ROZPRAWY - ARTICLES

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"IDENTITY POLITICS": DRAMATIC GENRES, SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS, AND THE BUTLERIAN FRAMEWORK

The act of classification affects all entities, whether they are living or deceased, objects or animals, natural or synthetic; and whether they exist in the soil, on the earth, or even on a page. The classificatory process ordinarily serves to differentiate between certain 'types' of entities in order to enable better comprehension of the organism concerned. However, in non-static subjects – such as those who enact or contribute to their very processes of being – this manner of categorisation actually restricts and inhibits growth, development, and the very *identity* of the subject. Literary and dramatic works have been held captive to such processes of classification since Aristotle, and the ever-limiting nature of literary criticism has only served to increase the options for generic categorisation. Polonius noted this expanding nature of genre: in *Hamlet* he considered the arriving players at Elsinore 'the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, / pastoral-comica, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical- / historical-pastoral'[1]. The shift here, from nouns to adjectives, emphasises this spiralling criticism that would rather turn inwards upon itself than seek alternative, *a posteriori* analytical approaches. Shakespeare's plays have arguably been affected more than most works by these fluctuating ideals of dramatic genres: from the plays' very inceptions, their genres have been altered, as we see in quarto versions, Heminges and Condell's First

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[1] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 2.2.351-3. All further references will be to this edition and contained within the body of the text.

Folio, and plays that have been dismissed as simply memorial recon-
structions. When scholars put drama into a particular generic 'category',
they anaesthetise the dynamism of the work itself: inexplicably, the *per-
formed* play ceases to hone its own identity, surrendering instead to the
prescriptions and connotations supplied by the *genre*.

  Judith Butler suggested an alternative response to this fascination
with classification, through demonstrating that gender – perhaps the
most prevalent and restrictive classificatory process – is not an allocation
prior to a person's birth, but, rather, is constituted through that person's
acts, and their *performance* as a human being. In 'Performative Acts
and Gender Constitution' (1988), Butler stated that that 'the acts by
which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within
theatrical contexts'[2]. Both gender and genre function as *a priori* sys-
tems of classification: in strikingly similar ways, they take the cate-
gorised entity – whether this is a gendered self or a 'comic' or 'tragic'
play, for example – as defined prior to the series of 'constitutive acts', acts
which construct a performed identity[3]. Using the performative framework
supplied by Butler for analysing gender, this paper will demonstrate the
insufficiencies of dramatic genre as a classificatory system and interro-
gate the critically superficial employment of marriage in genre-oriented
studies of Shakespeare's plays. Through specific analysis of *The Taming
of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice*, and *King Lear,* this paper will
outline how the performativity inherent in these works can be aligned
with the processes constituting gender to promote a method of analysis
centring more on characterisation and dramatic dynamism than on repe-
titive obedience to the unwieldy concept of genre.

Processes of becoming

Gender has been, more or less, a means for differentiation: for purposes
of identification it appeared necessary that some people be contrasted
with others, and biological features appeared an 'obvious' means of
achieving this. It proved to be a yardstick, in the most phallic sense,
against which to define people. Foucault asserted that that 'all desig-
nation must be accomplished by means of a certain relation to all other
possible designations': Butler takes up Foucault's theories, and applies
them to arguably the most various and complex natural entity on earth,

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[2] J. Butler 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenolo-
  gyand Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal*, 40.4 (1988), 519-531 p. 521.

[3] J. Butler, p. 14.

the human being[4]. Through this logic, women had been primarily known through the fact that they were not men. As Shakespeare demonstrates, men were often defined by their genitalia: Hamlet declares to Ophelia 'That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs', qualifying this with 'nothing'[5]. In this quotation Ophelia is, therefore, identified as a woman due to her lack of male genitals. All such characters that audiences and readers meet, whether they present as a Lady Macbeth, an Ophelia, Desdemona, Viola, Cordelia, or Cleopatra, are often identified through their relationships with men: they are daughters, lovers, sisters, wives, or mothers. In the list of Dramatis Personae that precedes each printed edition of the play, these strictly relational identities are demonstrated: in King Lear, Regan is identified beneath Lear as 'his second daughter'; in Much Ado About Nothing, Beatrice is explicated as 'niece to Leonato'[6]. Men have been critically considered the focal points in social drama, there are heroes, tragic heroes, villains and kings, and women are predominantly known by their relationships to these men. Jacques Lacan, as quoted by John Drakakis, identified Ophelia as '"that piece of bait"', stating that she is '"linked forever, for centuries, to the figure of Hamlet"'[7]. The aspect of performativity in gender, plays a significant role in the construction of male or female-ness: the terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are problematic in that such connotations are not necessarily a part of each gender, as many queer and gender theorists point out. The adherence to, or the rebellion against, the prescriptive behavioural, physical, or psychological 'norms' of gender make-up, so often impacts upon the reception of a certain character, and by extension on the formation of the plays themselves.

