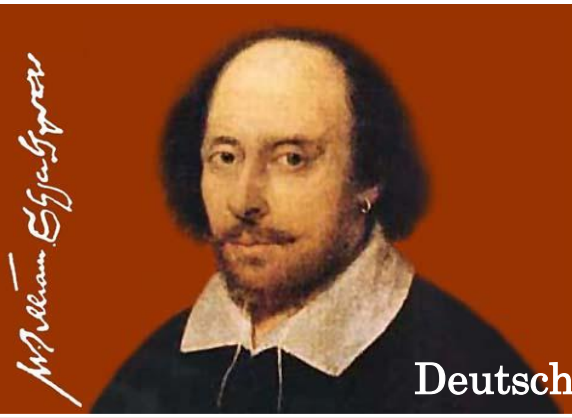
Shakespeare Seminar



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by

LORRAINE RUMSON

"I'm Only Cryptic and Machiavellian 'Cause I Care": Taylor Swift as a Poet

At the height of the media cycle for Taylor Swift's Eras Tour, her record-breaking album *The Tortured Poets Department*, and her general pop cultural dominance, a trend emerged of articles that compared Taylor Swift to Shakespeare. "Taylor Swift is a literary giant," wrote Jonathan Swift in 2023. "Should Taylor Swift be taught alongside Shakespeare? A professor of literature says yes," read a headline in *The Conversation* in 2024. As the article in *The Conversation* notes, Swift herself is a Shakespeare enthusiast, and Semler quotes an interview in which she claimed she "love[s] Shakespeare as much as the next girl" (Semler). This rhetorical move of comparing Swift to Shakespeare is generally positioned as being about Taylor Swift's songwriting skill and her talent as a poet. Semler describes teaching her album *Midnights* in relation to Shakespeare's sonnets, due to their overlapping methods – self-reflective writing and use of thematic clusters (Semler). Swift's writing style has even made it possible for a Buzzfeed community member to make a Buzzfeed quiz asking "Who said it – Taylor Swift or Shakespeare?" When instructors pose such comparisons or headlines ask such questions, they challenge their audiences' expectations about both Taylor Swift and Shakespeare. What if she really were a Shakespeare-level poet? Could it be that the blonde girly pop singer's words are indistinguishable from the Bard's, when context is removed? Conversely, is it possible that Shakespeare could be as delightfully emotional and personal as Taylor Swift?

When articles compare Taylor Swift with Shakespeare, they are not just suggesting their stylistic similarity. They are also commenting on their shared artistic relevance or validity. No Buzzfeed quiz asks the question "Who said it – Shakespeare or Marlowe?" or "Who said it – Taylor Swift or Charli XCX?" The concept behind a Shakespeare/Swift comparison is generally to express Swift's poetic skill (suggesting she is at least close to being a Shakespeare-level poet), but they still reaffirm the fundamental divide between the two artists. The comparison is only provocative because one would not expect Swift and Shakespeare to be on the same level. After all, Taylor Swift is just a pop star. By asking about Swift and Shakespeare, these comparisons draw attention to the split between high and low art, or canonical and popular art, and they assert Swift's transgression of that boundary, her capacity to create high poetry in a low art form. These headlines also assert the authors' own understanding, even ownership, of Shakespeare: they express a confidence with his work so complete that they are ready to make a claim about his relationship to Swift.

An element of the comparison between Swift and Shakespeare, often implicit but only spelt out by Semler when he writes about *Midnights,* is the thematic overlap between Swift's work and Shakespeare's, and her use of literary references to enhance those themes. Swift frequently alludes to literary figures, texts, and touchstones in her lyrics, such as in her reference to Wordsworth, the Lake Poets, and the Windermere peaks in the song "The Lakes," or when she describes careless and dissociative extravagance as "feeling so Gatsby" in "This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things". In her 2025 album *The Life of a Showgirl*, she returns to an extended allusion to Shakespeare in the lead single "The Fate of Ophelia". This song celebrates the speaker being "saved […] from the fate of Ophelia" by a lover who "dug [her] out of her grave," alluding to the postmortem scene of Hamlet and Laertes jumping into Ophelia's grave, but suggesting that, in this case, her lover arrived sufficiently early to prevent the tragedy of having her "sanity stolen." Swift's new approach to Shakespeare in "The Fate of Ophelia" will be discussed at the end of this article, yet even including "The Fate of Ophelia", none of Swift's literary references to date is quite so explicit and protracted as her use of *Romeo and Juliet* in her early song (and music video) "Love Story." The relationship between *Romeo and Juliet* and "Love Story" has been the illustrative example of many people who comment on Swift's lowbrow status, her failure to understand the play's tragic ending. Yet, far from being the straightforward romance her critics accuse her of writing, "Love Story" explicates a sinister relationship between family and sexuality.

"Stay Away from Juliet": The Patriarchal Control of Sexuality

"Love Story" was released in 2008 on the album *Fearless*. Swift, in preparing to re-release the album in 2021, described *Fearless* as being "the diary of the adventures and explorations of a teenage girl who was learning tiny lessons with every new crack in the facade of the fairytale ending she'd been shown in the movies" (Swift 2021). In that description, Swift identifies a core theme of the album: a growing awareness of the problems with seeming happy endings. She indicates that the album is about questioning the concept of the "fairytale ending," perhaps even becoming disillusioned about it. The song "Love Story" has often, within the Swift fandom, been interpreted as her manifesto of youthful romanticism, starry-eyed and innocent, for "love-struck teens" (Price 2008). Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that it is in this very song that the cracks in the facade of the fairytale are most notable.

Swift sets the scene lyrically in the first verse "on a balcony in summer air," and entreats the listeners to "See the lights, see the party, the ball gowns" (Swift 2008). This situates her rewriting of *Romeo and Juliet* strictly in the early part of the play, in the period in between when Romeo and Juliet encounter each other at the ball (1.5) and the culturally iconic, though famously anachronistic 'balcony scene'[1] (2.2). The reference to *Romeo and Juliet*, only implied by the balcony and ball gowns, is made explicit in the

[1] The play text of *Romeo and Juliet* contains no reference to a balcony; Lois Leveen has suggested the first use of a balcony for 2.2 was not until the eighteenth century, but it has by now become a piece of visually recognisable *Romeo and Juliet* iconography.

pre-chorus of the song, when she sings, "You were Romeo, you were throwing pebbles, and my daddy said 'stay away from Juliet'" (Swift 2008). Here, however, at the introduction of the characters' names, Swift makes clear what her interpretation of the conflict of *Romeo and Juliet* is. The source of the conflict is the daddy saying "stay away."

It is hardly revolutionary to say that *Romeo and Juliet* is largely about the parents' conflicts, perhaps even more than it is about the lovers. Already the prologue of the play is more preoccupied with the family strife than it is with the star-crossed lovers who, in the end, take their lives. Nor is it an especially novel claim that the primary conflict of *Romeo and Juliet* is the families' rejection of the possibility of love between their families. By 1948, Robert Metcalf Smith already implied that this interpretation was outdated in the *Shakespeare Association Bulletin* (61). Coppélia Khan, in her analysis of the theme of adolescence in the play, identifies that "the play is particularly concerned with the social milieu in which these adolescent lovers grow up – a patriarchal milieu…" (171). "Patriarchal," in this case, is not used only in its colloquial sense of male-supremacist, but specifically and crucially used to mean "organised around the father". Khan points out the significance of the patriarch in the context of Romeo and Juliet's tragedy. It is indeed a story in which Juliet's daddy says, most emphatically, to stay away. However, despite describing her father's perspective as the reason why the lovers in "Love Story" cannot be together, Swift does not make any allusion to a family conflict beyond the individual dislike that Juliet's father has towards Romeo. There is no family feud: Romeo's family is not present. As a country singer, she could have easily swapped out the Montague/Capulet feud for discourses of class, or even race, to establish that her Romeo is being kept from Juliet for reasons of some sort of prejudice. Yet this is not how the song is organised. Juliet's father's order, "stay away from Juliet," is unprompted by anything specific about Romeo; it is, rather, entirely about Juliet herself. In this way, Swift rewrites the family's rejection of her lover from concepts of feud or prejudice, and towards the concept of paternal control over a daughter's sexuality.

The Capulet family does indeed control Juliet's sexuality, although when speaking to Paris early in the play, Juliet's father asserts that he does value his daughter's wishes as part of her marriage.

