But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners. (Merchant of Venice, 2.3.18-19)

The aim of this chapter is to show how some of the women characters in Shakespeare challenge dominant fathers and, thereby a powerful patriarchal ideology. Patriarchy takes different forms and is portrayed with varying degrees of emphasis in Shakespeare. In Shakespeare’s England a daughter was considered a father’s a property, and the father had the right to pass her on to the man he thinks would best serve his need. In this context the rebellion of a daughter and her refusal to confirm to her father’s wishes has serious consequences in the Shakespearean text. The characters taken up for discussion in this chapter are Rosalind in As You Like It, Jessica in Merchant of Venice, Hermia in A MidSummer Night's Dream, Cordelia in King Lear, Desdemona in Othello and Juliet in Romeo and Juliet.

It is seen that Rosalind, Jessica and Hermia do not suffer any serious consequences for their rebellion, more so, because though they rebel, they do not pose any serious threat or challenge to the society. By the end of the play they are more than willing to submit to the patriarchal order. On the other hand, Cordelia, Desdemona and Juliet have to face serious consequences, because all of them defy their fathers by trying to assert their rights as women with independent choice and decision making ability. They refuse to be their father’s puppets and their rebellion results in a disruption of the existing social order.

Shakespeare's Rosalind is an active and daring, as well as intelligent and witty, woman. The independent woman we see in As You Like It is not there at
all. Linda Bamber has noted that in Shakespearean comedy, "insofar as the Self is within drama and human, it counts itself a member of the dominant social group" (27) and hence male, whereas "the feminine is Other to society's rules and regulations, to its hierarchies of power, and to the impersonality of its systems and sanctions" (28). Thus Rosalind has no identity except as the Other to a socially constituted, male Self; she is the periphery brought centrestage. Finally she rejoins the ranks of women in her society-limits, and her protean character to the traditional roles of daughter and wife in what Peter Erickson calls a "benevolent Patriarchy."(13) The engaging heroine of As You Like It simply disappears, disintegrates into the improved, but nonetheless re-established, masculine domain of the court and marriage.

In As you Like It Rosalind has no male rival, it is her play. But Shakespeare does not name it after her. She is energetic, effective, active, and verbally brilliant; by her energy, wit and combativeness she can successfully control events in the world around her including the world around men. She is banished by her uncle and has the courage to accept exile. She goes to the forest in search of her love Orlando. But she is also aware of the threats she will have to face as a woman. Therefore she decides to assume male costume as a strategy to avoid the normal vulnerability to male forces, as she admits:

Alas what danger will it be to us,
Maid’s as we are to travel forth so far
Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold (1.3.108-10)
The male costume empowers her and expands her identity giving her the freedom of action so that she can play both male and female roles. Yet the costume is problematic. Though it gives her the freedom of action and empowers her to take the initiative with Orlando, it simultaneously serves as a protective device, which temptingly offers excessive security, even invulnerability. In order to love, Rosalind must reveal herself directly to Orlando, thereby making herself vulnerable. She must give up the disguise and appear – as she ultimately promises Orlando---‘human as she is’ (5.2.67).

Celia who also rebels against her father by accompanying Rosalind to exile, looks at the pastoral space as an opportunity rather than punishment: “Now go we in content/ To, and not to banishment”(1.3.137-38). This liberty implies overcoming the restrictions of the female role. Although Rosalind and Celia escape from the patriarchal fold and are allowed to flourish for some time they are made to accept the traditional female role at the end of the play. The temporary nature of the male disguise affirms that disruption is temporary, that what has turned topsy-turvy will be restored. Rosalind does enjoy the flexibility and freedom that comes with the assumption of the masculine role. In the Forest of Arden, it is her decisions and initiative which control the progress of the play. But she constantly draws attention towards her disguise and she never reconciles her exterior (male) and interior (female) categories. Rosalind willingly confides to Celia that she remains a woman despite the male costume:
In my heart

Lie there what hidden woman’s fear there will-?

We’ll have a swashing and marital outside….

