

Paradigms of Femininity in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

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The Two Noble Kinsmen is an Elizabethan tragicomedy which presents medieval chivalric values against the background of ancient Greek mythology. The play is situated in a world outside history, in a semi-legendary pagan past to which Christian values are transferred. Shakespeare and Fletcher base *The Two Noble Kinsmen* on Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, which has been described as "a chivalric romance of a philosophical complexion."¹ However, while in *The Knight's Tale* the female characters, Ypolita and Emelye, are stylized and mostly confined to the background, in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Shakespeare and Fletcher substantially shift the focus of the narrative by providing these characters with rich and interesting personalities. Moreover, a subplot containing a completely new and dominant female figure, the Gaoler's Daughter, is inserted into the main story. As a result, a range of paradigms of femininity unavailable to readers of *The Knight's Tale* is offered to the audience of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

Ypolita and Emelye (or Hippolyta and Emilia, as Shakespeare and Fletcher call them) are the defeated leaders of a legendary nation of women-warriors, the Amazons. Classical and later ages seem to have had

¹*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Boston, 1987), p. 827.

varied and ambivalent attitudes toward the Amazons. However, in general, they were described as a threat to the systematically constructed patriarchal order. According to Jeanne Addison Roberts, the Amazons were an intriguing but terrifying male nightmare for the Greeks, while the Middle Ages seem to have had fewer problems with them, “accepting them as mythical constructs from alien antiquity.”² When Ypolita appears in *The Knight’s Tale*, the Amazonian threat seems safely suppressed. She is introduced as the wife of Theseus, who has conquered her country and wedded her. In the Renaissance, as Roberts puts it, the Amazons, “like their classical antecedents, were designed either to be seduced and subdued or to be destroyed.”³

According to some critics, *The Knight’s Tale* presents Ypolita and Emelye as received legendary figures with recognizable values, and suppresses disturbing tones.⁴ As it opens, Theseus is at the height of his glory. He is introduced as a great conqueror and an exemplar of wisdom and chivalry: “With his wysdom and his chivalrie”(865), he “conquered al the regne of Femenye”(866), and “weddede the queene Ypolita”(868).⁵ It has also been said that Theseus is shown exhibiting mercy at critical points in the narrative, because “it would not have been easy for Chaucer to make any abrupt departure from the traditional associations of wisdom and virtue which surrounded this ‘character.’”⁶

²Jeanne Addison Roberts, “Crises of Male Self-Definition in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*” in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and “The Two Noble Kinsmen,”* ed. by Charles H. Frey (Columbia, MO, 1989), pp. 133–144 (p. 134).

³Roberts, pp. 133–34.

⁴Roberts, p. 136.

⁵All quotations from Chaucer’s *Knights’s Tale* are from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

⁶D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, 1962), p. 261.

However, Henry J. Webb reads “a hint of ignobility”⁷ in Chaucer’s Theseus. Webb examines Theseus’ ethical and political theories, and concludes that he is hardly a noble and merciful individual. Other critics, such as D’Orsay W. Pearson, argue that Theseus’ classical image as “an unnatural, perfidious, and unfaithful lover and father”⁸ was widespread through the middle ages to the Renaissance. According to Pearson, the Renaissance image of Theseus is reflected in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, because “it is difficult to present artistically a dramatic character whose image is at variance with the image a culture holds of him.”⁹ In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Oberon accuses Titania of being responsible for Theseus’ past infidelity:

Didst not thou lead him through the glimmering night
From Perigouna whom he ravishèd,
And make him with fair Aegles break his faith,
With Ariadne, and Antiopa? (II. i. 77–80)¹⁰

The perfidy in Theseus’ legendary amours is thus deliberately brought to the audience’s attention, but it is suppressed in the wider context of the play, which begins with the preparations for the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta and ends with its celebration. The relationship of the mature

⁷Henry J. Webb, “A Reinterpretation of Chaucer’s Theseus,” *Review of English Studies*, 23 (1947), 289–96 (p. 289).

⁸D’Orsay W. Pearson, “‘Vnkinde’ Theseus: A Study in Renaissance Mythography,” *English Literary Renaissance*, 4 (1974), 276–98 (p. 276).

⁹Pearson, p. 280.

¹⁰All quotations from Shakespeare’s texts except *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are from *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford, 1986).

couple suggests a measure of constancy, with a basis of dignity and self-command, which serves as a foil to the instability of the young lovers, who enact passionate love and hate while lost in the Athenian forest.

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen* Theseus' image as the experienced warrior, the judge, and the arbiter is stressed. He is referred to as one whose "first thought is more,/Than others' laboured medittance," and whose "premeditating" is "More than their actions"(I. i. 135-37).¹¹ However, Shakespeare seems to have anticipated his audience's awareness of Theseus' reputation for lust and lechery, and exploited it in the dramatic consequence of the first scene of the play. Theseus' sensuality as illustrated in classical legend is adapted into the scene as the thematic conflict between love and duty, or passion and reason. The play opens at the very brink of the wedding ceremony. Hippolyta has accepted her marital fate and is on the point of being absorbed into the patriarchal hierarchy of wedlock. But the wedding is interrupted by the three mourning queens, and Theseus is asked to defer the ceremony and avenge their husbands' deaths. This scene is one of Shakespeare's alterations to *The Knight's Tale*, wherein Theseus is already married when the company of ladies in black intercepts him on his return to Athens. In contrast to Chaucer's Theseus, who at once accedes to their request and leads his army against Thebes, Theseus in the play is reluctant to postpone his marriage on their behalf. At first he refuses to help. Then he offers to send one of his soldiers, Artesius. Theseus' eagerness to consummate the marriage to Hippolyta is clear from his reply to the queens:

¹¹All quotations from *The Two Noble Kinsmen* are from The New Penguin Shakespeare, ed. by N.W. Bawcutt (Harmondsworth, 1977).

This is a service, whereto I am going,
 Greater than any war; it more imports me
 Than all the actions that I have foregone
 Or futurely can cope. (I. i. 171–74)

The First Queen even suggests that Hippolyta's sexual charm will captivate Theseus long enough to make him neglect "to do these poor queens service" (I. i. 199). She describes the difficulty of putting duty before sensuality with erotic imagery (I. i. 174–86). Theseus eventually changes his mind after Hippolyta and Emilia's intercession. He sets off for Thebes saying, "As we are men,/Thus should we do; being sensually subdued,/We lose our human title"(I. i. 231–33), thus symbolically illustrating the moment of reason's triumph over sensuality.

This alteration to the Chaucerian source also helps dramatize Hippolyta's past as an Amazonian warrior. As Ann Thompson notes, the Amazonian war briefly mentioned in Chaucer's opening is expounded upon by the Second Queen and "given thematic significance as an instance of war overcoming love as the male overcomes the female."¹² The Queen's plea characterizes Hippolyta who is being addressed:

Honoured Hippolyta,
 Most dreaded Amazonian, that hast slain
 The scythe-tusked boar, that with thy arm as strong
 As it is white wast near to make the male

¹²Ann Thompson, *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins* (Liverpool, 1978), p.174.

To thy sex captive, but that this thy lord,
 Born to uphold creation in that honour
 First Nature stiled it in, shrunk thee into
 The bound thou wast o'erflowing, at once subduing
 Thy force and thy affection. (I. i. 77–85)

Furthermore, Hippolyta herself describes her grotesquely barbaric war experience in a later scene (I. iii. 18–22).

The Amazons seem to have had two qualities, as is symbolized in the above-mentioned Second Queen's speech (I. i. 77–81). As formidable warriors living without men, they projected an image of "virginal or only rarely sexual"¹³ females. On the other hand, the Amazons had to signify "a false usurpation of the duties of the male reason by the lower, female passions,"¹⁴ and were made figures for "rampant sensuality."¹⁵ Paul A. Olson reads a Biblical connotation in the Second Queen's description of Theseus' conquest of the race of female warriors and his marriage to their queen Hippolyta, which I quoted above (I. i. 77–85). According to him, "long before Shakespeare wrote, Theseus had come to embody the reasonable man and the ideal ruler of both his lower nature and his subjects."¹⁶ Thus the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta embodies an orderly subservience of the female and her passion to the more reasonable male. It echoes the counsel of St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians:

¹³Roberts, p. 133.

