty usage of persuasive languge and role-playing. Women's verbal skills, similar to other deceptive acts such as disguise and role-playing, constitute subversive acts against patriarchy. Here, the focus has been on showing the extent to which language and role-playing empowered women, correcting male characters' false notions and misconceptions about women and courtship.

The *Merchant of Venice* celebrates the heroic image of a strong –willed and witty female figure. In her quest for selfhood, the heroine used disguise and deceptive language. These subversive tricks empowered the heroine, for they provide her with effective means to enter male-dominated space. The tricks, moreover, enabled the male protagonist to overcome his prior prejudices and misconceptions about women and marriage. From a feminist perspective, the heroine's deliberate act of disguise in Venetian court can be viewed as a subversive act, for it challenged common perceptions about women's ability to take a leading role in solving a judicial case. Symbolically, the playwright presented a witty and intelligent female character on stage as an allegorical figure of educated and learned women in the Elizabethan age. The disguised female lawyer exemplifies a model of a new modern woman who could produce witty speeches and exert her authority in a strictly male-dominated legal institution. Historically, women were denied education, particularly the art of rhetoric, and they were pressed to fit into the conventional domestic world. Through the heroic depiction of a witty female orator like Portia, the playwright reflects on the changing status and roles of women in England during the Elizabethan era.

In *Twelfth Night* , the playwright used disguised and cross-dressed characters on stage (normally played by young boys), to show the extent to which such artistic act provided women with the liberty to express themselves. Within the historical context, the playwright reflects on real-life individuals and real-life events in the Elizabethan age such as the phenomenon of cross-dressed females. During that era, there were fears and anxiety among both religious and secular writers about the spread of such a phenomenon. Cross-dressed women were stigmatized and criticized because they were considered a threat against current social norms and fixed gender roles. Unlike many secular and religious writers, Shakespeare celebrates the emancipatory potential of cross-dressed women. The playwright criticizes rigid social roles that constrained women from expressing their own potentiality. To Shakespeare, disguise and cross-dressing empower women because they offer a new possibility to explore new social roles. In a way, the heroin in the play exemplifies a new model of Elizabethan women who can challenge and revoke false notions and misconceptions about women's positions and roles in the Elizabethan society. By presenting witty and crossed-dressed women on stage, Shakespeare tries to raise the audience's consciousness with regard to a woman's status and roles in Elizabethan patriarchal society. Here, the dramatist's progressive and feminist ideas provided women, new models, to imitate and follow in the Elizabethan changing society.

Much Ado about Nothing, similarly, offers a heroic image of learned and educated women. In the play, a woman's use of language is associated with power while the lack of it means powerlessness. The contrast between two essential female protagonists highlights such a link. The playwright through two contradictory images of women on stage has presented a satirical parody of two negative stereotypical images of women common during the early modern period in England . Within the historical context, women in the Elizabethan age were labeled between those who are silent or obedient and those who are talkative or challenging. In other words, women's virtue or lack of it depended upon the physical image rather than the real personality. Whereas talkative women were stigmatized and categorized with undesired qualities such as ' shrew' scold'

and talkative, silent and obedient women, on the other hand, were praised and glorified as an emblem of virtue and honor. Here, Shakespeare takes a stand against the Elizabethan patriarchal culture which defines women's virtue upon the physical outlook rather than real personality. The playwright through the heroic image of a free-spirited and outspoken character like Beatrice celebrates the emancipatory potential of language for women. Like disguise and cross-dressing, verbal skill empowers women in their struggle for individuality, correcting male's misconceptions and false notions.

Based on the findings from this study, it can be concluded that Shakespeare's comedies celebrate the emancipatory potential of both language and role-play for women in their quest for selfhood. In Shakespeare's comedies, female characters can easily change identity and linguistic style. This is in accord with feminist critics' assumption on the constructive and performative nature of women's gender identity and linguistic style. Through heroic portrayal of women, the dramatist challenges common misconceptions and false notions that viewed women inferior and incapable of producing witty speeches or perform the tasks that are restricted to males. A progressive Humanist writer, Shakesreare used theatre as a vehicle to educate and reform the Elizabethan audience about the roles and positions of women in society. Overall, the playwright's main purpose is to raise people's awareness and change mentality on issues related to woman's right in choosing her own destiny in both domestic and public spheres.

