

Shakespeare's Women: Surviving without male protectors

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Written as part of the M.Litt. program at the University of Sydney, in the subject *Shakespeare: The Turn*.

Shakespeare lived in an essentially patriarchal world. And yet, for someone writing in “a society where the feminine model ... is silent acquiescence”¹ he produced a remarkable number of strong, intelligent and witty heroines – particularly (though not exclusively) in the comedies.

Some of these women rail against the constraints placed upon them by their society. Katharina, for example, spends most of the *The Taming of the Shrew* fighting against them, while at the climax of *Much Ado About Nothing* Beatrice cries out “O God, that I were a man!” (IV ii 3074).

However, if Katharina and Beatrice are restricted by society, they are also afforded certain protections. A number of Shakespeare's other heroines do not have this luxury. Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Cressida in *Troilus and Cressida* all lack male protectors, either through death, absence or abrogation of paternal responsibilities. All three of these women are intelligent, courageous and perceptive, and prove up to the task of fending for themselves. However, the worlds they occupy are very different, and this has a significant impact on their survival strategies. In particular, the choices they make are driven by the extent to which their societies allow them to have an innate sense of self-worth.

Viola comes towards the end of a procession of cross-dressing Shakespearean heroines. Her disguise as a page is also prefigured in the works generally accepted to be Shakespeare's plot sources for *Twelfth Night*: the 1531 Sienese comedy *Gl'Inganni*, as well as two or three other Italian plays called *Gl'Inganni*, Matteo Bandello's 1554 *Novelle*, and Barnaby Riche's 1581 “Apolonius and Silla” (all of which may, themselves, have been derived from *Gl'Inganni*).

¹ Hamilton, Sharon. *Shakespeare's Daughters*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc, 2003, p. 127

However, Viola stands apart from almost all of her predecessors in her *reason* for adopting male attire. Julia, Portia, Nerissa, Jessica and the heroines of the Italian works all *choose to leave* the protection afforded by their established places in the patriarchal society, and adopt a male disguise because it will either protect them in their travels or help them achieve their objectives. Even Rosalind, whose disguise had the initial purpose of providing protection after her unwilling eviction from the court, opts to maintain it after arriving in her father's domain of the Forest of Arden.

Viola, however, like Silla, is shipwrecked in a strange land. She clearly has money (she is able to pay the sea captain "bounteously"), but has no established place in this society, and no male protector, with the exception of the (socially inferior) captain. To ensure her own survival, she must rely on her wits.

Some commentators feel that Viola's motivation for adopting male attire is inadequate. L. G. Salinger, for example, argues that the "Italian authors give the heroine a strong motive for assuming her disguise, in that the lover has previously returned her affection, but has now forgotten her and turned elsewhere."² I would suggest, however, that Viola's motive is stronger, rather than weaker: the Italian heroines are acting to gain something they desire, while Viola's very life may be at risk if she does not take some action. If Rosalind and Celia (accompanied by Touchstone) are conscious of the "danger it will be to us, Maids as we are, to travel forth so far" (I iii 105-6), how much worse is Viola's situation - in a strange country, separated by the sea from anyone who knows "what [her] estate is" (I ii 41)?

Viola's first impulse is to turn to another woman for assistance. Although Olivia has recently lost her own male protectors, they have left her with an established place in Illyrian society, so her household is the obvious refuge for a single woman. However, the captain tells Viola, in no uncertain terms, that obtaining Olivia's support will be "hard to compass" (I ii 41), and she accepts him at his word, and immediately begins to consider alternatives. Given the ease with which she subsequently gains an audience with Olivia, this is a little surprising. But then, Cesario has an authorization from the Duke to "Be clamorous, and leap

² Salinger, L. G. 'The Design of *Twelfth Night*' in Stanley Wells Stanley (ed), *Twelfth Night: Critical Essays*. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1986, p. 195.

all civil bounds" (I iv 21) – an option rather less available to the stateless, friendless Viola.

