

BASED ON SHAKESPEARE:

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMERICAN FILM ADAPTATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

BY

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in English and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date approved: Aug. 24, 2011

### **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates turn-of-the-century American Shakespeare films and how they adapt Shakespeare's plays to American contexts. I argue that these films have not only borrowed plots and characters from Shakespeare's plays, they have also drawn out key issues and brought them to the foreground to articulate American contexts in contemporary culture. For instance, issues about gender, race, and class addressed in the plays remain reflected in the films through the figure of the modern American Amazon, the venue of a high school basketball court, and the tragic arc of a character's rise from fry-cook to restaurant entrepreneur. All of these translations into contemporary culture escalate in the diegesis of the films, speaking to American social tensions. Whereas individual studies of these turn-of-the-century films exist in current scholarship, a sustained discussion of how these films speak to American situations as a whole is absent. All of the films in my study translate Shakespeare to contemporary culture not only because the playwright's plots and characters adapt well, but because the plays themselves speak to American cultural contexts, adapting Shakespeare from multiple viewpoints as a means to appropriate the playwright for their own timely agendas.

For Dr. V. Gordon Lell  
02/10/1935 – 04/25/2009

Professor, mentor, friend.

For getting me started with all of this.  
For your pride in me.  
Thank you.

## Acknowledgements

Although the dissertation process requires many hours of solitary researching and writing, this project represents the help and encouragement of many caring and intelligent individuals. I would first like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Geraldo Sousa. He encouraged me to write about what interested me, and he sat with me over lunch many times to brainstorm ideas. He read multiple drafts of my chapters, and I greatly appreciate his incredibly speedy responses to my work. I would also like to thank Dr. David Bergeron and Dr. Richard Hardin for their support and their expertise during this process, as well as during my graduate career at KU. Many thanks to Dr. Courtney Lehmann for not only being my Shakespeare on film rock star, but for her help and encouragement. I also extend my thanks to Dr. Caroline Jewers for lending her knowledge to my project.

Because I wrote my dissertation from afar, I would particularly like to thank those at SDSM&T and KU's libraries, especially Scott Hall of South Dakota School of Mines and Technology Devereaux Library, and Pamela Bonham of KU Libraries. Without great libraries, this project would not have been possible, and both went above and beyond. I also would like to thank the University of Kansas Office of Graduate Studies for their funding support with a 2009 Summer Research Fellowship.

I extend many thanks to my amazing support network of friends and mentors both at KU and in Rapid City. I could not have done it without them. Thank you to Dr. Katie Egging, Gaywyn Moore, Dr. Keri Sanburn Behre, and Heather Emge for their intellectual and emotional support. I cannot express how much I appreciate your reading of pages and listening to ideas. Thank you also to Dr. Amy Devitt for her knowledge and help during both the dissertation process, and during my time at KU. In Rapid City, I would like to thank the women of my book

club, amazing people who put up with me during this entire process. And to my “top cheerleader,” Kathleen Batchelder: you are an inspiration and a wonderful teacher.

Finally, this project could not have been completed without my family. I would like to extend many thanks to Dr. Joe Sutliff Sanders. Not only is he a great brother-in-law, he is also a talented scholar and teacher. Thank you for taking time to jump over to British literature to read my chapters. As I have said before, I do not know how I will ever repay you. This acknowledgement does not do justice. Thank you to my siblings: Melendra, for her brainstorming and outlining with me; Natasha for her love and support; Sabrina for helping me not take this too seriously; Patrick for his barbeques and jokes; and Geni for her laughter. To my parents, Willis and Pat Sutliff, I cannot express how thankful I am for you: your support and encouragement reminded me that I could do this. To my in-laws, thank you for being interested in my project, and for walking the corgis when they got too rambunctious (thank you to Maddy and Riggs, our corgis: you both keep me on my toes). And finally, to my husband, Jay Benusis: my favorite person. Thank you for being the cook in our house. Thank you for listening as I explained my thesis statements. Thank you for being you: you are lovely and kind. I look forward to everyday with you.

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## Introduction

In her introduction to *Shakespeare and Modern Culture*, Marjorie Garber observes that “It is one of the fascinating effects of Shakespeare’s plays that they have almost always seemed to coincide with the times in which they are read, published, produced, and discussed.”<sup>1</sup> The cultural scholarship surrounding both Shakespeare’s texts and Shakespearean performance certainly illustrates such a notion, especially in reference to America’s relationship with the playwright, a connection that developed over the history of the United States with Shakespeare’s works illustrating their relevance in American social contexts. For instance, Shakespeare’s text proved poignant in the Astor Place riot of 1849 when the crowd rose up in anger against English actor William Macready’s portrayal of Macbeth. Macready’s aristocratic interpretation contrasted with the preferred American Edwin Forrest’s performance, a performance bolstered by his “frequent articulation of the possibilities of self-improvement and social mobility [which] endeared him to the American people.”<sup>2</sup> The response to *Macbeth* and Forrest illustrates a cultural response to Shakespeare, one in which his texts have scripted, as Garber states, what “we think of as ‘naturally’ our own and even as ‘naturally’ true: ideas about human character, about individuality and selfhood, about government, about men and women, youth and age, about the qualities that make a strong leader.”<sup>3</sup> As Garber theorizes and the Astor Place riot confirms, Shakespeare and America have an established relationship, a connection fraught with multiple viewpoints that appropriate the English playwright for timely agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare and Modern Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2008) xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 63.

<sup>3</sup> Garber xiii.

The following study looks at how a particularly popular form—film—appropriates Shakespeare during a specific window of time—the years immediately surrounding the turn of the twenty-first century—to “coincide,” as Garber would have it, with American perspectives on issues that were already portrayed in the stage versions of the plays they adapted. For example, these recent films consistently negotiate social issues addressed in the plays in American contexts, simultaneously engaging and suppressing American tensions toward such issues, particularly those surrounding situations of gender, race, and class. To examine these relationships, I investigate *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999), “*O*” (2001), *Scotland, PA* (2001), and *She’s the Man* (2006). I argue that these films have not only borrowed plots and characters from Shakespeare’s plays, they have also drawn out key issues and brought them to the foreground to articulate American contexts in contemporary culture. For instance, issues about gender, race, and class addressed in the plays remain reflected in the films through the figure of the modern American Amazon, the venue of a high school basketball court, and the tragic arc of a character’s rise from fry-cook to restaurant entrepreneur. All of these translations into contemporary culture escalate in the diegesis of the films, speaking to American social contexts.

While a wealth of individual studies of Shakespeare film adaptations exist in current scholarly conversation, a focused study on the layers of American cultural contexts presented in these particular adaptations is absent. Some of these recent films, including *10 Things* are deemed as “Shakespeare-lite,”<sup>4</sup> and these films too easily move to the periphery. Other films, such as “*O*” or *Scotland, PA*, critics pinpoint as politically and socially significant because of their weightier subject matter, such as violence in “*O*” or the “American Dream” in *Scotland*,

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen M. Buhler, *Shakespeare in the Cinema: Ocular Proof* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2002) 180.

PA.<sup>5</sup> Yet this case study begins where others have left off, focusing not only on the “Shakespeare-lite” or the generic conventions of modern English fidelity adaptations,<sup>6</sup> but on turn-of-the-century films as a whole. I begin with a discussion of Shakespeare’s history in America as a means to ground my project in the ways that Shakespeare’s plays dialogued with American culture, providing a backdrop for the anxieties regarding gender, race, and class that permeate turn-of-the-century Shakespeare adaptations. The work of cultural Shakespeare scholars, such as Lawrence Levine and Michael Bristol, as well as Shakespeare film scholars, such as Thomas Cartelli and Courtney Lehmann, provides such a foundation, beginning with nineteenth-century America and moving into the venue of film in the twentieth century.

Lawrence Levine, for example, details the history of Shakespeare in nineteenth-century America, observing that Shakespeare’s popular position existed because of the familiarity of the plays to Americans. As Levine notes, James Fenimore Cooper called Shakespeare “the great author of America,” and Levine adds that “[Cooper] insisted Americans had ‘just as good a right’ as Englishmen to claim Shakespeare as their countryman.”<sup>7</sup> In the nineteenth century, Shakespeare performance in America proved intensely popular, as evidenced by repeated adaptations of the playwright:

Shakespeare’s popularity can be determined not only by the frequency of Shakespearean productions and the size of the audiences for them but also by the nature of the

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<sup>5</sup> See Gregory Semenza’s “Shakespeare after Columbine: Teen Violence in Tim Blake Nelson’s “O” in *College Literature* and Barbara Hodgdon’s “Race-ing *Othello*, Re-engendering White-Out, II” in *Shakespeare, the Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD* for a discussion of “O”. Concerning *Scotland, PA* see Elizabeth Deitchman’s “White Trash Shakespeare: Taste, Morality, and the Dark Side of the American Dream in Billy Morrissette’s *Scotland, PA*” in *Literature/Film Quarterly*.

<sup>6</sup> Much of the research surrounding Shakespeare on film focuses on the types of films being produced: scholars have looked at the fidelity question and how auteur directors interpret Shakespeare (Olivier and Kenneth Branagh are definitive examples of the period-Shakespeare film). Scholars, such as Courtney Lehmann, Barbara Hodgdon, Douglas Lanier, Thomas Cartelli and Katherine Rowe, have all looked at the relationship between Shakespearean film and what it means for Shakespeare’s works as well as national (and international) populations and politics.

<sup>7</sup> Levine 20.

productions and the manner in which they were presented. Shakespeare was performed not merely alongside popular entertainment as an elite supplement to it; Shakespeare was performed as an integral part of it. Shakespeare *was* popular entertainment in nineteenth-century America.<sup>8</sup>

Shakespeare became part of American popular culture, an appropriation that foreign visitors saw as riotous and vulgar, particularly when the audience became involved in the performances.<sup>9</sup> Yet Americans, as Walt Whitman suggests, frequently saw their audience participation as claiming and owning the playwright.<sup>10</sup> I recount Levine's exploration of America's nineteenth-century comfort level with Shakespeare because he provides the foundation for an investigation into Shakespeare and twenty-first century popular culture, particularly with the emergence of the popular medium of film in the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Shakespeare film adaptations provide another connection to Shakespeare for Americans; and with the advent of Shakespeare on film, America and the playwright's relationship moves to a whole new cultural level in the twentieth century. Michael Bristol's *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (1990) describes this entry into a new century with an investigation of

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<sup>8</sup> In the early to mid-nineteenth century, Shakespeare's works appeared in parodies at minstrel shows, as well as full-play performances on stage, illustrating his acceptance and familiarity in American culture (Thomas Cartelli also discusses how this parody of Shakespeare could be irreverence toward the playwright and the aristocratic values later nineteenth-century American workers believed he stood for). Levine 21.

<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Frances Trollope was one such traveler in 1812: "She enjoyed the Shakespeare, but abhorred the 'perpetual' noises" and the men were coatless "with their sleeves rolled up." Levine 25.

<sup>10</sup> Walt Whitman enjoyed this "democratic" Shakespeare for the masses. During an 1840 performance he looked up at the boxes and saw "'the faces of the leading authors, poets, editors of those times' while he sat in the pit surrounded by the 'slang, wit, occasional shirt sleeves' of the working class (Levine 25). Also, if American audiences did not like a performance, such as Richard in *Richard III*, they showed their displeasure, as illustrated in an 1849 Sacramento performance when the actor, F. McDermott was bombarded with carrots because he did not perform the way the audience wished to see Richard depicted. Levine 28.

<sup>11</sup> From the onset, film was a popular medium, allowing those of lower economic means to enjoy leisure entertainment; yet Shakespeare on screen was not as popular as its producers wished. Although Shakespeare's *King John* was the subject material for one of the first films (1898), and although Pickford and Fairbanks were popular actors on the American screen (Pickford and Fairbanks did a talking film of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1929) with a much-reduced script but lots of action with whips), Shakespeare's popularity on screen dwindled, dwarfed by bigger blockbuster films. Not until mid-century did Shakespeare emerge onto the popular big screen.

American stage productions, exploring how Shakespeare survived both in popular media such as vaudeville, and more “highbrow” venues such as high class theaters. While Levine and Bristol discuss the stage history of Shakespeare in America, Thomas Cartelli broadens the scope by looking at the cultural implications and effects of Shakespeare in twentieth-century-American culture: “The Shakespeare that emerges from these acts of appropriation may thus be construed as the repositioned product of a complex of social, cultural, and political factors that variously combine under the pressure of colonial, postcolonial, and more narrowly national imperatives.”<sup>12</sup> “National imperatives,” similar to those Cartelli mentions, continue into the four Shakespearean adaptations of this study. In the case of *10 Things, She’s the Man*, “*O*,” and *Scotland, PA*, the act of appropriation allows the films to introduce, spar with, and allay the social issues, such as gender, race, and status, already present in the plays’ plots.

Social interpretations and inferences such as Levine’s, Bristol’s, and Cartelli’s remain vital for my analysis of American anxieties arising in these Shakespearean films; and Courtney Lehmann’s extensive cultural investigation of Shakespeare in the medium of film proves invaluable to this exploration as well. Building on Zizek’s argument that processes of identification “produce a certain leftover that cannot be integrated into the totality of the ‘corpus’ concerned,”<sup>13</sup> Lehmann claims that something remains more to Shakespeare’s text than can be seen. Lehmann adapts Zizek’s idea of the “leftover” for Shakespearean film, defining the “leftover” as “a ghost in Shakespeare’s machine—a cinematic one—which contains the makings of the auteur.”<sup>14</sup> In grounding her argument of Shakespeare as film auteur, Lehmann explains, “Shakespeare was merely a part of a much larger system of patronage, market exigencies,

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formation, Postcolonial Appropriations* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 1.

<sup>13</sup> Courtney Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains: Theater to Film, Early Modern to Postmodern*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002) 3.

<sup>14</sup> Lehmann 7.

performance technology, and the sociopolitical ideologies of early modern England”<sup>15</sup> — a correlation we see in American movies and that I apply to the films. By “interrogating and *changing* the terms of the Shakespearean authorship equation,” Lehmann sees Shakespeare as “a kind of montage of bodies *and* texts that matter, a locus of a [sic] resilient remainders that undermines totalizing interpretations and, more importantly, resists total deconstruction.”<sup>16</sup>

Lehmann’s research creates a foundation to examine the four turn-of-the-century adaptations in my study, particularly in her discussions of the “leftover,” as well as the “remainders” I see the films addressing in Shakespeare’s plays, such as the American Amazon, the basketball star, and the unambitious fry cook. Lehmann observes that Shakespeare becomes more than the text; and in the cases of the four adaptations in my study, the presence of the early modern texts and their author provides the films to speak to—and at times mitigate—social anxieties.

As depicted above, the methodology of my project draws on cultural studies, particularly through the lenses of performance and film, as well as the theoretical understandings of mass and popular culture in the United States. My study is indebted to scholars from Levine to Lehmann. To move into the films at the turn of the twenty-first century, I ground my argument in a discussion of American film in popular culture.<sup>17</sup> Such a discussion elucidates the social anxieties of race, gender, and class to which the four Shakespeare adaptations speak, and it simultaneously investigates the ways the films negotiate such cultural anxieties. The American culture and film scholar, John Belton, details the interplay between American film and American culture: “The movies play a crucial role in its [American culture’s] construction, in its representation/re-re-presentation, and in its transmission [. . .] One does not produce the other;

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<sup>15</sup> Lehmann 12.

<sup>16</sup> Lehmann 16.

<sup>17</sup> I see popular culture and mass culture as synonyms. Popular culture is commonly defined through mass media, such as cinema, television, and the music industry, and the images and stereotypes they create.

rather, each interacts with the other, and they mutually determine one another.”<sup>18</sup> This interlocking relationship between film and the public proves poignant when considering Shakespeare, particularly when the social issues present in the plays morph into specifically American anxieties in the popular medium of film.<sup>19</sup> Adapting an English playwright for American social situations demands certain American perceptions of early modern social issues; and without such interaction, as Belton describes, between film and popular culture, Shakespeare’s characters and plots would not give us such fodder for adaptations or an understanding of the contemporary social threat the issues in his plays present. For example, the battle of the sexes in *She’s the Man* follows the story of its Shakespearean counterpart, *Twelfth Night*, in its investigation of whether women or men love best. *She’s the Man* adapts the question to the competitive field of soccer, presenting a surface-level look at the battle of the sexes through athletic competition; yet a deeper concern arises with the same adaptational device when it also speaks to anxieties about Title IX and women in men’s sports. As such, the film’s layer of the Amazon threatens in two ways. First, the Amazon presents a strong female who invades the male space for her own purposes. Second, the sport of soccer draws attention to the social controversy surrounding Title IX. These two layers, added to Shakespeare’s plot and characters, demonstrate an identification with Shakespeare; but more important, they illustrate the ability to mold the playwright and his texts into pertinent, American social attitudes. I see the Shakespeare adaptations in question as engaging in a heightened relationship with popular culture in their investigations of the social tensions that transfer from Shakespeare’s plays onto the screen.

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<sup>18</sup> John Belton, *Movies and Mass Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, UP, 1996) 1.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Tratner explains movies and audiences as coming into existence together, which I see in concordance to Belton: “Hollywood filmmakers and those who track the industry, on the other hand, have thought and written quite a bit about crowd responses, mass fantasies, and social trends, particularly the trends that lead massive numbers of people to stand in long lines outside theaters.” Michael Tratner, *Crowd Scenes: Movies and Mass Politics* (New York: Fordham UP, 2008) 1-2.

A discussion of Shakespeare on film and “high or ‘proper culture’”<sup>20</sup> versus “popular culture” in the United States is nothing new; however, as my project illustrates, the relevance of social anxieties and *how* the films adapt Shakespeare reveal important understandings not only of Shakespeare’s plays, but also of the cultural anxieties that they speak to within popular culture. In his discussion of the symbiotic relationship between Shakespeare and American culture, Douglas Lanier explains that “Popular culture, so the story goes, is aesthetically unsophisticated, disposable, immediately accessible and therefore shallow, concerned with immediate pleasures and effects, unprogressive in its politics, aimed at the lowest common denominator, mass-produced by corporations principally for financial gain,”<sup>21</sup> and when applied to these turn-of-the-century Shakespeare films such an understanding is—at times—validated. For instance, certain genres of Shakespeare film adaptations seem to fall into “lower culture” popular culture, particularly when the playwright “becomes a standardized plot, a stereotypical character, and, especially, a moral or ethical choice—not to mention the ubiquitous favorite, ‘a voice of authority,’ as if it were possible to locate ‘his’ voice among the mix of Hamlet, Macbeth, Falstaff, Rosalind, Portia, Iago, the Ghost, and the Fool.”<sup>22</sup> Some scholars, such as Richard Burt, examine Shakespeare’s journey into popular culture as “dumbing down” Shakespeare and promoting conservative readings of both the playwright and American culture, especially in films marketed toward teens, what Burt labels Shakesploi flicks.<sup>23</sup> Diane Henderson seconds such a critique in her article, “A *Shrew* for the Times, Revisited,” which traces *The Taming of the*

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<sup>20</sup> Douglas Lanier, *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 3.

<sup>21</sup> Lanier 3.

<sup>22</sup> Garber xix.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Burt, “Afterword: Te(e)n Things I Hate About Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the 1990s, or, Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High,” *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa Starks (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002) 205-32.

*Shrew* through twentieth-century film adaptations, going so far as to read Kat in *10 Things* as a conservative role model.<sup>24</sup>

Yet my study illustrates that more is at stake when Shakespeare's plays enter contemporary America. For instance, "*O*" discusses problems of teenage violence in America;<sup>25</sup> and Douglas Lanier's seminal article "Shakescorp Noir"<sup>26</sup> provides an insight into how these films converse with American popular culture in a meaningful manner. For audiences, the films offer a "potential for critique," and for scholars and the academy the films offer "the challenge of engaging the political economy of screen Shakespeare."<sup>27</sup> Speaking of the Shakespeare trade<sup>28</sup> and the film "boom" of the 1990s, Lanier observes how capitalism and America have claimed Shakespeare for their own; and as he argues, Shakespeare has high cultural capital in American society. Gregory Semenza also challenges other scholars to go beyond mere investigation of "the manipulative tendencies of producers, screenwriters, and directors to cultivate and cash in on the shallowness and gullibility of modern American teenagers."<sup>29</sup> Lanier and Semenza engage in Shakespeare film's cultural impact in the United States, and I take up their challenge to delve into political and social challenges in Shakespeare through the medium of film. I argue that *10 Things*, *She's the Man*, "*O*," and *Scotland, PA* speak to both the fear caused by cultural stereotypes as well as the cultural stereotypes themselves.

Such a relationship with film and mass culture, as detailed by Lanier, explains how in the twenty-first century, movies continue to perpetuate or reject mass culture ideology, sometimes

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<sup>24</sup> Diane E. Henderson, "A *Shrew* for the Times, Revisited," *Shakespeare the Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge, 2003) 120-39.

<sup>25</sup> Melissa Jones, in her article discussing Shakespeare teenpics, also sees this political discussion in "*O*".

<sup>26</sup> Douglas Lanier, "Shakescorp Noir," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.2 (Summer 2002): 157-80.

<sup>27</sup> Lanier, "Shakescorp" 180.

<sup>28</sup> Barbara Hodgdon's book *The Shakespeare Trade: Performances and Appropriations* (1998) examines Shakespeare's capital worth.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Semenza, "Shakespeare after Columbine: Teen Violence in Tim Blake Nelson's "*O*", *College Literature* 32.4 (Fall 2005): 103.

using Shakespeare to do so. The selected Shakespeare adaptations in my study provide strong examples of films that specifically illustrate a relationship with mass culture; and while elements like genre of the films provide an occasion for social reflection, the films' specific engagements and adaptations of issues of gender, race, and class already present in the plays emphasize the contexts for American tensions. For instance, in "*O*," the protagonist, Odin, becomes identified by the location he occupies, the basketball court providing a label of black athlete,<sup>30</sup> the film using "its representation of basketball culture" to highlight "the construction of manhood through socialization in sports."<sup>31</sup> Understanding the threat Odin could pose when crossing from the Cyprian to the Venetian boundary (that is, from the basketball court to his high school campus), relies heavily on already established stereotypes of African American basketball players and reflects American anxieties concerning black and white relationships and teenage sexuality. That movies help audience members "across difficult periods of cultural transition in such a way that a more or less coherent national identity remains in place"<sup>32</sup> positions much responsibility on the medium of film. For example, when one looks at how race and location in "*O*" adapt to contemporary discussions of race in America, examinations of "national identity," as Belton details, can be possible. The film takes place in South Carolina,<sup>33</sup> with a black student, Odin, dating a white student, Desi. Already tensions arise with this biracial relationship, exposing both transition and disjointedness in our cultural understanding; but a more poignant issue than race relations resides in how Odin must behave and react on and off the court, revealing American

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<sup>30</sup> The role of black athlete identifies as particularly American not only because basketball was invented in the United States, but because sports scholars and sports reviewers define much of basketball as an African-American dominated sport.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, "Race-ing *Othello*, Re-engendering White-Out, II," *Shakespeare, the Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge, 2003) 101.

<sup>32</sup> Belton 2.

<sup>33</sup> South Carolina led the way in secession from the Union. It also was the first state to display the Confederate flag. This geographical location becomes "*O*"'s strategic focus on historical and racial conflict in the South.

apprehensions of race in prescribed social spaces.<sup>34</sup> Odin's violence and aggression remain praised on the court, something we expect out of our athletes.<sup>35</sup> Yet the fear lies in the "what if?" when aggression ventures off court, and those same anxieties play out when Odin kills Desi and then himself at the end of the film. Such fears the film attempts to allay yet paradoxically propagates.

Like "O," the other films discussed in this study similarly negotiate paradoxes (with gender and class issues) between social tensions and their propagations, and they often target specific film markets as a means to uphold specific cultural expectations. Three of the films, *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's the Man*, and "O" market themselves toward teen audiences and consequently, teen expectations of Shakespeare film. Films marketed toward teenagers are often labeled "teenpics," a genre often dictated by social conservatism. The teen film genre generally simplifies teenage life by prescribing gender roles to which the characters must conform if they are to achieve success.<sup>36</sup> Thomas Leitch explains the history of the genre, beginning with mid-twentieth-century films, such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), which uses teen characters to affirm adult values, with "fatal consequences" if a teen does not become a correctly socialized

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<sup>34</sup> Renford Reese, black masculinist scholar, states that "More than a half-century after Ralph Ellison wrote the classic book *Invisible Man* [sic], black men in America are still trying to become visible. An intense quest to become seen, heard, and felt has manifested itself in rebellious and counterproductive behaviors. Whether it is the baggy pants, the bandana, the braids in the hair, the earring, or the tattoo, black men have desperately striven for visibility." He continues by detailing an eminent danger for young African Males, that is, "the acceptance of the gangsta-thug image and the enthusiastic embrace of society's stereotypes." To be taken seriously, in both black and white circles, the gangsta-thug image and behavior must be considered. "O" attempts to insulate Odin from these stereotypes, yet the elusive boundary between talented ball player and potential threat raises our "national identity" anxiety. Renford Reese, *American Paradox: Young Black Men* (Durham: Carolina Academic P, 2004) xi.

<sup>35</sup> Jeff Greenfield discusses characteristics of "black" and "white" basketball, including our expectations as a culture in his article "The Black and White Truth About Basketball." Jeff Greenfield, "The Black and White Truth About Basketball," *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagele Caponi (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998) 373-8.

<sup>36</sup> The idea of a teen film is still debated. Thomas Leitch discusses teen films as a genre in "The World According to Teenpix (new treatments of teenagers in films)," discussing how after *Rebel Without a Cause* (1952), John Hughes, director of the Rat Pack films, helped catapult the genre in the 1980s. Richard Burt discusses teen films specifically in relation to Shakespeare in his article, "Afterword: T(e)en Things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or, Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High," from Lehman and Starks's *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, in which he does not speak highly of the genre, claiming it dumbs-down Shakespeare.

adult.<sup>37</sup> Leitch defines John Hughes's films of the 1980s as spaces where "adults offer inadequate role models" for teenagers and where "growing up would mean the end of the world."<sup>38</sup>

Shakespeare's comedies adapt particularly well to this teenpic model. In the romance comedy of *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, the endings calm the impending fear of the modern Amazon whom Kat and Viola represent. In the tragedy of "*O*," on the other hand, the genre presents a realistic interpretation of the Shakespearean tragedy when anxieties about race confront an American high school. Rather than focus on a study of audience response, for example, I use the genre of the teen Shakespeare film as an avenue to understand the cultural anxieties explored and encouraged in the diegeses of the films. As representations of popular culture, these films challenge normative societal roles not to the point of breaking these traditional roles, but to the point of highlighting the normative popular culture's anxieties.

The fourth film of this study, *Scotland, PA*, provides a glimpse into the life of what a failed teenpic adolescent may look like—a fry-cook deadbeat—and focuses on the cultural contexts that present themselves if one fails to follow cultural rules of success. This Shakespeare film dialogues both with its Ur-text and American popular culture, presenting an uncomfortable look into an uncomfortable lower-class society. Michael Warner, author of *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005), states that "To address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit a certain kind of social world, to have at one's disposal certain media and genre, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology,"<sup>39</sup> and such an observation applies to the film of *Scotland, PA* in how the film represents and questions the presented social frameworks of social (im)mobility. For example, *Scotland, PA* first addresses its concerns through the main character:

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Leitch, "The World According to Teenpix," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20.1 (1992): 44.

<sup>38</sup> Leitch 45.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Warner, *Public and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005) 10.

a man who lives in a perpetual state of adolescence, a thirty-something teenager working as a fry cook. Second, the film assumes that its audience understands the history of fast food restaurants in America, as well as the global impact of McDonald's has had in the world. Third, the characters live in a socio-geographic bubble, unable to leave because of social obstacles connected to low economic status. In the case of *Scotland, PA*, the American cultural references in relation to Shakespeare's plays heighten the tensions presented. How the audience positions itself in popular culture affects the articulation of anxiety; and for all of the Shakespeare films of this study, the dialogue between Shakespeare's text and the films proves telling in how American culture adapts the early modern social issues presented in the English playwright's works as a means to address American situations.

To explore the turn-of-the-century Shakespeare film adaptations and American contexts, I start with the films set in the high school world of athletics and explore two women, Kat of *10 Things I Hate About You* and Viola of *She's the Man*, who fill the role of the Amazon—a figure with important implications for American anxieties about gender—in the highly socially normative location of the American high school. The first chapter centers on the battle of the sexes, inspired by a modern-day Amazon in a film adaptation based on *The Taming of the Shrew* and a gender-bending character in an adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, respectively. Although *Shrew* and *Twelfth Night* contain no Amazons, the films appropriate the Amazon myth and impose it on the plays in order to launch an investigation of femininity in twenty-first century America in the form of the Amazon. For *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*, representations of the Amazon myth intertwine with the complexities of American normative behavior, prodding the anxieties present at the gender boundary.

Focusing on *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man* allows for an analysis of the modern Amazon in popular culture and the threat that she poses to the established social structure. In the opening of the chapter, I discuss ancient and early modern Amazon narratives in combination with modern portrayals of the Amazon, from Wonder Woman to the sports arena. *10 Things* and *She's the Man* use the background of Wonder Woman, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and the U.S. women's soccer team to explore other definitions of what it means to be female and a woman; and in doing so, the films not only engage their audience through portrayals of independent women, but they also make the Amazon endearing, thus tempering her threatening qualities just enough to make the conventional teenpic ending possible.

For example, to address rising social anxieties, *10 Things I Hate About You* modernizes the battle of the sexes depicted in Shakespeare's *Shrew* by adapting this problematic play into a light romantic comedy marketed toward a teen audience. In this portion of the chapter, I concentrate on Kat's Amazon roles of Riot Grrrl and soccer player to argue that she represents a different kind of femininity. Kat's identity also contrasts with Bianca's, demonstrating different interpretations of femininity. In the previous scholarship on *10 Things*, Kat's character remains undecided: Richard Burt, for example, views Kat as a pawn for conservative feminism,<sup>40</sup> while Michael Freidman views Kat as moving into the third-wave of feminism<sup>41</sup> through her acquisition of Girl Power.<sup>42</sup> In my investigation, I move beyond looking at what Kat lacks, focusing instead on what she *has*: her role as an Amazon. Through Kat, I discuss the ancient and early modern threat of the Amazon as transposed into the American fear of the strong,

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<sup>40</sup> Burt 209.

<sup>41</sup> The third-wave feminism extends from the second-wave, focusing its fight for equal rights to minority, lower-class, and transnational women (some say the second-wave excluded these groups). The third-wave also seeks a balance between femininity, power, and equality by including both sexes in their movement toward equality.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Freidman, "The Feminist as Shrew in *10 Things I Hate About You*," *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 22.2 (Summer 2004): 45-65.

independent (feminist) woman, a threat because the Amazon does not fit within the borders of a traditional male/female hierarchy—yet by the end of *10 Things*, she does.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the modern Amazon as a woman soccer player in *She's the Man*, investigating how American culture is suspicious of this new athletic female. Using a cultural study of women and sports in America, I examine how Viola reaches her Amazon status through soccer. Past scholarship on this film has focused almost solely on how *She's the Man* represents a conservative-agenda teen film that holds Viola back in its anti-feminist sentiments. I focus on what Viola possesses in the film by examining her soccer role. I argue that through soccer the film negotiates its anxiety about the strong female, illustrating its uncertainty by only allowing Viola to reach her Amazon status if she cross-dresses as a boy to achieve success. Like *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's the Man* attempts to allow a girl to be strong and still feminine, to be independent and still well liked by her peers; yet we find tensions concerning the Amazon when the film introduces the debutante plot, a narrative device that complicates the degree of Viola's success in living an Amazon identity.

In the second chapter, I focus on *Othello* and Tim Blake Nelson's 2001 tragic teen adaptation, "*O*." Nelson's "*O*" explores the violence of teenage life through the lens of race, developing the conflicts surrounding race through a powerfully metaphorical use of geographic location. In "*O*," I investigate the collapsing of the Cyprian space of the basketball court inside the Venetian space of the Southern private high school, exploring how this importation of one space into another shapes Odin. Because all of the white students and faculty can enter Odin's Cyprian space of the basketball court to observe him, Odin has no space of his own. Hugo, the Iago figure, moves smoothly between the basketball court and the high school campus, supplying

a “navigator” position for Odin, wielding the misplaced trust the basketball star has in him to plot Odin’s downfall.

The first part of the chapter discusses the role of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*, then continues to detail the comparison of the Cyprian basketball space and Venetian high school space in “*O*.” The collapsing of the spaces in “*O*” demonstrates how the American venue of basketball plays a strong part in Odin’s negotiation of the stereotypes placed on him. For example, Odin feels comfortable on the court, but the high school campus—the Venetian space—proves another matter. The basketball court exemplifies a way for the student body and the teachers to praise and like Odin, but it also provides the means for the predominantly white population to ostracize him. Odin’s aggression is applauded on the court, but off the court it becomes constrained, those around Odin threatened by what would happen if his aggression appeared in the high school venue. Hugo plays on the cultural stereotypes and fears of the school and manipulates Odin into the “gangsta-thug” stereotype, a cultural distinction that further complicates anxieties of difference. The last portion of this chapter discusses the “gangsta-thug” role and the anxieties such a role magnifies.

