‘Like Wax’
A Critical Look at Gender in Shakespeare

Shakespeare’s Hidden Women:
A look into the mystery behind his heroines

‘READ ALL ABOUT IT!’
Hot news topics across Europe

Ask Athena
New questions surrounding the topic of female subservience

Maidens: The Lover’s Muse
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A brand new selection of classifieds for all your shopping and employment needs!
From the Editor’s Desk:

As I walked through the Folger Shakespeare Library during my summer 2008 trip to Washington, D.C., I was impressed by my proximity to early modern historical texts and artifacts. Whether walking across the stage in the “Globe-like” theater, peering through the glass casing containing the oldest folio of Shakespeare’s collected works, or catching a glimpse of the enormous reading room housing over 500,000 written pieces, you can’t help but feel transported into early modern times—that is, until you step back outside and onto Capitol Hill.

This visit helped to frame this month’s issue of ‘Like Wax.’ I realized how closely we were tied to historical works. We have canonized Shakespeare’s literature; we have built museums to honor the works he wrote. He has become an integral part of our lives, whether in a movie theater, on the stage, or in a classroom.

This issue discusses the ways in which Shakespeare enhances our understanding of modern gender roles. It is designed to engage your critical thinking—while being entertaining, of course—so you can begin to understand the progression of gender roles through the ages.

“The Femme Covert Exposed” kicks off our issue, in order to give you background in this critical way of thinking, as well as to explain how we can connect Shakespeare to our modern world. From the big screen to the canonized works themselves, this article helps you see the ways in which Shakespeare’s heroines challenged the gender roles of the early modern period.

Our “Arts and Entertainment” section—this year’s Battle of the Sonnets—is sure to give you a laugh, while still critiquing Renaissance gender roles. We gave the subject of each sonnet the chance to provide her input and rate her respective poem. You can join in the fun at www.likewax.com.

Our “In the News” section will give you older news, and this month is an exciting one. You won’t want to peel your eyes from our pages until you’ve finished every last article. We provide a wide range of topics, from magical potions to a reunion after sixteen years of separation.

Of course, the issue wouldn’t be complete without our regular advice column from renowned psychologist, Athena. This month’s questions bring a whole new side to early modern gender roles, and Athena’s expert advice proves insightful yet again.

Finally, check out our classified ad section for all your shopping and employment needs. From a help wanted ad for bakers to an advertisement for a husband, this month’s classifieds prove versatile, to say the least.

For those who want to delve deeper into this topic of gender, see our recommended reading list near the end of this issue.

Remember to think about how your lives have been shaped by these early treatments to gender roles. Our rights today came from a progression of these gender roles over the centuries. Enjoy.

Laurel Lachowiez
Editor-in-Chief
In This Issue...

Hidden Women: Understand the culture behind Shakespeare’s heroines

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The Femme Covert Exposed

A look at gender during the early modern period

Photo courtesy of Google Image search
You can’t help but notice Gwyneth Paltrow’s grace in her Oscar-winning role for *Shakespeare in Love*. She touches us with her realistic representation of Elizabethan times, her struggle to perform the role of a man on stage in a time when females were excluded from social, political, and economic spheres. To us modern women, the idea of not being present in most areas of society seems unnatural. So, why does Paltrow’s performance move us so strongly? Why, if our society is so different from that of the early modern period, do we return, through film, to not only representations of Elizabethan culture, but also to modern adaptations of early modern works? Perhaps this time period and these seemingly timeless works can still, centuries later, teach us something.

Adaptations of Shakespeare’s works are abundant in Hollywood. After the debut of *Shakespeare in Love*, 2001 brought the film *O*, a modern adaptation of the playwright’s *Othello*, to our homes, followed by the 2006 chick-flick *She’s the Man*, based on *Twelfth Night*. What we construe as pure entertainment directly correlates to the ways in which we live our everyday lives. Our jobs, our sense of women’s rights, our ability to stand alone and independent (and without the fear of an arranged marriage) come directly from these works that have crept their way into our society through film. Paired with a wide feminist lens, we can connect our society, our way of life, to the works that we find so entertaining.

Left, Gwyneth Paltrow disguised as Kent in *Shakespeare in Love*. Right, Amanda Bynes cross-dressing as her brother Sebastian, and as Viola in *She’s the Man*.

My use of the term feminism accepts the stance that many females in patriarchal societies such as Shakespeare’s were excluded from the social, political, and economic realms of their time and confined to domestic duties in the home. In our understanding of Elizabethan history, this fact cannot be denied. However, we can widen our feminist scope to look at ways in which Shakespeare’s heroines challenge the gender roles of their period, ultimately perpetuating a progression of gender roles into a growing (but not complete) equality of power between the sexes.

I urge you to consider this view because it deals directly with our own modern society. The presence of Shakespeare’s works within 21st century entertainment proves that his works are classic, timeless even. But, while you may assume canonized literature such as Shakespeare’s is untouchable, I feel that it is the most tangible. Shakespeare’s works are a part of our society; these plays constituted much of early modern pop culture in Shakespeare’s time, and continue to flood our modern pop culture by their presence on stage and on the big screen. When you applaud Paltrow for her brave performance as she challenges social expectations, or laugh at Amanda Bynes (*She’s the Man*) for her trials as a cross-dressing student, you can make a connection between early modern gender roles and 21st century ideals. We women have gained many liberties we desire because of challenges placed upon gender expectations prior to our time. For me, some of these challenges stem directly from canonized literature—for the purposes of this article we will focus on Shakespeare in particular—proving that this literature is not beyond social critique, but integral to our views on everyday culture, evidenced by its popularity even today.

Keep this relevance in mind as you page through this article. In order for us to understand our social experiences where we deem female equality as necessary, it is important to understand and analyze the possibilities concerning the origin of our expanding liberties.

I’ll admit this way of thinking about modern gender roles is hard to grasp. My first college experience with early modern literature removed me from my comfort zone, from what I knew as normal, and opened my eyes to earlier gender roles. I was shocked when I read the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “You are but as a form in wax,” declares Theseus to Hermia as she fights against an arranged marriage, “your eyes must with his judgment look.” Theseus, Duke of Athens, is discussing Hermia’s obligation to her father and
the lack of control females hold concerning their personal relationships. This line has stuck with me over the years. In our modern culture, women strive to hold an equal position to men—whether at home, in the workforce, or in politics, women are present. To me, the representation of Shakespeare’s family and gender dynamics did not seem consistent to what I knew. What I found interesting was the fact that the heroines within Shakespeare’s works, whether comedy, tragedy, or romance, seemed voiceless in one way or another. The evidence in favor of this claim makes this topic one of little dispute.

