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## What "Makes a Monster of Their Minds": The Influence of Honor Culture, Shame, and Homsociality on Anxious Masculinity in Shakespearean Cuckoldry Plots

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WHAT “MAKES A MONSTER OF THEIR MINDS”: THE INFLUENCE OF HONOR  
CULTURE, SHAME, AND HOMSOCIALITY ON ANXIOUS MASCULINITY IN  
SHAKESPEAREAN CUCKOLDRY PLOTS

by

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A THESIS

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Master of Arts

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2022

WHAT “MAKES A MONSTER OF THEIR MINDS”: THE INFLUENCE OF HONOR  
CULTURE, SHAME, AND HOMOSOCIALITY ON ANXIOUS MASCULINITY IN  
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ENGLISH

ABSTRACT

In early modern drama, cuckoldry is used as the focal point for jokes and as a major plot device. Playwrights who use cuckoldry as a plot point often put the burden of blame on the women of these trysts, regardless of if they have made the women guilty or not, while failing to critique the behavior of men who act out in the face of these accusations. Unlike his contemporaries, Shakespeare seems to criticize men who choose to believe accusations of cuckoldry by putting their faith in homosocial bonds over their marital bonds. Across the timeline of Shakespeare’s plays, four plays explore similar facets of cuckoldry while reinforcing the idea that men who trust homosocial bonds over their marital bonds should face consequences: *Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale*. In each of these plays, Shakespeare uses honor culture and the importance of homosociality to instill a sense of shame in his characters while increasing their masculine anxiety. Threatened by the affront to their masculinity via cuckoldry accusations, these men lash out against their beloveds to varying degrees of consequence based on how consumed they are by their anxieties. While Shakespeare does critique the behavior of men who lash out against their innocent wives, he also issues a warning to them: be wary of putting faith into faulty homosocial bonds.

Keywords: masculinity, cuckoldry, homosocial bonds, William Shakespeare

DEDICATION

To my Aunt Peggy,  
I hope you're proud.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, a huge thank you to my family. To my mom for always being there to talk me off the ledge. To my dad for raising me with the backbone and drive to see this all through. To my two Victorias who heard too much about this before it even came to fruition. And to the family that I chose along the way—Matt, Lindsey, Krist, Alex, Drake, Sean, and Scarlett, this would not have been possible if I didn't have you guys keeping me (mostly) sane.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cuckoldry and the fear of being a cuckold is a particular area of interest for early modern writers, seeping into poetry, conduct books, plays, and several other kinds of literature. As pervasive as it is in early modern literature, the attention on cuckoldry within the early modern works focuses largely on either demeaning men or demonizing women. Since cuckoldry is the source of intense shame for men, looking at the dramatic portrayals of cuckoldry exposes the anxieties threatening masculinity in these plays. With the vast amount of works to analyze, there is also a considerable amount of critical attention on cuckoldry and its impacts. Jealousy and unease stemming from fear of cuckoldry are well-discussed points in critical discussions of early modern cuckoldry plays and specifically Shakespeare's plots that deal with cuckoldry.<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare references cuckoldry often in his plays but five of these feature false cuckoldry accusations that function as a central plot point: *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Each of these plays explores the actions and reactions of men who face the anxiety produced by cuckoldry allegations.

*Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *Winter's Tale* are of particular interest to study as the men of the play take direct action against their partners. Though each play features its own unique take on the idea of an innocent woman accused of cuckoldry, they do follow a similar pattern: a man believes in false cuckoldry rumors, the woman faces the consequences, and the man is forced to reconcile with his wrongs. Shakespeare seems

to progressively emphasize the masculine anxiety produced by cuckoldry in each play, leading to more disastrous effects. While *Merry Wives* also features a man believing in false cuckoldry rumors, Shakespeare resolves the conflict between the Fords before Ford can act out against his wife. Rather than punishing Ford, Shakespeare embroils him in Mistress Ford's plot to humiliate and dishonor Falstaff—a different point of discussion on the morality of attempting to social climb. Unlike *Merry Wives*, the other four plays showcase men lashing out at their partners along with varying consequences of reacting and responding to their wives' "infidelity."

Each of the four husbands in *Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *Winter's Tale* experience jealousy and anxiety about cuckoldry even though there is no validity behind the threat to their honor. Mark Breitenberg writes about how he interprets "male jealousy and cuckoldry anxiety as instances of masculine *excess*—representations of masculine dominion that are overstaged so as to reveal the contradictions and anxieties inherent in the patriarchal system that simultaneously enables and constrains its members" (377). He goes on to explore how this "masculine anxiety" is a result of the othering of women and the attempt to know female sexuality. While these ideas apply to my argument that Shakespeare is pointing towards a particular trend in the four plays, I only use Breitenberg's work to set a foundation for how some of the factors in these plays ultimately contribute to their "masculine anxiety." Applying this idea of anxiety to analyses of *Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *Winter's Tale*, which feature innocent women being accused of cuckoldry and their partners believing the accusations, highlights an anomaly among Shakespeare's false cuckoldry plots. *Much Ado*, *Othello*, and *Winter's Tale* stand out compared to what critics have written about these and other



cuckoldry plays, particularly in that they appear to serve as a warning sign to men as opposed to what Ruth Vanita argues were the point of these texts: warnings to women issued through cuckoldry plots.

Vanita argues that many of these plays are misogynistic. However, the way in which Shakespeare constructs the three cuckoldry plots in *Much Ado*, *Othello*, and *Winter's Tale* transforms the plays into “an apt caricature of all those contemporaries of Shakespeare whose dramatic works are likewise based on misogynist assumptions and delight in punishing women” (Vanita 13). Each dramatic portrayal of a “cuckolded” man acting out against their faithful wife appears to critique the violent or hasty responses of anxious men as well as warning men to be wary of the homosocial relationships they put their faith in. Though *Cymbeline* follows a similar formula for cuckoldry plots, there is an interruption in Posthumus’s ability to act out against Imogen when he is exiled. This difference between *Cymbeline* and the others sparks a slightly different conversation about homosocial relationships, early modern elite ideals about reconciliation and restraint, and the importance they hold in cuckoldry plots. Regardless of their differences, all four plays seem to focus on masculinity and its impacts on both men and women in the plays.

While it is impossible to identify a monolithic category of masculinity in any era, including the early modern period, this thesis hinges on the ability to analyze one facet within the general concept of masculinity. Using Breitenberg’s definition of “masculine anxiety” as a form of “excess,” I envision masculine anxiety as the fear surrounding cuckoldry that influences the actions and reactions of men who perceive a threat to their concept of manhood—particularly when a facet of masculinity is threatened by another

man. For the purpose of this project, the perceived threat is always a man believed to be cuckolding the male partner and the concept of manhood is rooted largely in the status of marriage and the role of husband. This definition works within Breitenberg's notion that "masculine anxiety" is a result of a patriarchal system that both elevates and limits masculinity. Whereas the men in these plays are reacting to cuckoldry as a way to protect their esteem and status (the elevation of masculinity), their reactions also narrow their perception of reality (the limitation of masculinity). I will argue that the severity of the anxiety and resulting actions are affected by additional factors including marital status, parental status, social status, and depth of homosocial bonds. These factors get progressively more high risk through each play in Shakespeare's timeline.

Along with the pervasive sense of anxiety around cuckoldry, the plays display the sense of shame in thinking oneself cuckolded. Building on Ewan Fernie's argument that shame is an inherently private and intimate emotion that should not be seen, Stephanie Chamberlain argues that "[t]here is no shame... unless there is at least the threat of public exposure" (5). In the circumstances around cuckoldry in Shakespeare, both of these facets of shame come into play; Claudio, Othello, Posthumus, and Leontes all have their honor in the face of the public threatened, but the act of being cuckolded serves as an internal wound. Shakespeare externalizes the reactions to this shame either through implicit staging within dialogue or through the language in the dialogue. In his work on Affect Theory, Silvan Tomkins explores the feeling of shame being something both internalized yet externalized. Tomkins theorizes that people externalize their emotions via biological and subconscious facial reactions—separated into both positive and negative affects. Applying this theory to Shakespeare's work uncovers an additional facet to the shame

that surrounds cuckoldry. The subconscious nature of the affects or reactions becomes embedded into Shakespeare's work as characters come face to face with their own shame. Both in the biological and social sense, the men who are threatened by cuckoldry in these plays become susceptible to public shame. As Shakespeare codes the private expression of shame into his "cuckolds," those expressions become relevant to the public. Whether manipulated by an outside deluder or expressed by the "cuckold" themselves, the expression of shame elevates the anxious response and, as a result, exposes the "cuckolds'" shame to public spectators. That public shame, in turn, further feeds into the anxiety surrounding cuckoldry.

The relevance of shame in dramatic portrayals of cuckoldry is also heavily linked with the early modern understanding of honor and reputation. Honor culture was a vital part of early modern society, so important that a person's credit would rely on their honor or their societal reputation.<sup>2</sup> According to Reta Terry the honor code evolved during the early modern period with, "[o]ne of the most complex changes in the code of honor [being] a move from an external code to an internalized concept of what it is to be an honorable man" (1071). Rather than being considered honorable through titles or birthright, "honor was becoming, by the seventeenth century, a matter of conscience; honorable men needed to seek, in every situation, to behave in a way as to please both their state and their God" (Terry 1071). The move towards a more internalized conception of honor did not take societal expectation out of the equation. In order to be honorable, a man had to act in accordance with societal norms and in line with Christian virtues. While honor was no longer passed solely through title, the assessment of honor still relied on "the reputation of an individual, according to his or her peers" meaning that

honor was “less derived from a person’s internal virtue than from society’s judgment of an individual’s worth” (Pollock 5). For men, their honor was inextricably linked with the honor of their wives and the members of their household; if a member of the household behaved dishonorably, then the honor of the man would be tainted.<sup>3</sup> In instances of cuckoldry, a wife’s infidelity becomes a reflection upon the man thus bringing more shame upon them. In order to preserve their honor, there had to be some kind of corrective action to reinstate their credit among society. Dramatic portrayals of infidelity then become enmeshed with these ideas about how the behavior of women ultimately impacts men. The early modern understanding of honor and reputation is at the heart of Shakespearean “cuckolds” reactions and responses to cuckoldry allegations.

Shakespeare in particular seems to use this honor code to call into question how honorable the reactions of alleged cuckolds are when the truth of their beloved’s fidelity is revealed. Reacting in order to protect honor often ends up serving to further impact “cuckolds” honor in Shakespeare, reminding men to be mindful of their responses.

In order to see how Shakespeare’s cuckoldry plots relate to those around him, I looked at plays on stage at the same time. In my examination of cuckoldry, I found that the amount of works that reference cuckoldry, mention the anxieties about it, or otherwise joke about horns and other related cuckold imagery is so immense within the early modern period that several parameters had to be put in place in order to discover any kind of pattern. Seeing as cuckoldry and the anxiety surrounding it so inundates early modern works, I limited the search for plays between the years of 1600 and 1620. Because the earliest of Shakespeare’s plays I am analyzing was first performed around 1598 and the latest was performed in 1611, I wanted to keep works within the same

general window.<sup>4</sup> With a narrower timeframe, I looked for plays that directly mention cuckoldry or reference cuckolds. After reading these plays, I eliminated any that merely referenced the act and did not actually feature cuckoldry or delusions of cuckoldry as a focus in the plot. Seeing as cuckoldry is central to the Shakespearean plays I am analyzing, I selected plays that seemed to focus on cuckoldry as much as Shakespeare does in his four plays. This produced six plays with infidelity as a central plot point, three of which feature plots where cuckoldry actually occurs and three in which the women are accused of cuckoldry but are innocent.

Among these plays are one attributed to Thomas Heywood and another confirmed to be authored by Heywood. The former, *A Pleasant Conceited Comedy, Wherein is Showed How A Man May Choose A Good Wife from A Bad*, features a young noble named Arthur spurning his faithful wife for the gold-digging prostitute Mary. Once Arthur “kills” his virtuous wife in favor of the fair Mary, Mary becomes unmanageable, openly berating Arthur as a cuckold before questioning, “What am not I of age sufficient / To go and come still when my pleasure serues, / But must I haue you sir to question me” (Heywood I3r). Mary ends her tirade about Arthur’s pleas to not do what and who she pleases with the decree that “yes [she] will haue [her] will” (Heywood I3r). Heywood villainizes this behavior, showing the vexation of Arthur and his regret at having killed his first wife for the second. The play begins its end when it is revealed that Arthur’s first, virtuous wife did not die when Arthur poisoned her, and she forgives him for his actions. Appallingly, there is no punishment for his attempted murder, and she seems to welcome him back with open arms. Arthur then launches into a final monologue warning men that

A good wife will be carefull of her fame,  
Her husbands credit, and her owne good name:  
.... A bad wife will respect  
Her pride, her lust, and her good name neglect

...

Seeke vertuous wiues, all husbands will be blest,  
Faire wives are good, but vertuous wiues are best. (Heywood L2r)

This final warning becomes a call to the men of the audience to be cautious in their selections but also seems to serve as caution to women against the behavior of the bad or fair wife. Whereas the men are being openly called to be wary, the women are more passively warned that being an unmanageable wife is not the ideal. Heywood seemingly puts the emphasis on the behavior of the women rather than the actions of the man. This kind of warning to men and cautioning of women also appears in his more prominent play *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.

*A Woman Killed* tells the story of the moral Frankford suffering at the hands of his wife, Anne, while she cuckolds him and must pay the price. Most notable for featuring a woman's penance for her unfaithfulness through self-starvation, Vanita argues that the onlookers of Anne's hunger strike are, "[f]ar from advising her husband to forgive and accept her," instead "they accuse him of being too merciful. Frankford restores to Anne the name of 'wife' only when he is sure she is nearly dead and he will never have to live with her as a wife" (11-12). Wendoll, the man cuckolding Frankford, faces punishment in the form of exile, though Frankford is loose with his exile: "Go villen, and my wrongs sit on thy soul / As heauy as this grieffe doth vpon mine" (Heywood F3v). In contrast, Frankford explicitly punishes Anne by requiring her to live separate from him and their children which ultimately drives her to starve herself. The decision to have Frankford neither pursue violent revenge against Wendoll nor end

Anne's life with his own hands portrays notions about religious or moral superiority evident in the play. Of note, though, is that there is no backlash against these decision from anyone in the play. In the face of Anne's death, Frankford is able to reestablish his connections with the men of the play and lay his wife to rest. The play diverts any attention to the horrific implications of Anne's self-imposed death and looks towards those early modern ideals of reconciliation between men. Again, the focus here lies almost wholly on Anne's decision to die rather than live as an unfaithful wife thus critiquing the behavior of a woman while praising the moral decisions of a man. Confirming Vanita's more general point, this play, like many other domestic tragedies, appears to caution women to remain faithful, lest they face a similar fate as Anne.

*A Woman Killed* serving as a warning for women is not the only perspective on the end of Heywood's play, however. While many critics focus largely on Anne and both the negative and positive implications of Frankford's decision to have her starve herself on stage, Paula McQuade argues that the ending is "at the forefront of seventeenth-century English 'feminism'" (249).<sup>5</sup> Similarly to how I envision Shakespeare's plots serving as a warning for men, McQuade claims that "Heywood's play deploys the conventional trope linking adultery and murder in new and unexpected ways to challenge the patriarchal assumptions of his audience" (250). Even if McQuade's argument is correct and Heywood does twist this ending to show the horrors that can stem from threats to masculinity, I argue that Heywood does not condemn the actions of his leading man in the same ways that Shakespeare ultimately does. The play ends with men convening over Anne's body, and no one claims that Frankford has acted maliciously, nor does he face repercussions for her choosing to die in light of his punishment.

Additionally, McQuade's argument focuses almost solely on the heterosexual relationship between Frankford and Anne without wholly considering the homosocial relationships of Frankford or the impact those relationships have on the outcomes of the play.

In this vein, I turn to Rebecca Ann Bach's discussion of the "homosocial imaginary" that shrouds *A Woman Killed* and its action. Through comparing what modern scholars consider the nuclear household and the early modern conception of household, Bach illuminates the overarching importance that homosocial bonds have within early modern households and social networks. It is the elevation of homosociality that shifts the focus of resolution from "saving the marriage for the children's sake" familiar to modern audiences to "killing Anne for the blood line's sake, in order to save the male-male kinship bond" (Bach 513). This is a thought that Lyn Bennet extends in her article connecting homosociality with economic systems of the period.<sup>6</sup> The bonds between men within *A Woman Killed* and other contemporary plays serve as the backbone for the reactions of allegedly or actually cuckolded men. Playwrights writing with this understanding construct plots that factor men's relationships to one another into character choices and outcomes; Frankford goes the route he does because of the constructed imaginary that he has been written into. Heywood and Shakespeare alike seem to construct the reactions of cuckolded men with these homosocial connections in mind. Just as homosocial bonds foreground their response, the bonds become the foundation for judgement in the plays. In not speaking out against the actions of Frankford, the men of the play reiterate that Anne's punishment is an acceptable action to



take. I will show that in Shakespeare, it is the perversion of the homosocial bond as a result of the men's anxiety that leads to the judgment and consequences against men.

