

# The Postfeminist Mystique: Feminism and Shakespearean Adaptation in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*

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## Abstract

"The Postfeminist Mystique: Feminism and Shakespearean Adaptation in *10 Things I Hate About You* and *She's the Man*" focuses on two recent teen adaptations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*, respectively. While I agree with those critics who read these films as conservative appropriations of Shakespeare's cultural capital, I focus specifically on how both movies exploit the generational divide between second and third-wave feminism in order to discredit feminism in general. As I show, *10 Things I Hate About You* associates feminism with unproductive anger, absent or threatening older women, and the inability to form or maintain close relationships, while the more recent *She's the Man* suggests that the second-wave victory of Title IX is no longer necessary, since the really good female players can play with the "guys" and the others will not want to play, anyway. In other words, both movies flatten out the complex and often disturbing patterns of gender and sexuality in Shakespeare's plays to authorize a "postfeminist" view of society and to suggest that feminism is outdated, irrelevant, and even harmful.

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In *10 Things I Hate About You*, the 1999 adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine the shrew becomes Kat, the strident teen feminist who learns how to relax her feminism, help her sister, and fall in love. More recently, in *She's the Man*,<sup>1</sup> the 2006 adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, Viola becomes a tomboy who poses as her brother in order to try out for the boys' soccer team at his school, Illyria, and assert her right to play sports. Both movies invoke Shakespeare's cultural authority through character and place names and basic plot similarities, and both use feminism to suggest that they endorse the freedoms of modern girls to shape their own futures. As I will show, this is far from being the case. Rather, *10 Things* and *She's the Man* should be read as postfeminist movies that advance a conservative view of gender and identity. More specifically, I argue that both movies 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wave feminism in order to ridicule both forms of feminism and to suggest that feminism in general is outdated, irrelevant, and even harmful.

Postfeminism has come into general use as a term used to describe the world after feminism — sometimes in line with third-wave feminism, but more usually to imply that feminism is no longer necessary. As Angela McRobbie puts it, postfeminism describes the conservative backlash that "positively draws on and invokes feminism . . . to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force" (2004, 255). Here, McRobbie highlights the postfeminist gesture as a kind of cultural shorthand that enables the death of feminism to be taken for granted. In *10 Things* and in *She's the Man*, this postfeminist shorthand is used to stereotype second and third-wave feminisms: In *10 Things*, older women are threatening or absent, and for younger women, feminism becomes a barrier to establishing close relationships with other people, especially romantically and within the family circle; in *She's the Man*, third-wave feminism, and specifically the movement towards "girl power," also drives its story of a girl who poses as her brother to prove that she can play soccer on the boys' team at an exclusive private school. But the film negates the second-wave achievement of Title IX by suggesting that only exceptional girls really want to play sports, and that kind of girl can find a place on boys' teams.

Media representations of feminism are starting to gain increasing attention from feminist analysts, who argue that we need to acknowledge the power of those representations and the ways in which they shape current perceptions of feminism.<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant developments in the feminist movement in the last fifteen years — Rebecca Walker's declaration that "We are the third wave" in 1992 — has aroused considerable media attention, often in the context of hopeful inquiries such as that of *Time* magazine in 1998: "Is Feminism Dead?" In fact, many feminists are now arguing that the unreflecting distinction between generational waves of feminism primarily serves the interests of conservative postfeminists. For example, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake have argued that to accept the binary opposition between second and third-wave feminists is to endorse conservative postfeminist arguments and to oversimplify grossly the complex and often contradictory relationships among different kinds of feminisms (Heywood and Drake 1997, 1-8), while the editors of the essay collection *Third Wave Feminism* note how "the third wave has been overly eager to define itself as something 'different' from previous feminisms" (Gillis, Howie, and Munford 2004, 2). While few current feminist writers completely reject "wave terminology" and continue to find distinctions between second and third-wave feminism useful, they also express concern about the extent to which that terminology perpetuates media stereotypes. As Rory Dicker

and Alison Piepmeier put it, "This emphasis on intergenerational conflict has certainly captured the media's attention: Typically, the media describe one generation as the victim and the other as the perpetrator, with frequent role reversals, depending on the cultural climate. Though there's not denying that this makes a good story, it's really just the latest incarnation of the feminist catfight" (2003, 15).

### Katfighting

I start here by examining the "Katfight" in *10 Things*, a movie that has received much recent attention from film and literature critics,<sup>3</sup> who in general agree that it tends towards a conservative view of gender and identity, although they do not pay the kind of detailed attention to wave terminology that I do. However, Michael D. Friedman dissents from this view, arguing in a recent article, "The Feminist as Shrew in *10 Things I Hate About You*," that the film shows us a Kat who moves from second-wave feminism to third-wave, and that this move is progressive: "By my assessment, 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" (Friedman 2006, 46). Friedman's identification of second-wave feminism as "old-school," implicitly outdated and outworn, echoes "postfeminist" relegations of second-wavers to the dusty past, and his reliance on the movie's screenplay to prove the more rigorously third-wave feminist intentions of the screenwriters ignores the fact that the cultural influence of the movie rises out of what viewers actually saw — that is, the final product on the screen, not what the screenwriters originally wrote.

While I find his overall argument unconvincing, I do find Friedman's article significant because as far as I can tell, it is the first to introduce the wave terminology typical of public debates over feminism into an analysis of *10 Things*. But this movie is far more concerned with critiquing feminism than it is in making genuine distinctions among feminists with different concerns. Although *10 Things* allows some space for considerations of sisterhood and female community, it nevertheless uses damaging stereotypes of both second and third-wave feminism to discredit and trivialize feminism in general. In my analysis of the movie, I examine Ms. Perky and Kat and Bianca's absent mother as figures who represent the damaging effects of second-wave feminism upon men and upon the girls and young women of the next generations and then show how the film's stereotypes of third-wave feminism fail to engage in any significant way with the issues of class, race, and sexuality that inform actual third-wave activism.