(1.3.118-20)

When her spirits are weary she exclaims: “I could find in my heart to disgrace my man’s apparel and to cry like a woman. But I must comfort the weaker vessel, as doublet and hose ought to show itself courageous to petticoat; therefore courage good Aliena” (2.4.3-6). Rosalind has to make constant efforts to overcome her female weakness and to ‘behave’ like a man. In Act 3.2. she again reminds Celia: “Good my complexion! Dost thou think though I am caparisoned like a man I have a doublet and a hose in my disposition” (194-196); and “Do you not know I am a woman” (249). By virtue of the costume, Rosalind has access to both male and female attributes; however neither Rosalind nor the play questions the conventional categories of masculine and feminine. The liberation that Rosalind experiences in the forest also has within it the conservative countermovement by which, as the play returns to the normal world, she is reduced to the traditional woman who is subservient to men. Rosalind is shown working out in advance the terms of her return. Still protected by her disguise she allows herself to come closer to the decisive moment. She instructs Orland to woo her: “come woo me, woo me … What would you say to me now, and I were your very very Rosalind?” (4.1.65-67). She subsequently tells Orland what to tell in a wedding rehearsal while she practises yielding:
Orlando: I take thee Rosalind for wife
Rosalind: I might ask for your commission; but I do take thee Orlando for thy husband. (4.1.129-30)

Though Rosalind teases Orlando with the wife’s power to make him a cuckold, it is clear to the audience, if not yet to Orlando, that Rosalind’s flaunting of her role as a disloyal wife is not a genuine threat. She may playfully delay the moment when she becomes a wife, but we are reassured that, once married, she will in fact be faithful. The uncertainty concerns not her loyalty but Orlando’s as is indicated by her sudden change of tone when he announces his departure: Alas dear love, I cannot lack thee two hours” (4.1.170). Her exuberance and control collapses in fear of his betrayal: “Ay, go your ways, go your ways; I knew what you would prove” (173-74). Her previous wit notwithstanding, the wooing scene is less a demonstration of Rosalind’s power than an exercise in vulnerability. She is once again consigned to anxious waiting of tardy men: “But why did he swear he would come this morning, and comes not?” (3.4.18-19).

Thus, Rosalind’s youthful rebellion is rendered harmless as there are constant reminders in the course of the play that order would be restored. Moreover Shakespeare renders Rosalind’s initiatives harmless by confining her activity only to love matters, which was regarded as the proper feminine sphere. Rosalind is in a political exile but she shows no disposition to meddle in politics; it is not through her agency that her father is restored in his rightful place. Her wit and satire are narrowly directed at two classes of beings—the sighing lovers and
women. In the course of her fun she usually talks about inconstancy, contrariness, jealousy, unfaithfulness, all of which belong to the traditional feminine sphere. Celia tells her: “We must have your doublet and hose pluck’d over your head, and show the world what the bird had done to her own head” (4.1.206-8). We know all along that Rosalind herself is the butt of her own jokes, being herself lovesick and female.

The final scene of the play, orchestrated by Rosalind, demonstrates her power in a paradoxical way. She is the architect of a resolution that phases out the control she has wielded and prepares the way for the patriarchal status quo. She accedes to the process by which, in the transition from courtship to marriage, power passes from the female to the male: the man is no longer the suitor who serves, obeys, and begs but is the husband who commands. To each of the two men in her life – Orlando and duke senior---she declares: “To you I give myself for I am yours” (5.4.116-117). However, she is not forced to adopt the male possession: her self-taming is voluntary. From the time she assumes the disguise, it is evident that she would gladly and voluntarily relinquish her power, and her willingness to do so restores harmony in the play. Moreover Rosalind submits not only to two individual men, but also to the patriarchal society that they embody. Patriarchal normalcy is restored in the final scene of the play. The relationship between the Duke Senior and Orlando is reasserted and completed as the Duke announces the inheritance to which marriage entitles Orlando: “A land itself at large, a potent dukedom” (5.4.169). Like Rosalind, Jessica also adopts
male disguise and elopes from her father’s place. Though her role in the play is limited to a few scenes, by her rebellion she challenges the undisputed rights of patriarchy over matters of inheritance, matrimony and religion.

Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, elopes with her father’s wealth to marry her Christian lover Lorenzo. Like Portia, who is the rich heiress of Belmont, Jessica is also the daughter of the rich money lender Shylock, a Jew. But interestingly Portia does not rebel against her father even after the latter’s death. It can be argued that Jessica rebels both against the patriarchal order and against the Jewish community, represented in the play by Shylock. Like Cordelia she is immediately reabsorbed into the patriarchal fold. In the play the Jews and the women represent the marginalised section of society. In this context Jessica’s rebellion paves the way for her conversion to Christianity and facilitates her acceptance within Venetian society.