The only other protector Viola knows of is Orsino. Presumably, her reluctance to approach him as a woman stems from the fact that her virtue (and her reputation) would potentially be at risk in an all-male household – always assuming she were to be accepted at all. Presenting herself as an eunuch, however, will avoid this predicament. It is not the most realistic solution, but in this world of revelry, realism is not mandatory. However, Viola's fantastical plan should not allow us to lose sight of the fact that she does have a genuine problem to deal with. This subterfuge will give her, at least temporarily, the ability to move freely and with safety in this new world.

However, along with new freedoms, male attire also brings new constraints. Having adopted a disguise, all the new relationships Viola forges are based on a falsehood. Hopelessly loving Orsino, and sympathizing with Olivia's own hopeless love for herself, Viola can neither plead her own case, nor reveal the impossibility of Olivia's desires. As Irene Dash points out, the "problems Viola faces caused by her disguise are, if less life threatening, more subtle and emotionally complex than those that confront Shakespeare's other women in breeches"³.

In some ways, Viola, in her "Cesario" persona, is not dissimilar to Feste. She is clever with words, and perceptive about other people, and so she adapts her language and manner to suit her audience. In their different roles, both Feste and Viola must rely on their wits to create and maintain their places in society, and both are aware of the risks they run if they do not keep the good favour of those around them. Nevertheless, it should be noted that for neither character is their *self*-image influenced by the perceptions of others.

Despite these similarities, Viola does not share Feste's level of emotional detachment, so she increasingly speaks from the heart – albeit in oblique terms. Her initial approach to Olivia is based on wit and wordplay, but when she talks of love, she does so with passion – her own passion, not the mere reporting of

³ Dash, Irene G. *Women's Worlds in Shakespeare's Plays*. Newark and London: Associated University Presses, 1997, p. 239.

Orsino's. In her subsequent meetings with Olivia, we see less of the detached and ironic Cesario, and more of the emotionally vibrant Viola.

Similarly, the depth of her relationship with Orsino gradually cuts away at her masquerade. Questioned by him about the "woman" she loves, Viola answers with the literal truth, but in such a way that he will not take her entirely seriously. However, just as she lost her detachment when pleading Orsino's cause with Olivia, so she does when pleading Olivia's with Orsino. Olivia has told Viola that she "cannot" love Orsino, and Viola uses this same phrase to challenge Orsino: "But if she cannot love you, sir?" (II iv 87). Viola puts her heart into showing Orsino that women's emotions are just as strong as men's, and, almost without realizing it, finds that she has stripped bare her own soul. Orsino's question, "But died they sister of her love, my boy?" (II iv 119), brings her closer to revealing the truth than at any other moment in the play. It is with a conscious effort of will that she abruptly shifts both the mood and the subject of their conversation onto safer ground.

At the end of Act III, Viola is presented with a new dilemma. Up until this point, the problems caused by her disguise have all related to emotional complexities: now she is faced with a physical challenge, which she is ill equipped to meet. She has neither the strength nor the expertise to match an assailant she believes to be "quick, skillful and deadly" (III iv 227). She attempts to talk her way out of it, and even tries to seek Olivia's protection – "I will return again into the house and desire some conduct of the lady" (III iv 248-9 - a seeming inversion of the woman's need for a male protector). However, when this fails, she faces the situation bravely. For all that she says "a little thing would make me tell them how much I lack of a man" (III iv 310-1), the physical threat seems less likely to break her disguise than the earlier emotional one.

Ultimately, of course, the proof of Sebastian's survival frees Viola to become a woman again. Her male protector has returned, and she can cast off her "masculine usurp'd attire" (V i 250). Sebastian has solved both the physical "threat" of Sir Andrew (both indirectly, via Antonio, and then in his own person), and also the emotional complication of Olivia's love. Furthermore, because of the emotional truth that came through her disguise, Viola has won for herself the love of Orsino. A happy ending is thus provided for the four lovers.