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پوختەی توێژینەوە

ئەم توێژینەوەیە شیکارێکی ئەدەبی بۆ سێ کۆمیدیای ڕۆمانسی ولیەم شکسپیر دەکات، بە تایبەتی پەیوەندی نێوان شێوازی ئاخاوتنی پاڵەوانی ئافرەت و هەوڵی بەدەستهێنانی خود لە هەر سێ کۆمیدیاکەدا. تێژینەوەکە هەروەها لێکۆڵینەوەیەکی ڕەخنەگرانە بۆ هەموو خەسڵەتە لەیەک چووەکان لە نێوان کارەکتەرە سەرەکیەکانی هەر سێ کۆمیدیاکە دەکات وەک شێوازی ئاخاوتن و بەکارهێنی فیڵی درامی وەک کەسایەتی گۆڕین و ڕۆڵ گۆڕین و هەموو ئامرازەکانی تر کە پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکان بەکاری دەهێنن لە ڕێچکەی بەدەستهێنانی خودی خۆیان. .

لە چاپتەری یەکەمدا توێژینەوەکە سەرەتایەک پێشکەش ئەکات دەربارەی نوسەری کۆمیدیاکان و کارە ئەدەبیەکانی. ئەوەی جێی سەرنجە شەکسپیر لە کارە ئەدەبیەکانی خۆیدا چەندین بابەتی گرنگ، تا ڕادەیەکی زۆریش ئاڵۆز، دەربارەی بابەتە ئاینی و ڕامیاری و فەلسەفی ڕاڤە کردوە. ڕەخنەگران بە شێوازی جیاواز شیکاریان بۆ کارە ئەدەبیەکانی کردوە، بە تایبەتی ڕوانگەی نوسەر دەربارەی کێشەی ئافرەت، بە تایبەتیش بابەتی ئەوەی کە ئایا نوسەری ئەو دراماینە هەڵگری بیری فێمێنستی بوە یاخود نا. هەربۆیەکیشە توێژینەوەکە ئاماژە بە هەموو ئەو تێڕوانینە جیاوازانە ئەکات لە لایەن ڕەخنەگران و نوسەرانەوە دەربارەی شکسپیر وتراون پەیوەست بە ڕوانگەی تایبەتی دەربارەی ماف و ئازادی ئافرەت. ئەوەی گرنگە ئاماژەی پێبدرێ ئەوەیە تا ئێستا زۆر کەم لە توێژەران سەرنجی ڕەخنەگرانەیان خستوەتە سەر پەیوەندی نێوان شێوازی ئاخاوتنی ئافرەتی پاڵەوان لە کۆمیدیاکان و هەوڵی بەدەستهێنانی خود ،هەربۆیەکیشە توێژینەوەکە ئەو لایەنە گرنگە بە ڕوانگەیەکی ڕەخنەگرانەی شیکاریانە ڕوون دەکاتەوە.

چاپتەری دوەم لێکۆڵینەوەیەکی ئەدەبی بۆ کۆمیدیای (بازرگانی ڤینیسیا) ی ولیام شکسپیر دەکات. ئەم درامایە هەر وەک چۆن ڕەخنەگران ئاماژەیان پێ داوە، کارێکی ئەدەبی ئاڵۆزەو هەردوو ڕەگەزی کۆمیدیاو تراجیدیا لە خۆ دەگرێ، بەڵام ئەوە ڕۆڵی پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکەیە کە ڕێچکەی تراجیدیای دراماکە ئەگۆڕێ بۆ کۆمیدیایەکی ڕۆمانسی، ئەویش لە ڕێگەی شێوازی هونەری ئاخاوتنی پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکە لەگەڵ کەسانی چواردەوری. توێژینەوەکە سەرنج ئەخاتە سەر چۆنیەتی بەکارهێنانی زمانی پاڵەوانەکە لە گۆڕینی مێنتاڵیتێت و بیرو ڕای کەسانی تر دەربارەی ماف و ئازادی ئافرەت لە دراما کە.