> CAPULET. My will to her consent is but a part;
> And she agreed, within her scope of choice
> Lies my consent and fair according voice. (1.2.287–289)

Furthermore, at this early stage of the play, Capulet does not even object to Romeo's general existence. He admonishes Tybalt,

> CAPULET. Content thee, gentle coz, let him alone;
> He bears him like a portly gentleman;
> And, to say truth, Verona brags of him
> To be a virtuous and well-govern'd youth (1.5.688–691)

At the point of the ball in which Swift's later "Love Story" is set, it is Romeo and Juliet's own self-perceptions, and not the intervention of parents, that lead them to recognise each other as dangerous. Only much later in the play (3.4), and occasioned in part by the "heightened sense of mortality" brought on by Tybalt's death (Khan 180) does

Capulet begin to assert his domination over his daughter's will. Furthermore, when he does, it is about whom she *should* marry – that is, insisting she marry Paris – and not whom she should *not*. There is, in *Romeo and Juliet*, not even a whisper of a thought in Capulet's mind that his daughter might have become enamoured of a Montague. This is quite the contrary in "Love Story," in which the father objects directly to Romeo's overture towards Juliet.

In the second rendition of "Love Story"'s pre-chorus, the lyrics change to "You were Romeo, I was a scarlet letter" (Swift 2008), with Swift using a different literary icon to make even clearer the threat of sexual corruption (and, moreover, the threat of social death as a result of sexual corruption) that is being projected onto Juliet. This danger is expressed even more pointedly when, in the chorus, she begs, "Romeo, save me" (Swift 2008). The experience of being kept from her romantic pursuits is not only frustrating but also dangerous, one from which she needs to be saved by the object of her romantic desire. As the narrative of the song progresses, Juliet becomes increasingly distraught and confused by the pressures of emotional control around her, and demands clarity from her Romeo, upon which he "knelt to the ground and pulled out a ring, and said 'marry me, Juliet'" (Swift 2008). Jonathan Bate, in his article "Why Taylor Swift is a literary giant", claimed that "Love Story" rewrote *Romeo and Juliet* to be "more palatable". Indeed, an engagement is a traditional signifier of a happy ending, and certainly preferable to death, but marriage neither protects Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's play, nor does it foreshadow a happy ending for Swift's Juliet. Tonally, Romeo's proposal is accompanied by a triumphant swell in the music, yet lyrically, the seemingly happy ending of the song is shot through with a disquieting undertone.

Immediately after saying "Marry me, Juliet," Romeo continues, "I talked to your dad, go pick out a white dress" (Swift 2008). The implication is that the conflict between Juliet's father and Romeo was simply sorted out with a conversation, and that the father's disdain of Romeo came only from a first impression that could be corrected. This is positive indeed, compared to a feud that ends in murder and suicide, where marriage, in fact, is the prelude to death. Yet the fundamental problem remains that the father's opinion of Romeo in "Love Story" is still the operative factor in the happiness of their prospective relationship. Thus, the father's control over sexuality, which so troubled Juliet in the pre-chorus, is still present. She has not been freed. Granted, Romeo has turned on his charm to convince her father that he is a worthwhile partner, but the discourse of paternal control of young women's sexuality remains unchallenged. In fact, Romeo has been talking with Juliet's father entirely without her input, and even without her knowledge. To celebrate their conclusion that she is to be married, she is given the minor freedom of "pick[ing] out" her own "white dress": while she is allowed to choose the aesthetic trappings of her marriage, she is still required to choose a dress in a color that symbolises virginity, and to participate in the ritual of marriage, in order to be with her beloved. At this time in the song, Juliet has not expressed a desire to marry Romeo, and, indeed, highlights that they are "both young," and thus possibly not sufficiently psychologically or practically prepared for marriage; yet the triumphant swell of the music assures the listener that this is an event to be celebrated. The control of Juliet's sexuality is passed, legally, from her father, on to Romeo.

Paul Kottman identifies the control of Juliet's sexuality as vital to Capulet's status in *Romeo and Juliet*. When "Capulet seeks fulfillment… in the relative mastery he might demonstrate by playing magnanimous host and deciding his daughter's worldly fate", he consolidates both ego and social power through his control of his daughter (Kottman 10). This is a highly literal expression of patriarchal power, which, in "Love Story," remains unchallenged and thus cannot lead to a happy ending. Juliet remains sexually controlled and legally bound by a man. While seemingly rescuing the characters from death, Swift's Juliet remains within the same patriarchal system that led to her death in the Shakespeare play. While "Love Story" does not explicitly present this as a cause for alarm, this ongoing patriarchal control demonstrates that the song is not just a key to Swift's view of youthful romantic idealism, but also to her later, cynical perspective about love. She uses Shakespeare not only as a point of reference for romance, but also as a point of reference for the way a father can control his daughter, drawing attention not only to the relationship between Juliet and Romeo, but also between Juliet and her father. Swift would become increasingly emphatic about the horrors of patriarchal sexual control in her later songwriting career and most seriously represent it in her 2024 album *The Tortured Poets Department*. In the album, and specifically the song "But Daddy I Love Him," which will be the subject of the next section, Swift returns to the relationship between patriarchal control and love.

"You'd Kill Yourself if I Ever Leave": Love as Social Rebellion

The Tortured Poets Department, released over fifteen years after the youthful adventures of *Fearless*, is full of brutally self-deprecating and confessional songs about codependent relationships. Whereas in *Fearless*, Swift explores early inklings of disillusionment with the "fairytale ending," her cynicism about romance is made highly explicit in *The Tortured Poets Department*. The song "But Daddy, I Love Him," returns to the themes of paternal sexual control from "Love Story," and addresses it with an even more acerbic tone and a more explicitly ambivalent ending. In "But Daddy I Love Him," the speaker involves herself with a man who is at odds with the values of her community, not only because she authentically loves him, but because she seeks the freedom and power represented by a man who upsets those values. She uses her lover to individuate from her community, but, in so doing, conveys that her individuation can only be afforded by her relationship to him. Swift characterises her partner specifically through the ways he creates separation from her father: "chaos," "revelry," a "remedy" to the sickness of her previous experiences (Swift 2024).

Like the father in "Love Story," the patriarchal figures in "But Daddy I Love Him" "slammed the door" on the speaker's "whole world" (Swift 2024), cutting her off from her desires. In "But Daddy I Love Him," the matter of the speaker's sexuality expands from just the "daddy" to the whole city, a matter of public debate among "elders" who are attempting to assert their authority, even their desire to actively sabotage the speaker's romantic life. The speaker identifies herself as a "dutiful daughter," but understands also that her position as a daughter is qualified by the control others will have over her: "these people only raise you to cage you" (Swift 2024). Khan asserts that the lack of authority in public is what leads the Montagues and (moreover) the Capulets

to assert domination over their children in the home (172), and, following this connection, Swift moves the conflict between private and public by making the matter of her romance a matter of public debate, in which "the elders… convened down at the city hall [to say] 'Stay away from her'" (Swift 2024). It is now not only the father saying "stay away from Juliet," but a whole collection of "elders." These elders are not only the speaker's family, and not only men (she is criticised also by "Sarahs and Hannahs in their Sunday best"), but their roles as political authorities ("at the city hall") indicate that they are representatives of a patriarchal order. In a further allusion to the Shakespearean conventions of her experience, Swift describes the way in which people try to control her as "sanctimoniously performing soliloquies I'll never see" (Swift 2024). This simultaneously dismisses their efforts as being invisible to her and alludes to stage conventions by which characters speak of conflicts for the benefit of an audience, rather than for the benefit of the other characters. It is not the speaker who is being dramatic, she implies, but *them*.

