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The male homoerotics of Shakespearean drama: A study of "The Merchant of Venice," "Twelfth Night," and "Othello"

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THE MALE HOMOEROTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*, *TWELFTH NIGHT*, AND *OTHELLO*

by

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ABSTRACT

The Male Homoerotics of Shakespearean Drama:
A Study of *The Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night,* and *Othello*

by

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This study seeks to both challenge and complicate the assumed heteronormativity of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Othello*. Reading and analyzing these texts in such a manner provides the only means to access and interpret the homoerotics embedded deeply within them in a meaningful way that, in turn, enhances traditional understanding of Renaissance England.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE MALE HOMOEROTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Proem

At the outset of this study, I feel it necessary to explain that I have written it and, in turn, offer it for consideration as an individual thoroughly grounded in the present; as, specifically, a gay man in the twenty-first century United States with a critical interest in male same-sex relations.[1] I want also to note that, despite my sexual orientation, I do not deliberately or systematically approach literature with the intention, or even the hope, that the texts I engage with as a professional literary scholar will depict non-heterosexual associations. But when I do encounter representations of this type, they increase my involvement with the primary source material and have a palpable tendency to compel my interpretive faculties. Caveats said, in accord with the title of this work, I will conduct a critical exploration of the male homoerotics of Shakespearean drama in the chapters of analysis that follow, and I will do so by considering a trio of plays that, in my judgment, are especially representative of the dynamics of non-normative male sexuality and desire: the romantic comedies *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night*, and the tragedy *Othello*. Reading these three works from such a distinctly and self-consciously queer[2] perspective will, I hope, result in intriguing and provocative interpretations beneficial to the lovers of Shakespeare of all persuasions, while also adding layers of nuance, depth,

and insight to our present understanding of male same-sex relationships in Renaissance England.

Terminology: "Friendship," "Buggery," "Sodomy," "Homosexual," "Homosocial," and "Homoerotic"

I begin with the word, "friendship." One way of understanding friendship is as an interpersonal relationship between two individuals that does not allow for much, if any, physical contact. Such relationships are, in other words, platonic. In contemporary times, friendship is much more rigidly codified and regulated for men than it seems to be for women in regard to particular behaviors. For example, while women friends can kiss, hug, and hold hands with one another without the threat of censure, men risk being branded homosexuals, or worse, if they engage in these types of actions with their male friends. This was not the case, however, in early modern England. Alan Bray, for instance, describes "the image of the masculine friend [as] an image of intimacy between men in stark contrast to the intimacy of homosexuality" during this period of history (1994: 42). In fact, men often shared beds with one another at this time and, that being the case, Bray explores the idea of the Elizabethan bed partner in some detail:

> This was a society where most people slept with someone else and where the rooms of a house led casually one into the other and servants mingled with their masters. Such a lack of privacy usually made who shared a bed with whom into a public fact. It was also a potentially meaningful one, for beds are not only where people sleep: they are also places where people

> talk. To be someone's 'bedfellow' suggested that one had influence and could be the making of a fortune. (1994: 42)

Bray continues by noting that the public sharing of beds by members of the same sex was just one manifestation of the ideal of masculine friendship: "When two men kissed or embraced, the gesture had the same meaning" (1994: 43). Two men sleeping together in the same bed. Two men kissing. Two men embracing. Though obviously acceptable, encouraged, and even idealized behaviors during the Elizabethan period, they have become anathema for all but homosexual males in the intervening four hundred years.[3]

Because the word "homosexual" did not exist in early modern England, its use is fraught with a certain amount of difficulty in the present context. David Halperin attributes "the invention of homosexuality" to one Charles Gilbert Chaddock, who "is credited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* with having introduced 'homo-sexuality' into the English language in 1892, in order to render a German cognate twenty years its senior" (15). Foucault, perhaps a bit more bluntly, points out that in the

> nineteenth-century [the] homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature. (43)

Halperin is more careful than Foucault to point out, significantly, that he is not insisting that homosexuality–as in sexual relations between members of the same sex–

> didn't exist before 1892. How, indeed, could it have failed to exist? The very word . . . [looks] only to the sexes of the persons engaged in the sexual act. Moreover, if homosexuality didn't exist before 1892, heterosexuality couldn't have existed either . . . and without heterosexuality, where would all of us be right now? (17)

Indeed, as Halperin's commentary suggests, there seems to be something nonsensical in the notion that neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality—as corpuses of physical-sexual acts—existed during the English Renaissance simply because the terminology to label them as such did not exist. On this point, Bray wonders, since the term homosexual had yet to be invented in early modern England, "did its equivalent? Only two of the possible candidates, bugger and sodomite, were in general use and neither was synonymous with homosexuality alone. 'Buggery' could be used with equal ease to mean bestiality as homosexuality," and 'sodomy,' likewise, had multiple significations (1982: 14). Of course, part of the problem with this terminology lies in the fact that we are dealing with two different historical time periods: the Renaissance and the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For us, the term homosexual neatly encapsulates the concept of two people of the same gender (particularly males) involved in some sort of sexual relationship that can include such acts as "sodomy" and "buggery." In the Renaissance, however, sodomy

> covered more hazily a whole range of sexual acts, of which sexual acts between people of the same sex were only a part. It was closer, rather, to

> an idea like debauchery. But it differed more fundamentally also in that it was not only a sexual crime. It was also a political and a religious crime and it was this that explains most clearly why it was regarded with such dread. (1994: 41)

Thus, during the Renaissance, sodomy and the sodomite can be understood as distinct and separate entities in relation to homosexuality and the homosexual, whereas today they are understood to be, for the most part, one and the same.

"Friendship" between males in the early modern period, then, involves behaviors and actions that correspond, roughly, to what late twentieth and early twenty-first century people, particularly in the West, would consider homosexual behaviors and actions. In a similar manner, the terms "buggery" and "sodomy" were used in a far more encompassing sense than they are today. And the word "homosexual," along with all of its derivatives, had not yet been brought into being. As such, we seem to be at an impasse, at least in regard to an adequate critical vocabulary with which to perform this study. But I would argue that, as long as we are aware of the historical contingency of the terminology as it is used, then careful analysis of the male homoerotics of Shakespearean drama cannot fall into either critical error or rhetorical absurdity.

When I use the term "homosexual" in any of its forms in this study, I do so in agreement with Halperin's notion that, as a set of sexual activities, homosexuality did exist during the Renaissance even though it was not referred to specifically as such in the period, and I do so to indicate sexual relations between members of the same sex. I also subscribe to Mario DiGangi's idea that the word "sodomy," and its correlate "buggery," prove inadequate descriptors because each "fails to describe a variety of same-sex

relations that were central to the social organization and literary culture of early modern England" (ix). Moreover, I consider both sodomy and buggery to be unacceptable expressions within the context of my work because of their pejorative and negative associations with male same-sex relations. Indeed, early modern English people used the interchangeable terms "sodomy" and "buggery" in reference to *the isolated deviant acts* of individuals who were otherwise considered heteronormative. By the time we reach the nineteenth century, however, the term "homosexual" was brought into use to describe *the unified, deviant identity* of those who engaged in the range of non-normative physical-sexual acts including "sodomy" and "buggery." It is this linguistic and rhetorical paradigm—with all of its negativity—that informs discussion in the twenty-first century.

A literal host of gay and lesbian and, now, queer literary scholars—and their allies—have made extraordinarily productive and insightful use of the term "homosocial" instead of "sodomy," "buggery," or "homosexual" in their respective studies. In her now, deservedly, famous work, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick coined the term "homosocial" as "a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'" (1). Yet, as appealing as Sedgwick's conception of the "homosocial" is, it does not serve my purposes in their entirety since it is grounded in the social while relegating the erotic and the sexual in regard to men to the realm of mere potentiality. Thus, I have chosen to use the term "homoerotic" in this work.

On the phenomenon of male homoerotics, DiGangi's analysis focuses on such questions as: "When is kissing an expression of sexual desire, of affection, or of a social

bond? Under what circumstances might our ability even to distinguish these realms be frustrated? In a patriarchal culture, is intercourse always more 'sexual' than kissing? Is it more *erotic*? (11)" His answers to these queries form what amounts to an extended definition of homoerotics (11). Richard E. Zeikowitz, meanwhile, considers "how bodies interact—literally, imaginatively, discursively" and, drawing on the work of Roberto Gonzáles-Casanovas, he posits a blending, rather than a strict differentiation, of the homosocial—social relations between men in all spheres, homophilia—intimate same-sex friendships, and the homoerotic—romantic love between members of the same sex, in order to analyze fourteenth century texts like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*, among others (3). Although I, too, am interested in the questions DiGangi raises, my use of the term "male homoerotics" coincides more so with that which Zeikowitz posits and, therefore, signals the reality—of social, friendly, erotic, and romantic—as opposed to only the social—interactions between men that includes, for example, words spoken emphatically or softly, yet also conveying a distinct sense of passion and/or desire, a simple look or a touch, the sharing of an embrace or a kiss, or even the enjoyment of a night of fully-fledged sexual intimacy.

Prior Criticism

Writing in the early 1960s, W.H. Auden proclaimed Antonio "a melancholic who is incapable of loving a woman" and insists that the highly emphatic nature of his feelings for Bassanio "seem an example of that inordinate affection which theologians have always condemned as a form of [false] idolatry, a putting of the creature," in this case, Bassanio, "before the creator," God (70, 72). Twenty-five years ago, Seymour

Kleinberg described Antonio in a strikingly similar manner: "he is a virulently anti-Semitic homosexual and is melancholic to the point of despair because his lover, Bassanio, wishes to marry an immensely rich aristocratic beauty" in order "to leave the diversions of the Rialto to return to his own class and to sexual conventionality" (113). Meanwhile, in a 1992 article that discusses the Antonios of *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice* in tandem, Joseph Pequigney tells us that each of these characters "loves his friend [Sebastian in the first play, Bassanio in the second] more than anyone or anything else, is emotionally dependent on him, proves willing to risk his very life on the friend's account, and provides him with funds, with painful consequences to himself." Neither, furthermore, "shows romantic or other interest in a woman" (201). Along the same lines, Steve Patterson, in a piece that appeared seven years after Pequigney's, claims "that Antonio's love is a frustrated sexual desire for Bassanio" in *The Merchant of Venice*, and "that his passionate love falls into an early modern tradition of homoerotic friendship, or amity," which "represented friendship as an identity premised upon the value of same-sex love which codified passionate behaviors between men" in Renaissance England (10). Alan Sinfield explains that, in the present of the early twenty-first century, "it will be widely agreed that the Antonio characters in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Twelfth Night* are in love with" their friends "Bassanio and Sebastian, respectively. Their love objects are," in addition, "both of a higher social class and rather full of themselves" and, "while they return the love of their Antonios, it is not with such an overwhelming passion" (14). And, finally, in a new, posthumously published, book by A.D. Nuttall, *The Merchant of Venice*'s Antonio receives rather blunt description as "a homosexual, virtuous Christian" (255). Not long afterward, Nuttall just as baldly states

that "Antonio loves Bassanio, but Bassanio is unaware of that fact. He loves Portia, a seriously rich lady who lives on a hill above the clatter and money-changing of Venice" (256). The remarks of all of these Shakespearean commentators testify to the long-standing, ongoing, and *unresolved* dialogue about the exact nature of *The Merchant of Venice*'s Antonio's sexuality and his relationship with Bassanio.

As seen above, Pequigney and Sinfield view *Twelfth Night*'s Antonio as being in love with—if not the actual lover of—this play's Sebastian. Contemporary gender studies of *Twelfth Night*, such as those by Phyllis Rackin, Jean E. Howard, and Keir Elam, focus, not surprisingly, perhaps, on the crossdressing Viola/Cesario.[4] Though brilliant in both conception and analysis, these three important works give little, if any, attention to the implications of Viola/Cesario's transvestism have for, and on, sexuality—in terms of object desire and its expression—particularly in regard to Viola/Cesario's relationship with the Count Orsino. Neither do they offer any consideration of Antonio's association with Sebastian. Within such an analytical and critical framework, Antonio and Sebastian seem to warrant consideration, too, particularly when Antonio mistakes Viola/Cesario for his beloved Sebastian precisely because of the success of her crossdressing as a man. Casey Charles, on the other hand, does include discussion of homoerotics—potential and otherwise—in his article on the problematics of gender in *Twelfth Night*. Indeed, he notes near the outset of his study that "the Olivia-Viola affair is more central to *Twelfth Night* than previously has been acknowledged. This centrality—along with the homoerotics found in relations between Antonio and Sebastian as well as between Orsino and his page [Viola/Cesario]—establish same-sex erotic attraction as a 'major them' in the play" (122). This being one of Charles's judgments of *Twelfth Night*, he soon launches into an

argument guided by the notions that "the effects of Viola's cross-dressing point to the socially constructed nature of gender," that the

> drama interrogates the exclusionary nature of the constructed categories of sex and challenges the symbolic hegemony of heterosexuality by producing representations . . . of same-sex love between Viola and Olivia as well as Antonio and Sebastian and that the final act exposes the failure of heterosexual 'regimes ever fully to legislate or contain their own ideals' (123).[5]

Moving from the realm of gender to that of emotion takes us to Dolora G. Cunningham who, in her brief consideration of wonder and love in *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*, explains that, in the latter play, the "main characters are able to turn back from their mistaken commitments and accept what turns out to be possible in the circumstances" in which they find themselves (264). By the main characters, she means, presumably, only Orsino, Olivia, Viola/Cesario and, most likely, Sebastian, each of whom experiences what Cunningham terms "the tempering of self-love and the re-directing of impossible emotional allegiances that occurs as the hitherto deceived lovers move away from the darkness of error and self-involvement" (265). Unfortunately, Cunningham does not discuss the problematics of either gender or sexuality in her article, but it can be assumed that, Olivia's infatuation with Viola/Cesario, and Orsino's equally unrequited attachment to Olivia, take their place as the impossible emotional allegiances she does reference. Since both of these relationships are resolved by the heterosexual marriages of Olivia and Sebastian and Orsino and Viola at the end of *Twelfth Night*, it can be surmised that the love and desire of Antonio (who receives no mention at all by

Cunningham) for Sebastian also functions as an impossible emotional allegiance that does not survive the shock of wonder and awe that leads to marital bliss between male and female. David Schalkwyk's work on the same subject, however, allows for the existence not only of same-sex love in *Twelfth Night*, but also its correlate, desire within an overall context of one individual's service to another. "Every instance of desire in the play is intertwined with service" (87). For instance,

> Viola's status as Orsino's servant is the condition of possibility and impossibility of her love for him and also of Olivia's erotic desire for her as Cesario; Orsino himself embodies courtly infatuation as a form of service in his dotage on Olivia . . . [and] Antonio's homoerotic affection for Sebastian restates in a very different key courtly devotion to the beloved as a form of service (87).[6]

Meanwhile, in a fascinating piece of performance history, Laurie E. Osborne notes that "our assessments of *Twelfth Night*'s treatment of homoeroticism depend on how we read the end of the play—specifically, on how we understand Antonio's position in the final resolution" (108-109). Thereafter, she explores a number of productions of *Twelfth Night* from the late eighteenth through much of the nineteenth centuries in which she reveals Antonio received pardon for his transgressions:

> The critical debate about the status of Antonio's homoerotic love and his place at the end of the comedy arises from new and certainly deserved inquiry into the nature of his love of and desire for his friend. The invention of a pardon for Antonio in the late eighteenth century and its use throughout the nineteenth century are most important because they mark

> the initial awareness that Antonio's place at the end of the play is a problem. (113)

She adds that the "ambivalence of the pardon itself and the staging of the pardon's implications anticipate our ongoing conflict between understanding of Antonio's love as an acceptably passionate, even erotic male friendship and a love that must be isolated at the end of the play *because* of its homoeroticism" (114). Finally, Laurie Shannon directs attention to what she terms homonormativity—as opposed to heteronormativity—in the Renaissance, using Sebastian's "But nature to her bias drew in that" (5.1.245) line in *Twelfth Night* as one of the significant loci around which her argument pivots, while Nancy Lindheim calls for a reassessment of the issues associated with, specifically, the homoeroticsm of *Twelfth Night* and critics' diverse interpretations of this aspect of the play.[7] As with *The Merchant of Venice*, criticism of *Twelfth Night* remains both varied and contentious, whether it is focused on love, gender, homoerotics, crossdressing, or any other subject. This obvious fact, of course, leaves room for yet another contribution to the ongoing dialogue, one that is, furthermore, concerned with the characters of Antonio and Sebastian as a male same-sex couple.

An online subject search using the MLA International Bibliography produces a list of over fifteen-hundred books, book chapters, articles, notes, queries, dissertations, and theses concerned with Shakespeare's *Othello*. Nearly one-thousand of these works appeared at some point in the last twenty-five years. A great many, though by no means all of them, deal with the highly-charged issue of race in relation to the play and its eponymous main character. However, it must also be noted that surprisingly few of this plethora of studies of *Othello* deal with the play's homoeroticism. In one essay on the

subject from the mid-nineties, Robert Matz follows Alan Bray in order to explore male-male desire as it is expressed in *Othello* in relation to "the institutions that support, solicit, and regulate it, and in terms of the particular social contexts that determine the way it is represented" (261). He concludes by noting that, at the end of *Othello*, "the homosocial order of Venice remains, presumably cemented by women, but without the threat of a woman . . . and [it] remains too without threat of misalliance or the recognition of homosexual desire as the homosocial order's (un)natural other" (273). In other words, Iago's downfall serves as nothing less than the eradication of homosexual desire, while the homosocial order itself—the ties that bind men together in hegemonic social and patriarchal solidarity—suffers no real harm because of Iago's homoerotic transgression. Ben Saunders, in a more recent article, contends that Iago's invocation of the term clyster-pipes (2.1.172) as a reference to Cassio's fingers serves as "a brief anal-erotic fantasy [that] momentarily transforms Cassio's hand into a vehicle that conjoins the anus with the mouth;" a metamorphosis that, Saunders insists, Iago longs for (150). Nevertheless, Saunders also quickly, and rather vehemently, asserts:

> I do not see Iago's clyster-pipes as a means to reintroduce . . . a traditional Freudian interpretation of the character as 'repressed homosexual'. . . .[an interpretation which] strikes me as perceptive in its acknowledgement of the dynamic role played by male-male desire; but it is also no less suspect, in that dogmatically Freudian accounts of sexuality are frequently homophobic and dependent on categories of sexual identity that cannot be applied to Renaissance texts without anachronism. (151)

For such Freudian interpretations of Iago, we must look back to Stanley Edgar Hyman who, in 1970, wrote: "Iago neither loves Desdemona nor believes for a moment that she loves Cassio. . . .It is he who unconsciously loves both Othello and Cassio; that love is repressed and, by the defense mechanism called 'reaction formation,' turned into hate" (101).[8] I do not believe that Iago loves Cassio. He is aware of Cassio's attractiveness, but he is not in love with him. He loves Othello, and that love is never "unconscious" in any sense of the term.

The comments of editor E.A.J. Honigmann on *Othello*'s Iago evince what has been termed homosexual panic, if not outright homophobia in the sense Saunders mentions above. In his "Introduction" to the Arden 3 edition of the play, Honigmann asserts that one "of Shakespeare's most original achievements in *Othello* is his exploration of the psychology of sex," and at least twice thereafter, he describes this drama as being almost inordinately preoccupied with the subject of intimate human relations; at one point, in fact, he goes so far as to describe *Othello* as a "sex-drenched play" (49, 52). However, he also chooses to dismiss even the mere suggestion of alternative, i.e., non-heterosexual, sexualities when he states that: "Despite the presence of one significant instance of male bonding, that of Cassio and Othello, we must beware of making too much of Iago's supposed homosexuality" because, if it exists at all, it does so only deep within the recesses of this character's subconscious (51). Thus, no awareness of Iago's supposed homosexuality is required or expected for readings or performances of the text. Indeed, Honigmann takes great pains to insist that the relationship between Othello and Cassio he refers to at this juncture "suggests nothing more than the non-sexual bonding of males who 'play in the same team' (here, military

service)" (51). Somewhat oddly in this context, he does not include any mention of the end of Act 3, scene 3 of *Othello*, in which Othello and Iago passionately swear their vows of devotion to one another. Certainly this also qualifies as a significant instance of male bonding and, furthermore, one that proves far more difficult to reduce to the level of the mere platonic. Although Iago, villainous monster that he is, could never be considered a hero, much less a queer icon, Honigmann has neither read nor interpreted *my Othello*. What we must truly beware of is *not making enough of* Iago's homosexuality or the homoerotics that shade many aspects of the play he inhabits.

The Male Homoerotics of Shakespearean Drama

In Chapter 2, "'Say How I Loved You': Love and Desire between Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*," I argue that Shakespeare fully invested *The Merchant of Venice* with a rich and believable homoerotic ethos that operates throughout the whole of this play. To this end, I engage in close reading of the text, and in particular of those scenes in which Antonio and Bassanio appear, either together or separately. The concepts of friendship, love, and sacrifice among male characters are crucial to my argument. Although *The Merchant of Venice* closes with what seems to be marital bliss for the male-female couples Bassanio and Portia and Gratiano and Nerissa, and Lorenzo and Jessica I maintain that, no matter Bassanio's status as Portia's husband, his homoerotic relationship with Antonio continues.

In Chapter 3, "'I Do Adore Thee So': The Romantic Courtship of Antonio and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*," I assert that Shakespeare presents us with the drama of a poignant romantic courtship that takes place, most significantly, between two male

characters, Antonio and Sebastian. Once again, close reading of the text, and in particular of the scenes in which Antonio and Sebastian appear together or separately, serves my purposes. Indeed, such a strategy reveals the gradual and plausible unfolding of a male same-sex relationship. Of course, *Twelfth Night*, not unlike *The Merchant of Venice*, concludes with the unions of the Sebastian and Olivia, and Orsino and Viola. Nevertheless, I maintain that this supposed heterosexual triumph is tempered by the fact that Antonio and Sebastian continue their homoerotic relationship despite the Sebastian's marriage to Olivia.

In Chapter 4, "'I Am Your Own Forever': The General and His Ancient as Warriors and Lovers in *Othello*," I explore the possibility that Shakespeare might not have privileged heteronormativity, as first impressions of the play suggest, and that Iago's hatred masks a profound love for Othello that encompasses the homosocial, the homoerotic, *and* the homosexual. As in Chapters 2 and 3, close reading of *Othello* yields a wealth of textual evidence that supports my position, including such unmistakably homoerotic moments as Iago's dream of lying in bed with Cassio, and Iago and Othello's passionate swearing of vows to one another midway through the drama. Although Iago always and ever remains nothing but the villain of *Othello*, I conclude ultimately that, in its overwhelming tragedy, the play presents us with a vision of the horrific calamity that results when human beings are not allowed to love as their hearts' truly desire, whether that love is between a man and a woman, two women, or two men.

In the final chapter, "Screening the Male Homoerotics of Shakespearean Drama," I turn to the realm of recent American cinema. In particular, I look at Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004), Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* (1996), and Oliver Parker's

Othello (1995), each of which, I contend, presents the male homoerotic aspects evident in their respective Shakespearean source texts as seamlessly and naturally as possible. In fact, such visual representations make present in a way no other medium can the male same-sex relationships of Antonio and Bassanio, Antonio and Sebastian, and Othello and Iago.

CHAPTER 2

"SAY HOW I LOVED YOU": LOVE AND DESIRE BETWEEN ANTONIO AND BASSANIO IN *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*

Tempestuous relations between Christians and Jews. The problematics of usury in a Christian and emergent capitalist society. Female agency, and the lack thereof, in a patriarchal world. Love, money, and family as influences on, as well as determiners of, marriage choices. Contractual, moral, and ethical obligations. True justice versus self-righteousness. The state in opposition to the individual, and vice versa. The conflicts that propel *The Merchant of Venice* derive from a potent and intricate mixture of all of these dramatic motifs, elements, and themes. Given the prominence of the relationship between the characters of Antonio and Bassanio, the idea of men both desiring and loving men demands addition to the foregoing list. Indeed, I shall argue in the following pages that Shakespeare fully invested *The Merchant of Venice* with a rich and believable male homoerotic ethos that operates throughout this early modern play.

Famously, *The Merchant of Venice* opens with the following enigmatic lines spoken by Antonio:

> In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.
> It wearies me, you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,

What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,

I am to learn;

And such a want-wit sadness makes of me

That I have much ado to know myself. (1.1.1-7)

Thus he reveals a deeply troubled state of mind and emotion yet, intriguingly, he claims mystification in regard to the source of his profound unhappiness. His friends, Salerio and Solanio, quickly attribute his melancholia to concern over events in the shipping trade in which he has, apparently, invested heavily. Antonio, however, demurs: "my merchandise makes me not sad" (1.1.45). Solanio proceeds to suggest, "Why then, you are in love," to which Antonio almost immediately replies: "Fie, fie!" (1.1.46). Rather uncritically, Solanio accepts Antonio's exclamatory remark and flippantly adds:

Not in love neither? Then let us say you are sad

Because you are not merry; and 'twere easy

For you to laugh and leap, and say you are merry

Because you are not sad. (1.1.47-50)

But we would be wise to direct more attention to Antonio's response to the intimation of his being in love, and for two reasons: the particularity of its syntax and, just as importantly, the swiftness of its utterance. In one sense, of course, Antonio's "Fie, fie!" serves as a simple, if emphatic, negation that his feelings for another encompass love. However, a different reading presents itself that must not be overlooked or discounted. Indeed, Pequigney tells us that "Solanio had clearly meant 'in love' erotically and heterosexually, which Antonio never is. His 'fie, fie' rules out that but not the kind of love he holds for Bassanio" (210). Kleinberg, too, notes in his discussion of this passage

that "It is suggested that his sadness is caused by love, the conventional cause, and Antonio does not absolutely deny it when he" utters his exclamation (116). To this commentary we can add that "Fie, fie!" stands as Antonio's admission of being in love with someone *and* it displays his disconcerted surprise at his friends' quick and unexpected discovery of that fact.

Solanio, as we have seen, seems to remain oblivious to both the undertone and context of Antonio's response to the suggestion of his being in love, but Salerio, does not. In fact, while preparing to leave upon the arrival of Bassanio, Gratiano, and Lorenzo, Salerio tells Antonio: "I would have stayed till I had made you merry, / If worthier friends had not prevented me," to which the merchant, not at all unkindly responds, "Your worth is very dear in my regard. / I take it your own business calls on you, / And you embrace th' occasion to depart" (1.1.60-64). By so saying and reorienting the end of their conversation once again toward trade, Antonio manages to quell any speculation about a possible romantic liaison that Solanio and Salerio had, no matter how inadvertently, begun. Moments later, Gratiano, commenting on those who choose to indulge in despair as he prepares to leave for dinner with Lorenzo, opines to Antonio: "for silence is only commendable / In a neat's tongue dried and a maid not vendible" (1.1.111-112). Antonio's rhetorical reply to this salty insight, "Is that anything now?," proves enigmatic. Bevington glosses this line as meaning: "was all that talk about anything" (30). Such an interpretation receives confirmation from Bassanio's remarks that immediately follow. Nevertheless, another reading presents itself: that Antonio cares not for dried ox tongue and, much more importantly, that maids—whether vendible or not—mean nothing to him. After Gratiano departs, and they are two men alone, Antonio

makes the following request of Bassanio: "Well, tell me now what lady is the same / To whom you swore a secret pilgrimage / That you today promised to tell me of" (1.1.118-120). And here we have the first solid indication of the *true* nature of Antonio's distress. It involves the fact that Bassanio has, apparently, chosen to redirect and bestow his attentions upon a woman, and not Antonio himself.

By way of explanation, Bassanio proceeds to briefly detail the dire financial straits he currently finds himself in, then proclaims:

> To you, Antonio,
> I owe the most, in money and in love,
> And from your love I have a warranty
> To unburden all my plots and purposes
> How to get clear of all the debts I owe. (1.1.129-133)

Antonio quickly entreats the other man:

> I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it;
> And if it stand, as you yourself still do,
> Within the eye of my honor, be assured
> My purse, my person, my extremest means
> Lie all unlocked to your occasions. (1.1.134-138)

In these citations, we ought not fail to note Antonio's eagerness to learn the exact nature of Bassanio's troubles. An equal, if not more, significance attends the fact that Antonio stands ready and willing to sacrifice himself via his money and his body, as well as his determination to undertake any measures available to him, in order to assist Bassanio. Indeed, Antonio's "purse," "person," and "extremest means" are "all unlocked" by the

key which happens to be Bassanio's status as a man Antonio desires. Of course, we already know that Bassanio's troubles, in one way or another, involve a "lady." But Antonio's insistence on helping Bassanio need not seem incongruent because of this; in fact, such devotion serves as nothing less than a testament of the strength of his desire and love for Bassanio. Put in other terms, despite the fact that Bassanio seems to have fallen for Portia, Antonio will still do whatever it takes to assist Bassanio—in the hope that his relationship with Bassanio will continue. In effect, his actions here indicate his willingness to share Bassanio with Portia in order to retain some measure of Bassanio's love.

Despite Antonio's declaration of unqualified assistance, Bassanio proceeds to say:

> I owe you much, and, like a willful youth,
> That which I owe is lost; but if you please
> To shoot another arrow that self way
> Which you did shoot the first, I do not doubt,
> As I will watch the aim, or to find both
> Or bring your latter hazard back again
> And thankfully rest debtor for the first. (1.1.145-151)

And, when he responds, Antonio chides Bassanio for attempting to play on his feelings:

> You know me well, and herein spend but time
> To wind about my love with circumstance;
> And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
> In making question of my uttermost
> Than if you had made waste of all I have. (1.1.152-156)

In regard to line 155, and in particular the term "uttermost," once again Bevington's gloss empties—by not attending to it—the context of any possible homoeroticism because it means nothing more than "in showing any doubt of my [Antonio's] intention to do all I can [for Bassanio]" (32). But, Antonio could very well be rebuking Bassanio for not believing in, *and/or* trying to childishly manipulate, his *desire* and *love* for Bassanio. As such, he sternly prompts Bassanio with: "Then do but say to me what I should do / That in your knowledge may by me be done, / And I am prest unto it. Therefore speak" (1.1.157-159). Then Antonio, presumably with some semblance of calmness, awaits Bassanio's explanation.

Given Antonio's repeated admission of sadness, Bassanio's next words must hurt him rather deeply:

> In Belmont is a lady richly left;
> And she is fair and, fairer than that word,
> Of wondrous virtues. Sometime from her eyes
> I did receive fair speechless messages.
> Her name is Portia
> . . . .
> And many Jasons come in quest of her.
> O my Antonio, had I but means
> To hold a rival place with one of them,
> I have a mind presages me such thrift
> That I should questionless be fortunate. (1.1.160-164 and 171-175)

As if he cannot bear to hear more of his almost certain loss of Bassanio to Portia, Antonio tells Bassanio:

> Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;
> Neither have I money nor commodity
> To raise a present sum. Therefore go forth
> Try what my credit can in Venice do;
> That shall be racked even to the uttermost
> To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.
> Go presently inquire, and so will I,
> Where money is, and I no question make
> To have it of my trust or for my sake. (1.1.176-184)

In a first encounter, the content of these lines seems to contradict earlier revelations on Antonio's part in regard to the status of his financial resources. However, he has previously claimed no more than that his funds are not invested in a single enterprise subject to the whims of fate, but, rather, in a diversity of ventures. This assortment of investments has resulted in his lack of immediately available liquid capital with which he could assist Bassanio. Antonio's willingness to borrow even more money on the credit of his good name and reputation in order to help Bassanio—the man he *desires* and *loves*—proves the far more significant element of this dramatic scenario. Thus we see compelling dramatic evidence of what Kleinberg describes in two ways, first as "homosexual eroticism in conflict with heterosexual marriage," and second as "the rivalry of romantic male friendship with the claims of conventional marriage" (113). Unquestionably, the

manner in which Shakespeare has represented this struggle between these two powerful forces creates a great deal of suspense about which, if either, will triumph.

Later, in Antonio's meeting with Bassanio and Shylock somewhere on the Rialto in Venice, the moneylender proposes the following condition on his possible lending of funds to Antonio:

> If you repay me not on such a day,
> In such a place, such sum or sum as are
> Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me. (1.3.139-143)

And, to Bassanio's horror, Antonio agrees to Shylock's terms. He does so, presumably because he has full confidence that his current financial ventures will yield an excess of profit with which to repay Shylock long before the bond actually comes due. However, this also stands as another significant indicator of Antonio's devotion to, and desire for, Bassanio; another symbol of the risks he will take for the man he desires and loves.

It proves intriguing at this juncture to consider the meaning of the term "love." In regard to *The Merchant of Venice*, Pequigney states the word "love" may signify "an experience of love" in general and without reference to sexuality or gender (211). Moments later, he concedes "it may also or instead mean lover, in which case the usage, of one man as the love of another, is rare, and with the exception of the sonnets does not occur elsewhere in Shakespeare" (211). Significantly, he adds that the "word lover as friend, without erotic connotation, was quite common" in the early modern period (211).

Kleinberg, on the other hand, claims that the question is whether the characters of *The Merchant of Venice*, "including Antonio, are using the word [lovers] in its rarer sense of intimate but platonic friends, or whether they use it to denote that friendship while slyly suggesting the erotic nature of the true relationship" (115). He adds that "of the nearly 150 times Shakespeare uses the words *lover*, *lover's*, *lovers*, and *lovers* in his works, only nine of those instances can be argued as sexually innocent (115). He concludes by asserting that lexical sources "note that the overwhelming meaning of *lover* is the modern one, and examples of Shakespeare's lack of reticence about homoeroticism are everywhere in the sonnets and the plays" (115). Set against one another as they are here, Pequigney's and Kleinberg's respective writings on the meaning of the word love—and its derivatives—bring forth a significant discrepancy: either love between men in an erotic sense, or love between men in a merely friendly sense, existed as the more rare form of linguistic usage during the Shakespearean epoch. In either case, we shall come to understand that Kleinberg's insights on this point of contention seem far more credible than Pequigney's.

"It is unmistakable," Kleinberg explains, "that Antonio and Bassanio are lovers [because] a number of characters [in the play] say so" (115). Pequigney, meanwhile, makes a comparable point when he notes that "we hear more about" Antonio's love for Bassanio "from others' mouths than from his own" (211). Allowing characters to discuss the circumstances of their counterparts in such a manner forms one of the most effective ways a dramatist can communicate significant information about other characters to audiences. Thus we learn of the nearly limitless depth of Antonio's feelings for Bassanio

in the discussion that takes place between Salerio and Solanio at the end of *The Merchant of Venice's* penultimate scene of Act 2, in which Salerio explains:

> I saw Bassanio and Antonio part.
>
> Bassanio told him he would make some speed
>
> Of his return; he [Antonio] answered, 'Do not so.
>
> Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio,
>
> But stay the very riping of the time;
>
> And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me,
>
> Let it not enter in your mind of love.
>
> Be merry, and employ your chiefest thoughts
>
> To courtship and such fair ostents of love
>
> As shall conveniently become you there.'
>
> And even there, his [Antonio's] eye being big with tears,
>
> Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,
>
> And with affections wondrous sensible
>
> He wrung Bassanio's hand; and so they parted. (2.8.35-49)

This passage bespeaks an exceptional level of emotion on the part of one man, Antonio, for another, Bassanio, that demands being understood not only as homoerotic, but also as poignantly, even achingly, romantic.

At the same time, we can see clearly how Antonio chooses to martyr himself to an extraordinary degree in the passage cited above when he tells Bassanio not to hurry back or rush through the business at hand—securing Portia—to return to him any more quickly than necessary. On this point Sinfield notes that Antonio "seems to welcome the chance

to sacrifice himself" for his lover, and that "contributes to an air of homoerotic excess" that pervades *The Merchant of Venice* (55). To this "sacrifice" Antonio also insists that Bassanio not think about him at all while he courts Portia. In the spirit of the fairness of everything "in love and war," we can argue that Antonio's tactics in this passage encompass the decidedly mercenary (but not the desperate) rather than anything approaching the altruistic. Indeed, Antonio's exhortation against Bassanio's even thinking about him while he courts Portia in Belmont serves as a rather disingenuous attempt to affect exactly the opposite and, thus, ensure that Bassanio *will* think only of Antonio while wooing the rich heiress. In fact, it warrants stating that only an insensitive brute would not recall the tearful distress of a close friend. This does not mean, however, that Antonio's emotions and tears are also affected. They are, rather, very real, and truly heartfelt. Solanio's comments on these circumstances, furthermore, include the following lines about Antonio and Bassanio:

> I think he only loves the world for him.
> Pray thee, let us go and find him out
> And quicken his embracèd heaviness
> With some delight or other. (2.8.50-53)

Without question, these words confirm what we have suspected since the opening scenes of the play—that Antonio does indeed desire and love Bassanio, that one man desires and loves another man.

We must also note that Portia herself recognizes the depths of Bassanio's feelings for, and attachment to, Antonio. Indeed, when she hears that Antonio owes Shylock only a mere "three thousand ducats" because of Bassanio, she insists:

Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond;

Double six thousand, and then treble that,

Before a friend of this description

Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault. (3.2.297-300)

Unquestionably, this passage reveals Portia exercising what remains of her financial agency for, once married, control over her money will fall to her husband. But we do not realize just how shrewd and calculated Portia's actions are here until she breathlessly tells Bassanio: "First go with me to church and call me wife, / And then away to Venice to your friend; For never shall you lie by Portia's side / With an unquiet soul" (3.2.301-304). Portia realizes the wholly dangerous nature of Bassanio's connection to and with Antonio, and understands that Antonio has the power to wrest Bassanio away from her permanently. She also *knows* for certain that Bassanio will leave Belmont for Venice to assist his beloved Antonio and that she will not be able to detain him under any circumstances. As such, she acts as quickly and as decisively as possible. To prevent losing him to Antonio, she insists upon their immediate marriage, meaning, at least, that they will then be legally and religiously bound to one another—no matter what Antonio's influence on, and over, Bassanio succeeds in manifesting.

As this scene works toward its close, Portia requests to hear the contents of the letter Bassanio received from Antonio. In response, Bassanio reads the following words:

Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried, my creditors grow cruel, my estate is low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit; and since in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared between you and I if I might

but see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter. (3.2.313-318)

It demands arguing that Portia must have had some idea what kind of language was in Antonio's letter to Bassanio, which makes her request to hear its text seem almost masochistic in nature. Indeed, every single phrase uttered must strike her like the most heinous of blows. Not only she, but we, too, learn even more about Antonio's feelings for his "sweet Bassanio." Antonio's willingness to discharge "all debts" of Bassanio's if Bassanio will only present himself at Antonio's execution stands as a desperate, if no less real, plea for a final, tangible demonstration of Bassanio's love for him. And, to ensure Bassanio's acquiescence to his request, Antonio effectively places him into a no-win set of circumstances when he points out that if Bassanio's love does not encourage him to make the journey to Venice to be at Antonio's side during his darkest hour, then let his message be rendered just as utterly powerless in that regard, as well.[1] Nevertheless, it proves a small wonder that, upon the conclusion of Bassanio's recitation of Antonio's letter, Portia exclaims: "O love, dispatch all business, and begone!" (3.2.319). On one level, of course, these words are a command to Bassanio and intended to spur him to get on with his trip to Venice, and Antonio, so that he may return to her all the sooner. But, in the present context, this line also functions as an emphatic complaint about the love Bassanio obviously feels for Antonio, and vice versa, that she fervently wishes would disappear so as not to trouble her further.

Following Bassanio's departure for Venice and Antonio, we are presented with one of the more enigmatic discussions in the entirety of *The Merchant of Venice*. After

praising her for "bearing thus the absence of your lord," Lorenzo tries to console Portia by telling her:

> But if you knew to whom you show this honor,
> How true a gentleman you send relief,
> How dear a lover of my lord your husband,
> I know you would be prouder of the work
> Than customary bounty can enforce you. (3.4.4-9)

Though, no doubt, Lorenzo intends no harm to Portia, his words—full of praise for Antonio as they are, as well as confirmation of the love Antonio feels for Bassanio—must give her a great deal of pause. Nevertheless, Portia calmly responds to Lorenzo by saying:

> for in companions
> That do converse and waste the time together,
> Whose souls do bear an equal yoke of love,
> There must be needs a like proportion
> Of lineaments, of manners, and of spirit;
> Which makes me think that this Antonio,
> Being the bosom lover of my lord,
> Must needs be like my lord. If it be so,
> How little is the cost I have bestowed
> In purchasing the semblance of my soul
> From out the state of hellish cruelty! (3.4.11-21)

And thus, in effect, Portia concedes that she *knows* Antonio and Bassanio are, in fact, lovers that are intimately, emotionally, affectionately, and psychologically attached to one another. In her conception of their relationship, Antonio and Bassanio spend hours and hours in each other's company; their very souls feel the proportionate love the one has for the other; their souls are so attuned to one another that their bodies follow in synch; they are nothing less than bosom lovers and, as such, each stands as very like the other. This likeness, furthermore, allows Portia to rationalize that sending Bassanio to Antonio really helps her because they are two parts of the same being—one half of which belongs to her. Given the bond she feels certain Antonio and Bassanio share, and how profoundly it threatens her marriage to Bassanio as well as her everyday relations with her husband, Portia's next actions seem inevitable, if surprising in the form they take. Her quickly and decisively formulated plans include transforming herself and her waiting-woman Nerissa into young men by the artifice of clever disguise, and to pursue Bassanio and Gratiano to Venice.

Not at all incidentally, we might also note that, in line 7 of the passages cited above, "How dear a lover of my lord your husband," Bevington glosses the term "lover" as "friend" (83). In line 17, where the phrase "bosom lover" appears, he footnotes this as meaning, merely, "dear friend" (83). Thus, within the space of only ten lines of drama, Bevington attempts to empty the passage, and the play as a whole, of any homosexual or homoerotic valance whatsoever. If *The Merchant of Venice* rests totally secure in its heterosexuality, then such knee-jerk annotations on Bevington's part seem excessive, if not downright panicked. Since his edition of the play reaches a wide audience of students at all levels of the education system as well as Shakespearean enthusiasts, we can only

surmise that he wishes to quickly and decisively guide these individuals away from what he must consider an "errant" interpretation inclusive of the homoerotics the term "lover," in and of itself, suggests in the contexts in which it appears. This strategy, however, lends even more credence, if needed, to the notion that the word "lover" in relation to Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* signifies what it would in the present time: an emotional, affective, and, above all, sexual relationship between two men.

In any case, as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, Solanio, Salerio, Portia, and Lorenzo all discuss, in some detail, the coupling of Antonio and Bassanio. Arguably, all but Portia share what can be termed an objective disinterest in the exact nature of the relationship these two particular characters enjoy with one another. Nevertheless, even her language, like that of the others, evinces a cool matter-of-factness in regard to the notion of two men romantically, lovingly, and sexually involved that suggests the sophisticates of English Renaissance society as a whole condoned homoerotic unions amongst its male members, at least tacitly. On this point, Patterson writes: "If today there remains something strange about a man in passionate pursuit of another male, such pursuits may have been more ambiguously coded then" (16). Pequigney, also, reminds us that, during the time period in question, "All upper-class men married. Their duties to property, propriety, and posterity demanded an heir. After that," however, "their romantic predilections" for other males, if they were so inclined, "were less important socially as long as they were reasonably discreet" (116). Sinfield, meanwhile, posits the intriguing idea "that in early-modern England same-gender relations," like those of Antonio and Bassanio, "*were not terribly important*" as a category of social concern (59-60, emphasis

in the original). From a twenty-first century perspective, such a notion proves rather remarkable. We are unable to know, Sinfield writes,

> what the limits of our sexual [whether homo-, hetero-, or bi-] potential are, but we do believe that they are likely to be disturbing and disruptive . . . . Fear even of thinking homosexually serves to hold [the structure of sexuality as we currently understand it] in place. So one thing footballers must *not* be when they embrace is sexually excited; the other thing they mustn't be is in love. But you can never be quite sure; hence the virulence of homophobia. (59)

In other words, we must not make the mistake of considering Renaissance England as determinedly and viciously homophobic in the same manner as the majority of the constituents of contemporary Western society have fashioned themselves to be, as the examples of Solanio, Salerio, Portia, and Lorenzo make clear.

Nevertheless, at the precise moment when it seems as if Bassanio and Portia, not to mention Gratiano and Nerissa, are on the very precipice of heterosexual happiness and fulfillment, Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salerio arrive in Belmont with what Portia surmises is dire news from Venice. Bassanio only confirms this conjecture moments later when he reveals:

> Here are a few of the unpleasant'st words
> That ever blotted paper!
> . . . .
> I have engaged myself to a dear friend,
> Engaged my friend to his mere enemy,

To feed my means. Here is a letter, lady,

The paper as the body of my friend,

And every word in it a gaping wound

Issuing lifeblood. (3.2.249-250 and 259-264)

Thus we receive confirmation of the fact that Antonio's business enterprises have failed. Furthermore, the sense of Bassanio's despair concerning Antonio's ill-fortune lingers throughout the lines cited above. In tandem with the overall context—which includes Bassanio's poverty—this concern for Antonio on Bassanio's part renders such phrases as "O sweet Portia," "Gentle lady, "When I did first impart my love to you," and "dear lady," all directed to his new wife herself, come across as mere attempts to placate rather than true terms of endearment. Then, most astonishingly of all, perhaps, Bassanio uses the rhetoric of marriage itself when he explains that he has "engaged" himself "to a dear friend" in order to secure adequate financial backing and support for his various schemes. Given what has passed prior to these moments in the play, we might well expect Bassanio to use a more explicitly economic word choice such as transaction, or contracted, rather than engaged, with all of its specificity and inherent connotations. He also, not incidentally, refers to both Antonio and Portio as "dear" persons, which only serves to equalize, as opposed to differentiate, them in regard to his affections and where they tend.

In addition to Antonio's misfortune, we also discover that Shylock now fully intends to collect on the original terms of the bond the merchant signed in order to finance Bassanio's venture to Belmont and Portia. In fact, Jessica tells the assembled group that Shylock

would rather have Antonio's flesh

than twenty times the value of the sum

That he did owe him; and I know, my lord,

If law, authority, and power deny not,

It will go hard with poor Antonio. (3.2.284-288)

Poor Antonio, indeed. He faces severe mutilation, if not outright death, because of the pound-of-flesh proviso he, perhaps unwisely, committed himself to with Shylock. Interestingly, Portia asks: "Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?," and Bassanio's response confirms this fact:

The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,

The best-conditioned and unwearied spirit

In doing courtesies, and one in whom

The ancient Roman honor more appears

Than any that draws breath in Italy. (3.2.289-294)

And so Bassanio extols upon Antonio's virtues in a manner that functions as yet another obvious demonstration of his intense devotion and loyalty to the beleaguered Venetian merchant.

In the next, comparatively brief, scene of *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio—with Solanio as his interlocutor—seemingly resigns himself to his fate when he states: "These griefs and losses have so bated me / That I shall hardly spare a pound of flesh / Tomorrow to my bloody creditor" (3.3.32-34). But then he utters the following supplication: "Pray God Bassanio come / To see me pay his debt and then I care not" (3.3.35-36). With almost certain death at hand, it proves telling that Antonio can think of no one else but Bassanio and his longing to see the man he loves and desires so much one

last time. In fact, this stands as nothing less than a poignant testament to everything he feels for Bassanio, and we must recognize it as such or we risk the truly sophisticated engagement with the play we have developed so far in these pages.

As the trial itself begins in Venice, Shylock swears "To have the due and forfeit of my bond," by which he means, of course, a pound of Antonio's flesh (4.1.36-37). To this he adds,

> You'll ask me why I rather choose to have
> A weight of carrion flesh than to receive
> Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that,
> But say it is my humor (4.1.40-43).
>
> . . . .
>
> So can I give no reason, nor I will not,
> More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing
> I bear Antonio, that I follow thus
> A losing suit against him. Are you answered? (4.1.40-43 and 59-62)

Bassanio chooses this moment to challenge Shylock:

> Bassanio: This is no answer, thou unfeeling man,
> To excuse the current of thy cruelty.
> Shylock: I am not bound to please thee with my answers.
> Bassanio: Do all men kill the things they do not love?
> Shylock: Hates any man the thing he would not kill?
> Bassanio: Every offense is not a hate at first.
> Shylock: What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice?

(4.1.63-69)

Antonio himself breaks into the exchange at this point with a mixture of impatience and resignation:

> I pray you, think you question with the Jew
>
> . . . .
>
> You may as well do anything most hard
>
> As seek to soften that – than which what's harder? —
>
> His Jewish heart. Therefore, I do beseech you,
>
> Make no more offers, use no farther means,
>
> But with all brief and plain conveniency
>
> Let me have judgment, and the Jew his will. (4.1.70, 78-83)

If he, like audiences of *The Merchant of Venice*, feels how ineffectual his lover Bassanio's attempt at a defense was, he tactfully refrains from mentioning that fact openly. But, perhaps we ought not be that hard on Bassanio who, after all, must know that he himself has neither the training nor the skills to truly assist Antonio in the formal setting of a courtroom. Given the love they share, however, Antonio probably realizes that it took a certain amount of courage for Bassanio to make himself heard in such a public forum.

Bassanio sounds far more truly confident during a short break in the trial, when he seeks to bolster his lover's spirits by saying: "Good cheer, Antonio. What, man, courage yet! / The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones, and all, / Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood" (4.1.111-113). To which a far more realistic Antonio responds:

> I am a tainted wether of the flock,

Meetest for death. The weakest kind of fruit

Drops earliest to the ground, and so let me.

You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,

Than to live still and write mine epitaph. (4.1.114-118)

And with these words, Antonio once again displays his willingness to martyr himself for Bassanio's love.

With the resumption of the trial itself shortly thereafter, Portia, now disguised as the lawyer Balthasar, questions whether or not the merchant Antonio has the ability to pay Shylock the money owed, and Bassanio, with a great deal of confidence, proclaims:

Yes, here I tender it for him in the court,

Yea, twice the sum. If that will not suffice,

I will be bound to pay it ten times o'er,

On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart.

If this will not suffice, it must appear

That malice bears down truth. And I beseech you,

Wrest once the law to your authority.

To do a great right, do a little wrong,

And curb this cruel devil of his will. (4.1.204-212)

As this speech testifies, mere bravado on Bassanio's part has all but disappeared. Indeed, this burst of words serves as nothing less than a public declaration of his feelings of love for, and devotion to, Antonio. Given this notion, we cannot overlook the fact of the venue in which Bassanio's assertion takes place—a courtroom. It may as well be a church, and Bassanio's words a vow sworn in a wedding ceremony. We must also be aware of the use

of the term tender in line 204. In one sense, at least, Bassanio uses it as a verb indicating his ability to provide the funds that will satisfy Antonio's creditor, Shylock. But we ought not allow the idea to dissipate that Bassanio offers the money because of the tenderness he feels toward his beloved Antonio. Using the wedding ceremony rhetoric a bit further, in line 207, Bassanio's insistence that he will "forfeit" his "hands . . . head [and] . . . heart" for Antonio sounds much like the vow "'til death do us part" each of the partners swear immediately prior to being pronounced married.

Of course, we also need to be cognizant of the fact that the audience here includes Bassiano's wife, the disguised Portia. Hence, from one perspective, at least, her response to Bassanio sounds appropriately legal:

> It must not be. There is no power in Venice
> Can alter a decree established.
> 'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
> And many an error by the same example
> Will rush into the state. It cannot be. (4.1.213-217)

But Portia/Balthasar's response does not only address the legalities of Shylock's and Antonio's bond and Bassanio's impassioned response to it in open court. No, indeed. This becomes immediately clear with the two phrases that bookend Portia/Balthasar's words: "It must not be" and "It cannot be." Here, she seems to be addressing her personal concerns rather than the suit at hand. Put in a slightly different manner, her utterances mean that it must not be, it cannot be, that Bassanio cares so deeply for Antonio that he would sacrifice his own life for that man. Thus, in this instance, sticking to the exact terms of the bond Antonio and Shylock signed, as well as to the exact letter of the law,

serves her purposes of securing Bassanio all to herself. As such, she instructs Antonio to prepare himself, by laying bare his bosom, to receive the sharp edge of Shylock's blade. When asked if he has anything to say just prior to the meting out of eye-for-an-eye justice, Antonio directs his words to the man he loves:

> I am armed and well prepared.
>
> Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well!
>
> Grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you,
>
> For herein Fortune shows herself more kind
>
> Than is her custom
>
> . . . .
>
> Commend me to your honorable wife.
>
> Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
>
> Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;
>
> And, when the tale is told, bid her judge
>
> Whether Bassanio had not once a love.
>
> Repent but you that you shall lose your friend.
>
> (4.1.259-263 and 268-273)

To this, an obviously affected Bassanio responds:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife
>
> Which is as dear to me as life itself;
>
> But life itself, my wife, and all the world
>
> Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
>
> I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all

Here to this devil, to deliver you. (4.1.277-282)

Portia/Balthasar then comments: "Your wife would give you little thanks for that, / If she were by to hear you make the offer" (4.1.283-284). Thus, in fairly quick succession, we hear from all three of the principals in this particular love triangle.

Without question, Antonio's words, aside from all else they accomplish in this passage, serve as an eloquent confirmation of the fact that he loves Bassanio and has, evidently, loved him for a very long time. Even more than that, however, Antonio requests that Bassanio remember him and speak only well of him upon his untimely and unfortunate death. Of course, the interrelated acts of remembering him and speaking well of him will, in effect, force Bassanio to also recall and talk of Antonio's love for him. Interestingly, in his response, Bassanio does not use the word love. But, then again, he does not have to; admitting that he would give up his wife *and* his life to secure Antonio's deliverance more than signals the undeniable fact that he returns the other man's love with just as much passion and devotion. For a single confirmation of this assertion, we need only turn to Portia/Balthasar's contribution to the dialogue, in which she insists that Bassanio's wife would not at all appreciate being forsaken in the manner Bassanio has just proclaimed to Antonio he would do in order to ensure his ultimate safety and well-being. In other words, she realizes, perhaps more than any other character in *The Merchant of Venice*, exactly how much of a threat Antonio's relationship with Bassanio—and vice versa—remains despite, or perhaps because of, the current circumstances in which Antonio's fate, quite literally, hangs in the balance.

Arguably, some of the most compelling moments in the entire play follow, when Portia/Balthasar holds Shylock to the precise letter of his bond which, effectively, renders

the terms null and void. Thus she secures Antonio's release. She also, not incidentally, manages to secure for Antonio—as well as Jessica and Lorenzo—a hefty share of Shylock's confiscated fortune. In recompense for these successes, Bassanio entreats the lawyer to accept a token of his and, significantly, Antonio's, appreciation. At first, Portia/ Balthasar declines to take any kind of offering from Bassanio and Antonio. Then, she notices the ring on Bassanio's finger, and requests that—with some determination—as an appropriate gift for services rendered. However, Bassanio prudently claims: "Good sir, this ring was given me by my wife, / And when she put it on she made me vow / That I should neither sell nor give nor lose it" (4.1.436-438). Nevertheless, upon Portia/ Balthasar's and Nerissa's departure, Antonio tells his beloved friend: "My lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (4.1.444-446). Mere moments later, Bassanio takes the ring off his finger, hands it to Gratiano, and bids him take it immediately to the lawyer. This is not only one more concrete example of the power Antonio has over Bassanio, but also an additional indication of the nearly indomitable strength of their relationship.

A great deal of literary-critical ink has been put to paper on the subject of the end of Shakespearean comedy in general, and the closing moments of *The Merchant of Venice* in particular. Janet Adelman, for example, explains that

> We ordinarily think of Shakespearean comedy as characterized by its ending in a marriage, or at least in the promise of a marriage, that will resolve the tensions of the plot as it marks the passing of the hero and heroine from childlike dependence on their old family unit to the

> [creation] of new adult identities in the formation of a new family unit. (73)

She notes a short while later that Shakespeare's "early comedies begin much more tentatively with the sense of marriage as problematically related to male identity" (75). Indeed, in these works, "Shakespeare explores male identity and friendship felt as *necessarily prior to marriage*," hence "we do not move directly from family bonds to marriage without an intervening period in which our friendships with same-sex friends help us to establish our independent identities; and marriage is notoriously disruptive of these friendships and sometimes the identities based on them" (75). In other words, same-sex friendship proves a, if not the, crucial factor in the early psychological and, presumably, the emotional, development of human beings. However, to become full-fledged adults, both men and women must renounce such ties with their counterparts by entering into a heterosexual marriage, or they risk not only being ostracized, but remaining in a childlike mental state for the rest of their lives. In regard to *The Merchant of Venice* itself, Adelman writes that "the play pits Antonio's love for Bassanio against Portia's and makes it clear that Portia can win only insofar as Antonio loses" in the brutal contest for his heart (79). She adds that "we are given at the end of *Merchant* Antonio's defeat and his isolation, for which the magical return of his ships provides only poor compensation. Antonio's isolation provides an uncomfortable ending to the comedy precisely insofar as it refuses to be wished away: as the only unmarried figure on the stage at the end, he suggests the tensions that comedy cannot resolve" (80). Because Antonio refuses to abandon the homoerotic and the homosexual of same-sex relations, he

must, therefore, suffer the ignoble consequences of loneliness and loss that, in turn, enables the primacy of the heterosexual to be ruthlessly asserted.

In her similar discussion of *The Merchant of Venice*, Coppélia Kahn writes "that men, if they are to marry, must renounce their friendships with each other—must even, perhaps, betray them; and that once they are married, their wives will betray *them*" (106). Alone, each of these related anxieties "constitutes a threat to the men's sense of themselves as men. In Shakespeare's psychology, men first seek to mirror themselves in a homoerotic attachment . . . and then to confirm themselves through difference, in a bond with the opposite sex—the marital bond, which gives them exclusive possession of a woman" (106). Kleinberg, meanwhile, claims that the "happy ending of the play is the triumph of heterosexual marriage and the promise of generation over the romantic but sterile infatuation of homoeroticism" (124). Patterson, in addition, claims that, key "to *The Merchant of Venice* is a dramatization of the failure of male friendship in a radically shifting mercantile economy—an economy that seems better regulated by a social structure based on marital alliance and heterosexual reproduction" (10). He later notes that the play represents "the travails of the ideal friend in a society that is re-evaluating its definitions of love and its virtues—a shift so disruptive that Antonio as amorous lover" of Bassanio "seems sadly outmoded, himself a kind of anachronism," and eventually describes Antonio as "the type of the homoerotic friend [who] becomes loveless and lonesome" during this period of the English Renaissance (14, 32). Each of these critics, as has been shown, gives primacy to the conventionally heterosexual over, and in utter detriment to, the homoerotic and the homosexual. But the insights of Adelman, Khan,

Kleinberg, and Patterson—useful and engaging as they are—also warrant both challenge and refinement.

Approximately midway through the final act of *The Merchant of Venice*, an argument between Gratiano and Nerissa erupts that, very quickly, comes to engulf Bassanio and Portia, as well. Of course, the wedding rings both Bassanio and Gratiano "gifted" the lawyer and his assistant with in Venice forms the source of this discord, because it means that both men have failed to live up to the marriage vows they exchanged with their respective wives. Before long, Antonio, who has been brought to Portia's estate in Venice, comments: "I am th' unhappy subject of these quarrels" then, in an attempt to engender Portia's goodwill and forgiveness for Bassanio, he explains:

> I once did lend my body for his wealth,
> Which, but for him that had your husband's ring,
> Had quite miscarried. I dare be bound again,
> My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord
> Will nevermore break faith advisedly. (5.1.247-251)

To this Portia says:

> Then you shall be his surety. Give him this,
> And bid him keep it better than the other.
> [*She gives the ring to Antonio, who gives it to Bassanio.*]
> Antonio: Here, Lord Bassanio. Swear to keep this ring.
> Bassanio: By heaven, it is the same I gave to the doctor! (5.1.252-255)

And so the subterfuge of Portia and Nerissa comes to light in a dramatically satisfying manner. But Portia has two other surprising revelations in store, one of which concerns us

here. She provides Antonio with a letter, saying: "There you shall find three of your argosies / Are richly come to harbor suddenly. / You shall not know by what strange accident / I chancèd on this letter" (5.1.274-277). Very soon thereafter, a stunned Antonio tells Portia: "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living; / For here I read for certain that my ships / Are safely come to road" (5.1.284-286). Then all assembled retreat into Portia and Bassanio's house for what little remains of the night—presumably in a state of heterosexual bliss and triumph except for Antonio. But Antonio, and therefore the homoerotic, *are* still very much a part of the fabric of the play in its conclusion. We do not hear even a mention of exiling him from Belmont and, twice in the above-cited passages, Bassanio notes that he *will* absent himself from Portia on occasion. And we have more than good reason to suspect that he will be in Venice, and in the arms of his beloved Antonio, during the course of those wanderings from home. At the conclusion of *The Merchant of Venice* we do not, in other words, discover the unequivocal triumph of heterosexuality Adelman, Kahn, Kleinberg, and Patterson suggest manifests.

Indeed, Adelman's reading of the play overlooks the reality that homosexual relationships between two men or two women can contribute just as much, if not more, to the creation of two whole and well-adjusted human beings with a great deal of value to contribute to the society in which they belong, as heterosexual couplings, presumably, do. The absolute certainty of such a notion dispels into mere myth the idea that males and females progress inevitably and naturally as they grow and develop from childish same-sex relations to the panacea of the marriage state. Given their obvious similarities in tone and analysis, the writings of Kahn, Kleinberg, and Patterson must be subjected to the test of the same qualification. Furthermore, that heterosexual union forms, quite literally, the

perfect ending to plays like *The Merchant of Venice*, in which one of the main conflicts revolves around same-sex versus male-female bonds, functions as another significant weak point in the arguments of these critics. As Kahn herself points out, "Shakespeare doesn't portray the quotidian realities of marriage" in this play or any of his other dramas, for that matter (104). She adds later that male "honor, on which their identities depend so deeply, is irrevocably lost if they suffer the peculiarly galling shame of being cuckolded. The double standard by which their infidelities are tolerated and women's are inexcusable conceals the liability of betrayal by women" that men fear so deeply (106). Undoubtedly, the "infidelities" Kahn mentions as the province of male privilege renders the supposed perfection, not to mention the finality, of the heterosexual marriage state highly suspect. Although it would be erroneous to claim that all men in the English Renaissance cheated on their spouses, a fair number of them did exactly that. We can, as such, reasonably surmise that more than some of these men indulged in extramarital relations involving same-sex partners like Antonio and Bassanio. Once again, Kahn helps us with supporting an assertion of this kind: in regard to the conclusion of *The Merchant of Venice*, she writes that

> Shakespeare seems to imply that male friendship continues to compete with marriage even after the nuptial knot is tied, and that men's fears of cuckoldry may be rooted in an awareness that they [because of their dalliances, same-sex or otherwise] deserve to be punished for failing to honor marriage vows in the spirit as well as in the letter (110).

Kahn, however, describes this as a "fantasy" element of *The Merchant of Venice*, rather than an indication of reality or even potentiality (110). I disagree. As my study suggests,

in its denouement *The Merchant of Venice* does, in fact, reveal the homoerotic between males in ongoing contention with heterosexuality, even after the vows of marriage have been sworn. Given the propensities and, more importantly, the freedoms of men in comparison to women at this time, I would also insist that the homoerotic actually trumps the heterosexual in this context.

CHAPTER 3

"I DO ADORE THEE SO": THE ROMANTIC COURTSHIP OF ANTONIO AND SEBASTIAN IN *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Without question, *Twelfth Night* stands as one of Shakespeare's most delightful, enjoyable, and accomplished comedies. Its plot of "midsummer madness" includes, and makes the absolute best of, a portentous shipwreck, a crossdressed woman in mourning for her dead brother, various counts, countesses, seamen, and servants alike suffering from the illness of unrequited love for the "wrong" person, drunken revels, an expertly fabricated duel of honor, and a key case of mistaken identity that only exacerbate the overall gleeful mayhem. Given its form as comedy, furthermore, *Twelfth Night* allows its audiences the pleasure of witnessing first-hand, vividly imagining, and vicariously experiencing several different modes of human existence in a completely non-threatening manner—chief among them, those dealing with gender and sexuality. Many studies of *Twelfth Night*, particularly in the last twenty-five years or so, direct concerted attention to the myriad questions and potentialities associated with gender that the play raises. Rather surprisingly, however, far fewer analyses center on the intriguing problematics of sexuality that *Twelfth Night* also elicits. As such, I shall argue in this chapter that, in regard to the characters of Antonio and Sebastian, Shakespeare presents us with a wholly poignant romantic courtship that takes place, most significantly, between two men. From

this perspective, Antonio and Sebastian's relationship with one another must be understood as homoerotic on both sides, or a sophisticated engagement with *Twelfth Night* cannot be effected.

Two questions mark Antonio's first appearance in *Twelfth Night*: "Will you stay no longer?," and "Nor will you not that I go with you?" (2.1.1). Significantly, these queries are directed to Sebastian, another young man, and obviously they indicate that Antonio does not want Sebastian to leave him. This, in turn, suggests an attachment on the part of one man for another that registers entirely on the homoerotic, as opposed to the merely friendly, level of association. On this point, Pequigney insists that Antonio's "openly amorous language habitual to him whenever he speaks to or about Sebastian—and rarely does his attention turn to anything else—is the foremost clue to the erotic nature of their friendship" (202-203). In response to Antonio's intense pair of entreaties, Sebastian says: "By your patience, no. My stars shine darkly over me. The malignancy of my fate might perhaps distemper yours; therefore I shall crave of you your leave that I may bear my evils alone. It were a bad recompense for your love to lay any of them on you" (2.1.2-4). Hence, not at all unkindly, Sebastian gives Antonio to know that he cannot remain and that he also needs must refuse the offer of Antonio's companionship on his journey. Sebastian's reasoning centers on the notion that the bad luck he himself has been experiencing will fall upon Antonio, as well, if he allows their involvement to continue while he remains beset by such persistent ill-fortune. Asking Antonio to bear troubles of such a nature—whether he volunteers to do so or not—offers Sebastian no good means of returning all the "love" Antonio has bestowed upon him to this time. From this very brief exchange of words, we can come to the reasonable, although provisional,

conclusion that Antonio loves Sebastian and, furthermore, that Sebastian has received Antonio's attentions as such and, quite possibly, has returned them in both kind and deed.

As their discussion continues, Antonio says: "Let me yet know of you whither you are bound," and Sebastian responds: "No sooth, sir; my determinate voyage is mere extravagancy. But I perceive in you so excellent a touch of modesty that you will not extort from me what I am willing to keep in; therefore it charges me in manners the rather to express myself" (2.1.6-10). Once again, as these lines clearly reveal, Antonio seeks to extend his relationship with Sebastian by asking to know the other man's destination. And, although at first entirely reluctant to divulge that information, Sebastian quickly admits to being so affected by Antonio's gentleness and lack of aggression that he feels it would be uncivil and rude of him to not inform Antonio of the exact nature of where he plans to go. This rhetorical gesture, in turn, shows Antonio's reciprocal importance to Sebastian. As such, he proceeds to explain:

> You must know of me then, Antonio, my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo. My father was that Sebastian of Messaline, whom I know you have heard of. He left behind him myself and a sister, both born in an hour. If the heavens had been pleased, would we had so ended! But you, sir, altered that, for some hour before you took me from the breach of the sea was my sister drowned.
>
> Antonio. Alas the day! (2.1.10-16)

As Sebastian and Antonio speak here, we see, quite literally, their relationship deepening and growing. Sebastian, apparently for the first time, exposes his true self to Antonio by telling him his real name, of his family connections, and the fact that he believes his sister

was drowned in the sea while he himself survived the shipwreck because of Antonio's successful efforts to save him from the same fate. We might well wonder at Sebastian's reasons for not divulging the truth of his identity prior to this particular moment in the play. However, willful deceit seems not to have been a factor or motivation on his part. Indeed, we can attribute his reticence to the trauma of experiencing a disaster and losing a beloved sibling. "Forgetting," or holding back, temporarily at least, the truth about his identity allowed him to protect himself from even more psychic and emotional pain, and to remain in a position where he could continue to be cared for by another man, Antonio, for as long as necessary for his complete recovery.

We may also understand something else from the circumstances detailed above: that Antonio has already taken his place as Sebastian's hero, as his knight-in-shining-armor, if you will, by rescuing him from the sea and certain death, *and* by nursing him back to full health. In any case, Sebastian continues by reiterating that his sister, Viola,

> is drowned already, sir, with salt water, though I seem to drown her remembrance again with more.
>
> Antonio. Pardon me, sir, your bad entertainment.
>
> Sebastian. O good Antonio, forgive me your trouble.
>
> Antonio. If you will not murder me for your love, let me be your servant.
>
> Sebastian. If you will not undo what you have done, that is, kill him whom you have recovered, desire it not. (2.1.21-28)

Sebastian's penchant for tears in regard to his sister and her loss makes him seem nothing if not effeminate, according to conventional understanding of Renaissance England. Even today, a man who cries would be, without question, considered as less than masculine in

most quarters of our society were he to indulge in the luxury of such an emotional action. But, we cannot fail to note that not only does Sebastian exhibit very little reticence as far as crying in front of another man—though, arguably, he would most certainly do so if others were present or nearby—Antonio displays no concern over Sebastian's doing so. In fact, as his response indicates, Antonio feels a great deal of empathy and compassion for Sebastian because of the predicament he currently finds himself in. Made conscious yet again of Antonio's distress because of his fate, Sebastian begs Antonio's forgiveness. Yet, in the very next line, the emotional intensity between these two men becomes even stronger when Antonio insists upon becoming Sebastian's servant if Sebastian "will not murder" him because of his "love." This proves a most enigmatic statement. On the one hand, it could mean that Antonio fears Sebastian will murder him precisely because of the same-sex love he feels and demonstrates for him. Far more likely, it means that if Sebastian does not allow Antonio to function as his servant, the rejection will, quite literally, kill him and make Sebastian a murderer in the process. In and of itself, this line demonstrates how much Antonio longs to be with Sebastian. This does not qualify as desperation but, rather, a very real and heartfelt desire on Antonio's part. Indeed, Schalkwyk notes that the

> service sought by Antonio is much closer to the devotion [to another] induced by Cupid. Yet for all the conventional familiarity of his conversation with Sebastian, he is in fact pleading to be allowed to be Sebastian's servant in the *literal* sense, because such service offers the opportunity for him to indulge his passionate attachment to his friend. (94)

He adds later that the "submission required by service infringes on the possibility, quality, and reciprocity of love and desire. Yet service also makes love possible. The ideal of reciprocity that informs the concept of service also holds out the promise of reciprocity in sexual love" (95). From a strictly heterosexist perspective, furthermore, if a man were to express the kinds of feelings Antonio does to Sebastian openly to a woman, he would be characterized as being totally romantic and, more importantly, unproblematically in love with her, as opposed to being vilified for longing to be with her in such a violent manner.

A similar vehemence marks Sebastian's response to Antonio. He longs for Antonio to kill him rather than to continue his relationship with such an undeserving and cursed man because he "allowed" his sister to die by virtue of being unable to save her from the raging sea. Considering the actual circumstances of Viola's supposed death, it seems not at all unusual that Sebastian would feel as strongly as he does about losing his sister. Indeed, this aspect of his character almost makes it seem as if Sebastian cares more about his dead sibling than the living Antonio. But such a reading would be, at this point, premature. Sebastian, at this point, exhibits so much distress that he says: "Fare ye well at once. My bosom is full of kindness, and I am yet so near the manners of my mother that upon the least occasion more mine eyes will tell tales of me. I am bound to the Count Orsino's court. Farewell," and then he departs on his journey immediately thereafter. Alone with himself, Antonio speaks a very brief, but wholly portentous, soliloquy:

> The gentleness of all the gods go with thee!
> I have many enemies in Orsino's court,
> Else would I very shortly see thee there.

But, come what may, I adore thee so

That danger shall seem sport, and I will go. (2.1.28-36)

Thus we have a significant reiteration of how deeply Antonio feels about Sebastian. He prays for the gods to watch over Sebastian since he cannot do so himself. Then Antonio remarks on the number of adversaries in Orsino's court that, in turn, ought to prevent him from going there. Nevertheless, he impulsively decides to "sport" with "danger" and to venture to Orsino's dukedom because he "adores" Sebastian so utterly and completely that he cannot bear to be without him. "Such 'adoration,'" Pequigney remarks, "especially as prompting the adorer to risk his all happily and carelessly only to be with the other, must stem from passion" (203). Furthermore, in the present context, if Antonio were exclusively heterosexual, admitting, even in soliloquy, to the adoration he has for a member of his own sex, it would seem oddly incongruent, if not downright absurd. From a homoerotic and homosexual perspective, however, Antonio's feelings make absolutely perfect sense.

Nevertheless, and despite the evidence presented above, some critics claim that Antonio and Sebastian's association never crosses the cold Platonic divide that separates mere friendship from physical, emotional, and affective relations amongst males of all kinds. Lindheim, for example, while she concedes that the "relationship between Antonio and Sebastian is emotionally freighted from the outset, [she also points out that] Antonio's language demonstrates the early modern overlap in vocabulary for all strong positive feelings, the extent to which a single language was applied unselfconsciously in discourses of erotic love, friendship, and religion alike" (688). She proceeds to insist that Antonio and Sebastian's relationship is one of friendship only, such as those that

occurred frequently during the English Renaissance among upper-class males and were considered far better than male-female relationships (including marriage) because they were, presumably, unions of souls rather than bodies and thus untainted by the grossness of sexuality. To me, this desire to force Antonio and Sebastian's relationship into what I will call the "closet of friendship," no matter how attentive to historicity it purports to be, comes across as rather disingenuous. Since the rhetoric or discourse itself does not, apparently, change between the realms of "erotic love," "friendship," and "religion," we ought not be so eager to dismiss the potentiality of homoeroticism, if not outright homosexuality, in regard to a couple like Antonio and Sebastian. Though they are friends (of sorts), I would never make a claim that Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are also two men who are erotically attracted to one another. The text of *Twelfth Night* itself fails to support an assertion of that kind. Traub confirms the notion that, although the relationship between Sir Toby and Sir Andrew is, without question, homosocial and, involving Olivia as it does, triangular,[1] it is *not* homosexual nor, even, homoerotic: fops such as Sir Andrew, she writes,

> while commonly perceived as having a 'passive' interest in male homoerotic encounters, are almost always involved in pursuing (if unsuccessfully) a heterosexual alliance. Sir Andrew, for instance, hopes to marry Olivia, if only for her status and money. True, he is manipulated by Sir Toby, and he may therefore be seen to partake of a homoerotic triangular relation whereby he woos his ostensible object (Olivia) in order to concretise ties with his real object (Toby). However, Sir Andrew seems

more accurately represented as void of erotic desire, merely attempting to fulfill the social requirements of heterosexuality. (147-148)

The text of *Twelfth Night* does yield a great deal of convincing evidence, however, that the relationship of Antonio and Sebastian both incorporates friendship and exceeds it, at least far enough to include homoerotic love.

We do not meet with Antonio and Sebastian again until the third act of *Twelfth Night*. The scene in which they appear begins *in media res* with Sebastian saying to Antonio, whom he has just met in Illyria: "I would not by my will have troubled you; / But since you make your pleasure of your pains, / I will no further chide you" (3.3.1-3). These words of gentle rebuke suggest an appreciation on Sebastian's part for Antonio's presence. He need not, in other words, remain alone; he has his companion with him now for support. Upon receiving such a welcome from the man he loves, Antonio says:

I could not stay behind you. My desire,
More sharp than filèd steel, did spur me forth,
And not all love to see you – though so much
As might have drawn one to a longer voyage –
But jealousy what might befall your travel,
Being skilless in these parts, which to a stranger,
Unguided and unfriended, often prove
Rough and unhospitable. My willing love,
The rather by these arguments of fear,
Set forth in your pursuit. (3.3.4-13)

A reading guided by the insights of homoeroticism forms the only interpretation that renders this passage fully comprehensible. Antonio begins it by confessing outright that he could not keep himself away from Sebastian. Indeed, his keen "desire" for Sebastian propelled Antonio to seek him out near Duke Orsino's court. Of course, the bawdy—but no less palpable—cannot, nor should it, be entirely avoided here: Antonio's longing for Sebastian translates into a penile arousal "More sharp than filèd steel" that "spurred him forth" to seek out Sebastian regardless of the danger to his person. Pequigney confirms for us that this impelling "desire" is sensual: the very word would connote libido even apart from the intensifying metaphor of the flesh-cutting metal spur" (203). In any case, Antonio goes on to claim that he was not driven totally by his "love" for Sebastian, but also by the very real fear he felt in regard to Sebastian's welfare given that he was going into Illyria unaccompanied and without any true knowledge of the area. This shows, once again, the sheer depth of Antonio's devotion to Sebastian who, for the most part, responds in a similar fashion:

> My kind Antonio
>
> I can no other answer make but thanks,
>
> And thanks; and ever oft good turns
>
> Are shuffled off with such uncurrent pay.
>
> But were my worth as is my conscience, firm,
>
> You should find better dealing. What's to do?
>
> Shall we go see the relics of this town? (3.3.12-19)

It seems a safe assumption from his choice of words in the above passage that Sebastian truly welcomes Antonio's presence as well as his assistance with the tasks he has at hand.

Sebastian, furthermore, does not feel as if he can ever adequately repay Antonio for the trouble it took him to come to him in Illyria.

Then, quite unmistakably, Sebastian asks Antonio to go on a date with him that would consist of the two of them strolling through the town sightseeing. Antonio, however, begs off by saying: "Tomorrow, sir. Best first go see your lodging" (3.3.20). Given how Antonio feels about Sebastian, this refusal seems rather odd. Indeed, Sebastian himself makes one more attempt to entice Antonio into taking the proposed excursion: "I am not weary, and 'tis long to night. / I pray you, let us satisfy our eyes / With the memorials and the things of fame / That do renown this city" (3.3.21-24). Yet, still, Antonio declines the invitation, and then reveals:

> Would you pardon me.
> I do not without danger walk these streets.
> Once in a sea-fight 'gainst the Count his galleys
> I did some service, of such note indeed
> That were I ta'en here it would scarce be answered. (3.3.24-28)

In addition to discussing something about his past in these lines, Antonio admits that he, too, would enjoy venturing on the outing Sebastian has proposed. This would, of course, allow him to spend a great deal of time with the man he loves and desires so; but he fears doing so will put him, and thus Sebastian, as well, in almost certain jeopardy. Antonio's revelations here engender Sebastian's immediate concern:

> Belike you slew a great number of his people?
> Antonio. Th' offence is not of such a bloody nature,
> Albeit the quality of the time and quarrel

Might well have given us bloody argument.

It might have since been answered in repaying

What we took from them, which for traffic's sake

Most of our city did. Only myself stood out,

For which, if I be lapsèd in this place,

I shall pay dear.

Sebastian. Do not then walk too open.

Antonio. It doth not fit me. (3.3.29-38)

As the lines cited above prove, Sebastian does not want Antonio to risk capture by Orsino's troops, or to otherwise be put into distress by venturing too openly in Illyria. Thus we see, from Sebastian's perspective this time, how much these two men both care for and look out for one another.

In the continuation of this scene, Antonio says:

Hold, sir, here's my purse.

In the south suburbs, at the Elephant,

Is best to lodge. I will bespeak our diet,

Whiles you beguile the time and feed your knowledge

With viewing of the town. There shall you have me.

Sebastian. Why I your purse?

Antonio. Haply your eye shall light upon some toy

You have desire to purchase; and your store

I think is not for idle markets, sir.

Sebastian. I'll be your purse-bearer and leave you

For an hour.

Antonio. To th'Elephant.

Sebastian. I do remember. (3.3.38-50)

Without question, these lines exhibit a great deal of courtship and romance as such forces can play out between two men. Indeed, both Antonio and Sebastian seem to want to give to, rather than take away from, each other. First, Antonio gifts Sebastian with his purse so that the latter will have sufficient financial means to buy himself a luxury item if he happens to come across one that he particularly fancies. Pequigney views this as a "kind and generous gesture, to be sure, but the intent behind it is less simple than the reply suggests" because, to him, Antonio gives his purse "with the ulterior motive of pleasing if not purchasing the desired youth" (204). I disagree, at least in part, with this assessment, and, as such, do not wish to read such calculated cynicism into these circumstances. Antonio merely knows well-enough that Sebastian does not have the monetary resources of his own to indulge in such extravagances, so he wants to support his beloved in this tangible way. We must not fail to note, as well, that Antonio also deftly manages to get Sebastian to stay with him for the night in the lodgings the Elephant provides. Not only that, since he cannot walk about the town freely, he insists that he will go to the inn first and see to the timely preparation of a suitable meal for both of them.

Antonio, furthermore, explicitly reminds Sebastian that later, when they meet at the Elephant, he shall "have" Antonio himself. This proves a most curious turn of phrase that begs careful consideration in the present context. We can be reasonably certain that strictly heterosexist interpretations of *Twelfth Night* would attempt to dismiss Antonio's "have" outright as a mere figure of speech signaling a scenario along the lines of: "They

shall share a convivial meal together and enjoy a long conversation afterward. Then they will proceed to separate rooms for the night where a pathetic Antonio will bemoan his loneliness and longing for Sebastian, while Sebastian himself sleeps peacefully and in total, ignorant bliss of Antonio's true feelings for him." Such a reading, however, begs credulity. Given the documented fact that, during the English Renaissance, men often shared beds with one another, and that a certain percentage of these men also engaged in same-sex relations, we can not unreasonably surmise that not only will Antonio and Sebastian enjoy a meal and conversation at the Elephant, but that they will also sleep in the same bed where they will indulge in the sensual and sexual delights two men who are in love with each other can take the greatest of pleasure in. Nevertheless, they part at this point in the play for an hours' length of time in which, as we have seen, Antonio will attend to the domestic details of their lodging while Sebastian roams the streets of Illyria. In addition, Antonio's last line in this passage, reminding Sebastian to meet him at the Elephant, demonstrates just how much he looks forward to spending the evening alone with his beloved Sebastian. And, for his part, Sebastian assures Antonio that he will indeed be there as they have arranged, signaling that he, too, longs for the intimacy their planned tryst will provide.