Most feminist critics of Shakespeare argue that his female heroines remain oppressed in the social, political, and economic spheres of their worlds. I agree that this occurs in many instances within Shakespeare’s works, but I feel that we must account for the socially constructed gender roles of the early modern period, rather than assuming that Shakespeare strives to oppress his heroines. While considering this idea, I want to examine how Shakespeare’s female heroines find ways to challenge their place in society and, as a result, challenge the gender roles of their time. By looking at Shakespeare’s works through a wider feminist lens, we can certainly agree that most female heroines in all of his genres are oppressed, yet still account for the small ways in which these females challenge the gender roles of their time.

**An Early History of Female Roles**

Phyllis Rackin is perhaps the best example of a feminist critic who, while looking at the unequal gender positions within Shakespeare, still accounts for cultural norms of the early modern period. Before we can critically examine Shakespeare’s works, an understanding of cultural expectations becomes important. Rackin explains that “by the end of Elizabeth’s reign, the humanist tradition of female learning was already fading, the learned woman a subject for ridicule. During the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, English women were increasingly excluded from work they had earlier performed; removed from participation in economic, political, and cultural life; regulated to a marginal and dependent economic status; excluded from the public arenas of political power and cultural authority; and confined within the rising barriers that marked off the home as a separate, private sphere.” Primogeniture dictated that the first born son would receive the inheritance of his family property. Common law gave a woman’s belongings to her husband immediately upon marriage. These laws and cultural expectations perpetuated the idea of the *femme covert*, or hidden woman, signifying a wife’s submission to her husband. These ideals stray from our 21st century understanding of female position in society, and present us with a world in which a certain degree of female oppression was normal. According to Russ McDonald, author of *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, husbands held the expectation that their wives would be subservient, something inconsistent with our views. This came from the idea that the wife was “the weaker vessel” and therefore physically submissive to her male counterpart. While a wife did hold power over her children and the servants of the household, the idea that the husband had the final say went uncontested. The only exception to female subservience occurred with single women—unmarried or widows—who held the right to own land, sign contracts, or sue and be sued on their own, without a male...
counterpart.

These gender differences emerged in great part from the physical differences between men and women. To members of the early modern period, a stronger physical appearance correlated to more feeling and higher intellectual activity. On a similar note, a woman’s menstruation was also believed to weaken her social, economic, and political position. Individuals present during the Renaissance viewed menstruation as a means of destabilizing the four elements of the world: earth, air, fire, and water. McDonald further adds that the Renaissance “insistence on female submission is grounded in the creation account recorded in Genesis 2 and 3, in which man is created first and then woman is formed from a rib taken from man.”

While our views on early gender roles lead to the common theme of female oppression, these Renaissance beliefs in female inferiority led to the common gender ideology that “good” women were silent, obedient, and chaste. According to Stephen Greenblatt’s introduction to The Norton Shakespeare, the strong female characters we view in the 21st century would have been seen as too opinionated in the early modern period. These women were known as scolds, and seen as a “threat to public order, to be dealt with by public authorities.” Methods for correcting insubordinate women included public humiliation, physical abuse such as slapping, bridling, or soaking, or ‘carting’ of those accused of being whores. Authorities would use public shaming for women who married men much younger than themselves.

Clothing was the means by which individuals visually expressed these gender differences. According to Rackin, sumptuary laws dictated certain requirements for male clothing, so that the dress would reflect a man’s social position in early modern England. Rackin also asserts that an individual’s body and gender signified his or her position in the social and political world of England. This social hierarchy did include a female’s submission to her male counterpart, but Rackin believes this stemmed more from an attention to social and political status rather than from the physical differences between the sexes.

The Actress as a “Bad Woman”

This strong opposition to a female presence in the social and political world of the Renaissance carried over to the stage, where female actors were nonexistent. Dymphna Callaghan, a professor of humanities at Syracuse University, explains that women “were the objects and the consumers of the very representations they could not produce, and by extension, the bearers, not the makers, of meaning.” Callaghan goes on to explain that most actors did not care about providing an accurate representation of women, but focused more on the aesthetic of what women seemed to represent, providing an inaccurate portrayal in the process. But why, exactly, could women not represent themselves on the stage? Peter Womack, author of English Renaissance Drama, explains that the absence of women on the Renaissance stage was not by chance, but by a cultural choice: early modern society dictated that a good woman was silent, obedient, chaste, and confined to the domestic sphere of her
home. Actors, on the other hand, were bold, loud, and very present within society. Because of these differences, a woman on the stage would be termed a “bad woman.” Women did attend and, in fact, enjoy the theater. But, this does not change the fact that the roles of female heroines—played by young men—were a male construction of the female character, rather than an accurate representation that a female actress might offer.

As playgoers viewed various performances in the early modern period, they were aware that the female roles were played by men and that they were watching a homogeneous cast. Because male actors could step outside the prescribed roles of females—namely being more loud or forceful than a typical female in the Renaissance could be—they created much humor on stage. Such use of male actors for female roles suggests the mystery surrounding the female figure. Actors would construct a female role according to their specifications and not according to fact. According to Womack, female impersonation on the stage became a form of female “othering.” Individuals could see what male actors thought women should be, but not what they truly were.

**So Why Is This Important?**

This background becomes crucial to our discussion of Shakespeare’s works because it allows us insight into the world from which Shakespeare designed his female heroines. While we see the subsuming of a woman’s property as oppressive, individuals in the early modern period viewed it as standard, as normal. Our understanding of these early modern gender expectations, far different from those of the 21st century, remains important because they show the transformation of gender roles throughout the centuries. We, as women, can understand and appreciate the progression of the role of women in the social, political, and economic spheres of society by looking critically at previous gender expectations. We have witnessed, from our own experiences in the 20th and 21st centuries, the progression of female gender roles from a state of domestic isolation to a state of social involvement. Something must have perpetuated this transformation in female gender roles. So, while we can see that females held certain positions in the early modern period due to cultural choice, we cannot rule out the argument that they were, at the same time, subtly pushing against their expected societal roles.