Or is it? A traditional production includes an unequivocal positive ending (at least for the four lovers), and many or most viewers would find this eminently satisfactory. However, the play contains just enough melancholy components to justify the director, if s/he chooses, to place a different slant on the ending. Sharon Hamilton feels that Orsino “remains the chauvinist and the fantasizer. Still, he has learned to value Viola’s courage and devotion. Is he a comparable prize for her?”⁴ Similarly, Harold Hobson, in a review of John Barton’s 1969 production, says “Viola knows that for Orsino she is little more than a consolation prize”⁵, and Sheridan Morley (writing about John Caird’s production of 1983) wonders “Is Orsino really going to settle down with a wife who was infinitely sexier when disguised as a man?”⁶

At the end of the play, Viola has happily given up her disguise and the problems it created, but she has also lost the freedoms it endowed. After confirming her (woman’s) love for Orsino, Viola – previously never at a loss for words, and regularly directing the conversational flow – is completely silent for the remaining hundred and thirty lines of the play. Is she lessened by conforming to the norms of society? Has she subsumed her own personality, and become no more than “Orsino’s mistress, and his fancy’s queen” (V i 390)? A feminist reading would doubtless say “Yes”; a romantic one, probably “No”. There is no single answer – it depends on the reader/viewer, with input from the director and actors. My preferred reading, however, is for a positive ending. In adopting male attire, Viola is not rebelling against the constraints placed upon women in her society – rather, she is doing what it takes to survive, and once that survival is assured, she is more than happy to return to the approved role. Arguably the most intelligent – and certainly the most perceptive – of the lovers, she knows Orsino’s faults, and loves him in spite of (or because of) them. And her silence at the end of the play? Beyond expectation or hope, she has just received everything she has spent five acts wishing for: perhaps she simply needs some time to absorb it all. “Cesario’s” wit

⁴ Hamilton, *op. cit.* p. 141.

⁵ *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 April 1971, quoted in Gay, Penny. *As She Likes It: Shakespeare’s Unruly Women*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 32.

⁶ *Plays & Players*, October 1984, quoted in Gay *op. cit.* p. 42.

and passion came from Viola, and they will remain even after she resumes her maid's garments.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helena is also without male protectors: her father has just died, and she appears to have no other male relatives. Fortunately, she does have an established (if lowly) position in the household of the Countess of Rousillon. However, there is nobody who will actively look out for her interests: in this sense, she is just as much on her own as Viola. While her short term survival is assured, her long term happiness relies on her taking action herself, as there is nobody to do it for her. *All's Well That Ends Well*, while still generally accepted as a comedy, presents a darker world than *Twelfth Night*, and in Helena we have a more troubled, less self-assured heroine than Viola.

Like Viola, Helena has both the courage and the ability to act for herself, even when this means moving outside her allotted place in society. However, unlike Viola, she is also prone to periods of passivity, if not outright hopelessness. Her "It were all one, / That I should love a bright particular star, / And think to wed it, he is so above me" (I i 90-2) may be compared with Viola's "my state is desperate for my master's love" (II ii 37). Viola's soliloquy contains a certain ironic detachment, whereas Helena's shows total self-abnegation. Even when things are at the worst for Viola, she remains active and focused. By contrast, Helena, as Alexander Leggatt points out, "seems always ready to sink into self-effacement and despair"⁷. She is despondent at the beginning of the play, and ready to give up her plan both when the king rejects her and again when Bertram does so. When she is safely married, she is hesitant even to ask her new husband for a kiss, and obediently returns to Rousillon on his command. W. Speed Hill highlights the fact that "For all her force of will, she is capable of equally great submission"⁸. It is almost as if her natural state is one of submission and conformity, but when challenged she can be jolted into uncharacteristic activity and defiance of society's conventions.

