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Exchange of the Changing Women in *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*

by

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in *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*

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I. Introduction

Between 1598 and 1602, Shakespeare experimented with the relationship between exchange and gender. In the three comedies, *Merchant of Venice* (1598), *As You Like It* (1600), and *Twelfth Night* (1602), the heroines of the plays have the opportunity become active within the masculine world of exchange. Women are viewed traditionally as subordinate to men and incapable of masculine functions, such as participation in exchange. However, Shakespeare creates a space in these comedies for a fascinating display of gender transgression. While respecting the conventions of gender hierarchies and the patriarchal order of marriage, Shakespeare simultaneously offers a critical, alternative view of the power women can hold within a masculine world.

These three plays all share the common theme of cross-dressing, which, in itself, is a pure defiance of the dichotomy of gender. A woman cross-dressed as a man no longer appears, and therefore no longer has the responsibility to act, as a woman. Portia, Rosalind, and Viola break expectations and boundaries set for women by disguising themselves as men. They fool others into believing that they are men and are deserving of the authority given to men in a patriarchal society. Although these costumes disguise their femininity, it is not the space that Shakespeare uses to empower them. His heroines do not gain agency through costumes, but through exchange.

Merchant of Venice, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* all follow the same progression through three alternate types of exchange. In the first type, women are the objects given by fathers to their son-in-laws during a wedding exchange. Marriage acts as a patriarchal

convention, in that the ceremony is the gifting of a woman from her father to her husband. A bride has no agency; she is objectified by a nuptial bond. The second type is material exchange. In these exchanges, a woman is allowed to participate as a giver; she is no longer objectified. However, she uses the wealth of her father to afford the gift, showing dependence on her father during these exchanges. Although a gift of jewelry to a husband has the potential to empower a woman, she is still bonded to her father in material exchange. In the third type of exchange, women disguise themselves as men and become capable of giving linguistic gifts. By cross-dressing, women are able to enter the world of exchange without being detected. Their voices become powerful to other men, and these women are able to offer gifts of advice and lessons of love. It is through the combination of cross-dressing and language exchange that a woman's power comes to fruition. A woman's agency over herself and authority over others grows stronger with each of these exchanges. Although each comedy ends in the place it starts, with a woman as the gift in a marriage, Shakespeare illustrates the way in which women could disrupt the social order by taking on an active role in the masculine forum of exchange.

The understanding of general exchange has been defined by Marcel Mauss; "Almost every anthropologist who has addressed himself to questions of exchange in the last half century has taken Mauss's essay at his point of departure" (Hyde xv). Exchange depends on a subject giving an object. Mauss explains that there are three obligations in exchange, "the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate" (Hyde xv). The idea of reciprocation is the distinction between gift giving and the exchanging of gifts. In exchange, "a

good is given in order to receive its equivalent in return [...] In gift giving, one gives to satisfy the need of the other” (Vaughan 2). Exchange is defined by giving a gift that creates a need for reciprocity or dependence by the acceptor/receiver on the subject/giver; whereas gift giving solely creates a reward for the receiver. This essay examines primarily exchange in which the subjects are defined as men or women and the objects are women, jewelry, or language.

To understand the idea of a woman as an object of exchange, one must grasp the concept of patriarchal order. Within a patriarchal society, men hold positions of power. A gender hierarchy is established in which a woman holds no agency over herself or the circumstances of the world that surrounds her. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Levi-Strauss attempts to define culture based on nature. He discovers that both primitive and modern societies create divisions based on gender, and he explains that “the study of relations between the sexes in our society could not reveal the truly tragic nature of this disequilibrium” (Levi-Strauss 38). Our society is defined by its masculine domination and the masculine nature of exchanges. Women are in subordinate positions and are therefore considered as exchangeable objects, belonging to fathers or husbands; “In our social order, women are ‘products’ used and exchanged by men. Their status is that of merchandise, ‘commodities’” (Irigaray 84). Marriage, according to patriarchal order, is the epitome of the objectification of women. In a traditional, Western wedding ceremony, the father is asked to “give” away the bride. A woman is given from her father to her husband as a gift. This gesture creates a kinship bond between the men, bonding

two families together by objectifying the woman as the father's gift and the kinship bond as the son-in-law's returned gift.

In "Women on the Market," gender critic Luce Irigaray examines the woman as a commodity within the economic system examined by Karl Marx. A woman has an exchange-value, based on physical properties (her nature and her body), and a use-value, based on her active properties as either a virgin, a mother, or a prostitute, which are essentially the same (802-8). This view of women links them to commodities, nearly dehumanizing them into objects with uses that can increase their value between men; they are treated as indistinguishable from exchangeable material items.

Material exchange may appear as a simple, superficial trade, but it is also layered with complex representations. The exchange of jewelry is a symbolic gesture, in that a monetary gift is offered, showing a willingness to give on the part of one participant, and a willingness to receive by the second person. Whether the jewelry is a platonic gift or, like the jewelry that these women exchange, a betrothal gift, it acts as a bond between the two members of the exchange. The rings in these plays take a place within a historical context; "as pledges of betrothal, or wedding gifts, rings are of very ancient origin" (Jones 297). Jones explains the use of wedding rings as an ancient tradition with varying histories and meaning. Rings were exchanged by the Egyptians, Jews, Romans, Christians, and Germanic tribes. The engagement ring was worn on the third finger according to two traditions: the Egyptian belief of a supposed nerve running from that finger to the heart, and, according to the Christian tradition of the trinity (the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost), the simple importance of the number three.

Engagement rings are represent bonds of fidelity, loyalty, love, et cetera. They represent abstract reciprocatation between two lovers upon the gift of a material good.

However, also according to tradition, usually the man was the gift giver, sharing the ring with a woman. The ring has both a sexual connotation and a meaning of power. The nicer the ring, the wealthier the giver. The ability to give any gift is a mark of power; “the bridegroom was to give it to his bride, to denote to her that she is to be subject to him” (Jones 292).

Accepting a gift, and also accepting a betrothal ring, puts the receiver in a position of submissiveness; “it was adopted as a ceremony in marriage to denote that the wife [...] was admitted as a sharer in her husband’s counsels, [...] in his honour and estate” (Jones 297). The woman takes on a secondary role in the household, supporting *her husband’s* ‘honor and estate,’ while bearing and sharing nothing of her own. Within history, the circumstance where “the fiancée gives a ring to her future husband, without receiving one from him,” does not occur often (Kunz 208). Shakespeare’s use of the gift of jewelry given by women alters the balance between giving, receiving, power, and submission. The exchange of jewelry from the hands of Portia, Nerissa, Jessica, Rosalind, and Olivia empowers them. The jewelry recipients should share in the women’s estates and honor.

Using gender critics like Gayle Rubin and Luce Irigaray, language, women, and material goods become connected as versions of commodities. In Rubin’s essay, “Traffic in Women,” she seeks to find a grounded view of gender between the ideas of Freud and Levi-Strauss. She argues that “Levi-Strauss sees women as being like words, which are misused when they are not

‘communicated’ [...] women are at the same time ‘speakers’ and ‘spoken’” (785). The connection between women and words is that they are exchangeable objects of men. She explains that a woman can act as a chameleon, taking a masculine role as a speaker/giver and a feminine role of the spoken/commodity. She illustrates the potential beyond the expectations of the patriarchy. In “Commodities among Themselves,” Irigaray says that “women, signs, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another,” connecting these three types of exchange (194). Women through matrimonial exchange, currency through jewelry exchange, and signs through language exchange are all commodities of men. She examines language as a masculine construction, so that when a woman speaks, she “expresses herself, to herself” (194). Language “belongs” to men (just as a woman “belongs” to a man), and it is only for exchange between men.

Irigaray explains that women have no control over their own exchange, much less any exchange, saying that, “A sociocultural endogamy would forbid commerce *with* women. Men make commerce *of* them, but they do not enter into any exchanges *with* them” (800). However, this is the idea held by the patriarchy. Both Rubin and Irigaray are curious about the idea of a woman *as* an exchanger, instead of as the exchanged. One of the strongest ways that women could break through the boundaries inscribed by gender inequality is through cross-dressing, such as the disguises used within these plays.

Cross-dressing has historically acted as a disruption of the gender hierarchy. Within the patriarchy of the Renaissance, cross-dressing was a transgression of the strict structure of gender

divide. However, onstage was a different matter. In Judith Butler's analysis of gender, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," she comments on the double standard, "Gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence" (Butler 907). Stigmas about the meaning of cross-dressing inspired law enforcement and violence during the time. In Michael Shapiro's book, *Gender in Play on the Shakespearean Stage*, records of arrests, trials, and punishment of women guilty of cross-dressing illustrate how real this threat was. Women were supposed to act like women and never like men, even if it was simply an issue of clothing. The dichotomy of these gender expectations includes being "dominant and subservient, perfect and less perfect, fit for rule and unfit for rule. Behind general assertions of man's proper lordship over woman lay standard appeals to differences between [...] capacities to reason, to control passion, etc" (Howard 423). The prejudice leads to a clear difference in power and a nearly unbreakable hierarchy of gender.