Our examination of early modern gender roles can stem from two works in particular. While many of Shakespeare’s works present varying degrees of female oppression, I am interested in examining the different ways in which female heroines challenge the social expectations of the early modern period. Through the tragedy, *Titus Andronicus*, and the comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*, we can connect Shakespeare’s culture to our contemporary understanding of gender roles.

Patriarchal control of a daughter is not an uncommon theme within Shakespeare’s works—in fact, it runs through each of his genres. Lavinia of *Titus Andronicus* serves as the strongest example of female silence both within the domestic sphere and within the sphere of society, making her a prime example to connect our notions of progressive gender roles. Raped and mutilated by the sons of Tamora, queen of the Goths, Lavinia finds herself devoid of any method of
communication. Her misfortune stimulates her father, Titus, to weave an intricate revenge plot, while allowing Lavinia to find alternative methods of exposing the perpetrators of her crime.

But, what happens in the realm of the workforce, that sphere where Rackin previously asserted that women were absent, and where our current understanding of gender roles allows us to be present? We can turn to The Merchant of Venice for an examination of Portia’s role in the legal system of Venice. Portia remains under the control of her deceased father, who creates a series of riddles to determine an appropriate suitor. While her domestic life is sheltered, Portia cross-dresses and enters the political sphere of Athens in order to save Antonio, a friend of her new husband, Bassanio. She manages to accomplish what the men of the court fail to do, and exculpates Antonio.

These two works will allow us to see how our contemporary roles in society have progressed through the centuries, proving that Shakespeare’s canonized literature is not untouchable, but very tangible in the context of our 21st century, daily lives.

**Pushing Past the Bounds of Physical Silencing**

The Norton Shakespeare claims that “language is society’s way of being intimately present in the individual.” However, we cannot deny that Shakespeare, in his day, manages to eliminate his female characters from such a statement by making speech in a male-dominated society a near impossibility. Rackin explains, within her book Shakespeare and Women, that “female sexuality in Shakespeare’s plays ... is invariably articulated as linguistic transgression—that is, a verbal replication of female obliquity.” In Titus Andronicus, we see the characters Chiron and Demetrius physically silence Lavinia, removing her hands, tongue, and chastity and, as a result, removing her from the intimacy of society and making her an object of political debate, proving Rackin’s theory that silence is representative of a woman’s confinement to the domestic sphere. In this sense, Lavinia is an object—something to be conquered and simply disposed of. The male characters within the work use language to objectify the young maiden: Aaron refers to Lavinia as a whore that has “become so loose” and encourages the brothers to “revel in Lavinia’s treasury.” Chiron and Demetrius, then, see Lavinia as an object of desire—or, more correctly, they desire her because of her chastity and marriage to Bassanio—and proceed to remove her from their patriarchal society by stripping her of both her honor and means of communication.

We cannot deny the fact that Lavinia is perhaps the strongest example of female silencing within Shakespeare’s works. As her hands and tongue are removed along with her chastity, Lavinia becomes, in every sense, an objectified character. Yet, we can’t overlook Lavinia’s resourcefulness as she aims to incriminate the perpetrators of her mutilation. At a critical point in the play—and also the critical point for Titus’ revenge—Lavinia alone serves as the means to drive the plot forward, as Shakespeare instills her with the power of communication. Though she is devoid of her hands to write or her tongue to speak, Lavinia manages to communicate the names of those who committed her rape, subtly pushing against the gender roles of her time. Though all feasible means of communication are gone, Shakespeare creates within his work seemingly implausible means for Lavinia to communicate. Drawing off Ovid’s tale in Metamorphosis in which Philomela is raped by her brother-in-law and then has her tongue cut out, Shakespeare strives to give Lavinia the power of communication even after all probable means of contact are removed. As Lavinia sorts through books in the library, eventually settling on Metamorphosis, understanding begins to spread between Titus and Marcus. Though a “speechless complainer,” Lavinia uses her intellect to guide her father and uncle to the perpetrators of her rape. Though she is devoid of hands, Lavinia utilizes her mouth to guide a stick in sand and incriminate Chiron and Demetrius.

The idea of not pressing charges for such a crime seems foreign to us, and we can commend Lavinia for her forward action. Yet, because good women in the early modern period valued their chastity, Lavinia’s voice following her rape is revolutionary. Shakespeare instills within his mutilated heroine a voice. Though literally silenced, Lavinia pushes to find a new method of communication, stepping outside her prescribed gender role to punish those who hurt her. We must view the removal of Lavinia’s hands and tongue as proof of her physical silencing—and even as a forced conformity to ideological customs—but we cannot change the fact that, above all odds, Lavinia creates a new means of communication. We can speculate that perhaps,
for Shakespeare, gender roles were “like wax” and capable of being molded into something new.

“The Lady Becomes a Warrior, and the Equal of Her Man”

This “something new” can perhaps be seen through the heroine of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia, as she steps out of her domestic life and into the political realm of Venice. To us, she is a modern heroine. Because of our transition from the domestic realm of the home into the social and economic spheres of the 21st century, Portia represents social and political struggles similar to our own.

Much like Lavinia, Portia holds little power in her domestic sphere, ruled over by her deceased father. As she states that she can “neither choose who [she] would nor refuse who [she] dislike,” Portia resigns herself, though slightly unwillingly, to the selection of a suitor by the means her father arranged prior to his death. According to Carol McKewin, author of “Counsels of Gall and Grace: Intimate Conversations between Women in Shakespeare’s Plays,” “… even Portia, that most fortunate of Shakespearean heroines, gifted with intelligence, money, and luck … adjusts to those restrictions which circumscribe her will—the wishes of her dead father that she marry only the winner of the lottery.” We cannot argue that Portia holds a voice with her father throughout the play, as his riddle serves as the means to determine her husband, stripping her of any say.