The role of black teen violence in American culture has provided the lens for the majority of “*O*” scholarship up to this point, with discussions focusing on both believable and unrealistic portrayals of young African American men. For instance, scholars observe the realistic portrayal of race relations in the United States present in the film,<sup>43</sup> and some critics cite “*O*” for being “paved with believability problems.”<sup>44</sup> Yet an in-depth exploration of representative anxiety,

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<sup>43</sup> Semenza 102. Film studios also had a hard time with the realistic content, particularly after the high school shooting in Columbine, CO. Miramax dropped the film because of the correlations between fiction and reality. “*O*” was picked up by Lionsgate.

<sup>44</sup> Some film critics argue the film to be completely unrealistic, such as Desson Thomson of the *Washington Post*: “Without the poetry, a retelling of *Othello* becomes paved with believability problems -- especially for a modern,

which I see implicit in the collapsing of the Cyprian and Venetian spaces and the socially expected behavior in each geographical space, has not yet been explored. The collapsing of the Cyprian space into the Venetian space in “*O*” limits the Othello character considerably, placing him under the eye of any high school student or teacher who would like to watch. Odin as entertainer and performer far outweighs Odin as a person; thus “*O*” takes the story of a black man on a basketball court into the territory of a dominant, mostly-white high school. On the basketball court, the high school students and audiences remain comfortable; yet when the geographically bound Odin grows violent off the court, surprise overrules understanding and violence overshadows the film.

I conclude my project with an investigation of the relationship between social and geographical mobility in *Scotland, PA*. I focus on the film addressing American contexts concerning the lower economic classes of society through Mac and Pat McBeth’s inability to move out of their stagnant situation in small town Scotland, Pennsylvania. *Scotland, PA* uses a hypertextual<sup>45</sup> relationship between the film and American cultural events, relying on its audience to recognize *Macbeth* as well as America’s history with the fast food industry as a means to speak to the fears of class divides (and potential advancement) in America. These allusions to the texts imply a different purpose of the film than the blockbuster films<sup>46</sup> discussed

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movie-fed audience.” Desson Thomson, Rev. of “*O*”, dir. Alan Fickman, *Rotten Tomatoes* 30 Aug. 2001: <<http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/o/>>.

<sup>45</sup> In his book *Literature and Film*, Robert Stam defines hypertextual: “‘Hypertextuality,’ refers to the relation between one text, which Genette calls ‘hypertext,’ to an anterior text or ‘hypotext,’ which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends.” Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo, *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007) 31.

<sup>46</sup> Shakespeare-on-film scholars like Richard Burt classify *Scotland, PA* as a teenpic. I argue that *Scotland, PA*’s viewing public is an older audience, the Gen-X audience who saw *Reality Bites* (1994) as their coming-of-age film. The viewing audience of *10 Things* and *She’s the Man* is for a younger crowd, thirteen-year-olds. The teenpic can also follow the rules established in John Hughes films (also in Roman New Comedy), in that there is usually a blocking agent that hinders the young couple getting together. *10 Things* and *She’s the Man* fit this criteria, and *Scotland, PA* does not.

in the previous chapters;<sup>47</sup> after all, the director assumes his viewing public<sup>48</sup> will know some of the play written by Shakespeare,<sup>49</sup> will understand the fast food references, with *Fast Food Nation* appearing in 2001,<sup>50</sup> as well as know that McDonald's has served billions of customers around the world. I see the film's use of such cultural allusions as a way to speak to American contexts, presenting the tension between classes in the forefront of the film: displaying it in the Bad Company soundtrack, the names of its characters ("Norm" Duncan certainly presents the middle-class norm of the town), and the carrot-eating Lieutenant McDuff.

Other scholars observe these allusions to *Macbeth* and fast food American culture in *Scotland, PA*, often focusing on class, or even the "American Dream" when they do so. "Morrisette stages his version of *Macbeth* as a literal tragedy of appetite,"<sup>51</sup> Courtney Lehmann argues; and Lehmann and Elizabeth Deitchman, among others, see class issues as pivotal factors to the tragedy in the film. I posit that the class issues reflected in the film also directly play into Mac and Pat's (im)mobility. To begin such an investigation, I start the chapter by focusing on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and his characters' literal movement. As a play in which movement makes up a significant part of the plot, *Macbeth* most successfully transfers to *Scotland, PA* by highlighting the entrapment of the characters on social and geographical levels. For instance, the

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<sup>47</sup> *Scotland, PA* was part of the 2001 Sundance Film Festival; and it did not rise in popularity until its release on DVD. Other films in the 2001 Sundance line-up include *Donny Darko* (2001) and *Memento* (2001). These films also gained a cult following when they released on DVD. Both *Donnie Darko* and *Memento* have male characters that must solve puzzles to save themselves and their loved ones. The protagonists in these films express certain ambitious characteristics, such as drive and competitiveness, for the purpose of self-survival (and saving the world, in *Donnie Darko's* case). *Scotland, PA's* protagonist unsuccessfully attempts to have these characteristics.

<sup>48</sup> Michael Warner states that "The difference shows us that that the idea of a public, unlike a concrete audience or the public of polity, is text-based—even though publics are increasingly organized around visual or audio text. Without the idea of texts that can be picked up at different times and in different places by otherwise unrelated people, we would not imagine a public as an entity that embraces all users of that text, whoever they might be" (67).

<sup>49</sup> As Eric Brown describes director Billy Morrisette's notes which describes he was aiming for an audience who knows *Macbeth*, even if they are sitting the back row, watching the movie, smoking weed, and reading the *Cliff's Notes*. Eric Brown, "Shakespeare, Class, and *Scotland, PA*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34.2 (2006): 147.

<sup>50</sup> Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Courtney Lehmann, "'Out Damned Scot': Dislocating *Macbeth* in Transnational Film and Media Culture," *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge: 2003) 245.

McBeths begin the film living in a mobile home, yet their lives (and home) remain anything but mobile. They believe moving to a single-family dwelling in suburbia will give them the social advantage they desire; yet the location proves even more socially immobile. The irony of the McBeths' stagnant position emphasizes their metaphorical entrapment: how does one escape the lower-income living and lower social classes? The question remains significant as class anxieties lurk in the shadows of the film.

I close the chapter with a look at how *Scotland, PA*'s cultural contexts underscore the plot about social mobility. The film pinpoints the tragedy of the couple by leaving them immobile. As underachievers who are “making up for lost time,”<sup>52</sup> Mac and Pat remain literally and figuratively trapped in Scotland; yet, the town of Scotland also becomes trapped, as illustrated by the films ending when McDuff stands in front of his new vegetarian fast food restaurant: a sure economic failure. This entrapment, as represented by the characters, highlights fears in American cultural contexts.

My project demonstrates that the issues of race, gender, and status are already implicit in Shakespeare; and these four film adaptations take those issues and represent them in recognizably American forms: the American Amazon, the African-American basketball player, and the fast-food entrepreneur. Anxiety remains the point of tension, the simultaneous push and pull; and the American adaptations of social issues explored by Shakespeare speak to already present cultural tensions in our contemporary culture. After all, the unknown in *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, that is the American Amazon, proves scary because the Amazon's boundaries—once in comic books and now in real-life soccer arenas—keep changing; and this causes great anxiety, as the films illustrate. In “*O*” the unknown appears on the basketball court,

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<sup>52</sup> *Scotland, PA*, dir. Billy Morrissette, perf. James LeGros, Maura Tierney, Lionsgate, 2001.

which the film transforms into a twenty-first-century Cyprian space. Such a geographical move echoes John Gillies' observation of a geographical paradox, with the "new geography" of Shakespeare's England "energetically generating a new poetry to make sense of its radically incongruous world-image, yet still enthralled to the imagery of the past;"<sup>53</sup> and "*O*" alludes to a similar pattern of geographical paradox by setting its film in the American South and presenting its discussion of race around the game of basketball. Like the other films, *Scotland, PA* entertains a paradox of its own in its small-town Pennsylvanian location, providing opportunity to physically leave a space, yet holding back its leading couple through social strictures. The social issues these films address bring an American Shakespeare to the turn-of-the-century screen, a Shakespeare who provides plots and characters, but also a Shakespeare who speaks to current American social contexts. Such appropriations of the English playwright not only develop the media of film and Shakespeare, but also promote America's ever-evolving cultural relationship with the playwright, even with social tensions.

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<sup>53</sup> John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 188.

## Chapter One

Locating the Girl Cell:<sup>1</sup> The Amazon in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*

Engendered in 1941, Wonder Woman is “perhaps the first feminist in pop fiction,” as well as a “huge paradox: the peaceful warrior, the compassionate warrior.”<sup>2</sup> With the abilities of super strength, speed, and flight, Wonder Woman, or Diana Prince, the name used with American friends, epitomizes the modern American Amazon: that is, the embodiment of female strength, confidence, influence, and beauty, adapting traits from her ancient Greek and early modern Amazon counterparts to form strong, independent women in turn-of-the-century America. From the fiction of Wonder Woman, to the reality of women in war zones, and even to women in sports, such as soccer champ Mia Hamm, the modern American Amazon exists in our culture not only as a myth but as an actual woman on the gender boundary, presenting a different kind of femininity. Shakespeare teenpics *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man* play on the gender boundary with their characters Kat and Viola, respectively, presenting a modern-day Amazon in their adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*, both

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<sup>1</sup> Eve Ensler, the author of *The Vagina Monologues* and world-wide advocate of ending violence against woman, asks us to “imagine girl is a cell that each of us—boys and girls—are born with. Imagine this girl cell is central to the evolution of our species and an assurance of the continuation of the human race.” This girl cell is not so hard to imagine if we think of the human race being born with the x-chromosome, though it is difficult to imagine the girl cell with so much power within the human race because others have harnessed the power. “A few powerful people, invested in owning this world,” Ensler writes, “understood that the oppression of this cell was key to retaining their power, so they reinterpreted this cell, undermining its value and making us believe that it is weak. They initiated a process to crush, eradicate, annihilate, humiliate, belittle, censor, reduce and kill off this girl cell. This was called patriarchy.” Ensler sees this girl cell, actual girl power, as so threatening to society, that we have to hurt girls, hit them, shame them, devalue them, to control the power they hold. In the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the social movement of Girl Power began, showing girls that their qualities of compassion, emotion, competition, and femininity are good and powerful traits. The backlash against Girl Power turned it into a less-threatening popular culture movement, placing the focus not on the girl herself, but projecting her power outward into more traditional roles, such as how to get a boyfriend, or how to be pretty. Popular culture's harnessing of Girl Power is not to say that the girl cell remains entirely tamed in American culture: examples of the modern American Amazon do exist. Ensler, Eve. “Girl Power Can Save the World,” *CNN.com* Feb. 10, 2010 <<http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/02/02/ensler.TED.talk.girl.power/index.html?hpt=Mid>>.

<sup>2</sup> Les Daniels, *Wonder Woman: The Complete History* (San Francisco: DC Comics, 2000): 201.

comedies that explore gender relationships, although the plays themselves have no Amazons present. I argue that *10 Things* and *She's the Man* not only appropriate Shakespeare's plays and characters but also the Amazon myth, hinting at the modern Amazon through Kat and Viola. With the Amazon, the films add another layer of independence and strength to the women characters not only to bring the battle of the sexes from the plays into an appealing modern context, but also to present another option of femininity beyond the apparent dichotomy of submission or independence. More complexities also appear in how the films negotiate the worry these new Amazons create, an anxiety precipitated by the lack of knowledge to combat this new woman; and ultimately, the films fail to reconcile this lack by assimilating the Amazon to American high school.

Like their ancient Greek and early modern Amazonian counterparts, Kat and Viola of *10 Things* and *She's the Man* occupy a gender boundary, their Amazonian roles falling into uniquely American cultural identities. Both Kat's role of Riot Grrrl and soccer player, and Viola's cross-dresser and soccer player roles identify the girls as what I label the modern American Amazon. While previous criticism on *10 Things* and *She's the Man* has focused on what the films and protagonists lack (such as feminist agency), I instead focus on what Kat and Viola have as modern Amazons. Both films appropriate Shakespeare's explorations of gender boundaries, attempting not only to untangle the gender roles presented by the playwright, but also to sort through the uncertainty of traditional gender roles and gendered locations at the turn of the twentieth century. Both films also present their explorations through sports, although in *10 Things I Hate About You* only a few select scenes appear in the sports arena. Yet seven years later, in *She's the Man*, the Amazon appears more forcefully, although still restricted. As in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*, the films explore definitions of femininity; and *10*

*Things* and *She's the Man* bring a new twist through sports, wavering on the edges of modern conceptions of American femininity, and hesitantly participating in “the reformation of what it means to be female”<sup>3</sup> that began with the first and second-wave feminist movements, and continues into the third-wave.<sup>4</sup> The “sports outlet”<sup>5</sup> given to women with the approval of Title IX in 1973 opened another space for women, as Mariah Burton Nelson explains in the introduction to *Nike is a Goddess*: “Told that certain sports are wrong for them [women], they decide for themselves what’s right [. . .] Told that certain sports make women look ‘like men,’ they notice the truth: working out doesn’t make them look like men; it makes them look happy. It makes them smile. It makes them radiate health and power. It makes them feel good.”<sup>6</sup> The films represent female confidence, power, and strength, through the venue of sports; yet, as portrayed in the films, not without some backlash: “It’s [women in sports] the story of women’s liberation—not just for those who came before, but for those of us who are here now, stretching and striving and wondering, What might I achieve? What might women achieve together?”<sup>7</sup> 10

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<sup>3</sup> Zennie Abraham, “Elizabeth Lambert is the Modern Female Athlete,” Zennie62.com, ed. Zennie Abraham, 12 Nov. 2009, 22 March 2010 <<http://www.zennie62.com>>.

<sup>4</sup> Though women’s rights have been part of the American political scene for the entire twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, the movements of action and change are defined as “waves.” Stacy Gillis, et. al, in their introduction to *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, give clear definitions of both first and second wave feminisms, while also acknowledging the that waves have many facets: “The first generation, those involved in the nineteenth-century women’s movement, responded [sic] to a common exclusion from political, social, public and economic life. The objective shared by this generation was to extend the social contract so that it included political citizenship for women.” Second-wave feminism encompasses the women’s liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, building on the first wave: “[B]y the second stage in feminist history in the 1960s and 1970s, a clear, self-defined and self-identified feminist movement had emerged. Reflecting on the gains of the suffragists, a second generation of feminists emerged, no longer convinced that inclusion into formal universal political structures would solve the problem. Disappointed by the fact that substantive change had not followed on from the modification of political structures, second wave feminists concerned themselves with broader social relations.” Third-wave feminism distinguishes itself from second-wave by addressing issues for minority women, lower-class women, and transnational women. Many third-wave feminists also support the idea that feminists can also be feminine. For third-wavers, gender equality has not been reached, and both men and women must work together to achieve such goals. Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, and Rebecca Munford, eds, Introduction, *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) xxi.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham.

<sup>6</sup> Mariah Burton Nelson, “Introduction: Who We Might Become,” *Nike is a Goddess*, Ed. Lissa Smith (New York: Atlantic Monthly P, 1998) x.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson xi.

*Things* and *She's the Man* address similar questions, although not without a fight: how does the Amazon fit into American culture?

The growing presence of women in sports presents a new understanding of femininity, and perhaps even feminism, and falls into what I consider the modern Amazon. The Amazon herself changes definitions throughout the centuries, although core ideas of “warrior women” and same-sex “homosocial society” have often stayed the same. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first definition of Amazon states “*pl.* A race of female warriors alleged by Herodotus, etc to exist in Scythia.”<sup>8</sup> I find the plural indication of the definition delightful because it exposes the Amazon to multiple classifications, allowing for many definers and connotations to shape just what an Amazon is; yet this multiplicity of definitions does not necessarily imply open definitions of “Amazon.” Herodotus defines perhaps the most prevalent classification of the Amazon, describing them as killing their Greek captors and landing at the island of Scythia,<sup>9</sup> their masculine attributes apparent in their self-sufficiency, their looting, and their fighting capabilities. “Their dress, speech, and nationality were strange”<sup>10</sup> to the native Scythians, who mistook them as men and fought against them in self-defense. The Scythians “discovered from the bodies which came into their possession after the battle that they were women.”<sup>11</sup> When the Scythians expressed their desire to marry the warrior women, the Amazons described themselves and their femininity as very different from the women of Scythia: “We and the women of your nation could never live together; our ways are too much at variance,” the Amazons declare. “We are riders; our business is with the bow and the spear, and we know

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<sup>8</sup> “Amazon, n.,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1989, OED Online (Oxford University Press, 4 Apr. 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Herodotus describes the Amazons as not having nautical skills, thus after the Amazons killed their Greek captors, they were not able to sale the ship on which they were captive. John Marincola, ed., *Herodotus: The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin, 2003) 276-77.

<sup>10</sup> Marincola 277.

<sup>11</sup> Marincola 277.

nothing of women's work; but in your country no woman has anything to do with such things—your women stay at home in their wagons occupied with feminine tasks, and never go out to hunt or for any other purpose,”<sup>12</sup> they conclude to the Scythians. With this statement of fact, the Amazons asked the Scythian men they had married to move with them, creating a new life in the Tanais Mountains, “riding to the hunt on horseback sometimes with, sometimes without, their men, taking part in war and wearing the same sort of clothes as men.”<sup>13</sup>

The ancient Greeks, those who initially captured the Amazons as Herodotus writes, also defined the Amazon as “Other” in the ancient Greek myth in which the Amazon straddled the gender boundary between male/female. The ancient Greek Amazon, as detailed by Page duBois, occupied the space of myth, providing a “cultural alternative to that of the Greek *polis*.”<sup>14</sup> The Greek *polis* clearly placed men as the norm “defined in relation to a series of creatures defined as different.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Greek/Male/Human fell on one side of the binary, and Barbarian/Female/Animal fell on the opposite side, and that which was not male yielded, by analogy, to the norm of male. “Myths and works of art delineated clearly the male/female polarity as one strongly marked in the culture of the Greeks,” duBois writes, detailing that the Amazons occupied both sides of the binary, falling into a “strangely ‘double,’ hybrid culture.”<sup>16</sup> The “hybrid culture” occurred because “Their society was composed of beings who were at once feminine and masculine,” and “They professed the activity preeminently masculine in Greek culture, the practice of war, yet paradoxically they were, like the Centaurs, a single-sex culture,

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<sup>12</sup> Marincola 278.

<sup>13</sup> Marincola 278.

<sup>14</sup> Page duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons: Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991) 32.

<sup>15</sup> duBois 4.

<sup>16</sup> duBois 34.

one exclusively female instead of male.”<sup>17</sup> Occupying a boundary space between male and female, the Amazon culture threatened the Greek male norm, while also solidifying the dichotomous system precisely because the all-female culture did not fit into the binary position the *polis* required: “Even as such mythical creatures as the Amazons seemed to question the boundaries between male and female, the myth as a whole ended by denying the viability of single-sex female culture.”<sup>18</sup> By depicting the Amazon’s single-sex culture as an impossible self-contradiction, the male norm in the Greek *polis* remained the measure for that which was not male.

The societal balance governed by the male norm also defined the early modern English culture that both feared and desired the Amazon because of her feminine and masculine attributes, her gender blending position a curiosity that needed mitigating. With her warrior abilities, missing breast, and living in the absence of men, the early modern Amazon became a potential reality among the many fictions about Scythia, the New World, and Africa and Asia. She “conjure[d] up images of spectacular female defiance, subversion, or ‘aggressive, self-determining desire,’”<sup>19</sup> Geraldo de Sousa observes in *Shakespeare’s Cross-Cultural Encounters* (1999). These connotations of the Amazon lived among the myths and stories told by early modern explorers, poets, and playwrights in narratives that relished tales of a desire: to pin down, tame, and domesticate the Amazon. Yet as some productions of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* illustrate through Theseus’s and Hippolyta’s relationship, domesticating the Amazon may also bring her too close to home, threatening the system from within its own borders. Her “gender inversion” began to “subvert expected early modern notions of

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<sup>17</sup> duBois 34.

<sup>18</sup> duBois 111.

<sup>19</sup> Geraldo U. de Sousa, *Shakespeare’s Cross-Cultural Encounters* (New York: Palgrave, 1999) 12.

womanhood.”<sup>20</sup> As Kathryn Schwarz observes, “stories about Amazons are testing grounds for social conventions, playing out the relationships between homosocial and heterosocial systems of connection that produce an idea of the domestic,”<sup>21</sup> and early modern fiction and plays helped to allay any real fear of actual Amazonian infiltration. Similarly, Schwarz adds that early modern narratives “are interested less in the Amazons’ resistance to patriarchy than in their participation in it,”<sup>22</sup> explaining that “[T]he point is not whether Amazons ‘win’ or ‘lose’ in their battles with men, but rather the difficulty of telling the difference, as incorporation into the social makes the line between conquering Amazons and being invaded by them indecipherable.”<sup>23</sup> Such boundaries have defined ancient and New World conceptions of the Amazons, and the threat of invasion is still a possibility.

As with ancient Greek and early modern understandings of the Amazon myth, modern definitions of the Amazon, which are broad and many, remain heavily contingent upon cultural understandings of female roles in society, influenced by American popular culture representations such as *Wonder Woman*, *She-Ra Princess of Power* (1985-6), *The Power Puff Girls* (1998-2004), and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), as well as by real-life women, like female body builders,<sup>24</sup> the Riot Grrrls of the Pacific Northwest, and the United States women’s soccer team. The editors of *Picturing the Modern Amazon* (2000) present one definition of the modern Amazon: “the modern Amazon is mainly independent and strong (both physically and mentally) rather than aggressive.”<sup>25</sup> Editor Laurie Fierstein does not challenge this definition “since persistent disagreement has informed the interpretation of amazon identity

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<sup>20</sup> Sousa 11.

<sup>21</sup> Schwarz 2.

<sup>22</sup> Schwarz 3.

<sup>23</sup> Schwarz 3.

<sup>24</sup> The 2000 Summer Olympics was the first to include female heavy weight lifting.

<sup>25</sup> Joanna Frueh, Laurie Fierstein, and Judith Stein, eds., *Picturing the Modern Amazon* (New York: Rizzoli, 2000) 2.

as well as discussion about the very existence of Amazons in ancient and modern cultures.”<sup>26</sup> Yet *Picturing* also defines the modern Amazon as aggressive in the competitive female body builder, a “hypermuscular” woman with characteristics of strength and competitiveness:<sup>27</sup> and the films present yet another type of Amazon—the Amazon in the teenage girl.

Perhaps the best-known American Amazon is the fictional DC Comics superhero, Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman, or Diana, as she was known on her native island, Paradise Island,<sup>28</sup> is the daughter of Amazon Queen Hippolyte, and named after the Goddess Diana, the huntress. Diana came to the United States to fight evil, winning a contest of strength and endurance to do so. Throughout the second-half of the twentieth century, Wonder Woman’s look and story have changed,<sup>29</sup> beginning as a “psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world,”<sup>30</sup> her creator states, although she would also remain maternal and feminine.<sup>31</sup> By 2000, conceptions of Wonder Woman altered with changing definitions of femininity affected by the second-wave feminist movement.<sup>32</sup> “Here was this

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<sup>26</sup> Frueh, Fierstein, and Stein 12.

<sup>27</sup> Fierstein contends that the hypermuscular female threatens society, and men in particular, through her visible and large muscles; whereas the ancient and early modern Amazon threatened through her strength and intellect as a warrior, but also through her more traditional feminine beauty that she retained despite her warrior abilities. Fierstein also discusses how the Amazons of the past were threats that could potentially be conquered: “An essential aspect of this representation was that the savagely skilled female opponent with great power was ultimately and inevitably conquered.” 13.

<sup>28</sup> Also later known as “Themyscira.”

<sup>29</sup> Born on the Amazonian island, Paradise Island, Wonder Woman’s Amazonian powers include super strength, super speed, and the ability to fly, all supernatural abilities that supplement her natural abilities taught to her by her Amazon sisters, such as martial arts and advanced medical techniques. In the 1960s and 1980s, Wonder Woman was retooled, where she got married, fought on the Justice League with Batman and Superman, had a love affair with Superman, lived in different dimensions where she turns to clay and falls over her native island (to explain character discrepancies as the character evolved), and finally, in 1997 she’s taken to Mt. Olympus where she is both a deity and a superhero, where she has “her cake and eats it too. ‘Now that I am a goddess, with power and immortality beyond the measure of humanity, ‘ she said, ‘there has never been a better time for Diana of Themyscira to once more claim the name of Wonder Woman.’” Daniels 199.

<sup>30</sup> Daniels 22.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Moulton, Wonder Woman’s creator, continues, “What woman lacks in the dominance or self assertive power to put over and enforce her love desires. I have given Wonder Woman this dominant force but have kept her loving, tender maternal and feminine in every other way.” Daniels 22.

<sup>32</sup> “‘The principles she avowed became watchwords for the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s,’” Jenette Kahn, president of DC Comics, states. Daniels 201.

beautiful, independent, self-sufficient woman who was a humanist. She was a feminist but she liked men. She had reverence for all living things. Her interest was in a utopian society of equality and peace,”<sup>33</sup> DC president, Jenette Kahn states. Wonder Woman represents a humanist who shaped an American conception of the Amazon that straddled gender lines (she fought with and against both men and women), female expectations (she was a superhero and a mother), and definitions of beauty (her image noticeably changed to a physically stronger body, although she still has curves and breasts that could never be mistaken for male). For many, such as Gloria Steinem, Wonder Woman became a symbol for women’s power and independence; and her superhero acceptance was welcome (at least in the comics) as necessary for the survival of humankind.

Sixty years after her inception, Wonder Woman helped engender ancillary characters in American popular culture that have grown out of the powerful, intelligent, and beautiful Amazonian persona that first appeared in 1941. The popular TV series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) presents a modern American Amazon in the character of Buffy, a pretty, tough, not-so-good girl who kills vampires in a thinly-veiled analogy to fighting the patriarchy.<sup>34</sup> With her Kung-Fu moves, Buffy titillates as she fights, yet chooses her sexual partners on her own. Like Wonder Woman, she becomes an Amazon others want around: the fate of Sunnydale, and the

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<sup>33</sup> Daniels 201.

<sup>34</sup> The creator of the show, Joss Whedan, was apparently tired of the depictions of weak, screaming women in horror films, thus he created a purposefully strong and feminist woman in Buffy. Buffy (Sarah Michelle Gellar), a pretty, slight teenage girl, also lives up to the expectations presented in her name with her strength and intelligence to kill vampires. The TV series appropriates the aspects of beautiful female warrior present in Buffy’s Amazon counterparts of the past, and Buffy possesses the skill and strength to kill vampires. Throughout the series, Buffy fights vampires both by herself and with help from various friends, but the last season brings in a particularly Amazon characteristic. In the final season, Buffy calls all of the potential vampire slayers together (all vampire slayers are young women) to fight the “First Evil.” The “First Evil” gave the ancient vampire slayers their powers through a metaphorical rape, and the female vampire slayers take their revenge, as well as save the world, by overpowering and destroying the “First Evil.” Buffy fights with her fellow warriors to save themselves, and the world, from a threat that tries to destroy them. This modern version of the Amazon illustrates characteristics of both strength and beauty for the purpose of entertainment, but also demonstrates the power of a female society that fights together.

world, rests on her shoulders. A champion of strong women, Buffy proves a sound example of female empowerment, the “Girl Power”<sup>35</sup> movement that the late-1990s TV show, the *Power Puff Girls* (1998-2004) also exhibits. The cartoon illustrates a “Girl Power” twist to the Amazon by presenting three kindergarten girls genetically born and altered by their Professor “father” to have super powers.<sup>36</sup> Cute and good, the girls fight as a trio, combining their super powers to bring down the bad guys. Real-life Amazon representations also graced the American cultural scene at the turn of the twenty-first century, particularly in sports. In 1991, the U.S. women’s soccer team won the gold at the World Cup in China and throughout the decade they fought for

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<sup>35</sup> Initially a true movement for female equal rights, “Girl Power” was a part of third-wave feminism that showed women and girls that they could be feminine and strong, and importantly, that they could define what femininity meant to them, whether that entailed having large, visible muscles as a body builder, wearing a power suit with high-fashion heels, or writing angry music at the injustices of the patriarchy. Unfortunately, “Girl Power” was quickly subsumed by the media and turned into a postfeminist campaign under the guise of women’s empowerment, specifically under the female role of the “Good Girl.” Feminist scholar Susan Douglas calls postfeminism “enlightened sexism,” defining it as “a response, deliberate or not, to the perceived threat of a new gender regime. It insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism—indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved—so now it’s okay, even amusing to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women.” Douglas continues that

Enlightened sexism is feminist in its outward appearance (of course you can be or do anything you want) but sexist in its intent (hold on, girls, only up to a certain point, and not in any way that discomfits men or pushes feminist goals one more centimeter forward). While enlightened sexism seems to support women’s equality, it is dedicated to the undoing of feminism. In fact, because this equality might lead to ‘sameness’—way too scary—girls and women need to be reminded that they are still fundamentally female, and so must be emphatically feminine.

What Douglas describes is dominant society’s definition of femininity, the backlash to feminism’s project of allowing women to define their own femininity.

After its consumption by popular media and the postfeminist movement, the “Good Girl” now connotes the antithesis of the Amazon in the twenty-first century, a reactionary response to the third-wave feminist movement; yet there is more at stake than a conservative agenda in these films. In both Shakespeare teenpics, Kat and Viola (and the audience) are teased with potentially defining femininity for themselves, but actual equality is “way too scary” as Douglas states, so the films must back off and submit to the generic conventions of the teenpic. The girls are shown as happy and content with their “choice” to pursue their girly femininity: “Indeed, enlightened sexism is meant to make patriarchy pleasurable for women,” Douglas states in her introduction to *Enlightened Sexism*. Susan J. Douglas, *Enlightened Sexism: The Seductive Message that Feminism’s Work is Done* (New York: Times Books, 2010) 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Fierstein quotes Abby Wettan Kleinbaum as Amazons having the following qualities: “she [the Amazon] was ‘strong, competent, brave fierce, and lovely—and desirable, too. . . [and] her strengths and talents have a supernatural quality’ that is not of the body.” 13. Like their American Amazon counterparts of Wonder Woman and Buffy, the *Power Puff Girls* have supernatural powers and talents, and qualities of bravery, strength, and fierceness, while also being cute. The girls always fight together as a trio, each exhibiting their own unique super power to help defeat enemies. Not typical Amazons as represented in ancient Greek or early modern culture, the *Power Puff Girls* represents an important change in American popular culture and representations of the modern Amazon in its representation of “Girl Power.”

their place soccer,<sup>37</sup> proving themselves “dangerous,” “aggressive,” “hard-working” and having “a lot of heart”<sup>38</sup> when they won Olympic gold in Athens, GA at the 1996 Olympics.<sup>39</sup>

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Amazons have moved from the Scythia of Herodotus, to the New World, to Paradise Island, to Washington, DC, to broader American culture, and even to film adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*. The teenpics *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She’s the Man* use the Amazon for a modern twist on the age-old battle of the sexes, while also relying heavily on the plot and characters of the plays. The films appropriate the Amazon myth to create an endearing battle of the sexes.<sup>40</sup> For example, Shakespeare complicates the battle of the sexes in *Shrew* with the intelligent characters Petruchio and Katharina, as well as through a framing device of the Induction, in which we see performance as a major factor in identity creation; and *10 Things* uses the battle of the sexes to highlight a conventional, happy ending at the end of the teenpic. For both early modern and contemporary audiences, *The Taming of the Shrew* proves problematic in its ending, particularly with Kate’s submission speech, but perhaps John Fletcher’s writing of *The Woman’s Prize, Or The Tamer Tamed* (1611) illustrates the desire for the other side of the story. Contemporary productions have taken varying approaches, either modifying the ending of *Shrew* by adding a wink by Kate to illustrate her playing at submission, or turning the tale of

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<sup>37</sup> Barbara Basler, “U.S. Women’s Soccer Team’s Message: ‘No One Will Get in Our Way,’” *The New York Times* November 29, 1991, late ed.: B19.

<sup>38</sup> Such terms, such as “dangerous” and “aggressive” are often used for stereotypical male behavior, yet here, it is used to describe the U.S. women’s soccer team. Barbara Basler, “U.S. Women’s Soccer Team’s Message: ‘No One Will Get in Our Way,’” *The New York Times* Late Edition November 29, 1991 B:19.

<sup>39</sup> Illustrating the United States’ perception of the women’s team’s second-class status, the United States Women’s soccer team played their Olympics games in multiple locations. There were not enough stadiums in Atlanta for the women’s soccer team to play in the Olympic epicenter. Instead, they played in various states in the United States, such as Alabama and Washington, DC, playing the final game against China in Athens, GA. Pettus 263. The U.S. Women’s soccer team also won gold at the 2000 Olympics, silver at the 2004, and gold at the 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Douglas describes this as a tenet of enlightened sexism. 10.

taming to one of domestic violence.<sup>41</sup> *10 Things* modifies its ending with the Amazon, allowing for a layer of strength in Kat not present in the modern shrew, providing a satisfying ending because Kat apparently can have her cake and eat it too.

*She's the Man* continues the conversation of the battle of sexes by adapting the nuanced battle of the sexes in *Twelfth Night*: a battle that hinges on the question of who loves more deeply, men or women, by using soccer as the impetus for physical battles of the sexes. *She's the Man* moves the battle of the sexes directly to the soccer field when Viola plays soccer both as a woman and then as a woman disguised as a man on a men's soccer team. The film reframes Viola's cross-dressing for its teen heroine as a kind of Title IX battle that acquires a distinctly Amazon quality—a vehicle that allows Viola to fight against a male soccer team as a female player while also getting the boy of her dreams. Such appropriation of the battle of the sexes certainly brings gender issues into both *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, the figure of the Amazon raising issues of both subversion and endearment.