¹⁴Paul A. Olson, "A *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Meaning of Court Marriage," *ELH*, 24 (1957), 95–119 (p. 102).

¹⁵Robertson, p. 265.

¹⁶Olson, p. 101.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians. 5. 22–24)

Indeed, the orthodox doctrine of male superiority is expounded in Shakespeare's comedies which are much concerned with the marriage relationship. *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew* reflect the sixteenth-century marriage doctrine in England. Luciana rebukes her sister Adriana, who is nagging her husband for his casual and unfair treatment to her:

Why, headstrong liberty is lashed with woe.
There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.
The beasts, the fishes, and the wingèd fowls
Are their males' subjects, and at their controls.
Man, more divine, the master of all these,
Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
Of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
Are masters to their females, and their lords.
Then let your will attend on their accords.

(*The Comedy of Errors*, II. i. 15–25)

Luciana sees the submission of wife to husband as a law of nature, essential to the concord of the universe. This attitude is also adopted by Katherine in her lengthier speech in the last scene of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which contains phrases such as: “Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,/Thy head, thy sovereign” (V. ii. 151–52); and “Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,/And place your hands below your husband’s foot”(V. ii. 181–82).

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, despite the recurring references to her past as the ruler of the Amazons, Hippolyta no longer challenges the conventional image of a loyal and docile wife. Though her marriage to Theseus can be seen as a political bond, she comes to believe in her dominance in Theseus’ affection. She successfully convinces Theseus to change his mind on behalf of the queens, as if to confirm the Second Queen’s address to her:

soldieress,

That equally canst poise sternness with pity,
Whom now I know hast much more power on him
Than ever he had on thee, who owest his strength
And his love too, who is a servant for
The tenor of thy speech. (I. i. 85–90)

As a wife in a patriarchal society, Hippolyta merely awaits her husband’s return from the war against Thebes. Although there is a moment when Hippolyta’s conviction of her dominance over Theseus is undermined by her awareness of his old friendship with Pirithous, she is reassured by her belief that conjugal love outweighs friendship. In contrast to Palamon

and Arcite, whose innocence of youthful friendship deteriorates as a result of the experience of erotic passion, Theseus and Pirithous are presented as traditional exemplars of a constant and selfless male bond. Their friendship stands as more mature and steadfast through their long acquaintance, and the perils and adventures they have undergone. As Barry Weller puts it, “the context in which their history is evoked makes it not merely a pattern but an alternative to marriage.”¹⁷ Their perfect male bond is discussed by Hippolyta and Emilia, who are struck by the loyalty and devotion of Pirithous to Theseus. They have noticed Pirithous’ deep concern for him, who has already left for his campaign against Thebes. As they bid farewell to Pirithous, who is setting off to join Theseus, Emilia says: “How his longing/Follows his friend!” (I. iii. 26–27). Hippolyta praises them:

Their knot of love,
Tied, weaved, entangled, with so true, so long,
And with a finger of so deep a cunning,
May be outworn, never undone. I think
Theseus cannot be umpire to himself,
Cleaving his conscience into twain and doing
Each side like justice, which he loves best. (I. iii. 41–47)

Emilia, taking Hippolyta’s final sentence as if “Hippolyta were speaking of a division of Theseus’ affection between herself and Pirithous, rather

¹⁷Barry Weller, “*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the Friendship Tradition, and the Flight from Eros,” in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and “The Two Noble Kinsmen,”* pp. 93–108 (p. 98).

than between himself and Pirithous,”¹⁸ replies: “Doubtless/There is a best, and reason has no manners/To say it is not you” (I. iii. 47–49). Whereupon Hippolyta declares her assertion of the priority of marital affection over friendship: “With great assurance/That we, more than his Pirithous, possess/The high throne in his heart” (I. iii. 94–96). Jeanne Addison Roberts, in her “Crises of Male Self-Definition in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” observes that “her resolution to believe herself dearer to Theseus than Pirithous is mustered with suspicious alacrity and carried out with an arbitrary decision to repress doubts.”¹⁹ Roberts takes it as an emblematic moment of Hippolyta’s life when she “dwindles into a conventional wife, conforming to male expectation.”²⁰

It is Hippolyta’s sister, Emilia, who embodies the Amazonian threat to the male-dominated society in terms of her controversial response to adult heterosexual love and matrimony. She desires to remain a virgin, as a votaress of Diana. She is unwilling to move towards a mature conjugal relationship, as declared in her speech on her innocent childhood bonding with Flavina (I. iii. 59–82), which is reminiscent of Helena’s speech on her “schooldays’ friendship” (III. ii. 203) with Hermia in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*:

So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry: seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,

¹⁸Weller, p. 98.

¹⁹Roberts, p. 140.

²⁰Roberts, p. 136.

Two lovely berries moulded on one stem.
So, with two seeming bodies but one heart,
Two of the first—like coats in heraldry,
Due but to one and crownèd with one crest. (III. ii. 209–15)

While Helena and Hermia move beyond girlhood affection, and are assimilated into the larger world of romantic love, Emilia remains in pre-pubescent virginity. Charles Frey gives us a sensitive study of Emilia's emotional instincts:

Remote from the dynamics of patripotestal interests, left to her own devices, Emilia displays no sense of familial drive. Lacking a father, a brother, or other male to define herself against, the daughter tends perhaps to resist marriage or to see it as especially troublesome.²¹

While Hippolyta has accepted a mature conjugal relationship with Theseus, Emilia refuses to move beyond childhood innocence to an acknowledgement and acceptance of heterosexual love. She tells nostalgically of her girlhood affection for Flavina, who died young (I. iii). As Emilia is aware, their innocent and instinctive friendship contrasts with that of Pirithous and Theseus, which “has more ground, is more maturely seasoned,/More buckled with strong judgement” (56–57):

²¹Charles Frey, “‘O sacred, shadowy, cold, and constant queen’: Shakespeare’s Imperiled and Chastening Daughters of Romance,” in *The Woman’s Part*, ed. by Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely (Urbana, 1980), pp. 295–313 (p. 307).

But I

And she I sigh and spoke of were things innocent,
 Loved for we did, and like the elements
 That know not what, nor why, yet do effect
 Rare issues by their operance, our souls
 Did so to one another. (59–64)

She concludes her story with a firm belief that such an exaltation of female bonding cannot be found in the adult heterosexual relationship: “the true love ’tween maid and maid may be/More than in sex dividuall”(81–82).

When Palamon and Arcite see Emilia, they desperately fall in love with her, and become rivals in love. They fight to the death, first in the duel to justify their claims to love Emilia, then in the tournament to gain her as wife. Emilia is condemned to become “the treasure” (V. iii. 31) to be won by bloodshed under the system of male authority. Richard Abrams argues that the play’s deepest conflict is not between the kinsmen, but between Theseus as representative of the traditionally powerful men, and Emilia as a politically disenfranchised woman:

While the kinsmen’s animosity is gradually tempered as they move towards the tournament’s fighting embrace, and though their antagonism is always rendered pleasantly symmetrical through the inclusion of many sharply contrastive touches, the antagonism of Theseus and Emilia belies a surface of calm, admitting no reconciliation.²²

²²Richard Abrams, “Gender Confusion and Sexual Politics in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,” *Themes in Drama VII: Drama, Sex and Politics*, ed. by James Redmond (London, 1985), pp. 69–76 (p. 74).

Emilia has sometimes been seen as an insipid character with little dramatic credibility, which is partly due to the discordant effects of collaboration between Shakespeare and Fletcher. Studies of style suggest that Shakespeare's Emilia desires to remain in pre-pubescent virginity but is reluctantly forced into marriage, while Fletcher's Emilia with a streak of sensuality grows increasingly interested in her two suitors. A remarkable production, staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1986, removed those inconsistencies from the text, and gave psychological validity to Emilia. As a result, she was dramatized as a strong-minded individual in her own right,²³ and it was in the presentation of her that the production explored the unfair position of women as subject to masculine control. Emilia's attire in the production suggested her to be conventional courtly young lady. In contrast to Hippolyta who enacted the Amazonian war in the opening dumb show, there was no reminder of her origin as an Amazon. However, as Margaret Shewring notes, Amanda Harris as Emilia "signals Emilia's disquiet at her sister's marriage to the conquering Theseus" in "her bearing and facial expressions."²⁴ Emilia's resentment at being a pawn in the tournament was evident in her adamant refusal to watch it. The predicament of Emilia derives from her recognition of being the unwitting instrument for the destruction of the kinsmen's friendship and life. Amanda Harris made it clear that Emilia consented to marriage not from affection or any desire for a husband but out of pity and in order to save at least one valuable life. The helplessness of Emilia's situation culminates in

²³Margaret Shewring, "The Two Noble Kinsmen Revived: Chivalric Romance and Modern Performance Images," in *Le Roman de chevalerie au temps de la Renaissance*, ed. by M.T. Jones-Davies (Paris, 1987), pp. 107–32 (p. 124).

²⁴Shewring, p. 124.

the capriciously fatalistic ending of the play. Although the tournament ends with Arcite's pyrrhic victory, Palamon takes his place as her husband as a result of Arcite's equestrian accident. She does not speak to Palamon after she is awarded to him by Arcite on his deathbed. Her last words are to promise "tears":

I'll close thine eyes, prince; blessèd souls be with thee!
 Thou art a right good man, and while I live
 This day I give to tears. (V. iv. 96–98)

In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, love is presented not as a mutual relationship based on acquaintance, but as a destructive passion which drives the Gaoler's Daughter into madness and leads Arcite to death. The parallel between her obsession with Palamon and the two kinsmen's obsession with Emilia is patent and has been exploited in the theatre. For example, in the Beth Milles's production presented at Theatre Row Studios, New York, in October 1993, the Gaoler's Daughter could be heard singing behind the scenes while Palamon and Arcite began their fight in the woods.²⁵ The Gaoler's Daughter, in her mad love for Palamon, functions as the play's most potent figure of desire, thus embodying the fantasy of unbridled female sexuality. Her passionate freedom and boldness contrasts with Emilia's passive and non-erotic interest in either of her suitors. In spite of her desire to remain in pre-pubescent virginity, Emilia is forced to marry the winner of the tournament without any romantic process of falling

²⁵Lois Potter, "Shakespeare Performed: *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in 1993–94," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 47: 2 (1996), 197–203 (p. 198).

in love. The resolution of the Gaoler's Daughter's madness, through her acceptance of the Wooer in Palamon's disguise, parallels the ending of the main plot where Palamon supplants Arcite as Emilia's husband.

Although the Gaoler's Daughter stands at the opposite end of the social spectrum from the Amazonian princess Emilia, they are both obliged to live in a world in which their natural instincts have to be subordinated to the codes of their social positions. The Gaoler's Daughter is to be a victim of her ungoverned obsession with her social superior, Palamon, and Emilia a victim of the two rival kinsmen's obsession with her. The Gaoler's Daughter allows herself to fall in love with Palamon, but she knows that he will never marry a mere gaoler's daughter. Her desperation comes from her acknowledgement that she is his social inferior, as is clear from the opening lines of her first soliloquy where she clearly reveals her passion for Palamon:

Why should I love this gentleman? 'Tis odds
He never will affect me; I am base,
My father the mean keeper of his prison,
And he a prince. To marry him is hopeless;
To be his whore is witless. (II. iii. 1-5)

The sub-plot involving the Gaoler's Daughter and her Wooer begins in Act II, Scene i, where the Gaoler and the Wooer enter in the garden beneath the prison, debating on their marriage contract. The Gaoler's overriding concern is not to appear richer than he is, so that he can minimize his daughter's dowry, while the Wooer makes it clear that his

marriage to her is not for money. They belong to a society where people live together “within the agricultural calender shared in the response to the season,”²⁶ as is illustrated in the episode of country people preparing for their May Day celebrations. The way the Gaoler’s Daughter’s family, her Wooer, and their friends gather round to restore her reason is indicative of the close society they live in. Their sympathy and tolerance towards her is theatrically highlighted in the boat-making scene (IV. i), where they play the parts of sailors on the Gaoler’s Daughter’s imaginary ship as best they can.