However, while Lavinia remains in the domestic sphere of *Titus Andronicus*, Portia steps into the male-dominated, political world of *The Merchant of Venice* in order to save Antonio. Again, though, we cannot deny that female oppression is readily present through the scenes of Portia’s transformation into a male lawyer. According to *The Norton Shakespeare*, fashion allowed individuals to disguise themselves and create a means of image-crafting. Portia’s transformation into Balthasar is something she must do in order to be heard in a male-dominated society. Danielle Clarke, author of “Speaking Women: Rhetoric and the Construction of Female Talk,” asserts that rhetorical skill is gendered both within the early modern period and within the world of the play. The use of certain rhetorical skills implies an individual’s position in certain spheres of society, and is “marked by class and status.” Portia gains her “personhood,” or political power, only when she dresses as a man, evidencing the gender separation associated with a voice in society. According to Catherine Belsey, when Portia assumes the guise of Balthasar, “the lady becomes a warrior, and the equal of her man.”

Belsey’s assertion seems to demonstrate that Portia only achieves power through the guise of a man, remaining voiceless as a woman. But, we can also view Portia’s transformation as a place where Shakespeare subtly challenges gender ideologies. When Portia disguises herself, she is no longer a “lady richly left … fairer than that word/Of wondrous virtues” associated with her domestic life, but an equal in the court as a “young doctor of Rome … bettered with his own learning” and fully invested in the political sphere of the court. But, what remains important is that a disguise is only a disguise. Underneath her disguise as a man, the voice of female Portia still remains. Clara Park, author of “As We Like It: How a Girl Can Be Smart and Still Popular,” describes Portia as “one who, by her energy, wit, and combativeness, successfully demonstrates her ability to control events in the world around her, not excluding the world of men.” Portia again pushes against the gender.
expectations of her time as she steps confidently into the Venetian courtroom. She is not obedient, and is certainly not silent, instead accomplishing what every other male in favor of Antonio fails to do. While the argument that Portia accomplishes her task of freeing Antonio under the disguise of a man still remains, we cannot overlook that Portia still achieves her goal, gaining political and rhetorical power as a woman. She disregards her cultural expectations, instead demonstrating her strength as a woman and bringing us closer to our modern gender roles.

**Putting Elizabethan Gender Roles into a 21st Century Context**

Let’s jump forward a few centuries. You probably feel equal to your male counterparts, stronger than them, perhaps. What you have probably overlooked is the fact that we aren’t too far off from the gender roles present in the early modern period. Let’s use Hollywood as our example. According to statistics (from 2002) on the Guerrilla Girls Web site, only one woman has ever won the Oscar for Best Director. In addition, 94% of all writing awards have gone to men. When looking at our modern entertainment and comparing it to Shakespeare’s world of pop culture, we don’t have as much control as we’d like to think. Actresses only comprise 25% of leading roles, leaving men with far better odds at finding employment in the movie business. So, while I certainly agree that our rights as women have progressed, I cannot help but feel that we are still very unequal to our male counterparts. Our understanding of early modern gender roles does impact us. It is very much a part of who we are and can help influence who we will become. *Shakespeare in Love* resonates with us not only for its entertainment value, but also for the message of inequality it conveys centuries after the Elizabethan period. By understanding this connection, we can take important steps toward gender equality. But, for the time being, Gwenyth Paltrow should just feel lucky the Oscars have a category for Best Actress, or a man might have taken her award.

**Interested in more statistics? We’ve listed a few here, but for more information, log on to www.guerrillagirls.com for even more statistics concerning gender discrimination.**

**Art Galleries with the most artwork by male artists:**

- National Gallery of Art—98% male
- National Portrait Gallery—93% male
- Hirshhorn Gallery—95% male
- American Art museum and Renwick Gallery—88% male

**Hollywood Statistics:**

- Only 7% of 2005’s top-grossing films were directed by women
- Only 3 women have ever been nominated for an Oscar for direction
- Only 12% of 2004’s top-grossing films were written by women

**United States Government Positions:**

- Only 14% of U.S. Senators are women
This month's Arts & Entertainment section is our annual Battle of the Sonnets! Two sonnets, subject responses (with original comments!), and sonnet ratings show you just how good (or bad) they are. This year's category: Love Sonnets. But the fun doesn't stop here. Jump online to www.likewax.com to post your ratings and comments to our Arts & Entertainment poll!
Oh Perdita, the object of my loving eye,
Your dress, your queenly garments, your look so fair
It moves me. Your soft red lips, your gentle tongue, the soft voice I try
To return to in my dreams, that loving stare
I receive from those doe-like orbs, filled with blue and green,
Your fairy walk of elegance and grace,
Ah, fair Perdita, I want you for my queen,
Thou art 'too noble for this place.'
Come with me, my love, to a place where we can, with open wings,
Be happy; to a lover's paradise, a haven, far away,
Where our family ties do not matter, where the people sing
In praise of our love, of our union, on our wedding day.
Oh, sweet Perdita, divine Perdita, I want you for my wife,
Your love, fair maid, will grant me eternal life.

—Florizel, Prince of Bohemia

Perdita’s Response:

Men seem to focus on our external features—our eyes, our lips, our breasts. I’ve never understood it. Like Petrarch, you idolize my body in its individual parts, dehumanizing me in the process. Am I a woman, or a figure your mind created? Florizel, why can’t you focus on my intellect and wit, rather than on my appearance? You want me for your queen, but you know nothing of my “queen-like” qualities other than my appearance.

I commend you, however, for encouraging a marriage across class lines. In my opinion, our society needs more of this.

Sonnet Rating: 6.7
Does your father know what gem he gives away in riddle?

Each casket laden with a lover’s choice,

But which, gold, silver, or lead, will guide me little by little

To my fair Portia’s face? Oh lovely maid, with sweet dulcimer voice,

Tell me I am yours. Do not let edict determine a lover’s bliss,

I strive to find an answer, to win your hand in this tedious game.

I’ve found it! My sweet Portia’s likeness

Hidden in a casket. We are one now, one and the same.

My bride, my life, what fortune has this casket granted me

By your flushed cheeks and tender gaze.

My sweet, marriage will set us free!

Most beautiful Portia, I will be with you for all of our days.

Divine thanks to the spirit who steered me toward the truest path,

‘Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.’

—Bassanio, Venetian inhabitant

Portia’s Response:
I think men like the challenge of chasing us females, rather than actually acquiring a wife. Three suitors came to try their hand at my father’s riddle—three! Did they speak with me about my dreams, my views, or even my consent to marrying them? No. This sonnet focuses too much on winning me, on a gamble, than on the qualities of my personality that would make me a good companion. While it may not matter to you now, Bassanio, my political finesse will prove useful. You’ll see.