The speaker's desires are embodied in the figure of her love interest, but, thematically, they are her emotional and sexual autonomy. Alluding to the importance of names in *Romeo and Juliet* and Juliet's famous "what's in a name?" line (2.2), she asserts dominion over her name: "I'll tell you something 'bout my good name, it's mine alone to disgrace" (Swift 2024). Yet despite the triumphant tone of the song, and like in "Love Story," the ultimate impact of these assertions of agency is not genuine independence. In "But Daddy I Love Him," the speaker indicates that she is brought closer to her lover by the fact that she is faced with constant disapproval and attempts to control her ("you should see your faces," she sneers. "I'd rather burn my whole life down than listen to one more second of all this bitching and moaning"). Although she sings with enthusiasm of "her wild boy," she repeatedly acknowledges also that he is an unstable presence in her life – "he was chaos, he was revelry"; "he's crazy but he's the one I want." Like in "Love Story," the speaker of "But Daddy I Love Him" ultimately wins the approval of her parents, for "we came back when the heat died down, went to my parents, and they came around" (Swift 2024). "Scandal… brings lovers closer," she adds, pointing again to the way in which romantic bonds are reinforced by social pressures that attempt to end them. As the speaker of "Love Story" felt she needed Romeo to "save her," and as Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet were driven to the violence of their ends by the violence of their delights, the speaker of "But Daddy I Love Him" might not, Swift implies, be so driven to attach to her lover if not for the forces trying to keep them apart.

Considering that *The Tortured Poets Department* is filled with songs about codependent relationships, ranging from depressed and alienated ("I Can Fix Him (No Really I Can)," "The Prophecy") to murderous or suicidal ("The Tortured Poets Department," "Down Bad"), the impression is not that this desire to pursue a chaotic, "crazy" man is a healthy decision for the speaker to make, but rather that the speaker has pushed herself into a dangerous relationship in order to free herself from sexual control. The continuity between "Love Story" and "But Daddy I Love Him" centres Swift's use of *Romeo and Juliet* around the theme of patriarchal sexual control – that is, a father's control over his daughter's sexuality – and the way in which romantic desire can be a site of rebellion. They both demonstrate that rebellion does not necessarily lead to freedom. The songs are preoccupied with the impact of outside opinions on these

relationships, the ways in which being forbidden a relationship can drive one deeper into it, the dynamic which leads to death in *Romeo and Juliet,* although only to unhealthy romance in the Swift songs. The conclusion that Swift proposes, both in 2008 and 2024, is that sexual control will inevitably lead to passionate relationships (for both songs also conclude with the consummation of a romantic relationship by an implied upcoming wedding), but that the conditions of these relationships are not stable, nor are they entered into fully voluntarily.

"I Didn't Know Who I Was Supposed to Be at Fifteen": The Youth of *Romeo and Juliet*

Romeo and Juliet is a good point of allusion for Taylor Swift for two reasons. Firstly, as implied by the headlines of the thinkpiece industry, she can establish her poetic credentials by creating connection between herself and Shakespeare. But secondly and more importantly, *Romeo and Juliet* specifically shares Swift's recurring concerns of the relationship between love and social expectation. Swift is also engaged in an ongoing process of recontextualising her Shakespeare references and orienting them towards her interests, and despite the fact that she is periodically criticised for only writing about her boyfriends, Swift's interests are generally not so much the passion of a given relationship, but of the ways in which external controls on people's behaviour, emotions, and sexuality affect those relationships. She shares her central theme, therefore, with what Kottman describes as "the most common interpretation" of *Romeo and Juliet:* "a conflict between the lovers' individual desires and the reigning demands of family, civic, and social norms" (1). The tension between desire (generally romantic desire) and social norms, which her speakers feel acutely, is a concern throughout Swift's body of work: in the song "Lover", the speaker insists "*we* make the rules," and in "Delicate", the speaker's awareness that her "reputation's never been worse" drives her to anxiously and repeatedly question her partner's perception of her. In those songs, the figures who put pressure on the speakers are shadowy and ambiguous, perhaps friends or online commentators. In "Love Story" and "But Daddy I Love Him," as in *Romeo and Juliet*, the locus of control is specifically patriarchal.

Yet there is a further reason why *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than any other Shakespeare play that features a forbidden love, appears so frequently and to such great effect in Swift's writing. Her origins as a teenage songwriter, and her focus in both "Love Story" and "But Daddy I Love Him" on adolescent experiences, brings her into direct conversation with the theme of adolescence, and the control of adolescents. While Swift herself was no longer a teenager at the time of *The Tortured Poets Department*'s release, she returns consistently to adolescence both in conversation with the teenage portion of her fanbase, and also because she recognises adolescence as a particularly tense, even potentially traumatic period of negotiating emotions and expectation, and thus worthy of continued evaluation even long after she has left it behind. As Rachel Prusko has pointed out, in *Romeo and Juliet*, "Shakespeare raises the unsettling possibility of a private adolescent self" (113), a type of identity that was unusual at the time for the stage, but, in the twenty-first century, is the site of a vast store of media and much of Swift's songwriting. As a depiction of adolescent interiority, *Romeo and Juliet* acts as