Jessica’s unhappiness at being a Jew’s daughter is evident from her first appearance in the play in Act 2 scene 2. Talking to Lancelot she refers to the house as hell. She is ashamed of her father and therefore decides to marry a Christian who would redeem her from her father’s sin:

what heinous sin is it in me
To be ashamed to be my father's child!
But though I am a daughter to his blood
I am not to his manners. O Lorenzo,
If thou keep promise, I shall end this strife,
Become a Christian and thy loving wife.   (2.3.15-20)
Shylock on the other hand, does not appear to be a good father. His only concern is his money, and his hatred for the Christians. But he trusts his daughter and unaware of her plans, he gives her the keys to the house as he goes to attend Bassanio’s feast. As Jessica bids farewell to her father her determination is very clear: “Farewell, and if my fortune be not crossed,/I have a father, you a daughter, lost” (Act.2. Sc.2).

According to her plan, Jessica disguises herself as a man and elopes with Lorenzo in Act 2 scene 2. Apart from masking her identity, her disguise also gives her necessary freedom required for this act of transgression. The most interesting part of this episode is however, her grabbing as much of her father’s wealth as she can. Like Portia, whose wealth passes to Bassanio, Jessica is also a medium to transfer the wealth of the Jew to the Christian. She hands over the casket to Lorenzo saying it is worth the pains and (35), and goes back to ‘guild’ herself with more ducats. No wonder that Lorenzo calls her: “wise, fair and true”

Shylock is shocked by the rebellion of his own ‘flesh and blood’. According to Valerie Traub “Jessica’s secret marriage, made worse by her theft of money and conversion to Christianity, signifies the loss of Shylock’s masculinity” (139). Jessica’s act however is not looked at as transgressive by the Christian males. Salarino sees more difference between Shylock and Jessica than between jet and ivory. Because Jessica deserts her father and converts into Christianity, her rebellion is not seen as devious by the larger society. After this
we see Jessica happily married to Lorenzo and in Act iii.scene ii she betrays her father once more by disclosing his intentions towards Antonio:

he would rather have Antonio's flesh
Than twenty times the value of the sum
That he did owe him; and I know, my lord,
If law, authority, and power deny not
It will go hard with poor Antonio.  

What Jessica does not realise is that her father, aware of the hypocrisy of the Christians, uses that opportunity to embarrass the Venetians and their law. He challenges the ideology of the court not by seeking membership of the power-wielding class but by a power of his own—the power of money. It is this power which she subconsciously tries to contest or even appropriate.

Thus, Jessica’s rebellion against her father does not give her any freedom of action. But she does question a father’s rights over a daughter and also asserts the fact that a daughter may not follow her father’s religion. Her rebellion provides a pretext for depriving the Jew of a part of his wealth, before he is forced to convert into Christianity and his wealth is restored to the coffers of Venice by Portia/Balthazar.

It is seen that disguise becomes a helpful weapon in the rebellion of Rosalind and Jessica. While both of them dawn the male costume to mask their identity, the male disguise also makes possible their efficacy, freeing them from social restrictions, while subduing the threat posed by their sexuality. Rosalind
and Jessica change clothes because they need to present themselves in circumstances where a woman would be rebuffed, or subjected to injury. The wearing of pants allows them a temporary escape from the patriarchal fold and a freedom to escape themselves, but this not lead to a direct challenge of the masculine order because they are content to resume their womanly duties. Even in disguise Rosalind and Jessica do not take part in any serious activity. Neither do they manipulate others nor do they deviate from the norm. By severely limiting their sphere of action, Shakespeare, mediates their assertiveness and renders them as non-threatening as their softer sisters.

*Midsummer Night’s Dream* too, relies on the inversion of gender roles. If one focuses on the women characters as the axes on which these inversions turn, alternatives to the play’s surface texts of patriarchal rule emerge. The play features contrasting depictions of female characters who are linked in their violations of socially prescribed gender norms. Hermia, for example, rebels against her father’s choice of a husband for her. Hermia’s father Egues fixes her marriage with Demetrius, who also loves her. But Hermia loves Lysander and refuses to go by her father’s choice. When all her pleas are rejected she elopes with her lover to the forest. In the forest she faces many trials and tribulations because, the magic of Puck turns Lysander against her; but she does not lose heart and puts up a brave front and is ultimately united with Lysander. Hermia’s rebellion against her father brings to light the Athenian code of marriage according to which a daughter was the father’s property. Hermia oppose her
father's choice of her suitor and refuses to marry Demetrius, whom Egues has chosen for her.

The play opens in the palace of Theseus, the Duke of Athens, where Egues arrives with a complaint against his daughter, Hermia. He says that his daughter has refused to marry the man (Demetrius) he has chosen for her. Instead she has fallen for Lysander who as Egues says had “bewitched” her bosom. He accuses Lysander of “turning her obedience into stubborn harshness”. Egues, therefore demands his right according to the ancient privilege of Athens to “dispose” his daughter. He asserts his parental authority and ownership of his daughter:

As she is mine I may dispose of her:

Which shall be either to this gentleman

Or to her death; according to our law… (1.1. 42-44)

Thesues, advices Hermia to be good to her father because without him she has no identity. A daughter, as Thesues says, is her father’s imprint and should always be indebted to him:

One that compos’d your beauties: yea, and one

To whom you are but as a form in wax,

By him imprinted, and within his power

To leave the figure, or disfigure it. (ibidem 48-51)

A daughter is just a wax statue, soft and fragile, moulded by the father. So she has to take the shape her father gives her and should not try to grow
independently. Hermia however protests and defends Lysander saying that he is also as worthy and good a gentleman as Demetrius, whom her father has chosen for her. Thesues agrees to it but also says that since her father does not approve of Lysander she cannot marry him against her father’s wishes. As a daughter Hermia just wishes that her father looked through her eyes and try to understand her feelings for Lysander. But she expects too much from him as Thesues says that it is a daughter who should look through her father’s eyes and not vice versa. Thus a daughter should see the world as she is taught to see and should not try to exercise her mind or choice. But Hermia would not give up; finding her pleas fall on deaf ears, she wants to know "the worst that may befall me in this case / If I refuse to wed Demetrius.” The Duke says that according to law of Athens if she refuses to marry the man her father has chosen for her, she has to either die or don the livery of a nun. But Hermia refuses to yield and says she would face the consequences of her rebellion, but will not marry Demetrius.

To escape punishment Hermia elopes with Lysander to the wood, and when they are in the woods a mishap occurs because of which Lysander turns against her. This is because of the mischief of Puck, a fairy, who pours the nectar of a magic flower (love potion) on the eyes of Lysander’s and later Demetrius, both men fall in love with Helena, Hermia’s friend. Unable to understand the change in her lover, Hermia at first thinks Lysander is teasing her. When she realizes that Lysander's professions of love for Helena are earnest, she turns her anger on her friend, accusing her of stealing away her true love.
When Puck realises his mistake he pours the love potion again on Lysander's eyes to break the spell. Lysander again shows his love for Hermia, she forgives him and accepts what has happened as a strange dream. In Act 4 the four lovers are discovered by Egeus in the wood. Demetrius says that he now loves Helena, and so Hermia’s marriage to Lysander is approved by Theseus and Egeus. After this, Hermia does not speak again until the end of the play. Thus, Hermia rebels against her father and questions his right. She is defiant and sticks to her decision till the end. She escapes punishment for her defiance only because Demetrius refuses to marry her, as he has realised his love for Helena. The order in the play is restored and the lovers are united. It all happens because of the magic flower and the trick of Puck, the fairy.

Although the different lovers are assisted by Puck and Oberon, the plot is laid by the characters themselves. Hermia deceives her father to secure Lysander as her spouse, and Helena deceives both her friends, Hermia and Lysander as well as Demetrius, in order to try and win her love. Both women boldly pursue their causes in defiance of patriarchal authority: they are ambitious and willing to engage in subversion to contest the patriarchal order.

It is seen that these women who are apparently free in courtship, defy their fathers and assert themselves by choosing their own marriage partners. But by taking themselves off the pedestal these maids move toward and necessitate their subordination as wives. It paves the way for their domestication by silence, by removal of disguise, and their possession by their husbands.
One can also notice a difference in the treatment and consequences of the father and daughter relationship in the Tragedies and The Comedies. In the plays discussed above the daughter’s choice of a husband does extend beyond the father’s range; and when it does extend vastly beyond the father’s range, as in the case of Jessica and Shylock, the results are tragic, for the father. But in the tragedies, the daughter’s revolt against their fathers’ wills has terrible consequences. In the plays discussed in the following section, the daughters marry someone far beyond her father’s range, someone who challenges his socio-political security. Thus we see that Romeo’s family is the age old enemy of Juliet’s family; Brabantio finds Othello repugnant as a son-in-law; France is inevitably under suspicion as rival or enemy of Lear’s England, which he indeed invades later in the play. Under these circumstances as pointed out by Charles Frye “Father’s cannot or will not think to extend their line through their daughters” (*Woman’s Part* 298). When these daughters fail to comply with their father’s wishes tragedy begins. When their masculine self–image is challenged, the fathers descend into rage, tyranny and even madness. In these plays the power of the father is limited and the plots explore the ramifications of the daughter’s rebellion of the father’s will. Thus these rebellious daughters have to face terrible consequences.