Sonnet Rating: 5.6
Whether you want to get the girl, or just play one on stage, our troupe is the best around.

Bottom's Theatre Troupe—world renowned for the fresh quality of our young male voices.

Husband trying to control your life?

Try Titania’s Pansy Potion™—One drop of this and we guarantee his attention won’t be on you any longer.
In the News:

Look here for some interesting developments in Shakespeare’s theatrical world.

Photos courtesy of Google image search
“Andronicus Murders Own Daughter after Seeking Revenge, Turns Dinner into Violent Affair”

Rome—

The body of Lavinia Andronicus was found earlier today, and with her the corpses (or parts thereof) of five other individuals. The motive for the murder seems to be revenge, as one witness remembers her father, Titus Andronicus, saying “Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,/And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die” just seconds before he took his own daughter’s life.

The other remaining dead bodies—those of Tamora, Roman Emperor Saturninus, and Titus Andronicus himself—were termed dead on arrival and seemed to be caused by a dinner dispute instigated by Andronicus’ brutal behavior toward his daughter. Tamora’s sons, Chiron and Demetrius, were found baked into a pie.

Witnesses believe that the dinner slaughter was part of an elaborate revenge plot planned by Andronicus himself. Lavinia had previously suffered a brutal rape and physical abuse, including the severing of both her hands as well as her tongue.

The more puzzling question is why Titus murdered his own child. Coppelia Kahn, an expert in father/daughter interactions, believes that the murder was caused by Titus’ inability to maintain a chaste daughter. “The image of the chaste woman as an impermeable container was ... highly visible in the Renaissance,” says Kahn, “For Titus, Lavinia’s worth resides in her exchange value as a virgin daughter.”

Authorities speculate whether Titus felt he no longer had control over his daughter’s virginity, and viewed murder as a means of escape. Kahn agrees that this type of behavior, while not always this extreme, is concurrent with a father’s feeling that he lacks control over his daughter: “[Titus] proves his title of paterfamilias, one might say, with a vengeance—not only on those who violated and injured [Lavinia] so brutally but on the girl herself, when he murders her.”

Marcus, brother to Andronicus, was the first to find Lavinia after her rape and remembers his brother’s sorrow at the discovery of his daughter’s tainted reputation: “I found her, straying in the park,/Seeking to hide herself, as doth the deer/That hath received some unrecuring wound.” He says that following Lavinia’s discovery, Andronicus would go into rages, at one point even saying “this sorrow is an enemy,/And would usurp upon my wat’ry eyes/And make them blind with tributary tears./Then which way shall I find Revenge’s cave?”

Marcus also informed authorities that though Lavinia had been physically silenced, she helped her family find the perpetrators of her rape. He remembers her energy when searching through books and her eagerness to find the tale of Philomela in Ovid’s Metamorphosis. He also remembers understanding Lavinia’s arm signals as an explanation “that there were more than one/confederate in the fact” and that she utilized a stick placed between her teeth to write the names of her attackers in the sand.

No motive for the rape has yet been found, though authorities suspect that the idea was initiated by Tamora, whose son was murdered by Titus upon her arrival in Rome.

Unfortunately, authorities have no leads concerning the remaining corpses. Authorities are looking into the details, but feel that the only solid explanation is that Andronicus’ atrocious treatment of his own child brought forth the truth concerning Chiron and Demetrius’ integrity, which spurred a chain reaction of violent events.

Burial services for Andronicus and his daughter will be held at the Andronicus monument. Saturninus was to be placed in his own family’s monument. When asked what to do with the body of Tamora, Lucius, another child of Andronicus, simply replied “throw her forth to beasts and birds to prey./Her life was beastly and devoid of pity./And being dead, let birds on her take pity.”
“Clothes Found Outside Venetian Court No Longer Source of Confusion”

Venice—

A bundle of fine gentleman’s clothing was found behind the Venetian court last week, and has proved puzzling for detectives trying to find the owner. After much deliberation, detectives have concluded that the clothing belongs to Portia, a maid recently wed to Bassanio. The young woman began her work of image-crafting in order to save the life of Antonio, Bassanio’s good friend and a merchant of Venice.

The disguise proved successful, as Portia—under the pseudonym Balthasar—presented herself as a “young doctor of Rome” and proceeded to free Antonio from his debt toward Shylock, a resident of Venice known for his money-hoarding capabilities.

Friends of Portia have said that the wardrobe disguise was completely uncharacteristic of the young lady, who typically demonstrated extreme obedience, evidenced by her decree upon marrying Bassiano that “her gentle spirit/Commits itself to [his] to be directed/As from her lord, her governor, her king.”

Detectives interviewed Nerissa, Portia’s waiting gentlewoman, who also assumed a male disguise in order to accompany her lady. Nerissa recalls Portia’s eagerness to assume her disguise and the thought she put into her male character. According to the gentlewoman, Portia claimed she would “hold thee any wager,/When we are both accoutered like young men/I’ll prove the prettier fellow of the two,/And wear my dagger with the braver grace,/And speak between the change of man and boy/With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps/Into a manly stride, and speak of frays/Like a fine bragging youth.”

Phyllis Rackin, an expert on gender, relates Portia’s cross dressing to that of the cross dressing seen by men in the theater: “she takes on the disguise of a boy, dressing in garments of the same gender that the real boy … would have worn when he stepped outside the theater. What is important, I think, is that this is a false appearance.”

Whether false or not, Portia’s confident performance impressed many. Upon discovery that Balthasar was, in fact, a female in disguise, individuals within the community were astonished at the rhetorical power the young girl held. Karen Newman, an expert in female psychology and its relation to cross dressing, believes that “Portia’s linguistic play here … resists the social, sexual, and political system of which she is a part and provides a means for interrogating its distribution of power along gender lines.”

What remains astonishing to detectives, though, is Portia’s ability to free Antonio from his legal obligations to Shylock, when a court of men could not accomplish the task themselves.

This is the first documented case of a woman in Venice stepping beyond the limits of her expected duties. Detectives are still contemplating the appropriate course of action. While a female presence is not forbidden in the Venetian court, it is certainly frowned upon and, as such, a method of discipline remains to be determined.

Fortunately, the agreement between Antonio and Shylock was determined null and void due to a technicality, so any actions taken to discipline Portia will not result in a subsequent trial for the merchant of Venice.