The stage demands something different of its women; "The Renaissance delighted in stories of individuals transformed out of all recognition" (Greenblatt 35). Performances allow us to observe and accept things that are taboo in the real world. It transforms wearing the "wrong" clothing from a sin to an important device of the theatre. Without the real world reaction of contempt for cross-dressing, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola have the opportunity to act as women and as men. Shakespeare's comedies embrace both the woman bound to passivity and male domination, as well as the active, criminal, cross-dressing woman; "J. M. Barrie once said

that critics complained about Shakespeare's women, 'as if he did not know what times were coming for women' [...] he knew, but he had to write with the knowledge that if he was too advanced about women, his plays would be publicly burned in the garden of Stationer's Hall'' (Fleming 3). In the plays, cross-dressing is not a crime but a tool for the women to gain access to the masculine world. The stage eliminates the public penalties for cross-dressing. Instead, it is used to escape from the conflict center to the play. The audience would, with only a few exceptions, perceive gender deconstruction as amusing; "Elizabethan entertainment relied heavily on the elements of disguise, deception, and multiple role-playing [...] thus inevitably prompting playwrights to question any simple view of human identity" (Crewe 442).

These ideas on cross-dressing rely on an understanding of the connection between clothing and identity. A change of appearances changes perception of personality and capabilities. In "Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory," Jones and Stallybrass explore the construction of identity through clothing; "gender, class, and memory are materialized through worn habits" (Jones 13). Cross-dressing is a basic rejection of hierarchy in these plays. One unmarked by gender does not fit into the dichotomy of the dominant and submissive, the subject and the object. There are freedoms available with disguise. Women can become the traders, the organizers of love. Women can be heard. A man will listen to a man.

It is the disguise that allows the immediate transformation from daughter, niece, or sister (positions of complete passivity) to a doctor/lawyer, page/advisor, or personal assistant to a duke (positions of authority). The motivations for Portia, Rosalind, and Viola vary; however, prominent motivations are "a) to cover their female parts and avoid lascivious approach; b) to get male privileges; c) to express defiance at patriarchy" (Ward 39). Whether for protection,

privilege, or defiance, costuming is used to gain a new identity and social status among men. All three plays start with fatherless, marriageable women, and their vulnerability in this situation becomes a motivation to cross-dress. They are in the world of courtship with wealth and no one to listen to them, so “they deal with their sudden vulnerability by taking on, quite literally, the guise of their absent fathers” (Hamilton 125). They assume the masculine form as an attempt to control their own circumstances. They are eager to join in social bonds (such as marriage) but also seek to have some amount of power.

Their disguises do not create a single effect of either gain or loss of control, but rather different opportunities and different approaches at linguistic exchange. During their time spent cross-dressed, these women form social bonds via exchanges of advice or lessons (which can be either easy or very distressing). Portia tests Bassanio’s love with the ring test; Rosalind seeks to both test and teach Orlando of the real way to love; and Viola teaches Orsino that women can love just as much as men can. These women must have power in their relationships in order for the men to accept their gifts and their varied forms of advice.

The challenge of these plays is to empower women within the plays while keeping the ending convention of marriage. Marriage is still, symbolically the gifting of a woman, the objectifying of a woman as exchangeable between fathers and husbands. The leading ladies, however hopeful their exchanges of jewelry and language are, are still left to be the objects of exchange. No matter how much dominance they show or how thoroughly they reject the patriarchy, the plays *do* end in marriage, or promise of it; it is the nature of a comedy to end in marriage, with or without fathers.

However, Carroll suggests that these three women are “capable of, and receptive to, metamorphosis, not only achieve their loves, but at the same time regain their lost shapes; yet at the end they are no longer the same as at the beginning of the play” (Carroll 31). She sees that they either learn something or change the world around them, establishing themselves as capable of dealing within the exchanges and bonds between men. They transgress the rules of gender and, without their fathers’ presence, pursue their husbands. Each of the three plays illustrates the change in the world differently, showing the different degrees to which male exchange has been impacted by these women. The weddings at the end of these comedies are single examples of how these plays highlight the empowerment of women, breaking from the objectification within the gender hierarchy.

In *Merchant of Venice*, Portia removes Shylock, Gratiano, Antonio, and Bassanio from pedestals of superiority. Not only does she stop Shylock’s life-threatening usurpation of Antonio, but she also stops Antonio’s usurpation of her husband. Only when Antonio believes himself close to death does he suggest that he might relinquish his masculine power onstage for her feminine one. Monica Hamill says, “Antonio resigns himself to death because he foresees that his sacrifice will forever cast Portia’s love for Bassanio into the shadow of his own greater love” (Hamill 232). By surrendering his life, Antonio is showing a masculine power, unbeatable by the feminine domestic powers. Disguised as Balthasar, Portia not only stops his self-sacrifice, but she reclaims her husband. Her disguise gives her the ultimate control over Bassanio and over male exchange in the play. At the end of the play, Antonio says to Portia, “I dare be bound again, / my soul upon the forfeit, that your lord/ will never more break faith advisedly” (5.1.251-3). She gains control of Antonio’s power over Bassanio and is able to have

her husband's full heart in her possession. Portia's power as a man lets her control all of the bonds of love, whether domestic, romantic love or worldly, homosocial love.

Rosalind changes the world to a lesser degree. She does not redefine the world of masculine exchange, but of her own exchange. At her wedding in *As You Like It*, "To her father and fiancé, she makes identical vows," submitting to both men, saying, "To you I give myself, for I am yours," (Hamilton 150, 5.1.114-5). However, upon meeting Orlando, she illustrates her defiance of patriarchal rule over love, expressing to Celia, "But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?" (3.4.36). She gets herself to the wedding. In Act 3, Scene 4, Rosalind confesses that she met her father in the woods; still she "avoids her father's recognition and establishes her own household within the forest" (Montrose 105). This is the same man for whom she mourns at the beginning, incapable of pleasure. She remains a man even after she has the opportunity to submit again to the role of passivity under her father's protection. Rosalind rejects her father and is responsible for not only her marriage, but also the marriage of three other couples.

In *Twelfth Night*, no moment of dominance is apparent. The story begins with Viola's separation from her brother, and ends with them being reunited, and her corresponding marriage to Orsino. Before their wedding, Orsino, who is leading cross-dressed Viola offstage, says, "Cesario, come—/ For so you shall be while you are a man/ but when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress and his fancy queen" (5.1.378-81). Viola is again a commodity— 'her master's mistress,' to be exchanged from the role of daughter/sister to that of wife, creating a bond between Orsino and Sebastian (5.1.320). The only changes that she does make on the

world are the circumstances of other lovers. Both Olivia and Orsino become engaged, when Olivia never thought that she could love again, and Orsino thought that he could love no other than Olivia.

Shapiro explains, “In each of [Shakespeare’s] plays involving a cross-dressed heroine, he tried something different. He varied or complicated the motif with increasing ingenuity” (Shapiro 9). Shakespeare produces a spectrum of power, starting with Portia (the most in control of commodities), through Rosalind, to Viola (the most like a commodity herself). However, supporting females also change the dynamic of each play. Characters like Nerissa, Jessica, Celia, and Olivia complicate the roles of women throughout these various exchanges. Although each of these plays illustrates different obstacles, the movement through each play begins with a woman as an object of exchange and seeks to end the play in the same way. However, Shakespeare alters the anticipated by using exchange as a tool to empower women.

This paper seeks to analyze the progression of exchanged objects in *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. First, there is the exchange of women. These three plays begin with fatherless daughters entering a masculine world and preparing for marriage. This section examines the submission of the females in these plays. The second section examines the material objects that these women are able to exchange, focusing on the gifts of jewelry to their suitors. A woman shows both dependence on her father’s wealth and will and independence within her relationship to the man whom she desires. The third section examines the exchange of language that occurs when these women are disguised as men. In return for these lessons of

love, these women receive husbands who have changed for the better. The progression of the exchanges towards feminine authority alters the negative connotation of marriage established by the patriarchy.

II. Exchange of Women

It is not unusual that all three of these plays begin with a single daughter and end with her transition into a wife. It is a classic theme in Shakespearean comedies to exchange women in marriage through a bond between fathers and husbands. However, what is unusual about these comedies is the absence of fathers at the beginnings of the plays. The bonds created between Portia, Rosalind, and Viola and their fathers restrict their mobility in the patriarchal economy. These women must respect their fathers' wills, even in their absence.