⁷ Leggatt, Alexander. 'Introduction' to New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *All's Well That Ends Well*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 30.

⁸ Hill, W. Speed. 'Marriage as Destiny: An Essay on *All's Well That Ends Well*.' *English Literary Renaissance*, 5, 1975, p. 357.

Furthermore, and again unlike Viola, she is very reliant on the aid of others in bringing her plans to fruition. Most particularly, she gains the support and assistance of a number of women in putting her ideas and initiatives into practice. Although she has formulated a plan to cure the king, and so win Bertram as a husband, she is unwilling to actually implement it until she has obtained the endorsement of the Countess. After prompting from the Countess, Helena explains her plan, and then requests "leave to try success" (I iii 246) – and is given not only leave, but "love, / Means and attendants" (I iii 250-1).

However, Helena has made one, fatal, error: she has overlooked the fact that *Bertram does not want her*. In her obsession with him, she has developed a plan with an objective, achievable outcome - marriage. Less clear-sighted than Viola, she has confused this with what it is she *really* wants – Bertram's love, which is less objective, and may not actually be achievable. Certainly, arranging to have him given to her as a reward, without any consideration of his own feelings, is unlikely to engender such love.

Returning to Rousillon as the wife of Bertram, Helena learns that he will not be following her, and again departs – this time, without first speaking to the Countess. On this occasion, she has no fixed objective, but simply wishes to disappear, so that Bertram may return home safely. Like most of the cross-dressing heroines, Helena will be traveling on her own. But rather than adopting male disguise, she instead travels as a pilgrim – a more realistic solution for a darker world. However, it again shows that Helena is less willing than Viola to be entirely self-sufficient – or, perhaps, that this is a world in which a lone woman *cannot* be entirely self-sufficient. Viola's disguise protects her from the obvious threats to a woman, but she must still engage actively and assertively with society – her disguise is the first step towards survival, but it does not automatically confer it. A pilgrim, however, exists by default under a mantle of protection – indeed, a pilgrim is almost expected to be passive and submissive. While Viola chooses a disguise that enables her to be self sufficient, Helena exchanges the protection of a husband for the protection of the church.

Helena's final plan (the bed trick) is perhaps her greatest step outside the social conventions, but even this requires the active consent and co-operation of Diana and the Widow in order to be undertaken. This co-operation may be bought rather than being given freely, but it nevertheless arises from Diana's openly

expressed sympathy for Bertram's wife - "Alas, poor lady, / 'Tis a hard bondage to become the wife / Of a detesting lord" (III v 63-4). Furthermore, the women complete their side of the bargain whole heartedly, with Diana telling Helena "Let death and honesty / Go with your impositions, I am yours / Upon your will to suffer" (IV iv 28-30). Irene Dash suggests that:

Shakespeare's portraits of women in *All's Well That Ends Well*, of their relationships with one another, of their perceptions of the male world, and of their sense of themselves have a validity that overshadows any realistic questions of plot.⁹

Like her original plan of curing the king, the bed trick aims for an objective outcome – although at least, in this case, it is an objective set by Bertram himself. Whereas Viola achieves happiness through making emotional connections, Helena is less secure in herself, and so concentrates on external results. And so, her chances of achieving true happiness with Bertram are somewhat more open to question than Viola's with Orsino. Will he ever love her as much as she loves him? It seems unlikely – even at the end of the play, his statements of love are guarded. However, Helena has achieved the objective outcome of a true marriage ("wedding and bedding") with Bertram, and her position in society is secure. With her lower sense of self-esteem than Viola, Helena may well consider this an acceptable result of her labours.

Unlike Viola and Helena, the heroine of *Troilus and Cressida* has a father still living, and also an uncle. However, her father has abandoned his daughter¹⁰, and betrayed his people; and the value of her uncle's protection is questionable, at best. Society has given them power over her, but they do not fulfil their corresponding obligation to look after her. And Cressida's is not the festive world of *Twelfth Night*, or even the darker environment of *All's Well That Ends Well*. It is a world of war, lechery and disease, in which people are commodified, and love and honour are devalued.

⁹ Dash, *op. cit.* pp. 61, 63.

¹⁰ The circumstances of Calchas' departure are not covered in the play. In I i, Pandarus says of Cressida, "She's a fool to stay behind her father" (84). This could be seen to imply that her father wanted to take her with him, and she refused – his subsequent arrangement to have her exchanged for Antenor could be a way of taking this decision out of her hands. However, Pandarus follows with the statement "let her to the Greeks", which implies (though does not prove) that she could at any time follow her father, even though

Cressida is given little opportunity to speak directly to the audience. She has only two short soliloquies – far fewer than Helena – and, unlike Viola, she does not share a great secret which allows us to see hidden truths in her words. Her motivations are therefore considerably more open to the decisions made by the actress and the director. In his introduction to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Troilus and Cressida*, Anthony B. Dawson summarises the various critical reactions to Cressida's betrayal of Troilus: "(1) She is a mere wanton ... (2) The literary tradition demands it ... (3) She is in a terribly vulnerable situation and ... needs protection ... (4) Troilus ... provokes her to it"¹¹. With the exception of the second, all these approaches can be – and have been – brought out effectively in stage productions. There is no one, true answer to the enigma that is Cressida. In this paper, I intend to consider a reading that shows Cressida as a victim of her society – as one who is, indeed, vulnerable (in Troy as well as in the Greek camp), and whose survival technique is very different from that of Viola or Helena. Gayle Greene says:

Daughter to a traitor in a world at war, Cressida has had to understand her society clearly and unsentimentally in order to survive, and the values she has grasped on a personal level are the same that motivate her world politically and philosophically – relativistic and mercantile standards which commit all the characters in the play to appearance.¹²

Viola, and to a lesser extent Helena, have an innate sense of self-worth that enable them to survive without male protectors – Viola entirely on her own, Helena with the support of other women. In Cressida's society, however, women are treated as objects, and their value is not intrinsic, but rather dependent on how they are viewed by others. A child of this society, Cressida knows that the only way for her to survive is to increase her own value in the eyes of others – specifically, of men.

When we first see Cressida, she is engaged in spirited dialogues with Alexander and Pandarus. Like Viola with Feste, and Helena with Parolles, in this

he left without her. And, of course, everything Pandarus says at this point is designed to attract Troilus, so none of it can necessarily be accepted as truth.

¹¹ Dawson, Anthony B. 'Introduction' to New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of *Troilus and Cressida*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 29-30

¹² Greene, Gayle. 'Shakespeare's Cressida: "A kind of self"' in Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz Carolyn, Gayle Greene and Carol Thomas Neely (eds), *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983, p. 134.

scene Cressida shows that she has the wit and the confidence to hold her own in repartee with a member of the opposite sex. A. P. Rossiter (who seems determined to dislike her) describes Cressida as a “chatty, vulgar little piece”¹³. However, as with Viola and Helena, much of this banter is designed to hide, rather than to reveal, her true feelings.

At the end of the scene, however, she has one of her few soliloquies, and the audience is allowed to see into her heart. She does care for Troilus – “more in Troilus thousandfold I see / Than in the glass of Padar’s praise may be” (I ii 284-5) – but she views his feelings for her as little more than a desire for sexual fulfillment. Once this is gained, she will lose what value she has for him, and the power that this gives her. This acknowledgement of her own emotions, even as she decides to hide them – “though my heart’s content firm love doth bear, / Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear” (I ii 294-5) – suggest that she is not simply a heartless minx. Rather, she is employing the survival strategies that have been taught by her environment, and fostered by her uncle (and, perhaps, by her father before him). In a world where everything is commodified, she is, as Carolyn Asp points out, attempting to “establish her value in the only way her culture allows”¹⁴. There is never the slightest suggestion that Troilus will legitimate her social position by offering marriage, so her best option is to maintain his interest by keeping her distance. It is a cynical decision, for a cynical world – but her explanation of this decision is bookended by two unequivocal statements of love for Troilus.