Portia’s case is unique among early modern society. As such, we here at ‘Like Wax’ would like to know what you think. Was Portia right to defend her husband’s friend? Or, should she have left the work up to her male counterparts? Your opinion matters. Our “In the News” editors have created a blog specifically for Portia’s cause and want you to share your thoughts.

If you, or a loved one, have ever felt confined within a specific role, or if you just have something to say, please don’t be shy. Your voice can make the difference. Go online to www.likewax.com/inthenews to post a comment to our blog. Or, send an email to editors@likewax.com to let us know what you think. Our magazine is designed to engage YOU, our readers, and we love to hear your comments. Starting next month, ‘Like Wax’ will be creating an opinion section filled with your letters and comments! So, don’t be shy—what you have to say does matter.
“Family Reunion Reveals Hidden Dysfunction”

Sicilia—

The shores of Sicilia proved a place for a reunion last week, as Leontes, King of Sicilia, was reunited with his wife, Hermione, and daughter, Perdita, after a sixteen year separation. Their separation came about by a stab of jealousy by Leontes, as he questioned his wife’s fidelity sixteen years prior.

The reunion of the family took place after quite a turn of events. The suspicion occurred upon the birth of Perdita, who Leontes believed to be the offspring of long-time friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia.

Paulina, a wife of one of the Lords in Leontes’ court, remembers Leontes’ anger. She remembers showing him his newborn and his contemptuous remarks, as he stated “This brat is none of mine./ It is the issue of Polixenes./ Hence with it, and together with the dam,/Commit them to the fire.” The order from Leontes brought about the apparent death of Hermione and Leontes’ elder son, as well as the banishment of Perdita to Bohemia, where she was adopted by an old shepherd.

The death of Hermione and his son took quite a toll on Leontes, who promised to “once a day … visit/The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there/Shall be [his] recreation.” This change of heart was brought about by Paulina, whose sharp tongue was criticized throughout the trial of Hermione’s apparent infidelity.

Perdita, meanwhile, settled easily into country life, winning the heart of young Prince Florizel in the process. Bystanders remember a country feast in which Perdita dressed as a queen, and recall Florizel saying “when you sing,/I’d have you buy and sell so, so give alms,/Pray so; and for the ord’ring your affairs,/To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you/A wave o’th’ sea, that you might ever do/Nothing but that, move still, still so,/And own no other function.” Florizel seemed unconcerned about the young maid’s social status, claiming “all [her] acts are queens.”

Unfortunately, Polixenes found the match between his son and the country maid unfavorable, claiming to “devise a death” for her “if ever henceforth [she]/These rural latches to his entrance open.” The opposition instigated the two lovers to flee to Sicilia, with the hopes of being married at the court of Leontes.

Upon arriving in Sicilia, Perdita’s royal ties revealed themselves and the lovers married amidst a happy crowd. The occasion became even happier as Leones and Perdita discovered Hermione upon Paulina’s insistence at the viewing of a statue created in the Queen’s honor. The statue’s lifelike appearance stunned the viewers, and they soon discovered that the statue was, in fact, Hermione, who explained that “knowing by Paulina that the Oracle/Gave hope [Perdita] wast in being, have preserv’d/Myself to see the issue.” The reunion was a cause for joy and celebration throughout Sicilia.

Psychologists still wonder about the functional nature of the family. Many were shocked at the seemingly incestuous desire Leontes demonstrated for his own daughter, as he made advances toward the young maid, only checked by Paulina’s reminder that his “eye hath too much youth in’t.”

Similarly, psychoanalysts remain shocked at the ease with which Perdita moved between class lines. Catherine Belsey, an expert in the field, shared her input, explaining that “young women are driven by cruelty or wickedness into exile, banished from their proper place … All of them bear their humiliation with patience, and all of them finally marry a rich husband, when, by magical or other means, he sees them in the beautiful clothes appropriate to their true rank.” Belsey continues with her psychological evaluation, stating that “the anxiety of the lovers centers not on the inappropriateness of their relationship but mainly on the predictable anger of the King” and that the union of the two lovers “fulfill[s] in fantasy a desire to overcome social difference.”

Belsey also believes that Perdita’s easy transformation from shepherdess to princess demonstrates that identities do not exist: “There are no identities, Jacques Derrida points out, only identifications … Identification thus occurs in a specific situation; it pertains to a particular time and place; and other identifications will succeed it, called forth by other situations … Perdita’s true situation is not there: she is no more a shepherd’s daughter than she is a goddess.”

Such an analysis makes sense in Perdita’s situation, and experts believe the princess will live a long, happy, and psychologically healthy life following her social transfer to a royal class. She now lives happily with her father, mother, and husband, and is trying to make up for her sixteen years in exile.
“Source of Magic Linked to Oberon—Forest is Peaceful Once Again”

Athens—

The source of magic plaguing the forest of Athens recently has been linked to Oberon, King of the Fairies. The motive for using such magic was to control his wife, Titania, after she disregarded his wishes.

Oberon used the “love-in-idleness” flower, commonly known in households as the pansy, in order to control his wife’s amorous feelings. According to Robin Goodfellow, an assistant to the King, Oberon became angry with Titania because “she, as her attendant, hath/A lovely boy stol’n from an Indian king./She never had so sweet a changeling;/And jealous Oberon would have the child/Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.” While not explicitly stated, Titania’s attachment to the child hinted at thoughts of infidelity.

Their dispute, perpetuated by Titania’s lavish treatment of the child, resulted in a strong argument between the two that was felt through the entire forest. Bystanders during the argument remember Titania’s displeasure at Oberon’s jealous rage, which created negative effects on nature including fog, floods, dead crops, and disease. One fairy remembers Oberon demanding an answer from Titania to the question, “am not I thy lord?”

Titania’s defensiveness at this question spurred interest, for Titania refused to back down from Oberon’s accusations and be silent, instead accusing him of returning only to see his “buckskinned mistress and … warrior love,” which bystanders understood as Hippolyta, the Amazon queen betrothed to Theseus, Duke of Athens.

Following the dispute, Oberon sent for the flower and made a potion out of the juice, intended to make the consumer love the next thing she sees.