Father figures are important in a woman's entrance into the courting world. The reliance on a father is not restricted to a father's role as a bride giver, but also as a dowry giver. Unwed women are at the complete disposal of their fathers. Future husbands also have this potential for domination over women. A woman does not become independent when she is no longer a man's daughter because she transforms into another man's wife. Fathers and husbands belong to the same order of control. They are the subjects of exchange when women are the objects of exchange.

Marriage lies at the heart of all comedies. The format of the comedy introduces young lovers, who find themselves in trouble, before they are brought back together with the union of marriage. However, marriage is also a commercial exchange. It is the central exchange that drives the plot of romantic comedies. The woman is the gift around which the smaller gifts of jewels, loans, letters, and advice circulate; "The result of a gift of women is more profound than the result of other gift transactions, because the relationship thus established is not just one of

reciprocity, but one of kinship” (Rubin 778). A bond is created between two men when they share a gift. Sometimes the bond is like that between Antonio and Shylock in *Merchant of Venice*, a lawful bond that requests the return of money or flesh upon a certain date. Other bonds are like the bond between Rosalind’s father, Duke Senior, and her lover, Orlando, to exchange a woman whom they love for the return of kinship and loyalty. Both types of relationships demand reciprocity. However, kinship develops around the second exchange. The men become connected by what they share; “Levi-Strauss adds to the theory of primitive reciprocity the idea that marriages are a most basic form of gift exchange, in which it is women who are the most precious of gifts” (Rubin 778). Marriage is the most precious gift; it is the gift of family. It is a tool for uniting two families into one line, one heritage, and one future. In the bond between a woman’s father and her spouse, concrete exchanges of the woman and the wealth pair with the symbolic exchanges of friendship and kinship.

Although none of the fathers in these three comedies arrange marriages for the heroines, their presence, literally or in spirit, is necessary for a courtly woman to pursue a potential husband. The gift of a woman is not for herself to give; “In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves” (Rubin 780). These rights belong to fathers, brothers, or husbands. Before understanding the role of the husband as the recipient of a woman, one must examine where the exchange begins, with the giver, the father.

The importance of the fathers in these plays is highlighted by the complete lack of mothers; “Since the mothers are presumably long dead—none is even mentioned—the daughters are, for all practical purposes, orphans. At the plays’ outset, each faces a crisis during which she

must fend for herself in the world” (Hamilton 125). The father’s distant control over the young women becomes the only primary source of family. The heroines are never concerned about their dead mothers, only about their dead or exiled fathers and brothers. They have no need for a motherly figure because women are of no use in their entrance into courting. As Luce Irigaray explains, mothers are like any other women, exchangeable objects (808). They are still dependent on their husbands and hold no agency over themselves or their children.

In *Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, the absence of fathers, unlike the absence of mothers, creates a dilemma for their daughters. Portia’s father is dead; Rosalind father is banished; and Viola’s father is dead (although he lives on in her lost brother, Sebastian, who shares the name). All three women begin the play with sorrow and loss. They have been left without a masculine guide and are conscious of the absence of the man needed to enter the world of matrimony. Left orphaned, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola must rely on the power of their fathers, whether it be his money, social connections, or advice; “having been nurtured and valued by a strong parent, the daughter has the resources to cope with adversity. The father may be absent, but his influence continues to guide and sustain her” (Hamilton 126).

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia makes her entrance as a daughter with a body “awearied of this great world”(1.2.1-2). Her first scene is one of passivity; she is “submissive to the will of her dead father” (Shapiro 101). The will acts as both a physical will, relaying the matters of his wealth and inheritance, and his will, as in his resolve, that Portia marry a man worthy of his fortunes and his kinship. Although he is dead, he controls her entrance into the courting world, and therefore into the world of men and trade. She starts as only a daughter, property to be

exchanged from her dead father to a suitor. She holds no agency in her own decisions but she could. Although she has wealth and servants, she chooses to respect her father's will, rather than to reject and break the patriarchal expectations. She chooses to respect masculine order and follow the rules set down for her by a dead man.

Portia illustrates her awareness of her predicament when she says, "I may neither chose who I would nor refuse who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father" (1.2.22-4). She both mourns her father's death and the situation that he has put her in. Although she now possesses her father's wealth, she does not possess his power. Her femininity restricts her mobility and rights within society. Her wealth is not explained within the text and can only be assumed to have been inherited upon her father's death. Portia is dependent, still, on her father's money. She must curb herself to his will and his casket test. Upon his death, he created the test as a way to distribute his daughter and his fortune to another man. The test asks that prospective son-in-laws and heirs choose a casket made of gold, silver, or lead. The men must choose a metal, within which Portia's picture has been hidden. By choosing a metal, a man chooses a monetary value that he associates with Portia. In this way, she is marked distinctively as an object of exchange.

Another father/daughter pair in *Merchant of Venice* is Shylock and his daughter Jessica. Shakespeare sets up this pair to contrast Portia's marriage. Jessica is Portia's foil. Like Portia's mother, Jessica's mother, Leah, is not present. However, at the beginning of the story, Jessica is still with her father, trying to escape his tyranny in order to choose marriage of her own. She expresses her own grief at the fact that she is bound to a present, living father, saying, "To be

ashamed to be my father's child/ But though I am a daughter to his blood, I am not to his manners," and then she decides that she will escape her father and "end this strife,/ become a Christian and [Lorenzo's] loving wife" (2.3.17-21). She chooses not to respect her father's will, running away from her Jewish father to elope with a Christian man. Jessica's elopement and rebellion to her father's will represents the choice Portia does not make. No approval of the exchange exists for Jessica, and no kinship is formed between father and son-in-law.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind, like Portia, is introduced as a fatherless daughter who is lamenting her current situation. Her first lines of the play come in response to her cousin's, Celia's, questions of her mood. She explains, "Unless you could teach me to forget a banished father, you must not learn me how to remember any extraordinary pleasure" (1.2.3-6). She depends on her father for her happiness and her identity in the world. Without him, she does not even 'remember pleasure.' Her uncle, Duke Frederick, compares Rosalind to her father, Duke Senior, illustrating her lack of an independent identity. She is "her father's daughter," a piece of property left without agency (1.3.56). However, because Rosalind is the daughter of a duke, she, like Portia, is also wealthy with money that does not belong to her. It is inheritance that connects her to Duke Senior. Celia introduces her wealth, saying, "Let's [...] get our jewels and our wealth together" (1.3.131-2). Rosalind's money defines her as property of her father, associating her with a monetary value. However, unlike Portia's father, Duke Senior is not dead but exiled. He leaves no will, leaves her with no guidance on marriage. As a woman, she cannot introduce herself into courtship without him there to present her.

In Duke Senior's stead, the masculine dominance over Rosalind shifts to her uncle, Celia's father. Duke Frederick takes advantage of Duke Senior's absence to sever the kinship bond with his brother. He chooses to exile Rosalind, thereby severing the bond between his own daughter, Celia, and Duke Senior's daughter, Rosalind. The brothers are no longer connected by their commodities (their daughters). Rosalind tries to defend herself, claiming independence from her father, saying, "Treason is not inherited [...] mistake me not so much/ to this my poverty is treacherous" (1.3.59-63). She denies a connection between herself and the will, money, and resources of her father. However, she is bound to her father as his property, his commodity, and Duke Frederick is aware of the presence of this bond. Duke Frederick's action of exiling her from court works as a reverse of the kinship bond as built through arranged marriages. His attempting to break all bonds to his brother leaves Rosalind with an unwelcome call for self-reliance. She has no control over her circumstances or wealth of her own as a woman.

Duke Frederick works in much the same way as Shylock as a father at the source of exchange. His daughter, Celia, is within his control at the beginning of the play. Like Jessica, Celia also runs away to escape her father's tyranny, saying to Rosalind, "Shall we part, sweet girl?/ No, let my father seek another heir [...] Now we go in content/ to liberty and not to banishment" (1.3.96-136). She breaks the expectation of patriarchal order. However, as a woman of court, Celia must be married under the bond of kinship between two families, between two men, but it is not Duke Frederick who introduces his daughter to the courting world. It is Ganymede. When Oliver comes to Rosalind to explain his brother's absence, he sees Celia,

disguised, and falls in love (4.3). Via the relationship between his brother and her cousin, their families are connected. However, the connection is not made by a bond between men, but between Orlando and Rosalind disguised as a man. Although Celia's father does not control her marriage, the formality of her betrothal still partially submits to the expected order of exchange in a patriarchal wedding.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is not immediately introduced as a daughter, but as a sister (of a presumably dead brother). Her first concern in the play is whether her brother survived a shipwreck; she says, "perchance he is not drowned," appearing hopeful for his continued presence in her life (1.2.5). The concern is heavily focused on how her life will be in his absence, not on her actual affection for her brother. Her father is also mentioned in this scene. Sharon Hamilton suggests that Viola's father must have died recently; she and Sebastian still appear at an androgynous age. Since her father died on her thirteenth birthday, "it cannot have been more than three years" (Hamilton 136). Viola assumes that her brother, too, has died (so shortly after her father). She has lost both of her connections to the masculine world of exchange and to her entrance into courtship. Even without her father's and her brother's presence, Viola remains chained to them; they are present in her conversation. The masculine system confines her without the company of any blood relatives to protect/possess her. Being property, to Viola, means being in safekeeping. Without a brother or father as her guide in this new land, she is not safe entering it as a woman, or as an unclaimed commodity.