But the evening Antonio had envisaged suffers irrevocable interruption because of the duel Sir Toby and Fabian engineer between Viola/Cesario and the Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Upon encountering this brawl, Antonio addresses Sir Andrew with: "Put up your sword. If this young gentleman / Have done offense, I take the fault on me; / If you offend him, I for him defy you" (3.4.255-257). When asked about his identity by Sir Toby, Antonio responds by flatly proclaiming himself: "One, sir, that for his love dares

yet do more / Than you have heard him brag to you he will" (3.4.259-260). Such a truly surprising development allows us to understand Antonio's willingness to fight for and, quite possibly, sacrifice himself for his beloved Sebastian. In other words, Antonio stands at the ready to be Sebastian's literal knight-in-shining-armor in word as well as in deed. His determination to take on any "fault" of Sebastian's tells us that Antonio considers himself and Sebastian almost as if they were one person or, at the very least, two parts of the same whole. At the same time, his implacable inclination to defend Sebastian if he proves to be the instigator functions as a significant reiteration of his devotion to the other man. Given that he uses the word himself, we can also have no doubt whatsoever that his "love" for Sebastian forms the sole motivation underlying Antonio's behavior. Interestingly, we may also note that no one else present in this scene—from Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, to Fabian and Viola/Cesario—comments in a negative manner on the "love" Antonio quite openly admits to feeling for the individual he thinks of as Sebastian.

At this point, Duke Orsino's soldiers arrive on the scene in pursuit of the fugitive. Knowing he has neither choice nor chance for escape, Antonio directs his next words to Viola/Cesario, whom he thinks of as his beloved Sebastian:

> I must obey.
> This comes with seeking you.
> But there's no remedy; I shall answer it.
> What will you do, now my necessity
> Makes me to ask you for my purse? It grieves me
> Much more for what I cannot do for you
> Than what befalls myself. You stand amazed,

But be of comfort. (3.4.273-279)

This speech reconfirms Antonio's willingness to sacrifice himself for the Sebastian he loves so much. He also evinces a heartfelt regret at the fact that his capture also means that he will not be able to assist Sebastian, financially or in any other manner, in the foreseeable future; otherwise he does not seem to care all that much about what happens to him personally while in the custody of Orsino's soldiers. However, immediately after the officers' next attempt to haul him away, Antonio rather frantically says:

I must entreat you of some of that money.

Viola. What money, sir?

. . . .

Antonio. Will you deny me now?

Is't possible that my deserts to you

Can lack persuasion? Do not tempt my misery,

Lest that it make me so unsound a man

As to upbraid you with those kindnesses

That I have done for you.

Viola. I know of none,

Nor know I you by voice or any feature. (3.4.280-295)

The effectiveness of disguise is one of the first items we should be cognizant of in the above-cited passage. In other words, Viola's transformation into the young man Cesario has proven so well-managed that no one—most particularly Antonio, who has, as we have already determined, spent a great deal of time, both intimately and otherwise, with Sebastian—recognizes her actual sex or gender. As such, he, out of all the characters in

Twelfth Night, ought to know almost instinctively the difference between Sebastian and Viola/Cesario, between a man and a woman.

Among all else it accomplishes, the passages cited above direct our awareness to the constructed nature of gender. On this particular subject, Charles helpfully notes that, "In the doubly androgynous role of male actor playing a woman playing a man, Viola/ Cesario must literally perform the role of the male; her success before the aristocratic Orsino and Olivia" and, we might well add, the seaman Antonio, "consequently points to the constructedness and performative character of gender itself" (123). Charles also explains that:

> This staging of gender imitation by Viola, the performance of her gender performance, uses her disguise and her identity with her brother Sebastian as vehicles to demonstrate that erotic attraction is not an inherently gendered or heterosexual phenomenon . . . Lovers like Olivia, Orsino, Malvolio, and Antonio construct fantasies that turn the objects of their affection into something more than they are, thereby disrupting the boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality and class-consciousness through the performance of these imaginary fantasies. (123)

In other words, a man exists, for instance, as no more than the clothes he wears, the style and length of his hair, the sound of his voice, and as what he chooses to say and do, the totality of which can be affected, as the case of Viola/Cesario makes so vividly clear. Of course, a woman exists in a similar manner. In regard to *Twelfth Night*, we, the audience, know Viola/Cesario's actual gender, which, in turn, forms the basis of much of the humor in this portion of the play. But, beneath this humor lies a rather sobering truth we ought

not to shy away from: for Antonio, his idea of Sebastian as the man he loves remains in full accord with hetero- and homosexual notions of erotic desire. As such, he experiences a great deal of unmistakable distress when Sebastian (Viola/Cesario) refuses to assist him or even acknowledge their past relationship. It seems a small wonder indeed, then, that Antonio cannot fathom why Sebastian (Viola/Cesario) will not provide him with his own money in his moment of greatest need and in consideration of the many "desserts" and "kindnesses" he has bestowed on him. For Antonio, these circumstances make no sense whatsoever, and we can successfully argue that, given all of his efforts and sacrifices on Sebastian's behalf, Antonio has more than mere right to feel both angry and betrayed. Though certainly a comedic device, we are, nevertheless, also witnesses in this scene to one man's acute pain that is engendered by the lack of action and recognition on the part of another he happens to love and to adore engenders. Without question, if Sebastian did not mean as much to Antonio as he does, Antonio would not be so upset and agitated.

With his next words, Antonio once again succeeds in making Orsino's officers pause prior to taking him away as the scene continues:

> Let me speak a little. This youth that you see here
> I snatched one half out of the jaws of death,
> Relieved him with such sanctity of love,
> And to his image, which methought did promise
> Most venerable worth, did I devotion.
>
> . . . .
>
> But, Oh, how vile an idol proves this god!
> Thou hast, Sebastian, done good feature shame.

In nature there's no blemish but the mind;

None can be called deformed but the unkind.

Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil

Are empty trunks o'erflourished by the devil. (3.4.300-310)

Thus we learn what we did not know before this moment in the play: that Antonio actually saved Sebastian's life in the shipwreck that occurred off the coast of Illyria, and that he also nursed Sebastian back to physical health with all the "sanctity of love" he felt for the other man. The quoted phrase, "sanctity of love," deserves special attention in the present context because it shows that Antonio felt his relationship with Sebastian—a relationship between two men—embodied the sacred, the holy, and the pure. Antonio's speech here becomes even more intriguing when his words focus attention on Sebastian's visage, to which he insists he did "devotion," in part, precisely because of Sebastian's good looks. In their turn, these pleasing features spoke to Antonio of Sebastian's "venerable worth." Many of us have made the mistake of believing something about another individual to be true based solely on the appearance they make in the world, rather than anything more tangible—just like Antonio apparently has about Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*. Antonio's comments here reveal his singular cognizance of Sebastian's physical appeal. And, yet again, considering all that Antonio has done for him since rescuing him from the shipwreck, little wonder attaches itself to the depth of Antonio's upset over what he deems Sebastian's betrayal, as revealed by the bitter specificity of his syntax. Sebastian, no matter how good looking, becomes now a "vile idol" rather than a "god" worthy of worship, and a "beautiful evil" in the service of no less a figure of human disapprobation than "the devil." With such evidence at hand, we may easily

surmise that, if Antonio did not feel as strongly about Sebastian as he does, his language here would not be so emphatic.

Later, before the Countess Olivia's house, the officers bring Antonio into the Count's presence:

> Orsino. That face of his I do remember well,
>
> Yet when I saw it last it was besmeared
>
> As black as Vulcan in the smoke of war.
>
> A baubling vessel was he captain of,
>
> For shallow draft and bulk unprizable,
>
> With which such scatheful grapple did he make
>
> With the most noble bottom of our fleet
>
> That very envy and the tongue of loss
>
> Cried fame and honour on him. What's the matter?
>
> First Officer. Orsino, this is that Antonio
>
> That took the *Phoenix* and her freight from Candy,
>
> And this is he that did the *Tiger* board
>
> When your young nephew Titus lost his leg.
>
> Here in the streets, desperate of shame and state,
>
> In private brabble did we apprehend him.
>
> . . . .
>
> Orsino. Notable pirate, thou saltwater thief,
>
> What foolish boldness brought thee to their mercies
>
> Whom thou in terms so bloody and so dear

Hast made thine enemies? (5.1.38-59)

In many respects, these lines reveal an Antonio of whom we may not have been aware prior to this moment in the play: a wholly masculine male and, according to Orsino and his men, a criminal figure. On this point, Burg provides invaluable insight. In his historical study of the subject, he describes English pirates being drawn from the ranks of servants, apprentices, vagabonds, beggars, wanderers, merchant seamen, and former sailors coerced or pressed into military service for the crown. These men led an exceedingly dangerous existence and, for lengthy periods of time, "found themselves in situations where the only manner of sexual fulfillment was with members of the same sex" (58). Burg later compares these pirates to contemporary prisoners jailed for crimes of various types, and notes that:

> Pirates were in worse condition than convicts. Not only were their diets poorly balanced by modern standards—although frequently they ate as well as their fellow countrymen who remained home in England—but they lived often with an extremely high level of anxiety. The constant anticipation of combat surely exerted a profound influence on them, and although there was at the same time always the threat of capture, trial for piracy, conviction, and death on the gallows, the likelihood of being taken by authorities was so remote it probably constituted no serious impediment to their sexual functioning. . . .The single certainty is that the only non-solitary sexual activities available to [them]. . . .for almost all of the time they were aboard ship were homosexual. (111)

As such, we have sufficient reason to suspect that it was Antonio's love for Sebastian, and Sebastian's love for him, that tempered his darker, piratical side, and ameliorated his experiences within such a violent and unpredictable milieu to bring forth—perhaps for the first time—his more caring, romantic, and courtly aspects.

In response to the charges that have been brought against him, Antonio claims he:

> never yet was thief or pirate,
> Though, I confess, on base and ground enough
> Orsino's enemy. A witchcraft drew me hither.
> That most ingrateful boy there by your side
> From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth
> Did I redeem; a wreck past hope he was.
> His life I gave him, and did thereto add
> My love, without retention or restraint,
> All his in dedication. For his sake
> Did I expose myself—pure for his love—
> Into the danger of this adverse town,
> Drew to defend him when he was beset;
> . . . .
> [but he] denied me mine own purse,
> Which I had recommended to his use
> Not half an hour before.
> Viola. How can this be?
> Orsino. When came he to this town?

Antonio. Today, my lord; and for three months before,

No interim, not a minute's vacancy,

Both day and night did we keep company. (5.1.62-84)

Antonio, as his recapitulation of the major events that have taken place between them indicates, still cannot yet bring himself to believe that Sebastian has betrayed him the way he apparently has. This reiteration of circumstances serves to underscore the crucial nature of the bond between Antonio and Sebastian. We also hear yet again of how Antonio saved Sebastian from certain death in the sea; and Antonio reminds us that Sebastian's good looks are on par with a very powerful and seductive form of witchcraft that drew him, like a moth to a flame, to Illyria, and to put himself in danger of capture, all for the man he loves. Most significantly, we learn in this passage that, following the shipwreck, Antonio and Sebastian spent the succeeding three months exclusively in each other's company both night and day. Sebastian, Pequigney comments in his discussion of the revelations noted above, "has continuously remained with an adoring older man who is frankly desirous of him . . . and who, moreover, saved him from death at sea and nursed him back to health. It is the classic homoerotic relationship, wherein the mature lover serves as guide and mentor to the young beloved" (204). In any case, by now, we ought to have no problem whatsoever understanding their relationship during this time as involving affective, physical, and sexual intimacies, as well as the camaraderie of male-male friendship.

Not long afterward, the real Sebastian (re)appears to the utter astonishment of all present, as the Count himself clearly indicates:

Orsino. One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons,

A natural perspective, that is and is not!

Sebastian. Antonio, O my dear Antonio!

How have the hours racked and tortured me,

Since I have lost thee!

Antonio. Sebastian are you?

Sebastian. Fear'st thou that, Antonio?

Antonio. How have you made division of yourself?

An apple cleft in two is not more twin

Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian? (5.1.193-209)

When Antonio ceases to speak, Sebastian lays eyes on his sister, Viola, dressed as the young man Cesario, and *Twelfth Night* very quickly thereafter draws to its conclusion with, seemingly, all of its various plot threads in a state of satisfactory, i.e. heterosexual, resolution. But, even though Sebastian has married Olivia, Antonio remains a very "dear" person to him—so much so, in fact, that "the hours racked and tortured" him during the long hours of their separation. His words to Olivia never betray such passion, such desire, such yearning. Furthermore, Sebastian, unlike Viola/Cesario, does not really know Olivia, and it would be somewhat naïve indeed if we believed unquestionably that he does truly love her after so brief an acquaintance before their marriage. In spite of his bemusement over the circumstances he so suddenly finds himself in, we could argue that he married Olivia because he thinks himself in some kind of dream, rather than in any kind of reality, and that he realizes he will be able to establish himself immediately—and, presumably, permanently—in a financial sense by marrying the very rich Olivia. Indeed, as Greenblatt describes this rather mercenary aspect of Renaissance England:

> Olivia is a prize encumbered only by her devotion to her brother's memory. (Her uncle, who could have filled the role of her guardian, is a hopeless sot whose own candidate for his niece's hand is suitable only to be bilked and mocked.) The lady richly left was a major male wish-fulfillment fantasy in a culture where the pursuit of wealth through marriage was an avowed and reputable preoccupation. Here the fantasy is at its most dreamlike because it focuses not on a widow—the only group whose members actually corresponded on infrequent occasion to this daydream—but on 'a virtuous maid' (1.2.36). (69)

We must also bear in mind that, although Sebastian and Olivia end up betrothed, and Count Orsino and Viola pledge their complementary desire to be joined in matrimony, Antonio remains very much a presence, though, admittedly, a silent one, at the close of *Twelfth Night*.