Unfortunately, Oberon’s plan did not work quite right, as he soon discovered that the potion could be used for a pair of lovers also within the forest. Hermia and Helena, in love with Lysander and Demetrius, respectively, found themselves victims of the flower’s powerful love potion. The four humans had entered the forest following an argument between Hermia and her father, who disapproved of her interest in Lysander.

The mismatching of lovers led to disputes between Lysander and Demetrius, though Oberon sought to fix these problems with more doses of his potion. After several tries, all was set right.

Upon learning of the source of the magic, authorities questioned Oberon as to his motive for utilizing the potion in the first place. Oberon replied, “When I had at my pleasure taunted [Titania],/And she in mild terms begged my patience,/I then did ask of her the changeling child,/Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent/To bear him to my bower in fairyland./And now I have the boy, I will undo/This hateful imperfection of her eyes.”

While under the influence of the potion, Titania was seen caressing and doting upon a man with the head of an ass. Neither she nor Bottom—as authorities learned the man was named—have any recollection of the incident, believing the memory to be “no more yielding but a dream.”

 Authorities could not pursue further punishment for Oberon’s actions, as all the humans were returned safely to Athens and the green world of the forest is out of legal jurisdiction.
Dear Athena,

I did something daring the other day. My beloved husband’s friend, Antonio, was close to losing his life because of an agreement he made on my husband’s behalf. I don’t know what we would have done if Antonio died because of us!

So, I quickly gathered some gentleman’s clothing and had my gentlewoman accompany me to the Venetian court. With the clothing, I disguised myself as a doctor and was granted admittance into the court.

You should have seen me! How I spoke—so convincing, so unyielding! I exculpated Antonio. I found a technicality in his monetary arrangement with Shylock so the Venetian court had to let him go. Antonio and my husband were so grateful. It brought joy to my heart to know that I prevented blood from being shed.

The newspapers soon discovered who I was, though. A lot of people think that my whole disguise was an act. Oh, Athena, but it wasn’t! I may have been dressed in a man’s clothing but the speaking, the confidence, the political power—all of that was me. And I loved it—the power, the freedom to speak my mind in front of a male body, it was liberating!

But, Athena, I need your help. Where do I go from here? Everyone knows I dressed up as a man to save a friend, but now that I’ve tasted what it is to be a man—to be free to express my opinions in a social and political world—I don’t want to return to my old, monotonous domestic life. I think my husband is expecting that I will return to my old habits. What should I do?

Sincerely,
Portia

Dear Portia,

Congratulations on your achievement! It sounds like you really handled yourself in court.

Changing the views of a large population is hard. While Antonio may respect that you saved him and your husband may be proud, individuals will probably expect you to return to your domestic way of life.

Karen Newman, an expert in patriarchal societies, feels that many see “marriage and the family as a kingdom in small, a microcosm ruled over by the husband.” Newman feels that she sees too many people in your situation who feel that they are “a microcosm to man’s macrocosm and as subject to his sovereignty.”

Perhaps you can find a comfortable place in the middle of these two extremes. While you probably won’t be allowed near the Venetian court for a while, talk to your husband to see if you can come to some sort of arrangement that gives you freedom beyond your domestic duties. The world is changing, so why shouldn’t you? Gently push on those gender expectations until you are in a situation you are comfortable with. Just don’t use cross dressing as a means of getting your way. Push for your rights as a woman. It might take some time, but rules aren’t set in stone.

Good Luck,
Athena

Dear Athena,

I need your help. I have just encountered the anger of my beloved Florizel’s father. I should have known better than to think I, a shepherd’s daughter, could marry a prince! I should have known that “the heaven sets spies upon us,” and that Polixenes would learn of our plan.

Sincerely,
Portia
Originally, I vowed that “this dream of mine/Being now awake,
I'll queen it no inch farther,/But milk my ewes and weep,” but
now I don't know what to do. I love Florizel, but I should never
have expressed my feelings. Oh, I wish I had never dressed up as
Queen of the Feast! My heart aches for him, but I know I cannot
cross class lines. My position, as a woman and as one of such low
rank, demands my obedience to this issue. Florizel wishes to run
away to Sicilia to be married, that though I am not the daughter of
a king, I will be, “once [I am his] wife.” I am unsure of what to
do. Do you have any advice?

Anxiously awaiting your reply,

Perdita

Dear Perdita,

You worry so much for one so young! I once heard a wise young man
say “The odds for high and low’s alike.” Your chances of finding
happiness are the same as Prince Florizel’s. Love does not take rank
into question. You cannot hide how you truly feel.

A friend of mine, Catherine Belsey, understands your situation and
agrees that “the issue [is] always class, rather than wealth.” But who says
your class needs to be fixed? Identity is not fixed, but flux. You have
the power to change this.

Think about Florizel’s offer; it could be the change you are looking for.
You can’t always let customs dictate how you act. Perhaps your actions
will help change the futures of other lovers to come. You could be the
stepping stone for cultural change. Good luck.

Sincerely,

Athena

Dear Athena,

I’m devastated. I’m in love with Demetrius, but he only has eyes
for Hermia, one of my good friends. I wish I had Hermia’s
admirable qualities—her voice, her eye, her looks. Perhaps if I
were more like Hermia, Demetrius would love me.

I’ve tried to express my love to him, but “the more I love, the
more he hateth me.” What should I do, Athena? I’ve tried to
vocalize my feelings, even asking to be used “as [his] spaniel,” for
any position near Demetrius is a position of joy to me.

Do you have any suggestions? I want him to love me, I need him
to love me, but I’ve tried all human means of persuasion. I could
use some divine wisdom.

Lovesick,

Helena

Dear Helena,

I wonder if perhaps you are being too vocal in your affections. While
expressing your emotions is something I applaud—in my opinion I
don’t think we see enough of it in your society—your newfound voice
could be making Demetrius uncomfortable. Perhaps try to tone down
your expressive tendencies and see if that helps the situation a little.

Also, I noticed that you seem to be assuming overly submissive roles,
and you aren’t even married yet! If you want Demetrius to respect you,
you must show that you can respect for yourself. Stop comparing
yourself to his dog, and walk around with confidence, knowing that you are
beautiful. You don’t need to compare yourself to Hermia to know
that.

Some friends of mine—Judith Bardwick and Elizabeth Douvan—see a
lot of this type of behavior among young women like you. They feel
that young females “use interpersonal success as a route to self-esteem
… In general, they have continued, even as adults, to esteem themselves
as they are valued by others.”