Arguably, it is this love that is her undoing. For, having made her decision, she then abandons it. Cressida is next seen on the night of her assignation with Troilus, and the audience is given no indication of why she has consented. Perhaps she has allowed herself to believe that there may be more to Troilus’ desire for her than simple lust – that lasting romantic love between two people may, in fact, be possible. Or perhaps she has simply been bullied into it by her uncle. Whatever the reason, “passionate Cressida is the first to provoke a kiss. And it is at this point

¹³ Rossiter, A. P. ‘*Troilus as ‘Inquisition’*’ in Priscilla Martin (ed), *Troilus and Cressida: A Casebook*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976, p. 102.

¹⁴ Asp, Carolyn. ‘In Defense of Cressida.’ *Studies in Philology*, 74 (1977), p. 410.

that she loses all her self-confidence, becomes affectionate, blushing and shy; she is now her age again"¹⁵. Sadly for Cressida, there is "no place for love in this world. Love is poisoned from the outset. These war-time lovers have been given just one night"¹⁶.

Although they are never explicitly stated in the play, the parallels between Cressida's situation, and that of Helen, appear too obvious to be completely ignored. Both women are loved by princes of Troy, and both are demanded by the Greeks. However, they are treated very differently.

Cressida's relationship with Troilus may not have the public acceptance of Paris and Helen (they have, after all, been together for only one night), but it does, at least, appear to be an open secret. Paris is aware that Troilus spent the night with Cressida, and Æneas also knows that "Troilus had rather Troy were borne to Greece / Than Cressid borne from Troy" (IV i 46-7).

The Trojans have a lengthy debate over returning Helen to the Greeks. Troilus, in particular, speaks passionately against it, arguing "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (II ii 52), and ultimately everyone agrees they must keep her, even though her return would mean the end of the war. However, when the Greeks ask for Cressida in exchange for a single Trojan general, there is no discussion at all. Paris acknowledges his brother's feelings, but says flatly "There is no help: / The bitter disposition of the time / Will have it so" (IV i 47-9). Even Troilus, for all his protestations of love, accepts without question that the exchange must take place. With a simple "Is it concluded so?" (IV ii 67), followed by "How my achievements mock me!" (IV ii 70), he departs Cressida's house ... leaving Pandarus to break the news to her. Upon meeting Paris, he speaks extravagantly of his grief, but offers not a word of argument against the action. In spite of his love, he clearly does not value Cressida above Antenor.

Cressida's initial reaction is to say "I will not go from Troy" (IV ii 111). However, neither her uncle nor her lover will support her in this, and so she is torn

¹⁵ Kott, Jan. 'Amazing and Modern' in Priscilla Martin (ed), *Troilus and Cressida: A Casebook*. London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976, p. 147.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 148.

from her home, and sent to the Greeks. Of course, she is nominally being sent into the protection of her father – but even though the whole activity is at his request, he seems unwilling or unable to look after her.

Immediately upon her arrival, Cressida is passed around and kissed by the Greek generals. Initially silent, when addressed by Menelaus and then Ulysses, she responds with the same wit she employed when speaking to Pandarus. Ulysses feels this marks her as one of the “daughters of the game”. However, R. A. Yoder argues that “despite their elaborate courtesy of begging kisses, the Greek generals are taking what Cressida, essentially a captive, has no real power to refuse. She plays their game with wit and spirit, for that is her best defense”¹⁷.