Unlike Heywood's confirmed authored play, there is little critical attention on *How to Choose*. In my own search, I could produce only five relevant analyses including Jennifer Panek's exploration of the prodigal husband. In her work, Panek notes that there is little scholarship around the play aside from explorations of authorship, source, and influences, and two analyses of comic structure.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the five sources Panek cites, there is a study of the moral conventions of the play by Emer McManus.<sup>8</sup> Panek herself studies "a set of half-articulated anxieties that attend the social role of husband in its liminal stages of betrothed husband-to-be and newlywed" ("Prodigal Husband" 62). More specifically, she analyzes the seemingly sudden jump Arthur makes from contented newlywed to adulterous and murderous husband. Panek determines that the entwining of the household and community networks in new marriages and the concern about credit is the motivation for Arthur's sudden anxieties:

his credit became an object of greatly increased scrutiny to all the many persons with whom he now, on his own account, engaged in buying and selling, borrowing and lending, evaluating and being evaluated for trustworthiness. Moreover, his credit now expanded to encompass the reputations of his new dependants—wife, servants, and eventually, children—which stretched out into the community as so many branches of himself, reflecting on his abilities as governor and provider. ("Prodigal Husband" 67)

While she does look into the anxieties specific to men within the domestic tragedy subgenre of prodigal husband plays, she does little to explore the subsequent actions of Arthur. In fact, Panek explains that his wife's publicly submissive behavior and the public's lauding of her morality is likely what worsens his frustrations and leads to his decision to kill her and remarry. It is the public's constant extolling of her virtues that

“grants her a kind of communally recognized moral authority that contributes to her husband’s discrediting and disempowerment” (Panek “Prodigal Husband” 72). Panek’s analysis only seems to confirm that the play has a sterner warning for women than the warning for its men. With no condemnation for that anxiety-induced behavior aside from Arthur’s ending monologue warning men to choose the virtuous over the fair, the play still appears to put the actions of women at the core of the anxieties rather than the actions of men.

*The Malcontent* by John Marston is the third play featuring a true cuckoldry plot that seems to caution women against cheating and otherwise acting against their husband’s best interests. Though Marston’s play seems to have a gentler warning, his plot does feature a woman, Aurelia, who is not only unfaithful but plots her husband Pietro’s demise. Mendoza, Aurelia’s lover, conscripts Malevole, the disguised former Duke, into his plot to kill Pietro which Malevole agrees to, though as in many other contemporary plays, Malevole fakes Pietro’s death choosing instead to reveal Mendoza’s plot to usurp Pietro’s place on the throne. In Malevole’s plans, Aurelia is left unaware that Pietro still lives and mourns his loss deeply. After being exiled by the man she cheated on her husband with and who has seized his place on the throne, Aurelia claims she “can desire nothing but death, nor deserue anything but hell. / If heauen should giue sufficiencie of grace / To cleere [her] soule, it would make heauen graceless” (Marston G1r). Disguised, Pietro hears her cries of guilt and is ultimately counseled by Malevole to forgive Aurelia and take her back. Her overwhelming guilt for cheating on and murdering her husband appears to be her saving grace in being able to win Pietro back along with the advice of a trusted homosocial relationship. That specific suggestion from Malevole is one of the

first acts of mercy in these plays that does not directly harm the woman at stake. Eventually, all is made right when Pietro can return to his place on the throne, exile Mendoza, and reconcile with Aurelia. While *The Malcontent* does seem to caution women against acting out against their husbands, it also encourages a little mercy from husbands who are subject to that behavior. Each of the three plays that feature genuine acts of cuckoldry do chastise women who behave in such a way, but, between him and Heywood, Marston seems to be the playwright who calls men's response into question. Rather than acting out of moral superiority and watching his wife waste away, Pietro ultimately shows grace and forgiveness allowing Aurelia to live.

Whereas there is certainly more scholarship on *The Malcontent* than some of the other plays, the majority of these analyses do one of two things: they explore connections to *Hamlet* or *Measure for Measure*, or attempt to understand the theatrical conventions being employed and determine genre.<sup>9</sup> The combination of tragic elements alongside the more comedic moments makes genre a particularly popular aspect to study. The lack of attention on cuckoldry in *The Malcontent* may well be due to the complex political workings of the play and their connections to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Measure for Measure*. In the comparisons to *Hamlet*, there is an emphasis on the political and moral implications of the play while analyses of *Measure for Measure* often explore the hidden dukes. Because Marston features complex political dealings including a disguised Duke and usurpers, the scholarly attention on political structures and disguise makes sense. The cuckolding gets highlighted in terms of how Mendoza uses Aurelia's unfaithfulness to his own political advantage, but there is little focused attention of the subject.<sup>10</sup> In drama saturated with cuckoldry plots and jokes, there may be inclinations to study other aspects

of this play even if cuckoldry plays an instrumental role in the plot. However, the cuckoldry in *The Malcontent*, and especially the homosocial relationship that leads to forgiveness, is relevant to the focus of this project. Malevole is the primary reason that Pietro ultimately forgives and reconciles with Aurelia. It takes a homosocial bond to restore the marriage bond. In contrast, in Shakespeare, the homosocial bond taking precedence over the marital bond is something that leads deluded men believing themselves cuckolded to disaster.

The first of the three plots closest to those false cuckoldry plots of Shakespeare is George Chapman's *All Fools*, which features two explorations of cuckoldry. Both delusions of cuckoldry in *All Fools* centralize around misunderstanding, though Gostanzo's anxiety centers around the honor of another man while Cornelio's anxiety is focused within his own marriage. In the case of Gostanzo, he is intentionally led astray by the mischievous Rynaldo to believe that Rynaldo's older brother, Fortunio, is secretly married to Gratiana when Fortunio is actually in love with Gostanzo's daughter, Bellomora. In reality, Gostanzo's son, Valerio, is married to Gratiana against Gostanzo's wishes. Because of their actual secret marriage, Valerio appears to be cuckolding Fortunio which drives Gostanzo to house all the lovers under one roof until everything gets sorted. In this plotline, Gostanzo's obsession with the alleged cuckoldry becomes something for the audience to laugh at. No malicious action is taken, nor does there appear to be any commentary on Gostanzo's anxieties. Whereas Gostanzo frets over the alleged cuckolding of another man, Cornelio is excessively jealous over his faithful wife, going so far as to publicly threaten divorce. When he admits that threatening divorce was merely to teach his wife a lesson, Gostanzo praises Cornelio's treatment as "well handled

in deed” and Marc Antonio, the father of Rynaldo and Fortunio, “commend[s his] wisdom” (Chapman I3v). The plot surrounding Gostanzo’s and Marc Antonio’s children more so encourages the audience to laugh at Gostanzo and the way he is manipulated, but the subplot with Cornelio openly praises his decision to strike fear into his wife. Thus, while the premise of cuckoldry in the first plot becomes something to laugh at, in the subplot it is an issue to be corrected in women, even if they are guiltless. Cornelio holds no remorse for his actions, nor does anyone fault his seemingly unwarranted jealousy.

Similarly to *How to Choose*, there is little critical attention on *All Fools*. Of the nine articles that my search produced, Charles Edelman wrote six of them.<sup>11</sup> Much of his work focuses on the history of the play—dating the play, exploring its production at the Blackfriars, and its modern publications. However, one of these articles focuses specifically on the reference to Gratiana’s comments about Gazetta’s desire to sprout horns. In this analysis, Edelman outlines how the mention refers back to Ovid and specifically to Pasiphaë’s raging desire for the bull her husband refused to sacrifice to Neptune, though Edelman makes no comments on the implications of this reference. Instead, he returns back to the likelihood that contemporary audiences “would have understood these allusions and enjoyed them” (185). The general lack of attention on *All Fools* may be due to the fact that it is not one of Chapman’s major plays. There is far more critical attention on *The Tragedy of Bussy D’Ambois*—my initial search produced 101 articles and seven books on the play. Despite the lack of scholarship on *All Fools*, the end of Cornelio and Gazetta’s plot line appears to directly oppose the endings of similarly

constructed Shakespearean plots. In praising the fear tactics that Cornelio uses rather than questioning his actions, Chapman appears to not warn men at all.

Yet another play handling the delusions of cuckoldry, Edward Sharpham's *Cupid's Whirligig* opens with Sir Troublesome just being wildly jealous and convinced his wife is unfaithful with zero context. While two men attempt to seduce her, Lady Troublesome wants nothing to do with them. Despite this, Lord Nonsuch, who is in love with Lady Troublesome, continues to try and convince Troublesome that she is cuckolding him. Troublesome eventually divorces Lady Troublesome due to his anxieties despite the fact that she loves him and is faithful to him. Though the play follows the ways in which one partner in a couple falls in love with someone they should not be with, the play ends with the Troublesomes remarried with little to say on the cuckoldry allegations aside from a brief interaction between Wages, Master Correction, and Mistress Correction:

*Mistres Corr.* O Maister Wages! how doth your good maister, sir Timothie Troublesome? what, doth he thinke he is a Cuckold still?

*Maist. Corr.* An arrant Cuckold(Wife) belieue it.

*Mistres Corr.* Come, come, Husband, you are such another; why doe you say so?

*Maist. Corr.* Because it is true, Wife.

*Wages Syr,* Maister Correction you are mistaken, I thinke hee be no Cuckold.

*Maist Corr.* Good Maister Wages talke no more of Cuckolds

And then discussion of the cuckoldry ends; the Corrections are invited to the wedding ceremony of the Troublesomes and other characters, and the play resolves. The reconciliation of the Troublesomes does not get staged as the other couples are united and there is no indication that the actions of Troublesome are addressed outside of the reunion with his wife. After this conversation with the Corrections, talk of cuckolds and

cuckoldry ceases. Sharpham seems to be the first of these playwrights to make no subtextual comment on the man's behavior nor on the woman alleged to be a cuckold.

Though the play centralizes around the complications of love and relationships, many of the articles that focus on *Cupid's Whirligig* are concerned with authorship as well as the history of the company involved with the play. Rather than analyzing the content, many of these works look at the circumstances under which Sharpham produced the play.<sup>12</sup> One exception is Anne Parten's analysis of Shakespeare, Drekker, and Sharpham's construction of plays that seem to create equality between the sexes to some degree. In regard to *Cupid's Whirligig*, Parten claims "Sharpham's Lady, when she points out that she might have 'sought revenge for wrongs,' is clearly raising the possibility of an adultery of her own to answer for her husband's; as always, retaliation in kind implies that the victim perceives himself to be, at least to some degree, his injurer's equal" (14). In this reading, it appears that whereas Sharpham does not particularly punish Sir Troublesome for his misdeeds and overwhelming jealousy, he did make the wedded pair equals. A reading of this sort does not account for the sudden drop in conversations about cuckoldry and the sudden, off-stage reconciliation. If Sharpham does create a structure wherein the Troublesomes are equals, he does little to explore the implications of Sir Troublesome's jealousy or his own adultery.

The last of the plays resulting from this research is Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *Phylaster, Love lies a Bleeding*. *Phylaster* is unique among these six because it features remorse from Philaster after he stabs his beloved Arethusa. Philaster regrets that he has "done ill" by striking "at her that would not strike at [him]" (Beaumont & Fletcher H1r). But just as Arthur's wife forgives him, Cornelio's wife bears him no ill for his

treatment of her, and the Troublesomes reconcile, Arethusa forgives Philaster for his actions and takes him as a husband. Outside of his remorse, Beaumont and Fletcher do little in the way of condemning Philaster for attempting to kill his beloved. By the end of the play, he is married to the woman he maimed for allegedly cheating and is restored to his proper place on the throne. The perceptions of cuckoldry in these plays are diverse, yet none truly seem to call into question the action taken by scorned men. Whether their characters are facing genuine acts of cuckoldry or base their thoughts on rumor, none of these playwrights appear to critique the underlying masculine anxiety or the actions that anxiety leads them to take.

Within the last decade, critical attention around Beaumont and Fletcher's plays focuses on the role of boys and gender.<sup>13</sup> Despite the attention on gender, none of the critical work seems to focus on how gender or the role of the page impacts the cuckoldry plot. In regard to *Phylaster*, there appears to be particular interest in how Bellario functions in the play as she is presenting as Philaster's boy servant when she is actually a woman in love with him. Akin to Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Bellario serves as the communicator between Arethusa and Philaster with the caveat that Arethusa and Philaster requite one another's love—Arethusa's father just opposes the match which turns them to secrecy. Many scholars explore the featuring of a pageboy and the fact that it is a crossdressing servant in that role.<sup>14</sup> With the amount of attention on gender and especially the role of a page in maintaining Philaster and Arethusa's relationship, the lack of attention on Philaster's cuckoldry delusion is surprising. However, in 1985 Lee Bliss explored the influences of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Twelfth Night* in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Phylaster*. After establishing the similarities and differences in politics of



*Phylaster* and *Hamlet*, Bliss turns to the connections of sudden spurned jealous lovers between Othello and Philaster. Bliss notes that “[t]hough in a manner more foreshortened and clumsily explicit than Shakespeare’s, Beaumont and Fletcher establish in Act One the grounds of Philaster’s mistrust: the romantic hero understands himself and the nature of passion as little as he understands women” (158). While it is not, as Bliss writes, carefully crafted and unpacked, Beaumont and Fletcher do provide an explanation as to why Philaster has this sudden switch in belief of his beloved’s fidelity. Without an Iago figure or the central focus around the psychological deterioration of the alleged cuckold, Beaumont and Fletcher “emphasize the fundamental and disturbing similarity between the hero’s romantic and idealistic response and the court’s” (Bliss 158-9). Instead of emphasizing the implications of Philaster’s actions, Beaumont and Fletcher bring attention to the irrationality of men suffering with cuckoldry anxiety but do not exactly warn against that particular behavior. Aside from Arethusa’s father giving the throne up to Philaster, the rightful ruler, there is no real consequences for the irrational decisions they make based on minimal evidence. While the two are alike in their staging of suddenly raging husbands, Beaumont and Fletcher do not critique Philaster’s sudden outburst as much as Shakespeare appears to in *Othello*.

Unlike these other early modern plays, Shakespeare’s plays appear to have a running thread that discusses the actions and reactions of the men. Shakespeare appears to highlight the danger of putting too much faith in the homosocial bond over the marital bond and actively punishes those who act out against their beloved. Throughout the course of the four plays, the moving parts change but a similar message lies beneath. *Much Ado* and *Othello* share a notable amount of similarities which makes them an easy

subject for comparison and analysis together. Both plays feature military men who feel slighted enough to cause trouble, envision a cuckoldry plot involving men who deeply love their faithful partners, and feature the death of the wrongfully accused beloved—though Desdemona’s is permanent while Hero’s is temporary. For Hero, death comes in the form of social death from which she can only be revived when Claudio laments her death and acknowledges that it happened because he believed in the lie, and when Hero can return in the form of her identical “cousin.” Desdemona’s fate is far more permanent as Othello’s contempt leads to her murder, along with Othello’s suicide upon realizing he was wrong about her innocence all along. Alone, these two plays offer several points of similarity to analyze: both the connection of military men and cuckoldry plots, and the response of men who realize their incorrect beliefs have caused irreparable harm to the women they love, and, in addition, the punishment of men who seek to disrupt the bonds of marriage via their homosocial bonds.

The similarity in the cuckoldry plots that feature a chaste or faithful woman becomes more complex when analyzing them alongside *Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare’s latest play in this trio is vastly different from *Much Ado* and *Othello*: Leontes and Hermione already have a child together with another on the way; Polixenes is not a military comrade but a fellow king and childhood friend; and, most notably, Leontes fabricates the cuckoldry plot on his own. Unlike *Much Ado* and *Othello*, there are no outside influences or motivations for creating the plot nor is anyone else intentionally fueling any kind of fear within Leontes; his belief in his wife’s infidelity is his own creation. However, when comparing the plot of *Winter’s Tale* with the other two plays, an interesting pattern appears: in each play, the men become increasingly more susceptible

to and influenced by their anxious masculinity. The escalating masculine anxiety seems to be connected to both the closeness of the homosocial bond between the alleged cuckold and the man “cuckolding” him and the strength of the marriage bond between the alleged cuckold and his partner. Whereas there is a rise in masculine anxiety, two opposite reactions occur: the men hear progressively more pleas to see their partner is honest and the consequences of believing the cuckoldry plot gets worse for each man.

Looking at *Cymbeline* next to these three, a similar idea emerges, but it is altered due to the fact that Posthumus is geographically distanced from Imogen. Posthumus still receives false evidence of Imogen’s infidelity, and he has a loyal peer beside him who attempts to discredit Iachimo’s claims. Despite this, Posthumus ultimately succumbs to the anxiety that his wife has been untrue. Whereas Shakespeare still seems to highlight the irrationality produced by masculine anxiety, he also uses Posthumus’s servant Pisanio as a way to counteract the full effects of that anxiety. In doing so, Shakespeare elevates the homosocial bond specifically between servant and master creating an entirely new conversation related to masculine anxiety and the roles well-intentioned homosocial relationships play in that anxiety. Unlike his contemporaries, Shakespeare does not have men share the delusions of cuckoldry and does not easily forgive the men who do believe allegations of cuckoldry. On the whole, Shakespeare seems to warn men that placing their trust in men who attempt to subvert the marital bond via a one-sided homosocial bond leads to disastrous consequences for men and the innocent bystanders around them.

## CHAPTER 1

### *THE WINTER'S TALE: DELUDER AND CUCKOLD IN ONE*

Working backwards from *The Winter's Tale* to *Much Ado*, enables us to more clearly see masculine anxiety at work in *The Winter's Tale* when Leontes convinces himself in mere moments that his childhood best friend is not only cuckolding him but planning regicide alongside his wife.<sup>15</sup> Leontes's masculine anxiety is so great that he convinces himself of this after requesting that his wife convince Polixenes to stay with them a while longer. After she is successful in her task, Leontes turns himself into a jealous monster once Hermione acknowledges that she has used her eloquence "to th' purpose twice: / The one, for euer aren'd a Royall Husband; / Th' other for some while a Friend" (*The Winter's Tale* 278). Hearing those words, Leontes reshapes the entire interaction between Polixenes and Hermione into a sordid affair and pursues the accusations until he faces the worst imaginable consequence: the loss of an heir. The presence of an heir to begin with plays a key role in Leontes' overwhelming anxiety alongside the distinct friendship between Leontes and Polixenes, and between Hermione and Polixenes.

Before Leontes accuses Polixenes of being the cuckold, Shakespeare continually emphasizes the significance of their well-developed friendship to show exactly why Leontes becomes so deluded. Polixenes is not just Leontes's best friend, he is a fellow king and lifelong ally. In the first scene of the play, Camillo explains how the

two kings “were trayn’d together in their Child-hoods; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection” (*The Winter’s Tale* 277). The love the two bear for one another is so strong that Archidamus admits to believing that nothing in the heavens nor the earth could shake the foundation of their bond. Leontes and Polixenes’ relationship is the strongest homosocial bond present in the three plays that follow this similar storyline. Shakespeare does emphasize the homosocial relationships in the other plays, but he does not create a connection as strong in the others. In *Much Ado*, Shakespeare creates a loose homosocial bond between Claudio and his deluder, Don Jon, via their military experience and Don Jon’s relation to Don Pedro. In *Othello*, he establishes a stronger bond between Othello and his “cuckolder,” Cassio, in making Cassio his right hand while also emphasizing the strength of Othello’s bond with Iago, his deluder. In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus and Iachimo share a borderline hostile relationship prior to Iachimo providing his “proof.” But none of the homosocial bonds in *Much Ado*, *Othello*, or *Cymbeline* are as meaningful as the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes. Other contemporary plays also do not feature such strong homosocial bonds, often creating a sort of distance between the cuckold and cuckolder or not acknowledging the importance of their homosocial bond. In *How a Man*, Arthur is cuckolded by unnamed strangers, and in *All Fools*, Cornelio’s relationship to his “cuckolder” is never really explored or explained.

Yet between Leontes and Polixenes there lies the “altruistic affection” Alan Bray notes as a “staple” in Renaissance discussions of friendship (74). In fact, the pair refer to one another as “Brother” (*The Winter’s Tale* 277), an indication that they have a relationship that is akin to the sworn brotherhoods informing the notions of friendship in the Renaissance.<sup>15</sup> Their strengthened connection heightens the resulting anxiety as the

cuckoldry delusion fundamentally undermines their homosocial bond. Although when critics approach analysis of Leontes and the breakdown of his sanity, they focus almost solely on how Leontes relates to Hermione.<sup>16</sup> Rather than analyzing the ways in which Leontes's relationship with Polixenes impacts Leontes's actions, critics argue "that Leontes seems to feel a sense of chaos or lack of control as he contemplates the degree to which his material existence, masculine identity, and patriarchal transmission of property rely on sexually active female bodies" (Dawkins 99).<sup>17</sup> Even though Shakespeare establishes from the beginning that the bond between Leontes and Polixenes is part of the reason why Leontes's delusion is so powerful to begin with, this fact appears to be relegated to the sidelines in scholarship. By reevaluating the importance of the homosocial relationship between Leontes and Polixenes, I argue that Shakespeare demonstrates how dishonor and mistrust in homosocial relationships creates shame and anxiety that has near irreparable consequences if acted upon. In a relationship where they are well and truly equals, a betrayal of this nature becomes all-consuming. By opening the play with a reminder of that intense connection between Leontes and Polixenes, Shakespeare clues the audience into why this delusion is so powerful and why it is so difficult for Leontes to break free from. Since these two men have a relationship that extends past casual friendship into a more serious bond, even the idea of Polixenes cuckolding Leontes is enough to create shame so intense it worsens his anxiety.

The relationship between Polixenes and Leontes is a source of shame because of the way the concept of honor becomes so warped in Leontes's allegations. In order to explore why Polixenes's involvement so deeply shames Leontes, I turn to Fernie:

Yet what is most interesting about [Claudio's public shaming of Hero] is that, though Hero bears the brunt of it, shame remains a largely male affair. Claudio

does not so much accuse Hero as attempt to shame her father Leonato. Honour, and that worldly shame which is its opposite, are matters for men. (*Shame in Shakespeare* 86)

Whereas Fernie is looking at the economic exchange of women and its associated transactions here, this idea is applicable to all the homosocial connections present in these plays. Shame inherently exists between the men who are at odds with one another in alleged cuckoldry situations because the act of cheating is dishonoring between men. Because he is a sworn brother, the dishonor of Polixenes's alleged extramarital affair becomes "something like a homosocial virus of shame" (*Shame in Shakespeare* 86). Since they have such an exceptional friendship, Leontes's delusion creates this intense sense of shame as Leontes understands himself to be dishonored by his sworn brother.

Before calling attention to Leontes's violent anxiety, Shakespeare must first showcase Leontes's shame in order to explain why Leontes becomes so gripped by anxiety. Using Tomkins' affect theory, I will explore how Shakespeare seems to script shame into Leontes character. Though directorial choices may impact the audience's perception of Leontes's emotions, the script outlines a clear understanding of the affective biological responses present in shame. Shakespeare seems to acknowledge these biological and subconscious reactions that Tomkins outlines in affect theory. Looking at Leontes's dialogue and the implicit staging, two potential affects surface: anger or shame. Leontes's first words upon creating his delusion are "[t]oo hot, too hot" which leads into the description of his "Tremor Cordis... [and how his] heart daunces, / But not for ioy; not ioy" (*The Winter's Tale* 278). In a humoral sense, the reaction does seem to align itself with choleric anger— especially considering the clarification that his heart shudders not for sanguine joy. However, the immediate need to seek out Mamillius to confirm the heredity of his own features lends itself more so to shame, for which no humoral category

exists. Without the humoral language to showcase his shame, Shakespeare instead scripts Leontes to seek out his heir. With only the language of the humoral, it seems as if Shakespeare intuits the bodily manifestation of shame and displays it in this stage action. Though he points to Leontes's anger with the references to the humoral, Shakespeare ultimately links Leontes's contempt of the perceived slight to his shame. This makes sense given that Tomkins relates the affects of contempt and shame closely to one another.

The act of seeking out his own face within his child's affirms Leontes's shame. Tomkins writes that "[t]he shame response is literally an ambivalent turning of the eyes away from the object toward the face[,] toward the self" (360-1). In making Leontes look down at Mamillius, Shakespeare creates the action of Leontes both hanging his head in shame and looking to confirm his own face, his own self. If we are meant to understand the affects as subconscious uses of the face, Shakespeare plays into the instinctual desires that Tomkins outlines by embedding this action into the writing, reaffirming the almost instinctual act of hiding one's face yet seeking it out all the same in the face of shame. Leontes looking for confirmation of Hermione's fidelity in their child's face, that desire to confirm that Mamillius is *his* child through their shared features, reflects how Leontes tries to defy his own shame by searching for familiarity in his child's face. Trying to find any qualities of his own in Mamillius's face portrays how he is trying to turn his face from the shame object and find respite in the biological likeness of his son. However, in looking towards Mamillius, Leontes only confirms his own doubt and in turn worsens his shame. Looking toward the self through the mirror of Mamillius ultimately worsens Leontes's shame. Seeing as Shakespeare is working within the cultural assumption that



an heir is legitimate so long as the child is born in wedlock, failure to confirm that heredity would be devastating for Leontes's legacy. As the only physical product of his and Hermione's marriage and the heir to all that Leontes has, finding that Mamillius might not be his, delusional or not, in turn worsens the effects of shame.

Since Leontes and Polixenes are such close friends, akin to sworn brothers, a Shakespearean audience would be cognizant of how painful and shameful Leontes's loss would be in real life. Choosing to make Polixenes the alleged betrayer in Leontes's cuckoldry delusion highlights Leontes's perceived loss. While Leontes invents the shame that Hermione brings onto him through her "infidelity," he also heightens that shame by making Polixenes the man who is cuckolding him. Tomkins notes "loss" of a close interpersonal relationship, particularly someone who is loved, as one of the motivators for shame (391). As much as his wife is a primary partner and the "loss" of her is difficult, Polixenes's alleged role in taking Hermione is just as much of a loss. Polixenes is someone whose trust and loyalty are significant to Leontes—a note that Shakespeare is sure to emphasize both in the first scene of the play and throughout the conversation of the two kings in the second scene. In making Leontes delude himself into believing that his closest friend and brother is cuckolding him, Shakespeare layers shame onto Leontes in the sense of losing both his brother and his wife. Considering the importance of homosocial bonds in the Early Modern period, Shakespeare's layering of shame with Polixenes only breeds more anxiety within Leontes. Structuring the play so that the audience is well aware of their relationship from the start would allow for an early modern audience to understand why Leontes's understanding of reality may become so warped. No other character that faces this deluded thinking believes their closest ally and

longest friend to be the one cuckolding him. Even the conflict that arises between Valentine and Proteus in *Two Gentleman of Verona*, arguably the closest Shakespearean match in friendship to these two, is not as high stakes as what Leontes may lose because of this alleged betrayal. Compared to the other alleged cuckolders in Shakespeare's works, Polixenes's relationship to the couple creates a far greater sense of shame, especially to an audience familiar with the terms of Leontes and Polixenes's relationship. Manufacturing the loss of Polixenes, though rooted in Leontes' loss of trust, creates shame in the same sense that the cuckolding itself creates shame.

Aside from establishing for the audience why Leontes drives himself into madness with this delusion, Shakespeare likely emphasizes this shame because Leontes's situation is unique among Shakespeare's cuckoldry plots. When looking at the other cuckoldry plots in Shakespeare, Leontes stands out as he convinces himself that he is being cuckolded. While shame plays a fundamental role in cuckoldry, Leontes's shame must be amplified as he is the only source of his delusion. Where Othello has Iago, Claudio has Don John, Posthumus has Iachimo, and Ford has Falstaff, Leontes has only his own thoughts. Shakespeare crafts and highlights the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes to show how Leontes could be so ashamed he blinds himself to logic. Though he heavily critiques the response that Leontes has, Shakespeare still sets up the precedent for Leontes's delusions within the shame dynamics between him and Polixenes.

Outside of creating shame for Leontes, Shakespeare also takes every care to heighten the anxiety he portrays in Leontes. In Leontes's deluded mind, the man who is akin to his brother has usurped his position as husband thus showcasing his "lack," his

inability to maintain the fidelity of his own wife. Robert Applebaum explores the duality of “lack” and its relation to masculinity in *Romeo and Juliet*, claiming,

On the one hand, the man wants to take up the position of his own lack; he wants to stir and occupy it, displacing his rivals.... On the other hand, the man wants to wear the mask of having the position occupied; he wants to show himself not stirring toward it but already standing there in possession of his masculinity. (252)

Shakespeare presents a similar inner battle by pitting Leontes against Polixenes; if

Polixenes proves himself able to take Hermione from Leontes, that exposes Leontes to the perception that he is unable to maintain his position as husband. Thus, in an attempt to both show he already holds the position of husband while somehow taking up that now “lost” position, Leontes finds himself in a jealous rage. In highlighting this sense of lack within Leontes, Shakespeare seemingly emphasizes the danger in twisting reality into this deluded worldview. Viewing the world through this narrowed perspective turns Leontes into a scorned and self-centered character bent on preserving his own legacy with no regard for how it impacts his loved ones until it is too late. In this late play, having Leontes twist himself into the deluded, jealous maniac seems to serve as the strongest warning against this masculine anxiety. Even contemporaries that twist themselves into delusion, like Timothy Troublesome of Sharpham’s *Cupid’s Whirligig*, do not face the same critical consequences of their anxiety as heavily as Leontes, if at all. Leontes tries to establish his authority while simultaneously destroying the connections around him as he attempts to show that he still remains a figure of power in that position, which ultimately leads to tragedy.

In addition to this feeling of “lack” intensifying the anxiety that shame already adds to the situation, the shared level of status required for a bond like theirs only serves to heighten Leontes’ anxiety. While Shakespeare’s other men also face the threat of

cuckoldry, none of the men who are allegedly cuckolding them are of the exact status as them or, if they are relatively close in status, none have status such as Leontes's.

Returning to the idea of honor, to be cuckolded by another king and a lifelong ally is the peak of dishonor. Leontes's honor is essential to his role as king and having Polixenes threaten that breeds fierce anxiety. Playing into Leontes and Polixenes's roles as kings feeds further into the anxiety that Shakespeare structures; again, an audience familiar with the threat another king such as Polixenes could pose to Leontes could understand why Leontes becomes so deluded once gripped by anxiety. Their status combined with the length and depth of their friendship may spark that same struggle that Applebaum notes. With this internal struggle creating anxiety working in tandem with how "Leontes formulates exclusively subjective meaning from ostensibly objective social relationships[.]" Leontes spirals through his anxiety (Wood 194). Shakespeare seems to emphasize how Leontes's anxiety only increases because he warps niceties that are likely common between Hermione and Polixenes into what his anxiety seeks to find. Due to this sort of confirmation bias, there is no way to instill reason into Leontes as he becomes consumed by the delusional idea that Polixenes has betrayed him and insulted his masculinity.

Polixenes's friendship with Hermione influences Leontes' anxiety just as powerfully as his own relationship to Polixenes does. Shakespeare intentionally includes the descriptor of "friend" when Hermione talks of Polixenes. There is also a direct reference to the duration of their friendship: she says that her actions have given her "Th' other for *some while* a Friend" (*The Winter's Tale* 278, emphasis added). Understanding that women were traditionally viewed as more promiscuous, language that designates that

Polixenes shares a close interpersonal relationship with Hermione and that emphasizes the length of their friendship only further ignites Leontes's anxieties. Additionally, Hermione is presumably nine months pregnant given that she gives birth while Leontes imprisons her; in calling attention to the length of their friendship, Shakespeare creates a subtext for Leontes to understand that his wife may be pregnant with another man's child. Shakespeare uses this context of friendship to provide "proof" for Leontes to believe that his suspicions are correct. By showing the audience how this "proof" is, at its core, delusional, Shakespeare seems to acknowledge the danger in men clinging to the slightest threat to their masculinity. This situation is comparable to the situation that Desdemona finds herself in. As she tries to defend Cassio because she cares about his friendship with Othello, Othello becomes more convinced of her infidelity. By creating a scenario where Leontes makes those mental jumps all on his own, Shakespeare thus adds more complexity to Leontes' fear while simultaneously showcasing how clinging to insufficient proof can lead to irreparable harm. While Leontes's perception still delusional, there is a modicum of proof embedded into the language that could spark such a violent reaction in Leontes. In deluding himself in his perception of Hermione and Polixenes' friendship, Leontes introduces the anxiety that Hermione is not bearing his own child, but Polixenes's.

Leontes and Hermione's relationship is also the most solidified out of the four plays; the pair have been married long enough to have a young child and another baby on the way. In fact, aside from the Fords in *Merry Wives*, Leontes and Hermione are the only couple in these plays who have been married for an extensive amount of time and the only couple with children at all. Mamillius plays a key role in the surge of anxiety that

propels Leontes into madness, as does Hermione's pregnancy. The anxiety the children introduce into the situation is likely due to the understanding of legitimate children at the time. In his chapter on jealousy in *Othello*, Marcus Nordlund cites honor culture, the threat of sexually transmitted diseases, and civil law as some of the major proponents of masculine anxiety surrounding cuckoldry. In regard to the legal aspect, "English civil law... pragmatically defined all children born to a married woman as legitimate, regardless of who had fathered them" (Nordlund 171-2). By including the heir in the plot, Shakespeare simultaneously raises the stakes of what Leontes could lose and worsens the consequences that Leontes can face as a result of giving into his own anxiety. Should Mamillius turn out to be Polixenes's child or another man's and not Leontes's, then Leontes would essentially give all that he worked for to another man. In addition to the potential shame of rearing and bequeathing an inheritance to an illegitimate child, the alleged infidelity heightens Leontes' anxiety surrounding Hermione's pregnancy. The sight of Hermione's pregnant belly spurs Leontes into further anxiety as he physically sees what he believes to be the product of his two closest relationships' betrayal. Masculine anxiety takes the forefront of his mind because he risks losing his kingdom to another man's heir thus continuing to show his "lack."

In order to showcase the dangers of Leontes's anxiety, Shakespeare creates several scenarios where Leontes hears the truth about his wife yet refuses to believe any of the characters' protests. His anxiety peaks as he refuses to listen to the pleas of his most trusted advisors and, most notably, the oracle of Apollo. He is given continual evidence that he is the father of his own children and Hermione is faithful, but his anxiety is so strong that it blinds him to reason. Once Paulina fruitlessly tries to make Leontes see

his delusion, Leontes accuses Antigonus of being a “(Traytor) [that] hast set on [his] Wife to this” and continues to claim that the other lords are “lyers all” when they try to defend Antigonus (*The Winter’s Tale* 285). Even in the face of his advisors, Leontes succumbs to his delusion, lashing out at anyone who dares to make him see reality. The increase in defenses of Hermione’s honor reveals the futility in combating anxiety that is so strong. In creating so many instances where Leontes has a chance to see reason, especially spoken by characters who are meant to be some of Leontes’s most trusted allies, Shakespeare portrays exactly how dangerous masculine anxiety can be. Leontes’s anxiety makes him delusional to the point where he cannot even believe a declaration of Hermione’s fidelity that comes directly from the mouth of Apollo. Due to his inability to accept the truth, Apollo’s prophecy that “the King shall liue without an Heire” starts to take hold with the death of Mamillius and the temporary death of Hermione (*The Winter’s Tale* 287). Leontes’s masculine anxiety warps his perception so much that he refuses to believe an actual god and he suffers both the loss of his heir and his wife who could bear him another heir.

While the loss of his heir is a harsh consequence for refusing to believe in the fidelity of his wife, Leontes’s punishment only builds from there, showcasing Shakespeare’s warning about the danger in acting out of delusion. It is only when Mamillius dies and Leontes can attribute the death to Apollo’s wrath that he understands his delusion is just that—a delusion. But Shakespeare further punishes Leontes for becoming so warped by that masculine anxiety by making his lost daughter fall in love with Polixenes’s son, Florizell. Even when Perdita is brought back to Sicillia and Leontes questions whether or not she is a princess, Florizell remarks “She is, / When once she is

my Wife” (*The Winter’s Tale* 300). Perdita’s status rests no longer in Leontes’ hands but in the hands of the Bohemian prince. Leontes’s anxiety about having another man’s heir on his throne becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy. The lost child that will undo the prophecy is found through Florizell, and since the newly revived Hermione is too old to produce another male, the kingdom of Sicillia is left, presumably, in the hands of the Bohemian prince. Entrenched so deeply in his masculine anxiety, Leontes must lose everything to realize the truth and atone for the resulting consequences. This facet in Shakespeare, consistent across his texts that deal with cuckoldry, is unique among his contemporaries.

Other early modern playwrights do not choose the path of atonement or punishment for their deluded men. Philaster follows a similar path to Leontes when he stabs Arethusa in the face of allegations that she has cuckolded him. Like Leontes and other Shakespearean men, Philaster recognizes that he will be “a loathed villaine” if “she may be abus’d” (H1r) and reconciles with the fact that she is potentially innocent. However, although he seems to lament his actions as Leontes does, Philaster does not face repercussions in the way many of the Shakespearean men do. He marries Arethusa and then takes his rightful place on the throne. Comparatively, Shakespeare harshly criticizes men who doubt their wives’ fidelity. Leontes is not permitted to have an heir and will, eventually, lose his kingdom to another bloodline. By not only crafting remorse but punishing the characters who succumb to their anxieties and think their wives untrue, Shakespeare creates a niche for his work that critiques anxious masculinity and the ways that masculine anxiety harms others.



What is key in this plot that distinguishes it from some of Shakespeare's contemporaries is the deep remorse that Leontes, and the other Shakespearean men who accuse their wives of cuckoldry, feels in the wake of his loss. When Paulina starts to berate Leontes for allowing his anxiety to cloud him to the point that his child dies and his wife is "dead," he encourages the reprimand, requesting that she "go on: / Thou canst not speake too much, [as he has] deseru'd / All tongues to talke their bittrest"; not only that, but he decrees that in the aftermath of their deaths he will "visit / The Chappell where they lye, and teares shed there / Shall be [his] recreation" (*The Winter's Tale* 288). Only *Phylaster* portrays a similar sense of remorse in accusing and acting out against his beloved, but the moment is relatively short, focuses primarily on Philaster's concerns about how he will be judged, and finally turns attention back to the fact that he also stabbed his page; Chapman praises the public shaming of Gazetta in *All Fools* and Sharpham does not clearly resolve Sir Troublesomes' jealousy in *Cupid's Whirligig*. Unlike his contemporaries, in his plays that deal with cuckoldry allegations Shakespeare ensures that the dismay and shame brought upon the men who are delusional are clearly at work. Leontes is not free from suffering in the aftermath of his delusions. Instead, he openly acknowledges his insanity and intends to fully suffer from the fallout of his actions. While Shakespeare seems to use the cuckoldry plots as a warning against falling prey to anxious masculinity, he uses the men's reactions to reaffirm the devastation that anxiety breeds in men as well as the others around them. Masculine anxiety does not solely harm the women that become the victims of jealous men's actions, it deeply impacts the men who suffer from it.

## CHAPTER 2

### *OTHELLO*: THE WEAPONIZATION OF HOMOSOCIAL BONDS

Arguably, *Othello* is the most effective at portraying the disastrous effects of masculine anxiety and the reactions it encourages on not just the “cuckold” but on everyone around them. Though *Cymbeline* comes next in the backwards trajectory of Shakespeare’s plays, there is a disruption in Posthumus’s actions which complicates the plot. This complication presents a new idea about homosocial bonds, particularly between that of servants and their masters, which I will explore after discussing *Othello* and *Much Ado*. Turning first to *Othello*, Shakespeare creates a fairly stable foundation for Othello and Desdemona’s relationship despite the tumultuous start of the play. Though Iago and Roderigo alert Brabantio to the elopement and Brabantio instantly tries to question their marriage, Othello remains steadfast in his belief that Desdemona truly loves him. Even when Brabantio insinuates that Desdemona may deceive Othello just as she deceived him, Othello vows his “life vpon her faith” (*Othello* 315). Othello continues to vocalize his devotion and love for Desdemona as Iago begins to pull the strings in his plot for Othello’s downfall. When Iago starts to put doubt into his mind by calling attention to the way that Cassio and Desdemona interact with one another, Othello begs Iago for tangible proof. Compared to Leontes, it takes almost the entirety of *Othello* to convince Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful. In the face of Iago’s accusations, Othello still holds onto the belief that Desdemona is faithful until Act Four, just a singular Act before the end of the play. In each of Iago’s attempts to make Othello

believe himself cuckolded, Shakespeare demonstrates just how steadfast Othello's love for Desdemona is and how much he doubts her infidelity. Only when Iago procures tangible "proof" does Othello fully bend to the anxieties Iago planted in him. In emphasizing Othello's faith in Desdemona and the subsequent delusion that Iago creates, Shakespeare highlights how perilous masculine anxiety can be even for the most reasonable of men.

In order to create that masculine anxiety within Othello, Shakespeare first creates a place for shame to take root in Othello's relationship to Cassio. Before providing Othello with tangible proof of Desdemona's affair, Iago focuses his plot on undermining the homosocial bond between Othello and Cassio. Less explicitly than he does with Leontes and Polixenes, Shakespeare first points to the connection between Cassio and Othello's relationship during Iago's tirade about Cassio's promotion over his own. Iago informs Roderigo that he resents Othello, Cassio, and Cassio's promotion because "[m]eere prattle (without practise) / Is all [Cassio's] Souldiership. But he (Sir) had th'election" to Lieutenant" (*Othello* 310). Othello presumably selects Cassio because he trusts Cassio's opinions and believes him to give sound advice. Cassio's election to Lieutenant is one of the motivators Iago cites for turning his wrath unto Othello, but because of the fact that Othello places his trust in Cassio through that role, it is also an easy source of shame for Iago to exploit. Iago recognizes the importance of homosocial bonds, particularly to Othello who relies upon them as a foreigner in a position of power, and in turn manipulates that bond to bring dishonor onto both men. Being connected through their military bond, Cassio and Othello have a duty to uphold one another's

honor and to avoid bringing shame upon one another. Their intertwined honor becomes Iago's target when he crafts the event that ultimately brings shame upon the pair.

While notions of honor began to shift from recognition of titles and status alone to more personal codes in the early modern period, the connection and valuing of sworn brotherhood and friendship was still a remnant in honor culture.<sup>18</sup> As Bray notes, "friendships between men... carried obligations that were frequently irksome and always dangerous. For a man's honor could be at stake in the manner in which the obligations of friendship were made and called upon" (76). Within a homosocial relationship of ranking military men, trust and honor become integral to upholding one another's station. As General and Lieutenant, Othello and Cassio have a commitment to one another within their military roles to make sound decisions and provide reliable advice. Beyond that, Othello stakes his personal trust in Cassio as he is the man he consults with most often; Desdemona even notes that Cassio was there throughout Othello's courtship of her and spoke highly of him (*Othello* 232). Othello relies on Cassio to uphold and preserve his honor both in their military and personal lives. In promoting Cassio over Iago, Othello, subconsciously or otherwise, raises Cassio's counsel over Iago's. Because Shakespeare creates this power dynamic wherein Iago feels inferior to Cassio and Othello receives counsel from Cassio, the Moor's relationship with Cassio becomes a site for shame to be evoked.

Though shame plays a larger part in Othello's reaction to learning of Desdemona's fidelity after he has murdered her, there is still shame in Othello's relationship to Cassio. The first instance of shame is a result of Cassio's failure to remain sober and keep order while Othello celebrates his nuptials with Desdemona. While

Othello is away, Cassio is meant to keep the revelry to an acceptable level but instead gets into a fight with Roderigo and is ousted from his role as Lieutenant in accordance with Iago's plan. It is this removal from office that shames both Othello and Cassio. According to Tomkins, one of the primary shame responses is to hide the face from the object of shame—to limit the ability for the thing causing shame to have access to any facial responses. In the aftermath of Cassio's removal from office, Othello continually denies Desdemona's requests for Othello to make time for Cassio:

Des. Good Loue, call him backe.  
Othel. Not now (sweet Desdemon) some other time.  
Des. But shall't be shortly?  
Oth. The sooner (Sweet) for you.  
Des. Shall't be tonight, at Supper?  
Oth. No, not tonight.  
Des. Tomorrow Dinner then?  
Oth. I shall not dine at home:  
I meete the Captaines at the Cittadell.  
Des. Why then tomorrow night, on Tuesday morne,  
On Tuesday noone, or night; on Wensday Morne.  
I prythee name the time, but let it not  
Exceed three dayes.  
...  
Oth. Prythee no more: Let him come when he will:  
I will deny thee nothing. (*Othello* 323)

Othello never notes that he will decidedly make time for Cassio. Rather, Othello seems to placate his wife with a vague insinuation that he will make the time should Cassio choose to come and only because Desdemona is requesting him to hear Cassio out. Just as Cassio leaves the scene because of his shame when Othello enters, Othello seems to be reluctant to make the time to hear Cassio's case which denotes his own internalized shame at having an officer promoted to be his second-in command fail at his job. In his failure to perform his duties as Lieutenant, Cassio brings shame not only on himself, but on Othello

who promoted him. There are three key points that Tomkins covers that apply to how shame functions here; first, Tomkins argues that “the face is experienced as most salient in shame” (359). As a result, “the shame response itself so dramatically calls attention to the face” and in turn causes the shamed to turn from the object of their shame “toward the face[,] toward the self” (Tomkins 360-1). The desire to turn away from the shame object, in this case Cassio for Othello and vice versa, is a result “of the possibilities of such shared awareness” for which “there is no greater intimacy than the interocular interaction” (Tomkins 385). Completely removing the ability to see one another’s faces, the site of their shame, confirms Othello’s shame. In creating this distinct separation between Othello and Cassio, Shakespeare not only reaffirms that Othello is experiencing shame as a result of Cassio’s actions, but provides a clear pathway for Iago to infect their relationship. With no communication between him and Cassio, Othello has to rely on what information Iago provides him, something Iago does not hesitate to abuse. This first instance of shame weakens Othello’s trust in Cassio thus playing into Iago’s plan while also laying the foundation for Othello’s anxiety related to Iago’s cuckoldry plot.

With Othello’s weakened trust in Cassio, Iago is able to shape Cassio and Desdemona’s interactions into an adulterous tryst. Not only has Cassio proven to be unfit for the role Othello selected him for, bringing shame upon Othello, but Iago fabricates an affair that insinuates Cassio violated Othello’s dignity as a husband. Experiencing shame already, Othello is susceptible to “the nature of the experience of shame [which] guarantees a perpetual sensitivity to any violation of the dignity of man” (Tomkins 358). Without the first instance of shame and weakening of trust in Cassio, Othello’s seemingly infallible faith in Desdemona would not be called into question. Shakespeare then creates

two layers of shame in order to show how masculine anxiety related to cuckoldry can impact even the most rational of men. While Othello and Cassio are not as close as Leontes and Polixenes, the breaking of trust and resultant shame still allows for Iago to plant the seeds for anxiety in Othello. Cassio being the one to cuckold Othello then becomes shameful because Othello is already ashamed by Cassio's failure and because Cassio is a man that Othello once trusted above others.

Along with the shame that comes with cuckoldry and the metaphorical loss of one of his closest men, there may be shame related to Othello's status compared to Cassio. While Othello outranks Cassio in the military, he is still a social foreigner compared to Cassio. As a Florentine, Cassio would likely have a better understanding of the social norms and customs than Othello would, resulting in Cassio having a slightly higher social status. This discrepancy in their social standings may be part of the reason that Cassio would need to be with Othello during his courtship of Desdemona. His opinion as an Italian familiar with society would hold more weight with Desdemona than Othello's alone. Rebecca Olson highlights this difference in social status as a source of jealousy between Othello and Desdemona. However, in looking at the relationship between Cassio and Othello, the same argument applies. Looking at the "Haply, for I am blacke" speech in Act Three, scene three, Olson pays particular attention to Othello's concerns about his inability to have "those soft parts of Conuersation / That Chamberers haue" (*Othello* 325).<sup>19</sup> Olson argues this is "a skill directly related to social station" that Othello's "bewitching eloquence" would not compare to (14). Cassio, however, portrays this kind of Chamberer's eloquence when Desdemona arrives to Cyprus ahead of Othello showering Desdemona with praise and requesting officers kneel as she approaches

(*Othello* 316). By distinguishing that oratory difference between the two, Shakespeare creates another aspect that can fuel Othello's anxiety in regard to his cuckoldry. Not only is Cassio displacing him as a husband, but he would potentially be a better social match than Othello. Having been berated by Brabantio about his station beneath Desdemona already, Othello proves sturdy in his belief that he is Desdemona's equal until Iago introduces this anxiety about Othello's status compared to Cassio.

Whereas the shame factors in his relationship to Cassio heighten his masculine anxiety, Cassio is not the greatest source of anxiety in Othello's presumed cuckoldry; it is the handkerchief that becomes a penultimate source of Othello's anxiety and the key switch Iago needs to get Othello to trust in him over Desdemona. Whereas Iago's focus on undermining the homosocial bond is instrumental in getting Othello primed for overwhelming masculine anxiety, Othello continually begs Iago for "[o]ccular proofe" (*Othello* 325). With that desire for proof, Iago turns to the most important symbol of Desdemona and Othello's union: the handkerchief. Othello divulges that his mother instructed him to give the handkerchief, the last remnant of Othello's mother, to his future spouse "when [his] Fate would haue him Wiu'd" (*Othello* 327). Not only does the handkerchief symbolize the love which Othello bears for Desdemona, but it also a symbol of the promise both to his mother and to his wife. Much like a wedding ring, the handkerchief to Desdemona becomes a symbol of their marriage. When Othello begs Iago for tangible proof, other than seeing Cassio and Desdemona's interactions through a twisted lens, then the handkerchief morphs into a perceptible representation of their marriage. To have that stripped away and in the hands of another man becomes the veritable proof that Othello so desires; his wife has, according to Iago, stripped herself of



the symbol of their marriage and instead given it to the man who Othello once trusted most. Iago chooses the handkerchief as the piece of tangible evidence not only because it is a symbol for Othello's marriage, but because it becomes irrevocable proof that Iago's words are not delusional. Having planted the seeds of this cuckoldry delusion already, Iago uses the handkerchief as a means to convince Othello that he is more faithful and loyal to Othello than Desdemona is. Even though the evidence is circumstantial at best, the growing anxieties in Othello make that handkerchief clear proof of Iago's honesty. The handkerchief becomes the key to Othello ultimately raising his bond with Iago over his bond with Desdemona, Despite his best efforts to believe in the fidelity of his wife, Othello is twisted far enough that his masculine anxiety narrows his vision to see Desdemona's actions only as confirmation of her adultery.

Given the tangible "proof" in the handkerchief in conjunction with Iago's manipulation, Othello puts more faith in his homosocial bond with Iago and falls prey to his masculine anxiety. From the start of the play Othello has immense faith in Iago, referring to him as "honest" and reiterating his trust in him to Cassio claiming that "Iago, is most honest" (*Othello* 315 & 319). Othello's trust in Iago is something that Iago does not hesitate to exploit. Throughout his entire plot wherein he uses every relationship to his advantage, Iago ensures that he maintains the guise of a trustworthy and honorable man. Upholding that reputation becomes the most important once Iago introduces the cuckoldry to Othello. That trust becomes the foundation of their vows to one another towards the end of Act Three, scene three:

*Iago.* Witnesse you euer-burning Lights aboue,  
You Elements, that clip vs round about,  
Witnessse that heere *Iago* doth giue vp  
The execution of his wit, hands, heart,

To wrong'd *Othello's* Service. Let him command,  
And to obey shall be in me remorse,  
What bloody businesse euer.  
*Oth.* I greet thy love,  
Not with vaine thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,  
And will vpon the instant put thee to't. (*Othello* 326)

With Iago's vows, Shakespeare solidifies the bond between Othello and Iago over that of Desdemona and Othello. Just after this, Othello requests that Iago kill Cassio and plots to murder Desdemona alongside Iago two scenes later. Iago's plot would not be as effective were it not for the immense trust that Othello has in Iago that Shakespeare is sure to emphasize. These vows alongside the other proof that Iago provides of his loyalty becomes Othello's downfall as raising the homosocial bond over his marital bond blinds him to any sense of reality.

With the anxieties that have taken root in Othello and his complete trust in his homosocial bond with Iago, Othello loses the ability to attend to more accurate information about Desdemona from the one woman who hardly ever leaves Desdemona's side. Before Othello officially confronts and murders Desdemona, he asks Emilia if what transpired between Cassio and Desdemona seemed suspect at any moment. As the woman closest to her, Emilia is hardly ever separate from Desdemona and is intimately familiar with her day-to-day activities. Emilia continually rejects any notion that the accused cheaters were ever alone together or even seemed to be hiding something from her. She offers to "[l]ay downe [her] Soule at stake" "to wager, [Desdemona] is honest" (*Othello* 331). Yet Othello sends her away to fetch Desdemona, claiming that Emilia "saies enough: yet she's a simple Baud / That cannt say as much. This is a subtile Whore: / A Closset Locke and Key of Villainous Secrets" (*Othello* 331). Othello, who once told Desdemona's father that he would bet his life on her faithfulness, is so twisted by the

anxieties put in him by the scorned Iago that he is unable to see that the most knowledgeable person in regards to Desdemona's intentions is telling the truth. As Desdemona's attendant along with being her confidant, Emilia is around Desdemona the most and would have the most insight to what Desdemona does and says when Othello is not around. Since it is Emilia that tries to assuage Othello's anxieties, Shakespeare demonstrates how rationality has escaped Othello seeing as Emilia is the most informed person about Desdemona's actions aside from Desdemona herself. In refusing to believe Emilia's claims, Shakespeare emphasizes the grip Othello's anxiety has on him. Even in the face of Emilia asserting Desdemona's innocence six separate times over the course of their dialogue, Othello cannot undo the image his anxious masculinity has created. The one individual who would have a working knowledge of Desdemona's activities is no longer a viable source of information for Othello, despite his having been a rational man before this point, leading to the ultimate tragedy of the play.

Unable to reconcile his own masculine anxieties, Othello ultimately smothers Desdemona in their bed. The murder of Desdemona is arguably the most difficult part of the play to read through and watch as Desdemona continually pleads for mercy and assures him of her innocence moments before Othello smothers her. Even the dialogue appears to build in a kind of struggle from Desdemona when she protests "O banish me, my Lord, but kill me not" resulting in Othello's "Downe Strumpet" (*Othello* 336). Each piece of dialogue seems to overlap as the pair struggle before the stage direction for her murder comes into play. Creating a scene so violent and uncomfortable allows Shakespeare to show the dire effects that masculine anxiety of this degree can have on unwilling participants. The audience's knowledge of Desdemona's innocence only

creates a more haunting and difficult scene to watch, playing into this continual reminder from Shakespeare that masculinely anxious men who place their faith in homosocial bonds over their marital bonds pose a dangerous threat to those around them. This extreme act of violence is consistent among domestic tragedy plays, as seen in *A Woman Killed*, yet Shakespeare invites a deep sense of shame into Othello in the aftermath of learning the truth.

The impact of Othello's suicide is not fully explored within the final moments of the play, though Shakespeare still highlights that putting faith in a one-sided homosocial bond over the marital bond and acting out violently towards the source of that anxiety leads to irresolvable consequences. In light of Othello's suicide preceded by a plea to remember him for the honorable ways he acted, Gratiano claims that "[a]ll that is spoke, is marr'd" and Lodovico remarks that the image of Othello and Desdemona dead bodies are "[t]he Obeject [that] poysons sight" (*Othello* 338-9). Even in light of his suicide, Othello is seen primarily as a murderer and his corpse along with Desdemona's taints the entire scene. The most violent of ends among these plays also serves as Shakespeare's most poignant critique that there are lasting impacts on those who elevate their homosocial bonds while disparaging their marital bonds. Though the breakdown of trust in marital bonds lies at the heart of cuckoldry jokes, as noted by Kate Lyon, the "collapse of [conjugal] trust creates the dramatic tension that turns those jokes to violence" as seen in both the murder of Desdemona and Othello's suicide (173). For a man who seems so infallible and secure, masculine anxiety and the perversion of the homosocial bond lead to an irreconcilable end. Each connected death and the fallout as a result of Othello's suicide only confirm that masculine anxiety impacts everyone connected to the anxious

man. Shakespeare emphasizes that giving into masculine anxiety and trusting a one-sided homosocial bond ultimately destroys the lives of all the people surrounding the couple at the center of that anxiety.

Though Iago subsequently kills Emilia to silence her, Othello must still face the consequences of his anxieties which ultimately drive him to suicide. The grief Othello experiences over Desdemona's death which drives him to suicide is one of the ways in which these plays progressively show how “it is men who require warning because they are in a position to do more damage” (Vanita 14). The power of masculinity and men is evident throughout Othello with the death of Desdemona demonstrating the devastating effects that come with elevating masculinity or male bonds. As Stephen Cohen writes, “the specter of cuckoldry is the product not of female agency but of a competition between men played out through sympathetic but disempowered women” (27-28). Undoubtedly, these men hold power over these women, but it is not just the “specter of cuckoldry” that Shakespeare warns about. More specifically, Shakespeare emphasizes that it is other men that utilize their power over women to twist innocent and loving men into believing themselves cuckolded. In highlighting how men use that power with other men, Shakespeare portrays the disastrous effects of believing those homosocial bonds over their marital bonds. Othello's susceptibility to his masculine anxiety causes him to lose the woman most dear to him—a fact so devastating that he cannot bear to live with it. His fate may differ from Claudio's so much because he fails to see reason through his anxiety.

The reason Othello does not succumb to his masculine anxiety as quickly as Leontes is likely because that anxiety is not created internally. Instead, Shakespeare

introduces an external drive for that anxiety: Iago. While there is no outside deluder in *The Winter's Tale*, *Much Ado* and *Cymbeline*, like *Othello*, include a character specifically designed to delude the male protagonist in their respective plays. However, Iachimo is only half acquainted with Posthumus and Don John is connected to Claudio primarily because of Claudio's relationship to Don Pedro. Comparatively, Iago is far closer to Othello when he hatches the plot than Don John is to Claudio or Iachimo is to Posthumus. Othello has immense faith in Iago, referring to him as "[h]onest Iago" and reiterating his trust in him to Cassio claiming that "Iago, is most honest" (*Othello* 315 & 319). Othello's trust in Iago is something that Iago does not hesitate to exploit. Not only that, but through Iago's exploitation of Othello's devotion, Shakespeare seems to be warning men to be cautious about the men that they trust. Though Othello believes Iago to be honest and honorable, the audience knows that he is deeply insulted by Othello and is acting out of his own scorn. Highlighting the irony of Othello's perception and the audience's knowledge, Shakespeare appears to warn men about a specific kind of homosocial bond to be wary of. While homosocial bonds are deeply important to the men in these plays and outside of the walls of the playhouse, Shakespeare seemingly notes that not all relationships are made the same. Through Iago's manipulation and deception of Othello, Shakespeare notes that one-sided homosocial bonds can cause serious harm to the man being exploited and those closest to him.

## CHAPTER 3

### *MUCH ADO*: SHAKESPEARE'S INITIAL EXPLORATION OF ANXIETY V. HOMOSOCIALITY

Where *Much Ado* differs from the other plays is that the elevation of both the one-sided homosocial bond and masculine anxiety are spread across two different characters. Claudio never really expresses the same anxious concerns as Othello, Posthumus, or Leontes nor does he harbor the same violent thoughts towards women that those men do. However, like the other men Claudio does put more faith in the men around him than in his beloved. In particular, Claudio trusts the word of a man who does not particularly care about Claudio in the slightest. Alternatively, Benedick functions as the human embodiment of masculine anxiety but ultimately trusts his beloved over his closest homosocial bonds. Seeing as this is Shakespeare's first play that has this false cuckoldry plot formula, *Much Ado* almost appears to be Shakespeare's attempt to look at these two plot devices individually before merging them into a singular character. Whereas the warnings about trusting one-sided homosocial bonds and resisting masculine anxiety appear the same, Shakespeare uses *Much Ado* to explore those ideas separately.

From the start of the play, Claudio and Benedick are set up as opposites in terms of masculine anxiety immediately after Claudio falls in love with Hero. When Claudio tries to ask about Hero, Benedick asks Claudio if he "would... haue [Benedick] speake after [his] custome, as being a professed tyrant to their sexe" (*Much Ado* 102). When Don Pedro and Claudio note Benedick's stubbornness in deciding not to get married,

Benedick responds, “That a woman conceived me, I thanke her : that she brought mee vp, I likewise giue her most humble thankes: but that I will haue a rechate winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an inuisible baldricke, all women shall pardon me: because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will doe myself the right to trust none” (*Much Ado* 103). In addition to considering himself a tyrant to women, Benedick openly acknowledges that he believes that the majority of women make cuckolds of men. The Folger edition of *Much Ado* glosses the recheat line as “i.e., wear the horns of a cuckold” (20) while the Norton edition notes that the invisible baldrick is “a sign of the cuckold’s ignorance” (1411). Benedick is clearly making a joke aimed at men he deems foolish enough to allow themselves to be made cuckolds since his characterization centers around being anxious about the sexual lives of women. The joke “suggests... marriage emasculates a man and flaunts the evidence of his emasculation by displaying the displaced phallus in his forehead” (Cook 187). However, Shakespeare ultimately rejects the basis of that joke as he scripts Benedick’s ending as a married man. I argue that Benedick’s remarks at the end of the play suggest that Shakespeare uses Benedick’s diminished anxiety to portray the laughability of such masculine anxieties. I suggest Shakespeare displays Benedick’s distaste of love, marriage, and women so early in the play for two reasons: first, because Benedick’s vehement distrust of women becomes ironic as he is deceived into falling in love with Beatrice, adding an extra layer of comedy in Shakespeare’s plot; second, because the destruction of Benedick’s anxiety towards the latter half of the play becomes an essential place for Shakespeare’s commentary in the complexity of Hero’s shaming and revival.



Despite Benedick's insistence that women are not to be trusted, Claudio is free from that anxiety and holds no stock in the idea that all women will make a cuckold of their husbands. Shakespeare has plenty of opportunities for Claudio to agree with Benedick's consistent remarks about cuckoldry throughout the course of the play, yet Claudio and Don Pedro seem to poke fun at Benedick for his fervent belief in the dishonesty of women. When enacting their plot to make Beatrice and Benedick fall in love with one another, they trick Benedick by claiming that Beatrice is already in love with him but it would be fruitless to inform Benedick because, according to Claudio, "he would but make a sport of [her love] and torment the poore Lady worse" and, according to Don Pedro, "'tis very possible hee'l scorne it, for the man (as you know all) has a contemptible spirit" (*Much Ado* 108-9). By using Benedick's contempt of women and their affections to manipulate him into falling love with Beatrice, Don Pedro and Claudio demonstrate how foolish they believe that contempt to be. Shakespeare uses this scene in particular to show that Benedick's anxiety is ridiculous to both Claudio and Don Pedro. Their use of that disdain in this prank serves as a comparison between Claudio and Benedick. Whereas Benedick finds Claudio's devotion to Hero unfathomable, Claudio believes Benedick's anxiety to be laughable and, in this scene, the butt of a joke. Setting up the dichotomy between Claudio and Benedick in the beginning of the play allows Shakespeare to manufacture the loss of Benedick's anxiety and the warping of Claudio's trust as the play continues on.

Despite his apparent lack of anxiety, Claudio is still susceptible to mistrust of Hero due to his initial trust in homosocial bonds, primarily with Don Pedro. The first instance Claudio trusts in a homosocial bond is when he entrusts Don Pedro to woo Hero

on his behalf. When Claudio admits to wanting to marry Hero, Don Pedro offers the following plan:

I will assume thy [Claudio's] part in some disguise  
And tell faire *Hero* I am *Claudio*,  
And in her bosome Ile vnclaspe my heart,  
And take her hearing prisoner with the force  
And strong incounter of my amorous tale:  
Then after, to her father I will breake,  
And the conclusion is, shee shall be thine. (*Much Ado* 103)

Claudio does not express any anxieties about Don Pedro undertaking this suit, entrusting that Don Pedro will stay true to his word and forfeit Hero when the wooing is finished. Shakespeare here seems to rely on the cultural norm that Bray examines where men in friendships trust one another to uphold the other's honor. It is that faith in the homosocial bond that Don John initially tries to manipulate. Learning that there will be a party involving masked revelry, Don John utilizes the mystery of facelessness to create mistrust in Claudio. Addressing him as Benedick, Don John tells Claudio that he "heard [Don Pedro] sweare his affection" for Hero and pleads for him to "disswade him from her, for she is no equall for his birth" (*Much Ado* 105). The diversion successfully persuades Claudio into believing that Don Pedro has betrayed him but does not succeed in destroying their bond as Don John aims to do.

Claudio's reaction to finding that Don Pedro has allegedly won Hero for himself becomes another way for Shakespeare to express that Claudio is not anxious about cuckoldry but is concerned about homosociality. Rather than focusing on Hero and her dishonesty after hearing Don John's allegations, Claudio turns his attention to the actions of Don Pedro, claiming "[f]riendship is constant in all other things, / Saue in the Office and affaires of loue / Therefore all hearts in loue vse their owne tongues" (*Much Ado*

106). Claudio's primary focus is on Don Pedro and the violation of their homosocial bond rather than the loss of Hero. Claudio only moves past Don Pedro's neglect to keep his promise because the suit is related to love. Notions about Cupid and the random, often painful parts of love that dominated the period may contribute to Shakespeare's note about love here. The slight from Don Pedro becomes something less personal and attributed to the lack of control that comes with love. Though his trust in Don Pedro falters, Claudio still holds true to his homosocial bond opting not to disparage or otherwise shame Don Pedro. Shakespeare demonstrates that while Claudio is not anxious, he does rely heavily on the men around him and has a deep desire to have faith in homosocial bonds.

Though Claudio does have a brief lapse of jealousy, it is not as severe as the anxiety experienced by the other "cuckolds" or Benedick and the jealousy is resolved in a short span of Act Two, scene one. When Benedick finds Claudio, he notes that he is there on the request of Don Pedro to tell him that "the Prince hath got [his] Hero" (*Much Ado* 105). The interaction between Claudio and Benedick afterwards is the first demonstration of Claudio's jealousy:

Clau. I wish him ioy of her

Ben. Why that's spoken like an honest Drouier, so they sel Bullockes: but did you thinke the Prince wold haue serued you thus?

Clau. I pray you leaue me.

Ben. Ho now you strike like the blindman, 'twas the boy that stole your meat and you'll beat the post.

After Benedick's jests, Claudio exits, fulfilling his own request to be left alone. There is not much in the way of Claudio vocalizing his own jealousy other than wanting to be left alone. While this may be connected to the affective desire to remove the ability to perceive facial expressions when ashamed, Claudio's desire to be left alone also leaves

room for interpretation as to the exact nature of his emotions. Shakespeare's ambiguity in that scene is clarified by Beatrice when she notes that "[t]he Count is neither sad, nor sicke, nor merry, nor well: but ciuill Count, ciuill as an Orange, and something of a iealous complexion" (*Much Ado* 106). The play on Seville oranges here notes the bitter attitude coupled with Claudio's apparent jealousy. Though Claudio refuses to speak on the matter, the characters around him note exactly what emotions seem to be lying under the surface. In scripting Claudio's silence and relying instead on other characters, Shakespeare portrays Claudio's faith to the homosocial bond. Not once does Claudio speak ill of Don Pedro nor of his alleged successful suit of Hero. Instead, Claudio maintains the air of someone who respects Don Pedro and supports him. In maintaining his faith in the homosocial, Don Pedro then alleviates the growing jealousy, proving to Claudio once more that he has an ally in Don Pedro.

The initial failing of Claudio's trust in his homosocial bond proves to be an advantage for Don John once more when Claudio renews his faith in Don Pedro and receives his bride. When Beatrice remarks that Claudio looks jealous, Don Pedro responds, "though Ile be sworne, if hee be so, his conceit is false: heere Claudio, I haue wooed in thy name, and faire Hero is won, I haue broke with her father, and his good will obtained, name the day of marriage, and God giue thee ioy" (*Much Ado* 106). Stunned into silence, Claudio must be prompted by Beatrice to admit his joy at Don Pedro actually pursuing Hero in Claudio's name. Nothing more is said about Claudio's brief lapse in trust, yet Don Pedro's loyalty to Claudio serves as a reminder that genuine homosocial bonds can ultimately be relied upon. By creating a fissure in this homosocial bond and repairing it, Shakespeare strengthens Claudio's perception that men are meant to be

trusted. Despite his prior belief that Don Pedro has betrayed him, learning the truth that Don Pedro kept his word reasserts Claudio's trust in the bonds of homosociality. That repaired and strengthened faith in homosocial bonds is what Shakespeare uses to set Claudio up to be preyed upon when Don John, Conrad, and Borachio develop the cuckoldry plot involving Hero.

Prior to developing the new plot that Don John and his goons work out, Shakespeare continually portrays the lack of anxiety in Claudio, choosing to focus instead on Claudio's ability to trust. In the Act following Benedick's declarations against women, Claudio becomes an almost perfect foil to Benedick when he tells Hero, "I giue away my selfe for you, and doat vpon the exchange" (*Much Ado* 106). Unlike Benedick, Claudio gives himself wholly to Hero without the fear that she will be unfaithful to him. Making this line come directly after Don Pedro's reveal that he won Hero for Claudio and Leonato's confirmation that he is giving his daughter to Claudio allows Shakespeare to portray just how easily Claudio can put away that budding anxiety. Shakespeare shifts Claudio's focus from what was almost lost to what has been restored. Even though this interaction comes after Claudio believed himself to have lost Hero to Don Pedro, Claudio is able to bounce back into a sense of trust that Hero will take care of the part of himself that he gives away. Don John ultimately relies on Claudio's ability to restore trust with ease as he plots against Claudio and Don Pedro.

The homosocial connection to Don John plays an essential role in making Claudio believe Hero has been unfaithful because Don John preys upon Claudio's faith in homosocial bonds in the false cuckoldry plot. Seeing as Don John is newly reconciled with his brother after an attempted coup, Don John must be cautious when outlining his

accusations to his brother and Claudio. When he comes to Don Pedro and Claudio, Don John begins not with the actual allegation, but an appeal to the pair: “You may thinke I loue you not, let that appeare hereafter, and ayme better at me by that I now will manifest, for my brother (I thinke, he holds you well, and in dearness of heart) hath holpe to effect your ensuing marriage” (*Much Ado* 111). Rather than producing concocted evidence first, Don John relies on the fact that Claudio has a far more established homosocial bond with Don Pedro and is tangentially connected with Don John through that bond. Even Don John, a bastard who acts only for himself, must pretend to believe that homosocial bonds are of the utmost importance to him. In choosing to have Don John appeal to Claudio and Don Pedro’s understanding of homosociality, Shakespeare creates an ironic effect similar to the audience’s knowledge about the women’s chastity. The audience knows Don John is acting only for his own gain, yet he acts as if he cares about the other men around him and elevates their connection above his own selfishness so that he can enact his plot. Doing so allows Shakespeare to emphasize the relevance of homosocial bonds in Don John’s cuckoldry plot.

Rather than aiming to create and portray anxiety within Claudio, Shakespeare highlights the complete reliance that Claudio has on his homosocial bonds. More specifically, Shakespeare focuses on the perception that Claudio believes in Don John due to their mutual connection to Don Pedro, not because he is unsettled by the status of his relationship to Hero. As the bastard brother of Don Pedro, Don John still classifies as family, something reaffirmed by Leonato’s greeting to Don John: “let mee bid you welcome, my Lord, being reconciled to the Prince your brother: I owe you all duetie”

(*Much Ado* 102). As such, their familial relation intertwines their honor. Don John notes his distaste for this when he tells Conrad, “if I had my liberty, I would do my liking” (*Much Ado* 104). There is a sense of restraint that Don John has to impose on himself, or he may presumably risk the same previous fallout with his brother. According to Linda Pollock, “the landed ranks were actively engaged in shaping and ensuring the honor of their relatives, attempting to impose their visions of honorable behavior on others while simultaneously protecting and sustaining their reputation” (17). Though Don John does not express any joy at these societal conditions, they are an important factor in his gaining Claudio’s trust. In allowing Don Pedro to woo Hero on his behalf and ultimately re-establishing his faith in Don Pedro when he presents Hero, Claudio exemplifies that he has faith in the homosocial bonds he has. The knowledge of this framework wherein family members are responsible for upholding one another’s honor allows for Don John to give himself the leverage he needs to gain Claudio’s trust. Shakespeare utilizes the family honor network to get Claudio to put his faith in Don John.

It is not initially Don John’s decision to rely on that network of honor, however. Cognizant of the fact that Don John is stuck under these codes and just managed to reconcile with his brother, Borachio advises Don John to focus on the importance of Don Pedro’s honor. When the first plan fails, Borachio admits that he may be able to use his relationship with Margaret to deceive Claudio, but Don John must “goe... to the Prince [his] brother, spare not to tell him, that hee hath wronged his Honor in marrying the renowned *Claudio*...to a contaminated stale, such a one as *Hero*” (*Much Ado* 107). Operating under the understanding of this honor system, Borachio encourages Don John to lean into that as the way to convince the men that he is being honest. It is this structure

of honor that allows for Don John to hold sway in his conversation with Don Pedro even though he has previously betrayed his brother. Shakespeare has Don John approach the situation from the perspective of preserving the honor of his brother who was involved in the wooing of Hero and maintaining Claudio's honor which is linked to Don Pedro's through their homosocial bond.

Shakespeare creating Don John's need to focus on the homosocial rather than creating a sense of anxiety likely stems from two specific relationships: Claudio's relationship with Borachio and Claudio's relationship with Hero. There is no indication that Borachio and Claudio share a prior relationship like he does with Don Pedro or Benedick; in fact, Borachio only delivers two lines around Claudio while they are both on stage in Act Two, scene one before the cuckoldry plot is even put into action, with only one being directed at Claudio.<sup>20</sup> There is no investment in the bond between him and Borachio; this lack of investment in this relationship can be contrasted with the deep investments with Cassio and Polixenes which provoke anxiety in Othello or Leontes, respectively. Those two characters have that manufactured loss of a close personal relationship that contributes to their shame which Tomkins notes. Since this is the first of the plays to handle that relationship, not scripting that allows Shakespeare to focus his attention solely on the importance of the homosocial bond between Claudio and Don Pedro along with the complexities of Don John's relation to that homosocial bond. In turn, Shakespeare has Don John focus his attentions on manipulating Claudio's trust in homosocial bonds, relying solely on concepts of honor related to homosocial relationships.



The fact that Claudio is engaged rather than married to Hero also plays a role in why Shakespeare begins his focus with Claudio's trust in the homosocial bonds over the overwhelming masculine anxiety found in his later "cuckolds." By the second Act, Hero and Claudio have only just gotten engaged and the false cuckoldry plot is employed the night before the actual wedding. Unlike Othello or Leontes's, Claudio's personal stakes are not so high that he has to worry about illegitimate children or some other dire social consequence. The resulting lack of anxiety is, perhaps, due to the idea of possession. To differentiate between jealousy and envy in her analysis of *Othello*, Olson explains that "[t]he connection between jealousy and guardianship helps to explain its distinction from the deadly sin of envy: in the early modern period to be envious of something was to want something you did not have, and to be jealous was to fear losing something that you did" (8). In *Much Ado*, Hero and Claudio are engaged to be married and while that engagement ensures that she will be his, they have not made that pivotal transition into marriage. Without that sense of rightful ownership, there is a less pervasive sense of jealousy which, in turn, begets less anxiety. Though Claudio is not free from causing harm to his alleged adulterous partner, that harm does not stem from the same anxieties later seen in Othello, Posthumus, or Leontes.

Despite not experiencing shame in the same way that Shakespeare's other men do, Claudio does still suffer from a sense of shame. Placing his trust on the word of another man, Claudio believes himself to be dishonored by Hero. In his mind, her premarital infidelity shames her and also Claudio as he is a "potential [groom] whose future credit potential could well hinge on the unsullied reputation of" his wife (Chamberlain 6). Honor and reputation were interlinked with the actual economies early

modern men were active in. Threats to that reputation, including the shame wrought by cuckoldry, then became a threat to men's general livelihood, something that Shakespeare seems to embed into the network of the play. Seeing as the cuckoldry anxiety exists only within Benedick, Shakespeare relies on a different kind of shame to spur Claudio into acting out against Hero. Shakespeare opts to portray the interconnection of reputation, honor, and community as it comes face to face with shame. Shame then becomes a poison not only for reputation, but for the actual credit Claudio will have within the community. In creating this pitfall, Shakespeare highlights the complex web of social relationships that are impacted by cuckoldry and its associated shame. Doing so allows the audience to understand the motivation behind Claudio's actions when it is not related to masculine anxiety. While he is not gripped by masculine anxiety in the same way the leading men in later plays are, Claudio is still subject to the idea that the shame cast on Hero, based on lies or not, can be applied to himself as well. It is the fear of shame, not his anxiety, that leads him to rebuke Hero's hand at the altar.

His rejection of anxiety seems to have two impacts: one, Hero is only defended after her "death," and two, Claudio is permitted to marry a "revived" Hero. Though Beatrice and the friar believe Hero to be chaste, neither speaks up until after she is publicly shamed. Even Leonato holds onto his doubt of Hero's chastity until after Borachio's confession is staged. Hero's fate becomes reliant on the beliefs of the men around her. This is where the previous anxiety that Benedick touts in the opening Acts becomes a tool for Shakespeare. While the primary focus is on Claudio and his mistrust of Hero, Benedick's transformation from deep anxiety about women to trusting them also plays into Shakespeare's warning about being cautious in relying solely on the

homosocial bonds men have. Upon Hero's defamation and in the face of Leonato's utter disbelief that Hero is truly chaste, Benedick pleads with Leonato to "let the Friar advise [him]" and acknowledges that though his "inwardnesse and loue / Is very much vnto the Prince and Claudio" he vows that "by [his] honor, [he] will deale in this, As secretly and iustlie, as your soule / Should with your bodie" (*Much Ado* 116). Benedick swears upon his honor that though he is loyal to Claudio and Don John, he will hide Hero's fake death from them. He also promises to deal with the matter "justly" with the dual meaning of "[h]onest and impartial" and "in accordance with reason, truth, or reality; right; true; factually correct" (*OED*, "just" II.11.a & I.4.b). Opposed to his prior accusations that all women would be untrue, Benedick admits that he will look at Hero's situation with reason, choosing to look at reality rather than his prior deluded way of thinking. Just after affirming his loyalty to protecting Hero over working with his military brothers, Benedick admits to Beatrice, "[s]urelie I do beleue your fair cosin is wrong'd" (*Much Ado* 116). While Hero is not his own wife or wife-to-be, Benedick does take up the role of anxious man traditionally prescribed to the husband in Shakespeare's later plays. In starting with Benedick as the anxious man and having him trust in Hero's fidelity, Shakespeare sets the precedent for how responding to anxiety impacts those around the anxious man. Putting his faith in Hero over Don Pedro and Claudio tangentially reaffirms his loyalty to Beatrice, resulting in their eventual marriage. Shakespeare establishes and reaffirms Benedick's anxiety as it relates directly to cuckoldry throughout the first Act, yet here, when faced with real accusations of cuckoldry, Shakespeare swaps the narrative. Rather than having full faith in the men accusing Hero of cuckoldry, Benedick takes the side of Hero, choosing to believe that women are faithful. This decision marks

Benedick's transition from anxious to secure, a transition that Shakespeare solidifies at the end of the play.

Benedick makes two significant jokes at the end of the play that point towards Shakespeare's decision to turn Benedick's masculine anxiety on its head. In the first, Benedick claims that "man is a giddy thing" (*Much Ado* 121) with the most familiar meaning of "giddy" during the period in this context being "incapable of or indisposed to serious thought or steady attention" (*OED*, 3.a). Arguably, Benedick admits here that his prior thinking of women being salacious by nature was "giddy" in that same sense. I argue that by referring to men as "giddy" Benedick acknowledges that his prior anxious self falls into that category of being unwilling to attend to reality. This idea is supported as he subsequently makes the statement that Don Pedro needs to get married as "there is no staff more reuerend then one tipt with horn" (*Much Ado* 121). The use of "reverend" coupled with Benedick's prior response to the allegations against Hero transforms this joke from something stemming from Benedick's anxiety about threats to his masculinity to a joke about his own prior anxieties. There is a layer of irony in Benedick now thinking that to be married and "cuckolded" by nature is "worthy of being treated with deep respect or held in high esteem on account of age, character, status, ability, etc.; venerable" (*OED*, "reverend, adj." 2). What he previously scorned gets morphed into something that is deserving of the highest respect. This can be seen as Shakespeare's final nod to the fact that Benedick is no longer beholden to his anxiety but is, instead, secure in his soon-to-be marital bond.

In overcoming his anxiety, Benedick allows himself to put more faith in his relationship with his beloved than his homosocial bonds. This reversal allows

Shakespeare to show the relationship between the homosocial and marital bonds; whereas Benedick places his pre-marital bond over his homosocial bond and suffers no consequences, Claudio places his homosocial bond over his marital bond resulting in the “death” of his beloved and his own public shame at having killed an innocent woman. Claudio holds onto his belief that Don John and Borachio showed him true evidence until Borachio exposes the story himself, although the moment the truth is exposed, Claudio claims to “haue drunk poison while [Borachio] vtter’d” the confession (*Much Ado* 119). In the fallout, Claudio requests that Leonato seek revenge against him and enforce “what penance [Leonato’s] inuention / Can lay vpon [Claudio’s] sinne, yet sinn’d [he] not, / But in mistaking” (*Much Ado* 119). Just as Othello and Leontes lose everything and have to atone, Claudio chooses to submit himself to whatever Leonato decides in order to atone for his mistake. There is a deep sense of remorse from Claudio similar to the other men that believe or know their beloveds to be dead. However, in this case, reunion is permitted, perhaps because Claudio did not act out of anxiety.

While putting his faith in Don John leads to Hero's “death,” the lack of paranoia that is present in Othello and Leontes also allows Claudio to avoid a tragic end, but not one without consequence. As part of Leonato’s “revenge” Claudio must “[h]ang her an epitaph vpon her toomb / And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight” (*Much Ado* 119). With the hanging of the epitaph above Hero’s grace, Claudio will forever be associated with her death. The responsibility for her social death hangs over Claudio even if Hero is not physically dead. However, Leonato also permits Claudio to marry “the copy of [his] childe that’s dead” that is in actuality Hero because “[s]hee died...but whiles her slander liu’d” (*Much Ado* 119-20). Atoning for his slander by correcting his misdeeds through the

epitaph, Claudio maintains the shame for having killed an innocent woman but can marry her because he did not fall susceptible to the anxiety of cuckoldry

Despite the cuckoldry accusation “killing” Hero, it appears that Claudio receives the “reward” of marrying a newly reborn Hero. Lyon's argument that “[w]hen masculine alliances take precedence over the marriage bond... tragedy ensues” does not just apply to every masculine alliance but seems to apply to a specific set of conditions for masculine alliances (161). Lyon is certainly correct in noting that the elevation of the homosocial over the marital bond results in tragedy, but it is specifically the reliance on faulty homosocial bonds that results in tragedy. While the more general claim does seem to apply to Benedick's belief in Hero and Beatrice over Claudio and Don Pedro, there is specific set of punishments for men who put their faith in other men who have been scorned or feel wronged. Don John designates himself as “a plaine dealing villaine” after reconciling himself with his brother (*Much Ado* 104). Not only that, but as Catherine Leon Alfaro notes, Don John's status as a bastard puts him in an already precarious social category. Along with that, Don John makes his own dissatisfaction with Claudio known by claiming “that young start-vp hath all the glorie of [his] ouerthrow” (*Much Ado* 104) and that “[o]nely to despight them [Claudio and Don Pedro], [he] will endeauour any thing” (*Much Ado* 107). Seeing as the audience is fully aware of Don John's intentions, Shakespeare seems to highlight that it is men who have vendettas that are the most dangerous men to rely upon. Though Don Pedro and Claudio are not aware of his current plots, Don John's status as bastard and his tenuous relationship with Don Pedro would be enough to cast mistrust onto Don John and his intentions. Shakespeare negates any potential suspicion that Don Pedro and Claudio may have by having Don John play into

their concept of honor which ultimately leads to the collapse of the wedding. In creating these specific character traits for Don John, Shakespeare ultimately warns the audience that men who are socially displaced and scorned by that fact are the men to be most wary of. As a result of this social displacement and resultant scorn, the scorned man in these homosocial bonds becomes self-centered. Don John, Iago, and Leontes no longer make choices or decisions based on the good of the other man they are connected with but choose instead to act in their own interest.

The same can be seen in *Othello* when Iago cites the decision to promote Cassio over him and Othello's rumored affair with Emilia as the motivation for his plot to destroy Othello's life. After outlining his scorn at Cassio's promotion over his own, Iago openly acknowledges that "[w]e cannot all be Masters, nor all Masters / Cannot be truly follow'd.../In following him, I follow but my self" (*Othello* 310). Already Shakespeare acknowledges that Othello's devotion to Iago is a one-sided bond and that Iago holds no loyalty because he feels that he deserved to be promoted over Cassio. In his first monologue, Iago even notes that in the face of rumors that Othello has cuckolded him he "for mere suspicion in that kinde, / Will do, as if for Surety" (*Othello* 316). While Iago continually plays the role of loyal ancient for Othello, the audience is aware that Iago feels slighted by Othello both professionally and personally. That indignation serves only as more evidence that men who are scorned bring destruction to the homosocial bonds that they manipulate. Shakespeare seems to use Iago's specific set of circumstances to portray how men should be cautious of those they may have unintentionally slighted as there may be a desire for vindication on the wronged party's behalf. The reliance that Iago has on Othello's perception of him as honest also serves as a warning in and of

itself. I argue that Shakespeare constructs these deluders as displaced social figure who believe themselves wronged in order to showcase exactly which type of homosocial bond should not be elevated about the marital bond.

The trope of the scorned man becomes a little more complicated in *The Winter's Tale* as Leontes becomes the scorned man that Shakespeare warns of. As a king who believes himself to be cuckolded, Leontes believes the entirety of his kingdom is at risk of belonging to someone else. His own scorn becomes apparent in his conversation with his servant Camillo where he lays out all of the perceived injustices he sees in Polixenes and Hermione's interactions:

Is whispering nothing?  
Is leaning Cheeke to Cheeke? is meating Noses?  
Kissing with in-side Lip? stopping the Cariere  
Of Laughter, with a sigh? (a Note infallible  
Of breaking Honestie) horsing foot on foot?  
Skulking in corners? wishing Clocks more swift? (*The Winter's Tale* 280)

Camillo recognizes the danger in trusting Leontes and continually attempts to convince his master that Polixenes and Hermione are not having an affair but, ultimately, Camillo fails in his task and is instead bid to poison Polixenes. Rather than Leontes not being able to put his faith in Polixenes, Shakespeare fashions Leontes into the man that Polixenes should not put his faith in. Betraying Leontes, Camillo informs Polixenes of the plot and saves the king's life showing how placing trust in men that are not scorned or believe themselves to be wronged is the correct option. Even though Polixenes and Leontes's relationship is the more established one, Shakespeare still emphasizes that a man scorned is not one to put faith in. The scorned man's actions then either directly or indirectly cause harm to not just men who trust in them, but innocent bystanders. Iago's scorn leads to the death of several people while Leontes's scorn leads to the permanent loss of his



heir and devastation to his wife. Just as Iago's scorn and Leontes's scorn bring forth devastation, so does Don John's scorn. Though it is not simply their scorn that brings about destruction, it is the "cuckold's" faith in that scorned man that wreaks havoc on the characters of the play. When Claudio chooses to put his homosocial bond with Don John above his upcoming marital bond with Hero, he ultimately puts his faith in a man scorned, leading to Hero's "death."