The Gaoler’s Daughter defies Duke Theseus, sacrifices her father by releasing his prisoner Palamon “to make him know I love him”(II. iii. 29), and runs away from home to meet him in the woods. Although she successfully frees Palamon, she fails to find him in the woods. Her increasing sense of failure and of guilt for what she has done to her father lead her to madness, as suggested in a series of soliloquies (III. ii and iv). The Gaoler’s Daughter openly discloses her sexual fantasies in her mad words. She projects her own desire onto all the young maids of her town, imagining they are all in love with Palamon and two or four hundred are impregnated by him (IV. i. 125–27; 128–29). The 1634 quarto text suggests that one of her specifically bawdy speeches was the object of censorship. This quarto text marks an inaccurate “*Exit*” for the Gaoler’s Daughter just before her speech about the lords and courtiers tortured in Hell for their lechery (IV. iii. 40–46).

A Doctor is called in. He observes her mental state and diagnoses it as

²⁶C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1972), p. 109.

“a most thick and profound melancholy”(IV. iii. 48–49) caused by the “intemperate surfeit of her eye”(IV. iii. 69). He recognizes that “It is a falsehood she is in, which is with falsehoods to be combated” (IV. iii. 91–91), and suggests the Wooer impersonate Palamon and humour her, and sleep with her if she wishes. As the Doctor realizes, the Gaoler’s Daughter is suffering from a melancholy of a sexual etiology, which is called a love melancholy. His prescription for her case seems to represent one of the psychiatric practices and beliefs current in Elizabethan England. Irving I. Edgar, in his *Shakespeare, Medicine and Psychiatry*, states that love melancholy was a well recognized form of madness in Shakespeare’s day.²⁷ A method of curing it, which Edgar refers to as advocated by Burton and Laurentius and others, quite equals the “bed trick” device, employed by the Doctor in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Edgar quotes from “The meanes to cure the love-foolish and melancholike” in Laurentius’ *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight*:

The enjoying of the thing beloved ... the principal cause of the disease which is this burning desire, being taken away, the diseased partie will finde himself marvellously relieved.²⁸

Being proposed to by the Wooer disguised as Palamon, the Gaoler’s Daughter says, “we shall find/Some blind priest for the purpose, that will

²⁷Irving I. Edgar, *Shakespeare, Medicine and Psychiatry: An Historical Study in Criticism and Interpretation* (London, 1970), p. 199.

²⁸M. Andreas Laurentius, *A Discourse of the Preservation of the Sight, 1599*, trans. by Richard Surphlet, Shakespeare Association Facsimiles, no. 15 (London, 1938), p. 121.

venture/To marry us" (V. ii. 75–77), thus revealing her apprehension that their marriage is socially impossible. Her words to him, "I have nothing/But this poor petticoat and two coarse smocks" (V. ii. 81–82), increase the pathos of her situation. In her madness, she discloses her preoccupation with her low social status and lack of sufficient dowry. It is also possible to take her words, "we shall find/Some blind priest for the purpose, that will venture/To marry us," as an indication of her suspicion about the Wooer's identity. On the other hand, it is open entirely to interpretation how far she is deluded into mistaking the Wooer for Palamon, and this ambiguity could be theatrically exploited. As the Doctor has predicted, she accepts the disguised Wooer, and later is reported by her father as having recovered from her madness and to be preparing to wed the Wooer (V. iv. 27–28).

The 1986 RSC production ventured to introduce the visual confrontation of the two heroines in the closing moments. Two female figures, dressed, bride-like, in floor-length white veils walked downstage. In a solemn synchronised movement they removed their veils and revealed their identities. One was Emilia whose mourning black was concealed by her long white veil, and the other was the Gaoler's Daughter who wore white underneath her veil. They stood facing each other as the lights went down.

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