an ur-text for Swift, not only in her vision of romance, but also in her vision of agency. Kottman has identified "a struggle for individual freedom" as the central conflict of *Romeo and Juliet* (6), and it is no coincidence that this struggle for freedom occurs between adolescents: a struggle to individuate from parents, authority figures, and social bonds. This includes, also, a need for the lovers to individuate from each other: the failure to do so is a central theme in *The Tortured Poets Department*'s representation of relationships in general (the song "The Black Dog," for example, chronicles the speaker compulsively watching her ex-partner's location on her phone). In "But Daddy I Love Him" the speaker specifically chooses to individuate from her community by enmeshing with her romantic partner: she demands he put them in dangerous circumstances ("telling him to floor it through the fences" [Swift 2024]) and uses the possibility of being impregnated by him exclusively for its power to shock ("I'm having his baby! No I'm not, but you should see your faces" (Swift 2024)). These are modes of self-expression that indicate less commitment to her partner and more desire to break free of patriarchal control. Unfortunately for the speaker of "But Daddy I Love Him," she is no more successful at this than her predecessor in "Love Story." While Shakespeare's Juliet ultimately expresses her autonomy through death, freeing herself of the worldly powers of her family, Swift's Juliet analogues both find a way to contain their romantic desire within the borders of what their respective fathers find acceptable.

It is a typical mark of adolescence that one must assert one's will against one's parents. The forms that this assertion of will can take are gendered. Khan, in "Coming of Age in Verona," argues that "girls in Verona are denied the adolescence that boys are allowed, in that girls have 'no sanctioned period of experiment with adult identities or activities'" (180; see also Prusko 118). Unlike Romeo or Tybalt, who, Khan argues, are able to express their experimentation with adult identities through romantic fantasy and violence, respectively, Juliet must shift immediately from being a girl, whose age and childishness are made much of by her parents, to being a married woman, with a married woman's duty to her husband. In "But Daddy I Love Him," Swift's speaker, too, is able to assert her will as something other than a "dutiful daughter" only by affiliating herself with a man, moving from daughter to wife. Khan identifies this too-rapid movement from childhood to adulthood as key to the tragedy: the feud between their families "makes Romeo and Juliet tragic figures because it denies their natural needs and desires as youth" (172). This connection of Romeo and Juliet's tragedy with their age finds resonance with Swift's interest in the unique pain of adolescence.

"Ophelia Lived in Fantasy": Avoiding Ophelia's Tragedy

In 2025, Taylor Swift released her to date most recent album, *The Life of a Showgirl*, with a lead single and flagship music video entitled "The Fate of Ophelia". The cover of *The Life of a Showgirl* depicts Swift partially submerged in water in a colour palette that evokes John Everett Millais's iconic 1851 *Ophelia*, and in the opening of the music video, she splays on the grass in a direct allusion to Friedrich Heyser's somewhat less famous 1900 painting, also called *Ophelia*. Swift demonstrates, with these allusions, an interest not only in Ophelia's role in *Hamlet*, but also an interest in the ongoing history of interpretations of her role.

As in 2008 with "Love Story," she was promptly met with a deluge of scornful comments suggesting that she doesn't understand Shakespeare, and, as with "Love Story", she does celebrate an ending in which the narrator is in a romantic relationship with a man, but there, the similarities end. In "Love Story," Swift collapses the ending of her story with the ending of Shakespeare's: while Swift's Juliet survives and Shakespeare's does not, the ending of "Love Story" is as tragic and as directly about the negative impact of patriarchal and family control as *Romeo and Juliet* is. In "The Fate of Ophelia", Swift explicitly differentiates the stories: the speaker is "*saved from* the fate of Ophelia" (2025; emphasis added). Ophelia's death, her experience of love as a "cold bed full of scorpions" that "stole her sanity," and her eventual confinement to a "grave", are all fates that Swift sees herself as having escaped – through the power of a man.