Kat and Viola represent the Amazon as having infiltrated American culture through sports and the Riot Grrrl, turning the myth (like Wonder Woman) into a physical being. Kathryn Schwarz states that for the twenty-first century Amazons are “less a presence than a rhetorical move;”<sup>42</sup> yet the histories of soccer and the Riot Grrrl music movement in the United States show how the “rhetorical move” transformed into an actual woman who invades an actual space. Both Kat and Viola represent the blurred line between fictional characters of films and real-world

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<sup>41</sup> The ACT 1976 production has Kate wink after her submission speech; whereas Charles Marowitz's 1974 production makes Petruchio's taming violent, turning Kate into an abused shell of a woman. Barbara Hodgdon, “Katherina Bound: Or Play(Ka)ting the Strictures of Everyday Life,” *PMLA* 107.3 (1992): 239-240.

<sup>42</sup> “The term ‘Amazon’ appears in a variety of contemporary contexts, from bad movies to the radical lesbian feminist separatism of the 1970s, and, as this diversity of implicit audiences suggests, it does not mean the same thing to everyone. Its status is at once absolute and oddly contingent; we know what it means, but ‘we’ are difficult to define.” Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) xi.

situations,<sup>43</sup> similar to, as Schwarz discusses, the early modern Amazon blurred fiction with reality. For example, as a fictional entity, the early modern Amazon was desired, yet if integrated into social cultures, she could potentially destroy the social structure already set in place.<sup>44</sup> What happens if the Amazon is already within the social structure, as with soccer and the Riot Grrrl movement? And, even if Wonder Woman did pave the way for the stronger, feminist woman, does American society want this stronger woman around?

### **Soccer Girl and Riot Grrrl: The Amazon in *10 Things I Hate About You***

In Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the battle of the sexes guides the play, ending with the female protagonist essentializing the sexes at her husband's command: "A woman moved is like a fountain troubled, / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty," Katherine claims. She continues: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee" (5.2.148-9).<sup>45</sup> After establishing the hierarchy of a heterosexual relationship, Kate identifies women as "unable worms" and further defines ideals of femininity:

Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,  
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,  
But that our soft conditions and our hearts  
Should well agree with our external parts? (5.2.171-4)

Katherine at the end of the play, who claims that women are the gentler sex, differs greatly from the woman who earlier in the play spars with Petruchio word for word when they first meet.

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<sup>43</sup> The disconnect between media representations of powerful women (shows like *The Closer*, *Bones*, *Veronica Mars*, and *The X-Files*), and actual positions of women (the occupations most occupied by women in 2008 were secretary, retail worker, elementary and middle school teacher, and maid) shows that reality and fictional representations do not match up—no matter how the media tries to spin it.

<sup>44</sup> Schwarz uses Queen Elizabeth as an example of the dangers of a powerful woman in charge. Though not an Amazon, Queen Elizabeth was often used as an analogy of the Amazon.

<sup>45</sup> All quotations for *Shrew* are from the Penguin edition. William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New York: Penguin, 2000).

*Shrew* gives us different perspectives of the sexes, questioning gender roles through Kate, Petruchio, and Bianca. *10 Things* continues these gender questions, focusing on the metaphorical and physical spaces occupied by strong women as it explores Kat and Bianca's relationship alongside the romantic relationship of Kat and Patrick. I argue that *10 Things* focuses on non-traditional female spaces to depict the battle of the sexes in a modern context, using such spaces to explore the sometimes evasive (and even threatening) American Amazon that the film layers onto Kat's original shrew role.

*10 Things* adapts *Shrew* through characters and plot, eliminating the early modern language, although keeping the taming plot alive and well through humor and charm. Kat Stratford (Julia Stiles) is the shrew, an angry female high schooler who tries to protect her sister, Bianca (Larisa Oleynik) from the Gremio character, Joey (Andrew Keegan), senior "hottie" and part-time model, who is a little full of himself. Cameron (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), like his Lucentio counterpart, falls in love with Bianca at first sight, and upon her appearance speaks the only actual lines from Shakespeare's play: "I burn, I pine, I perish."<sup>46</sup> Michael (David Krumholz), the Tranio figure, quickly tells Cameron to shut up, and then continues giving Cameron a lesson about girls to not waste his time on: including Bianca. According to their overly-protective, OBGyn father, Bianca cannot date until Kat does, a day Dr. Stratford believes will never come because of Kat's anti-high school sentiments. Not dissuaded by the dating rule, Cameron and Michael hatch a plan to find a backer who would pay the high school tough guy, and the Petruchio figure, Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger), to take out Kat, thus leaving Bianca free to date. Joey becomes the backer, thinking he is paying Patrick to date Kat so that he, Joey, can date Bianca. High school turmoil ensues, and the film ends with the pay-off plot revealed.

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<sup>46</sup> All quotations of the film come from the DVD of *10 Things I Hate About You*. *10 Things I Hate About You*, dir. Gil Junger, perf. Heath Ledger, Julia Stiles, Touchstone, 1999.

Kat proclaims her rendition of Kate's submission speech in her English classroom, and Patrick says that he is sorry by buying Kat a guitar, a gesture that causes her to forgive him. The plot of *Shrew* adapts well to the romantic teenpic genre, with its satisfying guy-gets-girl ending; yet such an ending is slightly disrupted—though only slightly—by a representation of stronger femininity. Claiming the film as pro-feminist would be an overstatement, but a dialogue about differing gender understandings starts in *10 Things*, a dialogue that shows an option of stronger femininity not only in Kat, but in the physical spaces she occupies.

*10 Things* differentiates between the shrew and Amazon roles in popular American culture by demonstrating both roles in Kat, a teenage girl who embodies a change in the definition of femininity not only in her characterization of a shrew, but in her Amazon-like persona (an identity at which the film hints, but does not fully develop). The shrew role presents nothing new for the audience of *10 Things*, she is alive and well in everyday sitcoms; and in *10 Things I Hate About You*, Kat Stratford models her early modern counterpart well, representing the modern shrew with enough success to be labeled a “shrew” by a teenage peer, even though the term is rather antiquated in the late-twentieth-century setting. In the film, Kat's shrewishness appears in her overtly second-wave feminist ideology, her anger, and her annoyance at the high school world around her. She personifies the man-hater, such as when she rams her car into Joey's double-parked sports car. Labeled a “heinous bitch” not only by her peers but also by the school's guidance counselor, Ms. Perky (Allison Janney), Kat certainly has the shrew role perfected. In fact, Kat's shrewishness becomes common-place and the characters, as well as the audience, have grown complacent about her behavior, although the film updates the shrewishness of Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew* by coding it feminist bitchiness. Much like Katherine in *Shrew*, who acts out the label of “shrew” that others place onto her before we

even hear her speak, Kat's bitch status first appears through images of her behavior, a montage of her glaring at peppy girls, blaring loud music, and tearing down prom posters. Later in the film, she follows her actions with ineffectual words, as evidenced by her classmates ignoring her whenever she opens her mouth. One initially wonders if Kat performs in the rhetorical space of ineffectual feminist precisely because those around her call her a "heinous bitch;" after all, her social persona changed after a degrading sexual experience with Joey three years prior, causing a shift in behavior from popular girl to bitch, as well as a shift in labels from the high school crowd.

In Kat's case, her reputation as an ice queen, and a "bitter self-righteous hag who has no friends,"<sup>47</sup> categorizes her into the definition of "bitch," a term, as Kathryn Schwarz suggests, is analogous to the contemporary Amazon,<sup>48</sup> instead of the shrew. The term "bitch," as Courtney Lehmann explains, also defines the popular culture feminist:

The bitch is unique to postmodern culture in that she has mitigated into the mainstream as *the* pop-cultural representation of the contemporary feminist. Through a masculinist [sic] lens, the bitch is a single, professional, power-hungry female who is often portrayed as either a psychotic sexual predator or as a barren ice queen, relaying the culturally conservative message that women's professional success must entail chronic dissatisfaction with their personal lives.<sup>49</sup>

Kat fits into this popular culture feminist definition: her high school professional success rewards her with admittance into Sarah Lawrence, but this success comes with a price: unpopularity. For the film, "bitch" equals shrew and unpopular, but the film also unintentionally connects the term

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<sup>47</sup> Joey Donner, Kat's classmate and the Gremio character lusting after Bianca in *10 Things* does not hesitate to label Kat during a scene in the English class.

<sup>48</sup> Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham: Duke UP, 2000) xi-xii.

<sup>49</sup> Courtney Lehmann, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Agenda: How Shakespeare and the Renaissance are Taking the Rage Out of Feminism," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53.2 (Summer 2002): 266.

with Amazon, a feminist reclamation of the label. If Kat had fully reclaimed the term “bitch” from the popular culture representation that *10 Things* presents, channeled it from shrew to Amazon, and continued her soccer and her Riot Grrrl music, her Amazon status may have prevailed. To be a bitch on one’s own terms gives a certain sense of power—and feminine power at that—against those who label her as an outsider.<sup>50</sup> But to represent Kat’s reclaiming of bitch the film would have to progress beyond the traditional teenpic ending of the eternal teenager;<sup>51</sup> instead, *10 Things* gives a small taste of Kat’s future at Sarah Lawrence with her guitar.

The film also glosses over feminist issues by over-simplifying feminist ideology in the comparison of Kat and Bianca. Investigations of “shrew as feminist” and feminism and *10 Things* are nothing new in current scholarship, although scholars identify varied types of feminisms in the film.<sup>52</sup> For instance, the first half of the film contrasts the two teenagers: Bianca exemplifies the cute, preppy, perhaps not very smart girl whom many boys desire.<sup>53</sup> Kat depicts the harsh, counter-culture, too-smart girl whom boys and girls avoid. *10 Things* also codes Bianca as third-wave feminist defining her femininity as independent and cutesy, while Kat is coded a second-wave feminist<sup>54</sup> with her anger and unisex wardrobe. Seemingly pitted against each other, the sisters appear at odds, a disjointed representation of feminism that the film

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<sup>50</sup> The Riot Grrrl movement was famous for reclaiming the word “bitch” in its songs and social activism.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas Leitch describes this teenpic ending in connection to John Hughes’s films, in which “growing up would mean the end of the world.” The attraction of teenpics is that the teenage audience does not have to think about growing up. Though Kat is going to Sarah Lawrence, the film ends with a touching moment of Patrick and Kat kissing, and thoughts of their relationship continuing when she goes to college are not with what the audience is left. Thomas Leitch, “The World According to Teenpix” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 20.1 (1992): 45.

<sup>52</sup> Jennifer Clement argues that *10 Things* and *She’s the Man* “exploit the generational divide between second and third-wave feminism in order to ridicule both forms of feminism and to suggest that feminism in general is outdated, irrelevant, and even harmful.” Jennifer Clement, “The Postfeminist Mystique: Feminism and Shakespearean Adaptation in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She’s the Man*,” *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 3.2 (Spring/Summer 2008): 1.

<sup>53</sup> The film gives conflicting messages about Bianca’s intelligence. She can speak French fluently, yet in her conversations with her friend, Chastity, she shows a shallowness in her logic skills.

<sup>54</sup> Kat seems comfortable with names like Sylvia Plath and Simone de Beauvoir, two authors she suggests should be read in her English class rather than Ernest Hemingway.

encourages (although real-life third-wave feminists would discourage).<sup>55</sup> Kat looks after Bianca since their mother left them three years before; and Kat particularly wants to protect Bianca from having sex before she is truly ready. Telling Bianca that she need not be what others want her to be, Kat bristles when Bianca flippantly replies that she happens to love being adored.<sup>56</sup> Later in the film, Kat talks about having sex with Joey before she was ready because she felt peer pressure. After hearing Kat's story, rather than the sisterly response that Kat apparently hoped for, Bianca engages in a third-wave feminist "daughter" battle against her second-wave feminist "mother," yelling at her sister for not allowing her to experience anything for herself, or to make her own choices. Yet by the end of the film, the sisters trade some qualities when Bianca punches Joey, and Kat allows Patrick to adore her, which could be a "presentation of feminism [that] is not essentially conservative but progressive," as Michael Friedman observes. Friedman also asserts, "Kat evolves from a second-wave feminist, a follower of the old-school feminism of the 1970s, to a third-wave feminist, one who embraces the contradictions and personal empowerment fostered by the Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s;"<sup>57</sup> yet Diana E. Henderson

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<sup>55</sup> The films depend on stereotypes concerning feminism presented in popular culture media outlets: "The media is a central site of consciousness formation and knowledge production in the U.S," Ednie Kaeh Garrison writes of media and third-wave feminism, "and it plays an important role in the cultural knowledge production of feminist consciousness." The "feminist consciousness" Garrison argues, has been inattentive to the power of the media, this inattentiveness contributing to "the relatively limited success of feminist revolution." Garrison sees a strong relationship between the media and culture-at-large, and feminism specifically; and I see *10 Things* and *She's the Man* as two media outlets that need our attention because of their roles as media outlets. In her discussion of third-wave feminism and the media, Garrison adds that "The double function of the media as a culture market leads to the representation of feminism and its variants as a label or lifestyle or brand as it gets re-constituted as a commodity for sale," a type of commodification that *10 Things* encourages in its initial pitting of Kat and Bianca against each other. Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "Contests for the Meaning of Third Wave Feminism," *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, Ed. Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007) 186.

<sup>56</sup> One of the strongest contrasts between Bianca and Kat resides in Bianca's desire to "be adored," and her conforming to a female appearance that allows such adoration to occur. Rubin and Basow explain that in adolescents, "Girls become more concerned with how women are 'supposed' to behave at the same time that others, especially males, start reacting to them in markedly gendered ways. Other social agents, especially parents, also begin pressuring girls to conform to their gender role (e.g., by encouraging girls to take more of an interest in their appearance." Whereas Bianca does not have a parent pressuring her, her own desire to not be Kat provides enough pressure to focus on a socially stereotypical appearance. Rubin and Basow 30.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Friedman, "The Feminist as Shrew in *10 Things I Hate About You*," *The Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship*, 22.2 (Summer 2004): 46. Even Richard Burt argues that *10 Things*

disagrees with such an interpretation of the film's ending, claiming that "[t]aming this shrew means temporarily erasing her intelligence and sarcasm, and replacing them with emotional submission."<sup>58</sup> Ultimately, Kat and Bianca's contentious relationship highlights the Amazon form of the emerging strong female, particularly at the end of *10 Things* when both girls seem to have influenced the other's behavior, even if their representations of the Amazon remain downplayed.

Although Friedman sees Kat as a third-wave feminist, *10 Things* criticism overwhelmingly focuses on what Kat lacks, neglecting her attributes; in contrast, I offer an exploration of what Kat *has*: that is, the Amazon role. For example, in *10 Things* Kat demonstrates simultaneously the ineffective shrew and the active Amazon in specific locations—namely, the soccer field and the dance floor, both places where Patrick follows but at his own risk. The first instance of Kat's Amazon role appears on the soccer field, where Kat's uniform and physical prowess cause Joey and Patrick some anxiety when she shoves a teammate to the ground in a play to steal the ball. Such moves remain unremarkable on the soccer field—after all, as UNC coach Anson Dorrance remarks, women play intensely and

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"takes a feminist turn," at certain moments, placing "male bravado and male authority over women," although even while observing feminist tendencies in film, Burt sees a distinction between the bad girl and good girl that exists in *10 Things*; and rather than taming Kat, Burt argues, Patrick "merely saves her from her potentially Sylvia Plath-like self-destructive impulses," ultimately concluding that "*10 Things*'s feminism, such as it is, comes at the price of harnessing it to a conservative idealization of the good girl." Richard Burt, "Afterword: Te(e)n things I hate about Girlene Shakesploitation flicks in the late 1990s, or not-so-fast times at Shakespeare High," *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa Starks (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002) 213-14.

<sup>58</sup> Melissa Jones stresses that *10 Things* suppresses female agency: "the film seems to find in updating *Shrew*'s scheme to protect patriarchal issues;" and Clement argues that *10 Things*, along with *She's the Man*, "should be read as postfeminist movies that advance a conservative view of gender and identity," adding that *10 Things* remains devoid of "real feminist concerns," portraying Kat "as, supposedly, a 'girl power' feminist." Melissa Jones, "'An Aweful Rule': Safe Schools, Hard Canons, and Shakespeare's Loose Heirs," *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004) 138. Clement 7. Diana E. Henderson, "A *Shrew* for the Times, Revisited," *Shakespeare, The Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge, 2003) 137.

aggressively—<sup>59</sup> yet the boys’ responses of overly-exaggerated grimaces illustrate strong discomfort with her aggressiveness, a personal response representative of larger cultural reactions to women moving into traditionally male sports. The new female athlete embodies aggression and competition,<sup>60</sup> not as a tomboy, but as a woman repossessing her body, allowing for freedom from “restrictive dress, behavior, and law.”<sup>61</sup> A cultural backlash fears that women’s involvement in sports—and women’s potential masculinization—will lead to an inversion of the gender hierarchy, as Joey and Patrick’s grimaces humorously allude to, as does the demonstration of the media’s horrified response of Elizabeth Lambert’s punching and pulling the hair of her BYU opponent after a 0-1 loss.<sup>62</sup> The moment when Kat shoves her female teammate to the ground shows that a new female-aggressive competitiveness has claimed a space in American culture, much to the hesitation of the teenage boys viewing Kat’s violent display, as well as Americans may have reservations about real-life applications of Title IX.

The film diverges from the shrew-taming plot of Shakespeare’s play to an Amazon-pursuing plot in its locations of the soccer field and the dance floor of Club Skunk, two locations intricately connected not only by Kat, but also by her pursuer, Patrick. As Kat hustles off the soccer field, Patrick attempts to woo her, smiling and winking, hoping that his overtly

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<sup>59</sup> Jere Longman, “For All the Wrong Reasons, Women’s Soccer is Noticed,” *New York Times* Nov. 11, 2009: 15.

<sup>60</sup> Jackie Joyner-Kersey defined the female athlete as elegant and beautiful in her athleticism. Zimmerman 24.

<sup>61</sup> Nelson x, xi.

<sup>62</sup> Although not the first athlete, male or female, to be violent on the field, and certainly not the first female soccer player to be violent, Lambert’s actions instigated great controversy in the sports and media arenas, particularly in how women *should* behave. Lambert’s actions caused the conversation of the double standard for women, and now particularly female athletes, to be once again highlighted. Some stated that “this is not sports play, this is assault,” while others, like Bruce Arian, the former coach of the United States men’s national team said, “Let’s be fair, there have been worse incidents in games than that. I think we are somewhat sexist in our opinion of sport. I think maybe people are alarmed to see woman do that, but men do a hell of a lot worse things. Was it good behavior? No, but because it’s coming from a woman, they made it a headline.” Anson Dorrance, the coach of UNC’s women’s soccer team, and former coach of the U.S. women’s soccer team says that similar behavior from men “does not seem to provoke the same visceral reaction and incredulous scrutiny that Lambert received,” continuing that “‘the world has changed. Women play with just as much intensity, work ethic and sometimes aggression.’ But although men can be celebrated for extreme aggression, like knocking out a quarterback in the N.F.L., ‘women are held to a different standard.’” Longman 15.

chauvinistic attitude will strike her fancy.<sup>63</sup> Kat responds to his overtures in unconventional ways for a teenage girl, her blatant honesty reflective of the Amazons telling the ancient Scythians that the Amazons do not fit the traditional mold of women who can marry and be domestic. Kat rebuffs Patrick by sarcastically admitting that her mission in life hinges on getting a man, claiming that “The world makes sense again” because gender hierarchies remain in place. Patrick continues pursuing Kat as he follows her to Club Skunk, where she goes to listen to her favorite band, a pseudo Riot Grrrl ensemble. Like the soccer field, Club Skunk provides Kat a space to let go and have fun, which the film also codes as Amazon-like with Riot Grrrl overtones. The Riot Grrrl movement engendered in the 1990s Pacific Northwest, boasting a “slogan [of] ‘Revolution Girl Style,’” a “vocal feminism with a punk rock beat,” forming bands and “taking their fierce feminism to the stage.”<sup>64</sup> For instance, on the dance floor at Club Skunk, Kat dances with a decidedly woman-power crowd, dressed in her Riot Grrrl look by wearing a sleeveless top, a choker necklace, and her hair down; a comfortable and happy look for her,<sup>65</sup> especially in comparison to the tight pony tail and combat boots of her high school attire. In the crowd, she receives no unwanted male attention, that is, until Patrick follows her to the club.<sup>66</sup> Originally in it for the money, much like his *Shrew* counterpart, Patrick grows interested in Kat as he watches her dance. His genuine interest represents a turning point in the film. For example, observing Kat in what for him becomes a more comfortable physical role, Patrick now enjoys the physicality of

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<sup>63</sup> The film hyperbolizes Patrick’s character as much as Kat’s character.

<sup>64</sup> This politically and socially active “fierce feminism” starkly contrasts Kat’s second-wave feminist role with the modern American Amazon of the Riot Grrrl. As activists against the patriarchy, Riot Grrrl musicians wrote their own songs and taught themselves to play their own instruments (alluded to by Patrick in the film when he bemoans listening to “chicks who can’t play their instruments.” Deitchman 479.

<sup>65</sup> Kat also looks comfortable and happy in her soccer uniform, attire that does not look feminine, but perhaps androgynous.

<sup>66</sup> The film never explains why Patrick cannot be seen at Club Skunk. It seems that the purpose was to illustrate potential danger.

Kat's Amazon persona first observed on the soccer field; it becomes "the strangely familiar"<sup>67</sup> as he watches her looking and behaving in a feminine, even sexy, manner.<sup>68</sup>

Watching Kat on the dance floor signals the first time that Patrick finds Kat truly desirable; and significantly, he finds her attractive when she fits into her Amazon space of a Riot Grrrl. "For men who look at Amazons and suddenly see women," Schwarz explains of early modern Amazon narratives, and as Patrick now sees Kat, "sexual difference underlies gendered identity, and the result is not closure but a jarring shift;"<sup>69</sup> and for Patrick a similar shift happens when he decides to join Kat on the dance floor and makes a jarring, if charming, mistake: "I've never seen you look so sexy," he says loudly over the music, with the last word, "sexy," filling the room as the music stops. Looking slightly embarrassed at his faux-pas, Patrick smiles as Kat grins happily, laughing. He takes the cue, asking her to Bogey Lowenstein's party, and she evades slightly, telling him that her "no" could possibly mean "yes" as she awkwardly shifts in and out of her Amazon role.<sup>70</sup>

*10 Things* indicates a turning point in the film with Patrick's appearance on the dance floor because he entered an Amazon location and remained positively received; yet unlike the

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<sup>67</sup> Though Sir Walter Raleigh made this observation of the Amazons of the New World, as Schwarz describes, I find it apt for what Patrick experiences in Club Skunk as he watches Kat. Schwarz 37.

<sup>68</sup> This sexiness is directly linked to Kat's dress: as a soccer player, she wears a rather unisex uniform, the cultural codes of clothing not helping in distinguishing male from female (like Herodotus's observations of the Amazon). In Club Skunk, Patrick becomes more interested because of her culturally-coded feminine clothing.

<sup>69</sup> Schwarz 29.

<sup>70</sup> The film never gives Kat complete access to her Riot Grrrl persona: we never see her actually playing a guitar or writing music (though at Gil's music store, we do see, briefly, Kat teaching herself to play the guitar). She exclaims to Patrick that she would like to start a band, but we do not see her pursue that goal. As Richard Burt points out, "All of the songs covered by women were originally sung and written by men." Potentially allowing for "cross-gender possibilities for performance," the film's understanding of the Riot Grrrl movement, much like its understanding of feminism, leaves women, and Kat, with no true choice of female empowerment. In American popular culture, the Riot Grrrl movement did not last long: "Unsurprisingly, however, authentic Riot Grrrl culture seemed to disappear more or less at the moment of its appearance in mainstream media. In many cases the media either oversimplified or misrepresented the movement or patronizingly belittled it." As *10 Things* portrays, the female power of the Riot Grrrl movement was replaced by a product of softer Girl Power, one that the magazine *Ellegirl*, for example, "sold to girls as strength and empowerment."<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the film only alludes to Kat's involvement in the Riot Grrrl movement, and we never see her up on stage or writing her own songs. Burt 218. Deitchman 479, 481.

ancient Amazons who took the Scythians with them, Patrick convinces Kat to branch out of her Amazonian spaces and attend Bogey Lowenstein's party, creating danger for her Amazon persona. The changing of locations shifts Kat to a more traditional female role.<sup>71</sup> Bogey's party, a staple of wrongdoing in many a teenpic, enforces traditional female stereotypes by not only contrasting Kat and Bianca, but also by presenting Kat as a "normal" teenager at a high school kegger. Kat goes to the party partially out of curiosity for Patrick, but also in solidarity with her sister. Both girls experience stereotypical teenage life at Bogey's party where hundreds of teenagers invade the future MBA's house, put up speakers, bring the alcohol, and start dancing. Bianca's selfishness, illustrated through her preoccupation with looking adorable and her desire for "teenage normalcy," changes at the party when she recognizes Joey's shallowness and grows bored with the drinking. For her, the party allows her to see how self-involved she truly is, and she begins to resemble slightly the independent role that Kat portrays throughout most of the film. Kat, on the other hand, gets drunk—"Isn't that what you're supposed to do at a party?" she argues with Patrick—and does a table dance. On the table, Kat's Amazon identity falls away with her conformity, which astonishes everyone: "How'd you get her to do it?" Joey asks Patrick. "Do what?" Patrick asks back, and Joey answers: "Act human." Joey also means act like a girl, which she does as she dances for the crowd.<sup>72</sup> Significantly, *10 Things* blatantly objectifies Kat

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<sup>71</sup> As Kat turns to a more recognizable and comfortable norm, this feminine ideal certainly allows the audience to escape from the reality of life, much to the point of many films, as well as much to the point of Shakespeare's plays in early modern London, yet such escapism, as Susan Douglas discusses, "masks, and even erases, how much still remains to be done for girls and women," and creates "images that make sexism seem fine, even fun, and insist that feminism is now utterly pointless—even bad for you." Through its alleviating of the Amazonian threat, the film sends mixed messages to its audience. One can be successful in her academic career, getting into her school of choice, yet *10 Things* highlights Kat and Patrick's romantic relationship to downplay Kat's soccer playing and Riot Grrrl roles as just a way to pass the time. Douglas 6.

<sup>72</sup> Such objectification is prominent in the enlightened sexism world-view, as Douglas explains, with media like "*The Man Show*, *Maxim*, *Girls Gone Wild*. But even this fare, which insists that young women should dress like strippers and have the mental capacities of a vole, was presented as empowering, because while the scantily clad or bare-breasted women may have *seemed* to be objectified, they were really on top, because now they had chosen to be sex objects." Douglas 4-5.

in her table-dancing scene, as illustrated by the camera angles and the onlookers at the party, a strong contrast from other American Amazons like Wonder Woman and Buffy. This caveat does not purport that men do not lust after Wonder Woman and Buffy, the “titillation and acquiescence” of the feminine ideal that Schwarz describes of the early modern Amazon is alive and well in for the twentieth-century Amazon too;<sup>73</sup> yet such blatant objectification occurs because of venue. Kat needed not worry at Club Skunk or on the field; and even Bianca realizes the shallowness of the party.

Bogey’s party is not the downfall of Kat’s Amazon identity: her table-dance physical display quickly moves back toward the aggressive, athletic physicality of the soccer player in a convergence of an Amazon persona and a traditional American girl role. For example, Kat helps Patrick out of detention by combining her physicality of the Amazon and the more traditional girl role when she flashes her breasts at her soccer coach, the detention monitor. In modern contexts, a woman’s breasts hold power and mystery as sexual objects and nutrient givers, and adding the Amazon layer makes the power of the breast even stronger. Both ancient Greek and early modern Amazons altered their breasts (searing off the right breast) for better ability to do battle. Breasts of the modern Amazon have a different influence: augmentation, rather than removal, equals power. For instance, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone observes that in the context of comics, female breasts remain points of power.<sup>74</sup> “What, if anything, do mega-breasts have to do with Amazons?” she asks, conceding that in ancient vase painting, representations of the Amazons breasts did not exist.<sup>75</sup> Her answer lies in that for contemporary American Amazons, at least those represented in comics as Sheets-Johnstone’s findings suggests, breasts do matter.

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<sup>73</sup> Schwarz 10.

<sup>74</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone discusses female comic book characters using their breasts to shoot laser beams. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, “Female Masculinity in the Comics,” *Picturing the Modern Amazon*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Laurie Fierstein, and Judith Stein (New York: Rizzoli) 124.

<sup>75</sup> Sheets-Johnstone 124.

Wonder Woman's breasts are buoyant and big; Buffy and Kat's breasts are cute and perky. As Kat's flashing scene illustrates, breasts matter as a technique of control. Obviously respected by her soccer coach, as demonstrated in the film by his praise for her "hustle" and his attentiveness when she enters into the detention classroom, he listens closely to Kat as she stumbles through how the team can win their next game. She remedies her lack of words by her flashing of her breasts, a moment meant for humor that astonishes her coach and the other students in the classroom. With the presentation of her breasts to her soccer coach, Kat relies on them both as physical aspects of her Amazon status, as a means of battle to reach her goal (free Patrick), but also as physical aspects of the traditional female by objectifying herself, distracting her coach through something she assumes he will find sexually appealing.

The film does not make Kat's objectification obvious, but the sequence from Patrick labeling her as "sexy" at Club Skunk, to her table dance at Bogey's party, to the flashing of her teacher places emphasis on Kat's body—and not her Amazon body. Rather than concentrate on her Riot Grrrl music or her athleticism, *10 Things* focuses on the more traditional female aspects of Kat, aspects that the film contrasts with Bianca at the quintessential high school event, the prom. Like the final wedding banquet scene of *Shrew*, the prom in *10 Things* instigates character changes. As the film concludes, the sisters change positions when characteristics of both girls influence the other, although the exchange of personality traits proves uneven in that most of Kat's Amazon characteristics become subsumed by more traditionally feminine traits. For example, Bianca's fashion taste influences Kat when the older girl meets Patrick at the prom dressed in an attractively simple gown and her mother's pearls. Kat and Patrick dance to Kat's favorite band, Letters to Cleo, because Patrick, as a gift to Kat, "called in a favor." Joey interrupts their good time, furious that Cameron took Bianca to the prom. He blows Patrick's

cover, and reveals that Patrick started dating Kat for money. Kat stares in disbelief at her prom date: “Nothing in it for you, huh?” she says, genuinely hurt, then turns on her heel and walks out of the room. After witnessing her sister’s sadness, as well as Cameron being punched by Joey, Bianca picks up the metaphorical baton and becomes physically aggressive, a change for her since up to this point in the film her attention to physical attributes focused on looking good.<sup>76</sup> Punching Joey in the face three times and then kneeling him in the testicles, Bianca becomes a fighter for Kat, Cameron, and herself. When the news reaches their father about what occurred, Dr. Stratford grows impressed with both of his daughters: similar to the sisters in Shakespeare’s play, Kat shapes Bianca, and although her influence results in violence, Dr. Stratford is proud of his strong daughters.

In the film’s final scenes, *10 Things* shifts from the prom to the location of the high school and qualifies Kat and Bianca’s Amazon strengths in a reestablishment of high school teenpic hierarchies. By pairing Bianca with Cameron, and Kat with Patrick, the film fails to show how feminists can have their cake and eat it too.<sup>77</sup> *10 Things* misunderstands—or perhaps understands too well—the threat of an actual, real-life Amazon by disallowing Kat’s success as

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<sup>76</sup> Friedman notes that this incident marks Bianca as a third-wave feminist, in contrast to the second-wave feminist role Kat plays throughout the film.

<sup>77</sup> There are examples of such juxtapositions. Pop artist Lady Gaga found this balance and touts this true valuing of girls, women, and their happiness, in her 2009 album *The Fame Monster*. Released ten years after *10 Things I Hate About You*, Gaga’s album reclaims the tenets of Girl Power, bitch, and female value. Defining herself as a “free bitch” and a “super-woman chick,” Lady Gaga advocates women’s power through her reversal of heterosexual hierarchies, her display of her body on her own terms, and her strength in her music and performances. In “Dancer in the Dark,” Gaga calls on Marilyn, Judy, Sylvia, and Diana for female empowerment, invoking these strong yet flawed women to help the female narrative-speaker in the song to throw off the chains of her boyfriend (he calls her “a mess” and “a tramp”): Marilyn. Judy. Sylvia. Tell ‘em how you feel girls [. . .] Find your freedom in the music [. . .] You will never fall apart, Diana, you’re still in our hearts. [Girls] Never let you fall apart, [Girls] together we’ll still dance in the dark.” Calling on the four women, Gaga’s narrative-speaker acknowledges female talent and strength, as well as brings to light that these women were stifled by the patriarchal society around them, hence their flaws and suicides. By lastly calling on Diana “You are in our heart, Diana,” Lady Gaga acknowledges Britain’s Princess Diana, a female figure of humanitarian service and tragic death. Diana also refers to the female huntress, the goddess Diana, and the namesake of Wonder Woman, as a valued female power. Although a pop star and not part of the now-suppressed Riot Grrrl movement, Lady Gaga differs from other female pop musicians in that her Girl Power remains unappropriated by popular culture. Lady Gaga, “Dancer in the Dark,” *The Fame Monster*, Streamline, 2009.

an Amazon to play out. As Richard Burt states, “*10 Things*’s feminism, such as it is, comes at the price of harnessing it to a conservative idealization of the good girl.”<sup>78</sup> Other modern productions of Shakespeare’s *Shrew* also grapple with how to present—and conclude—the play. For example, in the ACT 1976 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Freddie Ostler, as Kate, comes to Petruchio’s (played by Marc Singer) call of obedience in the final act of the play without any hesitation. Singer plays Petruchio as dumbfounded and a bit speechless when an obedient Kate stands before him ready to do his will. Both the surprise on Petruchio’s part and the wink Ostler gives after her oration of submission indicate a game the couple plays, but it also points out a certain level of power Kate holds in the relationship—and Petruchio, at least in this production, is aware of the power of Kate’s independent mind. Like the 1976 production, *10 Things* attempts to shift the play to appeal to its audience, hence, the Amazon role layered onto the “bitch role;” but it also attempts to draw in its audience by making Patrick’s pursuit of Kat endearing. This endearment downplays the threat of the Amazon, although coded signals such as the guitar Patrick gives to Kat and her acceptance (and excitement) in going to Sarah Lawrence perhaps illustrate future Amazonian spaces she can occupy.<sup>79</sup>

The film echoes social uncertainties about the American Amazon as illustrated through a comparison of Kate’s and Kat’s submission speeches. Kate blatantly defines the sexes and gender roles: women’s bodies are to be soft, “unapt to toil and trouble in the world,” unlike a man who “commits his body / To painful labor both by sea and land” (5.2.172; 5.2.154-5). Scholars read Kate’s final speech as both believably sincere, with the speech “reaffirm[ing] a

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Burt, “Afterword: Te(e)n Things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High,” *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa Starks (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002) 214.