Philip Davis has observed that, in literary criticism, 'paraphrase is what we mainly do': we are 'secondary creatures not getting back to the heart and root of the matter as if for the first time again, but just putting received things into other words, knowingly repeating the already known in another version'[8]. Not 'getting back to the heart and root of

[4] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock, 1970), p. 144.

[5] W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by Harold Jenkins, *Arden Shakespeare* (London: Cengage, 2001), 3.2.120-121, 123.

[6] W. Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan and H. R. Woudhuysen, *Arden Shakespeare* (London: Cengage, 2001), pp. 634, 914.

[7] J. Drakakis (ed.), *Shekespearean Tragedy* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 282.

[8] P. Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 1.

the matter' is a creatively inhibiting side-effect of theory: Julia Kristeva stated that literature is 'always in the process of becoming', with 'process' conveying action and movement; dramatic works, especially, do not exist to be examined in stasis[9]. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir asserted, to much critical interest, that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather becomes one': although, as disputed by Butler, De Beauvoir admits that one *necessarily*, at some point, 'becomes' a woman, this concept of *becoming* coherently links gender and genre in a manner which invites contrastive analysis[10]. The similarity between Kristeva's and de Beauvoir's statements is inescapable, with both of these 'process[es] of becoming' painting dynamic pictures of action, self-definition, and change that affect and alter our perceptions both of literature and of gender. While De Beauvoir appears to defer to the inevitability of *becoming* a gender, her rejection of the idea of an automatic gender – as based on physicality and biology alone – invites performative analysis. The concept of performativity exposes the *process* of construction, rather than, in Megan Becker-Leckrone's terms, privileging the '*remains* of a process' and using this as a platform from which to classify the entity concerned[11]. Dramatic works are not, by default, *performative*, although they are works for performance; the classificatory system of genre functions as a post-performative structure that focuses on the *constructed* work alone rather than the play-as-process. Butler states that 'gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*'[12]. This statement relates perfectly to *a priori* considerations of genre: it is not a stable locus from which point a wide variety of plays appear, each conforming to the specific blueprint for that particular genre.

In 2.3 of *Twelfth Night*, Feste the clown informs Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch that 'journeys end in lovers meeting'[13]. Follow-

[9] J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 3.

[10] S. de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (Colchester: Vintage, 1989), p. 265.

[11] M. Becker-Leckrone, *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005), p. 7 (My italics).

[12] Butler, p. 519.

[13] W. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 2.3.43.

ing Sir Andrew's approval, 'excellent good, i'faith', the clown continues, demanding 'What is love? 'Tis not hereafter, / Present mirth hath present laughter: / What's to come is still unsure'[14]. This classic example of the Carpe Diem mentality urges lovers to embrace their *current* situation, where 'present mirth' produces 'present laughter'. The emphasis on the 'present', through iambic stresses, parallel phrasing, and repetition, depicts a transient state, where all may quickly alter: the dismissal of the future in 'tis not hereafter' calls into question the finality of how 'journeys end'. This tension, between the apparent finality of where 'journeys end', and the uncertainty of 'What's to come', invites consideration of the role played by marriage both in Renaissance culture and also in dramatic works of the period, questioning the goal-like status afforded it in dramatic criticism as an elusive point of ultimate social and dramatic attainment. Marriage as a generic device in Shakespeare's works has three functions: it is either a Butlerian 'constitutive act'; it operates as a generic catalyst – which will be returned to later; or it exists as an *enabling* act – in that it permits the use of other dramatic features seized upon by theorists to categorise plays[15].

In many situations, where the Shakespearean marriage is employed as a *defining* feature of genre, it is more of a repressive device to suppress seemingly 'rebellious' or simply autonomous women, such as Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Seemingly non-troublesome women too, for example Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, whose intelligence and good nature defy categorisation as either rebellious or troublesome, are also subjected to such suppression. The place of marriage in Shakespearean 'comedy' has been seized upon by modern genre-theorists, resulting in such prevailing terminology as 'comic resolution', 'ritualistic resolution', and 'comic closure'[16]. The pervading presen-

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[14]   *Twelfht Night*, 2.3.45. 47-49.

[15]   The 'enabling' function of marriage is evident in, for example, the 'romances': the father-daughter reunion – so often used to define a play as a 'romance' would not have been possible were it not for an earlier marriage. As we see in *The Winter's Tale*, for example, Leontes's suspicions of Hermione's infidelity result in him casting away Perdita as his legitimate daughter. Only upon realisinghis errors in accusing Hermione of adultery does Leontes understand Perdita's true relationship to him, and thus the reunion takes place.

[16]   L. Danson, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 135; A. Stott, *Comedy* (London: Routlegde, 2005), p. 123; L. Hopkins, 'Marriage as Comic Closure', in *Shakespeare's Comedies*, ed. by E. Smith (London: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 36-53 (36).

ce of 'resolution' in these discussions of the 'comic' marriage scenario is
steeped in theoretical considerations of the genre: the marriage in
'comedies', where it appears at the ends of plays, is in itself regarded as
a resolution; a harmonising device intended to give to the play a sense of
finality, and the restoration of social order. Lawrence Danson states that
'comic resolution serves to secure the social order at women's expense';
the efficacy of this ritualistic use of marriage resides in the fact that
complex moral and social issues lurk under its seemingly conventional
guise[17]. The problem lies in the 'resolution', as both Andrew Stott and
Danson term such an ending, where the assumption is made, by critics,
that marriage guarantees closure and a 'happy ever after'[18].

Lenses of interpretation

Danson – among so many other critics – takes the concept of 'comic
resolution' as an appropriate perspective through which to analyse
Shakespeare's 'comedies'. This approach almost validates the use of
marriage as a restraining device, through which the female characters
can be restricted, 'comedies' can be critically controlled, and therefore
categorised in static, generic terms. The restraining potential of mar-
riage – as demonstrated in the actual play-text, which can highlight
social problems – also appears, sometimes, in a framing format, where
the subject of marriage both introduces and concludes the play. For
example, in *Measure for Measure*, an absence of marriage introduces
and instigates the plot, and the play concludes with the proposed mar-
riages of Isabella and Duke Vincentio and of Angelo and Mariana. *A Mid-
summer Night's Dream* opens with discussion of the marriage of
Theseus and Hippolyta, and ends with the promise of marriage for the
two young couples; Hermia and Lysander, and Demetrius and Helena.
This practice of 'book-ending' dramatic plots with marriage indicates a rest-
raining force, or a manner of control, inherent in Renaissance nuptials.
The theme of restriction is communicated throughout *The Taming of the
Shrew*, particularly in reference to Katherina who is subjected to the
unsatisfying restriction of marriage at the close of the play. Non-con-
sensual restriction is first conveyed when Petruchio calls Katherina
'Kate'; she immediately contradicts him, and reclaims her name, decla-
ring 'Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing; / They call

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[17]   Danson, p. 135.

[18]   Stott, p. 123.

me Katherine that do talk of me'[19]. This diminutive version of Katherina's name throughout the process of wooing is a form of restraint in itself: our 'heroine', as twenty-first-century theatregoers may like to term her, would take on a reduced identity in the Renaissance marriage, anticipated by this name-shortening.

Rosalie Colie asserts that genres can function as '"frames" or "fixes" on the world'; Susan Snyder develops this concept in her introduction to the Oxford Shakespeare edition of *All's Well that Ends Well,* deeming genres 'lenses of interpretation'[20]. These images promote a more *interpretive* use of genre, rather than the unyielding and categorical restraint intimated through many critical works. Zeffirelli's 1967 production of *The Taming of the Shrew,* starring Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, intensifies the use of restrictions, rendering physical what Diane Henderson refers to as the 'ideological frame'[21]. Zeffirelli literally uses frames within frames to emphasise this restrictive nature of marriage. In 3.2, where in Shakespeare's play-text Gremio gives his account of the marriage, Zeffirelli visually represents the build-up to the ceremony, with Katherina running through the church doors towards the altar[22]. Similarly, in 5.2, when Katherina enters the feast room, dragging Hortensio's new wife and Bianca along with her, she steps through a highly decorated door. Both doors can be viewed as thresholds; the latter as a threshold through which neither of the other two newly-wed wives had been inclined to step. These thresholds intimate restriction; they are liminal, designated points where one enters the territory of wifehood. This social enclosure of women by marriage marks its function as an emotionally restrictive space, particularly when contrasted with the single Katherina's daring exploits in the same production, flight from Petruchio on the roof. But, of course, a physical door has two purposes, and it is against this restraint of social, physical, and psychical natures that Katherina strug-

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[19] W. Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew,* in *Complete Works,* ed. by J. Bate and E. Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 2.1.184-85. All further references will be to this edition and contained withhin the body of the text.

[20] R. Colie, *Resources of Kind: Genre in the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA: U of California p, 1973), p. 113; W. Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well,* ed. by S. Snyder (Oxford: OUP, 2008), p. 41.

[21] D. Henderson, 'A shrew for the Times', in Shakespeare: *The Movie II: Popularizing the plays of film, TV, video, and DVD,* ed. by R. Burt and L. E. Bose (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 120-39, p. 139.

[22] See *The Taming of the Shrew,* dir. by F. Zeffirelli (20th Century Fox, 1967).

gles. Her fleeing from the feast room mocks both the assumed finality of Petruchio/Burton's 'kiss me, Kate' (5.1.192), and the apparently submissive, loving embrace shared by the turbulent couple. Katherina runs from the very room wherein her recent marriage is being celebrated. The frames within frames, then, function as a matryoshka structure of restriction when Zeffirelli portrays marriage in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Such physical or even syllabic liminal spaces, represented by the doors, windows, and name-shortening in both the text and performances of *The Taming of the Shrew*, reflect the emotional restraint presented by marriage: film, television, and theatrical directors pick up on Shakespeare's *textual* clues, transforming them into more *tangible* examples of this repression, undermining the seemingly restorative potential of marriage which has been seized upon by critics.

The 'book-ending' technique in 'comedies', as referred to earlier, is much in evidence in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here, the tale of the manipulation of Christopher Sly – told, quite uniquely in Shakespeare's works, in the form of an induction scene – precedes what a modern audience generally think of as 'the plot', in the Folio version, and the marriage between Katherina and Petruchio provides the 'comic closure'. The differences between the quarto and the Folio texts are enlightening in terms of genre study. The 1594 quarto play-text advertises *A Pleasant, Conceited Historie*; in the folio text, the play is simply *The Taming of the Shrew*, and is categorised as a 'comedy'. The notion of the marriage in comedies functioning as a 'constitutive act', symbolic of the restoration of social order, can be further investigated by contrasting these two versions of the text. In *The Taming of a Shrew* as a 'history', the induction scene featuring Sly opens the play and is, significantly, returned to at its end; in the 'comedy' Folio play-text, the induction is used only in the beginning. The quarto version's use of the drama featuring Sly to end the play lends an air of artificiality to 'the plot' with Katherina, Petruchio, et al; the lack of the complete 'frame' as demonstrated in the quarto results in the marriage in the Folio text becoming less artificial, and not as a feature of a domestic 'comonty' performed exclusively for ly[23]. As such, the use of the term 'induction scene' for the scenario featuring Sly requires an alternative definition when it functions in the

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[23] W. Shakespeare, *A pleasant Conceited Histoire, Called The Taming of a Shrew*, ed. by G. Holderness and B. Loughrey (Hertfordshire: Harvester, 1992), Induction, 140. All further references will be to this edition and contained within the body of the text.

manner in which we see in the quarto. It does not merely induct, but frame, providing a 'continuous, metadramatic perspective on the inner play' which emphasises the 'taming' as performance, rather than providing a moral and psychological comment[24].

The Messenger in the Folio text, acquainting Sly with the doctor's recommendation of *hearing* a play, echoes this framing concept: 'Therefore they thought it good you hear a play / And frame your mind to mirth and merriment, / Which bars a thousand harms and lengthens life' (IND. 2. 134-36). The use of 'frame' and 'bar' suggests an element of control: 'frame', in this sense, means to adjust, to take on a new perspective. We can apply the Messenger's statement that to hear a play 'bars a thousand harms' to the construction of *The Taming of the Shrew's* plot. This consequently reframes the fraught relationship of Katherina and Petruchio as artifice, a metadrama in the play as presented to Christopher Sly. As the Page observes, the distinction between 'comonty' and 'history' is only slight: he informs Sly that comedy 'is a kind of history' (IND. 140). As such, the framing device is rendered an important theatrical concept, in that it evidently influences the allocation of genre, as we can see from comparing the 'history' play-text – complete with frame – and the 'comedy' play-text without the corresponding final scene. If we pursue this dismissal of the phenomenon of metadrama, and apply the fates of those acting the inner play to the genre of the 'play' as we recognise it, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* could, by the deaths of Pyramus and Thisbe, be classified as a 'tragedy'. This lack of a definitive and critically-agreed genre for the two play-texts, and the relevance of the absence and presence of continuous metadrama in the Folio and quarto versions respectively, calls to account the allocation of genre to *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Rings, things, and nothings
The image of the door as a restrictive device, already noted briefly in the discussion of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is also apparent in *The Merchant of Venice*: on being notified of the Prince of Morocco's approach, Portia observes that 'Whiles we shut the gate upon one wooer, another / knocks at the door'[25]. This image increases Portia's sense of enclosure:

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[24] Holderness and Loughrey, p. 18.

[25] W. Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice,* in *Complete Works*, ed. by J. Bate and E. Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 1.2.131-32. All further references will be to this edition and contained within the body of the text.

not only is she metonymically encased within a casket, but that casket is shut up inside her dead father's house. Often in drama, restriction simultaneously promises liberation; such repression is used, cathartically, to heighten the relief experienced when this treatment is overcome. Shakespearean 'comedy' never reaches this point of relief, however: the restriction of the plays' female characters by marriage is, problematically, critically considered to function as a socially-restorative device. Dramatic props, clues within the play-text, and imaginative productions of Shakespeare's works draw to the foreground this recurring motif of frames and enclosures, which is indicative of an emotional restraint epitomised by marriage and, in turn, the static framing of a play-text by dramatic genres. The theme of restriction in marriage is further intimated by certain objects that draw the audience's attention to the problems regarding such generic uses of marriage. Where, as we saw in Zeffirelli's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, restriction is symbolised physically by a door, restriction possesses a much smaller diameter in *The Merchant of Venice*: that of a ring. Portia's figurative 'liberation' from the caskets – in which she is metonymically enclosed prior to Bassanio's venture – is somewhat undermined by the fact that she had no choice in her future. Portia simply moves sideways from one form of restriction to another: is it better to be enclosed in a marriage, than to be 'curb'd by the will of a dead / father' (1.2.24-25)? Portia's commentaries to Nerissa on her suitors in 1.2., although redundant in terms of the progression of the plot, provide the background to Portia's situation. They bring forth the image of a wasp caught up in a spider's web, to use the imagery applied to Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew*: struggling and stinging fail to liberate the creature, and suffice merely to express its anger and frustration. And Portia's barbed comments, included only to demonstrate her ready intelligence, function in a similar manner: to portray her dissatisfaction at being thus restrained.

In the midst of her feigned argument with Bassanio, over his giving of Portia's ring to the supposed law clerk in 5.1., Portia herself states, 'By heaven I will ne'er come in your bed / Until I see the ring' (5.1.190-91). This is further emphasised in her condemnation of Bassanio's giving away of his wedding ring: she manipulates Bassanio's earlier syntax, declaring: 'If you had known the virtue of the ring, / Or half her worthiness that gave the ring, / Or your own honour to contain the ring, / You would not then have parted with the ring' (5.1.199-202). This imagery is so bound up in chastity and virtue that one cannot miss the link between the wedding ring and sexuality; while Portia is mocking

Bassanio's attempts at persuasion, employing his repetition of 'the ring', she uses such imagery to make this betrayal span more than merely a physical dimension. The use of 'ring' to conclude both Bassanio's and Portia's lines signifies and reinforces the restrictive potential of the ring in a linguistic and metaphorical contest, to ascertain who is truly being restricted by the ring. As Nerissa dismisses Gratiano's description of this token as 'a paltry ring', she declares that the 'posy or the value' was not the sole significance: the oath sworn by Gratiano, that he 'should wear it till [his] hour of death' (5.1. 147, 151, 153) transcends that concept of mere worth or physicality. The ring, for Portia at least, represents all that should be accompanied in marriage: love, obedience, and sharing. She states: 'This house, these servants, and this same myself / Are yours, – my lord's! – I give them with this ring, / Which when you part from, lose, or give away, / Let it presage the ruin of your love' (3.2.170-73). The physical act of enclosing, or even trapping, one's finger inside this ring intimates the restrictive power of marriage: this motif of restriction has pervaded Portia's life, with the power of the dead patriarch – her father – governing her eventual fate and happiness.

Briefly to contextualise the relevance of the shape of the ring to female autonomy, the physical implications of the ring's shape have been much debated in critical works on Renaissance drama, most intensely by Alison Findlay: the general consensus that it is linked inextricably with the female genitals holds strong[26]. Hamlet's pronouncement upon Ophelia and her 'nothing', identifies all women through the Lacanian concept of 'lack'[27]. Feminist criticism locates sexuality in the ring, giving prominence to physical connotations: likening the ring's shape to the 'hole' of the vagina, and its ability to be penetrated; as Irigaray writes, it is 'a body open to penetration [...] in this "Hole" that constitutes its sex'[28]. Irigaray continues, asserting that:

> [Woman's] sexual organ represents *the horror of nothing to see*. A defect in this systematic of representation and desire. A "hole" in its

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[26] See A. Findlay, *A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackweel, 1999).

[27] See D. Luepnitz, 'Beyond the Phallus: Lacan and Feminism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. by J.-M. Rabaté (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 221-37.

[28] L. Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. by C. Porter (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1985), p. 24.

scoptophilic lens. It is already evident in Greek statuary that this
nothing-to-see has to be excluded, rejected, from such a scene of
representation[29].

The constitutive 'hole' of the vagina, and the similarly conspicuous hole
of the ring, explicitly reconcile female sexuality and the shape and con-
notations of the ring. This representational quandary binds female
genitalia up in this image of 'nothing'. The marital ring is, in itself, one
and everything: the conspicuous 'hole' in its centre pulls 'nothingness' in-
to its identity. The wedding ring as signifier for the restriction of female
sexuality and autonomy is fitting. The empowerment inherent in the
relationship between the male 'thing' and the corresponding female 'lack'
is inverted in the use of 'ring'. 'Ring' can be seen as an expansion and an
improvement on 'nothing': *something* is there, though it is not known as
a 'thing'; 'nothing' has been somewhat defined and explicated. The mari-
tal ring, however, is a more complex object.

    As 'lenses of interpretation' has suggested, the restrictive space
that accompanies problematic Shakespearean marriages more often than
not is used to enclose female characters. As we see in *All's Well That
Ends Well* and *The Merchant of Venice*, female characters' rings play a sig-
nificant part in the construction of the drama: Portia twice encloses
Bassanio's finger with the ring, and Helena's ring on Bertram's finger is
the key to ascertaining the truth behind all the lies and deception in the
French court. Female characters present their rings as symbols of mar-
riage, only for them to be quickly given away and denied. This struggle
against one-way restriction - where the male characters continually trap
female characters into unhappy marriages, emotionally restrain them,
and syllabically limit them - is rendered impotent by the male characters'
lack of regard for their marriage, and its symbol of validation; the ring.
In a similar way, dramatic works struggle - by their performative natures
- against the all-encompassing restriction of dramatic genres, where
works are reduced to a sum of their parts, rather than the process as
a whole. The marital ring enters into a leitmotif of restriction in the
'comedies': in, particularly *The Merchant of Venice* and *All's Well That
Ends Well*, there is a three-fold level to this restriction, through the
genre itself, the marriage, and the ring.

    As critics, we can locate significance in the fashion of the
wedding band surrounding an, albeit minimal, but identifiable space. To

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[29] Irigaray, p. 26.

return to Feste's prescriptions on love, the 'present' time is here sur-
passed: when Shakespeare portrays marriage by focusing on the ring,
the *symbol* of marriage, the focus is on the consequences of the union.
This problematises the concept of marriage as finite conclusion sig-
nifying a restoration of social order: consequences are inherently linked
in with the place that the ring holds in Shakespeare's plays. The
constituent elements of New Comedy, the form with which Shakespeare
most notably engages in his 'comic' works, reduce, inevitably to ca-
tastrophe, the one climactic moment. The structural elements of the
'comedy' can, figuratively, form the band of a ring, and the final element,
catastrophe, occupies the centre[30]. The likening of generic components to
the shape of a ring – a wedding ring – makes explicit both the constitution
of 'comedies', and neatly aligns catastrophe with marriage, invoking the
uncertainty in Feste's song.

A. C. Bradley contentiously states that 'it is only in the love-tra-
gedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, that the [tragic]
heroine is as much the centre of the action as the hero'[31]. Angela Pitt
pursues this idea: 'Cleopatra and Juliet are the only women [...] who hold
the centre of the stage in tragedy. Others are there for a brief moment,
or else play crucial supporting roles'[32]. Returning to the notion of
ring-as-restrictor, this 'centre' to which both Bradley and Pitt refer is
debatable: what constitutes a 'centre of action'? Does the female charac-
ter, or heroine, need to have eponymy to be so intrinsically involved in
'the action'? In the 'tragedies', marriage is used indirectly as a generic
catalyst, in that it influences those features that have been identified as
driving forces in a particular genre, for example the Aristotelian fatal
flaw in the 'tragedies'. Although a staple of Shakespearean criticism, the
notion that a human being possesses an innate psychical flaw which,
when exacerbated by trauma, will cause his or her downfall, remains
somewhat improbable. The eponymous male in the 'tragedies' spends
considerable quantities of on-stage time with his wife, or a family mem-

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[30]   The likening of the climatic moment, in Shakespearean drama, to the catastrophe
element in New Comedy is reinforced when Edmund notices Edgar's appoach in *King
Lear*: 'Pat he comes, like the catastrophe of the old comedy' (1.2.134). This is the
moment that Edmund to chooses to instigate the chain of events which will lead to
Edgar's banishment.

[31]   A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1904), p. 2.

[32]   A. Pitt, *Shakespeare's Women* (Newton Abbott: David and Charles, 1981), pp. 49-50.

ber for whom he wishes to construct a marital union: it is unlikely that
such women would not have an influence upon the man, be it deliberate
or accidental. The subtle images of the marital ring – as previously
discussed – and the Lacanian concept of 'nothing' collide in *King Lear*.

The love trial is situated in the midst of Lear's attempts to marry
off his youngest daughter: with the two eldest daughters already mar-
ried, Cordelia's marriage would grant Lear the means to absolve all
monarchical responsibilities. Her betrothal may have been the driving
force for such a contest: Lear states that France and Burgundy, the
'great rivals in our youngest daughter's love', are, at this moment in
court, 'here [...] to be answered'[33]. The very public situation of this
attempted betrothal could be explicated by Lear's favouring of his young-
est daughter: he may have wished to celebrate the impending proposal.
The land dowries were presumably dealt with prior to Lear's interviews
with France and Burgundy, to lure the best suitor with an enticing offer.
Ironically, Lear's intention that 'future strife / May be prevented' by the
love trial proves misjudged: inadvertently, he *invites* strife and torment
by publicly commanding his daughters to present that one abstraction
that may not be quantified: love (1.1.43-4). Cordelia identifies this
impossibility: 'What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent' (1.1.62).
The articulation and even dissection of 'love' moves against its true natu-
re: love is to be *felt*, not merely to be spoken. It is this difficulty, faced by
Cordelia, which perhaps moves the outcome from one course of action to
another. The love trial is the turning-point in Lear's destiny. Given that
the action starts *in medias res*, the audience has no way of knowing
Lear's past behaviour in order to contrast this moment of pride-driven
folly with earlier examples. Lear commands Cordelia to quantify her love
for him:

> Lear: What can you say to draw
>   A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak.
> Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.
> Lear: Nothing?
> Cordelia: Nothing.
> Lear: How, nothing will come of nothing. Speak again

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[33] W. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by J. Bate and E. Rasmussen
(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), 1.1.37-9. All further references will be to this edition
and contained within the body of the text.

> Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
> My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
> According to my bond, no more nor less (1.1.85-93).

Lear's folly in holding the love trial introduces the two leitmotifs of the play: 'nothing' and female speech. These two themes can be linked through the Lacanian concept of lack, making 'nothing' an overtly *female* manner of expression, capable – as we see in *King Lear* – of influencing and, indeed, instigating the ensuing action in the play more than the archaic notion of the fatal flaw.

Cordelia's 'nothing' occupies an intriguing space between speech and silence. Maureen A. Mahoney, in 'The Problem of Silence in Feminist Psychology', asserts that 'feminist literary critics have recognized that textual silences reveal not only cultural suppression but also, alternatively, women's deployment of silence as a form of resistance to the dominant discourse'[34]. As Mahoney points out, the multi-faceted and inherently dichotomous nature of silence – where it may indicate *either* suppression or resistance – makes it a complex phenomenon. Cordelia's 'nothing' articulates a refusal to enter into what Mahoney describes as the dominant discourse of profuse, depthless flattery: as Goneril ironically states, this is a love that 'makes breath poor and speech unable' (1.1.51). Emily C. Bartels observes that Cordelia signifies 'a physically embodied nothing, which becomes "the very ground of being" in the play': 'nothing' and 'being' collide to offer an either positive or negative self-determining means of *being*[35]. Bartels continues, explicating the process for such self-determination: 'the problem is not merely one of gender – though, of course, Cordelia's nothing is different from Lear's – and that difference may be what precipitates the play's crisis'[36]. Cordelia transforms 'nothing' into *something*; something which dictates the course of the play from that very moment.

In other parts of *King Lear*, 'nothing' is made tangible, with empty space – which is the very *essence* of nothing – being repeatedly contained within solid parameters. The Fool's discourse on 'nothing' in 1.4.

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[34] M. A. Mahoney, 'The Problem of Silence in Feminist Psychology', *Feminist Studies* 22.3 (1996), 603-25, p. 604.

[35] E. C. Bartels, 'Breaking the illusion of being: Shakespeare and performance of self', *Theatre Journal*, 46:2(1994), 171-85, p. 172.

[36] Bartels, p. 172.

also corresponds with this imagery: after Lear instructs the Fool that
'nothing can be made out of nothing', the Fool launches into a metaphor
featuring eggs for Lear's crown: 'Why, after I have cut the egg i'the mid-
dle and eat / up the meat, the two crowns of the egg' (1.4.130, 151–52).
Later the Fool, pointing to Lear, observes: 'That's a shelled peascod'
(1.4.149). This concept of 'nothing' being contained within visible para-
meters ironically contradicts its appearance as *nothing*, becoming, in-
stead, *something*. 'Ring' is an expansion of 'nothing', in terms of refe-
rence to female genitalia and identity: but does 'nothing' remain 'nothing',
when it is concretised? The marital ring is a perfect example of the con-
tained 'nothing' – its core is air; abstract, and uncontrollable. Shakes-
peare's continued use of this object to represent marriage intimates that
critics' very superficial considerations of marriage as a restorative device
does not delve deep enough into either this phenomenon or the tangible
representations of nothing; they simply accept it.

Closure?

The use of marriage as a restraining device, then, used by critics to
categorise and control dramatic works, is continually struggled against
by the works themselves. Restriction can take physical forms, such as the
ring in *Merchant of Venice*, and the doors in Zeffirelli's production of
The Taming of the Shrew; it is also communicated through abstract
means, such as the syllabic contractions. The concept of 'nothingness' as
representative of the *female* is challenged through Cordelia's seemingly
empty speech, which enters into a leitmotif of disproving both Renais-
sance and contemporary pronouncements of 'nothing' being truly va-
lueless. As shown through consideration of *The Taming of the Shrew*
Folio play-text alongside the quarto version, where marriage functions
as a generic device of 'comedy', the artificiality of plot that accompanies
the quarto text dissolves in its Folio counterpart, resulting in this un-
satisfactory union providing an incomplete frame which provides a see-
mingly moral comment on 'tam[ing] a curst shrew' (5.1.200). Where
marriage has been deemed a 'resolution' by so many critics, it actually
raises more problems that it 'resolves': the concluding status it has been
previously afforded can be complicated by the concept that we never
actually *see* a marriage in Shakespeare's works. The closest the audience
gets to the nuptial ceremony in Shakespeare is the proposal: however,
some filmic or theatrical productions of Shakespearean drama – Zeffi-
relli's *Taming of the Shrew*, for example – shun the play-text, choosing,