Swift notes the effect of a father figure on Ophelia when she sings, "The eldest daughter of a nobleman, Ophelia lived in fantasy" (2025): while it is seemingly true (assuming Ophelia and Laertes have no other siblings) that Ophelia is Polonius's eldest daughter, she is rarely described in this way. Swift, therefore, situates Ophelia in a tense position between authority ("eldest") and submission ("daughter"), which, Swift interprets, Ophelia finds intolerable, causing her to dissociate into a state of "fantasy". However, unlike the previous negotiations of patriarchal authority that Swift's Juliet attempts, Ophelia is unable to reconcile her individuality with her position under her father. Her attempt to escape into the "bed" of "love" proves unsuccessful for her. Not for the speaker however, who proudly declares that she has been saved from "linger[ing] in purgatory" by her lover "com[ing] for [her]" (Swift 2025). While "The Fate of Ophelia" engages with both the source and interpretive history of Ophelia, it, unlike Swift's interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* in "Love Story" and "But Daddy I Love Him," ultimately separates itself from Shakespeare. Ophelia's tragedy is one that Swift's speaker circumvents; Juliet's tragedy is one that her speaker find themselves still trapped inside.

Conclusion: "It's a Love Story, Baby"

It would be a misinterpretation to assume that Swift's use of Shakespeare's teenaged tragedy in "Love Story" is primarily drawing on the overwhelmingly intense romance of *Romeo and Juliet* to allude to the scale of emotion that she sings about, or that it is an attempt to borrow Shakespeare's cultural clout. While scale of emotion and poetic reputation are important features of her songs about love and her public image, respectively, they are not as important as the thematic resonance between *Romeo and Juliet* and specific features of the romance in "Love Story." It would be even more of a misinterpretation to assume that Swift has tacked a happy ending onto the story in order to make it more pleasant. The most significant resonance is not, as the title suggests, the love between Juliet and Romeo, but, rather, the way in which Juliet's sexuality is controlled by her father. To an even greater extent than Shakespeare's Juliet herself, Swift's Juliet experiences the direct rejection of her lover by her father, and, as "a scarlet letter," also experiences herself as marked and sexually shamed. It is the patriarchal control of sexuality, not the strength of love, that Swift finds in *Romeo and Juliet* and that she makes the cornerstone of her song.

This theme is made more explicit in "But Daddy I Love Him," in which the speaker conceives of her lover primarily through the lens of the offensive effect he has on the people around her. Not only does she love someone who is rejected by her father (and associated figures), but the very fact that he is rejected by her father is a crucial part of the reason she pursues him. His nature as "chaos", "revelry", is appealing to the speaker crucially because this means that, through him, she is able to commit a social rebellion – yet, like the speaker of "Love Story," she finds herself trapped, reaffirming the importance of patriarchal sexual control, conceding to it rather than escaping from it. A final notable feature of Swift's use of *Romeo and Juliet* is that it has a tragic ending. Although she does not end either of these songs in death, her albums are filled with unfortunate events. She primes her listeners for tragedy. Despite the seemingly happy endings of "Love Story" and "But Daddy I Love Him," Swift prepares her listeners to understand that, as variations on *Romeo and Juliet*, even these upbeat, happy songs contain elements of tragedy.

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Zusammenfassung

Ein gängiger Trend in der Thinkpiece-Branche der letzten Jahre war es, Taylor Swift mit Shakespeare zu vergleichen. Im Allgemeinen dienen diese Vergleiche als nachdrückliche Rechtfertigung für Swifts künstlerische Bedeutung, und literarische Intertextualität verbürgt ihr dichterischen Können. Ihre Songs haben jedoch auch eine spezifische thematische Resonanz mit Shakespeares Werk, die dieser Aufsatz näher untersuchen möchte. Anhand der Songs "Love Story" aus dem Album *Fearless* und "But Daddy I Love Him" aus dem Album *The Tortured Poets Department* zeige ich, wie Swift sich intertextuell mit *Romeo und Julia* auseinandersetzt, nicht nur, um das Ausmaß der Romantik in den Songs auszudrücken, sondern darüber hinaus, um auf die patriarchalische Kontrolle über die Sexualität jugendlicher Frauen und die Schwierigkeit der Versuche von Mädchen, dieser zu entkommen, hinzuweisen.