Why don’t you stop this trend? You don’t have to follow the same path
as your friend, or even other eligible females for that matter. Stand up
for yourself and be happy that you are different. Chances are,
Demetrius will see the new Helena and appreciate you more for it.

Good Luck,

Athena

Dear Athena,

Things have taken a turn for the worse here in Rome. I think my
days are numbered. About a week ago I was out with my
husband, Bassianus, when we came upon the Goths, Tamora,
Chiron, and Demetrius. I poked fun at Tamora’s promiscuity,
something I shouldn’t have done. The two sons killed my
husband, Athena! To make matters worse, they raped me, cutting
out my tongue and removing my hands in the process. Even now,
I have to use young Lucius to help transcribe what I write in the
sand by means of a stick in my mouth.

I think the rape was my fault. I had to go on, taunting that woman
for her affair with the Moor, telling her she had “a goodly gift in
horning.” I lost my chastity, Athena. But not to worry, I warned
my father and uncle of the matter. Removing my hands and
tongue could not stop me from incriminating those two
barbarians.

But this is what I’m worried about. I’ve always been my father’s
pride and joy. But now, mutilated as I am, he barely looks at me. I
think he is ashamed of me. He couldn’t control what happened,
but I think he feels responsible for my rape. Our family prides
itself on honor, and I have a funny feeling that something terrible
is going to happen. Any advice on how I should handle this?

Counting down the days,

Lavinia
Dear Lavinia,

Such tragedy! My warmest sympathies go out to you and your family. You shouldn’t feel bad about your comments to Tamora. No amount of verbal abuse makes rape an acceptable action. While you perhaps could have avoided her anger, you couldn’t have avoided the actions of her sons. I respect you for your ability to speak out, especially in such a patriarchal society.

As for your father’s curious behavior, I think I can help you understand what he is feeling. According to expert Claire McEachern, “patriarchy is, in fact, composed of two principle systems of affective loyalties: the family, over which the father rules, and a social/political system founded on male alliance, in which the father is invested.”

When you were raped, Lavinia, your father lost that control over his family. As my friend Coppelia Kahn puts it, he “failed to oversee properly both the transmission of political power and the exchange of a daughter” you. Your father is probably upset over this fact, rather than being upset with you. In these situations, there is not much you can do. You were correct in identifying the two men involved in your crime, so just relax and have faith that your father will handle the situation.

Best of Luck,

Athena

Dear Athena,

My father is so infuriating! He just doesn’t understand that I love Lysander, and I will never marry Demetrius. He got so angry that he took this matter to Theseus, Duke of Athens. He told me that my “father should be as a god” and that I am “by [my father] imprinted.”

Oh, Athena, I don’t know what to do. I may have acted too rashly. Theseus warned me that if I didn’t marry Demetrius, I would “either die to the death, or … abjure/For ever the society of men.” After hearing this, I promised to run away with Lysander. We want to marry where Athenian law cannot interfere with our love.

What should I do? I just don’t think it’s right that my father should be able to dictate who I marry. Do you agree?

Please help,

Hermia

Dear Hermia,

Your case is not uncommon among young women your age. Early modern gender roles dictate that a father holds rule over his house.

Have a question for Athena?

Submit your question to askathena@likewax.com for a chance to have your question answered!

Your society is one where, according to my friend Clara Park, “fathers may dispose of their daughters as they will.” While you may find this frustrating, it is important that you understand that this behavior stems from a culturally informed choice.

With that said, I do not think that your role as a submissive daughter needs to be permanent. As time progresses, so can the roles of young women. I agree that you should be allowed to choose your husband. While you see this, your father may need some convincing. Try sitting down with him to discuss why you love Lysander. What distinguishes Lysander from Demetrius, or any other suitor for that matter? Your father may listen more to reason than to rebellion.

Let me know how your situation works out. The control of a father seems to be one of the trickiest areas for you young ladies to gain your independence. Katharine E. Maus seems to understand the delicate balance between your father’s wishes and your own. It is important for your father that your marriage be “a property relation involving economic alliance of individuals,” while still being “a social relation … associated with love” for you.

Good Luck,

Athena
Lost:
Search and rescue volunteers needed to find daughter in forest outside Athens. Daughter disappeared after argument with father concerning marriage preparations. Any news of her whereabouts or any volunteers should report to Egeus in Athens.

For Sale:
Fine gentleman’s clothing. Like new—only worn once. Outfit suitable for daily social and political activities in Venice, including use in the court. Interested buyers should contact Portia at her house in Belmont.

Urgent:
Father seeks aids to intercept wedding plans between son and ‘low-born lass’ pretending to be of noble lineage. Aids must be capable of extreme measures, not limited to having this imposter’s beauty ‘scratched with briers and made more homely than [her] state.’ Interested parties should contact Polixenes at his palace in Bohemia.

Wanted: Suitor for Daughter
Father from well-off Venetian family seeks suitable husband for his only daughter. Suitors need not be of noble blood. Emphasis placed on logic, reasoning, and attention to lady’s needs. Suitors must be able to correctly choose a casket based upon the following riddles inscribed upon them:

1. ‘Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.’
2. ‘Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.’
3. ‘Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.’

The suitor who chooses the appropriate casket will find a picture of his lady. Suitors who choose incorrectly will be dismissed immediately.

Inquiries can be made to the house at Belmont.

Baker Wanted:
Baker needed for royal dinner to honor Roman family. Desserts will include an assortment of pies. Baker must supply baking tools. Employer will supply ingredients. Baker must not question ingredients provided or motives for the dinner. Interested parties can contact Titus at his house in Rome.

Wanted: 'Poor lowly maid' seeks royal costume for country feast. Costume must make individual appear queenly. Individuals with possible garments should contact Perdita at her cottage in Bohemia.
Can't get enough of Shakespeare's Plays?
Read the works discussed in this issue here:


For Further Reading:

For supplementary materials concerning gender roles in early modern England, look to this list as your educational guide:


Our “In the News” Editors put together a list of experts who contributed to the articles. We’ve added the list here to allow you to continue your reading:


We here at ‘Like Wax’ feel that texts can connect us to historical periods and movements. Because of this, we encourage you to read sources outside of our magazine to fully understand this progression of gender roles.

We asked Athena to provide a list of her recommended sources. Here’s what she thinks you should read:


