The Representations of the Construction of Male Subjectivity in *Cymbeline*

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According to the introduction in Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen’s *William Shakespeare Complete Works* (The RSC Shakespeare), *Cymbeline* is presumed to have been written in about 1610 just after *Pericles* (1608). This play was published for the first time in 1623 in the First Folio, in which this play was classified at the category of tragedy.

In 1875, Edward Dowden first categorizes this play as a romance play together with Shakespeare’s other late three plays: *Pericles, The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* (Dowden 403). Northrop Frye says that the essential elements of a romance play are adventure, death of the main characters and the exaltation of the hero. He explains about the nature of romances as follows:

...romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on. The perennially childlike quality of romance is marked by its extraordinary persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time or space. (Frye, *Anatomy*, 186)

Like Shakespeare’s other three romance plays, *Cymbeline* has some typical elements of contemporary romances. The main theme of the play is not only the adventure and death of the main characters, but also the representation of the hope for the new era. The play demonstrates the revival of patriarchal society as well as its disruption and the reunion of family and lovers after their parting.

Frances A. Yates compares Shakespeare’s late plays with the political state in England around 1610 when these plays were written.
and performed in London. Focusing on the political significance of the marriage between Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatinate of Bohemia, Yates discusses Shakespeare’s late plays including *Cymbeline* in the context of Elizabethan revival in the Jacobean era:

If this historical approach to *Cymbeline* is confirmed, it will mean that this Last Play belongs to the movement of Elizabethan revival in connection with Prince Henry and his sister, a movement which James was only half-heartedly in favour. . . . (Yates 59)

Yates considers that these romance plays represent the nostalgia for the real Golden Age of Queen Elizabeth I, which had ended several years before. It is often indicated that the people in those days expected the revival of Queen Elizabeth I and her glorious reign from Princess Elizabeth’s marriage with the Elector Palatinate Frederick, the leader of the association of Protestant princes in the Holy Roman Empire in Europe. Especially, there is the record that *The Tempest* and *The Winter’s Tale* were performed at their wedding ceremonies in February and March 1612 (Gurr 389).

However, there remains a question what kind of significance the reign of King James I actually had on the romance plays. Shakespeare’s company flourished as the King’s Men since 1603 in the Jacobean period. The plays, which reminded the audience of the past glory and embodied their hopes and desires for the future, must have important meanings to be performed. This essay studies the representations of the male characters in *Cymbeline* in relation to the climate of the Jacobean age, in particular to the monarchy and the construction of male subjectivity.

1. **The Relationship of Male Subjectivity to the Female Characters**

This play can be divided roughly into three parts: the plot of the war between Britain and Rome, the individual relationship between Imogen and Posthumus and the plot concerning the two princes of
Britain, who were abducted in their childhood. In this essay, the discussion focuses on Cymbeline, the king of Britain, and Posthumus Leonatus, husband of Princess Imogen, Cymbeline’s only daughter. The emphasis will also be placed on the representations of the construction of their male subjectivity in the play in terms of their relationship with the female characters and politics. Gordon McMullan says:

The crisis of the ‘late plays’ is always, in one way or another, a family crisis, and the breaking of deadlock in each of the plays is effected by or through women: Marina, Imogen, Perdita and Miranda unwittingly, Paulina consciously. (Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, Introduction 120)

Certainly, the female characters function in important roles in this play, as Bruce R. Smith says, “the female other takes on mythic, quasi-divine qualities appropriate to romance” (Smith 111). Imogen, who symbolizes the hope of the new era, leads the play to the happy ending, while King Cymbeline nearly causes the serious crisis in Britain because of his lack of ability to see through the reality of the situations. What is more, the women characters fulfill the important functions, influencing the construction of male subjectivity. The most remarkable aspect of the play is that in order to establish their sense of identity the male characters depend on their relationship with women.