As Gillis, Howie, and Munford show, the "generational wave paradigm" overly stresses differences between the generations and also elides differences within generations, relying on

a simplistic and distorting model based on birth date: "The historical narrative, underlying the generational account of stages of feminist theory and practice, overly simplifies the range of debates and arguments preceding the stipulated 'era,' and appears to be meshed in a sororal anxiety relating to inheritance" (Gillis, Howie, and Munford 2004, 4, 3). *10 Things* exploits this "sororal anxiety" by representing older women as absent or potentially abusive and their legacy as one of highly problematic and outdated concerns with sex, independence, and workplace equality. In fact, there are no positive adult female role models in the movie. The only grown woman who appears is Ms. Perky, the guidance counselor who stocks her office bookcase with romance novels and who is more interested in writing her own (heterosexual) erotic romance novel than in providing guidance. Though the second-wave women's movement is, admittedly, more usually accused today of downplaying or erasing sex as a feminist issue, Jane Gerhard has shown how the "blending of sexual freedom, broadly defined, and women's liberation was the characteristic feature of second-wave feminism" (2001, 194). The emphasis on sexual freedom typical of early second-wave feminism aroused considerable anxiety about women's sexual behavior, and as Janice Radway points out, some of that anxiety focused on the increasing popularity of romance novels: "To a traditionally patriarchal culture, it appeared as threatening evidence of the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s upon respectable women" (1999, 397).

Overly sexed and independent of male control, Ms. Perky also evokes "ball-busting" female characters such as Alex Forrest in *Fatal Attraction* (1987), Isabelle de Merteuil in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (1992), and Carolyn Burnham in *American Beauty* (1999). Like these characters, Ms. Perky is in control of her sexuality, yet frighteningly resistant to male restraint, and in *10 Things*, she represents a threat to the healthy development of adolescents. Ms. Perky's obsession with erotica associates her with unrestrained sexuality and even goes so far as to suggest the possibility of her sexual predation on the students she is meant to be counseling. When Patrick is sent to her to be chastised for teasing the "lunch lady" with a bratwurst, pretending it is his penis, Ms. Perky looks suggestively at his crotch and says sarcastically, "Aren't we the optimist?" She sends him away briskly, but then sits down to her computer and writes in "bratwurst" instead of "member." While Ms. Perky controls the situation — she rejects Patrick's attempt at humor when he suggests that he enjoys "these little moments together," i.e., his frequent visits to her office to be disciplined for bad behavior — her control is sexualized by exchanges such as the above. Since this conversation with Patrick — a student — suggests the substitution of words in Ms. Perky's erotica, the film implies her inappropriate sexual interest in the attractive male teenagers with whom she works.

Moreover, Ms. Perky's interest in romance and sex inspires disdain in Kat, who is able to supply her with further metaphors for penile erection, but who clearly despises Ms. Perky's lack of intellectual depth. Although Richard Burt identifies Kat's friend Mandella and Bianca's friend Chastity as "bifurcated" aspects of the Widow in *Shrew* (Burt 2002, 212), I believe that Ms. Perky takes on this role. Like the Widow, whose rudeness to Katherine is blatant,<sup>4</sup> Ms. Perky brusquely calls Kat a bitch to her face and suggests that she needs to modify her behavior. Also like the Widow, Ms. Perky is "lusty," or lustful (4.2.50) and is not submissive to male authority. In early modern society, widows were often depicted as frightening women whose sexual instincts had been awakened but contained during their marriage, but who were now free to indulge their desires at will. Jennifer Panek has argued that the figure of the lusty widow actually assuaged male anxieties, since she could be assigned the "feminized" sexual passion that was "dangerously demeaning when aroused in men" (2004, 82). The excessive, uncontrollable female sexual passion associated with widows in the early modern period is associated in *10 Things* with Ms. Perky through the feminized, erotic romance novel genre, precisely as a means of deflating and mocking the threat aroused by second-wave assertions of sexual freedom for women.

### Absent Mothers, Frightened Fathers

The only other significant adult female role in *10 Things* is that of the absent wife and mother, who left Kat and Bianca's father at some point prior to the film's beginning, who has no role or evident interest in her daughters' lives, and who, by her absence, stands for that most negative of female stereotypes, the "bad mother." Both *Shrew* and *10 Things* feature absent mothers and domineering fathers. In *Shrew*, the mother is gone, presumably dead, and while Katherine and Bianca's father Baptista acts affectionately to Bianca, he regards Katherine with resignation, tempered by the desire to get her off his hands as soon as possible. His desire to marry off Katherine leads him to keep Bianca imprisoned within his house until the older sister is married,<sup>5</sup> a tactic Dr. Stratford employs for a rather different purpose in *10 Things*. As an ob-gyn specialist, Stratford claims to "be up to my elbows in placenta" delivering the babies of what Bianca, in a highly class-inflected moment, calls "crack whores." However, though Stratford's response to his position as single father is to restrict closely the social lives of his daughters for fear they might become pregnant, his desire to control his daughters is represented in the film as a sincere, albeit extreme, concern for their well-being. Given the difficulties single mothers face, it hardly seems unreasonable to want one's teenage daughters to avoid pregnancy. Stratford's intentions are not mercenary or malicious, and the absence of his divorced wife implies that he

is merely overcompensating for the lack of trust in responsible female behavior with which his wife's departure left him.

Through its sympathetic portrayal of Stratford, the film suggests that he has been victimized by the effects of second-wave feminism, which has implicitly made divorce more prevalent and has undermined his ability to control his own life, even ruining his job. He acts as an abandoned husband doing his best to care for unruly daughters and to protect them from a world in which unrestricted female sexual freedom leads to pain and unwanted pregnancies. One could also trace the conservative anxiety about feminism and the canon here through Stratford as a stand-in for the patriarchal authority of Shakespeare himself. A common complaint from conservative "protectors" of the canon is that if schools start to include works from women and people of color, there will be no room for Shakespeare. Stratford's victimization by the after-effects of feminist empowerment suggests that the same could happen to Shakespeare. Just as Courtney Lehmann notes with regard to the 1999 film *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *10 Things* reminds us that not only are women hurt by feminism's false promises of "having it all," but also "that the true victims of . . . feminism, are not today's women, but rather today's men" (Lehmann 2002, 6).

What Stratford does not know is that Kat has already had sexual intercourse one time, with the boy now pursuing Bianca — the arrogant Joey Donner. The bedroom scene in which Kat reveals this secret to Bianca is crucial to any feminist account of *10 Things*. It is also the only scene in which the two sisters are alone together. Bianca is cross because she can only go to the prom if Kat goes, and Kat refuses to go. Bianca lies moodily on her bed, watching *The Real World* on TV — a none-too-subtle indication of her frustration of being shut out of the "real world" of dating and heterosexual relationships. Kat knocks on the door, entering at Bianca's "come in." Finding its music a distraction, Kat shuts off the TV, a significant departure from the standard teen-movie template, which usually relies on music quite heavily in order to cue an emotional response.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, this scene is played with no music whatsoever, suggesting the seriousness of what Kat has to tell Bianca — that she had sex with Joey in ninth grade.

Kat finally tells Bianca what happened by saying, "Joey never told you we went out, did he?" Bianca reacts to this incredulously, as well she should, since Kat obviously despises Joey. Kat says, "In ninth — for a month." Though Kat can't bring herself to say they had sex, her sidelong, uncomfortable glance makes what happened clear to Bianca. Significantly, Kat places this event as occurring "right after Mom left. Everyone was doing it — so I did it. After, I decided I wasn't ready . . . he got mad and dumped me." When Bianca asks Kat why she didn't tell her about this, Kat says, "I wanted you to make up your own mind about him." Bianca says, "Then why did

you help Daddy hold me hostage?" Kat replies, "I guess I thought I was protecting you." Bianca's justifiably angry answer is, "By not letting me experience anything for myself?" This scene is unlike anything in Shakespeare's play, which, if anything, establishes an acute dislike between Katherine and Bianca. The one scene in *Shrew* where Katherine and Bianca are alone together shows Bianca submissive to her older sister's demand that she tell which man she likes best. Katherine, however, does not believe Bianca's statement that "of all the men alive, / I never yet beheld that special face / Which I could fancy more than any other" (2.1.10-12) and hits her. It is a very short incident, but hardly implies affection between the two sisters. Bianca will promise anything to get Katherine off her back, and Katherine is bitterly jealous of Bianca and of Baptista's affection for her younger sister.

In the film, however, Kat seems to really care for Bianca and to be worried about her welfare. For example, Kat chooses to attend Bogey Lowenstein's party because she wants to please Bianca, and she gets drunk because she cannot seem to prevent Bianca from succumbing to Joey's advances. Instead, it is Bianca who distrusts Kat. Kat's worry has made her buy into the patriarchal system of silent control; as Burt points out, instead of giving Bianca the information she needs to make a rational judgment, she has cooperated with their father's attempt to keep Bianca in ignorance (2002, 215). Bianca's hostility towards Kat comes largely from this cooperation — what Bianca wants is guidance, not isolation. The root of the sisters' problems appears to be their lack of a mother, a lack that also characterizes *Shrew*. In *10 Things*, however, the lack of a mother is played out differently. Far from acting as a role model — a woman who has accepted her own role in the patriarchal order leading her daughters through the process of growing up — Kat and Bianca's mother has abandoned them, and, partly because of this, Kat has had sex too early and with the wrong person. Though Kat has decided to stop sleeping with Joey, asserting her right to choose how and when to have sex (a central focus of both second and third-wave feminism), that choice has led to her bitterness and alienation from everyone around her, a change from her prior popularity that Bianca, in an earlier scene, describes as an "unsolved mystery."

The film's brief suggestions of Kat and Bianca's negative maternal heritage strongly suggest that Kat needs to commit what Astrid Henry, drawing on second-wave feminist Phyllis Chesler's *Letters to a Young Feminist*, calls "psychological matricide" — a matricide that allows third-wave feminists to disavow their connections to second-wave feminism and "ensures that we listen to our peers, not our mothers" (Henry 2004, 10). In Henry's analysis, this psychological matricide is a complex and contradictory force that enables third-wave feminists both to identify themselves as daughters, and, paradoxically, to resist that identification as they reject the second-wave feminist mother. In the film, this dynamic plays out in a far more simplified form. As long as Kat adheres to

second-wave feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan, the film suggests, she will be unable to form close relationships with her peers and, most importantly, with her sister, because she will be identifying with her mother's generation of feminists. Kat needs to sever her attachment to the maternal and accept patriarchal standards of behavior, which will then enable her to relate to her peers and, especially, her sister.

Where Henry invokes "psychological matricide" to help explain how third-wave feminists often set themselves in opposition to second-wave feminists, even as they rely on the principles and advances made by those feminists, the film frames Kat's choices as far more limited. Kat must symbolically kill the mother, but instead of portraying third-wave feminism as a viable alternative to second-wave feminism, the film eliminates this option by depicting second-wave feminism as largely middle-class and obsessed with style, not substance. Heywood and Drake point out that third-wave feminists "grew up with equity feminism, got gender feminism in college, along with poststructuralism, and are now hard at work on a feminism that strategically combines elements of these feminisms, along with black feminism, women-of-color feminism, working-class feminism, pro-sex feminism, and so on" (1997, 3). These multiple strands of feminist activism never appear in *10 Things* as serious preoccupations, and certainly not as issues of which Kat takes much notice. The English teacher Mr. Morgan points out this limitation when Kat suggests that their English courses expand to include such female writers as de Beauvoir and Charlotte Bronte, sarcastically telling Kat, "The next time you white girls meet to complain about the lunch meat, or whatever . . . ask why the school can't buy a book by a black man!" But far from suggesting that Kat devote some time to studying, for example, bell hooks, Mr. Morgan marginalizes women of color and suggests that women's rights are trivial compared to racial prejudice, as if the two were somehow opposed; if you work towards one, you can't work towards the other. His words suggest, in fact, that all *men* need equality before women's issues can be addressed, a point emphasized by two of the male, "wanna be" white Rasta students, who, as one of the main characters says, "think they're black." The "Rastas" rise up to support Mr. Morgan by cheering, whereupon the teacher says, "Don't get me started on you two!" Like the white "Rastas" and their adoption of a disempowered identity for which they are ludicrously unsuited, Kat's feminism appears as an oppositional identity without any grounding in her actual status as a privileged white woman from the upper middle classes.

Likewise, Kat's parroting of Marxist jargon merely earns her Bianca's and her friend Chastity's mocking takeover of her lines as they finish her critique of Bogey Lowenstein's party as an excuse for teens to drink and have sex to distract themselves from their "meaningless, consumer-driven lives." Kat's only response to the mockery of the younger girls is a mock-grin and a "hah," suggesting that in fact she has no adequate response because she is merely rattling off phrases she



has learned by rote. As Melissa J. Jones notes, Bianca's "mockery suggests that such ideological criticism is predictable, empty, and quite frankly, boring" (2004, 142), a suggestion reinforced by the setting and camera position. In a medium shot, Kat is confined between her father on one side and Chastity and Bianca on the other in a hallway that is, like the rest of her home, expensively decorated and clearly reflects upper-middle class status. Such surroundings only intensify the silliness of her words and her lack of any complex understanding of Marxist theory.

Kat's politics seem flimsy and outdated, and more seriously, they isolate her from everyone else. Kat has only one friend, Mandella, who considers herself to be romantically "involved" with Shakespeare, and who is also white, heterosexual, and, apparently, upper-middle class. Mandella does not entirely agree with Kat's feminism and does not accompany Kat to the supposed Riot Grrrl show at Club Skunk, the film's most self-conscious reference to third-wave "girl power" feminism. She would like to go to the prom, and when Kat says that by staying home they are making a statement, Mandella mockingly retorts, "Oh, goody! Something new and different for us." Mandella's romantic desire for Shakespeare certainly makes her rather odd — she even has his picture up in her locker — but she still conforms to traditional ideals of female identity that the movie associates with Shakespeare's cultural authority. Her relationship with the geeky, but self-confident, Michael begins and grows because he is able to quote Shakespeare to her, and she can respond. His invitation to the prom is signed "William S." Michael not only dresses in Elizabethan doublet and hose himself, but he also includes a "Renaissance" gown with the invitation, and Mandella is delighted with this dictation of her sartorial choices. A rather marginal character, Mandella appears more frequently as Michael's love interest than as Kat's friend or as a feminist herself. In fact, Mandella, who accepts Shakespeare as the authority on love, correspondingly rejects Kat's feminism as far too radical a mode of being.

### ". . . Girls Who Can't Play Their Instruments"

Kat's isolation presents a curious contrast to second and third-wave feminism's emphasis on community, especially in the context of a film designed to appeal to young women. Feminists such as Meenakshi Gigi Durham stress the shared experience of girlhood as a space in which resistance to patriarchal and sexist portrayals of adolescent girls may take root (Durham 1999, 216). *10 Things*, however, gives Kat no such shared space. For example, one of the few moments in which Kat appears among other young women is when she goes to Club Skunk to see a Riot Grrrl show. However, the band playing is also the band most frequently seen and heard in the film, Letters to Cleo, which hardly qualifies as the "angry girl music" cited as typical of Kat's tastes. Certainly, this is a band with a prominent female lead singer, but the rest of the band — the ones who actually play

the instruments — are male. Letters to Cleo — a band that, earlier in the 1990s, had appeared on the popular show "Beverly Hills, 90210" to play at the Peach Pit (not quite a Riot Grrrl credential) — fits into the far more culturally acceptable category of male bands with a charismatic female singer exemplified by 10,000 Maniacs, the Cranberries, Garbage, and No Doubt (to name but a few).<sup>7</sup>

The band's unthreatening image is matched by the women in the club, the vast majority of whom are white, middle-class, thin, and, by and large, well-dressed in body-revealing and fashionable, not Riot Grrrl punk, clothes. Though Kat usually appears at school in pants and a tight shirt, here she is wearing a tube top and skirt with a bead necklace, a very feminine look that strongly resembles her more formal outfit for the prom later in the movie. Kat speaks only briefly to the woman dancing next to her, and the only other person she interacts with is Patrick, who, by a casual reference to Bikini Kill and the Raincoats (a Riot Grrrl band and early punk band, respectively) grabs Kat's attention sufficiently that she follows him through the club. When he clumsily remarks that "I was watching you up there [dancing] before. I've never seen you look so sexy" as the music stops — arousing considerable laughter — Kat laughs too, but also seems quite flattered. Because the focus here is definitely on the evolution of Kat's relationship to Patrick, third-wave Riot Grrrl feminism is invoked only superficially and without connecting Kat in any significant way to its principles or its activism. Instead, Patrick's Riot Grrrl references enable Kat to relax her "feminazi" pose long enough to start falling for him.

Because Kat never engages with other feminists and because the film so frequently conveys her feminism through musical references that water down actual Riot Grrrl punk performances, Kat's feminism seems purely a matter of style, and thus typical of the stereotype of the publicity-obsessed third-wave feminist promoted by the media, often with the support of second-wave feminists. As I mentioned earlier, one famous example of this kind of skepticism was the 1998 *Time* issue of June 29, which featured the cover headline "Is Feminism Dead?" and included an article by Gina Bellafante that mocked "girl power" feminism as "that sassy, don't-mess-with-me adolescent spirit that Madison Avenue carefully caters to" (1998). In the same issue, Nadya Labi argued that "The bustier-busting sloganeering" typical of bands like the Spice Girls "is the touchstone for much of what passes for commercial feminism nowadays, especially the kind marketed to the demographic group the Spices are proudly empowering: preteen and teenage girls. Or 'grrrls,' as that tiresome battle growl goes" (1998). While aspects of these critiques have some merit — certainly, "girl power" as represented by the Spice Girls seemed more centered on clothes and makeup than on issues of equality and power — Bellafante and Labi seem to regard all third-wave feminism as marred by frivolity and superficiality. As Sarah Curtis-Fawley noted in her response

to these articles, what is missing from *Time's* issue on feminism "is any attempt to analyze what real women think about feminist values and politics" (1998) or any indication that there might be a gap between the ways in which feminism is being represented and the ways in which actual feminists represent themselves. Instead, the *Time* articles are typical of the media's exploitation of second-wave resentment against third-wave feminists who seem to have rejected them. Though these resentments do have some grounds in reality, *Time* uses them to, as Jennifer L. Pozner writes, "erase real feminists from the picture" (2003, 34) and to represent feminism as a movement that has lost its purpose, energy, and will to live.

This absence of real feminist concerns is also typical of *10 Things* and its portrayal of Kat as, supposedly, a "girl power" feminist. For example, the opening scene of the movie uses music to set up Kat's identity as an angry feminist, but avoids any indication of actual social issues that might be important to that feminism. This scene is set to the tune of "One Week" by the all-male band Barenaked Ladies — a song in which two lovers fight but, at the end, admit they were wrong and say, "I'm sorry." The song thus signals the plot of the film to come and, while the whole song does not play out in this sequence, it was a Top Ten hit in the summer of 1998, when the movie was being produced, and its basic theme would have been well-known to the audience of the film. As the camera pans across the Seattle skyline, it comes to rest by locating the source of the music in a very new and shiny convertible car with four teenage girls, two with ponytails and all wearing feminine tops, fairly heavy makeup, and jewelry, bopping along to the song and united in their enjoyment of Barenaked Ladies — a band whose name obviously draws attention to the ways in which women are subjected to male observation. As their car waits at a pedestrian crossing, suddenly "One Week" is drowned out by Joan Jett's "Bad Reputation." The camera pans left to discover the source — a rival, much more battered car, driven by Kat, alone, who looks over at the four girls with disdain and takes off the minute the street is clear.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to the girls, Kat listens alone to the tough female Joan Jett, an introduction that implies an adversarial, lonely feminism for Kat that is isolating her from healthy relationships with other people, while the more conventionally feminine behaviors of the girls are portrayed as more fun and more likely to encourage healthy interpersonal relationships.

Music also signifies Kat's attitude as the movie ends, but that attitude is no longer the "bad" one signaled by Joan Jett. Kat has realized that she really cares for Patrick, in spite of his mercenary, but temporary, collusion with Joey to get her to date. As the movie nears its ending, Kat comes out of school to find the guitar she has longed for in her car, and Patrick turns up to apologize for taking Joey's money. The perceptive viewer realizes that Patrick has used Joey's last

payoff to buy the guitar, which in an earlier scene Kat has handled at the guitar shop. This earlier scene is the only scene in which she actually plays, but rather than belting out a Riot Grrrl or Joan Jett song, she simply fingers a few chords, unaware that Patrick is watching her from behind. The non-diegetic music the audience hears is a plaintive, piano-based love song called "The Weakness in Me," sung by Joan Armatrading, rather than Kat's own playing. The romantic music indicates the scene's importance not in terms of Kat's empowerment through music, but rather in terms of the development of Kat and Patrick's relationship. Significantly, Kat does not hold the guitar standing, in the traditional male rock star pose; instead, she plays it sitting down, very hesitantly, in sharp contrast to the macho posing of male guitar players such as Jimmie Page or even Joan Jett herself. Such playing hardly accords with Riot Grrrl feminist Melanie Klein's description of women playing guitar as "thrilling," as a vision of "a strong woman with a power tool waiting to be bent to her will" (1997, 215). Though Friedman argues that Kat's acceptance of the guitar signals her embrace of third-wave feminism (2006, 58), I see that acceptance as far more problematic. We never do see Kat forming her own girl band, or making any serious plans to do so. Furthermore, though Kat comes from an upper-middle-class family and appears to have no money problems whatsoever, Kat does not buy the guitar herself — it comes as a gift that enables her entry into the traditional heterosexual romance.

As a symbol of her new relationship with Patrick, the guitar continues Kat's inscription within the confines of heteronormative economic control, as indicated by Stratford's post-prom decision to allow Kat to attend Sarah Lawrence College, a progressive private college that was once female-only. Sarah Lawrence is also one of the most expensive colleges in the country, and thus is economically out of reach for all but the rich and those who qualify for financial aid — and, given her father's income, Kat is clearly not a possible candidate for the last condition. At the beginning of the movie, Kat is excited to be accepted to Sarah Lawrence, but her father balks, wanting to keep her close by him and under his control. After the prom, when Kat's increased closeness to Bianca indicates her newer, gentler persona, Stratford tells her that he has sent a deposit check to Sarah Lawrence and Kat, overcome, hugs him. However, although her father's change of mind indicates his greater trust of her, it also emphasizes that Kat must rely completely on his financial support. There is never any suggestion that Kat might take a job and earn her way through school, or alternately, declare financial independence from her father in order to qualify for financial aid. The movie's conservatism demands that Kat wait to have her desires for music and for college validated by males, and economic independence — an issue centrally important to both second and third-wave feminisms — is ignored.

Though Kat and Bianca finally talk and form sisterly bonds that enable Bianca to attack Joey violently at the prom in retaliation for his schemes, female closeness is validated only within conventional standards of female behavior. Family bonds are naturalized as the ones that should take priority, and sisterhood extends not outwards but, rather, inwards, towards blood sisters rather than towards a sisterhood of all women. The heterosexual romance is the only viable alternative to family life depicted in the film. Though Kat will ostensibly leave for Sarah Lawrence, the movie's final shot of her and Patrick kissing leaves them in the romantic moment, reinforced by the camera's sweep up to the roof of the school, where Letters to Cleo are playing the Cheap Trick song, "I Want You to Want Me." The logic of romantic comedy is used to subvert the possibilities of third-wave feminism, as well as to silence Kat altogether. When Patrick gives her the guitar, Kat, pleased, still puts up a little resistance to the happy ending, saying, "You can't just buy me a guitar every time you mess up." Patrick says, "I know. But there's always drums, the bass, and maybe even someday a tambourine." He kisses her, and she says, "And don't just think you can . . ." — but he kisses her again, stifling Kat's protests. The "happy ending" is thus defined as the moment when Kat — like Katherine in *Shrew* — is finally silenced by her firm placement as the "femininely" passive member of a heterosexual relationship. In contrast, in the play Petruchio says, "Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (5.2.179-80), thus giving Katherine the opportunity to perform her own action. Patrick, on the other hand, makes no invitation. He just goes ahead and kisses Kat, who becomes the passive recipient of Patrick's affection; and as the music swells up and takes over, we hear "I want you to want me, / I need you to need me, / I'd love you to love me, / I'm beggin' you to beg me . . ." — reinforcing the traditional romantic comedy message that any woman who says she doesn't need a man is fooling herself. As it depicts feminism as an artificial and damaging ideology that prevents women from engaging in truly fulfilling relationships, *10 Things* also suggests that women need to acknowledge their own desires for men before they can become mature, adult individuals in a postfeminist world.

### "Girls Can't Beat Boys"

Like *10 Things*, *She's the Man* deploys Shakespeare's cultural capital to validate its essentialist views of gender and sexuality and to promote a conservative view of class and education through a canonical text, in this case *Twelfth Night* — a play in which, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "The transforming power of costume unsettles fixed categories of gender and social class . . . In *Twelfth Night*, conventional expectations repeatedly give way to a different way of perceiving the world" (1997, 1762). However, although *She's the Man* employs the cross-dressing plot of *Twelfth Night*, it carefully reinforces "conventional expectations" about gender and sexuality by constantly

reminding us that Viola is in fact female, through flaws in her performance of masculinity and through scenes in which she is dressed as a properly feminine girl. Furthermore, the movie's use of upper-class markers of privilege, such as private boarding schools, debutante balls, cars for the students, and enormous houses, naturalizes those privileges even more than *10 Things* does.

*She's the Man* portrays Viola as the exceptional female who proves her ability to play with boys' team, implicitly suggesting that Title IX's landmark assertion of girls' rights to play sports is irrelevant to contemporary girls. Viola is the only girl who manages to circumvent her school's cutting of the girls' soccer team, and her solution — to disguise herself as her brother Sebastian so that she can try out for his school's boys' team — isolates her as the exceptional female who can play with the boys, yet never lose her femininity or her attractiveness to males. Though Viola — like Kat, who also plays soccer — can be regarded as a kind of third-wave, girl-power feminist who combines athleticism and tomboyishness with makeup and romantic relationships, in fact the movie repeats *10 Things*'s split between second and third-wave feminism by deprecating the second-wave achievement of Title IX and reducing third-wave feminism to a single girl who displays only the most superficial signs of that feminism. Viola's dilemma is recast one not of survival, as in *Twelfth Night*, but rather as asserting her right to play soccer with the boys. More significantly, the blame for this dilemma rests with the girls of her school (Cornwall Academy), not enough of whom have signed up to play soccer to constitute a team. By assigning the blame for this problem to the girls themselves, who apparently do not appreciate the advantages granted them by Title IX, the focus on the split between second and third-wave feminism so central to *10 Things* is used here to endorse the stereotype of third-wavers as frivolous girls and simultaneously suggest that the concerns of second-wave feminism are irrelevant to today's young women.

Like *10 Things*, *She's the Man* restricts the primary adult female characters to one — Viola's mother — who is, however, no feminist, but rather a silly, upper-middle-class socialite. She is no Ms. Perky either, despite one brief moment of lust for Viola's ex-boyfriend, and in fact *She's the Man* avoids embodying second-wave feminist stereotypes in any specific character. However, the film does critique second-wave feminism through the specter of Title IX, the 1972 legislation that ensured equal support for male and female sports and academic activities in both public and private schools. Title IX was and is a major second-wave feminist triumph, and was one particular advance that allowed third-wave feminists to feel that they grew up with many opportunities that their mothers lacked. However, it has been much attacked by those who assert that it discriminates against male athletes and that it weakens all sports for both men and women. Title IX's status as the basis for non-discriminatory practices in educational athletics received a blow in 2005, when the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the Department of Education released

a statement that purported to clarify Title IX's provisions. Assuring schools that they may use surveys to determine student interest in athletic participation, the statement argues that "results that show insufficient interest to support an additional varsity team for the underrepresented sex will create a compliance with part three of the three-part test [to ascertain a school's adherence to Title IX requirements] and the Title IX regulatory requirement to provide nondiscriminatory athletic participation opportunities" ("Additional Clarification" 2005). In other words, lack of interest, as defined by a survey, would justify cutting girls' and women's teams and allow the school to avoid being censured under Title IX, an interpretation that has justifiably earned criticism from advocates of women's rights.

*She's the Man* begins as Viola learns that her high school girls' soccer team has been cut because not enough girls signed up. Horrified, the girls who want to play soccer confront the boys' coach, who is mildly sympathetic and tells them, "If there's anything I can do, just say the word." But when Viola suggests that she and her teammates try out for the boys' soccer team — a right that is, in fact, guaranteed them under the provisions of Title IX (Women's Sports Foundation) — the coach and the members of the boys' team laugh incredulously, and the coach slips into near-rhyme:

It isn't me talking,  
It's scientific fact,  
Girls can't beat boys,  
It's as simple as that.

When Viola reminds her boyfriend — the star of the boys' soccer team — that he has previously praised her as a better player than half the boys on his team, he chooses to lie rather than break solidarity with the other boys. The incident portrays males as smugly certain of their physical superiority as backed up by "scientific fact," yet also as threatened by athletic females.

Although if the girls had researched their legal rights at all, they would have had stronger grounds for their protest, there is a definite feminist element to this early scene, one that has considerable potential for a girl-power strategy. By grouping the girls tightly around the figure of the coach — who, as we see from a medium long shot, is actually watching the boys' team practice, while the girls are watching him — the scene suggests a female solidarity that empowers these girls to demand the right to play soccer. While Viola has most of the lines in the scene, she does not have all of them, and the girls seem to be united in their friendship and their athleticism, a unity reinforced when Viola breaks up with her boyfriend for his attempt to dominate her. The camera leads us to identify with the girls, and especially with Viola, who gets several close-ups, as opposed to the boys, who get only medium shots, and the coach, whose only close-up is in profile

and clearly intended to show his arrogance, as he laughs off Viola's request to be allowed to try out for the boys' team.

So far, so feminist, more or less. But the scene's portrayal of a female solidarity opposed to male insensitivity and discrimination does not last long. Viola counts on the help of three friends to support her impersonation of her brother — two fellow girl soccer players, and one apparently gay male hairdresser, Paul. But the primary ways in which she "proves" her maleness draw uncritically upon the most stereotypical aspects of American masculinity, ranging from groping her crotch to using an excruciatingly awkward form of hypermasculine slang — "What up?," "You know it bro," and, addressed to a woman in a bar, "Foxy momma" — to asserting her sexual potency through the display of what appear to be former girlfriends, dressed in tight revealing clothes and in sexy high heels, in front of her male teammates at a local restaurant. Viola's "girlfriends" are in fact her soccer friends, and all of them are being coached in their performances by Paul. But in spite of these faint elements of solidarity, the scene not only defines masculine behavior as aggressive, rude, and sexually harassing, but it also naturalizes that behavior as an essential part of what being male is all about. As the climax to the parade of "girlfriends," who have been patronized and slapped on the butt, Sebastian's actual girlfriend Monique shows up and thinks that Viola is in fact Sebastian. Monique has already been established as an insensitive bitch who is relentlessly pursuing Sebastian, and by humiliating her in front of the entire restaurant (Viola proclaims that "When my eyes are closed I see you for what you truly are — which is uuugly!"), Viola earns the applause and approval of her teammates, who include her own love interest, Duke. After this "taming" of the unruly woman, the males now address her as "man," and Duke tells her, "You're officially my idol now, man." After their assistance at the restaurant, Viola's friends reappear in a helpful way only once more, at the carnival, where they help Viola escape Monique's attentions. Thus, although Viola's success as a male impersonator does rely significantly on her friends' support, the movie restricts the implications of such support by its increasing focus on Viola's growing love for Duke and the complications that ensue once Sebastian returns from London and turns up at Illyria.

The name of the restaurant — Cesario's — in fact calls attention to a significant difference between *10 Things* and *Twelfth Night*. Cesario is the pseudonym Viola uses in the play, because she does not pretend to be her brother but rather invents a new persona for herself as a "eunuch" who can sing to the duke: ". . . for I can sing, / And speak to him in many sorts of music / That will allow me very worth his service" (1.2.53-55). In *She's the Man*, Viola is more constrained than Shakespeare's Viola. She has to use her brother's identity because this is the only way she will be accepted at Illyria as a possible soccer player, and her performance of "Sebastian" is marked by a hypersexual masculinity that is far removed from Shakespeare's Viola's construction of an



androgynous persona that draws on both masculine and feminine gender stereotypes. This is all the more noticeable since the film's real Sebastian is actually a rather nuanced character, one who prefers rock music to sports and who writes sensitive song lyrics. Audiences are clearly meant to ponder the irony: The girl acts like a boy! The boy acts like a girl! However, Sebastian's rare appearances do not seriously disturb the film's essentialist view of gender, especially since his "sensitivity," which appears only on the paper on which his lyrics are written, does not prevent him from dropping his trousers to prove his maleness at the climactic soccer game, an act that thrills the girls and makes his father say, "That's my boy!"

### She's the Woman

The movie avoids the potentially subversive implications of Viola's male impersonation by reminding us over and over that she is, in fact, female. Though Viola's act as "Sebastian" apparently fools everyone she meets, it is actually so inadequate that a charitable viewer can only assume that all the people around her are supposed to be blinded by their assumptions that no girl could act such a role. As Sebastian, Viola speaks in an inconsistently deeper voice that frequently shoots up the register towards a more "girly" high voice; displays inappropriately "feminine" sensitivity to feelings and injury; and seems oddly fashion-conscious, as when she notices Olivia's shoes and is surprised and pleased to hear that Olivia "got them at Anthropologie." While in real life these traits 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 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. More significantly, by interposing scenes of Viola's debutante activities with "Sebastian's" more masculine activities, the movie rarely goes more than one or two scenes without presenting Viola as a feminine, nubile, and desirable young woman. Her body-obscuring boy's clothes are regularly displaced by body-revealing dresses, and her short-hair wig comes off to remind viewers that, in fact, she has reassuringly feminine long hair — like Kat, in fact, who has long wavy blond hair that tends to be tightly tied back, but that is more loosely arranged in her more "feminine" scenes at Club Skunk and at the prom.