Although Viola does not have a masculine family figure during her entrance into the play, her first scene does put her in a position of subordination. She is dependent on her Captain

(who acts as a father figure). He is present to help Viola in her transition. Viola offers him her father's money in exchange for his knowledge and assistance. He first assures her that she is not alone, showing hope for the life of her lost brother, Sebastian. Viola responds with a monetary gift, saying, "There's gold./ Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope/ whereto thy speech serves for authority/ the like of him" (1.2.19-21). In this exchange, Viola connects her father (via the 'bounteous' money she has on her) to the Captain (1.2.52). She then trusts the Captain with her clothes in exchange for a man's wardrobe. When the Captain has left with her clothes, Viola leaves her womanhood with him. She does not return in these clothes until after the play has ended and she becomes engaged to Orsino.

Olivia's situation, in many ways, parallels Viola's predicament, as she has lost both her father and her brother. Olivia begins the play, as the other heroines do, mourning the loss of a male family member (her brother) and unwilling to enter the courting world without masculine guidance or approval. Like Viola, Olivia has a masculine role model to fill the gap left by her absent father: her uncle Toby. Unlike the Captain, Toby is not a good father-figure. He tries to arrange Olivia's marriage to Andrew Aguecheek, a match that she does not approve of. Olivia, like Jessica and Celia, chooses to marry without fatherly approval. In this way, Olivia offers a contrast to Viola's insistence on a preexisting relationship between her husband and her father. In the decision of her groom, Olivia chooses Cesario/Sebastian based on her own, independent desire, abiding by no will, no memories, and no family connections.

Although the plays begin with a bond to a father, they must end with a bond to a husband. The receivers within the exchanges of women are generally selected by the women via fatherly approval. For Portia, Rosalind, and Viola, their fathers are in some way connected to the future husbands. Although approval is not expressly given, the very knowledge that a future husband had some connection to a father is enough for a woman to approve of these romantic interests.

For Portia, she must first face the fear of a possible future with unsuitable suitors before she discovers Bassanio as an approved suitor. The casket test that Portia's father sets up is meant to find not only a husband worthy of his daughter, but also worthy of his fortune. With marriage to Portia comes control of her father's wealth. Portia is even labeled a commodity by Bassanio, who introduces Portia as "a lady richly left" with hair like "golden fleece" (1.1.161, 170). Her beauty is matched equally by her money. Men come from the distances to take this test; "the wide world [is not] ignorant of her worth/ For the four winds blow in from every coast/ renowned suitors" (1.1.167-9). The suitors must gamble their right to marriage (and to heirs); "should a suitor chose the wrong casket he must promise never to generate within the bonds of wedlock his own flesh and blood [...] He will become, in this legal sense, a castrate" (Shell 114). In a lottery of picking gold, silver, or lead, a suitor risks his ability to create a patrilineal line and all of his chances at future love. He must pick a metal that encapsulates a picture of Portia. She is confined by metal; she is confined by her money.

On the other hand, her father's test relies on a choice of humility and an absence of greed. The perfect man will not say that he "deserves" her father's fortune and Portia herself or

that these gifts are “what many men desire” (2.7.23, 37). A man of modesty is a man unable to choose silver or gold. The man who chooses lead in this “hazardous gamble” is a man who will be worthy of kinship and control over all of her father’s commodities (Shell 113). The lead casket asks the suitors to realize their circumstances, to realize that they *must* “give and hazard all”(2.7.16). The risk will either end with the exchange of kinship or a gift in the form of a promise (never to form another kinship). Bassanio makes the right choice and is worthy of these fortunes. What is more important to Portia, however, is that Bassanio, “a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier,” is “worthy of [...] praise” because he “visit[ed] in her father’s time,” (1.2.107-16). Revealing his history with her father means that he is an approved husband. Portia chooses the man both approved of by herself and by her father.

Rosalind’s first encounter with her future husband, Orlando, is before his wrestling match (a display of masculine power) in her uncle’s court. However, she has no right to connect herself to him without approval. Her approval comes when she is able to connect her own father, Duke Senior, to Orlando’s father, Sir Rowland de Boys. She explains that her father “loved his father dearly” (1.3.29). A bond is created between both absent fathers as they “are giving a symbolic blessing to Rosalind and Orlando’s union” (Hamilton 145). Duke Senior plays the same role as Portia’s father; he unites the young lovers with approval even in his absence. However, Rosalind’s father still lives. Orlando and Duke Senior are able to make their bonds in person. In Act Two, Scene Seven, Orlando meets Duke Senior in the woods, and together they speak of the hardships of the times and form a bond. Again, the two are seen bonding when Orlando tells Rosalind, “I must attend the duke at dinner. By two o’clock I will

be/ with thee again” (4.1.154-5). He leaves his bond with Rosalind behind in favor of bonding with her father. This puts the kinship bond between men at a higher value than the bond between young lovers. Because Duke Senior lives, his actual consent, rather than a memory or implied consent, is needed for the play to end in marriage. Rosalind, dressed as Ganymede, in the final scene, says, “You say, if I bring in your Rosalind,/ You will bestow her on Orlando here?” explicitly asking her father for permission to wed Orlando (5.4.6-7).

Viola, just like Portia and Rosalind, links her father to her future husband. In her very first scene she exclaims, “Orsino! I have heard my father name him/ He was a bachelor then” (1.2.28-9). Knowing that her father spoke well of Duke Orsino, Viola has the opportunity to choose him as a husband. Her father-figure, the Captain of the ship, also knows of Orsino. There are very few clues about this bond before Viola changes into a man for the entirety of the play. This one statement becomes enough approval for Viola to move into Orsino’s household to work for him. She quickly bonds with Orsino as Cesario, as a man, which becomes another way of connecting Duke Orsino to her family. Her masculine disguise would look much like her identical twin brother. Viola carries the memory of Sebastian with her, in effect, dressing so like him that they appear with “One face, one voice, one habit, [but] two persons” (5.1.211). Therefore, Orsino’s quick bond with Cesario becomes an imitation bond with her brother, Sebastian.

The relationships created between men frame the world in which feminine exchange must define itself. The masculine kinship bond labels women as objects of exchange. Portia’s father,

Rosalind's father (Duke Senior), and Viola's father and brother (the dual Sebastians) have distinct roles as givers (even though they are all absent at the start of the play). In the world of commercial exchange, they are giving away the most precious commodity: a human being and the right to be known as kin. For all three fatherless women, their "preferred suitor is linked to a past time when her life was more secure" (Hamilton 137). These suitors are familiar to the family. As recipients in the exchange, they return loyalty and honor for the gifts of a bride and her dowry. They give symbolic gifts in exchange for physical gifts.

The difference between symbolic economics and real economics also plays a role in the exchange between women and men. Irigaray questions what would happen if "women left behind their condition as commodities- subject to being produced, consumed, valorized, circulated, and so on, by men alone- and took part in elaborating and carrying out exchanges" (Irigaray 810). In the next chapter, these exchanges are qualified by Portia's, Rosalind's, and Olivia's gifts of engagement jewelry. In the world of exchange, the women offer trinkets of romantic love and pocket change, but men rarely take these exchanges seriously. Being commodities themselves, participation in trade is restricted and challenging for women. The exchange of jewelry is, nonetheless, an opportunity for women to breach the line between object and subject, moving away from their inferior role as a bride. Although material exchange does not allow as much power as linguistic exchange does, by giving a physical gift, a woman gains more power to intervene within the patriarchy by becoming a participant, rather than a gift herself.

III. Rings and the Exchange of Materials *by* Women

Although a woman begins as a gift, a dependent object with no private funds or powers within exchange, when she uses jewelry as a gift she can disrupt the pattern within the masculine domain of exchange. Instead of being restricted to being property, property passes through her to a man. Jewelry is traditionally a man's gift for a woman. It is a gift of romance, rings especially, as they represent promises of fidelity and love in return. The exchange of jewelry proves how "love and money are [...] closely interconnected" (Holderness 27). These moments represent the space where a woman is allowed to give materials and participate in exchange. Although the gift giver in an exchange possesses an innate power, dependence on a father's income restricts the amount of power that women as gift givers can really claim.