## CHAPTER 4

### *CYMBELINE*: UNEXPECTED DISRUPTIONS AND ALTERNATE ENDINGS

*Cymbeline* precedes *The Winter's Tale* and follows *Othello* yet deviates slightly from the standard plot that I have examined. Those deviations ultimately change the outcome of the play and the warning issued to men. Like *Much Ado* and the other two plays, *Cymbeline* features a husband, Posthumus, convinced his partner, Imogen, is cuckolding him but features a different ending for the couple in question. Most notably, Posthumus and Imogen not only ultimately uncover the truth in cuckoldry plots, but they do so without Posthumus having to suffer the same consequences as the other men—aside from the potentially bruised ego. In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus seeks to kill his wife but cannot fulfill the objective himself because he is in Italy which results in Imogen surviving and a happy ending for the young couple. Like *Othello* and *Leontes*, Posthumus hears pleas from his ally Philario prior to his decision to order the murder of Imogen, pleas that ultimately fall on deaf ears because of Posthumus's focus on honor. Throughout the course of the play, Shakespeare seems to shift the focus from whom not to trust and what not to do to what bonds are the most valuable and how to prioritize reconciliation over violence.

Just as honor was an important facet of culture for men, elite men prioritized practicing restraint and seeking reconciliation in order to preserve honor. Though conflict was often inevitable, exhibiting restraint and showing “[p]atience under provocation was portrayed as a masculine virtue, not just, as is more conventionally claimed, as a feminine

one” (Pollock 15). When facing threats to honor, then, men of higher status were expected to show their virtue by not responding as being hot-headed would be an insult to their honor. Still, according to Pollock, “[t]he purpose of peacemaking was not to eliminate all conflict—disagreements and anger had their place—but to prevent permanent wounds from forming.... If amends were made and peace was sought by the offending party, those who stood stiff against such importuning dishonored themselves” (20). Peacemaking and exhibiting restraint become a fundamental plot point in *Cymbeline* as Pisanio must reconcile Posthumus’s misguided rage toward Imogen and Iachimo eventually seeks punishment for his own wrongdoing. I argue that this historical backdrop serves as a way for Shakespeare to demonstrate an alternate ending for men who are deluded into masculine anxiety by a man scorned.

*Cymbeline* appears to function in a similar way to *Othello* with slight variations of plot, beginning first with the reaction of Desdemona and Imogen’s fathers. Neither father approves of their daughters’ match, something Brabantio makes clear in his rants to Othello in the opening Act of the play. Though he disapproves of his daughter’s choice in husband, he makes no moves to stop her from traveling with him, instead warning Othello about her potential faithlessness. Cymbeline, on the other hand, acts on his distaste for Posthumus and Imogen’s marriage, banishing Posthumus from his court after seeing that he is there: “Thou basest thing, auoyd hence, from my sight: / If after this command though fraught the Court / With thy vnworthinesse, thou dyest” (*Cymbeline* 370). The exile in conjunction with Cloten and Posthumus’s off-stage scuffle discussed in Act One, scene one and scene two influences the reactions that Posthumus can manifest when he learns of Imogen’s alleged infidelity. In creating physical distance between the

pair, Shakespeare makes it all the more difficult for Posthumus to personally act on his masculine anxiety. Prior to *Cymbeline* and in the play *The Winter's Tale* after it, the men are able to lash out against the women who are “cuckolding” them because they exist within the same space. Posthumus is relegated to an entirely different country, no longer sharing the same space as Imogen. Therein lies the first substantial difference between the *Othello* and *Cymbeline*: even though both men succumb to masculine anxiety, Othello is able to act on his murderous desire after learning of his purported cuckolding while Posthumus cannot. In choosing to separate Posthumus from Imogen, Shakespeare shifts responsibility for acting out anxious responses from the “cuckold” onto a more rational third party: Pisanio.<sup>21</sup>

Unlike the other plays wherein warnings about fidelity are ignored and men's actions are unhindered, Posthumus's plans are disrupted by Pisanio. Just like Philario and the other voices of reason in Shakespeare's plays, Pisanio takes up the role of decrying the insanity of the alleged cuckold. Where Pisanio differs is that he is the only bystander among Shakespeare's plays who is given direct agency within the alleged cuckold's plot to attack his wife. As Posthumus's servant, Pisanio is duty-bound to fulfil the requests that are given to him by Posthumus, a task he takes seriously. After the Queen tries to coax Pisanio into betraying Posthumus and convincing Imogen to fall in love with her son, Cloten, Pisanio notes that he will think about her proposal, “[b]ut when to [his] good Lord, [he] proue untrue, / [he'll] choke [him]selfe: there's all [he'll] do” for the Queen (*Cymbeline* 373). Even in the face of the Queen's bribes of elevating Pisanio's status should he succeed in making Imogen fall in love with Cloten, Pisanio stays true to Posthumus. He does not seek greater station and chooses instead to maintain his loyalty

to his lord. By targeting Posthumus's servant in this endeavor, Shakespeare highlights the tenacity of the bonds between servants and masters. Without that kind of unfailing loyalty, Posthumus could easily be betrayed, yet by having Pisanio reaffirm his loyalties to Posthumus, Shakespeare asserts that it is the homosocial bond between master and servant that remains untainted and true. It is the dynamic of this relationship that Shakespeare relies on when Posthumus turns to Pisanio to execute the deeply mistaken order to kill Imogen.

Pisanio is given the unique position of carrying out Imogen's execution orders, allowing him to take control of the situation in a way characters of the other plays cannot. Stepping into that role requires Pisanio to defy his homosocial bond with Posthumus and subvert the power dynamics between master and servant in order to serve Posthumus's better self and the one that he would want to have were he exposed to the truth. Upon receiving the letter and seeing Posthumus's accusations and the subsequent order to kill her, Pisanio battles with the knowledge of Imogen's innocence and the duty he has to Posthumus:

How? That I should murder her,  
Vpon the Loue, and Truth, and Vowes; which I  
Haue made to thy command? I her? Her blood?  
If it be so, to do good seruice, neuer  
Let me be counted seruiceable.

...

O damn'd paper,

Blacker as the Inke that's on thee: senseless bauble. (*Cymbeline* 381)

Though he no longer aims to be "serviceable," Pisanio still struggles to understand the implications of what Posthumus asks him to do. Ultimately Pisanio acts in the interest of protecting his master from the fallout of a wrongful accusation. Upon reading the letter accusing her of adultery, Imogen pleads for Pisanio to fulfill his duty, preferring death to

a life where her beloved views her as an adulterer. However, Pisanio refuses, protesting that she “shalt not damne [his] hand” for which Imogen calls out to Pisanio’s loyalty noting that if she is not killed by Pisanio himself, he is “[n]o Seruant of [his] Master’s” (*Cymbeline* 383). Faced with accusations of not fulfilling his duty and Imogen’s questions as to why he has not killed her as order, Pisanio responds that his actions have been “[b]ut to win time / To loose so bad employment, in the which / I haue consider’d of a course” (*Cymbeline* 383). The entirety of Pisanio reading his orders, rejecting them, being questioned for rejecting them, and finally revealing that he has a plan so that he will not have to get innocent blood on his hands demonstrates the true honor that Pisanio has.

Manifesting the cultural shift from understanding honor as title-based to a more internalized conception driven by societal codes and Christian ideology, Shakespeare demonstrates just how honorable Pisanio is even as a simple servant. Considering that “English culture was suffused with the ideal of restraint” (Pollock 13) and “the landed ranks condemned unnecessary violence” (Pollock 9), Pisanio’s intervention allows for the correction of Posthumus’s misunderstanding. As David Schalkwyk argues, the “erotic relationships are displaced onto master-servant relationships so that each...allows for the transformation of the other” (624). His exhibition restraint and preservation of Posthumus’s honor not only transforms the relationship that Pisanio has with Posthumus so that Pisanio becomes the bearer of Posthumus’s honor, but it also greatly impacts the relationship between Posthumus and Imogen. Were it not for displacing the marital bond onto Posthumus and Pisanio’s homosocial bond, the same dire consequences from prior plays could come to fruition. Shakespeare intentionally uses the master-servant

relationship to present a different route: maintaining honor and eventually making amends. In practicing restraint and hatching the plan to disguise Imogen as a page, Pisanio effectively takes control of Posthumus's honor, upholding these ideals when Posthumus himself is unable to.

Notions of honor and, particularly, the idea that family members were responsible for upholding honor play a role in Shakespeare's staging of Pisanio's intervention. Returning to Pollock's arguments about honor culture among noble families, family protected one another's honor because "[a] person's honor largely accrued from society's opinion of him or her rather than from any internal personal assessment" (18). While Pisanio is not related by blood, he is still a part of Posthumus's household. Maintaining Posthumus's honor still falls onto Pisanio's shoulders due to the fact that "[l]ike their economic activity, the moral behavior of household dependants was also the responsibility of those above them in the domestic hierarchy" ("Prodigal Husband" 66). The connection between servant and master is inextricably linked with each person relying on the other to maintain their end of the bargain when maintaining honor. Whereas it is Posthumus who is ordering the murder of an innocent woman, he is acting on misinformation which only Pisanio is able to recognize. By choosing to instead save Imogen's life, Pisanio protects Posthumus's societal reputation thus maintaining Posthumus's honor even if Posthumus is unaware of Pisanio's good deed. Shakespeare utilizes what the audience would understand about the domestic hierarchy and Pisanio's responsibility to preserve Posthumus's honor to create the interference of Imogen's murder. Pisanio's choice to lie in order to preserve honor also portrays Shakespeare's emphasis on the importance of truth throughout the play.

Shakespeare's addition of agency for Pisanio directly contrasts the plays that preceded *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* which follows it. Those who believe in Hero's fidelity in *Much Ado* do not have the ability to influence Claudio's decision to humiliate her or defend her before she is publicly denounced; when Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona's innocence, he does not permit Emilia the agency to stop the inevitable conclusion of his plot to kill Desdemona; and Leontes's advisors do not get the chance to take action in defense of Hermione, their cries of her innocence and efforts to get Leontes to see reason ignored along the way to her trial.<sup>22</sup> Bringing Pisanio into the unfolding of the cuckoldry plot allows for Shakespeare to show exactly which homosocial bonds are reliable. While the scorned men these "cuckolds" rely on prove to bring disaster, it is Pisanio who swears that to if he were "true to [Cloten], / Were to proue false, which [he] will neuer bee / To [Posthumus] that is most true" (*Cymbeline* 385). Despite receiving murderous orders from Posthumus, Pisanio continues to uphold the virtue of his master. Barbara Mowatt and Paul Werstine suggest in the glosses for the Folger edition that Pisanio is playing on the meaning of "true" as "honorable" in the period—further highlighting Pisanio's commitment to preserving Posthumus's honor. In making Pisanio the one to thwart Posthumus's plans while still asserting that Pisanio does so to preserve the honor of Posthumus, Shakespeare highlights the idea that men of honor, servants specifically, who are not scorned are the homosocial relationships that men can rely on. However, Pisanio is not the only figure who attempts to preserve Posthumus's honor. Philario, the primary ally Posthumus has in foreign lands, attempts to make Posthumus see reason when Iachimo presents evidence but ultimately fails as other Shakespearean rationalists do.



Philario serves a similar role to that of Emilia or Leontes' attendants in terms of defending a man from his own madness. It is Philario who has to call Posthumus to wait and see if Iachimo is really telling the truth, asking him to "[h]ave patience Sir," urging him to take his ring back from Iachimo as "[i]t may be probable she lost it: or / Who knowes if one her women, being corrupted / Hath stolne it from her" (*Cymbeline* 379). At this first insistence, Posthumus bends and asks Iachimo for further proof. The initial appeal to rationality works until Iachimo swears "By Iupiter" that he got the ring from Imogen herself. Instantaneously, Posthumus convinces himself once more that Iachimo *must* be telling the truth. Another man swearing upon a god becomes more powerful than the faith Posthumus puts in Imogen's fidelity. Even Philario's subsequent plea to "be patient: / This is not strong enough to be beleeu'd / Of one perswaded well of" falls on deaf ears; now Posthumus urges Philario to "[n]euer talke on't: / She hath bin colted by" Iachimo (*Cymbeline* 379). Though Philario attempts to stop Posthumus from tumbling down the same anxious spiral as the other Shakespearean "cuckolds," he ultimately fails because of Posthumus's faith that Iachimo would not violate his own honor by lying while swearing upon Jupiter. Though Shakespeare intentionally stages a rather heated agreement between Iachimo and Posthumus when they make the bet over Imogen's chastity, Shakespeare still shows Posthumus believing in the lofty ideals of honor. Like Claudio, Posthumus falls into the trap of believing Iachimo because he wants to believe that other men can be men of honor.

Shakespeare seems to create Posthumus with various elements from the two previous leading men but radically changes the relationship between deluder and "cuckold." While Shakespeare seems to construct Claudio and Posthumus with the same

beliefs about upholding masculine honor, Posthumus's relationship with Iachimo is not as deeply entrenched in codes of honor prior to their bet as Don John and Claudio's relationship is. Othello and Posthumus can both be seen as men of honor who adore their wives, initially believing fully in their faithfulness until they are dishonestly led to think otherwise. Iago is a close and trusted confidant of Othello—someone that Othello believes he can trust in wholeheartedly from the beginning. However, the voice in Posthumus's ear is a relative stranger. The pair seem to have known each other briefly in Posthumus' youth, meet in a bar, get into a debate about the purity of his wife, and then make a wager. Aside from that singular conversation, where Iachimo vocalizes his doubt of Posthumus's valor claiming that he saw Posthumus when he was "of a Cressent note" (*Cymbeline* 371) and was seemingly not as impressed as Philario thinks he ought to be, the pair know little of each other; their relationship is more akin to that of Borachio and Claudio in *Much Ado*. However, Iachimo is of a much higher status than Borachio and is certainly of a higher social status than Posthumus in Rome where Posthumus is a foreigner. Iachimo must then hold some sway over Posthumus's reactions even without their strengthened homosocial bond. Though he has no basis to trust in Iachimo in terms of their homosocial bond, that social power may lend weight to the evidence that makes Posthumus decide is too damning. Even without that homosocial tie, Posthumus jumps to the worst possible punishment for Imogen. Iachimo's ability to describe Imogen's bedchambers, produce the ring and bracelet Posthumus gave to her, and describe a mole under her breast pushes Posthumus into the same anxious state as Othello and Leontes. Despite the weakness of their homosocial bond, Posthumus is fairly quick to believe that Iachimo is telling the truth, only initially doubting him when he describes her bed

chambers. The first show of any tangible evidence with the ring is enough to sway Posthumus into doubting his wife's fidelity.

Considering the fact that Iachimo and Posthumus are not exactly close, there must be some different element to the functions of masculinity that push Posthumus to believe Iachimo over Imogen's fidelity. The most likely threat in this situation is once again honor; allegedly, Iachimo has slept with his wife and Posthumus made a promise to forfeit some of his valuables and, intentionally or otherwise, his honor. While each of the alleged cuckolds have their honor slighted, Posthumus has a unique experience. In a foreign country with a local claiming to have had his wife and providing evidence, Posthumus seemingly has no choice but to yield to what Iachimo has to say. I argue that Shakespeare has Posthumus submit to the validity of these claims because, as Chamberlain notes in an economic analysis of *Much Ado*, "wom[e]n's shame...constituted household shame, and fathers and husbands necessarily shared in its negative consequences" (5). If there is potential for shame and dishonor, then Posthumus must do what needs be to protect his own remaining honor. Posthumus opts to fast-track judgment rather than seeking out the truth or confirming it with another witness because of the potential threat to his honor and, by proxy, his own masculinity. While both Othello and Posthumus are fed lies in order to misconstrue reality, only Posthumus is truly blind what's happening. Their faith in the men they hear these reports from then becomes incredibly important; Posthumus is willing to believe a relative stranger with just a couple of stolen bits of information. While the evidence seems concrete, the lie still stands, once more subverting the marriage for a homosocial bond. It is that subversion—

the homosocial bond becoming more reliable than the marriage bond—that leads to the plots to kill innocent wives in both of these plays.

Whereas the connection between Iachimo and Posthumus is tenuous at best, Posthumus still chooses to trust Iachimo over Imogen, reiterating Shakespeare's warning about the danger in elevating the homosocial bond over the marital bond. Despite calling Iachimo's proposition "[a] repulse" and suggesting that it "deserue[s] more, a punishment too[,]" the physical distance Shakespeare creates blinds Posthumus to his original resentment towards Iachimo (*Cymbeline* 372). Even though Posthumus very nearly calls Iachimo delusional—noting that he is "a great deale abus'd in too bold a perswasion" (*Cymbeline* 372)—and the pair are veritable strangers when the wager is first made, he still bends to Iachimo's information. Falling prey to this information is complicated because Posthumus has no way of fact checking what Iachimo is saying other than reaching out to Pisanio or Imogen himself. Unlike the other Shakespearean "cuckolds," Posthumus never physically sees Iachimo and Imogen interact and can only rely on the evidence Iachimo does provide when deciding how to respond. Claudio sees what he believes to be Hero having an affair with Borachio. Othello is threatened by the delusion of Desdemona's infidelity because Iago orchestrates that perception with the characters at his disposal. Othello physically sees Cassio interacting with Desdemona, feeding the jealousy that eventually consumes him. Iago's whispering skews Othello's perception of real events that Othello is *present* for. Even Leontes watches Polixenes and Hermione interact, spurring him into his own jealous mania. That substantial visual evidence is not available for Posthumus. Separated from Imogen and unable to verify any substantive claims of her infidelity, Posthumus must rely wholly on Iachimo's declarations and

evidence. While Othello must put some stake into Iago's claims, Iago is influencing something that is readily apparent and available to manipulation. Iachimo is just using the insight he gained during a trip that Posthumus can't verify with his own eyes. In choosing to trust Iachimo and protect his remaining honor, Posthumus puts even more faith into that masculine bond with a relative stranger. The faith that Posthumus has in Iachimo's word is what so nearly endangers his beloved, a continual warning from Shakespeare's other cuckoldry plots.

Like many of the other men at the heart of these cuckoldry delusions, Iachimo is not exactly the most trustworthy of men. While not scorned in the same manner as Don John or Iago, Iachimo still demonstrates his lack of respect for Posthumus when he details his knowledge about Posthumus to the Frenchman and Philario in the bar prior to their bet. In fact, Iachimo is the only deluder to speak in open distaste of the "cuckold." Iachimo vocalizes his disrespect for Posthumus as he accuses Imogen of being unfaithful throughout the conversation with Posthumus:

*Iach.* Either your vnparagon'd Mistris is dead or she's outpriz'd by a trifle.

*Post.* You are mistaken: the one may be solde or giuen, or if there were wealth enough for the purchases, or merite for the guift. The other is not a thing for sale, and onely the guift of a God.

*Iach.* Which the Gods haue giuen you?

*Post.* Which by their Graces I will keepe.

*Iach.* You may weare her in title yours: but you know strange Fowle light vpon neighbouring Ponds. Your ring may be stolne too, so your brace of vnprizeable Estimations, the one is but fraile, and the other Casuall;. A cunning Thiefe, or a (that way) accomplish'd Courtier, would hazzard the winning both of first and last. (*Cymbeline* 372)

Throughout Posthumus's attempts to declare Imogen's fidelity and righteousness, Iachimo continually insults Imogen thus reflecting poorly back onto Posthumus's honor. He insinuates that Imogen cannot outmatch a mere trinket, suggests that other men will

attempt to woo her, and, worse, that Imogen will succumb to the desires of other men. In order to get Posthumus to agree to this wager or, at the very least, admit that Imogen could be unfaithful, Iachimo “manipulates his audience, achieving his external end of persuasion without any concern for an internal one or for ethical means” (Beier 49). There is no apparent honor in the way Iachimo seeks to manipulate Posthumus and his beliefs about his wife’s fidelity. Shakespeare portrays Iachimo’s lack of honor here and in the disturbing bedroom scene where Iachimo sneaks his way into Imogen’s bedroom at night without her knowledge. While Posthumus is not aware of the circumstances under which Iachimo receives his “evidence” of Imogen’s infidelity, he is aware of the blatant dishonor that Iachimo dishes out freely. While warning that men who are this dishonorable are not meant to be trusted, Shakespeare’s highlighting of Posthumus’s decision to trust in Iachimo after this reflects the importance of reconciliation among the early modern elite.

Above reiterating this notion that scorned men are not men to trust in homosocial relationships, Shakespeare seems to focus on reconciliation in *Cymbeline* more than he does in the other plays. While Claudio and Leontes eventually reconcile with their beloveds at the end of their respective plays, there is not much emphasis on those moments. Though *The Winter’s Tale* focuses on the reanimation of Hermione, the broader focus of the scene is the supernatural implications of her “revival” rather than her reconciling with Leontes. With Pisanio stepping in and stopping Posthumus’s violent reaction to Imogen’s alleged infidelity, the focus of *Cymbeline* shifts from revenge to restraint. That initial response allows for Shakespeare to then focus on reconciliation when Iachimo admits to his lie in front of the court in England. While Posthumus tries to

get himself executed for believing himself to have ordered the murder of his innocent wife, Iachimo admits to all of the lying that he did in order to drive Posthumus to that decision and requests that Posthumus take his life as recompense for his wrongs. Rather than exacting revenge, Posthumus tells Iachimo to “[k]neel not to [him]: / The power that [he has] on [Iachimo], is to spare [him]: / The malice towards [him], to forgiue” (*Cymbeline* 398). After hearing the whole truth of the situation, Posthumus chooses to forgive and reconcile rather than returning to his previous violent reaction. Posthumus corrects his previously dishonorable reaction of lashing out against Imogen with the honorable decision to accept Iachimo’s request for reconciliation.

In order for reconciliation between Imogen and Posthumus to fully take place, there must be a sense of stability in the homosocial bonds in the play. Imogen and Posthumus are able to reunite “only once all the men, soldiers and king alike, have renounced their competitions, personal and political, local and national. Thus, as in the other plays, male bonds and male competitions exist uneasily and simultaneously, but, to make room for bonds between men and women, they must alter radically (Leon Alfaro 156). The radical alteration of Iachimo and Posthumus’s relationship is vital to the end of this play. Making peace with the homosocial bond allows for the reunited married couple to start their marriage with a clean slate and no implications that Iachimo is a threat to Posthumus’s marriage. *Cymbeline* is the only play to have the deluder apologize to the “cuckold” and the only one wherein the deluder is forgiven. *Much Ado* ends without fully resolving the threat of Don John attacking Messina while *Othello* ends with orders to punish Iago.

Though *The Winter's Tale* features the deluder repenting and eventually being forgiven, the deluder and “cuckold” are enveloped in one character. This complicates the reconciliation process as Leontes does not have to make amends to himself, but to the man who he accused of cuckoldry. Shakespeare does not stage their reconciliation, but instead discusses it through an exchange between gentleman, with the one who witnessed the reconciliation claiming it “a Sight which was to bee seene, cannot be spoken of” (*The Winter's Tale* 318). The same gentleman goes on to explain that “it seem'd Sorrow wept to take leaue of them: for their Ioy waded in tears. There was Casting vp of Eyes, holding vp of Hands, with Countenance of such distraction, that they were to be knowne by Garment, not by Fauor” (*The Winter's Tale* 318). Polixenes and Leontes' expressions are so powerful as they reconcile that those present could not even bear to look at their faces.<sup>23</sup> The reconciliation of the pair is undeniably important to both men, though Shakespeare chooses not to stage the actual events reiterating that the scene itself would be so powerful that bearing witness to it would be almost too personal. While Shakespeare highlights how powerful reconciliation is in *The Winter's Tale*, by not staging the moment, the lasting impression lies in Hermione's revival. More importantly, the reconciliation occurs after Leontes's actions have already had their lasting impacts. Even if Polixenes and Leontes reconcile, Mamillius is still dead and Leontes will still lose his kingdom to another man. With *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare seems to present an alternative to these cuckoldry plots: one where restraint and reconciliation take precedence over anxiety and revenge.



## CONCLUSION

Whereas each play has its own unique take on a cuckoldry plot, the message of being wary about which homosocial bonds to put faith in and being cautious about how men respond to their masculine anxiety pervade *Much Ado*, *Othello*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Kenneth Gross claims that it is slander "that produces monsters. It forces a monstrous face on others, makes a monster of their minds" (66). What Gross attributes to slander, I argue is rooted in the perversion of these homosocial bonds. Utilizing the early modern conceptions of honor and shame as the backbone for masculine anxiety, Shakespeare uses characters' responses and their consequences in order to critique the exploitation of masculine power over women. By specifically incorporating characters who are scorned or otherwise socially displaced, Shakespeare adds an additional layer of commentary to the decisions of "cuckolded" men who primarily rest their trust in the weakened homosocial bonds with these scorned men. The warning and critique about acting out on anxieties comes forth strongest in *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes is the quickest to succumb to his anxieties and the delusion that he is being cuckolded; he is also the only man whose anxieties become a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts when his lost daughter and only remaining heir marries the son of Polixenes. Leontes's anxiety blinds him to reality resulting in the loss of his male heir, the long loss of his wife, and, ultimately, the loss of his kingdom through his daughter's marriage. Whereas Shakespeare features a specific deluder in his other plots, there is no other character that works to deceive Leontes into believing that he is a cuckold. This deviation from the

other three plays morphs Leontes into the scorned man that Polixenes can no longer trust. With the plans to poison Polixenes, Leontes proves to have altered their homosocial bond into a faulty and unreliable homosocial bond.

*Othello* and *Cymbeline* both explore the violent reactions of men who believes themselves cuckolded, though Shakespeare uses different avenues to rectify the delusions and condemn the actions of the anxious man. For *Othello*, the long process of being deluded ultimately ends in the death of his wife and himself. Opening the play with Iago's explanation about why he hates Cassio and *Othello*, Shakespeare establishes early on that Iago has faulty bonds with the men in *Othello*. Despite the audience's knowledge of Iago's scorn, *Othello* and the others in the play trust in Iago wholeheartedly, ultimately leading to the devastation of nearly every character in the play. While much of the focus is on Iago and the perversion of his homosocial bonds, Shakespeare still criticizes *Othello*'s reaction to kill Desdemona with *Othello*'s own suicide. Shattered by the news that Desdemona was innocent all along, *Othello* feels that there is no other way to rectify his murder than by killing himself as well. *Cymbeline* explores similar violent responses when Posthumus trusts the openly disrespectful Iachimo and sends orders to Pisanio to kill Imogen. The inclusion of Pisanio illuminates the importance of putting faith in the correct homosocial bonds as Pisanio deceives Posthumus in order to save Imogen and to salvage Posthumus's honor. Whereas *Othello* emphasizes the destruction that is wrought by putting faith in faulty homosocial bonds and acting out on the violent urges of anxiety, *Cymbeline* turns the focus onto the importance of reconciliation between men. The critique of Posthumus's decision to simply kill Imogen still underlies the ending of the

play, but the primary focus of the final Act is to show how restraint and reconciliation can rectify those wrongdoings.

As the first of these cuckoldry plots, *Much Ado* explores masculine anxiety and faulty homosocial bonds in two separate characters. Through Claudio's plot line, Shakespeare showcases the dangers of trusting in men who care only about themselves. Like the other deluders, Don John vocalizes that he does not care for the men around him and Shakespeare establishes that he already violated and only recently reconciled the homosocial bond with his brother. Claudio's trust in notions of honor and the importance of homosocial bonds ultimately leads to the "death" of Hero, which he is permanently linked to, though Claudio's lack of anxiety and the decision to act out only to preserve his own honor is rewarded with being able to marry a "reborn" Hero. Through Benedick, Shakespeare portrays the absurdity of masculine anxiety as Benedick finds himself in love with the same woman he claims to hate. Shakespeare most thoroughly showcases the importance of seeing through that anxiety with Benedick's decision to trust in Hero's fidelity over Claudio's allegations. In putting his faith in a slandered woman over his two most trusted homosocial bonds, Benedick transforms from an anxious threat to women to a defender of their honor. That transformation serves as Shakespeare's earliest message that men should be cautious of how they respond to their anxieties.

Both the warning that men should monitor their reactions to masculine anxiety and the warning to be cautious about which homosocial bonds men should trust seem unique among Shakespeare's contemporaries. In the six other plays I examined for this thesis, none of the authors appear to overtly criticize men for how they respond to allegations of cuckoldry. Those who do act against their wives are either praised for their

actions or their wives forgive them. Each play does appear to emphasize the importance of relying on the homosocial bonds around them, however. The ending of *A Woman Killed* focuses on the reconciliation of homosocial bonds; *All Fools* features a scene of men commending Cornelio's actions against his wife; and *The Malcontent* uses a homosocial bond to restore order to the political arena and the marital bond. While Shakespeare's contemporaries highlight the importance of these homosocial bonds, none of them appear to highlight those of danger or, at least, they do not have other honorable men stake their trust in faulty homosocial bonds. The particular use of a scorned man to create these delusions also seems unique to Shakespeare.

Although I explore faulty homosocial bonds as they relate to cuckoldry plots, devoted attention to a man who is socially displaced and as a result scorned is one of the facets of this project that could be further explored. Of particular interest would be the overlap of these socially displaced men and their selfish motivations. Seeing as early modern works seem to condemn acting out of self-interest alone, these socially displaced and scorned men may prove an interesting area of study. Particularly, looking at the Shakespearean characters who inhabit these traits might result in a more nuanced exploration of how Shakespeare uses these men to impact the characters around them and to influence the plot that they are in. As homosocial bonds exist across all of Shakespeare's plays, an exploration of the potentially faulty homosocial bonds created by these scorned men may reveal a similar pattern to the one I argue for here.

Another potential area for expansion is in looking at how Shakespeare criticizes men who attempt to be unfaithful themselves. The bed tricks utilized in *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* seem to hint at this idea as they both result in the

“correct” marital bond being secured. More exploration of these plots and the motivations for those plots is needed in order to discern the specific critiques Shakespeare may be issuing. Though it is clear that Shakespeare appears to critique men who act out when they believe themselves to be cuckolded, more could be said about how Shakespeare treats men who attempt to be unfaithful themselves. Analyzing plots that do feature attempted infidelity may expose a new facet to the argument that Shakespeare holds men accountable in ways that his contemporaries do not.

## NOTES

1. See Mark Breitenberg, Donald Bruster, Joan Byles, Stephanie Chamberlain, Derek Cohen, Stephen Cohen, Cristina Leon Alfaro, Katherine Lyon, Marcus Nordlund, Rebecca Olson, and Ruth Vanita.
2. See Stephanie Chamberlain, Jennifer Paneck “Prodigal Husband,” and Reta Terry.
3. See Jennifer Paneck “Prodigal Husband” and Linda Pollock.
4. The approximate timeline of the performance of the plays collected is as follows: *Much Ado about Nothing* (1598), *How to Choose* (1602), *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), *The Malcontent* (1603-4), *Othello* (1604), *All Fools* (1604-5), *Cupid’s Whirligig* (1607), *Philaster* (sometime before 1611), *Cymbeline* (1610-1), *The Winter’s Tale* (1611).
5. Reina Green, Maya Marthur; Jennifer Paneck “Punishing Adultery.”
6. Bennett argues that “the communities of men” in the play “are really homosocial economies — economies because their bonds depend not only on shared worldviews but also on the circulation of capital, and homosocial because they not only exclude female participation but also use women as their most valuable form of capital” (36).
7. Three of the sources Panek cites appeared in my own search as well including Alexander Leggatt and Jeremy Lopez who both explore comedic structure and stock characters; and Charles Cathcart who argues that there are moments inspired by *The Taming of the Shrew* in *How to Choose* in “*How a Man May Choose a Good Wife From a Bad and The Taming of the Shrew*,” and C.R. Baskerville who explores authorship of the play. Panek cites J.Q. Adams which did not appear in my own search but also explores authorship of the play.
8. McManus explores how Heywood uses *How to Choose* as a way to preach to women of the audience. He argues that Heywood’s ultimate message leave women of the early modern audience “with a vision of the domestic Promised Land: the moral high ground” (173).
9. Comparisons between Shakespeare and *The Malcontent* appear in Michael Cordner, Benedict J. Whalen; Eric Leonides. Analyses of genre and theatric conventions appear in R. A. Foakes, Nathaniel C. Leonard, Nate Pritts.
10. See Cordner: “Humiliation at the hands of Aurelia prompts Mendoza to improvisatory inventiveness.... The Mendoza of this stage of the action is no longer the victim of the kind of denigration via *Hamlet* allusion which has been his lot earlier” (178).
11. The three analyses not written by Edelman include Charles Cathcart, Leonard Goldstein, and Shonna McIntosh. Edelman’s sources include “A Heifer’s Horns”;

“John Payne Collier, Thomas J. Wise, and Chapman’s *All Fools*,” “Knights, Pigeons, and Chapman’s *All Fools*,” “George Chapman’s *All Fools*,” “Scriveners and Notaries.”

12. See Mary Bly; Charles Cathcart “Authorship, Indebtedness, and the Children of the King’s Revels” and “John Day and Edward Sharpham at the Black and White Friars,” and Clifford Leech.
13. See Mary Trull, Peter Berek, and Jeffery Maston.
14. See Marie H. Loughlin, Jo Miller, and Christine Varnado
15. There are only 29 lines of dialogue from the end of Hermione’s conversation with Polixenes in 1.2 to Leontes’s sudden shift in believing himself cuckolded in the same scene
16. John Ellis seems to misconstrue this relationship in his work, though he makes a fair argument that “it is Leontes and not Hermione who loves, or has loved, Polixenes” (546). At least so much as the love Polixenes and Leontes bear for another is completely different from any friendship between Hermione and Polixenes.
17. See Janet Adelman, Claire Dawkins, Peter Erickson, and Michelle Ephraim.
18. See Reta A. Terry.
19. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the immense amount of scholarship that focuses on Othello’s jealousy as it relates to his race. Though I do believe that race can play a factor, I agree with critics like Olson and Nordlund who cite other more prominent sources of insecurity within Othello, namely his social difference as a Moor opposed to his racial difference.
20. Both of the lines are fairly inconsequential in terms of establishing any kind of connection between Borachio and Claudio. The first line is directed at Don John, “And that is Claudio, I know him by his bearing,” and the second is directed at Claudio, “So did I too, and he swore he would marrie her tonight” (*Much Ado* 105).
21. There is one other instance in which a third party disrupts the plans of the “cuckold” in *The Winter’s Tale*. Leontes orders Antigonus to kill Perdita out of the fear that his daughter is actually Polixenes’s daughter. Antigonus swears to uphold Leontes decree to kill his daughter but is visited by Hermione in a dream where she requests for him to leave the baby in a remote area so that she’ll be deemed gone. Antigonus heeds his vision from Hermione but gets killed through the famous “[e]xit pursued by a Bear” stage direction (*The Winter’s Tale* 288). Though this third-party intervention does result in the ability for Leontes to reconcile with both Polixenes and Hermione, I do not explore it in depth as it does not initially save Hermione from her fate. While Antigonus’s intervention is significant to the ending of the play, Hermione is still hidden away to save her

from Leontes's anxiety. This is vastly different from Pisanio's intervention which directly saves Imogen from dying.

22. See above. Antigonus's intervention is unrelated to the trial of Hermione but does allow for the eventual reconciliation.
23. This interpretation relies on the *OED*'s definition of "favor" as "countenance" relevant during the period.



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