The rebellion of the daughters is not taken very seriously in the comic world, but it assumes serious dimension in the tragic world. Cordelia, *In King Lear*, does not comply with her father’s demand for a performance of devotion, and thereby offers an assertive rejection of Patriarchal authority. Lear has
arranged for the division of his kingdom between his three daughters in order that he may abdicate and live out his last years with Cordelia, the youngest. The divisions have been made but Lear wants to satisfy a strange whim before he makes a proclamation. Therefore he arranges for a public drama to weigh his daughters’ love. Lear, who is pleased by the effusive speeches of Goneril and Regan, is enraged and humiliated by Cordelia’s silence, her reticence is totally unexpected. Lear becomes furious and impetuously divides his kingdom between Goneril and Regan. Cordelia, disinherited and banished is rejected by the Duke of Burgandy, earlier an ardent suitor. The King of France recognises however that ‘she herself is a dowry’ and takes her off to be his wife. Cordelia thus embodies the paradoxical qualities of a good and disobedient woman. But it is interesting to note that she rebels against her father only to be reabsorbed into the patriarchal fold by her marriage to the King of France. King Lear opens with Cordelia’s culpable silence:

    Lear: What can you now say to draw
    A third more opulent than your sister’s? speak,

    Cordelia: Nothing, my lord.

    Lear: Nothing
    Cordelia: Nothing
    Lear: Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.(1.1.84-89).

Cordelia’s silence here is not a mark of virtue, but a denial of filial affection. For her silence, however, is the only way of subversion. Her refusal to play her role in Lear’s public drama is not a statement on her personal autonomy or rights of
her individual will. She only asserts her right to retain a part of her love for her would be husband:

Good my Lord,

You have begot me, bred me, lov’d me: I

Return those duties back as are right fit,

Obey you, love you, and most honour you….

Haply when I shall wed,

That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry

Half my love with him, half my care a duty:

Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,

To love my father all. (1.1. 94-102)

Her refusal to play her role in Lear’s public drama dramatizes the outrage of her denial of conformity. She fails to appreciate the pomp and ceremony of the scene, that her father is also their king. She treats him like an ordinary father, thereby demeaning his public stature. Although it is Lear’s vanity which is hurt, he ensures that she loses all that he is capable of giving as father and as king. Lear confuses the role of father and King; he believes that his daughters are an extension of his Kingdom, not free thinking individuals. That Cordelia is reabsorbed into the patriarchal family by marriage is incidental.

But by resisting her father and asserting her right Cordelia breaks the harmony of the play which is restored by her forgiveness and death at the end. Cordelia is banished and goes to France with her husband and does not appear
until the fourth act. Her absence from the rest of the play is a clear example of the prototypical ‘Shakespearean woman’: absent, silent or dead. When she reappears she is no longer a transgressor, but an obedient daughter to Lear. Cordelia’s plainness and sincerity is fully emphasised when she asserts the reason of her being cast away:

It is no vicious blot, murther or foulness,
No unchaste action, or dishonour’d step,
That hath deprived me of your grace and favour,
But even for want of that for which I am richer,
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not, though not to have it
Hath lost me in your liking. (1.1.226-232)

However she does not show anger, hate or any other bad feeling for the way her father’s treats her at the beginning of the play, but forgiveness and love:

No blown ambition doth our arms incite
But love, dear love, and our aged father’s right
Soon may I hear and see him!(4.4.27-30)

Lear fears that Cordelia cannot love him: “You have some cause, they have not” (4.7.75), he says referring to the ill-treatment by her sisters. But Cordelia demurs with “No cause, no cause”. Her love and forgiveness is presented in sharp contrast with the villainy of her sisters. Her return brings changes to the disrupted world as evil is destroyed. However she does not find a better end. She is
imprisoned together with her father by Edmund. Cordelia’s only care is her father, and her father’s only care is his beloved daughter. In the last scene Lear, with dead daughter Cordelia in his arms, recognises her as a truly virtuous woman: “What is’t thou say’st? Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle and low – an excellent thing in women” (5.3.271). Ironically it is soft because it is dead. While Cordelia is reconciled with her father and her death redeems Lear, the relationship of Desdemona and Brabantio achieves no reconciliation.

Desdemona’s rebellion in Othello appears to have a more serious dimension because she challenges most strongly the traditional role expected of a woman by her elopement and subsequent marriage with the Moor—Othello. Desdemona’s act of disobedience is portrayed as a “gross revolt” more so because the husband she chooses is a Moor. Desdemona marries for love, but the men in the play—Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio—describe her act of transgression in terms of her sexuality, which was a common charge against women who try to question the traditional norms. Desdemona is rebellious in the sense that she goes against the grain, she secretly marries a man who is different is age, race, culture and nationality. Together she and Othello try to fight a society/culture entrenched in cynicism, racism and sexism. The principle of evil and malice in Othello is “the outraged voice…of the patriarchal social order” which kills Desdemona to “undo the breach her sexuality has created in the stable male order,” (Snow 411).

As the play begins Brabantio, Desdemona’s father, is awakened by the midnight din caused by Iago and Roderigo who want to inform him that his
daughter has eloped with the "Barbary horse," i.e., Othello. Iago tells Brabantio that “an old black ram/ Is tupping your white ewe” (1.1.89-90). Both Iago and Roderigo address him in the most incendiary terms about his daughter's disappearance--the "lascivious Moor" has spirited her off; Desdemona has "made a gross revolt, / Tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes/ In an extravagant and wheeling stranger/ Of here and everywhere (1.1.136-138)." When Brabantio comes to his senses and realizes that his daughter is not in her bed, he instinctively starts blaming his daughter and breathlessly blurts out to Roderigo:

"O unhappy girl!—
With the Moor, say'st thou?--Who would be a father!—
How did'st thou know 'twas she? --- O, she deceives me
Past thought (1.1.164-67)

His initial reaction is one of raw fury because he feels betrayed by Desdemona, and sees her act as a threat to his right as a father. He always believed his daughter to be a demure and reserved girl as he later describes her as “A maiden, never bold; / of spirit so still and quiet that her motion/ Blush'd at herself (1.3.94-96).” Therefore her boldness is beyond his imagination and he says:

O treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act. (1.1.171 -72).

Desdemona’s rebellion is seen as an assertion of her sexual self, which destabilises the male order. Brabantio feels deceived by his daughter; and
unwilling to accept that she could defy him, he shifts the blame from her to Othello. "Is there not charms," he asks Roderigo, "by which the property of youth and maidhood/ May be abus'd (1.1.171-173)?" When Roderigo answers that there are such charms, Brabantio thinks and convinces himself that “The Moor has enchanted her”. Otherwise his daughter could have never disobeyed him. When he confronts Othello in the next scene he accuses him of using foul means: “O thou foul thief, where has thou stow'd my daughter?/ Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her,/ ....Thou has practic'd on her with foul charms,/ Abus'd her delicate youth with drugs or minerals/ That weakens motion. (1.2.62-75).

The appearance of Desdemona in the next scene clears all doubt as she accepts her love for Othello in front of the Duke. As a daughter, she acknowledges her father’s contribution in her life and education but also asserts her rights and duties as a woman:

    But here’s my husband”

    And so much duty as my mother showed

    To you, preferring you before your father,

    So much I challenge, that I may profess

    Due to the Moor, my Lord (1.3.183-86)

A daughter was considered a property to be passed on from a father to the husband; Desdemona here deprives her father of the right to choose a husband for her. Unable to control his daughter’s decision, Brabantio advises Othello to beware of her:
Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see.
She has deceived her father, and may thee. (1.3.289-90)

Desdemona and Othello demonstrate faith in a faithless world. To the suspicion which Brabantio cast upon Desdemona’s fidelity Othello replies: “My life upon her faith!” (i.iii.291) Though Othello’s words turn out to be ironical, we cannot doubt his words or love for Desdemona. Othello is a victim of his own emotions and Iago takes advantage of it. Iago’s jealousy against Cassio leads him to hatch a plot in which Desdemona becomes the victim.

By trying to help Cassio Desdemona again goes against the norm and tries to exert her power over her husband: “If I have any power to move you, / His present reconciliation take” (3.3.46-47). On Iago’s instigation Othello starts doubting Desdemona’s fidelity. In vain Desdemona tries to defend herself against Othello’s claim of her affair with Cassio. Othello calls Desdemona a devil and a “Strumpet” and says “she must die, else she’ll betray more men” (5.2.5). As Desdemona faces Othello’s accusations she declares “Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?” (4.2.69). Desdemona repeatedly defends herself, telling Othello that she has done nothing wrong: “O, falsely, falsely murdered” (5.2.117) and “A guiltless death I die” (5.2.121). Like Desdemona, Juliet also dies a guiltless death because she is a victim of family feud.

*Romeo And Juliet* centres on the rebellion of thirteen-year-old Juliet against her materialistic father, who, within the tradition of the times, sees himself as an absolute lord over his family. Juliet, Capulate’s daughter defies her
father by secretly marrying Romeo, the son of Montague her family’s great enemy. Capulet arranges his daughter’s marriage with Paris, a young nobleman of Verona, but Juliet does not comply with her father’s wishes. With the help of Friar Lawrence she succeeds in avoiding the marriage; but a daughter who defies her father cannot go unpunished. The order in the play is restored only by the death of the two lovers at the end, which also leads to the reconciliation of the two families. Juliet’s choice of a husband who is independent of her father’s influence proves a catalyst, though a bitter one, for the changes necessary to a revitalization of the society. According to Coppelia Kahn “The feud is an extreme and peculiar expression of patriarchal society, which Shakespeare shows to be tragically self-destructive”(84).

The culture of Verona as depicted in the play is perfectly integrated in the patriarchal system. It is a culture where the male code of honour and blood feuds are given high value. In this culture women, as Mercutio says, are only sexual objects to “raise the spirits of men”. The patriarchal culture of Verona can also be seen in the difference of treatment between sons and daughters. Romeo’s parents feel totally unconcerned about his marrying and are never in open conflict with him. Juliet’s parents, on the other hand, assert their right to determine her husband from the moment the play begins. Standing as the voice of despotic patriarchy, Capulet has always regarded his daughter’s marriage as a topic of major importance. His concern has always been to find a suitable match for his daughter. Convinced of his absolute power and right over his daughter, he
expects full submission and obedience to his decisions. Thus when the Count of Paris expresses his desire to marry Juliet, Capulet at first feels that Juliet is still very young and a “stranger” in the world because:

She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;

Let two more summers wither in their pride

Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.(1.2.9-11)

But within a couple of days he fixes Juliet’s marriage, with Paris without even bothering to ask her. Capulet considers his daughter as property, to trade or not to trade, as the “market” demands. But Juliet has already rebelled against her father by secretly marrying Romeo, the son of her family’s greatest enemy. Lady Capulet’s words as she discloses the news/order from her father to Juliet shows that marriage was in fact a gift which a father could give, according to his choice, to a daughter at the time he thinks is most appropriate:

Well, well, thou hast a careful father, child;

One who, to put thee from thy heaviness,

Hath sorted out a sudden day of joy

That thou expect’st not, nor I look’d not for.(3.4.107-110)

Indeed Juliet had never expected such a gift. The timing of the confrontation is particularly cruel. Juliet has just consummated her marriage and bade her young husband a wrenching farewell. Romeo is making his way out of the Capulet orchard even as her parents enter her room. But Juliet never ventures to reveal the true situation to her father. When Juliet staunchly disobeys and refuses to
marry Paris and asks for some more time, her father thinks her to be the most ungrateful daughter because:

How! Will she none? Doth she not give us thanks?  
Is she not proud? Doth she not count her bles’d,  
Unworthy as she is, that we have wrought  
So worthy a gentleman to be her bridegroom? (3.4.142-145)

Juliet dare not tell her father that her marriage is not possible because she is already married and, Capulet rages against her, threatens her, and berates Juliet. It shows the scalding force of a father’s rage—wave after wave of insults, threats, and curses. The quarrel escalates to the point that Capulet issues Juliet a stark ultimatum:

Graze where you will, you shall not house with me:  
Look to’t, think on’t, I do not use to jest.  
Thursday is near; lay hand on heart, advise:  
An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend;  
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die i’ the streets, (3.4.189-193)

In the marriage, a daughter is like a commodity who has to agree to be sold to the bidder her father chooses. Juliet’s rebellion is thus felt as a direct attack on his patriarchal authority. His understanding of gender roles are so fixed in his mind that any hope of compassion from him is inconceivable. The humiliating words he uses to describe his own daughter (“green-sickness carrion”, “baggage”, “disobedient wretch”, [3.5.155; 159]) shows that he treats women as
inferior beings. This is best exemplified in the character of his wife, Lady Capulet, who also feels no empathy for her daughter.