<sup>79</sup> As Thomas Leitch explains, teenpic endings, like in John Hughes’s films, focus on the present rather than the future. Teens do not want to be reminded that they will grow to be stumbling adults; rather, that they will stay forever happy as teens.

cultural ideal [. . .] of desirable femininity,”<sup>80</sup> as well as shallow, “In this final monologue, his [Petruchio’s] heroine performs a spectacular flight of fancy, and disavows her [Katherine’s] previous humourless self in a puzzling declaration of her dependence on her master. It is hard to take her words seriously. She who does is a fool.”<sup>81</sup> Kate’s final speech makes many modern audiences uncomfortable; and many productions, such as the ACT 1976 production, provide humor to solve such problems. *10 Things* does so through the convenience of the teenpic ending. For example, volunteering to read her version of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 141 out loud, Kat stands in front of her peers, visibly marked in a traditionally feminine look with a skirt and flip-flops, her hair styled down. This observation is not to say that Kat cannot choose to look feminine: she does, for example, at Club Skunk. The distinction between Club Skunk and the classroom resides in Kat’s motives: at Club Skunk she danced for herself in female-dominated space; in the English classroom, she reads a poem for Patrick in a decidedly non-female space.<sup>82</sup> Although Kat’s version of Sonnet 141 with its unmetred and unrhymed prose,<sup>83</sup> “In faith, I do not love thee with mine eyes,” seems sloppy for a student just accepted to Sarah Lawrence, and although called all sorts of negative terms like “nursery doggerel”<sup>84</sup> by scholars, Kat does not totally drop the intellectual ball; after all, the theme of her poem fits with Shakespeare’s Sonnet, illustrating

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<sup>80</sup> Holly Crocker observes that “The display of Katherine’s obedience provides empirical evidence of Petruchio’s ability to reaffirm a cultural ideal, in that her final speech performs the rhetorical configuration of desirable femininity current in early modern discourse.” Holly Crocker, “Affective Resistance: Performing Passivity and Playing a-Part in *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54.2 (2003): 142.

<sup>81</sup> Helga Ramsey-Kurz continues in her interpretation: “Yet, it seems that there is not a single female in Petruchio’s and Katherine’s audience who would: neither Bianca, nor the widow, nor the innkeeper in the outer play are likely to take Katherine’s speech all in earnest. The only losers are those males who have foolishly bet on Katherine’s disobedience.” Helga Ramsey-Kurz, “Rising Above the Bait: Kate’s Transformation from Bear to Falcon,” *English Studies* 88.3 (June 2007): 277.

<sup>82</sup> It is in the English classroom where Joey repeatedly insults her, calling her a bitter hag, and referring to her bad mood as a product of her menstrual period. Mr. Morgan, the English teacher, also repeatedly sends Kat to Ms. Perky’s office for her rude behavior, even if Kat is not being rude. The film illustrates again and again that the English classroom is not a safe or comfortable space for Kat.

<sup>83</sup> Kat did ask Mr. Morgan if the assignment should be written in iambic pentameter, and he threw her out of the class, thus the students apparently never receive an answer.

<sup>84</sup> Henderson 136.

her ability to offer a close-reading of the text. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 141, the speaker-poet concedes to loving his lover with his heart rather than his head: "But 'tis my heart that loves what they [his eyes] despise," he states. He continues, "But my five wits, nor my five senses, can / Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee."<sup>85</sup> Kat's poem, seemingly hastily written between prom night and English class the following Monday, does follow the same theme as Shakespeare's sonnet. In her poem, Kat focuses on how much she hates Patrick, only to realize that no matter how much she intellectually hates him, she cannot stop loving him: "But mostly I hate the way I don't hate you, / Not even close, not even a little bit, / Not even at all." As she reads out loud and she begins to cry; her submission portrays a much more emotional response than Kate's rationalizing the roles of men in women in her speech. The poem seems to replace her intellectuality with emotional responses, as Diana Henderson argues,<sup>86</sup> but the problem lies not in Kat's crying or emotional display, but in the film's manipulation of such a display.

The negotiation of feminine expectations presents a problem in *10 Things*, just as it does in *Shrew* in the inconsistencies between Katherine before Petruchio and Kate after Petruchio. Such inconsistencies are not solely Shakespeare's, either. Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*, which presents the woman's side of the taming story, also presents differing feminine roles, with Petruchio's second wife, Maria, pulling a Lysistrata-like trick to tame Petruchio, exclaiming that "I am no more the gentle, tame Maria. / Mistake me not; I have a new soul in me / Made of a north wind, nothing but tempest," to Bianca (1.2.70-2).<sup>87</sup> Petruchio's nightmare of a dominant wife has come true, much to his frustration. Whereas *The Woman's Prize* could be read as a feminist text, as editor Eric Rasmussen notes, it also is a play that "may ultimately exploit the

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<sup>85</sup> William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 141," *Shakespeare's Sonnets* ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden, 1997) 141.

<sup>86</sup> Henderson 137.

<sup>87</sup> John Fletcher, *The Woman's Prize, Or The Tamer Tamed, English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (Norton: New York, 2002).

theme of women's equality without being genuinely committed to it,"<sup>88</sup> proving perhaps just as ambiguous in its own ending as *Shrew*.<sup>89</sup> *10 Things I Hate About You* continues the variations of feminine definitions when Kat reads her poem, a moment where the film codes her in more traditionally feminine looks and actions, such as when her voice breaks and tears roll down her cheek, a seeming broken feminist. Even feminists cry. The film contrasts the crying Kat with her Amazon roles of the humanist warrior role (like Wonder Woman) in her helping Bianca and freeing Patrick from detention, and her more aggressive role on the soccer field. The contrasting of roles does not equal juxtaposition, and like its predecessors of *Shrew* and *A Woman's Prize*, *10 Things* shows the power dynamics that exist in heterosexual relationships, solving its gender boundary problem by taking the easy way out and adhering to genre convention, as Pittman asserts: "What could be seen as troubling conformity to masculine desire is normalized by the concept of mutual love."<sup>90</sup> Rather than explaining the social implication of Kat's emerging Amazon role, *10 Things* relies on its generic teenpic ending to resolve its discrepancies in harnessing Kat's Amazon role.

The teenpic ending of the film jars when it does not meld with the Amazon role depicted throughout. Ariane Balizet notes that "the young woman [Kat] in this story will not be complete until and unless a young man enables her self-discovery."<sup>91</sup> Yet as Kat's Amazon roles demonstrate, she illustrates self-discovery throughout the entire film. The issue remains not with Kat, but how the film handles this new Amazon woman: the tools to temper the Amazon are not

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<sup>88</sup> Eric Rasmussen, *The Woman's Prize, Or The Tamer Tamed*. Introduction. *English Renaissance Drama*. (New York: Norton, 2002) 1218.

<sup>89</sup> Like *Lysistrata*, the women tame the men so that all can go back to living within the patriarchal hierarchy in peace. Rasmussen also sees this happening: "Fletcher enables his audience to have it both ways: the women defy their men only to submit once they have made their point." 1217.

<sup>90</sup> L. Monique Pittman, "Taming *10 Things I Hate About You*: Shakespeare and the Teenage Film Audience," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 32.2 (2004): 150.

<sup>91</sup> Ariane M. Balizet, "Teen Scenes: Recognizing Shakespeare in Teen Films," *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, ed. James Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson: MacFarland, 2004): 130.

yet in use; yet we know how to ignore the shrew, for example. As Kat leans over the white Fender Strat<sup>92</sup> in her car, emotions run from upset to happy in that Patrick buys Kat off although she also has the instrument of her Riot Grrrl persona.<sup>93</sup> “You can’t just buy me a guitar every time you screw up, you know,” Kat says to Patrick, to which he responds by stopping her mouth with a kiss. As *10 Things* demonstrates, our means for handling the Amazon start with entering into her traditional spaces, and bringing her back to traditional teenage spaces of the high school and prom. Such action mirrors early modern stories of bringing the Amazon home. The Amazon, though, has not been completely stymied as we see another representation of the Amazon seven years later in another Shakespeare teenpic film, *She’s the Man*.

### **Ballgame or Ballroom: The Amazon in *She’s the Man***

In Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Viola and Orsino discuss which sex can truly love in a stronger, more consistent way. In the play, Duke Orsino embodies his own hyperbole, highlighted in Act 2, scene 4, when the Duke and Cesario, really the disguised Viola, define the sexes on their own terms. The two left alone, Orsino proclaims:

There is no woman’s sides  
 Can bide the beating of so strong a passion  
 As love doth give my heart; no woman’s heart

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<sup>92</sup> The guitar he buys for Kat is significantly more than the \$300 he was paid to take her out. Either he chipped in his own money, or he knew someone and got a good deal. Either way, he did make an effort in fixing his mistakes.

<sup>93</sup> Pittman asserts that the film relies on gender stereotypes, and such an ending illustrates her point: “Junger’s film glosses over the complex gender and power dynamics that the rougher edges of Shakespeare’s drama leave exposed,” adding, “*10 Things I Hate About You* works hard to soften the obvious gender inequities of the original, but in many ways silences honest and serious debate over gender in the process [. . .] The contradictions stridently voiced by *Taming* are so normalized by the film and ornamented by the vocabulary of teenage love that they slip past the audience’s notice.” Pittman 146-7.

So big to hold so much; they lack retention. (2.4.93-6)<sup>94</sup>

Yet Viola knows, as does the audience, that the fire of her own consistency in the face of complete failure reduces Orsino's infatuation with Olivia to a sputtering flame on a matchstick. After all, how may she woo Orsino dressed as a eunuch? "We men may say more, swear more" Viola states to Orsino, "but indeed / Our shows are more than will; for still we prove / Much in our vows but little in our love" (2.4.16-18). The dramatic irony of the scene grows strong as Orsino takes pride in his exaggerated consistency while admonishing female inconsistency, cementing his hyperbolic love by sending Cesario off to "say more, swear more" to Olivia rather than show more in his love. This battle of the sexes in *Twelfth Night* proves more tangled because the "he" that is Cesario is really a "she," and Orsino also stays blindly ignorant of his hyperbolized and empty ability to truly love. Such dramatic irony transfers well to the Shakespeare adaptation *She's the Man* in which the young Viola becomes a male soccer player, and Duke's confusion about love is explained away by his age. Like *10 Things*, *She's the Man* brings the comedy of the battle of the sexes to the screen, and appropriates the Amazon myth to explore femininity. I argue that *She's the Man*, released seven years after *10 Things*, provides a representation of the American Amazon in Viola the soccer player, a woman who reframes her cross-dressing as distinctly Amazonian in a Title IX battle. Viola plays men's soccer *as a woman*; yet the film's worries about the athletic woman, the Amazon, falsely suggests that Viola gets her cake and eats it too, providing an illusion of an actual Amazonian space.

*She's the Man* follows the *Or, What You Will* portion of Shakespeare's play's title by presenting its American Amazon in the image of a dedicated, female, teenage soccer player. Viola (Amanda Bynes) first appears as both a cute teenager in a bikini, but also a skilled athlete

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<sup>94</sup> All quotations for *Twelfth Night* are from the Penguin edition. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Jonathan Crewe (New York: Penguin, 2000).

with ambitions to play for the Tar Heels at UNC.<sup>95</sup> As an athletic woman who repeatedly shuns the stereotypical feminine roles of the debutante society that her mother so desperately wishes her to join, Viola's Amazon identity develops alongside her crossed-dressed soccer playing, ending on the battlefield of the film's final soccer game when she plays as a woman on a men's team. To get to the final game, *She's the Man* relies on the characters and plot of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with a few discrepancies. Viola cross-dresses as her brother, Sebastian (James Kirk), to play on the men's team at his high school, Illyria. Viola rooms with Duke (Channing Tatum), who also plays soccer. Duke has a crush on Olivia (Laura Ramsey), much to the dismay of Viola, who quickly develops a crush on Duke. Not making first-string<sup>96</sup> on the soccer team, Viola strikes a deal with Duke in which Duke will train Viola for first-string if Viola helps Duke get Olivia. Slapstick comedy ensues as Viola attempts to survive high school as Sebastian, culminating in the soccer game in which Viola reveals she is a girl, highlighted by the following debutant scene in which she wears a mermaid-cut dress to emphasize the curviness of the female figure.

Any similarities between Viola and her *Twelfth Night* counterpart stop at cross-dressing, with the differences between play and film most significantly illustrated when one considers the characters' motives for cross-dressing. Viola of Shakespeare's play dons a man's garb to protect herself in a hostile land, gaining employment from Orsino, the local Duke, when she realizes employment as a woman with Olivia proves impossible. Viola of *She's the Man* cross-dresses not for survival, but to get back at her ex-boyfriend by playing on the rival high school's soccer team in hopes of defeating him in the season's opening game. The film quickly labels Viola as a

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<sup>95</sup> UNC is the alma mater of female soccer greats like Hamm; and their women's soccer program boasts twenty-one national championship wins.

<sup>96</sup> First string is the term the film uses to distinguish between the starting line-up (the first string), and the secondary players (the second string). Viola makes second string on the Illyria Men's soccer team, presumably because she's a girl who does not know the masculine moves in men's soccer.

tomboy as if to minimize the huge suspension of belief in which the audience must participate to see Amanda Bynes as an adolescent boy. Monique (Alex Breckenridge), Sebastian's girlfriend, mistakes Viola for Sebastian when she sees Viola walking in a hoodie and jeans, commenting on Viola's "total lack of curves."<sup>97</sup> Viola's mother, Daphne (Julie Hagerty), attempts to entice her daughter to the debutante ball with frilly gowns, giving up in frustration because she ended up with a daughter who "only wants to kick a muddy ball around a field all day," and who claims a "strict no ruffles policy." Because of her tomboyish nature, Viola makes the two women (and many men) uncomfortable, and not because of the contemporary Amazon connotation of lesbian, but for something just as "transgressive" in the intensely socially conservative debutante culture of *She's the Man*: Viola is not a girly girl who wants to attend the debutante ball.

Daphne, Viola's mother, and Monique hope that Viola could just grow out of her tomboy phase, yet Viola's interest in soccer, as illustrated by the popular success of women's soccer in the United States from 1991 to 2006, occurs as more than just a phase; in fact, her interest is a life choice. "Labels such as 'tomboy' no longer distinguish the girl who plays soccer," Elise Pettus writes, adding, "The image of the female soccer player is changing, and it is also changing us."<sup>98</sup> Daphne and Monique represent the anxiety surrounding such a changing definition of femininity; and I posit that soccer creates an Amazon role, represented in American culture by our U.S. women's soccer team, and represented in *She's the Man* by Viola defining herself as an athlete. In her introduction to *Nike Is a Goddess*, Mariah Burton Nelson remembers reading about Babe Didrikson Zaharias and relishing Babe's words: "Reading her story, I realized I wasn't a tomboy, so I need never stop being one. I was an athlete. A lifelong athlete, just like

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<sup>97</sup> All quotations of the film come from the DVD of *She's the Man*. *She's the Man*, dir. Andy Fickman, perf. Amanda Bynes, Channing Tatum, *DreamWorks*, 2006.

<sup>98</sup> Elise Pettus, "From the Suburbs to the Sports Arena," *Nike Is a Goddess*, ed. Lissa Smith (Place: Publisher: 1998) 266.

Babe.”<sup>99</sup> Nelson sees sports as a story of women’s liberation, that “Female athletes repossess their bodies,” in what I observe as a redefining femininity under women’s own terms. The U.S. women’s soccer team attempts such redefinition, and for awhile it worked. In 1991, the team won their first World Cup gold, going on to win Olympic gold in 1996, 2004, and 2008. Brandi Chastain, U.S. women’s soccer team player who won the 1991 World Cup championship for her team, brandished a new feminine for herself and for female athletes by stripping off her shirt after her winning goal, revealing her black, Nike sports bra.<sup>100</sup> Criticized for blatant advertising, critics also accused Chastain of inappropriate behavior. Many fought back for the female soccer player, stating that a sports bra was an acceptable piece of workout clothing for women, often worn without a shirt. Many also saw a double standard in Chastain’s treatment: men often take off their shirts after a winning basket or goal—why was it so horrific that Chastain did the same?<sup>101</sup> Described as “the cloth symbol of Title IX’s success,” the sports bra became a symbol of a new femininity. Chastain designing her own sports bra symbolizes a modern Amazon act as a modern Amazon piece of clothing. Rather than removing a breast for better battle capability, the modern Amazon creates a sports bra that helps her excel at her sport.

With *She’s the Man*’s release in 2006, the U.S. women’s soccer team’s popularity had fluctuated from its distinction in 1991 and into the first decade of the twenty-first century. Now more girls and women participate in sports, particularly soccer, as players like Mia Hamm, Julie Foudy, and Michelle Akers showed America how women can be excellent and competitive

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<sup>99</sup> Mariah Burton Nelson, “Introduction: Who We Might Become,” *Nike is a Goddess*, ed. Lissa Smith (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1998) xii.

<sup>100</sup> Chastain was also in a test group for creating an acceptable sports bra for women, including fabric that breathed, strong yet comfortable support, and long-lasting. The sports bra she wore at the 1991 World Cup was a prototype of this new bra that Nike was designing.

<sup>101</sup> In a *Washington Post* article discussing Chastain’s shirt removal, the author cites a survey from America Online in which “nearly 80 percent of users who voted in a poll said that the Brandi moment was ‘no big deal’ and just a celebration of victory.” Ann Gerhart, “Chastain Lifts Sports Apparel Market,” *The Washington Post* July 14, 1999: C1.

athletes.<sup>102</sup> Realizing that they represented their gender as female athletes, the U.S. women's soccer team attempted to alleviate some of the pressure by coding themselves as athletes, although as Nelson remarks, "even when feminism is not an individual's motivating force, it is the result."<sup>103</sup> As a national game, many see women's soccer as a means to redefine the sport, disengaging from the male model of the game.<sup>104</sup> Taking a chance to form a female way of playing and harnessing women's mental and athletic strengths, the U.S. women's soccer team had "a psychological edge that enabled them to pounce on the other team's weak points and push through to victory."<sup>105</sup> Having fought to revolutionize the sport, the women's team lived through playing for no pay, wearing cast-off men's uniforms (they had been turned pink in the wash), and sacrificing careers and school to play the sport they loved.

Yet from 1991 when the U.S. women's team won gold at the World Cup to 2006 when *She's the Man* released, soccer perhaps grew more domesticated, subsumed by a popular culture that hoped to define how girls should play, especially by comparison to boys. Not concerned in defining female soccer play, *She's the Man* concentrates on how Viola plays soccer as a cross-dressed female, thus, *as a boy*: "The shared premise of all the arguments against women in sports is this: female athleticism is not as valuable as male athleticism," Jean Zimmerman writes. She adds, "For all the glorification of Mia Hamm and Sheryl Swoopes, for all the hundreds of thousands of girls flooding into the soccer programs and softball leagues [. . .] we still have one

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<sup>102</sup> As I type this paragraph, two young female soccer players have walked into the local Starbucks with their mothers, soccer uniforms on, pony tails up.

<sup>103</sup> Nelson xii.

<sup>104</sup> Longman 15.

<sup>105</sup> First U.S. women's soccer coach and UNC coach Anson Dorrance saw a difference between his male and female athletes, such as "Women were likely to be better listeners. They tended to be more open to learning new things. On the other hand, it often seemed that being liked mattered more to women players than being the best." Women's soccer legend April Heinrichs showed Dorrance how female teams can care about being the best, while also being good teammates. Pettus 250, 256.

foot stuck in the past.”<sup>106</sup> Although Zimmerman made this comment in 1998, it holds true for 2006 when *She’s the Man* premiered. For example, Frank Deford, sports correspondent for NPR observes, a “glass grandstand”<sup>107</sup> exists for women in that both sexes do not seem to enjoy or support women’s teams. That women’s sports are valued less than men’s is not surprising; and even though women’s soccer’s success provided hope, it is comparable to the Riot Grrrl movement of the late 1990s in that soccer also has become less of a revolutionary movement.

The domestication of women’s soccer, particularly that women should play like “ladies” as opposed to athletes is best exemplified by Elizabeth Lambert’s violent behavior following a November 2009 soccer game. Although occurring three years after *She’s the Man*’s 2006 release, Lambert’s punching and pulling the hair of a rival player certainly does not exhibit good sports(wo)manship; yet it does exhibit the double standard of women in sports when the team immediately suspended Lambert.<sup>108</sup> Critics like to point out that male athletes exhibit similar violent incidents on the field, yet their punishment is not as severe as Lambert’s. Of these athletes include LeGarrette Blount, a running back for Oregon who punched an opposing player and was consequently suspended, only to be reinstated a few months later.<sup>109</sup> We even expect such behavior in men in some sports, like American football. Yet, Lambert’s violent display seems to have crossed a gender line, as Anson Dorrance counters, claiming that he hated to call it

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<sup>106</sup> Jean Zimmerman, *Raising Our Athletic Daughters: How Sports Can Build Self-Esteem and Save Girl’s Lives* (New York: Double Day 1998) 30-1.

<sup>107</sup> Deford focuses his article on the UConn women’s basketball team, easily the most talented group of basketball players in the nation, winning over seventy basketball games in a row, and by double-digits at that. His observations are easily transferable to women’s sports in general. Frank Deford, “Uconn Women’s Team Excels; Will America Notice?,” *NPR* February 17, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Lambert’s behavior was also twisted to be femininely “hot”: “On Monday night, ‘The Late Show’ with David Letterman used a male voiceover to portray the video [of Lambert] in a sexy manner. This is a way to trivialize, or make less threatening, women’s sports, said Pat Griffin, an emeritus professor of social justice education at the University of Massachusetts. ‘It isn’t about women’s soccer and how great its players are,’ Griffin said. ‘It’s about titillation, about sexualizing women in a catfight, that weird porno-lesbian subtext: let’s watch two women go at it.’” Jere Longman, “For All the Wrong Reasons, Women’s Soccer is Noticed,” *The New York Times* 11 November 2009: 15.

<sup>109</sup> Kathleen Deveny, “Who You Callin’ Lady?: The Soft Bigotry of High Expectations” *Newsweek* (21 Nov 2009): 24.

a higher standard, but “‘It’s almost like they crossed a gender line they weren’t allowed to cross, like we want to take them out of the athletic arena and put them in the nurturing, caring role as mothers of children.’”<sup>110</sup> Comparing Lambert’s 2009 incident to 2006’s *She’s the Man* illustrates the troubles with the changing standards created for American female athletes in the United States; *She’s the Man* questions the gender line, with interesting conclusions as to who defines what space is for what gender.

How the film handles gendered spaces preoccupies much of the criticism on *She’s the Man*, and much of it up to this point has focused on the conservative agenda of the film, glossing over what Viola has for what she lacks. As with *10 Things*, the conversations about the representations of feminism in *She’s the Man* remain not new in Shakespeare scholarship, as demonstrated in four articles published in 2008 that all illustrate the film’s simplistic, socially conservative adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. In her extensive article about three film adaptations of *Twelfth Night*, including *She’s the Man*, Laurie Osbourne argues that through Viola’s cross-dressing, *She’s the Man* negotiates gender equality within the patriarchy, also observing that both Sebastian and Viola must show their bodies to the soccer crowd to prove their identities, stating that “‘Viola’s comparable display [of nudity] makes her quest for equal opportunity evident without sexual explicitness.’”<sup>111</sup> Jennifer Clement, on the other hand, sees only a conservative agenda for the film, stating that

While in real life these traits [of femininity] are hardly incompatible with maleness, in the world of the film they are clearly intended to remind viewers that Viola is only acting a role [. . .] These slippages in Viola’s impersonation reinforce the film’s conservative

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<sup>110</sup> Longman 15.

<sup>111</sup> Osbourne takes issue with the film endorsing patriarchal values, but she also applauds the film for somewhat sophisticatedly addressing gender equality, such as when Viola and Sebastian must reveal their bodies. Laurie Osbourne, “*Twelfth Night*’s Cinematic Adolescents: One Play, One Plot, One Setting, and Three Teen Films,” *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 26.2 (Summer 2008): 31.

belief in essential gender roles; Viola may act tomboyishly at times, even when she is not in character, but she is so fundamentally a girl that she cannot maintain the ‘Sebastian’ act consistently.<sup>112</sup>

Issues of Viola behaving as a boy to be a better girl continue in Elizabeth Klett’s analysis, when she observes that *She’s the Man* puts down female empowerment to encourage “a reductive ‘Girl Power’” that “effectively trumps a potentially progressive narrative about female adolescent empowerment.”<sup>113</sup>

In broader understandings of the social implication of Viola’s cross-dressing, L. Monique Pittman remarks about the film’s repeated reminders that the “male Viola” is really a girl: “[T]his transparently cross-dressed performance advances a distinctly conservative perspective on both gender identity and the human subject [. . .] clos[ing] off those uncertainties [of gender] with gestures to an essential self at the core of the film’s heroine, Bynes’s Viola.”<sup>114</sup> Using Shakespeare’s plot and Bynes’s wardrobe, for example, *She’s the Man* “initially demonstrates the permeable boundaries between gender identities; however, each of these devices reverts to conservatism because the film never allows Bynes’s gender switch to become so convincing that it destabilizes long-held categories of difference.”<sup>115</sup> Yet, rather than focusing on Viola’s efficacy of masculine imitation to destabilize social constructions, one can view her Amazon identity and her occupation on the soccer field as a destabilizing component; thus placing focus back on Viola as a girl, rather than on her performance as a boy. Although Viola may not convince her

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<sup>112</sup> Clement 17.

<sup>113</sup> Elizabeth Klett, “Reviving Viola: Comic and Tragic Teen Film Adaptations of *Twelfth Night*,” *Shakespeare Bulletin: A Journal of Performance Criticism and Scholarship* 26.2 (Summer 2008): 78.

<sup>114</sup> L. Monique Pittman, “Dressing the Girl/Playing the Boy: *Twelfth Night* Learns Soccer on the Set of *She’s the Man*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 36.2 (2008): 124-5, 122-23.

Jennifer Clement, in the same article in which she discusses *10 Things*, argues that *She’s the Man* uses essentialist views of gender, as well as backlash responses of feminism (analogous to what Clement notices in *10 Things*) “to promote a conservative view of class and education through a canonical text.” Clement 9.

<sup>115</sup> Pittman, “Dressing” 123.

audience she is a boy, she convinces the characters in the film; and I argue her Amazon persona allows her to do so. I read Viola's cross-dressing performance as a contemporary Amazon narrative in that Viola stays a strong woman soccer player throughout the film, her cross-dressing a vehicle for her achieving Amazon status—that is until she threatens the social order and the teenpic ending must step in, defining her femininity as not an athlete, as Viola did, but as a female athlete: the debutante athlete.

An obvious discrepancy to the claim that Viola occupies a modern Amazon role resides in the fact that Viola must also cross-dress; yet Viola's cross-dressing role remains distinct from her Amazon role (she is not an Amazon because she cross-dresses, for example). In fact, the cross-dressing becomes the means for Viola to reach full Amazon status, illustrating the film's anxieties about strong women in that it allows Viola to develop her soccer prowess as a boy and not as a girl.<sup>116</sup> The film also tempers Viola's Amazon identity through the debutante plot. With all of these obstacles to face, how does Viola become an Amazon? Like her counterpart in *10 Things*, Viola's Amazon identity is fundamental to her soccer playing role; yet unlike Kat in *10 Things*, Viola actually becomes a modern American Amazon because of soccer, like Mia Hamm and the other women players of the U.S. women's soccer team.<sup>117</sup> Viola wishes to be a female soccer player, becoming a better woman by playing for the UNC Tarheels, the NCAA soccer champions multiple times. Unlike Mia Hamm, Viola achieves her soccer goals by cross-dressing and learning to play like a boy to become a better female soccer player, whereas the U.S.

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<sup>116</sup> Though not purposefully cross-dressing, the Amazons of Scythia were mistaken for men for their non-feminine dress, as described by Herodotus. Marincola 277.

<sup>117</sup> As Elise Pettus observes of Mia Hamm: "The image of the female soccer player is changing, and it is also changing us. Mia Hamm's long, shiny hair swinging in commercials for Pert Plus is a kind of semaphore. Being a soccer player, it tells us, doesn't mean we won't grow up to be women. The image of Hamm and her teammates working together out on the field from match to match and season to season sends an even stronger message that many girls and women are beginning to believe: Being a soccer player can help us grow up to become better women." Pettus 266.

women's soccer team built a female way of playing, attempting to push beyond a singularly male model of the sport.

*She's the Man* appropriates *Twelfth Night*'s cross-dressing theme to promote the humor that resides in a girl attempting to break through the "glass grandstand;"<sup>118</sup> and to do this endorsement, the film constantly compares Viola's female soccer playing to male soccer playing. In the opening scene of the film, Viola plays co-ed beach soccer, and her athletic soccer abilities mirror those of the male soccer players' in competitiveness and competence—even if she wears a bikini.<sup>119</sup> After kicking the winning goal, Viola reclines on a blanket with her boyfriend, Justin (Robert Hoffman), who tells her: "You're probably already better than half the guys on my team." After this display of athletic prowess, the film cuts to practice fields of Cornwall High School, which Viola attends as a senior. As Viola and her teammates reach the practice field, they react in surprise that the Lacrosse team preempted their practice slot. Amidst their confusion, another teammate runs toward them, reporting that the girl's soccer team had been cut because not enough girls had signed up. Immediately the film calls into question the apparent necessity of Title IX; whereas some think that "Title IX's impact on American society can't be underscored," that it "caused the reformation of what it means to be female,"<sup>120</sup> the film certainly does underscore Title IX by showing that women do not need their own teams because the best women players will just learn how to play on men's teams.<sup>121</sup> With their team cut, Viola and her teammates react in anger and approach their soccer coach, who stands on the sidelines as the men's soccer team practices.

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<sup>118</sup> An example of "enlightened sexism" as Susan Douglas describes.

<sup>119</sup> Laurie Osborne gives kudos to the film for not sexualizing Viola in her bikini, rather focusing on her soccer skills as they play on the beach. I agree with Osborne.

<sup>120</sup> Zennie Abraham, "Elizabeth Lambert is the Modern Female Athlete," Zennie62.com, ed. Zennie Abraham, 12 Nov. 2009, 22 March 2010 <<http://www.zennie62.com>>.

<sup>121</sup> Clement also sees this move in *She's the Man*.

During this exchange, the film directly compares the value of women's and men's sports by Viola's insistence on trying out for the men's team, and her coach's laughing and his sexist response: "You're all excellent players, but girls aren't as fast as boys. Or as strong. Or as athletic. That's not me talking," he continues, "it's scientific fact. Girls can't beat boys. It's as simple as that." With the men's soccer team standing around her, Viola turns to the team captain, her boyfriend, for assistance: "What do you think about it?" she asks him. "I think the coach said it all," he answers, to which she exclaims in astonishment, "Yesterday you told me I was better than half the guys on your team!" He denies ever saying such a disloyal statement and attempts to shut down the conversation; but, rather, Viola ends the conversation by dumping him.

Viola's response to her coach's and Justin's sexism sends her on a transformative journey as she plans to cross-dress and play on the rival high school's men's team, both as a way to continue to play soccer (without her senior season, Viola's hopes for a college scholarship are dashed), but also as a means to seek revenge on Justin. Although Viola's response to her coach and boyfriend occupies both reactionary and progressive viewpoints—reactionary because she falls into the "enlightened sexism" trap of thinking feminism is no longer necessary (or no longer exists),<sup>122</sup> and progressive because she devises a plan to show that her coach and Justin remain wrong in their sexism—Viola's decision to cross-dress and still play soccer slightly mitigates the film's anxieties about the Amazon by proving humorous and endearing. This tempering does not mean that Viola's Amazon role becomes easy for her; after all, the film codes Viola's male-style of soccer playing, highlighted with her winning "scissor kick" (a conventionally male soccer move), as successfully Amazonian, insinuating that the male form of soccer signals the correct

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<sup>122</sup> Viola's strongest illustration of postfeminist thought happens when she does not rally for more women to join her team so that women's soccer can be reinstated at the school according to Title IX. Also, once Viola cannot play on the men's team, the film never again mentions her goals to play for the UNC Tarheels, the team of Mia Hamm and the team that won NCAA championship after championship.

form. Rather than picking up pointers from the U.S. women's soccer team, where she could be a female athlete, Viola's Amazon is controlled under male athletic rules.