Even in Viola's triumphant debut as a girl player on the boys' team, the film reminds us that she is still not quite one of the boys. After winning acceptance as a "man's man," Viola is able to earn a place on the first-string boys' varsity team, but only because she has been coached by Duke. The team's coach, played by the English former professional soccer player Vinnie Jones, routinely addresses his team demeaningly as "ladies," intimidating them with his special brand of "hard man"

masculinity.<sup>9</sup> Viola's performance as her brother is dramatically unmasked at the game between her school (Cornwall) and her brother's school (Illyria), but the coach, rather against character, tears up the rule book that forbids girls to play on boys' teams and declares, "We don't discriminate based on gender!" However, though she plays a central role in the game, Viola makes no goals. Instead, she assists Duke to one goal and, through a slightly miscalculated foul shot, enables him to make the game-winning goal, as well. She may be good, but even within this team sport Viola supports the more effective male player, rather than becoming a star herself.

Between the game and the final shot, Viola makes her debut at the Stratford Country Club ball — no class-mixing prom for this movie. Dramatically late, Viola finally appears in the spotlight with Duke, dressed in a light green gown that reveals her figure extremely well, especially her cleavage. Once again, we are reminded that Viola is really female, a fact that Duke underscores right before the ball when he tells her, "Everything would be a whole lot easier if you just stayed a girl!" Viola says "I promise." The fluidity of gender so marked in *Twelfth Night* — in which Viola is never out of her boy's clothes — is firmly tamped down here in a strictly conventional and upper-middle class vision of female adulthood as sexually attractive, privileged, and heterosexual. This vision dissolves into the movie's final shot — Viola playing with the boys as a girl, her long hair flying — a filmic technique that suggests she may be able to move between her tomboy athleticism and her more conventionally feminine identity with ease. However, the final shot also suggests a vision of girls' athletics in which separate teams — and, implicitly, Title IX — will be unnecessary, as the best female players will rise to the top and be able to compete with even the toughest males. Such a vision, of course, endorses an individualistic, male-dominated hierarchy and relies on the antifeminist dismissal of sisterhood and its insistence that women must compete on men's terms and rely on themselves in order to succeed.

For both *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, Shakespeare's plays are sources for romantic narratives that simplify the plays' far more complex and disturbing representations of gender, sexuality, and class into apparent celebrations of "girl power" and the opportunities today's girls enjoy for personal fulfillment. In the process, they also employ media stereotypes of second and third-wave feminism, playing one against the other to support essentialist views of gender and identity, and to suggest that late 1990s and early 2000s America is, indeed, a postfeminist society. In these fantasies of upper-middle-class American education, the principles and victories of second-wave feminism are portrayed as irrelevant to the current generation of girls; and third-wave feminism is reduced to being able to play with the boys while also remaining attractively girlish enough to guarantee romantic male attention. Given the influence films have in helping to shape teenage

female identity, these representations of feminism deserve close attention, especially when they so clearly demonstrate how much the pinnacle of achievement in our society remains to be "the man." *10 Things* and *She's the Man*, released seven years apart from one another, show graphically how Shakespeare's work continues to be invoked as the basis for conservative critiques of feminism that oversimplify feminist debates and market the movement as, at best, irrelevant, and at worst, harmful for teenage girls.

### Notes

1. *She's the Man* was written by the same screenwriting team as *10 Things*, but has a different director and was produced from a different studio.
2. Two examples I have in mind are Jennifer L. Pozner's article "'The 'Big Lie': False Feminist Death Syndrome, Profit, and the Media" (2003) and Ednie Kaeh Garrison's article "Contests for the Meaning of Third Wave Feminism: Feminism and Popular Consciousness" (2004).
3. These critics include Richard Burt, in "Afterword: Te(en) Things I Hate about Girlene Shakesploitation Flicks in the Late 1990s, or Not-So-Fast Times at Shakespeare High" (2002); Melissa J. Jones, in "'An Aweful Rule': Safe Schools, Hard Canons, and Shakespeare's Loose Heirs" (2004); Janet Badia, in "'One of Those People Like Anne Sexton or Sylvia Plath': The Pathologized Woman Reader in Literary and Popular Culture" (2005); Alexander Leggatt, "Teen Shakespeare: *10 Things I Hate About You* and *O*" (2006); Monique L. Pittman, "Taming *10 Things I Hate About You*: Shakespeare and the Teenage Film Audience" (2006); and Sarah Hentges, in her 2006 book *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film*.
4. In act 5, scene 2, the Widow tells Katherine that "Your husband, being troubled with a shrew, / Measures my husband's sorrow by his woe. / And now you know my meaning" (29-31).
5. See act 1, scene 1.
6. In this respect, *10 Things* resembles what the college students I teach seem to regard as *the* teen movie, John Hughes's *The Breakfast Club* (1985). That movie's scene of mutual confession and comfort is one of the few scenes in the film that is played with no music at all.
7. Even Joan Jett and the Blackhearts fits the template of a male band with a female singer; however, Joan Jett plays guitar and cultivates a tough-girl image more like that of the Riot Girrl bands.
8. Kat's action recalls the decidedly masculine drag-racing typical of other teen movies. As one who grew up in the eighties, my point of reference here is *Grease* (1978), where women cheer on the men, who always race the cars. A more recent update of drag-racing is the 2001 movie, *The Fast and the Furious* and its sequels, marketed with exactly this kind of macho auto combat.

9. In his soccer career, Jones displayed exceptional brutality and earned red and yellow cards for fouls with great frequency. Jones has translated his image as a tough fighter on the pitch into a number of film roles, most notably in *Lock, Stock, and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998) and *Snatch* (2000).

### Online Resources

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*Basic Instinct*. Internet Movie Database. <http://www.imdb.com/find?s=all&q=basic+instinct>.

Barenaked Ladies Homepage. <http://www.bnlnmusic.com/default2.asp>.

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*Dangerous Liaisons*. Internet Movie Database. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094947/>.

*Fatal Attraction*. Internet Movie Database. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093010/>.

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