At the beginning of these plays, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola are introduced as wealthy, melancholy women with wealthy, missing fathers. They are inheritors of fortunes, looking to share it with a husband. The literal exchange of material wealth constructs a new kind of relationship. While a woman's use of her father's fortune attaches herself to him, removing independence, it simultaneously creates an opportunity to be involved in exchange with men. Komter recognizes that "Women's gift giving is caught in a fundamental paradox," explaining that giving gifts can either be "a powerful means of affirming social identities and of creating and maintaining social relationships," or a "risk of losing [...] identity by giving much too others" (Komter 96). The situation that is created puts a woman in a place of power while asking her to give what she does not really possess. Giving jewelry is costly, and the gift of jewelry is an affirmation of status and power.

The gifts of jewelry in these plays become even more complicated on top of the underlying dependence on fathers. For Portia, her ring is accepted by Bassanio, and then given away by the suggestion of a man. She struggles to retain the power over the gift recipient. Viola does not even give a ring; it is Olivia who steps up into this position of exchanger. Olivia pretends that Viola has given her a ring, and returns it in order to guarantee the return of Cesario/Viola. The ring is a mock gift from Viola and a gift disguised as an unwanted return from Olivia. This ring travels between the hands of women, with no intentions of engagement or promise of love and fidelity. Rosalind's gift of jewelry takes on another problem, as she gives a chain to Orlando, rather than a ring. The chain does not have the symbolic connotations of engagement or femininity associated with it. It is a more masculine material gift. The complications that arise around these gifts of jewelry make these women's attempt at exchange and attempt at power a challenge.

In the *Merchant of Venice*, exchange of material wealth absolutely surges through the plot. The very conflict of the play is a loan between Shylock and Antonio. Portia attempts to send her own money to save her husband's friend, but finds her money worthless in that situation. Women cannot alter circumstances with money, because the exchange of money is within the masculine domain. However, her wealth is still very important in her relationship with Bassanio. She has already been marked in connection to her father's inheritance and his metal caskets during the test. Rather than being inside of a casket of gold or silver (materials of jewelry), her portrait is hidden within the modest lead casket. Although linked to wealth, she is

independent from jewelry. In these comedies, jewelry exchange is the woman's domain. It is a safer material exchange because of its feminine associations and its correlation to love and marriage.

Portia's use of the betrothal ring with Bassanio is a statement of her family's wealth and ability to give expensive gifts. As a gift from her to her husband, the ring has more value than other objects of exchange; it is "an emblem of faith and trust" (Kunz 209). She displays a moment of power beyond the feminine passivity when she demands that Bassanio keep the ring as a sign of his fidelity, "which when [he] part[s] from, lose[s], or give[s] away/ let it presage the ruin of [his] love/ and be [her] vantage to exclaim on [him]" (3.2.172-4). Essentially, Portia threatens Bassanio about keeping her gift close. Portia gains an active role, rather than a feminine, passive role, in their relationship; "When Portia sets firm conditions for the ring, she ostensibly interrupts and blocks off the circle of gift-giving" (Singh 154).

Even minor characters in *Merchant of Venice* give engagement gifts of jewelry to their husbands; "The sacred and peculiar quality of a ring that has been given to a man by his wife as a memorial of marriage is expressed in strong terms in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*" (Kunz 247). Portia's gift is amplified by its repetition with Nerissa and Jessica. Jessica's ring is part of her father's fortune that she steals when she runs away with Lorenzo, who is an unapproved husband. Her dowry is not provided by her father in a bond with Lorenzo. Jessica also breaks the tradition of the ring, as she does not share it with her husband. It does not become a symbol of empowerment, bonding, or love. She sells this ring for a monkey, eliminating the romantic ideas of kinship, love, and fidelity in exchange for its worth only as monetary value. This ring becomes the reverse of Portia's ring; rather than turn money that does not belong to her into a

symbol of power, Jessica turns a symbol of power into money to spend on something frivolous. The ring, however, has the same history. It was given to her father, Shylock, as a betrothal gift from her mother, Leah. Jessica's ring offers a strict contrast to Portia's ring because it does not come from a willing father, nor is it given to a husband. The tradition of the ring is corrupted with Jessica's unapproved exchange.

On the other hand, Nerissa's gift to Gratiano predicts exactly how Portia's exchange turns out. It is a symbol of fidelity. Although Nerissa's father is never mentioned, nor her ability to afford the ring, it becomes the same symbol of power with an air of mystery. Nerissa becomes a shadow to point out the power of Portia's exchange. In the ring test in the final scene, Nerissa plays the same game with Gratiano as Portia does with Bassanio, to test his devotion and her control. The ring holds true to these symbols of fidelity and power. It is a gift loaded with relevance, echoing Portia's actions.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola does not give a ring. She is shipwrecked, without her fortune, and depends on her only living, masculine relative, her brother, to control her situation. Shakespeare, however, still includes the exchange of a ring in a creative way. Where Viola lacks in the play, her counterpart, Olivia, steps up. Olivia's ring becomes the object of exchange. Both Viola and Olivia transition "from loving dead brothers to loving unattainable male figures" (Kahn 42). Olivia, however, does not strive to preserve her brother's memory and guidance. Olivia's present is different from Portia's or Rosalind's gifts of jewelry because she does not *need* her father to enter courtly exchange. She does not need approval in the form of a memory or a bond between her beloved and her deceased father. Cesario is a foreign, young, feminine

male who has no connection to her family. She ignores her uncle Toby's attempts to arrange her marriage to Sir Andrew Aguecheek in order to chase Cesario. Although Sir Toby disapproves of the match, Olivia's independence is resilient. She gives gifts and picks her own husband, negotiating her own marriage.

This ring exchange is more complicated than that in *Merchant of Venice*, as Olivia does not simply present the man she is courting with a ring. Olivia gives the ring to Cesario through her servant Malvolio, saying, "He left this ring behind him [...] Tell him I'll have none of it [...] If that youth will come this way tomorrow/ I'll give him reasons for't" (2.1.290-5). Viola immediately knows that she, as Cesario, has "charmed" Olivia (2.2.18). This symbolic ring appears to be a gift from Cesario, and therefore from the duke. However, it is Olivia's gift, passed through the hands of a man, in order to conceal her intentions. Viola's response to the gift is one of futility. She says, "Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness [...] our frailty is the cause [...] O Time, thou must untangle this, not I; / It is too hard a knot for me t' untie" (2.2.27-41). This exchange is actually taking place between women. Although Olivia pretends that this is normal exchange, Viola is tormented by the artificiality of it. This ring is not the same symbol of power as it is between Portia and Bassanio. Rather, it highlights Viola's lack of power by showing Olivia's grasp of it. Viola doesn't have the willpower, and "Although she initially displays a brisk resolve to take control of her life, as the play unfolds she feels herself trapped by events she cannot subdue to her will, and soon throws herself on the mercy of Time" (Shapiro 155). She lacks the ability to actively alter the situations of economics or love.

However, Olivia's apparent seizure of power (in deciding her own marriage and giving gifts of jewelry without masculine approval) has complications of its own. She devalues the ring's importance; "Rings figure often in the complications of literary plots and in historical legend, and they are the subject of much speculative comment" (Hazard 112). In *Twelfth Night*, the ring is no longer the anticipated symbol of commitment or empowerment. Olivia destroys order and expectations by being attracted to a man that her father never knew, by being attracted to a woman dressed as a man, by giving a false gift of jewelry, and by not producing equal exchanges. Because she does not follow the conventions, she does not become as fortunate as Viola does. By following the rules of feminine submission, Viola secures a happy ending of an equal relationship with a man she loves. She denies Olivia's ring and Olivia's second attempt at a gift of jewelry. Olivia asks Viola, "Here, wear this jewel for me; tis my picture" (3.4.199). Olivia tries to share a locket, but Viola rejects it. Her gifts are not exchanged, and she does not receive anything from her gift recipients. She gives a pearl to Sebastian to solidify their bond, but she is unaware that she has no bond with that man, and is giving an empty gift, a gift without reward (4.3.2). Then, offstage, Olivia and Sebastian are married, and their bond together is "strengthened by the interchangement of [...] rings" (5.1.154). Her jewelry exchanges do not benefit her in the same way that Portia's exchanges do. She falls in love with a woman but, by mistake, marries Sebastian rather than the "man" with whom she fell in love.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind's gift to Orlando is not a ring but a gold chain. However, Mary Hazard explains in *Elizabethan Silent Language* that chains have just as powerful of a history in exchange and proving oneself worthy by being able to exchange them as rings (Hazard

119-22). She explains how the length was related to amount of gold, and therefore value of the piece; it was worn by nobles and gentlemen and “represented the man” (Hazard 120). The exchange of a chain does not have the feminine connotation of a ring. Rosalind’s gift of a chain is closer to the standard because she does not exchange it for a promise or for fidelity. It is simply a symbol of her status and wealth and of her father’s status and wealth. The chain is a more appropriate use of her father’s fortune than a ring filled with feminine, matrimonial symbolism. The chain could just as likely have been a gift from him. The chain does not have inherent romance; it gains it only because it is given by a woman. With this gift deviating less from patriarchal expectation, Rosalind also gains less power.

Rosalind’s father is very important in her jewelry exchange, not only because she is financially dependent on him. Only after she has connected her father and Orlando’s father does she exchange the jewelry with him. Disguised as a reward for a courtly entertainer (given to him at the wrestling match), the chain is really an attempt at empowerment and expression of romantic interest. Although not a ring, “when offered as gifts, [jewelry] carried a meaning more specific, more personal, more precious, and certainly more lasting than most gifts” (Hazard 109). The altered circumstances of Rosalind as a daughter, in that her father is still alive and in control of his own fortune and his own daughter, gives Rosalind less flexibility and power than Portia or Olivia. The necklace reflects this change in conditions. In contrast, the ring is an exchange of promises; “More than any other widely used jeweled artifact, rings were valued for their talismanic and symbolic functions” (Hazard 112). She does not exchange a ring because she is not capable of exchanging one without her father’s inheritance and her father’s approval. She

says that she wants to give Orlando more “but that her hand lacks means” (1.2.234). She cannot give more than this chain, as she has no right to give herself. The right to her future lies in the hand of her father, who is alive at a distance and waiting to be reunited with her.

Jewelry exchange proves to be the domain of a woman, but it offers more challenges than benefits. Successful empowerment cannot be realized by this type of exchange. Outside of a masculine costume, a woman can *only* offer jewelry, dowry, and inheritance, all goods given to her by her father (and more often given *by* the father to the husband). She can only play a passive role in her marriage and her gifting. This traditional gender system “functioned historically in Early Modern England where marriage, among the elite at least, was primarily a commercial transaction determined by questions of dowry, family alliances, land ownership, and inheritance” (Newman 23). The patriarchal order impedes a woman’s success within trade, making significant exchanges nearly impossible and making her more likely to be the object of exchange than a participant. Although material exchange can offer some authority to the woman, linguistic exchange is how her potential can be reached. During the passage from commodity, to artificial man, and back to commodity, she has more control over economics when her gender has changed and when men will accept her gifts of advice.

IV. Cross-dressing and the Exchange of *Language*

The gift of language becomes an exchange in these plays because it demands a response from the recipient. Control of language and the ability to produce it as a gift creates a superiority in the subject of exchange; “it is not only the creativity of our language capacity that defines our humanity, but our ability to give language gifts that others can receive” (Vaughan 20). The gift of language in these plays is produced in the forms of advice or lessons. Within these exchanges, the receiver has an obligation of reciprocity—to learn from the words and respond appropriately. As within a material exchange, the receiver of a gift of language submits to the dominance (whether with wealth or words) of the giver. This return can alter the circumstances in favor of the giver.

Portia’s linguistic exchanges illustrate a full progression of her command as the circumstances of the exchanges change and as her gender changes. The power of language comes easier and earlier for Portia than it does for any of these other women. Portia’s first linguistic exchange takes place in Belmont, when she is still dressed in her womanly wardrobe, still unmarried, and still bound to her dead father. During the casket tests, Portia intervenes in her own future by playing the song, “Tell me where is fancy bred, / or in the heart or in the head,” in order to sway Bassanio’s decision towards the rhyming choice of *lead* (3.2.63-64). In this scene, all three types of goods (a woman, material wealth, and language) are being used as devices in Bassanio’s decision. However, because the other suitors made the wrong choice without Portia’s linguistic help, it seems that her gift of language is the most powerful in

encouraging the correct choice. Language is a more valuable gift than the offer of a woman or the temptations of gold and silver caskets. Portia gives a lesson to Bassanio and opens an exchange. By actively guiding his answer, she produces a returned gift: marriage to the man whom she chooses. This is Portia's least active language exchange. Although Portia controls language, she does not produce the music herself. As a woman, she has no right to personally change the rules of the test. The gift could not be accepted by Bassanio from her own mouth because it would defy the order of exchange, disrespect her father's will, and imply that she does not trust her future husband's abilities. If Portia, as a woman, used her own language to change the test, she would disrupt the patriarchy.

In order to give language rightfully as a gift to a man, Portia must change into a man. Cross-dressing assists Portia's control over language and her ability to use words as gifts. When she changes from the traditionally weak role of woman into a man, Portia is allowed to become more authoritative and more active. Instead of being her father's daughter or Bassanio's wife, she is allowed to take on dominant roles of a doctor and a judge. Cross-dressing allows Portia to offer a gift of advice, or a lesson, to help Antonio and Bassanio. Language becomes a tool for power. As Vaughan explains, the "conception of language" has long been identified as a masculine tool due to "biologism, Phallogocentrism, and the symbolic order of the father" (Vaughan 20). Just as these plays break other boundaries, the gender boundary on language is broken as the women show mastery over linguistic exchange.

Portia's first task of language exchange as a man is to solve the dispute between Shylock and Antonio. It is significant that her first language exchange is such a masculine exchange of power and violence to protect Antonio, her husband's friend. The exchange of language is not with someone with whom she wishes to bond but instead with someone over whom she wishes to gain control. She aims to change the circumstances in the masculine world of loans and bonds by acting as a judge, bringing a sense of morality and humility back to the men who have run amuck with their masculine power. She uses language as she considers men do, with intentions to "speak of fray/ like a fine bragging youth, and tell quaint lies" and finds a loophole in the language of the bond (3.4.68-9). Using the authority of a judge and of a man, she deciphers the language of men.

Although Portia's task begins as saving her husband's friend, a challenge that she can pursue with a calm and composed logic, the circumstances change when Shylock's attack becomes personal. Portia grows emotional and cruel with her interpretation of the men's language after Shylock provokes her. Shylock says, "These be the Christian husbands!" an insult aimed at Bassanio, and continues, "I have a daughter; / Would any of the stock of Barabbas/ had been her husband, rather than a Christian" (4.1.293-5). Shylock recalls the father's right to exchange a daughter and the kinship drawn up between a father and his son-in-law. However, his anger with Christians is muddled with his anger at his daughter for running away with Lorenzo, a Christian. He connects Bassanio as a Christian to Bassanio as a husband, insulting him all the more. Portia's task is no longer solving a public dispute. She has the male privilege of defending her lover (of playing the hero), on top of her power over the finances of these men. In a 'quaint lie,' Portia tells Shylock that he will walk away with his pound of flesh,

before saying to him, “but in the cutting 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” (4.1.306-10). She gives him an opportunity at power and strips it away with a turn of phrase. As Balthasar, Portia acquires control of the situation that her feminine fortune could not fix. It is only with the authority of appearance and mastery of language that she can alter the exchanges of this scene. In return, Portia gains the respect and allegiance of Antonio.

While Portia allows the exchange to continue, she removes the masculine threat of violence from the exchange. It is no longer sacrificial; she removes the body (in this case Antonio’s body) as an object of exchange. This action hints at the exchange of marriage, making a commentary on the cruelty of placing a body as the object in exchange. Exchange becomes reserved for words and money. Thanks to Portia as Balthasar, rules of exchange are preserved, but no blood is drawn.

Linguistic exchange is also used to teach men the knowledge that women have about love. It is a gift to a groom-- for a return of a better groom. Gaining authority through masculine costume, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola use the appearance of authority to give authority to their words on love. Because of their lessons on love, the world surrounding these women adjusts itself to understand love in a different way. Love is not receiving dowry, loans, and jewels (Bassanio), not fawning over a woman and treating her as a material prize (Orlando), and not a purely masculine art (Orsino). Marriage becomes redefined as not purely a masculine

exchange, but one in which women should play a less stereotypically subordinate role. A woman (changed into a man) exchanges advice for a well-trained husband.

Portia's third exchange of language is the ring test that follows Shylock and Antonio's trial, bringing together Portia's power with jewelry and her power with words. After the trial, Balthasar is offered an exchange from Antonio and Bassanio. At first she says that completing the job makes her feel "well paid," and then asks, "know me when we meet again" (4.1.417). She offers clues that her returned gift should only be a bond of loyalty and friendship; "By offering a gift, the giver solicits friendship, establishes a relationship, perhaps seeks a reward. Gift-giving can be competitive—its underlying motives are competition, rivalry, show and a desire for greatness and wealth" (Newman 20). Antonio, her rival, turns this exchange into a competition. He and Bassanio insist on rewarding Balthasar materially, so she plays along, demanding Bassanio's wedding ring four times. Although Portia had warned Bassanio not to lose the ring, dressed as Balthasar, she demands the ring as a prize for saving his friend. She provides an emotional test for Bassanio's will, a test in which she can give the better gift: a wife, a fortune, and a future (things that Antonio cannot guarantee his friend).