چاپتەری سێیەم لە توێژینەوەکە لێکۆڵینەوەیەکی شیکاریە بۆ ڕۆڵی پاڵەوانی ئافرەت لە درامای (دوانزە شەو) ولیەم شکسپیر. سەرنجی ئەم بەشە لەسەر کاریگەری زمانی ئاخاوتنی پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکەیە لە گۆڕینی بیرو ڕای کەسی سەرەکی دراماکە کە بیرو ڕایەکی ناڕیالیستی و دژە فێمێنستی هەیە. ڕۆڵگۆڕین و کەسایەتی گۆڕین دوو خسەڵەتی گرنگن کەپاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکە

بەکاری دەهێنێ لە گەشتی دۆزینەوەی خودی خۆیدا. ڕەگەزێکی تری گرنگی دراماکە ڕۆڵی چارەنوس یاخود قەدەرە لە گۆڕینی ڕێچکەی گرێی درامی کۆمیدیاکە و پەیوەندیشی بە هەوڵی پاڵەوانی ئافرەت لە دۆزینەوەی خودی خۆی. لێرەدا گرنگی ئەدرێ بە شێوازی هونەری ئاخاوتنی پاڵەوانی ئافرەت لە گۆڕینی بیرو ڕاو مێنتاڵیەتی کۆمەڵگای باوکسالاری یاخود پاتریارکی.

چاپتەری چوارەم لێکۆڵینەوەکی شیکارانەیە بۆ ڕۆڵی دوو ئافرەتی پاڵەوانی سەرەکی لە گەشتی گەڕان بە دوای خودی خۆیاندا لە کۆمیدیای ڕۆمانی (هەڵەیەکی بچووک) . ئەم کۆمیدیایە وەک هەردوو کۆمیدیاکەی تر باس لە کێشەی نێوان کارەکتەری ئافرەت و کۆمەڵگەی پاتریارکی دەکات. هەر وەک دوو کۆمیدیاکەی تریش، توێژینەوەکە لە ڕوانگەی فێمینستی هەوڵ ئەدات هەموو ئامراز و ڕێگە جیاوازەکان دەست نیشان بکات کە هەردوو پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکە لە گەشتی دۆزینەوەی خودی خۆیاندا بەکاری دێنن. لێرەدا سەرنج لەسەر شێوازی ئاخاوتنی ئافرەتی پاڵەوانە ئافرەتەکەیە لەگەڵ کارەکانی تر، لەگەڵ کۆمەڵێک فێڵی درامی تر کە کەسایەتی ئافرەتەکان بەکاری دەهێنن بە مەبەستی گۆڕینی مێنتاڵیتی کۆمەڵگەی پاتریارکی. .

دواهەمین بەشی توێژینەوەکە تەرخان کراوە بۆ دەرئەنجامی گشتی ، کە کۆمەڵێک خاڵی گرنگ و بەسوودی تیا بەیان کراوە دەربارەی ڕۆڵی ئافرەت لە کۆمیدیای ڕۆمانسی ولیەم شکسپیر، هەرەوەها بەهای گرنگی ئەکادیمی توێژینەوەکە بۆ هەر هەوڵێکی تری ڕەخنەگرانە دەربارەی دراماکانی تری نوسەر. .

الملخص

تتناول هذه الأطروحة التجسيد البطولي للمرأة في ثلاث مسرحيات كوميدية رومانسية مختارة لوليم شيكسبير لتبين مدى أسهام مهارة البطلة اللغوية في سعيها لتحقيق الذات. وتحاول الدراسة إيجاد أنماط التشابه بيت مختلف الشخصيات البطولية في ثلاث كوميديات, ولا سيما إستخدامهن الذكي للغة, إضافة الى الحيل الأخرى مثل التنكر وتغيير الأدوار وغيرها من الخدع الذكية التي استخدمتها الشحصيات البطولية في سعيهن لتحقيق ذاتهن. و تتبع أهمية هذه الأطروحة من كونها تلقي الضوء على نواح غير مكتشفة في كوميديات وليم شيكسبير الرومانسية, ولا سيما العلاقة بين مهارة المرأة اللغوية أو الخطابية وسعيها لتحقيق الذات. والأهم من ذلك, تؤكد الأطروحة على الأجندة الإنسانية والنسوية لوليم شيكسبير في المسرحات الكوميدية المختارة الثلاث.