Lady Capulet has learnt to submit to her husband’s will and does not seem to have a mind of her own. Her fear of the male is manifested when she turns away from reporting Juliet’s unwillingness to marry, to her husband: “Here comes your father; tell him so yourself, / And see how he will take it at your hands” (3.5.124-125). As she has accepted the constraints of her role as a woman, she is incapable of hearing or identifying with Juliet, and makes it clear that she is blameless in Juliet’s defiance of authority. As she fully supports the patriarchal authority of her husband, she naturally rejects her own daughter: “Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word / Do as thou wilt, for I am done with thee” (3.5.202-203). Lady Capulet is seen to have internalised her submissive position in the family. In this context Juliet’s rebellion and growth into womanhood is thus seen in her refusal to remain an easily manipulated girl under her father’s thumb. The Nurse, who first appears, avant-garde in her thoughts about marriage and the legitimacy for a woman to choose her husband, also changes her mind and asks Juliet to forget Romeo and yield to her father demands.

Isolated by the events Juliet approaches Friar Lawrence for help; but she finds herself forced to yield to gender constraints when the Friar counsels her to pretend submission to her parent’s demands to marry Paris. But this is merely a trick because the Friar gives her a “distilled liquor” (3.4) which makes her swoon
and appear dead on the day of her marriage to Paris. Though she is able to escape marriage by this trick, the news of her death spreads to Romeo, who is banished on charges of murder. Romeo kills Paris and poisons himself. When Juliet wakes up from her swoon and finds Romeo dead she also stabs herself to death. Her suicide represents the culmination of her defiance to the patriarchal authority. As Capulet says at the end of the play “poor sacrifices of our enmity”(5.3.303).

In Shakespeare’s England home was the foundation of social order and marriage was a significant means of preservation of lineage and the succession of property. From this perspective the largest cause of the tragedy of the young lovers in the play rests not on their “star-crossed fate as the chorus states in the prologue, but upon the way they bring destruction upon themselves by violating the norms of society in which they lived; a society, which demanded strict filial obedience and loyalty to the traditional friendships and enemies of lineage. This society was patriarchal, a system where a father was worshiped like a God. The play seems to suggest that the tragic death of a rebellious daughter like Juliet is destined by “work of heaven” (5.3.261). As Friar Lawrence says “A great power than we can contradict / Hath thwarted our intents” (5.3.155).

Thus, it can be said that in these plays, Shakespeare concentrates on the perversity of the father’s claim to direct their daughters in marriage. The Elizabethan’s were well attuned to a father’s claims of legal and emotional interest in the daughter’s marriage. The thwarting of the father’s expectations
brings forth imprecations and diatribes of surpassing bitterness for the daughters. According to Charles Frye “the concomitant absence of any son’s” makes these play a ground for the father daughter conflict. The father’s concern of economic and emotional security, and of political control and generational extension of line, helps to dictate the father’s interest in the choice of his daughter’s marriage partner. As Frye says: “when the daughter chooses radically against the father’s will, she effectively shuts him off from patriarchal domination of the son-in-law and consequent son like extension of his powers and values.” (*The Woman’s Part* 298).

However, the father-daughter conflict is not restricted to issues of marriage alone. It is more an assertion of patriarchal will and power over the daughter(s) that is at stake. In the clash of wills between Lear and Cordelia it is the former’s vanity and the latter’s cussedness which takes centre stage rather than any other issue at hand. In the case of Egeus and Hermia too, the undesirable marriage proposal merely brings out the highhandedness of patriarchal will. In Jessica’s case, issues of race and religion are central, although after her elopement, Shylock’s cry for his ducats lends a comic edge to the whole affairs. Moreover, Jessica, by extension, becomes a part of the Venetian Christian Society which Shylock is pitted against. In Desdemona’s case the whole issue is racial: she has married an ‘outsider’ despite Othello’s military position. Had she married a fellow Venetian, one moreover of fairer skin, her father’s disinchantment would not have been so absolute. Thus Shakespeare dramatises various social issues through the frame of father-daughter conflict.