To test Bassanio's faithfulness, Portia says to him, "And if your wife be not a mad woman, [...] she would not hold out enemy for ever/ for giving it to me" (4.1.443-5). Antonio takes power over his friend and convinces him to give away the ring. In this scene, Antonio clearly holds more influence over her husband than Portia does. Antonio only says, "Let his deservings, and my love withal, / be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (4.1.448-9). Bassanio bends to his will, for his love. This is the second exchange of this ring. The first time

it was between man and woman in a wedding bond, and the second between man and “man.”

The ring is no longer a symbol of fidelity, as Portia wished it. It now becomes a material exchange of thanks and memory, a monetary exchange between men, losing its romantic significance.

In the final scene, Portia, dressed again as a woman, responds to his betrayal, “If you had known the virtue of the ring [...] or your own honor to contain the ring/ you would not have parted with the ring. / What a man is there so much unreasonable/ if you had pleased to have defended it [...] wanted the modesty to urge the thing held as ceremony?” (5.1.199-206). This speech parallels her artificial demands that only a mad woman would ask him to keep the ring; only an unreasonable man would have asked for the ring. Portia plays both sides of this argument in order to make Bassanio realize that it must be *his* decision to submit to the will of his wife. He cannot listen to Antonio’s advice any more. In a final act of assertion, Portia exchanges the ring a third time, this time through Antonio’s hand, saying, “Give him this,/ and bid him keep it better than the other” (5.1.254-5). Antonio becomes neither a giver nor a receiver. The ring is passed through the hands of another person, just as in *Twelfth Night*, in order to disguise its intentions. However, Antonio is ruined by his duties as a messenger. Portia excludes him from the exchange, essentially retracting his influence on the second exchange of the ring. Antonio becomes a messenger for Portia’s cleverness and power over language. He delivers her ring to Bassanio, serving and empowering her. It is in this exchange that Portia, “in a kind of fusion of Balthasar and the Portia of the first three acts, judges *and* forgives, gives *and* receives, accepting the men’s promised conversion rather than forcing it upon them” (Carroll

125). Portia gives a lesson of loyalty to her husband and a lesson of humility to his friend, gaining a husband who is devoted to her alone.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind in disguise as Ganymede sets up lessons in love with Orlando. She demands his attention (where Portia demands a ring), saying to Orlando, “I would cure you, if you would but call me Rosalind and come everyday to my cote and woo me” (3.2.410-1). Her test, like Portia’s, assesses his loyalty to the relationship. Rosalind demands his promptness, unwavering attention, and ability to pretend that “Ganymede” is his love, Rosalind. She proposes the exchange of a cure for lovesickness if he plays the male role in her performance/test when she says, “I will take upon me to wash your liver as clean as a sound sheep’s heart, that there shall not be one spot of love in’t [...] if you would but [...] woo me” (3.2.406-11). Instead she gives a lesson on how lovers should love and how they should display said love. She says she is giving him one lesson, but instead provides another, bending her words to convince Orlando to accept her linguistic offering. In return, she is wooed, and his true love is confirmed.

Orlando’s inappropriate fawning needs to be confirmed as true love, so Rosalind uses deception and word games to assess his love; “She is doing nothing wrong, for she merely leads Orlando toward the very thing he incessantly wants” (Ward 53). He is asked to give Ganymede his time. However, this is just as much of a gift to the lovesick Rosalind as it is to the lovesick Orlando. In her training in love, dressed as a man, pretending to be herself, she demands Orlando’s quick return to her, threatening, “if you break one jot of your promise or come one minute behind your hour, I will think you the most pathological break-promise, and the most hollow lover, and the most unworthy of her you call Rosalind” (4.1.178-81). In this, Rosalind

demands an exchange. He will only get Rosalind if he can make an oath, another type of language exchange.

However, Orlando is not as capable with language exchanges as Rosalind is. By running late, he breaks his oath. Instead, he sends his brother, Oliver, with a gift of a bloody napkin as proof that he would have come if he could have. Rosalind, dressed as Ganymede, swoons and then pretends she was performing as Rosalind. At this, Oliver questions her manhood, advising her to “take a good heart and counterfeit to be a man” (4.3.171-2). Blood is symbolic of both genders, highlighting the gender divisions that compose Rosalind/Ganymede. It represents both a woman’s virginity or menstruation and a man’s battle wounds or ability to stomach violence. Orlando does not strive to help his cause with Rosalind, only her male counterpart, Ganymede. He offers a bodily exchange of blood for forgiveness, recalling the violence of the trial scene in *Merchant of Venice*. Portia halts Shylock’s flesh exchange, and Rosalind swoons at Orlando’s blood exchange, illustrating that blood and flesh are unacceptable gifts to exchange with women. The gift of this napkin, too, appears to be a mistake for Orlando. In the same way that Bassanio fails his test, by giving a material item as a substitute for a verbal gift exchange, Orlando fails by using a napkin in the place of a promise. The gift to Ganymede is an excuse for his broken loyalty.

When Rosalind reassumes her womanhood, she does not continue to chastise her lover for his broken promise, as Portia does. In fact, she forgives Orlando for his failure while still dressed as Ganymede, saying, “I will weary you no longer [...] I know you are a gentleman of good conceit [...] I am a magician [...] if you will to be married tomorrow, you shall; and to

Rosalind if you will” (5.2.49-70). She instead decides that he has learned his lesson and essentially proposes offering herself as a gift in exchange for him being a well-learned husband. The exchanges of language (the love test) and the exchange of the bloodied napkin are actual exchanges between a woman and a man, building on the bond they will carry into marriage. However, to the outside eye and even to Orlando, this is an exchange between men. Exchange between men is one of friendship and trust. Rubin explains that, “One can solicit a friendly relationship in the offer of a gift; acceptance implies a willingness to return a gift and a confirmation of the relationship” (Rubin 778). Their relationship is confirmed as one of friendship before they enter the relationship of husband and wife. Ganymede can rely on Orlando to do her bidding, and Orlando can rely on Ganymede to prepare him for love and reward him with his lover.

In *Twelfth Night*, Viola’s cross-dressing is not intended to be a path into verbal exchange with men. Where Portia and Rosalind use their costumes to exchange with their lovers, Viola is not Orsino’s lover when she disguises herself and does not desire exchange with men; she changes for protection, not for power. She hopes, in her only scene as Viola, that she “might not be delivered to the world, / Till [she] had made [her] own occasion mellow/ what [her] estate is” (1.2.42-4). As Jean Howard says, “Viola adopts male dress as a practical means of survival in an alien environment and, perhaps, as a magical means of keeping alive a brother, believed drowned, and of delaying her own entry into the heterosexual arena” (Howard 431). Her masculine mask protects her in the masculine world of Illyria. As Cesario, she goes to work in the court of Duke Orsino; instead of gaining power and resisting the patriarchy, Viola finds a

replacement male to take over the power and return her to the position of passivity. However, even in her passivity, Viola does participate in exchanges of language.

Her first language exchange is with Olivia. Although not a lesson to train a better husband, Viola/Cesario uses language to teach Olivia how to love. She shows greater power with language than Olivia when she replies of her parentage, "Above my fortunes, yet my state is well./ I am a gentleman" (1.5.266-8). Olivia is perplexed by this message, repeating it to herself in a monologue; she then says, "I'll be sworn thou art./ Thou tongue [gives] thee fivefold blazon [...] Methinks I feel this youth's perfections/ with an invisible and subtle stealth" (1.5.278-85). She has both been fooled by Viola's mastery of language (which exists because of her authority gained by disguise) and put in awe at her talent and stealth. Viola's mastery of language is only improved by the authority gained in her disguise. Olivia is effectively deceived into believing that Viola is in fact Cesario, "the man" (2.2.25). Olivia believes what Viola tells her and manages to learn from her gifts of language. Although she falls in love with "Cesario's" appearance, she is also mystified by her words. Viola, in a pun on Olivia's speech explains, "if you are she [the lady of the house], you do usurp yourself; for what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve" (1.5.180-1). Olivia has reserved her love for her deceased family, but Viola explains that although she may choose whom to love, she cannot get in her own way and deny her own chance to love. Because of Viola's gifts of language, Olivia is again free to love a new man, freed from her mourning for the men whom she has lost.

Viola also teaches Duke Orsino a lesson in love, giving him a gift. She is unaware that she has entered an exchange; she is oblivious to the fact that she is training her future husband

and being rewarded. When Orsino says to Cesario, “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,” she corrects him (2.4.93-6). She uses her power over language to express her discontent at his view of love, saying, “My father had a daughter loved a man [...] she never told her love [...] for still we [men] prove/ much in our vows but little in our love,” and when asked if she died of lovesickness, Viola responds, “I am all the daughters of my father’s house/ and all the brothers too” (2.4.107-21). Just like Portia and Rosalind, Viola “is given the opportunity to educate her beloved while disguised as a man. She teaches him that women are also desiring objects, and that ‘they are as true of heart as we’” (Suzuki 138). Orsino realizes in this moment that his ability to love is no more outstanding than any woman’s ability is, just more that Olivia’s ability to return his love.