Distinct from *10 Things*, *She's the Man* sets up the battle of the sexes much more blatantly than the film based on *The Taming of the Shrew*, the quintessential play of such a battle, by immediately threatening the coach and men's soccer team, creating conflict with the norm and disrupting the fraternal relationship among the men. Such a clash illustrates modern controversy with Title IX, but it also represents an analogous relationship to how ancient and early modern Amazons proved as threats to the acceptable social order.<sup>123</sup> The understanding of such a threat helps clarify why Viola's cross-dressing role is so pertinent to her Amazon identity, and how this cross-dressing both furthers and hinders Title IX's goals. Viola displays "inappropriate performances"<sup>124</sup> as a person crossing gendered spaces when she wishes to join a boy's team as a female player and when she cross-dresses as a boy. The disguise plot of *She's the Man* allows Viola to adapt her performances, transforming what Viola of *Twelfth Night* did for survival to a twenty-first-century redefinition of femininity, a necessary cross-dressing to circumvent the sexist inequalities valued by her coach and ex-boyfriend.

*She's the Man* illustrates the strict dichotomy of gender roles and behaviors through gendered locations; and Viola must persevere in her Amazon identity. The film highlights clear-cut ideals about gender in Viola's initial cross-dressed scene, where she worries that the other high schoolers will see through her disguise.<sup>125</sup> The stereotypes begin when her friend, Paul,

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<sup>123</sup> Schwarz sees this relationship in what she describes as mirror games: "Amazonian mirror games work in two ways in early modern texts," Schwarz states, "The first is an accumulation of effects: women in appropriately feminine roles [. . .] engage in inappropriate performance, becoming recognizable as Amazonian," she explains, continuing that "The second is a disguise plot, in which the interchangeability of Amazons and men creates a crisis of difference." Schwarz 36.

<sup>124</sup> Schwarz 36.

<sup>125</sup> Viola asks her gay friend, Paul (Jonathan Sadowski), for help with the cross-dressing process. Coded as gay through stereotypes of his occupation (a hair stylist), clothes, and mannerisms, Paul takes on the captain's role in *Twelfth Night* and helps Viola change into a boy. In a teenpic, this transformation from girl to boy is impossible in

drops Viola off at the school. As Paul and Viola sit in a VW Bug in front of Illyria High School, the film could enter into a socially significant moment when Paul, comforting his friend, tells her to “Remember, inside every girl there’s a boy.” Following his statement, the script allows for a space to let the double entendre sink in. When Paul, presumably along with the audience, realizes the sexual connotation, he continues, “That came out wrong, but you know what I mean.” In acknowledging that both genders can be in one person, Paul’s statement hints at Viola’s role as an Amazon and the flexibility in defining each sex; yet the moment ends as Paul throws Viola her soccer ball in farewell, and she enters the sea of teenagers at the high school’s orientation. Immediately believing that those on the high school grounds know her true sex, heightened by the soundtrack playing “Good girl, and such a bad boy,” Viola grows frightened of her boy-ness. She calms herself in her strange masculine voice that inexplicably takes on a country-twang accent: “I can do this. I am a dude. I am a hunky dude. I am a badass hunky dude.”<sup>126</sup>

In the next scene, Viola’s cross-dressed performance undergoes its first test as she uncomfortably enters the boys’ dorm where she quickly realizes the masculine attributes she displays in her girl soccer playing identity certainly remain too girly for the testosterone-filled, topsy-turvy situation of the dorm. Chaos reigns with loud music, boys throwing all sorts of sports balls, and boys wrestling. The camera stares at Viola as she stares at others; and when she enters her dorm room, Viola only has a moment of relief before her roommate, Duke, and his friends

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any believable way, demonstrated through a comedic montage of trying on mustaches and sideburns, followed by Viola imitating the walk of male strangers on the street. Yet, the most significant alteration happens when Viola’s friends help her bind her breasts, the only semi-believable change to Viola’s appearance, which also happens to highlight the film’s queasiness concerning the Amazon in that Viola must cross-dress as a means to achieve her Amazon identity. The film represents Viola’s binding of her breasts as an analogy to the Amazons’ own breast alterations that were completed as a means to perform better as a warrior; only throughout most of *She’s the Man*, Viola must hide her femaleness, rather than alter or enhance it, to become a strong warrior.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Roeper of “Ebert and Roeper” gives Bynes a tough review: “Mere words cannot convey how awful Bynes is at playing a girl playing a boy.” Yet as many other reviewers remark, this teenpic is for the thirteen or under crowd. And as far as teenpic genre conventions, comedy, not believability, remains Bynes’s goal. Richard Roeper, rev. of *She’s the Man*, dir. Alan Fickman. *Rotten Tomatoes* 20 Mar. 2006: <[http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shes\\_the\\_man/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shes_the_man/)>.

stare some more, momentarily displaying how transparent her male costume and male performance really are. They break the awkwardness by asking her age, deciding, like Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, that her “Smooth and rubious” “Diana’s lip” and her “small pipe [. . .] as the maiden’s organ, shrill and sound, / And all is semblative a woman’s part” occur due to her/his young age (1.4.31-4). “Bynes, with her chipmunk cheeks and goggly [sic] eyes, comes off more like some bizarre third sex—Davy Jones after an infusion of estrogen,” Owen Gleiberman, a reviewer for *Entertainment Weekly*, remarks of Viola’s masculinity.<sup>127</sup> While Gleiberman compares Viola acting as Sebastian to a man (Davy Jones) on estrogen, Viola is a woman donning her masculine disguise and infiltrating the space of a men’s dorm, and soon, a men’s soccer team. Viola threatens precisely because she is a masculine woman, not because she is a feminine man.<sup>128</sup>

Viola plays her cross-dressing role in hyperboles, transgressing traditional gender roles by unnerving the men around her in the expressions of her emotions, a stereotypical female trait; and in the realm of the film, such behavior proves awkward for a heterosexual male. Although the film could code Viola as gay, *She’s the Man* staunchly places Viola’s male role as heterosexual, for the most part avoiding any reference or humorous moment that could occur if Viola’s heterosexual femininity got in the way of her heterosexual masculine performance.<sup>129</sup> In the world of the film, Viola’s feminine male heterosexuality becomes more of an infraction than

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<sup>127</sup> Owen Gleiberman, rev. of *She’s the Man*, dir. Andy Fickman, *Entertainment Weekly* 16 March 2006 <<http://www.ew.com/ewarticle/o,,1173448,00.html>>.

<sup>128</sup> This scene reminds us that she is a woman when her tampons fall out of her bag onto the bed, much to the teenage boys horror. Viola covers for herself by pushing a tampon up her nose, claiming that they stop nose bleeds, and that Beckham does it all of the time.

<sup>129</sup> Conversely, *Twelfth Night* does not shy away from homosexual overtones. One may read Antonio’s love of Sebastian as homosexual, as Trevor Nunn’s 1996 filmic *Twelfth Night* interprets. Nunn’s film also highlights a homosexual attraction between Orsino and Cesario in Scene 2, Act 4 in which Feste sings for the two (the stage directions of *The Pelican Shakespeare* state that more people are present) and in the darkened room, Cesario and Orsino almost kiss. Feste looks uncomfortable for the two, not in that it is a homosexual kiss, but rather, in the dramatic irony.

if she were a homosexual male because she repeatedly slips out of the stereotypical heterosexual male traits. For example, during lunch after soccer try-outs, Viola's roommate and his friends ask her whether "his" sister is hot. Not quite knowing what to say, Viola replies, "She has a great personality." The others groan in despair; and to recover from what she believes to be a gender-revealing error, Viola watches with the others as Olivia, Duke's crush, walks in, exclaiming: "Check out the booty on that blondie!" The others at the table quickly stop her hyperbolic masculinity because she overstepped a masculine boundary: if Duke has a crush on Olivia, no one else can. The dialogue continues at the table, revealing that Olivia has been dumped, and that's she's "Really vulnerable. Confidence, self-esteem is way down. In man-words, time to pounce." They high-five after speaking the "man words" and a disgusted Viola grimaces. Reaching across the gender boundary created by her disguise, Viola looks at Olivia, commenting in a slightly feminine voice that Olivia looks sad. She continues in her boy voice: "It's just I can relate. I just got out of a bad relationship too. You think you know someone and you realize it's all been a big lie. Every touch. Every kiss." She reverts to her girl voice as her eyes close, and she seemingly remembers every touch and kiss. Noticing the interchangeability of genders that Viola practices, the guys disperse, embarrassed. Trying to fix the situation (as well as cement her male identity), Viola closes with, "Plus, you know, you can never get a chic to shut up." For Viola, her problem lies not in getting the chic, herself, to shut up, but to shut up the inappropriate (as deemed by the geisis of the film) gender stereotypes that come out of the wrong gendered identity.

As the lunch scene illustrates, Viola's cross-dressing for the means of playing soccer begins to fail; and her solution becomes reliant upon location. For example, after failing at soccer tryouts and not making first string, Viola recovers her manliness at the boys' social field:

Cesario's, the local pizza place. Paul suggests to his friend that drastic heterosexual measures are needed; namely, Viola must demonstrate that she can be a man by getting the girl. At Cesario's, Viola plays a boy with many ex-girlfriends (really her former Cornwall teammates), ex-girlfriends she must dispose of. Viola's same-sex relationship with the women allows her to act familiarly and intimately with them, showing Duke and the others that a "delicate, refined, handsome"<sup>130</sup> male musician can get the girls. Although Cesario's is the boys' hangout, it becomes a safe space for Viola because her fellow female soccer players are there. Viola performs a masculinity that the other boys admire,<sup>131</sup> particularly that she can touch the girls and talk to them—albeit most of the talking Viola does belittles the women. The scene's humor titillates with PG-13 girl-on-girl action, while also giving the appropriate heterosexual outs for the female Viola: "Later," Viola says to her supposed love interest, as she kisses her fingers and touches them to the other girls' lips in a suave move that both fends off the homosexual implications of two girls kissing, as well as demonstrates Viola's ability in sending a beautiful woman on her way. Viola participates even more in the gender stereotypes by calling her supposed girlfriends "needy," "psycho-bitch," and "Ball and frickin' chain," in overt, sexist stereotypes.

The film begins to disrupt gender boundaries at Cesario's, and it continues to do so in the following scenes of the carnival and debutante plot as a means to heighten the stakes for which Viola plays; after all, her college soccer career relies on her *playing*. The scene that follows at the debutante carnival offers more gender stereotypes in its topsy-turvy setting where Viola must

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<sup>130</sup> This is how Olivia refers to Viola/Sebastian. She indicates that she likes the rocker type (as in rock music) over the athletic type.

<sup>131</sup> The boys admire her ways with the women so much so that Duke states, "We might need to do a little reevaluating here," to his friends, connoting that they need to reevaluate their performance of masculinity. Also, Viola does not perform a believable masculinity for the audience, though. Her masculine performance in Cesario's is used for humor in the film, as well as for solidifying stereotypical gender roles.

perform both the boy and the girl simultaneously, providing teenage humor as she jumps between the sexes, changing her wardrobe in a port-a-potty and a moon bounce. While in her girl role,<sup>132</sup> Viola volunteers at the kissing booth—a tradition about which she surprisingly does not complain—and here she and Duke form their heterosexual relationship. In the kissing booth, the film highlights the more traditional, submissive ideal femininity of the debutante, particularly when Duke and Justin get into a fight over Viola;<sup>133</sup> the conservative reading that the debutante plot may garner also pointedly shows the contrast between the female athlete identity Viola chooses and the debutante female.<sup>134</sup> For example, Viola does not passively accept their fighting, but rather tries to stop them; and this comparison proves poignant in the debutante lunch scene that follows. The lunch compares Viola and Olivia, with Viola arriving late and disrupting the program loudly by eating a large drumstick with her hands. Olivia, on the other hand, eats daintily and soft music plays in the *mise-en-scene* as the camera focuses on her. The contrast between the two girls seems to indicate that the debutante definition of femininity appears the common sense choice, yet a scuffle in the ladies room interrupts such a conclusion when Olivia, Monique, and Viola get into a fight (over a boy!), slapping, punching and pushing each other until an appalled middle-aged luncheon organizer stops them, telling the three girls that “When debutantes disagree, they say it with their eyes.”

Viola’s physical aggression as a debutante labels her violent, yet the same behavior on the soccer field labels her athletic; and in the final soccer game between Cornwall and Illyria, issues of sex and gender, which up to this point remain confused and humorous, begin to be

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<sup>132</sup> We never see Viola volunteer in her boy role as Sebastian at the carnival.

<sup>133</sup> This buying of female goods is what actually happens in Gil Junger’s *10 Things I Hate About You*. Also, the scene ends on a less than romantic note when a young boy next in line sums up the debutant plot’s view of ideal, submissive femininity: “You don’t have to flirt with her first, genius. You’re paying for it.”

<sup>134</sup> Viola has an anxiety dream in the film in which she is playing soccer on the men’s team in a debutant dress: and the field is decidedly hostile. She misses kicking the ball and instead falls flat on her back, debutant dress and all.

clarified. The clarity begins tenuously when Viola sleeps in on game day, and her brother, Sebastian, takes her place. Playing horribly to everyone's frustration, Viola's nemesis, Malcolm (James Snyder), suspects Sebastian of being a girl, and the principal stops the game, asking the teenager to drop his shorts and prove his sex. The crowd gasps in admiration (Viola's friend, Kia, even congratulates Paul on his work) at his genitals. With Sebastian's sex clarified, Viola safely enters the field as her brother during the second half of the game, without revealing her true sex. Having trained with Duke, Viola's soccer skills exhibit competency and aggression, yet Duke, angry with Sebastian for kissing Olivia, will not pass the ball to Viola. She calls him out on it, stating that she needs to win this game,<sup>135</sup> and to clear up his confusion as to who kissed whom, Viola removes her wig, exclaiming that her brother, Sebastian, not her, had kissed Olivia. The game stops and the players listen as Viola admits her love for Duke, to which the still confused boy responds, "That's a little weird. I know Viola; I kissed Viola." When Viola says, "You kissed me," Duke balks at the notion of kissing a boy. "Just because you wear a wig, doesn't prove that you're a girl," he responds, when the obviously feminine Viola with her long hair stands before him, the team, and the crowd. Perhaps confused by her unisex soccer uniform, as well as wishing to believe and see what he prefers,<sup>136</sup> Duke's ambivalence about Viola's femininity pushes her to give more proof. She finally lifts her shirt to show her breasts (which presumably remain unbound),<sup>137</sup> and finally Duke grows satisfied at Viola's identity.

The echoing of Brandi Chastain's shirt-lift at the 1991 World Cup may be intentional, but rather than being reprimanded for displaying her sports bra as Chastain did, Viola's showing her

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<sup>135</sup> Viola's motivation for playing this game—to beat Justin—apparently still supercedes any goals for her own personal success, such as playing for UNC.

<sup>136</sup> Much like how other men of the past mistakenly construed ancient Amazons.

<sup>137</sup> Laurie Osborne points out that "*She's the Man* avoids sexually objectifying either character for the audience. More to the point, the plot moves on matter-of-factly and directly to whether Viola can play on the Illyria team as a girl" (31).

breasts—presumably without a sports bra—gives her access to the soccer game. Her exhibition, along with her brother's, provides Viola a chance to disrupt gender norms by playing as a woman on the men's team. Like her counterpart in *10 Things*, Viola uses her breasts as a purely female weapon, a means to an end. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone sees breasts in twenty-first-century comics as a new cultural definition of the American Amazon, where “super-female muscularity and super-breast-laden females, as portrayed in comic books, are related.”<sup>138</sup> Granted, Viola does not represent a “super-breast-laden femal[e]” but her showing of her breasts provides another example of how the film appropriate the Amazon for its own agenda, that is, the teenpic. Viola's displaying her breasts allows her to play the rest of the game as an undisguised Amazon, a position she presumably would not have reached unless she had cross-dressed and learned to play the game as a boy, illustrating that she can play as an equal—and not as one of the boys but as a female equal—because of her cross-dressing.

After lifting her shirt, Viola comes face-to-face with her original coach from Cornwall who furiously insists that she cannot play, while her current Illyria coach (Vinnie Jones) fights back, stating that “Here in Illyria we don't discriminate based on gender.”<sup>139</sup> Duke accepts the situation for the sake of his fellow male teammates, quoting Maria's words, in a letter presumably written by Olivia for Malvolio, from *Twelfth Night*. Out of context from the play, but also out of context for the situation at hand, Duke exclaims: “Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.” It is not Viola who is great, but rather the team; and in the context of the film, he seems to say that the men of the team need to accept Viola as a teammate for them to succeed, although he himself does not forgive her at this moment. Duke models the “greatness” they must all achieve as he

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<sup>138</sup> Sheets-Johnstone 125.

<sup>139</sup> Though Illyria's Coach should have said “sex” rather than “gender,” the sentiment remains the same.

hides his anger at her gender elusiveness long enough to help Viola make the winning goal of the game. As Justin taunts her that she kicks like a girl, Viola surprises him and makes the winning goal with a male shot: the scissor kick that Duke taught her. As if to contrast Viola's newly revealed aggressive femininity with the supposedly masculine teenage boy (and to play on more stereotypes of gender), Justin cries at the unfairness of it all, while Viola cries not at all and quietly lets Duke walk away.

*She's the Man* has a difficult time reconciling the Amazon myth it appropriated with the actual American Amazon it portrays in Viola; and following the soccer game when she makes the winning kick, the film balances Viola's athletic femininity with a more girly femininity by making her look like a girl. The final soccer game illustrates seeming acceptance of and need for the American Amazon: like the fictional American Amazons of Wonder Woman and Buffy, for example, the team needs Viola to win the game. The desire for Viola to win does not negate the threat she poses. Similar to the situation in *10 Things*, the anxieties of having no means to handle the Amazon present a necessity also to harness her; therefore, the film takes us back to the debutante ball as a reminder that Viola is still a girl. Reverting back to the debutante clearly illustrates the worry of allowing Viola to "have it all" as an Amazon, leading to questions of "why?" Why not allow Viola to "have it all" as an Amazon? And, why does the American Amazon remain so threatening? Laurie Osborne claims that the film "mark[s] the progress of, as well as ongoing opposition to, [its] crossdressed heroine's struggle for both voice and choice in [her] social destiny."<sup>140</sup> The film's downplays Viola's "voice and choice" as illustrated through Duke's request that "everything would just be a lot easier if you stayed a girl." Duke admits this feeling to Viola while also admitting that he misses his roommate and the intimate

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<sup>140</sup> Osborne 31, 32.

talks they had. Although it must be easier for Viola to perform only one gender, as Duke alludes to, the film does not allow Viola to define the terms of the gender roles she chooses.<sup>141</sup> Whereas the ancient Amazons defined the terms of marriage with the Scythians, the film defines Viola's female role through the acceptance of Duke's terms.<sup>142</sup> Such a move attempts to push the American Amazon into myth status rather than a physical presence, the conventions of "normative heterosexuality" and "a happy ending,"<sup>143</sup> edging their way in and pushing the Amazon out.

Just as women's soccer has maneuvered its way into American culture, Viola maneuvers her way onto the men's team at Illyria; and even if the film touts a conservative agenda as previous scholarship argues, we do have the modern American Amazon in the film to present another version of femininity. The final scene of the film shows Viola running ahead of the men's soccer team, concluding with Duke picking her up and kissing her—Amazon uniform and all. Like *10 Things, She's the Man* provides a glimpse into what the American Amazon could have, but to say that this film represents a feminist agenda goes too far; after all, "Amazon encounters raise the possibility that 'dominant masculinity' might simply be the version that

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<sup>141</sup> The ancient Amazons were able to define their terms; for instance, they negotiated the terms for their marriage to the Scythians, stating "If, however, you wish to keep us for your wives and to behave as honourable men, go and get from your parents the share of property which is due to you, and then let us go off and live by ourselves." They continued, "Look now—if you think fit to keep us for your wives, let us get out of the country altogether and settle somewhere on the other side of the Tanais" to which the Scythians agreed. Thus the Amazons "have kept to their old ways, riding to the hunt on horseback sometimes with, sometimes without, their men, taking part in war and wearing the same sort of clothes as men." Marincola 278.

<sup>142</sup> Although Laurie Osborne tries to see a progressive agenda to *She's the Man*, she also sees the patriarchal parameters that confine Viola: "Her success in becoming 'the man' in person and in name implies a persistent patriarchal framing of status and power [. . .] [with] fixed—and opposing—gender identities. Nonetheless, the later films qualify the gendered patriarchy they display [. . .] Viola succeeds as herself on the soccer field. Moreover, unlike his predecessors, Duke in *She's the Man* remarks that he ultimately does not regret Viola's deception. Without it, he notes, he would not have been able to talk with her as he did." 32.

<sup>143</sup> This is analogous to what Schwarz observes with early modern Amazons: "Amazon encounters at once reveal and negotiate that conflict [of gender identifications], using gestures of closure—normative heterosexuality, a happy ending—to disarm and socialize a story in which men want women who act and often look a great deal like men." Schwarz 27.

wins,”<sup>144</sup> Schwarz argues of the early modern Amazon experience; and this observation also fits aptly with the contemporary Amazon and patriarchal world. Case in point, Title IX is completely rebuffed by the film, portraying the law as unnecessary since Viola plays on the men’s team;<sup>145</sup> and the means for harnessing the modern American Amazon in *She’s the Man* do exist in the debutante plot where the film places Viola in her woman’s weeds<sup>146</sup> to avoid destabilization<sup>147</sup> in the high school world of the film. Yet, the film also gives us the Amazon, and even if we value her less, she still exists; and perhaps someday, female masculinity could become more acceptable.

### **Wonder Woman in the Twenty-First Century?**

Both *10 Things* and *She’s the Man* address the issue of the American Amazon through their appropriations of Shakespeare and the Amazon myth, seemingly transforming the shrew of *The Taming of the Shrew* and the cross-dresser of *Twelfth Night* into contemporary women who can simultaneously occupy competitive and compassionate representations of femininity. The films use Kat and Viola as “testing grounds”<sup>148</sup> for socially acceptable gender roles. As persons on the gender boundary, these characters appeal to audiences because they speak and act for themselves; but they also appeal because they apparently know when to submit, if only for their own happiness. As such, the films safely integrate their Amazons into the patriarchal social structure. For *10 Things*, the shrew must be transformed into a more desirable object, away from

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<sup>144</sup> Schwarz 39.

<sup>145</sup> We are left wondering what happens to the other girls on the Cornwall women’s team who are not able to play at all after their team is disbanded?

<sup>146</sup> At the debutant ball, Viola chooses her own dress, a mermaid-cut, non-frilly affair that accentuates any curviness that she may have; and she also gives a cheer, pumping her fist into the air when she reaches the end of the runway.

<sup>147</sup> “Bringing [Amazons] close to home invites chaos,” Schwarz observes. Schwarz 23.

<sup>148</sup> Schwarz posits: “Instead I want to suggest, perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, that stories about Amazons are testing grounds for social conventions, playing out the relationships between homosocial and heterosocial systems of connection that produce an idea of the domestic.” Schwarz 2.

the stereotype of nag and bitch. For *She's the Man*, the cross-dresser must be revealed to allay any threat she poses to the social order. The films address the twenty-first-century metamorphosis of the battle of the sexes with presentations of an independent woman and changes of femininity from ideological and political movements such as third-wave feminism and Girl Power.<sup>149</sup> *10 Things* and *She's the Man* attempt to negotiate these changing definitions, labeling the new feminine that straddles the Amazonian and high school locations. This endeavor does not without occur without challenges.

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<sup>149</sup> Julia Stiles, as Deitchman has detailed, blurs the fiction and real life in the relationship between the “Good Girl” and American society. The “Good Girl,” Deitchman explains, locates “a young woman’s strength in her ability to look good, be good, and get a boyfriend.” As the smart and beautiful “*ELLEgirl*” (*Ellegirl* is a magazine that caters to the female tween and teen crowd, the younger version of the fashion magazine, *Elle*) of 2001, Stiles represents the “Good Girl” through her role of the intelligent Shakespearean actor, her good looks, and her niceness. Described as “confident, attractive, independent, and scary smart,” Stiles also had the qualities of “being nice, with a ‘down-to-earth attitude.’” *Ellegirl*’s necessity to qualify Stiles’s identity into their definition of the ideal girl presents a narrow identity of Stiles, what Deitchman labels the “Good Girl” role.

Elizabeth Deitchman claims,

As a pop culture phenomenon, Girl Power is really about preserving patriarchal values, and particularly about protecting heterosexual masculinity. More to the point, the teen romance—the principal genre of Girl Power fiction, a genre that suffuses and sustains the contemporary Shakespeare teen-film—provides the principal vehicle for Girl Power’s consolidation of masculine, heteronormative identities.

This use of “Girl Power” as a vehicle for the “consolidation of masculine, heteronormative identities” grapples with the Amazon in *10 Things* and *She's the Man* as the films attempt to bring together the two disparate roles of femininity in the single persons of Kat and Viola. To say that the films use “Girl Power” to tout a conservative agenda, as many scholars have noted, ignores the roles of Riot Grrrl and soccer player that exist within *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, respectively. Elizabeth Deitchman, “Shakespeare Stiles Style: Shakespeare, Julia Stiles, and American Girl Culture,” *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, ed. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) 481, 478, 481, 485.

Popular culture’s “Good Girl” and Girl Power stand as powerful avenues to define femininity, using false claims of politically active feminisms to tout weak definitions of womanhood—all under the guise of strength. The power in creating a monolithic definition for the American feminine stands in the ability to marginalize those outside of the definition, thus giving implicit authority to those who support generalized concepts of feminine gender, what many call the dominant culture or popular culture. (Susan Basow and Lisa Rubin, in the psychological studies article, discuss the dominant culture, whereas many cultural, film, and literature scholars use the terms popular culture or mass culture.) Susan A. Basow and Lisa R. Rubin, “Gender Influences on Adolescent Development.” *Beyond Appearances: A New Look at Adolescent Girls*, ed. Norine G. Johnson, Michael C. Roberts, and Judith Worell (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1999) 26.

## Chapter Two

### Matters of Geography: *Othello* Moves to the Basketball Court

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, space and location seem to define Othello's persona and authority. Othello's military talents carve a metaphorical space for him in the Venetian military, where the Venetians promote him to general for his abilities. In a strong indication of trust, the Venetian Duke sends Othello to fight the Turks and claim Cyprus, protecting Venice's commercial interest. Venice's occupation of Cyprus also demonstrates political power over the Ottoman empire; and sending Othello to watch over the island underscores Venice's confidence in the general's loyalties to the city-state. Thus the distance between Venice and Cyprus remains an issue of utmost importance in Shakespeare's play. "*O*," a 2001 film adaptation of *Othello*, ignores such geographical distance across the Mediterranean in favor of collapsing the Cyprus and Venice spaces.

In creating a Cyprian-like island of the basketball court and a Venetian-like high school campus and then placing the Cyprus space within the Venetian space, "*O*" shifts the Othello character's identity. "*O*" disregards Othello's authority over Cyprus, transforming Othello from a powerful general to a high school basketball star. By altering the locations of Venice and Cyprus, "*O*" adapts the roles of Othello in Shakespeare's play in a way that reflects stereotypically American racial contexts, placing Odin (Mekhi Phifer) more substantially in the Iago character's control. Russ McDonald describes *Othello* as a love story,<sup>1</sup> yet the folding of the Venetian and Cyprian spaces in "*O*" moves the play into the realm of competitive basketball, with an emphasis on male relationships. The link between the Cyprian basketball court and the

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<sup>1</sup> Russ McDonald, introduction, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*, by William Shakespeare (New York: Penguin, 2001) xxxi.

Venetian high school campus brings the focus of the film to the Othello and Iago characters, shaping the main characters in racial and spatial contexts through the lens of basketball. I argue that this relationship in conjunction with the blurring of spaces in “*O*” allows Odin to gain authority only by physical domination. His violence identifies him with negative stereotypes prevalent in American racial hierarchies.

Many scholars write about the importance of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*,<sup>2</sup> and inevitable comparisons between London, Venice, and Cyprus ensue, often with the focus on the anxiety that surrounds these locations. The “myth of Venice,” what Virginia Mason Vaughan describes as a “widespread Renaissance belief that Venice was the epitome of a rationally ordered and prosperous republic,”<sup>3</sup> represented “ideals of fairness and justice”<sup>4</sup> and shaped thought of the Italian city-state in Shakespeare’s England. Cyprus, on the other hand, was associated with the Turks, particularly when Venice lost the island to their Ottoman foes in 1571.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as Vaughan and others suggest, Venice remained full of contradictions: a leader in commerce and capitalism, where “centuries of legal and governmental tradition have defined Venice as the locus of rational judgment,”<sup>6</sup> it also invited “as much suspicion as admiration.”<sup>7</sup>

The early modern stage represented the Venetian government as “positive, righteous and farsighted” and the citizens as full of “hatred, jealousy, greed and vindictiveness.”<sup>8</sup> Roberta

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<sup>2</sup> Graham Holderness’s book *Shakespeare and Venice* (2010) also thoroughly investigates the relationship of Venice in Shakespeare’s works.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Textual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Vaughan 16.

<sup>5</sup> Cyprus was also associated with Venus, making for a complex location for Shakespeare’s tragedy. Leo Salinger, “The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson” *Shakespeare’s Italy: Functions of Italian Location in Renaissance Drama*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and F. Sancticci Falzon (Manchester: Manchester UP) 172.

<sup>6</sup> Vaughan 22.

<sup>7</sup> John Drakakis, “Shakespeare and Venice,” *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, ed. Michel Marrapodi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) 172.

<sup>8</sup> Roberta Mullini, “Streets, Squares and Courts: Venice as a Stage in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson,” *Shakespeare’s Italy: Functions of Italian Location in Renaissance Drama*, ed. Michele Marrapodi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and F. Sancticci Falzon (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993) 163.

Mullini, in her discussion of Venice in Shakespeare and Jonson, states that “What Shakespeare compares is a public and a private image, the contrast between state politics and individual misbehavior.”<sup>9</sup> London playgoers viewed Venice as both a foreign city with “venereal” anxieties, as the birthplace of Venus; but also a foreign city with similarities to their own government, “representing ideals of fairness and justice.”<sup>10</sup> Anxieties surrounded the “model of ‘civility’”<sup>11</sup> presented in the city’s ceremony and show, of both Venice’s venereal underbelly as well as the public pomp of the Catholic Church. The similarity between English and Venetian governments also likely caused discomfort; for instance, James I’s English reign began the year before *Othello*’s first performances,<sup>12</sup> when England itself was having a change of government. As others have noted,<sup>13</sup> playgoers would certainly have received Venice with anxiety because of its social practices, but also with respect because of its system of government.

Scholarship also discusses the varying degree of “Other” that both Venice and Cyprus symbolize. In *Othello*, Cyprus connotes “Other” because of its eastern Mediterranean position. Although also associated with Venus, Cyprus’s geographical proximity to the Ottoman Empire suggests a threat of violence. Early modern fears may arise in connecting Cyprus to Turks, yet *Othello* allays such discomfort through the Turks’ almost absent role in the play. Cyprus’s non-militaristic role in the play supports a domestic tragedy rather than a military tragedy. The play itself takes place before the loss of Cyprus to the Ottoman Empire, and in fact, the military purpose of the island—to protect Venice’s eastern trade routes—loses focus when a tempest

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<sup>9</sup> Mullini 163. Mullini also understands the disconnect in Venice as indicative of the use of “ceremonies, rites and spectacles.” 168.

<sup>10</sup> Vaughan 16.

<sup>11</sup> Vaughan 16.

<sup>12</sup> Vaughan 27.

<sup>13</sup> Scholars such as Leo Salinger in “The Idea of Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson,” Roberta Mullini in “Streets, Squares and Courts: Venice as a Stage in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson,” John Drakakis in “Shakespeare and Venice,” Pamela K. Jensen in “‘This is Venice’: Politics in Shakespeare’s *Othello*,” John Gillies in *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, and Virginia Vaughan all discuss Venice and its relationship to Shakespeare’s England.

wipes out the Turks. In Cyprus, Othello and his military become sentries protecting a territory rather than soldiers fighting a war. Yet in the play, Cyprus overshadows the Venetian space by occupying four of the five acts. As in a comedy, Cyprus occupies a topsy-turvy space, providing the living quarters for Othello, Desdemona, Iago, and the other Italians; and the violence precipitates from a domestic dispute, not from military action, occurring in a distinctly private yet public space. “Cyprus, a pole apart from Venice, is momentarily Othello’s ‘green world’ where a new order reigns,”<sup>14</sup> R. A. Yoder remarks, although *Othello* is not a comedy, and the topsy-turvy green space turns into tragedy.