As the definition of subjectivity, Jonathan Culler’s argument is useful:

The question of the subject is ‘what am I?’ Am I made what I am by circumstances? What is the relation between the individuality of the individual and my identity as member of a group? And to what extent is the ‘I’ that I am, the ‘subject’, an agent who makes choices rather than has choice imposed on him or her? The English word subject already encapsulates this key theoretical problem: the subject is an actor or agent, a free subjectivity that does things, as
On the basis of Culler's view, this essay defines subjectivity as the agency which enables one to judge and act by free will, which is almost but not entirely affected by cultural and social circumstances. Through the examination of the representations of Cymbeline and Posthumus’s subjectivity, this essay aims to consider the significance of this play in the context of gender and politics.

2. The Construction of Cymbeline’s Subjectivity

The play begins with two gentlemen’s dialogue about some rumors among the courtiers, which enable the audience and the readers to know two important matters of the story. One of them is that the princess of Britain named Imogen secretly married Posthumus Leonatus against her father’s will. Posthumus belongs to the class of gentleman but inherits good reputation from his father; after his death bringing up Posthumus as his page, the king had provided him with good education. The people surrounding Posthumus appreciate his personality and virtue highly, blessing his marriage to Princess Imogen wholeheartedly. However, Cymbeline, the king of Britain, did not permit their marriage because Posthumus is not socially fit to marry a princess of Britain. Moreover, the Queen, Cymbeline’s second wife, wants to marry Imogen Cloton, her son by her former marriage, in order to make him the heir of the country and to obtain influential political power herself through her influence on her son. Consequently, Imogen is imprisoned, while Posthumus is banished from Britain.

The other important issue in this play is that Cymbeline’s two princes were kidnapped and have been lost for twenty years. Regarding the disappearance of the two princes, the gentlemen in the prologue of the play accuse the carelessness of the guards at that time and the incompetence of the king’s servants to find the two princes for such a long time:
Sec. Gent. That a king’s children should be so convey’d,
So slackly guarded, and the search so slow
That could not trace them!
First Gent. Howsoe’er ’tis strange,
Or that the negligence may well be laugh’d at,
Yet is it true, sir. (1.1.63–67)

Thus the opening scene demonstrates that King Cymbeline lacks authority both as a father to control his daughter, Imogen, and as the monarch to rule his servants and his country. Moreover, because Imogen is confined by the king due to her secret marriage with Posthumus and the two princes are missing, Britain in this play faces a national crisis concerning the heir to the next throne.

Constance Jordan explores the notion of the monarch referring to the formulation of the monarch’s status in the reign in Elizabeth I:

The notion of the monarch’s status as godlike was not, in any case, fixed. Early in the reign in Elizabeth, it was formulated in such a way as to limit rather than promote absolute rule and to address not the question but the nature of the succession. Its formulation drew on the medieval notion of the monarch’s “two bodies”: a body natural and a body politic. Only latter was immune from death and therefore in a sense divine. . . . what was divine about the monarch was therefore not his person, but rather the nature of the monarchy he inherited, coextensive and coexistent with the state. It was the transtemporal office not the person of the monarch that was imbued with a numinous authority and power. (Jordan 21)

According to Jordan, in order to establish his subjectivity the monarch needs to be aware of the construction of the two bodies, the body natural and the body politic. For example, King Lear is represented by Shakespeare as the monarch who fails to recognize this reality. He misunderstands that he can keep his royal authority even if he transfers his
position as the monarch to his three daughters.

The episode of Imogen’s secret marriage suggests that Cymbeline cannot execute his authority over his daughter; he clearly fails to construct his subjectivity as father, the body natural. He imprisons Imogen, trying to recover his control over her, yet he cannot give influence upon her in a true sense until the end of the play. Comparing this play with *Pericles*, R. A. Foakes says that in *Cymbeline* “Shakespeare developed more refined ways to create dramatic worlds in which fortune and violence are controlling factors” (Foakes 186). Cymbeline tends to use his political power in the form of violence to exhibit his control, but his challenge to construct his male subjectivity through the act of violence never succeeds in this play.

On the other hand, in order to construct his subjectivity as the king of Britain, Cymbeline also needs to exercise his ability to reign over his country, embodying the body politic for the people in his country. Nevertheless, Cymbeline is portrayed as being incapable even to govern his country, while he has lost his two princes twenty years ago. It becomes apparent in the later scene that Belarius, one of Cymbeline’s former subjects, kidnapped the princes to execute his revenge on Cymbeline, who banished him from Britain without any certain reason. Not trusting Belarius’ allegiance, Cymbeline believed the two villains’ false information that Belarius had communicated secretly with Rome. This incident also indicates Cymbeline’s inability to understand his subjects, which has led to the disappearance of his two princes. Thus, Cymbeline has been unable to construct his subjectivity not only as father in the private arena but also as the king of Britain in the public sphere. From the beginning, this play suggests that Cymbeline has an unstable sense of identity both as the body natural and as the body politic.

Such instability of Cymbeline’s subjectivity is highlighted by the political crisis in Britain. In Act 3 Scene 1, Caius Lucius, a general of the Roman army, arrives at the court of Britain to urge Britain to pay tribute of the three thousand pounds to Rome. After that, the situation immediately develops into war between Rome and Britain. The direct
cause of the war is Cymbeline’s following the advice of the Queen and Cloton, not to pay tribute to Rome. Cymbeline is so much influenced by his wife that he makes a fatal mistake starting the war which sways the fate of his country.

In this scene, the Queen shows much more aggressive attitude toward the Roman messenger than King Cymbeline, who cannot take his initiative in the negotiation with Rome. The Queen strongly resists the Roman messenger’s demand for the tribute and persuades the king:

That opportunity,
Which then they had to take from’s, to resume
We have again. Remember, sir, my liege,
The kings your ancestors, together with
The natural bravery of your isle, which stands
As Neputune’s park, ribb’d and pal’d in
With Rocks unscaleable and roaring waters,
With sands that will not bear your enemies’ boats,
But suck them up to th’topmast. (3.1. 15–23)

Convinced not to submit to Rome by the Queen and Cloton, Cymbeline defiantly refuses to obey them and as the result, the war is declared against Britain by Rome (3.1. 54–69).

The monarch’s political decision, which leads the war between Britain and Rome, has a risk to kill people and change the fate of the country. Because he is in the position of the king, which has supreme power in the country, Cymbeline needs to act with great discretion for the national interests. The least he has to do is not to mix public matters with private ones. As in front of Cloton Cymbeline calls the Queen “your mother” (3.1. 40) in this scene, it seems that Cymbeline cannot draw the line between public and private affairs. Since the Queen clearly leads him to decide the war against Rome, Cymbeline’s vulnerability to the influence by his wife and his inability to see through the real situation are clearly revealed in this scene. Constance Jordan also
indicates Cymbeline’s incapacity to rule his country:

Cymbeline himself, dominated by the Queen, is witless for most of the play. The British body politic is therefore figuratively without a head and, in the imagery of plot, no more than a trunk. (Jordan 71)

Cymbeline not only cannot keep his control over his wife as her husband but also cannot function as the king who is assumed to achieve a lasting peace of his country. When the Queen loses her sanity with Cloten’s apparent death in Act 4 Scene 3, Cymbeline laments:

Again: and bring me word how ’tis with her [Queen].
A fever with the absence of her son;
A madness, of which her life’s in danger: . . .
...My queen
Upon a desperate bed, and in a time
When fearful wars point at me: her son gone,
So needful for this present. (4.3. 1–8)

Suddenly losing his only support in making decision, he is at a loss with the difficulty of dealing with the politics of Britain by himself. Shortly after this in Act 5 Scene 2, the stage direction indicates that Britain nearly loses the war to Rome and the Roman army captures Cymbeline: “The battle continues, the Britons fly, Cymbeline is taken: then enter to his rescue, Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus” (5.2). If Belarius and the two kidnapped princes did not take part in to the war, Cymbeline surely would lead Britain to the defeat in the battle.

It can be considered that the instability of the king’s subjectivity allows the vicious Queen to interfere in the public arena of politics, causing the disruption of the country brought about by the danger of the war. Cymbeline, who is indecisive and totally controlled by his wife, also cannot see through the reality in the situation, in particular, the Queen’s hidden ambition. Not only led to the war by the Queen, he
advocates the Queen’s wish to marry Imogen to Cloton so that Cloton can inherit the kingdom. Actually, the Queen schemes to have political power to control the whole country through her son by making him the king. She speaks the following aside:

…but for her [Imogen],
Where is she gone? Haply, despair hath seiz’d her:
Or, wing’d with fervour of her love, she’s flown
To her desir’d Posthumus: gone she is,
To death, or to dishonour, and my end
Can make good use of either. She being down,
I have the placing of the British crown. (3.5. 60–66)

According to the social assumptions in the play, the Queen is supposed to exist only in the private arena, relating herself to the natural body of the monarch, Cymbeline. However, the Queen does not stay in the private sphere, but interferes with Cymbeline in the public sphere. She persuades him to start the war against Rome and to make Cloton the next king of Britain. Her intervention clearly affects the politics of Britain.

In Shakespeare’s plays it is unusual for a woman character to express her desire for political power so strongly. In The Winter’s Tale, Paulina, the queen’s maid of honour, also interferes with the public sphere, by resisting King Leontes, who suspects his wife’s infidelity. However, her intervention eventually brings about the happy ending to the play. Pauline, who does not have any ambition to get political power for herself, makes Leontes feel regret for his tyrannical behavior toward Hermione. On the other hand, the Queen of Cymbeline is represented as a vicious woman and her interference with the politics merely exercises a bad influence upon the country.

In Cymbeline, the Queen does not realize her ambition to obtain the political power through her son and dies in madness. At the beginning of the last scene, Cornelius, a physician, tells Cymbeline the deceased
Queen’s last words. The Queen left word that she had never loved the king and she was just attracted to his high political position. According Cornelius,

First, she confess’d she never lov’d you: only
Affected greatness got by you: not you:
Married your royalty, was wife to your place:
Abhorr’d your person. (5.5. 37–40)

Moreover, Cornelius informs the king that she simply pretended to love the king’s daughter, Imogen, and she even tried to poison him to death. To this report, Cymbeline answers in surprise, “She alone knew this” (5.5. 40). This incident underlines his incapacity to see through the Queen’s vicious nature and ambition. Certainly, through the Queen’s death, this play criticizes women’s ambition to take the place of men and get the political power in the public arena. However, such impressive descriptions of the Queen’s ambition also remind the audience of the existence of women who desire to assert their will in the public sphere. Juliet Dusinberre says:

Shakespeare’s theatre offers . . . a consistent probing of the reactions of women to isolation in a society which has never allowed them independence from men either physically or spiritually. (Dusinberre 92)

Though the Queen depends upon her son until the end, her isolation from him leading to her death, the plot associated with the Queen shows the life of the woman who tries to refuse the control of the patriarchal society in the play.

In this play, the dangerous situation of Britain is recovered by the appearance of the two princes who were kidnapped by Belarius twenty years ago and have grown up to be brave and dignified young men. With the appearance of the princes and the miraculous victory of
Britain against Rome, most of the tragic plots in this play are settled with the happy ending appropriate for a romance play.

In the last scene, Cymbeline takes control of the situation of his country as the king and leads the story to a happy ending, resolving all problems. He decides to bring peace between Britain and Rome, achieving his reunion with his lost children, Imogen and the two princes, and thus gets the heir to the throne. He also accepts Posthumus as Imogen’s husband despite the difference in their social positions. However, what is emphasized in this scene is some miraculous power of super human being such as Jupiter and the ghost of Posthumus’s parents, which lead Britain into a new era of prosperity and glory in spite of the king’s failure. Though Cymbeline is the ruler of the country, which accidentally has won the victory over Rome, it is clear that he neither functions as the leader of the country nor as a husband who can keep wife under his control. Moreover, hope for the future is entrusted to his two princes who have led Britain to victory. Certainly, Cymbeline is given the public position as the king of Britain and his title seems to help establish his sense of identity. However, he is never described as the monarch independent of his wife’s agency, judging and acting by his own free will. It is really quite doubtful whether Cymbeline becomes aware of the human situation as King Lear does.

3. The Representation of Posthumus’s Subjectivity

This section will focus on the relationship between Imogen and Posthumus and his establishment of subjectivity. As has been mentioned, Posthumus inherits a high reputation from his father who performed military exploits under the former kings of Britain. From the beginning of the play, the people in Britain praise him for his good nature and high virtue derived from his father. They also think that his high virtue has attracted Imogen, the princess of Britain. Though Posthumus belongs to the class of gentleman, Imogen fell in love with him and married him secretly. However, even if Posthumus is virtuous and in good reputation, the man in the class of gentleman is not suitable
to marry the princess of Britain. In Act 1 Scene 1, as a result of their secret marriage, Posthumus is banished from Britain to Rome by Cymbeline, while Imogen is punished by being confined in the prison.

First of all, what is to be noted about Posthumus’s sense of self is that he finds the foundation for his subjectivity in his relationship with Imogen rather than his male social position in society or honour which he may be able to win on the battlefield. In sixteenth and seventeenth century England, a man could generally gain his sense of identity through his achievement of honour in the public arena such as the war or through gaining male controlling power over his lover or wife in the private arena. In Shakespeare’s other plays, for example, Bertram of All’s Well That Ends Well goes to the war in order to win honour. It is during their holiday from the battle that the male characters in Much Ado About Nothing are eager to conquer their lovers’ affection. In the private arena it is through the victory in the field of love that they try to win their confidence as men. Janet Adelman says:

In Cymbeline, a plot ostensibly about the recovery of trust in woman and the renewal of marriage is circumscribed by a plot in which distrust of woman is the great lesson to be learned and in which male autonomy depends on the dissolution of marriage. (Adelman 201)

As Adelman suggests most of the plot of Cymbeline is connected with the issue of women. Since Posthumus is greatly concerned with his subjectivity in the private arena, there seems to be a sign of the breakdown of the sense of values asserted by military culture in the play.

When Iachimo declares that he does not believe Imogen’s fidelity and that he can seduce any faithful woman in Rome, Posthumus is easily provoked to bet Iachimo on Imogen’s chastity. In order to justify his confidence in his control over his wife, Posthumus insists on her faithfulness intensely, trying to prove his subjectivity through her
chastity in the private arena. Before Iachimo gives Posthumus the false report about Imogen’s chastity, he says to Philario, his father’s friend in Rome:

Fear it not, sir: I would I were so sure
To win the king as I am bold her honour
Will remain hers. (2.4. 1–3)

At this point, Posthumus still has perfect confidence in his power to control Imogen’s chastity, keeping his subjectivity as her husband. Yet, these lines also suggest that, Posthumus, who married Imogen secretly in spite of King Cymbeline’s opposition, seems to have a serious problem with constructing his political identity. In constructing the firm connection with Imogen in the private arena, he comes to lose the king’s trust in his loyalty as well as the chance to acquire the stable position in the public arena. That is to say, the position as Imogen’s husband becomes the only basis for Posthumus to establish his sense of identity on. Because of the lack of his sense of self in the public arena, he can do nothing but depend on his position as Imogen’s husband.

However, it is necessary to note that the wager between Posthumus and Iachimo has a possibility to put Imogen in danger of losing her chastity regardless of intention. Even if Iachimo never harms Imogen directly, Imogen is thus involved in her husband’s impulsive conduct. Northrop Frye explains about the importance of women’s chastity as follows:

One can, of course, understand and emphasis on virginity in romance on social grounds. In the social condition assumed, virginity is to a woman what a honor is to a man, the symbol of the fact that she is not a slave. (Frye, The Secular, 73)

Since Posthumus’s action may lead to disgrace Imogen’s honour seriously, his decision to risk Imogen’s chastity in the wager can be counted
as a kind of sexual violence against her.

What is more, the wager on Imogen’s chastity also provided the occasion for Posthumus to confirm that he has power to control his wife’s sexuality. For, Iachimo, who does not believe Posthumus’s good reputation from the beginning of their meeting, seems to find the clue to destroy Posthumus’s sense of self in this wager:

This matter of marrying his king’s daughter, wherein he must be weighed rather by her value than his own, words him (I doubt not) a great deal from the matter. (1.5. 12–15)

Right after this, when Iachimo meets Posthumus in Rome for the first time, Iachimo just insists that he does not believe the height of Imogen’s great virtue. By dismissing his belief in Imogen he irritates Posthumus persistently, comparing Imogen with Italian women or jewels. Yet, Iachimo gradually changes the matter of their talk from Imogen’s chastity to Posthumus’s confidence in his control over his wife. When Iachimo proposes the wager to Posthumus, he reveals his more interest in Posthumus’s confidence rather than in Imogen’s fidelity:

I dare thereupon pawn the moiety of my estate, to your ring, which in my opinion o’ervalues it something: but I make my wager rather against your confidence than her reputation. And to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world. (1.5. 105–110)

Thus, women are merely instruments for Iachimo to gain privilege over other self-confident men like Posthumus. On the other hand, Posthumus, who is highly praised as a noble gentleman at the beginning of the play, is easily provoked by Iachimo and finally says:

...if you make your voyage upon her, and give me directly to understand you have prevail’d, I am no further your enemy; she is
Just before these lines, Posthumus professes himself as “her [Imogen’s] adorer” (1.5. 65–6) and represents her as “the gift of the gods” (1.5. 82). Nevertheless, any respect for Imogen’s sensibility is not implied in Posthumus’s speeches. Posthumus tries to construct his sense of identity by controlling her sexuality. At this point, Imogen is only treated just as a medium through which men try to prove their confidence in their power to control women. Even if Posthumus expresses his respect and love for Imogen in words, ironically he resembles Iachimo in that they regard Imogen as a medium.

However in Act 2 Scene 4, in which Posthumus thinks that he has lost the bet on Imogen’s chastity, he loses his sense of identity, deprived of his controlling power as husband. He totally believes Iachimo’s vicious lie that Imogen has fallen into Iachimo’s temptation and commits adultery with him. Greatly despaired over Imogen’s supposed betrayal, Posthumus curses all women in the world:

Is there no way for man to be, but women  
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards,  
And that most venerable man, which I  
Did call my father, was I know not where  
When I was stamp’d. Some coiner with his tools  
Made me a counterfeit; yet my mother seem’d  
The Dian of that time: so doth my wife  
The nonpareil of this. O vengeance, vengeance!  
...—for there’s no motion  
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm  
It is the woman’s part: ...  
All faults that name, nay, that hell knows, why, hers  
In part, or all: but rather all.... (2.4. 153–180)

Even if Imogen’s adultery is Iachimo’s complete lie, Posthumus’s belief
in Imogen’s betrayal leads him to lose his trust in womanhood. His assumed failure in controlling his wife’s sexuality leads to his loss of his self-identity in the private arena as well.

After this scene, Posthumus commands his servant, Pisanio, to assassinate Imogen and disappears from the stage until Act 5. After a long absence, when he appears on the stage, he regrets that he made Pisanio kill Imogen on his impulse of anger. He swears himself to atone for killing Imogen because of her “little faults” (5.1.12) by fighting as a soldier of the British army in the war against Rome, which has broken out just after his arrival at Rome.

In Shakespeare’s play, men like Posthumus, who cannot establish their male subjectivity in the private arena, seek to found their self-identity on the basis of honour by winning victory in the battlefield. In *Troilus and Cressida*, Troilus, a prince of Troy, who has lost the foundation of his subjectivity Cressida’s betrayal, also tries to reconstruct his sense of identity in the war against Greece. In the case of Posthumus, however, he desires to fight for the victory of Britain not to find the foundation of his subjectivity but simply to atone for his sin against his wife:

...I am brought hither
Among th’ Italian gentry, and to fight
Against my lady’s kingdom: ’tis enough
That, Britain, I have kill’d thy mistress: peace,
I’ll give no wound to thee: therefore, good heavens,
Hear patiently my purpose. I’ll disrobe me
Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself
As does a Briton peasant: so I’ll fight
Against the part I come with: so I’ll die
For thee, O Imogen, even for whom my life
Is, envy breath, a death: (5.1. 17–27)

Now that Posthumus finds death preferable to escaping from his sorrow
over Imogen’s death, he does not consider the war provides a chance to reconstruct his self-identity. Having led Britain to victory, he transforms himself into a Roman again to become a prisoner of war, so that he can search for some suitable place to die (5.3. 64–83). Death is “th’ sure physician” (5.4. 7) for the sorrow of Posthumus:

Most welcome bondage; for thou art a way,
I think to liberty: yet am I better
Than one that’s sick o’ th’ gout, since he had rather
Groan so in perpetuity than be cur’d
By th’ sure physician, Death; who is the key
T’ unbar these locks. (5.4. 3–8)

Such a positive way of thinking about death makes a contrast with the death represented in Shakespeare’s problem plays. For example, in Measure for Measure, Claudio wants to escape from death, persuading his sister, Isabella, to beg Angelo for his life. Posthumus, who simply seeks to die for his atonement not to construct his self-identity in the public arena, is an unusual man among Shakespeare’s characters. He puts a special emphasis on the significance of his establishing his subjectivity only in the private arena.

4. Conclusion

This essay dealt with the representations of the construction of male subjectivity in Shakespeare’s Cymbeline in the context of the female characters and politics. The discussion focused on especially King Cymbeline of Britain and Posthumus Leonatus. In this play, both men depend on the female characters, the Queen and Princess Imogen, in order to establish their sense of identity.

In the case of Cymbeline, he is portrayed as the monarch who can construct his subjectivity neither as the body natural nor the body politic. As he cannot control his daughter, who married Posthumus secretly at the beginning of the play, he has never resisted the vicious
Queen's interference in the public sphere of politics. The instability of the king's subjectivity also provokes the war against Rome, which is a serious national crisis in Britain. Cymbeline, who cannot see through the Queen's hidden ambition, easily follows her advice in all aspects. Eventually, Cymbeline is never able to establish his male subjectivity both as a father and as a monarch, who is independent from his wife's agency. He always depends on the private existence of such people as the Queen and his son.

On the other hand, Posthumus is a character who changes his outward identity most frequently among all the characters. Whenever he travels back and forth between Britain and Rome, he disguises himself as British or Roman. However, despite all these changes in his appearance, it is his relationship with Imogen in the private arena that is always the foundation of Posthumus's subjectivity. As he has never placed a special emphasis on the establishment of his subjectivity in the public arena such as the war, the representation of the construction of Posthumus's subjectivity seems to suggest the breakdown of the sense of values which is supported by military culture in the play.

In Shakespeare's earlier plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It* and *The Merchant of Venice*, mainly female characters tend to depend on their romantic relationships with male characters in order to construct their sense of self. The heroines in these plays similarly have their own free will so as to find their lovers by themselves and persist in their love until the end of the play. Certainly, these plays have different kinds of endings; Juliet dies in the final act, while Rosalind and Portia have a happy ending with their marriage. The difference may suggest the limitations of the representation of women's free will in the Elizabethan era.

In *Cymbeline* both Cymbeline and Posthumus try to construct their subjectivity on the basis of their relationship with women. That is to say, the male characters have the same tendency to construct their subjectivity as the women do in Shakespeare's earlier plays. The similar representations of the construction of male subjectivity can also be seen
in Shakespeare’s other late plays in general. Such transition of the representations of male subjectivity suggests the transformation of the traditional sense of value taking place during the Jacobean era.

Works Cited

1. Text

2. Critics

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—143—