Orsino’s love is then tested, not by Viola but by fate. When he discovers Olivia’s marriage to “Cesario,” his immediate response is not in anger towards Olivia, but towards the one for whom he cares more. He accuses Cesario of being a “dissembling cub,” of breaking the loyalty and the bond that had grown between them (5.1.161). His respect for Cesario/Viola flourished when he receives the linguistic gift, his lesson on love. His anger at the situation proves that his loyalty lies with Cesario/Viola; “Orsino’s agonized sense of betrayal arises more from the loss of Cesario than from the loss of Olivia, a reaction that permits the audience to accept his love for Viola when her true sex is revealed” (Shapiro 163). Unlike Bassanio and Orlando, Orsino passes his test of love. Viola’s accidental exchange of language causes a return of a loyal husband.

Even with her discomfort in costume, Viola causes change in the world around her. She gives lessons of love to both Olivia and Orsino. Olivia, who refuses to love any man since the death of her brother, becomes capable of love again, and Orsino, who can only love one woman, becomes able to love another. Viola breaks gender boundaries and becomes an androgynous icon of love, “deflect[ing] conventional heterosexual courtship in the play, disrupting its normalized hierarchies and trajectories” (Crewe 441). Although she does not overtly try to change the laws of love, her very presence confuses the order of Illyria. Marriage becomes a possibility for both Olivia and Orsino because of what she says to them. Viola gives both the gift of language and the capacity to love to two people (who started hopelessly devoted to not sharing that love).

Linguistic exchange is a clear outlet for power. Although Portia begins with linguistic exchange, when she dresses as Balthasar, she is capable of directly exchanging advice. She gains the ability to strengthen her bond with Bassanio to be stronger than his bond with men. Rosalind’s linguistic exchange only begins when she is dressed as Ganymede. With her costume, she is successful in arranging her own marriage to a man who understands love. Viola’s costume as Cesario brings her closer to Orlando and makes him capable of love and loyalty to her. Cross-dressing and language exchange are closely connected in these plays. They both open up opportunities for authority and changes in appearance, love, and the masculine world of exchange.

Portia, Rosalind, and Viola effectively interfere and break boundaries: the boundaries of love and economics between men and women. Authority over language leads to the shining exchanges of these plays. Through these exchanges, positive futures can be found in the oppressive nature of marriage. These women illustrate their power as equals in bonds and exchanges, paving the way for a healthier, happier marriage of equal respect and power, regardless of gender and what clothes they wear. They change back to their 'women's weeds' and find themselves in a changing world of love and exchange.

V. Conclusion

Merchant of Venice, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*, on the surface, appear as comedies with cross-dressed heroines, acting as the templates for disguise breaking down the power divide within the gender hierarchy. However, the plays reveal themselves as discussions of the gender hierarchy of the *exchange* system. Finding themselves as objects of exchange, women desire not a transformation into manhood, but into subjects of exchange. By becoming the subjects or gift givers, women gain agency, independence, and control. Their journey takes them from objects in marriage exchange between men, to subjects of jewelry exchange with men, and finally to subjects of linguistic exchange as men. Although this pattern of exchange and change is followed in all three plays, Shakespeare uses variations in circumstances and personality to illustrate different progressions in power. Each time Shakespeare uses an absent father, the motif is altered. Likewise, the motif of jewelry exchange gets more complicated with each comedy. Shakespeare also creates contrasting women for every cross-dressed heroine to alter the significance of each exchange. Even with the differences between the plays, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola emerge as the most significant women, capable of being equals to men and capable of using language to become active participants in masculine exchange.

In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare constructs the most challenging alterations to the exchanges. Viola cross-dresses only to be able to place herself again in service of a man. In her very first scene, she submits herself permanently to the power of Duke Orsino. In her submissiveness, Viola is nearly out-staged by Olivia, who seems completely in control of her own exchanges and introduction into nuptial bonds. Olivia takes the role as jewelry giver,

usurping a role that Shakespeare had reserved for his cross-dressed heroines. She even escapes the oppressive condition of mourning for her lost brother before Viola does. However, Shakespeare uses Viola's wallowing and passivity as the key to her empowerment. Because of her submission to Orsino, she is forced to woo Olivia (whom Viola inspires to love living men rather than dead ones). Because of her submission to her own dead family members (referring to herself as her father's daughter), Viola is able to inspire Orsino's understanding of a woman's love. At the end of *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare designs a marriage between equals for Viola and an unequal marriage for Olivia. While Viola does not reach the agency of Portia or Rosalind, her relationship with Orsino is one of friendship and understanding, where Olivia's relationship with Sebastian is one of misunderstanding. Viola is Shakespeare's weakest cross-dressed heroine, making simple, small progress; she is empowered only by circumstance. However, even with the challenges that Shakespeare creates, Viola still gains more power in the patriarchy than Olivia does.

Rosalind is the second strongest heroine, beginning as weak as Viola is, but growing to be strong as Portia is. She is confronted by the differences of her circumstances. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare alters the motif of the absent father to have Rosalind's father in exile, and he alters the jewelry exchange to be of a chain, rather than a ring. These changes become challenges for Rosalind. Unlike Portia or Viola, Rosalind is not freed from possible, future intervention by her father, as Duke Senior still lives. Her use of a chain, rather than a betrothal ring, complicates her attempt at bonding with Orlando through gift exchange. Shakespeare then uses her cousin Celia as a contrast to stress Rosalind's role as a main character. Celia does not

cross-dress, nor does she exchange jewelry. She is dependent on Rosalind for devising plans and relies on Rosalind to make marriage available to her. Rosalind becomes the middle ground between Viola and Portia. She is not in pursuit of power (as Portia is) but protection (as Viola is). However, she does have the opportunity to change back and decides, instead, to remain a man, realizing the empowerment of her language exchanges with Orlando. Shakespeare varies the situation in *As You Like It* so that Rosalind's dominance progresses through self-discovery.

Shakespeare's use of the absent father and ring exchange is the least challenging in *Merchant of Venice*. Portia shows the most strength and initiative, beginning with the most power within the patriarchy, and gaining more power than either Viola or Rosalind. Shakespeare highlights Portia's power with Jessica and Nerissa. Jessica is rebellious and rejects the patriarchy. However, other than her escape from her father, no real signs of independence are evident. She acts as Portia's foil. Jessica is not bound to her father as a marriageable commodity and does not have a bond with her husband by means of jewelry exchange. Although she initiates her marriage, she does not evolve or gain power. She remains married and with her father's fortune only because of Portia's power, relying on a woman to approve her marriage as Celia relies on Rosalind. It is Portia's demand that causes Shylock to draw up a will, leaving his fortune to his Christian daughter and son-in-law. Nerissa, on the other hand, reflects Portia exchange. She participates in both cross-dressing and jewelry exchange. However, her lack of history (no information on her father or her financial independence exists) puts her within Portia's shadow, a serving woman blindly following her mistress's plans, just as Celia follows Rosalind. Nerissa mimics Portia's important strides toward empowerment, emphasizing Portia's

growth as a character. Portia abandons her position as an object, a reward within a casket, by participating in multiple material exchanges and linguistic exchanges, showing a progression in her power. Exchange by exchange, Portia continues to gain agency. By the end of the play, she is able to extinguish bonds between men, demolishing the violent bond between Shylock and Antonio and the loving bond between Antonio and her husband. Shakespeare creates a new woman: from Portia the heiress into Portia the judge. She becomes capable of control over women and men, as well as her own circumstances.

These three comedies all illustrate progress, varied by Shakespeare's experimentation. They all begin with dead fathers, exiled fathers, or women running away from fathers. The women are then introduced to their future husbands, who are more suitable if connected to their fathers. Strong women try to bond with them via gifts of jewelry. Jewelry becomes symbolic of an unsuccessful attempt at an equal bond of friendship and loyalty with a husband. For Portia, Rosalind, and Viola, the change into men's clothes opens a space where they can finally be heard and accepted as characters deserving of equal bonds. Using linguistic gifts as lessons of love, the heroines are able to alter the circumstances of their imminent wedding. In the end, Portia, Rosalind, and Viola illustrate their ultimate power through language, the same medium with which Shakespeare works. The power of discourse, and the power to give language as a gift, is the source of a woman's activity in the masculine world of kinship and exchange. Control is found with control of language. They are able to change men and their own positions within their nuptial bonds. Shakespeare uses the progression of exchange to establish new rules within the traditional kinship exchange between a father and his son-in-law over a woman. These

heroines gain bonds of equal or superior power to men, develop from the objects to the subjects of exchange, and forever disrupt the patriarchal order of marriage.

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