“O”’s shifting of Cyprus from an island fortress to a basketball court places the emphasis back onto male-centered aspects of Cyprus, and *Othello*’s Venice, a “prelude” to Cyprus,<sup>15</sup> turns into the gatekeeper—the high school—that surrounds the basketball court in the 2001 adaptation. Placing the basketball court inside the private high school campus allows the students access to the basketball court at any time; and the mostly white high school residents repeatedly enter the Cyprian-like space to view the talents of their basketball team. With such participation in the basketball space, the high school brings Shakespeare’s Venice, “a city sharply divided along racial and religious lines,” as Geraldo de Sousa observes,<sup>16</sup> into a contemporary American setting of a private, Southern boarding school by highlighting American issues about race relations. Cyprus, “a peaceful island” as described by Giraldi Cinthio, Shakespeare’s source, “become[s] the strategic focus of Christian-Islamic conflict in the Mediterranean” in Shakespeare’s play.<sup>17</sup> “O”’s Cyprian space transforms into a “strategic focus” of basketball game brackets, a highly competitive, male space outlined by bleachers and fans in the stands. The basketball court as

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<sup>14</sup> R. A. Yoder, “The Two Worlds of Othello,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 72 (1973): 218.

<sup>15</sup> Yoder 215.

<sup>16</sup> Geraldo U. de Sousa, *Shakespeare’s Cross-Cultural Encounters* (New York: Palgrave, 2002) 84.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Neill, introduction, *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, by William Shakespeare (New York: Oxford UP, 2006) 25.

Cyprus becomes entertainment for Venice, and Odin's mastery of the space transforms into an amusement for his viewers. Michael Neill states that *Othello* is a tragedy of relocating oneself,<sup>18</sup> and in "O" the tragedy of physical and emotional relocation manifests itself through the layering of the basketball court inside the high school campus. As spaces, they function as separate and distinct locations, but their geographical proximity places an unfair advantage on the Venetians. Odin sees himself as a master, a professional, yet he falls under the scrutiny of any Venetian-like student or teacher who desires to be present.

Inserting Cyprian space (the basketball court) into Venetian space (the Southern high school) significantly changes the trajectory of the *Othello* story in this modern context. Scholars have not discussed *space* in "O."<sup>19</sup> Cyprus is Othello's space, a far-off eastern Mediterranean island that he can control particularly well, the Venetians think, because of his Othered status. Whereas in *Othello* the large distance between Venice and Cyprus creates an isolated space for tragedy to unfold, in "O," the basketball court within the high school leaves no space, disallowing a private place for Odin, while allowing those in the high school a clear view and heightened control over their star basketball player. In his personal life, Odin presumably lives with a roommate in a campus dormitory, like the rest of the student body; he also plays basketball for the pleasure and observation of the school. Constant company and surveillance by the white majority leave Odin vulnerable to Hugo's (Josh Harnett) insinuations of Odin's inability to fully understand white people. The lack of geographical distance also highlights the high school's regulation of the court, as demonstrated when Dean Brable<sup>20</sup> enters the locker room and takes authority from Coach Duke. The high school campus is highly controlled; for example,

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<sup>18</sup> Neill 157.

<sup>19</sup> Discussions of "O" up to this point in the film's research discuss class and racial issues. Elizabeth Deitchman, Barbara Hodgdon, Courtney Lehmann, and Gregory Semenza, to name a few, have explored "O" in such investigations. A focus of space in the film remains absent.

<sup>20</sup> Dean Brable's Shakespearean counterpart is Desdemona's father, Brabantio.

there are restrictions on men and women being in each others' dormitories after certain hours. In both Venice and Cyprus, Odin's abilities become apparent to all, unlike his Shakespearean counterpart, whose abilities are known by reputation.<sup>21</sup> Whereas *Othello's* Cyprus functions as a citadel and a blessed wedding isle,<sup>22</sup> "*O*"'s Cyprus portrays a competitive arena that addresses the early modern apprehension of the Turks in modern racial contexts, namely the racial hierarchy of American basketball.<sup>23</sup>

### **Othello's Cyprus**

How "*O*" changes the geographical distance between Cyprus and Venice becomes significant in that, unlike Odin, Othello obtains direct authoritative power in Cyprus, which provides him with a clearer picture of his standing with the Venetians. Othello, leading the troops on Cyprus, emphasizes his respected position, and his previous demonstrations of military ability bolster this role. Near the opening of *Othello*, the Venetian council wastes no time in

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<sup>21</sup> Pamela Jensen also remarks about Othello's unseen talents. 158. Pamela, K. Jensen, "'This is Venice': Politics in Shakespeare's *Othello*." *Shakespeare's Political Pageant: Essays in Literature and Politics*, ed. Joseph Ahelis and Vickie Sullivan (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) 155-187.

<sup>22</sup> As described in Act 2, Scene 2.

<sup>23</sup> The basketball system in the United States highlights an analogous power relationship of race and conceptions of masculinity in American society, with the black players playing, yet rarely coaching or achieving other positions of power in the organization. Black players are often scouted by white coaches, coaches who enter "the hood" to find raw talent. Such comparisons of the hierarchy are heightened in the Shakespeare teenpic by its comparing white and black players, Hugo and Odin. The characteristics of black masculinity, often defined by aggression and violence, remain acceptable on the basketball court because the perimeters of the game control it, the black players exhibiting "virtuoso performance that shows no strain," a type of playing that sports critics have labeled as "black," citing player Arthur Ashe and the emergence of such basketball style in the 1940s, and continuing to Michael Jordan in the 1990s. Though reductive, the differences of play are still described as contingent on race: if a white player plays with the same seeming effortless execution, he is compared to fellow black players rather than white. "Most simply (remembering we are talking about culture, not chromosomes), 'black' basketball is the use of superb athletic skill to adapt to the limits of space imposed by the game. 'White' ball is the pulverization of that space by sheer intensity," Jeff Greenfield writes in 1975, setting up a dichotomy that potentially perpetuates stereotypes; but such a comparison allows for social and political critique necessary to understand dominant discourses of race as illustrated through "*O*"'s analysis of Odin and fellow (white) player, Hugo, and how not only Odin's race, but also his perceived "innate" attributes lead to his downfall. The racism and stereotypes defining black behavior grows more problematic when both on-court and off-court behaviors are regulated by mainly white coaches, and the struggle for who defines African American masculinity continues. Jeff Greenfield, "The Black and White Truth About Basketball," *Signifyin(g), Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagal Caponi (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1998) 373, 374.

calling upon Othello to help protect state interests: “Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman” (1.3.48-49),<sup>24</sup> the Duke demands; and only after they handle the interests of state do they address Brabantio. “I did not see you. Welcome, gentle signor. / We lacked your counsel and your help tonight” (1.3.50-51), the Duke states to the Venetian, and Brabantio proceeds with his grievances of a kidnapped daughter by a deceitful Moor. All are “very sorry” (1.3.73) for Othello’s stealing of Desdemona, yet Venice’s respect for Othello stands strong, as illustrated when the Duke specifically asks Othello for his perspective on the events. After Othello’s and Desdemona’s testimony, the issue of their elopement seems resolved, and the focus returns to Cyprus. The Duke states that Cyprus is “best known” to Othello; and although a suitable leader currently defends Cyprus, “opinion, a more sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice” onto the Moor (1.3.222-5), indicating that he is the better choice. Othello’s service takes precedence over his transgressions; even Brabantio states, “I humbly beseech you proceed to th’ affairs of state” (1.3.220), and Othello unhesitatingly undertakes “This present wars against the Ottomites” (1.3.234), directly leaving for Cyprus after arranging Desdemona’s travel plans. Act 1, scene 3, illustrates Venice’s respect for Othello, so much so that the elopement with Brabantio’s daughter is as only a blip in the council’s concerns; and with Venice’s commercial stronghold on the line, Othello’s reputation as a leader and a soldier preempts the council’s considerations of their general’s breach of social etiquette.

The action of the play quickly moves to Cyprus, and Othello’s connection with those on the island echoes his esteemed relationship with Venice. Othello’s relationship with Cyprus proves cordial as those already at the citadel eagerly await his presence, as evidenced by the

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<sup>24</sup> All quotations from *Othello* are taken from the Penguin *Othello*, edited by Russ McDonald. William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello the Moor of Venice*, ed. Russ McDonald (New York: Penguin, 2001).

soldiers' concern that his ship may have gone down in the tempest: "Pray heavens he be [safe]; / For I have served him, and the man commands / Like a full soldier" (2.1.34-6), Montano states, his worry almost overshadowed by his compliments as he advises everyone to move to the shore to look for the general's ship. When Othello lands, he reveals his connection not only to the soldiers but also to the island of Cyprus itself: "News, friends!" he tells the soldiers. "Our wars are done; the Turks are drowned. / How does my old acquaintance of this isle?—" (2.1.201-1), he asks. He follows his question by telling Desdemona that she will be "well desired in Cyprus" as he too has "found great love amongst them" (2.1.203-4). The soldiers on the island, Othello's acquaintances, describe the general in professional terms as "noble and valiant" (2.2.1), yet they also celebrate the personal event of his marriage: "For, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial [. . .] Heaven bless the isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!" (2.2.6-7, 10-11), the herald exclaims, identifying Cyprus as not only a Venetian necessity in east-west commerce, but also as a blessed wedding isle.

Because Cyprus functions as Venice's eastern-most stronghold and Othello's honeymoon location, Othello must divide his leadership role into that of general and husband, leaving him vulnerable to the machinations of Iago. Othello juggles the responsibilities of both roles with confidence, as demonstrated when he handles the fight between Cassio and Montano: "Hold for your lives!" (2.3.154), Othello exclaims; and in a move meant to shame the soldiers, Othello asks, "Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? / For Christian shame put by this barbarous brawl!" (2.3.159-61).<sup>25</sup> Othello commands Iago to speak "on thy love" (2.3.167) about the events that transpired, and Iago's manipulative response begins the downward spiral of tragic action. Iago's testimony results in Cassio losing his position

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<sup>25</sup> Othello's exclamation also has a tangential purpose of solidifying Othello's own similar religious standing to the Venetians.

as lieutenant. The brawl also challenges Othello's domestic authority, resulting in waking Desdemona, a situation he must amend. He leads her back to bed, explaining that "'tis the soldiers' life / To have their balmy slumbers waked with strife" (2.3.246-47). As these initial events on Cyprus portray, Othello's knowledge of military leadership certainly proves more practiced than his domestic authority, yet his commanding personality transfers well from one duty to the other, at least at first.

As the action unfolds on Cyprus, Iago shakes the general's confidence by focusing on Othello's relationship with Desdemona, bringing Othello's public role of general in direct confrontation with his private role as husband. The play never returns to Venice, ironically leaving our tragic hero to the devices of the tricky Iago on an island Othello supposedly commands. In fact, because of the vagaries of sea travel, Iago lands on Cyprus before Othello, symbolizing some loss of control for Othello right from the start. Iago's manipulations begin in Venice, transferring to Cyprus when he provides testimony about the fight between Montano and Cassio. "Honest Iago's" recounting of events he originally orchestrated sets the pace for his manipulations; with talented rhetorical ease, he first "devise[s] a means to draw the Moor" (3.1.36) away from Desdemona, resulting in Othello's separation from his wife, but also from his authoritative roles. The public position of Othello moves to the private and domestic space of the bedroom, and the resulting homicide/suicide scene turns public, making the tragic events all the more poignant.

As Roberta Mullini observes, Shakespeare's differentiations between public and private images, as well as politics and individual misbehavior,<sup>26</sup> play out on Cyprus, trapping Othello-the-soldier in a domestic love story. In the case of "*O*," Odin's entrapment stems from the

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<sup>26</sup> Mullini 163.

importing of Cyprus into Venice, the basketball court into the high school, and the “individual misbehavior” by Hugo leads to Odin’s own misconduct, trapping Odin in a story of male competition, rather than a love story. The boundary between public and private breaks down in “*O*” precisely because geographical distance collapses. The geographical intimacy of the two locations leaves Odin transferring what he knows from the basketball court to the high school campus, where he exhibits negative racial stereotypes. The blurring that occurs with the importation of the African-American dominated basketball court into the white-dominated space of the high school campus highlights the racial roles in which Odin finds himself placed: racial roles he does not consider relevant to his sense of self until Hugo, the Iago character, brings them to light and makes them an issue.

### **From Cyprus to the Court: Tim Blake Nelson’s “*O*”**

Through a comparison of spaces in “*O*” and *Othello*, one can understand how the setting of the American South mirrors the emphasis and importance of differing spaces present in Shakespeare’s *Othello*, although “*O*”’s blending of *Othello*’s disparate locations signals a significant dissimilarity. The preparatory high school as a Venetian space represents racial strife in its twenty-first-century context; the white faculty and student body respond with awe and fear to Odin’s athletic ability, which the film hints connects to his race. The basketball court, “*O*”’s island, seems more stable than the historically volatile Cyprus; yet much like Shakespeare’s Cyprus, the basketball court becomes associated with jealousies and insecurities, catalyzed by Hugo’s malicious plot. The results of Hugo’s plan highlight the basketball court’s hidden and unpredictable variables in the visible structure of athletic regulation. However, unlike *Othello*, “*O*” places the unstable cultural and military space of Cyprus at the center of its Venice by

uniting the two locations and favoring the competitive basketball court. For example, only two classroom scenes appear in the film, much of the off-court dialogue focuses on basketball, and our first glimpse of “*O*”’s characters occurs on the court. This new realignment of spaces defines each location in a specifically racial framework, as evidenced during the MVP award pep rally. “*O*” initially labels the Cyprian space as Odin’s, and the pep rally supports this affiliation when Odin wins the MVP award; yet, the Venetian student body moves into the gym’s bleachers and physically surrounds the Cyprian space during the ceremony. The excitement at the rally concentrates on Odin, but it also highlights the coach’s and the student body’s excitement for the high school—the Venetian space—to win glory through basketball championships. Although the Cyprian space appears favored by the film, the Venetian space becomes the more powerful location. The blurring of the spaces creates problems for how Odin functions in either space.

Tim Blake Nelson’s “*O*” closely follows *Othello*’s plot and characterization, highlighting the Iago-Othello relationship in Shakespeare’s play by focusing on the high school men’s basketball culture. Odin James<sup>27</sup> is a black athlete originally from “the hood,” scouted by the private, mostly white high school to play basketball on scholarship. Michael Cassio, performed by Andrew Keegan,<sup>28</sup> also plays on the basketball team and occupies the position of Odin’s “go-to guy,” even sharing the MVP award with Odin at the star’s insistence. Hugo Goulding happens to be the son of the basketball coach, Duke Goulding<sup>29</sup> (Martin Sheen); and the teenager’s motivations for planning and initiating the demise of Odin lie in the jealousies of Coach

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<sup>27</sup> The lead character’s name alludes to the Norse God, Odin, who stands for war and battle, but also wisdom and poetry. Odin James also brings allusions of O.J. Simpson and his trial of 1995 for the death of his white wife.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Keegan is not new to the Shakespeare teen film: he played the Gremio character, Joey, in *10 Things I Hate About You*.

<sup>29</sup> Coach Duke’s name alludes to the Duke of Venice in Shakespeare’s play. Yet, Coach Duke of “*O*” does not control the Venetian space. Rather, Dean Brable, Desi’s father, controls the Venetian space of the Southern high school, and Coach Duke Goulding rules the basketball court. Some of Coach Duke’s actions in the film represent more Othello-like characteristics of *Othello*, particularly in reference to Hugo. For example, Hugo wishes the approval of his own father, just as Iago wishes approval from Othello (thank you to Keri Sanburn Behre for discussing Coach Duke’s role in the film with me).

Goulding's love for Odin, Odin's star status on the team, as well as Odin's choosing Michael to share the MVP award. Doubt ensues when Hugo convinces Odin that Desi (Julia Stiles) is a "whorey snake."<sup>30</sup> In the Cyprus space of the basketball court, violence and drug abuse move from the fringes of "O" to the center as Hugo manipulates Odin through rhetoric and steroids. Steroid-exacerbated paranoia destroys Odin's athletic and domestic relationships. In the final scene, after Odin murders Desi and shoots himself, Hugo restates his motivations; and we see how the destruction of Odin causes great tragedy for the South Carolina high school.

Unlike *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*, "O" shifts its focus from comedy to American tragedy.<sup>31</sup> Whereas *10 Things* and *She's the Man* temper a humorous threat of the American Amazon in their adaptations of early modern comedy, "O" transports the seriousness of race, athleticism, and male relationships to the forefront in its representation of cultural stereotypes. As a means to highlight these issues, "O" follows in the footsteps of mid-twentieth-century stage tradition by positioning its tragic focus on the Othello and Iago figures, significant in this modern adaptation.<sup>32</sup> Scholarship has defined "O" as a film about race, class, and heterosexual relationships;<sup>33</sup> however, I argue that a pressing question of identity resides in "O"

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<sup>30</sup> All "O" quotations are taken directly from the DVD. "O", dir. Tim Blake Nelson, perf. Mekhi Phifer, Julia Stiles, Lions Gate, 2001.

<sup>31</sup> "O"'s release was delayed because of the tragic shootings at Columbine. Miramax dropped the film because of the allusions to Columbine; Lionsgate picked up the film.

<sup>32</sup> That "O" follows a tradition of focusing on the lead male characters in Othello is nothing new in the play's performance history. Michael Neill relays the history of Othello and Iago's relationship throughout the twentieth century in his introduction to the Oxford *Othello*: "Thus the painting by Peter Blake, conceived for the 1970 paperback cover of Ridley's long-lived Arden edition, showed Iago hovering at Othello's shoulder, ready to pour the poison of suspicion in his ear. The striking recurrence of such images reflected the increasing dominance of Iago in performance, and the consequent displacement of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in favour of that between tempter and victim as the principal focus of the play's tragic concerns." Neill 37.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, for example, focuses on race, and briefly addresses basketball: "In its representation of basketball culture, *O* is all about the construction of manhood through socialization in sports." Marguerite Rippey addresses the issues of race and "black monsters" in screen adaptation of Othello, whereas Alexander Leggatt observes "O" to be about racial stereotypes. Gregory Semenza focuses on location in that "O" addresses teen violence in the American high school. Barbara Hodgdon, "Race-ing *Othello*, Re-engendering White-Out, II," *Shakespeare, the Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge, 2003) 101. Marguerite Hailey Rippey, "All Our *Othellos*: Black Monsters and White

through the film's focus on basketball, and subsequently, male relationships. Such issues of identity remain concretely linked to the blurring of the Venetian and Cyprian spaces and the resulting action as a means to control the Othello figure, transforming him from a leader, lover, and hero to a broken basketball star, rapist, and thug.

"O" defines the Venetian and Cyprian spaces in much the same way as *Othello*, although in the film, the spaces remain highly racialized. In *Othello*, Venice represents the familiar and domestic space, and Cyprus becomes the more ambiguous and militaristic space, but in "O" the white population may comfortably occupy both locations while both spaces control Odin. Odin understands the rules of the basketball court, but so do the white students. Despite his physical prowess on the court, Odin does not lead the basketball space; a white man—his coach—does. Odin also relies on Hugo as an interpreter in the Venetian space. Those on campus like Hugo, echoing to *Othello*'s "honest Iago" in both Venice and Cyprus. The only person mistrusting Hugo is Desi, who claims that she does not trust someone who has no enemies. Hugo uses Odin's reliance on him on the high school campus to manipulate the black star's identity as a basketball player, tarnishing not only Odin's basketball reputation, the identity Odin initially understood, but also the stability of the spaces themselves.

"O"'s organization allows for a clear look into the identities of Odin and Hugo through the symbolism supplied by each location. Unlike *Othello*, both the Venetian and Cyprian spaces become locations of violence, with the most egregious aggression occurring in the Venetian space. Like *Othello*, the film starts in the Venetian space. The film begins with an introduction to

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Masks on the American Screen," *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa Starks (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002) 25-46. Alexander Leggatt, "Teen Shakespeare: *10 Things I Hate About You* and *O*," *Acts of Criticism: Performance Matters in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Honor of James P. Lusardi*, ed. Paul Nelson and June Shlueter (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2006) 245-58. Gregory M. Colon Semenza, "Shakespeare after Columbine: Teen Violence in Tim Blake Nelson's "O"," *College Literature* 32 (Fall 2004): 99-124.

the Southern high school colored by Hugo's voice. In this initial scene, the camera slowly focuses on white images against a black background; and as Hugo continues to speak, the inside of a campus bell tower comes into view. Hugo voices his desire to fly like a hawk, a hawk the film repeatedly juxtaposes with Odin. Although without the racial slurs of its original play, the racial symbolism of this opening scene is blatant when the images of white doves come into focus against the walls of the bell tower. The polarizing of the two characters, and subsequently the two spaces, occurs with Hugo's words as he expresses his desire to be like the hawk, Odin: "All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. I know you're not supposed to be jealous of anything, but, to take flight, to soar above everything and everyone: now that's living." This first Venetian-located scene introduces Hugo's motivations and jealousies of Odin, identifying the two through tired stereotypes of the angry white man<sup>34</sup> and the black superstar. More important than the stereotypes is "O"'s use of location to emphasize the boys' relationship as a means to investigate Odin's identity. Through Hugo and Odin, "O" establishes how location does indeed matter to the story, how the American South, the basketball court, and the high school campus retell the tale of conflict between white and black men, and the perceived threat they pose for each other. What better way to accomplish this task than place the black man's supposed space of authority, the basketball court, within the control of the predominantly white high school?

The film moves quickly to the Cyprian space, with the first basketball scene revealing much about the division of spaces in "O," particularly the identification of the teenage boys. For instance, although Coach Duke tells the team what plays to make, his instructions to get the ball

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<sup>34</sup> "O" uses the "angry white man" role to give reference for Hugo's anxieties towards Odin and his motivations for ruining the African American teen, providing an American discussion of race comparative to the Othered position of Othello in Venetian society. Michael Kimmel discusses the "angry white man" in Chapter 10 of *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006).

to Odin reveal his trust in and reliance on Odin to get the job done. In this scene Odin the star comes onto screen just as the camera catches a live hawk flying across the gym, the camera then turning its focus back to Odin expertly handling the ball. Hugo, used to manipulating fellow students on the high school campus, is controlled on the court by Coach Duke, who forms the team into a huddle. Certainly Hugo's position on the team helps them succeed, but the glory goes to Odin, who wins the game at the buzzer with a lay-up. The scene's ending highlights the roles of Odin and Hugo: Odin expertly handles the Cyprian court, as exemplified when his teammates place him onto their shoulders and the crowd floods the court. Hugo removes himself, watching from a distance, envious of the hawk's success. The scene's ending not only demonstrates the athletic hierarchy between the two boys, with Odin clearly at the top, it also shows spatial division because Hugo chooses to not participate in the Cyprian celebration.

Odin dominates the basketball court in the first game, illustrating a seemingly safe space for him as he basks in the praise from fellow students and basketball players. But closing the first game with Hugo looking on suggests that the safety of the Cyprian space is an illusion. "*O*" presents the basketball court as a pseudo-green space, a place of safety and immutability in which Odin could seek sanctuary from the high school campus. Yet as in *Othello*, this space, like Cyprus, proves unstable. For example, while Odin knows his talent places him in control of the basketball court, he is the star on the court only if the spectators perceive him as valuable to the mission of gaining a state title. Throughout the games in the first half of the film, Coach Duke and the student body support Odin; yet near the end of the film, Odin loses their admiration at the slam-dunk exhibition. At the competition Odin excels above the other participants, but his ability is drug-enhanced and the steroids cause him to break the back-board and shove a ball-boy to the floor. As a result, many of the students shun Odin from the high school space. Earlier in

the film, others praise his winning methods, exemplified in the MVP award pep rally when Coach Duke announces Odin as the MVP, telling Odin and the crowd, “I love him like my own son.” Odin shares the MVP award with Mike, providing explicit motivation for Hugo. The scene solidifies the court as Odin’s Cyprus; but it also labels him as a scouted<sup>35</sup> player, his success always dependent on others’ assessment of him.

The location of the basketball court as Odin’s Cyprus inside the high school campus exacerbates the basketball court’s instability, with the high school growing as a space of volatility for Odin because of racial divides. Indeed, given that he plays on scholarship, Odin’s identity as a basketball player remains the reason he is able to interact with the mainly white school family at all. Whereas Othello was always a general, both on Cyprus and by reputation in Venice, Odin relies on the basketball court for a perception of self, leaving him vulnerable to Hugo’s machinations in both locations. The first such instance of Odin’s vulnerability occurs when Hugo convinces Roger (Elden Henson), the Roderigo figure, to call Desi’s father, the dean of the school, and accuse Odin of raping Desi. “Someone sort of stole something from you,” Roger tells Dean Brable (John Heard), and the film’s next scene shows the dean entering the men’s locker room in the middle of Coach Duke’s angry harangue about his team’s flagging efforts. When Brable enters, Coach Duke stops and says, “Dean, you are welcome here,” illustrating how the high school authorities have power even in spaces directly relevant to the sports domain. Yet gone are the respect and confidence that the Duke of Venice pays to Othello. As in the first act of Shakespeare’s play, Odin attempts to defend himself, although his rhetorical abilities prove weaker than Othello’s; and he turns to Coach Duke for help: “Come on Coach,

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<sup>35</sup> Mark Gerson, in his review “Black Kids and Basketball” discusses the process in which colleges and the NBA recruit players. High school and college coaches, or perhaps their scouts, go to the predominantly black neighborhoods to “scout” talent for their teams. Thus I call Odin a “scouted player” because he was particularly drafted by the high school to play for their basketball team. Mark Gerson, “Black Kids and Basketball,” *Commentary* 99.3 (March 1995): 56.

there's no witness. I'd never do anything like that. Ever." Coach Goulding defends Odin and attempts to calm Dean Brable, yet the situation dissolves only when the coach tells Brable that "This is a family matter," asking the Dean to take the issue out of the public space to a more private location. The scene illustrates the lack of respect for Odin in the high school space, demonstrating Odin's absence of maneuverability in the high school; ultimately, the high school and what it represents — academia, upper-class — matters more than athletics, no matter how many basketball games the team—or Odin—wins.<sup>36</sup>

The would-be Venetian and Cyprian spaces in "*O*" dominate the film's screen time, yet three spaces exist outside these major locations: Odin's previous home, Hugo's drug dealer's establishment, and a motel bungalow Odin and Desi visit. Like Othello's home in Shakespeare's play, Odin's original home in "*O*" is ambiguous and remote. Odin's current home, his dorm room at the high school (a space we never actually see), proves transient: after he finishes his senior year, Odin will move to college. Geraldo de Sousa observes that "Othello has encountered many places of transit, but has not found a place of residence [. . .] Nothing in the play connects Othello to a precise place, but rather to a large geographical and cultural region."<sup>37</sup> "*O*" is no different from its source. Just as Iago refers to Mauritania, a North African region, as Othello's home (2.2.224), Hugo mentions "the hood" as Odin's home. Like Othello, who uses generic terms to describe his homeland,<sup>38</sup> Odin discusses his home in stereotypical cultural terms, insinuating he was poor and surrounded by drugs (although he himself was not a drug dealer). The film does not reveal the exact location of Odin's home; rather, he seems to have emerged from a large cultural stereotype that could exist anywhere in urban America.

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<sup>36</sup> This is perhaps in a weird academic/sports reversal.

<sup>37</sup> Geraldo U. de Sousa, *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) 67, 68.

<sup>38</sup> Sousa, *At Home* 68.

The second location in “*O*” that has no concrete corollary in Shakespeare’s Venice or Cyprus is Hugo’s drug dealer’s establishment. Because Odin’s talents dwarf Hugo’s lack-luster skills, Hugo turns to outside assistance as a means to compete. For his help, Hugo relies on performance-enhancing drugs, which he obtains after the first basketball game and the MVP awards ceremony. Going off campus to find the solution for his sub-par basketball ability, Hugo drives to a blighted area of town. He and his drug dealer seem to have a comfortable relationship, as evidenced by the drug dealer telling Hugo that if the drugs do not work, he should stop using them: “I’m saying because there’s some things in life we weren’t meant to have. It’s not worth making you all crazy and shit.”<sup>39</sup> The steroids do not physically affect Hugo, as illustrated by his slight build, although drugs may explain his extreme emotional outbursts and psychological dysfunctions. Making Hugo “all crazy and shit” is exactly what the steroids do, since his skills on the basketball court consistently wane in the film, as Coach Duke never fails to remind him, and his paranoia and violence exist from the beginning of the film. The scene also indicates that Hugo’s steroid use is habitual, although he seems to be fooling only his drug dealer, who jokes with the young man about college game tickets when Hugo makes it to the big time of college ball. In a circular fashion, the drugs cause Hugo to believe he has his steroid use under control, along with his basketball image. He may even think that his father will love him more with his steroid successes. Such examples of paranoia also illustrate how Hugo’s drug use radically changes the Iago character of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. The substance abuse provides clear psychological motivation for Hugo’s actions, whereas in *Othello*, much of Iago’s evil resides in the lack of clear motivations. In “*O*” the most horrific violence in the film occurs when the boys misunderstand the identities they believed they had under control, and for Hugo, that includes his

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<sup>39</sup> Interesting for the drug dealer to tell Hugo to stop using as he would lose out on a client.

high school self. For instance, Hugo cannot entirely control the high school space, as the killings at the end of the film demonstrate; and Odin's transferring his basketball aggression to the high school campus ends in tragedy. Hugo illustrates the first example of this misunderstanding, shown when he turns to drugs as a means to identify himself as an athlete.

Hugo leaves campus to better his chances back on the basketball court, and upon his return he targets Odin in that same competitive space. Following the philosophy that "The only person you have to answer to is yourself. You make your own rules. The minute you figure that out, you're free,"<sup>40</sup> Hugo uses this misconstrued logic to manipulate Odin into sabotaging himself both on the court and in the larger campus community, beginning his exploitation as the two workout in the school's weight room. Hugo casually asks Odin if he trusts Mike. When Odin answers that he trusts Mike on the court, Hugo pushes further by adding emphasis: "But do you trust him?" Hugo's insistence brings in the element of location: whereas Odin can trust Mike on the competitive court, Hugo's insinuation reveals that Odin should not trust Mike on the Venetian front. Hugo focuses on the domestic, Venetian space by sowing uncertainty concerning Mike and Desi's relationship, asking Odin if Mike knew that he and Desi were getting together. When Odin answers that Mike set up Odin with Desi, Hugo switches tactics and focuses on Desi, escalating the conversation by calling her a devious white girl. Hugo finally concludes by instructing Odin to watch Desi's and Mike's actions. Compared to Odin, Hugo is the expert, conceding that Odin knows "the hood," where he came from, but Hugo knows "white girls": "Now you grew up in the hood and saw plenty of hustlers, but the one thing that I do know better than you is white girls, man. White girls are snaky. They're whorey snakes," he confides to Odin. Hugo undermines Odin's confidence, reminding him that he is an outsider; he instead

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<sup>40</sup> Hugo tells this to Mike during science class when the two are supposed to be dissecting frogs.

originates from a space linked racially with the basketball court. With misgivings, Odin defers to Hugo as the native insider, deciding to observe Mike and Desi together.

The following scene displays a montage of Odin observing Mike and Desi together, and this ocular proof leads to the third space that is neither Cyprian-like nor Venetian-like in “*O*”: a space that follows the initial rape accusation and builds on the tragedy that is Odin’s failure to negotiate either space successfully. Both Odin and Hugo misconstrue space, and while Hugo cannot keep up with Odin on the court, Odin cannot transfer his athletic skills to the social arena of the Southern preparatory school. As a means to gain some domestic equilibrium and acceptance, Odin leaves campus with Desi. The couple drives to a secluded private motel where they are to have a special night together. To reach their destination, Desi borrows and drives a car, as well as reserves and presumably pays for the hotel room. With doubts about Desi’s fidelity, Odin grows angry at Desi’s power: if she can manipulate a night out together, what else can she engineer? The simple examples of Desi’s dominant social position mark a distinction between Desi and Odin that highlights the issues of location in the film: Desi, with money and privileged citizenship, has power inside and outside the campus space, while Odin does not. To remedy his lower position, Odin uses the third space to gain control. The motel room may allude to the Sagittary in *Othello*, although the outcome of Desi and Odin’s stay there does not seem to mirror Othello and Desdemona’s stay after their elopement. In American culture, as represented in the film, the night in the motel tends to produce unease concerning the issues of teenage sex and inner-racial sex. This anxiety around venereal activities may echo early modern English worries of Venice’s more relaxed sexual culture, but other similarities to Venice fall short. Rather, “*O*” uses this tertiary space as a vehicle to explain Odin’s grievous violence. For example, Odin’s violence fits within the boundaries of the basketball court, and he is an asset to

the high school because he understands the high school rules. Hugo changes the rules on Odin, and in the outside space of the motel, Odin realizes the deck is stacked against him. In discussing “*O*” and high school violence, Gregory Semenza states that “rage is never ‘natural,’”<sup>41</sup> nor is Odin inherently dangerous as other critics pose, yet Odin’s use of forceful tactics—that is, escalated violence of short-term and exploitative maneuvers—in the motel room highlight his spatial disadvantage; and his actions place him in a highly precarious position in the specific context of the basketball court and in the larger context of an predominantly-white Southern high school.

Initially in the motel room, Desi takes control, confiding in Odin that she wants to share herself with him in whatever manner he chooses. Out of his element, Odin imagines her words as proof of her role as a “whorey-snake” of a white girl, particularly when she takes the top sexual position. The violence begins when Odin switches sex positions so that he commands the top, determined to take control. In a strange hallucinatory moment, Odin looks into the mirror and sees Mike rather than himself having sex with Desi. Unable to place himself in the rented motel room with his white girlfriend, Odin becomes a white man; and as if to erase the image, he forces himself harder onto Desi and their sexual activity is no longer love making. She pleads with him to stop, and he only ceases when he reaches orgasm, crying with shame and hurt as he does. Desi’s face is blotchy and red, and she’s clearly hurt physically and emotionally.<sup>42</sup> Odin feels an unnatural and dangerous rage, what a reviewer refers to as: “his civilized face merely a cover;”<sup>43</sup> but the consensual-turned-rape sex act provides a realistic (perhaps too realistic) look at aggressive and exploitative tactics in the wrong location.