instead, to stage the marital ceremony[37]. In the play-text of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherina and Petruchio's marriage is relayed, second--hand, by Gremio; in Zeffirelli's version, Petruchio stops Katherina's mouth with a kiss as she is in the process of saying 'I do not', in front of the eager wedding congregation, resulting in her indignant and incomplete 'I do ...' being heard by all[38]. This alteration to the play-text represents an anxiety regarding the lack of closure apparent in the written work: this mouth-stopping is not portrayed by Shakespeare. We can take Zeffirelli's insertion in one of two ways: either, the recitation of marital vows provides a much-needed, first-hand confirmation of the marriage, or else it intensifies the unsatisfactory match, by further evincing Katherina's resistance. Indeed, there is a particularly excruciating moment when Taylor's Katherina, after being married to Burton's Petruchio, sinks into a crowd of well-wishers, grasping at her father in horror[39]. In its catalytic function – such as in *King Lear* – marriage complicates the features so often assumed to 'cement' a play's genre firmly as 'tragic': the concept of the fatal flaw instigating the ensuing action is out-dated, and dramatic criticism ought to break away from such dramatically-inhibiting modes of analysis.

Whether gender or genre, the use of a title to differentiate certain objects from other objects is no longer feasible or even productive: genres do not always behave in the manner in which we have always assumed they do, and women or men do not always adhere to the strict behavioural 'norms' with which we have previously associated their genders. In etymological terms, gender and genre are inextricably linked: they come from the same root. In looking at the derivations and deviations of 'gender', its affinity with 'genre' cannot be missed: the Portuguese term for gender is 'genero'; the Italian 'genere'; the Latin 'gener'[40]. In the performative sense, too, they both depict an anxious, inexplicable need to render categorised those entities which are inherently performative. In the same way in which genders are designated to people, genres are *applied* to dramatic works, rather than being born through their essence and performance. So, the conceptions of gender – as a me-

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[37] There are parodic representation of the marriage ceremony – such as in *As You Like It* – which servrs to reinforce my theory that a satisfactory marriage is never conducted upon the Shakespearean stage.

[38] Zeffirelli (dir.).

[39] Zeffirelli (dir.).

[40] http:www.oed.com/view/Entry/77468#eid3044893 [accessed 26 February 2011].

ans of identifying people – and genre – a means of differentiating bet-
ween dramatic works – have the same purpose, the same end-game and,
essentially, the same fallibility as a means of classification. Saussurean
linguistic theory has long destabilized the assumption that signifier
equals signified, and it is now time to focus critical attention on the sub-
ject, rather than on the complexities of the signifier alone. From a de-
constructionist perspective, if language itself is not the fixed, stable
entity it had previously been assumed to be, how can genre retain its
privileged place in dramatic criticism? Shoshana Felman proposed a the-
ory that could help liberate the subject from these constraints of as-
sumed knowledge. She argues against the '"notion of application"', ad-
vocating instead the 'radically different notion of implication: [...] the in-
terpreter's role would here be, not to apply to the text an acquired scien-
ce, a preconceived knowledge, but to act as a go-between, to generate
implications'[41]. So much comes from within drama, as if folded within –
as the very word 'implication' suggests – drama is dynamic, not pro-
grammatic, it [is] a template of eclectic possibilities'[42]. Butler succes-
sfully helped to destabilise the 'natural category' of gender, and such
work remains to be done on genre: the gender of literature. To re-en-
gage with Kristeva and de Beauvoir's statements, Shakespeare's plays
are dynamic, they resist definitive classification, and are, dramatically,
always in 'the process of becoming'[43].

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[41]   S.a Felman (ed.), *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading –
       Otherwise* (Baltimore: J. Hopkins UP, 1982), pp. 8,9.
[42]   Davis, p. 6.
[43]   Kristeva, p. 3.

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ABSTRACT

Performativity, as defined by Judith Butler, is a means of analysis that focuses on the dynamic constitution of a subject, rather than focusing on the end result alone. The post--performative rut, into which criticism of drama has fallen, is best illustrated through critics' reliance upon the unwieldy concept of genre which results in the unnecessary anaesthetising of dramatic works.

This article sets out to demonstrate how, through engaging with Butler's framework of performativity, Shakespeare's plays can be liberated from the theoretical stranglehold of genre. Through specific analysis of *The Taming of the Shrew, The Merchant of Venice,* and *King Lear*, this article interrogates the dominant critical uses of marriage as a generic feature, illustrating how simplistic notions of generic categorisation actually inhibit and restrict the plays' development and inherent performativity. The relevance of applying the principles of performativity to the study of dramatic works results in a process of analysis centring more on characterisation and dramatic dynamism rather than on archaic notions of dramatic genres. Keywords: William Shakespeare; gender; dramatic genres; performativity; Judith Butler; *The Merchant of Venice; The Taming of the Shrew; King Lear;* taxonomies.