تنقسم الأطروحة على أربعة فصول وخاتمة.الفصل الأول مقدمة تتناول بشكل موجز وليم شيكسبير وعصر الملكة اليزابث ومكانة المرأة قي هذا العصر. كما يقدم بايجاز الأسئلة التي تحاول هذه الأطروحة الإجابة عليها وأهمية الأطروحة.

يقدم الفصل الثاني تحليلا للتجسيد البطولي للمرأة في مسرحية تاجر البندقية لشيكسبير. ويركز هذا الفصل –كغيره من الفصول الأخرى– على إبراز دور لغة البطلة المتميز والقعال في سعيها لتحقيق ذلتها. تبدأ المرحلة الأولى بتجربة تقوم فيها البطلة بإختبار حبيبها من خلال خدعة درامية. وتبدأ المرحلة الثانية بعدما تقرر البطلة تغيير شخصيتها وتقمصها شخصية المحامي للدفاع عن صديق حبيبها في مدينة البندقية. وتجتاز البطلة هذه المرحلة بسبب مهارتعا اللغوية الفائقة وحنكتها في لعب دور المحامي المتمرس. وتنتهي المرحلة الثالثة لعملية بحث البطلة عن الذات بعد أن تختبر البطلة بمهارة فائقة مدى وفاء حبيبها وإخلاصه لها وذلك من خلال حيلة ماكرة وذكية. إن مهارة البطلة اللغوية, إلى جانب المهارات الأخرى مثل التنكر وتقمص الشخصيات ولعب الأدوار المتعددة , تعد وسائلا فعالة تمكن البطلة من تجاوز المصاعب العديدة في سعيها لنحقيق ذاتها في مجتمع أبوي سلطوي. لا شك في أن تلك الوسائل الفعالة أو الأستراتيجيات التحررية تعطي البطلة مكانة وموقعا إجتماهيا أعلى في مجتمعها الأبوي. وقد انعست المسرحية على التغيير الجذري لوضع المرأة ومكانتها في إنكلترا الحديثة من خلال تقديم شخصيات بطولية على المسرح.

ويتناول الفصل الثالث بالتحليل دور الصورة البطولية للمرأة في مسرحية وليم شيكسبير: الليلة الثانية عشرة , حيث تأخذ البطلة على عاتقها مهمة تصحيح الآراء والمتقدات الخاطئة للأمير المهموم في حب غير واقعي وبعيد المنال حيث تركزت حوارات البطلة مع الأمير على موضوعات الحب والتقرب من الحبيبة.

أما الفصل الرابع فيتناول بالتحليل النقدي التجسيد البطولي للمرأة في مسرحة شيكسبير: ضجة بلا طائل ويتتبع بشكل أساسي سعي امرأتين لإثبات ذاتهن في مجتمع ذكوري أبوي, حيث تدور أحداث المسرحية حول الصراع بين البطلتين من جهة والشخصيات الذكورية المهيمنة من جهة أخرى والتي تحاول من خلال الخطط والحيل أن تتحكم بمصير العشاق وجمع شملهم في زواج مدبر وتقليدي. يركز الفصل على بيان الطرق المختلفة التي استخدمتها البطلتان لمواجهة وسائل المجتمع الذكوري القمعية, وبالذات الدور المتميز والفعال للغة البطلة الأولى في نقدها لعادات وممارسات المجتمع الذكوري. لقد منحت اللغة النقدية البطلة القوة والإمكانية اللازمتين لمواجهة الضغوطات الكثيرة من مجتمعها الذي يحاول ارغامها لكي ترضى بدور المرأة التانوي والتقليدي وغير الفعال.

أما القسم الأخير من الأطروحة فهو الخاتمة التي تلخص ماتوصلت له الدراسة من نتائج