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<sup>41</sup> Semenza 114.

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, in her discussion of this scene, oddly states that Desi’s touching of Odin’s neck after the rape shows that Desi enjoyed it. I whole-heartedly disagree. The film shows Desi shocked and hurt. Her touching of Odin after the incident illustrates shock rather than pleasure.

<sup>43</sup> From an *Entertainment Weekly* review, quoted from Semenza. 114.

Odin's visions of himself as a white man, particularly as his imagined romantic rival, complicates his understanding of the high school and basketball court of the film. The racial implications grow more complex in Odin's imagination, a white man raped Desi, not a black man. "O" works hard to present Odin as an upstanding citizen and basketball player, providing drugs as the explanation for his violent actions at the end of the film. Yet by turning Odin into a white man, if only momentarily, and if only in his imagination, "O" illustrates that both stereotypes of the black man—the upstanding citizen and the violent thug—remain widespread tropes of black identity. The balance between social responsibility and social exploitation often walks a fine line, as demonstrated in the film. For example, turning of Odin into a white man *and* a negative trope of a black man reveals apparent social tensions concerning racialized spaces. Renford Reese, African American and masculinist scholar, argues that "Black men in America are still trying to become visible," and that young black men accept a "gangsta-thug" image, that is, the tattooed, dangerous black man,<sup>44</sup> by complying to an "enthusiastic embrace of society's stereotypes" as a means to gain visibility.<sup>45</sup> Up to this point in the film, Odin carefully conforms to the clean athlete, good student identity as a means to function in the predominantly white, Southern, prep school space; whereas Hugo follows the "gangsta-thug" motive and identifies black men in such limited terms. Yet, during the rape scene, "O" momentarily erases Odin's racial identity to highlight the layering of spaces. Odin becomes visible as a person (rather than as a commodity) by growing visible as a white man, although in reality, the action he committed was as himself, a black man. Once the film introduces this negative view of Odin, Pandora's box opens; and the aggressive, threatening black man pervades the film, both on the court and on the

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<sup>44</sup> Renford Reese, *American Paradox: Young Black Men* (Durham: Carolina Academic P, 2004) xi.

<sup>45</sup> Reese xi.

campus. His violence, okay in the perimeters of the basketball court, damages him in the predominantly white campus.

Focused on control of space, the relationship between Odin's personality shift and geographical location allows for a trail of violence predicated on racial hierarchies to present itself in the film. For example, on the court, Odin's violence equals talent, and he sits at the top of the hierarchy; however, following the rape scene Odin's footing becomes even more tenuous, and he works to stabilize his standing and impress the student body, and his coach. To do so, Odin submerges himself in his athlete identity, withdrawing to the basketball court from the threat of the high school, and specifically the white Mike and white Desi. This moment of retreat represents Odin's turning point, the *peripeteia* of the film, where if the audience's perception of Odin had not changed during the rape scene, the film wishes it to change at this point. Back on the court, Hugo provides Odin with steroids. Somewhat akin to Othello's own seizures, the steroid use specifically occurs in "O"'s Cyprian space, providing a concrete motive for Odin's behavior (although this explanation happens after the rape scene). Up to this point in the film, steroid use remained centered on Hugo as a means for him to compete with Odin on the basketball court; yet Odin's use of steroids shifts the composition of the film's equivalent of the Cyprian space to one of uncertainty. As such, Odin's original displays of violence within the boundaries of the basketball court depicted talent; with steroids, his talent moves into socially unacceptable violence both on and off the court. The court functioning as a safe space proves false when Odin brings in an outside element by taking the steroids, and thus loses the love of his fans, worries his coach, and gives Hugo more control.

While the use of steroids allows "O" an avenue to explain Hugo's entitlement, steroids and drugs also explain Odin's aggressive actions and loss of control in the last portion of the

film. His use of the illicit substances corresponds to his moments (and places) of authority, giving him what he believes are distinguishing characteristics from the other players. In using performance-enhancing drugs, Odin falls into the cultural stigma of Reese's "gangsta-thug" in two major ways: first, he uses drugs to distinguish himself; and second, he turns into a violent stereotype of the innately aggressive black man. Odin takes to the basketball court as a means to prove himself, shooting up with steroids moments before he walks onto the court in front of a cheering student body and waiting college scouts. "They don't know who they're fucking with," he says to psych himself up; the use of the f-word signals a change in his character. Hugo pays the dealer, and we see in the teenagers' exchange that Hugo encouraged Odin to use the steroids: "You really fucked me up, man," Odin yells at Hugo, to which the self-proclaimed MVP says, "Me?" "All this wondering you got me going through," Odin cries, "is bullshit." With those words, Odin moves onto the basketball court; and as the previous games illustrate, Odin controls the court. The exhibition rules are simple: each player receives three attempts to slam dunk the ball, with only the highest shot scored; yet Odin challenges the system and tells the judges he will only shoot once. One shot is all it takes as Odin shatters the backboard.<sup>46</sup> Coach Duke smiles and claps, obviously proud of his protégé and adopted son as he exclaims that he did not know backboards could do that anymore. What follows this athletic amazement shocks everyone. The cheers of the crowd and Coach Duke's proud smile slowly fade as Odin's steroid-induced success causes him to behave in ways that not only remain unacceptable at the high school, but also on the basketball court, a space controlled by the predominantly white preparatory school.

Odin's self-destructive behavior begins when he picks a fight with the ball boy, shoving the younger African-American to the ground and then facing the astounded crowd in a

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<sup>46</sup> Odin's winning slam-dunk is the living definition of "If there is a single trait that characterizes 'black' ball it is leaping agility." Greenfield 375.

confrontational stance, ending the scene by not only shattering the backboard of the basket, but also by breaking the hoop from its foundation and holding it over his head in a victory of “O.”<sup>47</sup> Instead of the reverent “O” chant from the crowd, they boo him and he runs off of the court; and rather than impressing the basketball scouts, Odin’s steroid-induced skills ruin his chances at college basketball. Initially when on the court, Odin performed with aggressive abilities within safe boundaries; but with the outside influence of steroids, his taboo eruption on the court alienates him from both the court and the campus. This self-destruction at the slam-dunk exhibition encapsulates the tragedy of “O”: a master of the “Cyprian” space, Odin sometimes chooses methods of success that are detrimental to his relationship with the film’s Venice.

Odin’s violence on the court seems to provide solidification of the threat he poses to the student body and to the authority figures. Their condemnation of his behavior supplies yet another factor that contributes to the tragic ending; and as the final scenes of the film demonstrate, Odin carries the aggression to the high school campus. Following the exhibition, Odin appears in Hugo’s room, where Hugo convinces Odin to escalate his drug use by taking cocaine. The introduction of cocaine allows the film to give a clear explanation as to how and why Odin believes Hugo’s conversation with Mike, reminiscent of Act 4, scene 1 of *Othello*, of which Odin only hears snippets. The cocaine use also explains why Odin goes along with Hugo’s plan to kill Desi. After Mike leaves the room, Odin steps out from his hiding place, telling Hugo he is going to kill Mike, and Hugo pushes him to kill Desi, too. To keep Odin’s trust so that the final stages of his plan may be carried out, Hugo marries himself to his teammate: “You’ve been everything to me, O. To me, you’re not my friend, man, you’re my brother. And when a brother

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<sup>47</sup> Eric C. Brown, in his article, “Cinema in the Round: Self-Reflexivity in Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*” follows the symbol of the “O” in the film. Eric C. Brown, “Cinema in the Round: Self-Reflexivity in Tim Blake Nelson’s *O*,” *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, ed. James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004) 73-85.

is wronged, so am I. I'm you, O, part of you." Having broken Odin to the point that he does not even recognize himself as the star basketball player, Hugo attempts to be the second white man to take over the black teenager's identity. No longer a star athlete, no longer a competent boyfriend, Odin searches for some semblance of victory with Hugo and cocaine. Drugs escalate from the court to the dorm room, the trail of violence and drugs spilling into the prep school space, and contaminating the Southern high school from its basketball center.

The ending of "O" illustrates Odin's self-destructive behavior at its worst. Odin and Hugo have foregone the evening's basketball game so that Odin may stay on campus to execute his portion of the plan. While Hugo distracts Mike and Roger, Odin slips into Desi's room through her window. Her response to seeing him is amorous; yet he retains his purpose. They kiss on the bed;<sup>48</sup> but the scene swiftly moves to Desi's death: "I wish I could let you go but I can't. I can't," Odin cries as he suffocates her with his hands. Desi claws back at him while he keeps crooning: "Shh. Go to sleep. Go to sleep." When Odin finally releases his girlfriend, as with *Othello*, Emily (Rain Phoenix), the Emilia character, interrupts. Scared and angry, she outs Hugo in front of Odin and another student, Jason. As she keeps repeating evidence that could clear up the whole situation, "You gave that scarf to Michael," Hugo shoots her to shut her up. Horror all around him, Odin cannot regain himself. He picks up the gun, asking Jason, as a white kid, to question Hugo why he did it. Like his Shakespeare counterpart, Hugo gives no reason in his response: "Ask me nothing. I did what I did and that's all that you need to know. From here on out I say nothing." Odin cries for the truth, and not receiving it, finally tells the surrounding students his own truth: "You tell them I loved that girl," he cries. "I'm being played," he

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Neill wonderfully discusses the importance and presence of the physical and symbolic bed in *Othello* in his essay "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*." Michael Neill, "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*," *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's Othello*, ed. Anthony Gerard Barthelemy (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994) 187-215.

continues, shouting that he is not the gangsta-thug stereotype: his mother was not a crack head. He is not a drug dealer. With his truth told, he shoots himself, his ultimate self-destructive behavior complete.

As the film's ending demonstrates, the Southern high school has a very different game, and a very different set of rules, from the space of the basketball court. Odin cannot successfully play the game because the rules do not concern him. In this film, importing the Cyprian space into the Venetian space leads to a momentary success on the court, but it also leads to Odin's inability to transfer effectively his masterful Cyprian skills to the Venetian space. Odin's trust in Hugo highlights his desire to play on the Venetian field, but unfortunately, their relationship provided a foundation for the violence both on and off of the basketball court. The violence highlights the racial conflicts present in the Venetian and Cyprian locations, but it also defines cultural hierarchies of race in that the Cyprian space does not matter outside of its Venetian context. As depicted by the college scout's shock at the slam-dunk exhibition, Odin's steroid-induced behavior pushes him out of both the Cyprian and Venetian spaces forever.

### **A True Reflection?**

For a film that claims to be hyper-vigilant in its fidelity toward a "true reflection of American life now," "*O*" presents Odin not only as a stereotype of black violence, but also of the American basketball system. The realignment of the Cyprian and Venetian spaces has overwhelming consequences for Odin's acceptance in either space. With real authority of the basketball court controlled by Coach Duke, and Dean Brable residing over the high school as well as the Cyprian space, "*O*" shows not only obstacles of race for its star basketball player, but also obstacles of spatial hierarchies that he must navigate to maintain his position in both spaces.

Odin unsuccessfully negotiates the film's equivalents of the Cyprian and Venetian spaces because his knowledge of the Cyprian court does not transfer to the Venetian space.

Placing the Cyprian space in the jurisdiction of the Venetian space, the film traps Odin from the start, his visibility as a person confined to his star role, transforming to the gangsta-thug role as the tragedy progresses. With the collapsing of distance between the Cyprian and Venetian locations, "*O*" fails to resist repeated social stereotypes of viewing and presenting African-American men. For example, Michael Neill, speaking of *Othello*, states that "*Othello*, we have come to recognize, is a key text in the emergence of modern European racial thought—a work that trades in constructions of human difference that, although they are by no means identical to those that have stained the history of our own time, are recognizably ancestral to them."<sup>49</sup> We can apply this conclusion also to American thought and "*O*", such as when a review in *Entertainment Weekly* observes "that '*O*' is the story of 'a young black man whose civilized façade is merely cover for an intrinsic and bottomless rage.'"<sup>50</sup> Alexander Leggatt states that "Odin has always had a dangerous streak."<sup>51</sup> Frederick Luis Aldama reads both Shakespeare's *Othello* and Nelson's *Odin* as violent, although he sees drugs as *Odin*'s motivation: "*Othello*'s short temper and frequently uncontrolled fits of violence are part of his natural personality; these traits, translated into *Odin*, are artificially induced by the use of steroids and quickly result in abrupt swings of mood and murderous anger and rage."<sup>52</sup> As these reviews illustrate, "*O*" walks a fine line in its investigation of racial stereotypes and hierarchies, balancing *Odin*'s "intrinsic" violence with the outside catalysts of steroids and cocaine. Michael Kimmel observes that "Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence;

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<sup>49</sup> Neill, introduction 50.

<sup>50</sup> Semenza 115.

<sup>51</sup> Leggatt 255.

<sup>52</sup> Frederick Luis Aldama, "Face, Cognition, and Emotion: Shakespeare on Film," *College Literature* 33 (Winter 2006): 205.

it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture,"<sup>53</sup> a tenet "*O*" attempts to follow by explaining Odin's damaging behaviors through drug use. Yet because the cultural setting of the film rests on the accessibility and understanding of racial stereotypes, particularly those surrounding basketball, "*O*" cannot thoroughly (or easily) explain away Odin's dangerous behavior through his steroid and cocaine use.

Location plays an important part in Odin's identification of self. At the end of the film, Odin understands the hierarchy of the cultural system: the prep school campus matters more than the basketball court, no matter how well he plays or his talents impress others. Odin's violence occurs not because of an innate trait, but rather, because of the importation of Cyprus into Venice.<sup>54</sup> Odin left drugs behind when he came to the school, but he eventually follows Hugo's advice and takes steroids as a means to stay competitive in the Cyprian space for the purpose of Venetian gain. Odin's phenomenal skills on the court take him to extraordinary heights, but he can only soar as far as the "Venetian" rules will allow. As Aldama points out, drugs trigger the violence in "*O*", a significant distinction from *Othello*;<sup>55</sup> yet the film and above reviews illustrate uncertainty in understanding black masculinity in twenty-first-century America.

The film's privileging of the play's Venetian space demonstrates that the success of negative stereotypes relies on binaries of various perceptions surrounding the black American

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<sup>53</sup> In the same discussion, Kimmel also states "Either we think of manhood as innate, residing in the particular anatomical organization of the human male, or we think of manhood as a transcendent tangible property that each man manifests in the world, the reward presented with great ceremony to a young novice by his elders for having successfully completed an arduous initiation ritual." Kimmel 3.

<sup>54</sup> The film alludes to Odin's drug use of his original home, but not necessarily of violence. It seems to take the importation of some of his home-life issues into the Venetian space of the high school to make him more susceptible to Hugo's machinations.

<sup>55</sup> Aldama 205.

male athlete.<sup>56</sup> The wholesome and clean African American male, at one time represented by Tiger Woods<sup>57</sup> or Michael Jordan,<sup>58</sup> and the “gangsta-thug” like Kobe Bryant or even O.J. Simpson, provide these classifications of black athletes in American media. The “Ideal Negro”<sup>59</sup> image has become synonymous with “selling out;”<sup>60</sup> a “real” African-American man needs street credibility and an image of keeping it real.<sup>61</sup> For some basketball players, bringing their masculine identity off the court presents an attempt at becoming visible, yet because of American culture’s misrepresentation of black men, the African-American’s visibility becomes manipulated by misconceptions of racial hierarchies, as the ending of “*O*” so pointedly illustrates.<sup>62</sup> Throughout “*O*”, Odin does not neatly fit into these stereotypes as his lack of place

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<sup>56</sup> Odin engendered from the “urban poor,” recruited by the South Carolinian high school to play basketball and win championships. Much of the tragedy in “*O*” occurs because of Odin’s Othered status: according to Coach Duke, Odin is the only black student at the high school, although a look at the cheering student body shows other African American students. Yet, to stay in accordance with the environment “*O*” establishes, the script and the predominantly white student body see him as the only black student—Odin’s own *harmatia*, and a perfect cultural scapegoat for the tragedy that will ensue. Much of “*O*”’s tragedy stems from Odin’s fall from his “Hoop Dream,” his identity as a black man sacrificed to American stereotypes. Critics describe the ghetto basketball player’s individuality tied up with this “Hoop Dream” of basketball: “The subtext is clear [. . .] the dream of sports stardom is so powerful and so tied to their self-definition that when the dream is in mortal danger [. . .] the individual begins to disintegrate along with the dream;” and these critics of the “Hoop Dream” see large social and political issues concerning basketball and African American teens, particularly in connection to success: many see limited options present for these inner city kids if they do not make it in sports (often their ticket into college). Murray Sperber, “*Hoop Dreams: Hollywood Dreams*,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* 40 (1996): 5.

<sup>57</sup> Tiger Woods faced condemnation recently when he crashed his SUV into a tree. Scandal ensued when extra-marital affairs were discovered. Woods’s gangsta-thug image was perhaps solidified when his affairs became public, gaining some “street cred,” as Reese would describe.

<sup>58</sup> Jordan also cheated on his wife and somewhat tarnished his image.

<sup>59</sup> Reese 92.

<sup>60</sup> For example, in having to perform certain aggressive court behaviors, implications of both the “sell out” and the “gangsta-thug” affect how a player acts off-court. Reese sees these images competing to form a young African American man’s masculine identity: “Ironically, their drive to be role models and their drive to be perceived a ‘real’ black men are mutually exclusive. In other words, in order to have one identity, they must give up the other.” Though Reese’s observations may be placing young African American males in a box, he does highlight an issue for African American teens that is represented in “*O*”. 82.

<sup>61</sup> Reese discusses Joe Louis as the “Ideal Negro” that “unlike Jack Johnson, he knew his place. Knowing one’s place as a prerequisite for white America to lionize a black athlete.” In other words, knowing one’s place is selling out. Reese 92.

<sup>62</sup> When surveying 756 African American male teenagers, Reese used a “realness scale.” For example, Dr. Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* is not as real as James Evans of *Good Times* because Evans “was embraced as an icon of black masculinity because it appeared that the system was always against him.” For TV audiences Dr. Huxtable’s success marked itself as unreal. When comparing contemporary athletes, Reese discovered that those surveyed responded to the athletes who had brushes with the law and as Reese observes, tattoos and earrings as more real than “sell-out” athletes like Tiger Woods. “The pattern of the survey suggests that young black men do not look at the well-

demonstrates. In fact, the film provides no space for Odin, and he fits nowhere in “*O*”. The film provides Hugo with the power to influence this type of negative visibility for Odin, and the blurring of the play’s spaces in the film allow for the identification of Odin to be controlled more closely by Hugo. Some twentieth-century American productions of *Othello* have omitted the Iago character, leaving Othello’s sexualized black body as the impetus to his downfall, as Marguerite Rippy details,<sup>63</sup> but “*O*” uses the Iago figure and his addiction to drugs to enhance the “stereotypical brutality in the American mind” of Odin.<sup>64</sup> The film rejuvenates the role of Iago as a means to neatly (and somewhat falsely) explain American anxieties of the black male body and behavior, allowing for Hugo’s interpretation of Odin’s race to define the danger of black masculinity.<sup>65</sup>

“*O*” gives us precious few answers as it concludes, ending with students crying and hugging (reminiscent of *Columbine*), Coach Duke running out of the gym, and the police leading out Hugo in handcuffs and placing him into a squad car. His voice-over echoes what he said in

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mannered and disciplined black man as being authentic. They are not revered or idolized,” Reese concludes, addressing the contradictory messages sent to young black men. The paradox: if a young African American man behaved in well-mannered way, allowing his masculinity to fit into American society, he would be shunned by many young African American males as “selling-out” (Reese gives the example of Denzel Washington playing the role of a corrupt cop in *Training Day*. Reese argues that role models such as Washington have a duty to portray the African American in a positive light to break stereotypes). As Reese points out, a young African American male cannot have both masculine identities, “to have one identity, they must give up the other.” Reese 53, 92, 57.

<sup>63</sup> Rippy 28.

<sup>64</sup> Rippy 26.

<sup>65</sup> A strong American culture myth surrounds black men and innate violence, but also black men and innate athletic talent. The basketball court as the analogous Cyprian space functions effectively because it provides a comfortable venue for the performance of black male violence. The idea of innate talent, especially among African Americans, holds strong in our society, particularly since the numbers between black and white players vary so widely, and repetition on the court seems to indicate differing styles of play between the races; yet most sports critics also understand that supreme athletic talent on the court greatly depends on discipline, practice and training. In basketball, the black man has “calling card” moves, “eclectic self-expression” and calm collectiveness—seeming intuitive for him; and whereas a “‘black’ player overcomes an obstacle with finesse and body control; a ‘white’ player reacts by outrunning or overpowering [sic] the obstacle.” The “finesse and body control” allows for success in another “black basketball” trait, deception, a concept that off of the court allows for many a person in dominant culture to vilify the African American male; yet in the game of basketball “deception is crucial to success,” the faked head turn, the release of a seemingly late shot: “basketball is one of the few games in which the weapon of deception is a legitimate rule and not the source of trouble.” Such qualities of African American talent on the court are often recoded as threatening off of the court. In the case of “*O*”, Odin threatens because of an assumed violent innateness of his race and talents. Greenfield 373, 376, 374.

the opening of the film: “All my life I always wanted to fly. I always wanted to live like a hawk. To take flight, to soar above everything and everyone. Now that’s living.” The irony permeates the scene when the camera shows a dead Odin covered with a sheet and Hugo in handcuffs. By the end, Hugo isolates himself even more, never understanding what he needed to do to become loved and respected.<sup>66</sup> Odin, “loved, accepted, and admired,” as Gregory Semenza describes, “was actually nothing like the hawk envisioned by Hugo, except on the basketball court.”<sup>67</sup> Sitting in the backseat of a patrol car, Hugo truly is “despised by all and unable to fit in” and thus “oddly has become by the end the sort of creature he always wanted to be.”<sup>68</sup> The “social functionality”<sup>69</sup> of “*O*” remains intertwined in the relationship between identity and location; in the film, rules of the Cyprian space cannot transfer to the Venetian space, whereas the Venetian space may alter the rules of the Cyprian space.

The high school campus and the basketball court negatively play into Odin’s self-identification because both spaces remain under direct control of the white world. In Shakespeare’s play, Othello wishes for others’ approval. He does his job well to receive this approval; he strives to love Desdemona well to show his virtues as a man;<sup>70</sup> and he attempts not to become “the barbarian that white Europeans believe him to be.”<sup>71</sup> In the American context of the Southern high school, Odin’s masculine identity becomes even more tied up with the white world around him because of the simultaneous locations of the court and the campus, and

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<sup>66</sup> It grows apparent that Hugo does not consider the discipline and goodness that helped create Odin’s masculine identity; rather, Hugo “stakes a claim to an entire set of cultural conventions originally designed to identify those bodies and subjectivities made to suffer so that white men could retain privileged access to a disembodied norm.” Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia, 2000) 20.

<sup>67</sup> Semenza 107.

<sup>68</sup> Semenza 107.

<sup>69</sup> Semenza 101.

<sup>70</sup> Gregory Semenza sees Othello as a man “deeply anxious about how he is perceived by others.” 113. Geraldo de Sousa, in his article “Unhoused in *Othello*” discusses Othello’s “unhoused free condition,” in that he has no space for his own, an alien in a semi-hospitable space. Geraldo U. de Sousa, “Unhoused in *Othello*,” *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare’s Othello*, ed. Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA of America, 2005) 134.

<sup>71</sup> Semenza 113.

Othello's identity of an esteemed general morphs into a suspicious thug. The layering of the Venetian and Cyprian spaces heightens the issues of the negative stereotypes surrounding African American male visibility in the United States, perhaps fulfilling Nelson's "true reflection of American life now."

## Chapter Three

### From Scotland, UK to Scotland, PA:

#### (Im)mobility in *Scotland, PA*

In 1849, across the Atlantic Ocean from Scotland, a riot broke out at the Astor Place Opera House in New York City when audiences rejected British actor William Macready's seemingly aristocratic depiction of Macbeth in favor of a performance by American actor, Edwin Forrest. The event started with the crowd throwing rotten eggs, among other projectiles, at Macready, behavior that pushed the actor to consider canceling performances. The following night, Macready and Forrest squared off with their respective presentations of *Macbeth*, and another riot ensued. By the time the authorities quelled the uprising, twenty-two people had died, and 150 had been injured.<sup>1</sup> An observer pointed to the centrality of class in the conflict, saying that "the rich and well bred are too apt to despise the poor and ignorant; and they must not think it strange if they are hated in return."<sup>2</sup> The cause and location of the violence go hand-in-hand, occurring in an American theater ignited by apparently "working class" American tastes. Macready's performance seemed too elite, whereas Forrest, a man of the people, "'born of humble life who 'worked his way up from poverty and obscurity,'"<sup>3</sup> spoke to the audience.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of Forrest's *Macbeth* highlights two distinct issues significant not only for *Macbeth*, but also for its 2001 film adaptation, *Scotland, PA*. The first issue speaks to physical location in localized terms of home and work place. The second issue addresses broader perceptions of

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 65.

<sup>2</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006) 29.

<sup>3</sup> Kimmel 28.

<sup>4</sup> These characteristics epitomize what Kimmel labels the "Self-Made Man." Forrest's "Self-Made Man" performance of the tragic Scotsman proved more attractive to the popular audiences of New York City. Kimmel 28.

social mobility and its relationship to location in the American context of *Scotland, PA*. Whereas *Macbeth* raises questions in connection to the literal movement across physical location and its social implications,<sup>5</sup> *Scotland, PA* focuses on metaphorical movement across social classes. To do so, the film exchanges home for workplace. By using the fast-food restaurant, the film adapts Macbeth's tragic demise away from literal geographic movement to American concerns of metaphoric social mobility and failures of mobility. I argue that the shift of locations from the play to the film proves relevant because the changes permit *Scotland, PA* to engage in American contexts of location and social mobility.

Billy Morrissette, director of *Scotland, PA*, produces a fidelity film,<sup>6</sup> staying close to plot and integrating a sexual relationship between its lead protagonists to create the necessary intimacy between the Macbeth and Lady Macbeth characters.<sup>7</sup> Creating a tragicomedy from Shakespeare's tragedy, Morrissette creates main characters that live unambitiously. Joe "Mac" McBeth and Pat McBeth live an extended adolescence, their lifestyle and their hourly-paying jobs creating a film not about Mac McBeth, not about Pat McBeth, but about the couple in small

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<sup>5</sup> *Macbeth* presents us with a tragedy surrounding home and nation, and geographic location introduces a multitude of social issues not only for the characters and audience members in American contexts, but also in early modern England contexts. For instance, early modern playgoers may have associated their new king, James I of England, with the protagonist of Shakespeare's only Scottish play; and James's influence in actual geographical boundaries also resonates with the 1606 play. Concerning geography, history reveals potential unease in the "imperial theme" (1.3.129) introduced by both Macbeth and King James I. James joined Scotland and England under the title of "Great Britain," yet as Arthur Kinney addresses, such imperial ideas of a unified nation brought unease to many of England's citizens. Whereas with Queen Elizabeth, English nationhood reigned supreme, by 1604, James issued a proclamation for the united nation of Great Britain.<sup>5</sup> Unification of geography led to uncertainties about joining of cultures; James wished to strengthen his position by combining Scotland and England as one land, while English citizens felt their sense of nationhood undermined. Scotland's landscape seemed barren; England's, by comparison, proved lush. Nation and home remained redefined for the English population, and with this redefinition came uncertainty. Arthur Kinney, "Scottish History, the Union of the Crowns, and the Issue of Right Rule: The Case of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," *Renaissance Culture in Context: Theory and Practice*, ed. Jean R. Brink and William F. Gentrup (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1993) 23-4.

<sup>6</sup> A film purposefully and publicly adapting Shakespeare's work for a modern adaptation. Morrissette expected his audience to know *Macbeth*, even if it was only the *Cliff's Notes*. Eric C. Brown also notes this in his article "Shakespeare, Class, and *Scotland, PA*."

<sup>7</sup> Morrissette's interpretation follows a twentieth-century production tradition (as noted by Nicholas Brook in his introduction to the Oxford *Macbeth*) where sexuality is used to show intimacy between the couple.

town Pennsylvania.<sup>8</sup> Mac and Pat live in a thirty-something adolescence, occupying a trailer and working at Duncan's, a burger joint run and owned by a rather silly man, Norm Duncan (James Rebhorn). When Pat grows tired of her unambitious husband and their stagnant life, she uses her persuasive powers (namely, her sexuality) to convince Mac to kill their boss so that they may own the restaurant. Successful in their murderous endeavor, the couple buys the restaurant from Norm's sons Malcolm (Tom Guiry) and Donald (Geoff Dunsworth). They quickly remodel it by adding a drive-thru,<sup>9</sup> an idea first suggested by three carnival druggies (corollaries to *Macbeth's* witches) when they read the future for Mac over a Magic 8 ball. With the drive-thru, the business goes well, but it does not take long before Lieutenant McDuff (Christopher Walken) comes to the small town and investigates Norm Duncan's death. Mac grows paranoid as the film progresses, and taking the advice from the carnival druggies, he kills his best friend Banko (Kevin Corrigan), after which he significantly distances himself from Pat. *Scotland, PA* ends with Mac attempting to shove a hamburger down the vegetarian Lt. McDuff's throat, followed by Mac falling off the roof of the restaurant and onto the Texas longhorns hood ornament of his Camaro. The final scene shows McDuff in front of the newly named restaurant ("McDuff's"), chomping on a carrot.<sup>10</sup>

*Scotland, PA* adapts from *Macbeth* the subject of movement; the issue of movement in *Macbeth* has important symbolic weight in the play. Throughout the play, the Macbeths move

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<sup>8</sup> Courtney Lehmann remarks that *Scotland, PA* is Pat's film, rather than Mac's.

<sup>9</sup> I choose to use the spelling "drive-thru" rather than "drive-through" because the first spelling is how the McBeths spell it in the film.

<sup>10</sup> The last scene shows McDuff standing in front of the restaurant with a new sign reading: McDuff's: Home of the Garden Burger. Wearing a chef's hat, McDuff chomps on a carrot as he stares at a completely empty parking lot. Gone is the bustling business of McBeth's—even of Duncan's. Although McDuff won the battle with McBeth, he lost the war when he purchased the restaurant. As American culture shows, burgers and fries, not garden burgers and carrots, are the staple of fast food, demonstrating that low(er) brow tastes rise above high(er) brow with the amazing success of fast food not only in America, but world-wide.

from location to location, presumably over “a starkly rugged country,”<sup>11</sup> of Scotland, all the while disturbing each location they occupy. “In different ways, the Macbeths ruin three places of residence,” Geraldo de Sousa notes, adding: “The Macbeths contaminate or pollute Inverness; they leave Forres haunted; and they empty out Dunsinane. Ironically, as they move from castle to castle, they find themselves more and more confined.”<sup>12</sup> Their travels and subsequent confinement start at Inverness and end in Dunsinane, the couple moving from location to location because of Macbeth’s newly acquired kingship. The play first introduces the Macbeths’ abode at Inverness, a house that proves dangerous to those who visit, especially Duncan. Once Macbeth kills Duncan, the couple travels to Scone for Macbeth’s coronation, and then they continue to their castle at Forres. Forres also becomes infected by the couple’s foul deeds, as demonstrated when Banquo’s ghost appears at the Macbeths’ banquet. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth finally move to their castle at Dunsinane, the location where they meet their tragic ends. Movement proves important at Dunsinane because not only do the Macbeths physically travel there; Dunsinane is also the location where Birnam wood, a normally fixed entity, physically travels to meet Macbeth. The literal movement present in *Macbeth*, illustrated by the Macbeths’ actual movement and the movement of the woods, provides an analogue for *Scotland, PA*’s changes to American contexts, particularly in the case of social (and economic) mobility.

When the theme of movement translates to Morrissette’s *Scotland, PA*, it appropriates distinct American inflections, heavily associated with class status. For example, the film takes pains—especially through the McBeths’ homes—to differentiate between the socio-economic spheres of Norm Duncan and the McBeths, the latter of whom Duncan defines as “Scotland

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<sup>11</sup> Geraldo U. de Sousa, *At Home in Shakespeare’s Tragedies* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010) 144.

<sup>12</sup> Sousa 151.

trash.”<sup>13</sup> Mac and Pat certainly occupy the position of “Scotland trash” as evidenced by their trailer home, an abode that brandishes all of the American stereotypes of “trailer trash” with its peeling paint, plastic lawn chairs, unkempt yard, and cluttered interior. The McBeths’ cars, both Camaros,<sup>14</sup> also represent an explicit American emphasis with this classic muscle car: an American-made and American-designed powerful, gas-guzzling automobile. Mac’s Texas longhorns hood ornament, which he transfers from one car to the other, also depicts a distinctly American flavor. The drive-thru, supposedly invented in 1928 by a Kansas City bank, provides a third example of American transposition to Shakespeare’s tragedy. Restaurants began using the drive-thru in 1948, with McDonald’s implementing its first drive-thru in 1975.<sup>15</sup> Mac claims that the drive-thru represents the future of the restaurant because people do not need to leave their cars to have a meal. They can order their food, pick it up, and leave—all without exiting their vehicles: movement is barely paused. The themes of movement in *Scotland, PA* symbolize class mobility in some form, bringing the issue of movement introduced in Shakespeare’s play into an American context. With these decidedly American inflections, *Scotland, PA* translates issues of movement in *Macbeth* from concerns of geographic mobility to class status in America, speaking to points of social unease.