When next seen, Cressida is being sent – by her father – to meet Diomedes. Dawson feels that for Cressida to capitulate so quickly to Diomedes “undermines her previous protestations of love and implies superficiality”¹⁸. However, at the time she made her promises to Troilus, she was still in Troy: now, she has been sexually assailed by all the Greek generals, and is fully aware of just how powerless she is. If her position in Troy was uneasy, her position in the Greek camp is far worse – and Troilus’ promise to bribe the guards and visit her is unlikely to help the situation. She needs someone to protect her, and as her father cannot or will not, she uses her only asset of value in this world – her beauty – to get someone else to do so. It is surely better to be the plaything of just one Greek, than of the whole camp.

Initially, she tries to keep Diomedes at a distance, as she did Troilus, to maintain his interest. However, it will not work in this case – Cressida’s value is lower with Diomedes than it was with Troilus. Cressida needs a new protector *now* if she is to avoid being subjected to further indignities – or worse – from the Greeks, so when Diomedes appears ready to walk away, she strokes his cheek and asks him to “come hither once again” (V ii 45).

Thus far, it can be easy to sympathise with Cressida’s situation. She is surviving, as best she can in a dangerous world. But at this point she passes on to

¹⁷ Yoder, R. A. ‘ “Sons and Daughters of the Game”: An Essay on Shakespeare’s “Troilus and Cressida”.’ *Shakespeare Survey*, 25 (1972), p. 22.

¹⁸ Dawson, *op. cit.* p. 29.

Diomedes the sleeve that Troilus gave her as a token of his love. As Jan Kott says, "She did not have to give it. She could have become Diomedes' mistress without doing so"¹⁹. However, Kott also provides an answer to this: before becoming Diomedes' mistress, she "had to kill everything in herself"²⁰. That is, handing over Troilus' sleeve is a symbolic breaking away from her former life, in which the possibility of romantic love had become almost tangible, and she seemed to have true, lasting value in someone else's eyes. In this new life, ruled entirely by cynicism and need, her "heart" must seize on anyone she can see who will value and protect her – even if only temporarily. She attempts to avoid responsibility for her choices by explaining "turpitude" as a fault of her sex. However, while this is simply making an excuse, Cressida is nevertheless a victim – less of the imperatives of her sex than of the society that has made such imperatives necessary.

By her own standards, and surely by the official standards of her world, she is condemned. Yet where minds are so readily corrupted and eyes so irresponsibly blind, it is self-righteous for her world to judge Cressida. After all, she is simply practicing the way of that world.²¹

Thus, Viola, Helena and Cressida are all strong, intelligent women, who do not shrink from looking after themselves in the absence of male protectors. However, the choices they make are driven by the interrelated factors of their innate self esteem, and the societies that they inhabit and that have formed them. Viola has a strong enough sense of self to fully enter the male domain, and to rely entirely upon her own abilities to create a niche for herself in a new society. Helena, less confident, recruits a network of women to assist in carrying out her plans. Cressida, however, can only see herself as reflected in the eyes of others: a true child of her corrupt society, the only way she can survive is to ultimately become a "daughter of the game".

Viola's long term happiness may be open to a little doubt, and Helena's rather more so, but they have nonetheless achieved for themselves secure and lasting positions in their respective societies. For Cressida, however, the outcome is bleak. Diomedes' protection will not last, and a proportion of Shakespeare's

¹⁹ Kott, *op. cit.* p. 149.

²⁰ Kott, *op. cit.* p. 149.

²¹ Yoder, *op. cit.* p. 23.

audience – and certainly Shakespeare himself – were well aware of her ultimate fate: as Feste says in *Twelfth Night*, “Cressida was a beggar” (III i 59). Cressida’s value is entirely in the eyes of her beholders, and when she loses their favour, she has nothing. By contrast, Viola has an innate sense of self-worth, as does Helena to a lesser extent. Thus, when they lose the protection of their male relatives, they are able to both survive and to build new connections - connections that are more lasting than Cressida’s because they are openly recognised and supported by society.

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