To observe importance of class in this film is nothing new. Elizabeth Deitchman, for example, has observed that the comparisons between the McBeths, Norm Duncan, and Lt.

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<sup>13</sup> All quotations of the film come from the DVD of: *Scotland, PA*, dir. Billy Morrissette, perf. James LeGros, Maura Tierney, Christopher Walken, Lot47 Productions, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> It has been noted by other scholars that almost every car in *Scotland, PA* is a Camaro.

<sup>15</sup> Mac and Duncan are a bit behind the times in implementing the drive-thru. Who first used the drive-thru for a restaurant is debated, but In-and-Out Burger, and Jack in the Box, had drive-thrus in 1948 and 1951, respectively. McDonald’s first drive-thru did not appear until 1975. *Scotland, PA* certainly uses McDonald’s as its corollary to Duncan’s/McBeth’s, thus, the film is most likely alluding to McDonald’s use of the drive-thru as the way of “the future” to which Mac refers. “Autoists Do Banking from Cars,” *Popular Mechanics* (July 1930): 13. “McDonald’s History,” 3 June 2011, <[http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our\\_company/mcd\\_history.html?DCSext.destination=http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our\\_company/mcd\\_history.html](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company/mcd_history.html?DCSext.destination=http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company/mcd_history.html)>.

McDuff highlight the tastes and cultures of lower and middle class.<sup>16</sup> She continues by connecting “social class directly to morality, vilifying the white-trash McBeths actually trapped in their class category and veiling the dark side of the American Dream.”<sup>17</sup> Eric Brown argues that *Scotland, PA* “translates the play’s tragic ambitions into anxieties over class and social mobility, while at the same time self-consciously involving itself in the kind of ‘low-class’ representations of Shakespeare that displace his own traditional status as high-culture.”<sup>18</sup> As important as these observations about class are, I argue that class can best be understood in the film through its connections with place. Place, however, does not remain an unproblematic topic to tackle in the film. For example, while Courtney Lehmann asserts that the film “privileges place over protagonist,”<sup>19</sup> she also argues that the town of Scotland, PA is a “metonymy for a place that is everywhere and nowhere in particular.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, for Lehmann, place remains both crucial and ambiguous. Nonetheless, the link between physical location and social class is too important to ignore. In this chapter, I move one step further, discussing not only social mobility, but how physical location connects with social class in *Scotland, PA*, trapping the McBeths in the “nowhere” of small town America. Certainly class plays a part in the McBeths’ entrapment, but the position of location—and what that reveals concerning social advancement—remains unexplored. The film’s connection between social class and physical space allows for a new look into the reasons for Mac and Pat’s deterioration, especially when considering the brevity of their entrepreneurial endeavor and suburban living space.

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Deitchman, “White Trash Shakespeare: Taste, Morality, and the Dark Side of the American Dream in Billy Morrissette’s *Scotland, PA*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34.2 (2006): 143.

<sup>17</sup> Deitchman 140.

<sup>18</sup> Eric C. Brown, “Shakespeare, Class, and *Scotland, PA*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34.2 (2006): 149.

<sup>19</sup> Courtney Lehmann, “‘Out Damned Scot’: Dislocating Macbeth in Transnational Film and Media Culture,” *Shakespeare the Movie II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, ed. Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose (New York: Routledge, 2003) 246.

<sup>20</sup> Lehmann 232.

When discussing physical locations in *Scotland, PA*, looking for direct analogies between the places of the play and the places of the film becomes tempting; however, the film tends to be inexact with the discrete locations of the play. *Scotland, PA* introduces locations similar to those of *Macbeth*, but not all of the physical spaces have direct correlations. For example, the witches of *Macbeth* occupy the outdoor space of the heath, and the druggie-witches of *Scotland, PA* occupy a run-down (and shut down) carnival. The McBeths live in two homes, their trailer home and then a suburban house, and their boss, Duncan, never enters either. The restaurant the McBeths acquire becomes a composite of Forres and Dunsinane, where the plot elements of Banquo's ghost appearing and McDuff killing Macbeth occur in a modern-day adaptation of an on-location press conference and a battle on the roof top, respectively. In comparison, Shakespeare's characters live in three castles, and in the first, Inverness, Duncan enters and is murdered. Although the locations of the play and film do not directly coordinate, the plots between the two remain similar. For instance, Macbeth fights for King Duncan on a battlefield; Mac fights for Norm Duncan in the fast-food joint that Duncan owns. Macbeth murders Duncan in his home at Inverness; Mac murders Duncan in his own restaurant. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth die in their home at Dunsinane where the wood comes to meet them; Pat McBeth dies alone in her suburban home, and Mac dies at the hands of Lieutenant McDuff at the restaurant. The few examples listed above demonstrate similar moments of plot but tenuous comparisons between locations.

These somewhat shaky connections between place in the two texts give way to firmer connections, though, when one examines the symbolic importance of place in the play. In *Macbeth*, the spaces of Scotland remain divided between outside and inside, and both locations evince discomfort and even danger. Historically, the Scottish landscape proved one of tough

conditions, and Sousa notes that travelers also commented on the “absence of houses, inns, and other comforts, associated with life in England or on the Continent.”<sup>21</sup> On the stage, the harshness of the outside, particularly with its weird sisters, plays against the seemingly safe spaces of the Macbeths’ abodes. Frances Dolan discusses the witches as occupying the outdoor space of the heath, Macbeth as positioned in the indoor space, and Lady Macbeth bridging the gap between both.<sup>22</sup> The relationship between the “outdoors and indoors remain[s] contiguous,” as Sousa remarks, “invading and pervading each other’s domain,”<sup>23</sup> and literal moments such as Birnam wood moving toward Dunsinane certainly support this observation. The space indoors also proves dangerous, with the house representing what happens when codes of hospitality are broken. As a space “The household, because it intimately expressed the values of its head, could readily provide the environment of ritualized gestures of exchange, trading favors for adherence, deference for patronage, and hospitality for honor,”<sup>24</sup> Felicity Heal explains of late medieval households. When considering *Macbeth*, the play reflects such transactions, albeit in a misbalanced manner. For example, Duncan promotes Macbeth to Thane of Cawdor for his good deeds in battle against Macdonwald, but also acknowledges that he cannot actually repay Macbeth enough:

O worthiest cousin,  
The sin of my ingratitude even now  
Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before  
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow

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<sup>21</sup> Sousa 145.

<sup>22</sup> Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representation of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Sousa 144. I see such an observation clearly depicted in twentieth-century productions as well, with Orson Welles’s *Macbeth* (1948) a strong example.

<sup>24</sup> Felicity Heal, “Reciprocity and Exchange in the Late Medieval Household,” *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 180.

To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,  
 That the proportion both of thanks and payment  
 Might have been mine. Only I have left to say,  
 More is thy due than more than all can pay (1.4.14-21)<sup>25</sup>

Macbeth responds as the subservient in the conversation, “The service and the loyalty I owe, / In doing it pays itself. Your highness’ part / Is to receive our duties” (1.22-24), and then heads toward Inverness to host Duncan. The danger at Inverness is hidden in the codes of hospitality that Duncan trusts and Macbeth perverts.

For *Scotland, PA*, the symbolic importance of location does not rely as heavily on a relationship between outside and inside, but on where both physical and social dangers occur. For example, physical danger resides in the McBeths’ surrogate home, the fast-food restaurant, “Duncan’s,” later known as “McBeth’s.” McBeth’s, the restaurant, certainly proves dangerous to Duncan, whom Mac accidentally murders when the druggie-witches suddenly appear in the restaurant’s kitchen, startling Mac and causing him to bump Duncan head-first into the deep-fat fryer. During the murder, Pat is injured when hot grease splatters and burns her hand after her boss falls into the fryer. Lieutenant McDuff also points out that Mac and Pat kill their customers slowly with the greasy food. Near the end of the film, Mac holds Ed (John Cariansi), Scotland’s lone police officer, hostage inside McBeth’s, and then spars with Lt. McDuff on the roof of the restaurant. As a partial corollary to Dunsinane, McBeth’s also proves dangerous to Mac and Pat. The stresses of hiding a murder, running a restaurant, and attempting to be accepted as part of a higher social class become too much for the couple. As a result, Pat kills herself by chopping off

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<sup>25</sup> All quotations from *Macbeth* are taken from the Penguin *Macbeth*, edited by Stephen Orgel. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New York: Penguin 2000).

her once-burned hand (an allusion to the blood Lady Macbeth cannot wash from her hands); and Mac dies at his restaurant, retribution for killing Duncan in that same location.

The McBeths' place of business represents physical danger, but their homes represent a more implicit danger: social dissipation and lack of upward mobility. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's homes present dangers for others, but Mac and Pat's homes represent danger specifically for the couple. From its early scenes, *Scotland, PA* illustrates the McBeths' first home, a trailer, as a symbol for the life stage where Mac and Pat appear to be stuck. For example, when the film shows the mobile home, it looks rundown with chipping paint, and the attempt to spruce it up with a hanging "McBeths" placard only highlights the disrepair of the abode. The two scenes that show the trailer's interior particularly illuminate the McBeths' lifestyle: cramped and cluttered, the trailer acts as a playhouse for the couple to drink forties and play sex games, like "manager and bad counter girl." The trailer home shows that Mac and Pat have stayed too long in this elongated transitional period from adolescence to adulthood. What remained cute in his twenties "isn't so cute in [his] thirties," the carnival druggies tell Mac, and the trailer home represents this attitude of extended adolescence.

For *Scotland, PA*, the tragedy lies not in the characters' tragic rise and fall, but in that even with an upward social bump, Mac and Pat cannot truly become part of the middle class society; they are doomed in their lower class. The murder of Duncan indicates the small shift for the McBeths, and their acquisition of Duncan's restaurant provides a taste of the upper social echelon of Scotland, Pennsylvania. For example, in a visual montage following the murder, the film shows the McBeths at a new home, one with white, clean paint and a trim yard. The "Duncan's" sign is taken down at the restaurant, and the couple replaces the old tables and chairs

with shiny Formica.<sup>26</sup> The couple changes the menu, implementing Mac’s idea of “little chicken pieces with dipping sauces,” as well as chocolate dip for ice cream, and the “McBeth Burger.” Banko drives the French Fry truck, Mac’s idea to get the customer off the street and through the front door. Pat and Mac change their personal appearances as well, Pat wearing clothes that “fit right off of the rack” looking “terrific” as she enjoys her ownership duties a bit too much.<sup>27</sup> Mac sports a leisure suit, and with it he gains a backbone that eventually leads to his downfall as he retreats into himself, when like his counterpart, he considers his actions too deeply.<sup>28</sup> During the montage, the film’s soundtrack plays “Beach Baby,”<sup>29</sup> emphasizing the potential American Dream the McBeths seem to have found.<sup>30</sup>

But the montage also reveals that although the McBeths have changed their markers of social standing, nothing of significance has really changed about their character. For example, the lyrics to “Beach Baby”<sup>31</sup> mention an “all-American male,” the type of American man that the film attempts to create in the character of Mac:

Do you remember back in old LA  
when everybody drove a Chevrolet  
Whatever happened to the boy next door

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<sup>26</sup> The McBeths’ new design of the building, particularly the drive-thru, looks exceptionally like the 1953 Stanley Weston McDonald’s with golden arches. 3 June 2011.

<[http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our\\_company/mcd\\_history.html?DCSext.destination=http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our\\_company/mcd\\_history.html](http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company/mcd_history.html?DCSext.destination=http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company/mcd_history.html)>.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Pat asks an employee to make ice cream cone after ice cream cone until he creates the perfect treat—reminiscent of Doug’s inane expectations of Pat at the opening of the film, when he forces her to make ice cream cone after ice cream cone, until she make the perfect cone.

<sup>28</sup> Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have an exchange after the murder about his thoughts. Lady Macbeth tells him to “consider it not so deeply.” (2.2.33).

<sup>29</sup> The First Class, “Beach Baby,” rec. 1974, Single, UK Records, 1974.

<sup>30</sup> The American Dream the McBeths seem to have found actually confines them in the falseness of success—an American dream that, by definition, they will never fulfill. Elizabeth Deitchman also discusses the American Dream in *Scotland, PA* in her article “White Trash Shakespeare: Taste, Morality, and the Dark Side of the American Dream in Billy Morrisette’s *Scotland, PA*.”

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, one of the song’s co-writers, Gillian (Gil) Shakespeare, wife of a band member, shares our early modern poet’s surname.

The sun-tanned crew-cut all-American male one-hit wonder First Class's "Beach Baby" sings in its opening stanza as the camera focuses on the McBeths standing in their restaurant. Mac represents the epitome of the all-American male when he wears a leisure suit and surveys his new business—and a fast food business at that. When the camera proceeds to their new home, the connotations of the "all-American male" lyric certainly stand out, illustrated when Mac retrieves his morning paper in his bathrobe, turning to look at his new Camaro parked in his driveway as he returns to the house. Mac also becomes the proud owner of a swimming pool, where Pat lounges during the film's montage. Such details of the McBeths' suburban abode contrast starkly with their first home, the trailer. For example, the couple's trailer home, designed to be mobile, actually is steadfastly immobile in the trailer park. The suburban home exhibits signs of higher social class, the McBeths seemingly upwardly mobile. Yet, as the camera shows during this scene, even the suburban home, a place of affluence, reveals their "Scotland trash" tastes. For example, Pat lounges in the pool, but when the camera angle widens, it reveals the reality of an above-ground pool of extremely small size. Mac's new car boasts the Texas longhorn hood ornament of his previous vehicle. Finally, although the yard appears clean-cut and the exterior paint looks fresh, the inside of the home is dark and cluttered, decorated in kitsch décor. As the medley of images demonstrates, the McBeths have been able to afford luxuries, but trading their mobile home for a suburban home illustrates a lateral rather than vertical move. Mac does not depict the "all-American male;"<sup>32</sup> and the couple's poor taste demonstrates the danger of falling into social dissipation. The McBeths' will soon pollute—in the same way that the Macbeths pollute Inverness—their new house,

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<sup>32</sup> As Michael Kimmel explains, such a conception of masculinity and manhood does not exist: "Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture." Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006) 3.

turning it into a “Scotland trash” home with their lowbrow taste and poor habits of cleanliness, despite the nicer neighborhood and clean exterior.<sup>33</sup>

Just as the new house signifies an empty shell of social mobility, the McBeths’ sexual relationship also points to their unhappiness following their change in class. As with Shakespeare’s play, after the murder the protagonists’ intimacy falters, and Mac and Pat’s (re)definitions of ambition shape their actions and their relationship, allowing them to be controlled by their new social station as they maneuver in their new locations. Whereas Mac’s life pre-homicide exhibited extended adolescence—a thirty-something underachiever<sup>34</sup>—post-homicide, Mac pursues economic and class success with single-minded focus to the detriment of his relationship with Pat. Before the murder, the film portrays the McBeths’ relationship as one of sexual attraction, using their sexuality to mirror the intimate relationship Macbeth and Lady Macbeth presumably have in Shakespeare’s play. In *Macbeth*, the couple’s connection and trust to each other is initially indicated when Macbeth sends his wife a letter with the news learned from the witches. Following twentieth-century-tradition, *Scotland, PA* purposefully uses sexual attraction to portray the couple’s connection presented in *Macbeth*.<sup>35</sup> Yet the intimate relationship changes after the murder, as Nicholas Booth explains of *Macbeth*: “It changes radically in 3.2, and they are never intimate again; simultaneously their roles are reversed, and he now displays the determination on blood which was once hers alone, but which she can no longer sustain.”<sup>36</sup> *Scotland, PA* is faithful to a similar pattern, as Pat’s sex appeal has no effect on

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<sup>33</sup> Lehmann and Deitchman also discuss the issues of taste in their investigations of *Scotland, PA*.

<sup>34</sup> The 1994 film *Reality Bites* discusses issues of growing up: twenty-something adults moving into their thirties. Ethan Hawke’s unambitious character contrasts with Ben Stiller’s financially stable character. In the end, the unambitious behavior remains rewarded as Ethan Hawke gets the girl. Michael Kimmel also describes this extended adolescence of males in his book *Guyland*, in which he investigates the phenomenon of late twenty-something males living extended teenage lives: living with parents, working part-time jobs, and so on. Michael S. Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (New York: Harper, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Brooke, Introduction, *Macbeth* (New York: Oxford UP), 2008, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Brooke 19.

her husband after he commits murder, and Mac takes on the drive for upward mobility that once characterized Pat. For example, at the opening of the film, the McBeths turn everything into sexual innuendo, such as when Doug (Josh Pais), the manager, asks Mac to look at his wife's "beautiful cones" after she creates what Doug deems the perfect ice cream cone (on the thirteenth try). Mac does admire Pat's cones, only not the cones to which Doug refers. They kiss heavily, much to Doug's discomfort. Such displays of affection by the couple occur repeatedly in the restaurant and in their car; yet after the murder of Duncan, physical affection diminishes. During the murder, Pat uses kisses to persuade Mac to kill their boss, yet the lack of physical displays of affection is blatantly absent once Duncan dies. Directly following the murder, Pat wraps herself in the homemade blue prints of Duncan's drive-thru, inviting her husband to join her in a clandestine sexual liaison. They do begin foreplay, but Mac expresses hesitancy—"Shouldn't we get out of here?"—and Malcolm interrupts them.<sup>37</sup> The last time the couple demonstrates physical contact occurs when the McBeths purchase the restaurant from Malcolm and Donald, Duncan's sons. Mac begins to comment on the low price, and Pat kisses him to stop him from completing his sentence. Such a drop in physical displays of affection starkly contrasts with how Mac and Pat behave in the beginning scenes of the film, providing a deeper sense of the unhappiness that comes with the couple's new social environment.

The couple continues to experience an unsatisfactory relationship in their new suburban home, a space that corresponds most clearly to their Shakespearean counterparts' abode at Dunsinane. It is at this location that Mac realizes his upper-class status is only a performance. Not only does Mac and Pat's plan fall apart in the location of their house, so does their relationship. Lieutenant McDuff visits their home, following a disastrous press conference where

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<sup>37</sup> Although not shown, it is assumed the couple had sex after Malcolm gives up knocking on the door, attempting to wake his father.

Mac saw Banko's ghost,<sup>38</sup> and puts the pieces together of the murder. Entering the literally dark and figuratively deteriorating space, McDuff receives an earful from Mac. Mac cannot hide his sarcasm: "You're gracing our humble little home with a vegetable dish. A tidbit. Showing us how the other half lives," Mac almost sneers. "Other half?" McDuff asks; and Mac continues, "I meant better half. It's what you think, don't you?" Mac's distinction between himself and McDuff as different types of men represents the film's translation of Macbeth and Macduff,<sup>39</sup> adapting the two Scotsmen to an American meat-eater versus an American vegetarian, an hourly-wage employee to a white-collar worker.<sup>40</sup> Mac's comparison also highlights his feeling of inadequacy: that he does not really belong in the upper classes of Scotland. In his outburst, Mac himself gives evidence that the suburban house is a lie. The house should signify that Mac has reached "better half" status, but his comments reveal that he does not believe it, despite acquiring the house and the restaurant. After McDuff leaves, Mac and Pat's relationship disintegrates.

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<sup>38</sup> The McBeths hold a press conference to dedicate their new drive-thru, the event emphasizing the location of upward mobility, especially when the McBeths are treated as local celebrities and enter the event on the back of a convertible, waiting. The questions at the event focus almost exclusively on Pat McBeth's clothes, demonstrating the social connotations inherent in owning the restaurant, making the location of McBeth's a place of social prominence. During the questions, the film alludes to *Macbeth* and the banquet scene at Forres, when Mac sees Banko's ghost, calling on him to ask his questions. Pat covers for her husband, blaming his behavior on stress and a hallucinatory "condition" present since childhood.

<sup>39</sup> For example, as Robin Headlam Wells observes, Lady Macbeth "Protest[s] that he 'dare do all that may become a man' (1.vii.46)," a statement that causes Macbeth to argue "that there are bounds even to manly action," as Wells comments. Wells also states, "she [Lady Macbeth] resists his suggestion of limit, implying that true manhood knows no bounds." In comparison, Macduff understands manhood as being one who can mourn for his murdered family, challenging Malcolm's command to "dispute it like a man" (4.3.220) by telling Duncan's son, "I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man" (4.3.220-1). *Scotland, PA* highlights this difference between Macbeth's and Macduff's personalities by positioning Mac as a lower class, blue collar, presumably cruel-hearted meat-eater, and Lt. McDuff as a middle class, white collar, presumably kind-hearted vegetarian. By presenting Mac in a lower social sphere than Lt. McDuff, the film uses the comparison between the two men to reveal tensions over class mobility. Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 118.

<sup>40</sup> McDuff representing the New Man, a shift in America's perception of masculinity that Jonathan Rutherford discusses emerged in the early 1980s: "In contrast, New Man is an expression of the repressed body of masculinity. It is a fraught and uneven attempt to express masculine emotional and sexual life. It is a response to the structural changes of the past decade and specifically to the assertiveness and feminism of women." "New Man" contrasts with "Retributive Man," a persona Mac fulfills in the last few scenes of the film, a label that "represents the struggle to reassert a traditional masculinity, a tough independent authority. The classic figure is Rambo." Jonathan Rutherford, "Who's That Man?" *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*, ed. Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988) 32, 28. Kimmel also discusses this type of masculinity emerging in the 1960s and culminating in the mid-1980s.

Leaving to meet the carnival druggies, Mac tells his wife that he will take care of everything, while she pleads for him to stay. The contrast in mood from the suburban home to their previous trailer home could not be more absolute: even though they lived in cluttered, low-income conditions, the trailer home was a space for companionship, and the suburban home presents a space of bickering rather than lovemaking. When Mac leaves, Pat knows that their livelihood and relationship have disintegrated.

The concluding fight between McBeth and McDuff perhaps heavy-handedly speaks to the social issues presented in the film, but significantly, it highlights the fallacy of the McBeths' supposed social happiness that ends in Mac's death. To do so, the film intercuts between the McBeths' house and their restaurant. At the house, Pat sits alone, drinking, eventually moving to the kitchen where she positions a knife on a cutting board. In one swift motion, she cuts off her hand, leaving it on the cutting board inside its oven mitt. She falls to the floor, dead. At the restaurant, Mac fares no better. As he and McDuff fight with guns and hamburgers on the roof of the restaurant, Mac falls off and lands directly onto the longhorn hood ornament of his Camaro.<sup>41</sup> As with other moments in the film, the irony cannot be ignored. A sign of his upward mobility, Mac's new car also causes his ultimate unhappiness by proving the means of his death.<sup>42</sup> For the couple, their opportunity and attempt at upward social mobility provides their downfall, neither able to adapt to their new home or their new restaurant. For the McBeths, their lateral movement ends in the final tragedy of death.

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<sup>41</sup> If the film ended there, McDuff would have won; yet, the last scene shows McDuff standing in front of the restaurant with a new sign reading: McDuff's: Home of the Garden Burger. Wearing a chef's hat, McDuff chomps on a carrot as he stares at a completely empty parking lot. Gone is the bustling business of McBeth's—even of Duncan's. Although McDuff won the battle with McBeth, he lost the war when he purchased the restaurant. As American culture shows, burgers and fries, not garden burgers and carrots, are the staple of fast-food, demonstrating that low(er)brow tastes rise above high(er)brow with the amazing success of fast-food not only in America, but world-wide.

<sup>42</sup> Both Lehmann and Deitchman connect Mac's death with his bad (or lack of) taste.

For Shakespeare's play, the interplay between outside and inside, between the witches, between the Macbeths' houses, and certainly between the couple themselves, creates a play that, as Stephen Orgel states, is "in the broadest sense [. . .] political."<sup>43</sup> The issues of movement and contiguous space in *Macbeth* maintain political and social meaning when they move across the Atlantic, as evidenced by *Scotland, PA*'s representation of social advancement and upward mobility. With the transference to *Scotland, PA* the portrayals of those meanings take on new representations. The theme of mobility moves from the castles and battlefields of *Macbeth* to the suburban homes and fast food restaurants of *Scotland, PA*. For the film, such American icons as fast food, Camaros, and drive-thrus allow for an investigation into the theme of mobility in *Macbeth*, with clear American inflections. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth moved over geographic space, but also through political circles to rule Scotland. Pat and Mac of *Scotland, PA* perform movement, but they do not actually go anywhere. What results is a tragic balancing act for Mac and Pat McBeth, who almost move up into Scotland's higher social circles, but they do not quite make it.

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<sup>43</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Macbeth*, introduction (New York: Penguin, 2000) xxix.

## Conclusion:

### Moving Forward

To close this investigation of turn-of-the-century American Shakespeare film adaptations, it is fitting to highlight a recent American Shakespeare adaptation, *Were the World Mine* (2008).<sup>1</sup> In the film, a homosexual and thus marginalized high school student, Timothy (Tanner Cohen), plays Puck in his all-male, private high school's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the small town where Timothy lives with his mother, cherry-picked Biblical quotations set the foundation for negative groupthink surrounding homosexuality. When his rather eccentric drama teacher instructs Timothy to focus on the words of Shakespeare's play, telling him to listen to the rhythm, Timothy finds the recipe for the fairy love potion; and the action that follows highlights his liberal use of the potion on the whole town, causing everyone to enter homosexual relationships. The film ends with Timothy getting the boy of his dreams, Jonathan (Nathaniel David Becker), the captain of the rugby team, who loves Timothy even after the spell has been reversed.

I introduce *Were the World Mine* because it presents ample opportunity for concluding my case study of American social contexts existing in the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. The social issues present in *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's the Man*, "O", and *Scotland, PA* all address social uncertainties adapted from Shakespeare's plays for contemporary turn-of-the-century Shakespeare, and *Were the World Mine* is no different in its adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Dream's* plots of love transfer easily to the setting of high school love in this film adaptation. For example, similar to how Hermia cannot marry Lysander because

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<sup>1</sup> *Were the World Mine*, dir. Tom Gustafson, perf. Tanner Cohen, Wendy Robie, SPEAKproductions, 2008.

of her father, the film has a blocking agent in the anti-homosexual sentiments of the town, sentiments that attempt to keep Timothy from the person he loves. The social issues investigated in the film follow the trajectory of the other films in my study, illustrating that even with fewer numbers of Shakespeare film adaptations being released than in the decade leading up to the twenty-first century, Shakespeare and America have a tightly-knit relationship—and both continue to be adaptable—well into the twenty-first century.

*Were the World Mine* modifies Shakespeare for film by returning to the text. In a technique different from previous turn-of-the-century Shakespeare films, the film focuses on contexts of American homosexuality by transforming Shakespeare's text into a plot device that propels the action. As such, Shakespeare's words take a place of prominence in the film because the plot is contingent on Timothy's understanding those words. For example, although the film does not implement early modern English in its dialogue, Shakespeare's text gains a presence not represented in the earlier films of the twenty-first century when it becomes the key to Timothy's happiness. First, the high school drama teacher, Ms. Tebbit (Wendy Robie) instructs her students to garner the meaning of Shakespeare's words through the use of song, best exemplified when Timothy taps out the iambic rhythm of the words and magically enters the text to learn the recipe of the love potion. For Timothy, understanding Shakespeare's words, both vocabulary and rhythm, opens up hidden text in his copy of Shakespeare's play, and words that were previously invisible magically materialize on the page. Timothy's comprehension of the text leads him to grabbing a bowl and creating Puck's magic potion for the love flower. At the end of the scene, Timothy—astonished—holds a violet petunia. The magical properties get tested when his heterosexual male friend enters the room, and the petunia's magic juices cause him to fall in love with the first person he sees: in this case, Timothy.

Second, the film utilizes the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* to indicate that the love potion has taken hold of an individual when Lysander's words to Hermia, "The course of true love never did run smooth" (1.1.134),<sup>2</sup> become a mantra when the townspeople come under the spell of the potion (delivered by a spitting petunia). As the film continues, Timothy uses the flower to set up townsfolk in homosexual relationships,<sup>3</sup> on a mission to have the town spend an evening walking in his shoes. Shakespeare's text again becomes a significant point in the townspeople's new relationships as various characters echo Lysander's words, "The course of true love never did run smooth." When the potion from the magic flower affects most of the town, Ms. Tebbit gently admonishes Timothy to set things right; and the school's performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* becomes the location where all is remedied. As the audience attentively watches the play, Timothy's singing of the words causes the magic love potion to rain down on the audience. All are returned to their senses. For Timothy, he believes the end of the performance (and use of Shakespeare's text) signals the end of his romantic relationship with Jonathan. Yet Shakespeare's words did have transformative power: Jonathan loves Timothy even after the spell lifts.

*Were the World Mine* presents an appropriation of Shakespeare that harkens back to Shakespeare's text at a time in American film when the text has routinely taken a back seat. Such a move on the film's part highlights the prevalence and adaptability of both film and Shakespeare in the United States; and while such a relationship certainly stands as the core of my project, it also remains central to current concerns in Shakespearean film scholarship. In the spring of 2011, scholars at the Shakespeare Association of America conference sat in a seminar and discussed the future of Shakespeare on film, disagreeing over the "death" of Shakespearean

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<sup>2</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Russ McDonald (New York: Pelican, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The flower does not cause people to have homosexual sexual orientation, but it happens that the first person the potion-infected lover saw was of the same sex.

film adaptation. Many of these scholars contributed to a special *Shakespeare Studies* issue in which they investigated the question of Shakespeare “after film.” Many of us at the seminar agreed with Thomas Cartelli’s assessment that claims of Shakespearean film’s death, and the death of cinema (film has “already died as often as Shakespeare’s Cleopatra,”<sup>4</sup> Cartelli notes) are “a tad preemptive.”<sup>5</sup> Yet questions of changes in film media, screen size, and accessibility of Shakespeare’s plays and texts influenced our discussion. In conversation with Shakespeare and his text on screen, Gregory Semenza, in his introduction to the *Shakespeare Studies* issue, states: “I am arguing, somewhat contradictorily, for the benefits of greater freedom to leave the Shakespeare text behind and, at the same time, for the practicality of our ability to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Shakespeare text. How do we reconcile these two ideas?”<sup>6</sup> His last question encompasses what Shakespeare on film scholars repeatedly address, many of the answers grounded in historical and culture contexts. For example, Doug Lanier explores questions like Semenza’s through a continued investigation of Shakespeare and “the mutations of cultural capital,”<sup>7</sup> observing that “Shakespearean cultural capital now moves freely from investment to investment, from one cultural arena or medium to another, in a search for renewed value.”<sup>8</sup> Courtney Lehmann finds strong cultural and historical context in her investigation of Baz Lurhmann’s *Romeo + Juliet* (1996) and *Australia* (2008),<sup>9</sup> claiming that Lurhmann’s *Romeo + Juliet*, specifically, engages in “countermemory [. . .] ‘a transformation of history into a

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Cartelli, “Doing It Slant: Reconceiving Shakespeare in the Shakespeare Aftermath,” *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 27.

<sup>5</sup> Cartelli 27.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory M. Colon Semenza, “Introduction,” *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 21.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas Lanier, “Recent Shakespeare Adaptation and the Mutations of Cultural Capital” *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 104.

<sup>8</sup> Lanier 104.

<sup>9</sup> Courtney Lehmann, “Looking for Mr. Goodbar: Shakespeare Film as Counteremory,” *Shakespeare Studies* 38 (2010): 77-87.

totally different form of time,’”<sup>10</sup> and in fact presents a living Shakespeare on film with its status as the “highest-grossing Shakespeare film of all time, as well as a changeling that has morphed into more than ten different ‘special editions’ on DVD.”<sup>11</sup> Such a discussion of the “death” of Shakespeare on film presents questions of multiple boundaries: cultural, historical, and textual. This project’s current investigation of *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She’s the Man*, “*O*”, and *Scotland, PA* answers such queries in situating the film’s cultural contexts in American popular culture, investigating how the cultural capital of Shakespeare, minus his language, speak to American cultural frameworks, as well as influence the characters and the persona of a projected Shakespeare in American culture.

*Were the World Mine*’s return to the text, without using Shakespeare’s text as dialogue, presents a juxtaposition of 1990s and twenty-first century’s Shakespeare on film. Although the film uses known genre conventions, such as teenpic devices, and it presents its dialogue in modern-day English; it also, significantly, focuses on Shakespeare’s text as a point of power. After all, through Shakespeare’s words, Timothy receives what he desires. As with *10 Things*, *She’s the Man*, “*O*”, and *Scotland, PA*, *Were the World Mine* focuses on the ongoing cultural relationship American has with the British playwright, yet the 2008 film provides a twist by focusing on the text as a plot device. All of the films in my study translate Shakespeare to contemporary culture not only because the playwright’s plots and characters adapt well, but because the plays themselves speak to American cultural contexts, adapting Shakespeare from multiple viewpoints as a means to appropriate the playwright for their own timely agendas. As

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<sup>10</sup> Lehmann 78.

<sup>11</sup> Lehmann also discusses Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population’s definition of counteremory as “dreamtime [. . . ] a story of how the ancestors ‘sang the universe into being so as to make it consubstantial with themselves.’” Such a singing with and from the past Lehmann sees *Romeo + Juliet* doing, and I posit that *Were the World Mine* quite literally does this type of counteremory by performing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as a musical. Lehmann 78.

my project demonstrates—and *Were the World Mine* alludes to—just as American culture will transform, so will our ways of adapting Shakespeare onto screen.

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