Given the play's treatment of gender and sexuality, the final scene of *Twelfth Night* has been the subject of much critical scrutiny—scrutiny that, nevertheless, warrants further consideration. Adelman, for example, reminds us that "Shakespearean comedy is characterized by its ending in a marriage, or at least in the promise of a marriage, that will resolve the tensions of the plot as it marks the passing of the hero and heroine from childlike dependence on their old family unit to the establishment of new adult identities in the formation of a new family unit" (73). In other words, a natural progression from neediness to appropriately coupled emancipation occurs as men and women move from childhood to adulthood, from singleness to matrimony. On *Twelfth Night* itself she remarks that "Antonio receives at the hands of a Viola disguised to look like Sebastian

. . . a shorthand form of the rejection that we might expect him to receive from Sebastian himself as Sebastian moves [naturally and inevitably] from the homosexual bond to the heterosexual bond" (88). Furthermore, "the play gives us at this moment an image of loss that it can do little to assuage, since at the end Antonio finds Sebastian only to stand silently by, watching him commit himself to Olivia. Even in its direct expression of loss, that is, the relationship of Antonio to Sebastian suggests the pain that the fantasy of sexual simultaneity is designed to assuage" (88-89). From these comments we are, it seems, to understand that homosexuality in *Twelfth Night* retreats into the mere fantasy it always was so that heterosexuality can take its "rightful" place in the social milieu. Homosexuality, in addition, causes nothing but pain for those males like Antonio who do not seek marriage to a woman. But, Antonio and Sebastian's relationship was always a reality, never just a fantasy, and heterosexual relationships cause just as much pain as any other kind of human association. We need only look at *Twelfth Night*'s Orsino and Maria, both of whom pine miserably for Olivia and Sir Toby, respectively, for confirmation of such an assertion. It can be argued, as well, that the play does not have to assuage the image of loss Adelman contends it presents, because, in fact, no real loss takes place. Antonio and Sebastian's mutually homoerotic relationship will continue, no matter Sebastian's status as Olivia's husband. This assertion can be made because, in the play, Sebastian never tells Antonio that their romance must end because of his marriage to Olivia, and it would be a mistake to assume such a breakup occurs off-stage. Furthermore, men of relative privilege, like Sebastian, were free to pursue their erotic desires regardless of their putative marital status and as long as they were fairly circumspect in their amorous and sexual activities.

From a similar perspective, Schalkwyk wonders if Antonio truly does not recognize the real Sebastian when he shows himself immediately prior to the reunion of brother and sister, "or has Sebastian become the signifier of a love that cannot be told, rather than an object of loss? Whatever the case, he is mute from now until the play's supposedly festive closure, a muteness that, because he is a body and not a word, the theater forces to speak its own silence as the printed page does not" (407). Given the effectiveness of Viola/Cesario's disguise as a boy, who remarkably resembles her twin brother, Sebastian, and what Antonio has suffered because of it, it ought not be too surprising that he questions Sebastian's very reality at this juncture. Furthermore, we can see Sebastian as a "signifier of a love that has already been told and, much more importantly, remains a palpable force," as opposed to a love that cannot be expressed for whatever reason. Yes, Antonio does remain mute as the play concludes, but the memory of his relationship with Sebastian speaks volumes to him and to the audiences of *Twelfth Night*, rather than merely dissipating into abject silence.

"The homoeroticism of *Twelfth Night*," Traub writes, "is anxious and strained. This text explores a diversity of desire, proceeding with erotic plurality as far as it can; then, in the face of anxiety generated by this exploration, it fixes the homoerotic interest onto [Antonio] whose relation to Sebastian is finally sacrificed for the maintenance of institutionalised heterosexuality and generational continuity" (136). Later, Traub contends that—despite the appeal of homoeroticism—Antonio, in effect, disappears at the end of *Twelfth Night* because he dared to declare his desire for Sebastian openly and because he sought a relationship of exclusivity with Sebastian, both taboo in a patriarchal and heterosexist society. But, it could be said that Olivia's attachment to Sebastian by

marriage seeks the same kind of exclusivity as Antonio does in his relationship with Sebastian. And, prior to the hastily arranged wedding, she, too, spoke of her desire just as vehemently and openly as Antonio did his. Of course, Olivia does not suffer the same kind of marginalization as Antonio because she exists comfortably within the realm of institutionalized and compulsory heterosexuality that seeks to maintain itself by suppressing and subverting, if not outright eradicating, alternative forms of union such as same-sex relationships.

Greenblatt, meanwhile, claims that "in *Twelfth Night* events pursue their natural curve, the curve that assures the proper mating of man and woman. To be matched with someone of one's own sex is to follow an unnaturally straight line; heterosexuality, as the image of nature drawing to her bias implies, is bent" (68). He adds a short while later that, with the couplings of Sebastian and Olivia and Viola and Orsino, "Nature has triumphed. The sexes are sorted out, correctly paired, and dismissed to bliss. . . .And nature's triumph is society's triumph, for the same clarification that keeps marriage from being scandalized by gender confusion keeps it from being scandalized by status confusion" in terms of the class ranking of these characters (71). Of course, a great deal of irony attends Greenblatt's notions, given the fact that the term "straight" has come to be so thoroughly associated with so-called normal heterosexual relations. Yet, in the passages cited, he describes same-sex relationships in the Renaissance as "straight," albeit with the derogatory qualification of "unnaturally." As such, Greenblatt reveals the heterosexual bias from which his assertions are made. However, according to Shannon, "Renaissance articulations of nature can be seen to contradict this notion. 'Nature," she argues, "very often operates in a homonormative (sometimes, though not consistently,

homoerotic) manner . . . In affective terms, affiliation, affinity, and attraction normally proceed on a basis of likeness, a principle of resemblance strong enough to normalize relations between members of one sex above relations that cross sexual difference" (187).

Thus Greenblatt and Shannon reveal a significant dichotomy: the former claims that same-sex relationships were considered "unnatural" in the Renaissance, while the latter argues that different-sex unions were thought of as "unnatural" during this period. True nature's bias, in other words, inexorably draws its complement, rather than its opposite, toward itself. On something of a more radical note, Pequigney flatly refutes the commonplace idea of a *Twelfth Night* that ends with a pathetic Antonio, unwanted and abandoned by his beloved. He insists, rather, that the "expectation is set up that in taking a wife Sebastian will not and need not suffer the 'rack and torture' of losing his male lover. Not the rejected 'poor Antonio' of the commentary, he is instead the 'dear Antonio' here and hereafter of lucky Sebastian. Does this," Pequigney questions, "imply a *ménage à trois* at Olivia's house? That's anybody's guess, but a guess about nothing, for once they leave the stage the characters vanish into thin air" (206). We might quibble with Pequigney on this point: even though the characters disappear forever behind the curtain at the close of the play, who they were and the situations they found themselves in while on stage remain in the *imaginations* and the *memories* of audiences and critics alike. So, the "guess" he discusses in his essay qualifies as being about much more than "nothing." In addition, Pequigney does not consider any alternatives to the somewhat equivocal outcome of the play he envisions, which, though it does not banish Antonio, it also does not provide a concrete resolution of this character's fate. Sinfield's reading of

Twelfth Night's denouement, on the other hand, both supports, and expands on, Pequigney's:

> I have suggested that Sebastian's marriage to a stranger heiress need not significantly affect Antonio's relationship with him . . . They might all live together in Olivia's house (as Sir Toby does); she may well prefer to spend her time with Maria and Viola (who will surely tire of Orsino) rather than with the naïve, swashbuckling husband whom she has mistakenly married. So, Antonio need not appear at the end of *Twelfth Night* as the defeated and melancholy outsider that critics have supposed; a director, reading only partly against the grain, might show him delighted with his boyfriend's lucky break. (65-66)

Furthermore, during this period, men of the upper classes were expected to marry and to produce an heir. As long as these imperatives were accomplished, their erotic desires–for male or female partners outside of marriage—were not subject to extreme scrutiny in the social milieu insofar, of course, as they maintained discretion.[2] Without question, Sebastian's marriage to Olivia provides him with the means of remaining "reasonably discreet" as far as his continuing involvement with Antonio. In tandem, the insights Pequigney, Sinfield, and Kleinberg offer in their respective pieces support the notion that Antonio and Sebastian's homoerotic and homosexual relationship does not suffer any irreparable harm simply because Olivia has married Sebastian.

This brief and necessarily incomplete survey of recent critical attitudes toward the conclusion of *Twelfth Night* reveals as much discord as it does accord. Most of Shakespeare's comedies, as we have seen, end in an actual or at least potential marriage

between a man and a woman—and often multiple marriages. By definition, the concept of heterosexual union demands the exclusion of any others, such as Antonio, who might also lay claim to the attentions and affections of either the bride or groom. However, to me, this type of conventional wisdom operates on the assumption that couples so wedded will remain faithful and monogamous to one another until death do they part. Considering the social and sexual freedoms men, and particularly upper-class men like Sebastian, enjoyed in Shakespeare's England, such a view courts with the gullible and the naïve. Sebastian's marriage to Olivia, I would argue, can then be seen as the perfect shield capable of protecting him from accusations of impropriety or sodomy because of his continuing homoerotic and homosexual relationship with his beloved Antonio. Furthermore, as I have argued throughout this chapter, I am convinced that the text of *Twelfth Night* supports the notion that Antonio and Sebastian continue as an involved couple despite the latter's marriage, I would not go so far as to suggest that Antonio, Sebastian, and Olivia live happily-ever-after in the same house. It seems far more likely to me that these two relationships—Antonio/Sebastian and Sebastian/Olivia—would evolve in separate, though no less equal, spheres of association. Thus the courtship of Antonio and Sebastian that *Twelfth Night* portrays succeeds in conveying the love and the romance of two men deeply committed to one another, and our collective understanding of such relationships in Renaissance England grows ever more nuanced and informed.

CHAPTER 4

"I AM YOUR OWN FOREVER": THE GENERAL AND HIS ANCIENT AS WARRIORS AND LOVERS IN *OTHELLO*

In life we do not discover everything about the people we are involved with on that journey all at once; we learn about them, and they us, bit by bit as time, experience, and, sometimes, determination allows. We come to know Iago, Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, and all the other *dramatis personae* that appear in Shakespeare's *Othello* in a comparable, though, of course, dramatically compressed, manner. Therefore, I was content, for example, to accept the fact that Iago was acting as deliberately malicious in the opening scenes of the tragedy simply because he had been passed over by Othello for promotion to the rank of officer in the professional military service both are members of. It seemed a logical consequence, in fact, that Iago would retaliate for being treated in such a disrespectful manner by denigrating both Cassio and Othello, following the latter only to do him an equal, if not greater, wrong. Beyond vengeance, however, something unexpected and extraordinary occurs when Iago continues his chameleon-like verbal manipulation of Othello in Act 3 of the play. Indeed, part of Iago's elaborate fabrication of proof of Desdemona's marital indiscretion(s) includes not only representing Othello's wife as a wanton, but also depicting himself as Cassio's bed partner and, thus, as the apparently willing recipient of another man's amorous physical advances. As the highly

visceral images Iago creates here resonate in the minds of conscientious readers, the realization begins to dawn that, perhaps, something else entirely has been going on in *Othello*—at least in regard to the sexual dynamics at work in the drama. Indeed, for queer male readers of *Othello* like myself, the exhilarating possibility that Shakespeare might not have privileged heteronormativity as much as was first thought begins to manifest at this point, and soon demands a complete reassessment of the play guided by the thesis that Iago's hatred masks a profound love for Othello that encompasses the homosocial, the homoerotic, *and* the homosexual.

Hyman was among the first of a comparatively small group of literary, theatre, and psychoanalytic critics to comment in print on Iago's apparent non-normative sexuality: "Iago neither loves Desdemona nor believes for a moment that she loves Cassio, despite several statements to the contrary. It is he," in fact, "who unconsciously loves both Othello and Cassio; that love is repressed and, by the defense mechanism called 'reaction formation,' turned into hate" (101). These insights provide a degree of initial critical support for investigating *Othello* from the perspective that Iago's homosexuality functions as both an observable and remarkable element of his character that, in turn, produces a significantly different interpretation of the play than a strictly heterosexist take allows. That Iago not only fantasizes about him, but that he displays a predilection for observing Cassio's attractiveness, forms one of the noticeable attributes of his homoerotic character. In the first scene of the play, for instance, Iago describes the newly-promoted lieutenant as follows: "One Michael Cassio, a Florentine, / A fellow almost damned in a fair wife," which suggests that his particular man's beauty equals, if not surpasses, that of women (1.1.21.22). Toward the end of the first act, Iago again

directs his attention to Othello's right hand man: "Cassio's a proper man. . . .He hath a person and a smooth dispose / To be suspected, framed to make women false" (1.3.375 and 380-381). Then, while attempting to set his nefarious plots into motion, Iago says of Cassio: "the knave is handsome, young, and hath all those requisites in him that folly and green minds look after." Shortly after Act 5 begins, Iago remarks that Cassio has "a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly" (2.1.234-236 and 5.1.19-20). We can understand at least two key things about Cassio and Iago from the lines cited here: the former's good looks are not only a given, they also inspire a great deal of envy and jealousy in the latter. At the same time, serious difficulties arise when we try to imagine Iago's ruminations emanating from a man, and directed toward—as well as concerning—another man, as being totally uninspired by either homoerotic or homosexual inclinations.

Another example of Iago's homosexual character begins to manifest as the ensign talks with Roderigo in the opening of the drama. His words here are filled with a potent mixture of bitterness and cynicism:

> Three great ones of the city,
> In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
> Off-capped to him; and by the faith of man,
> I know my price, I am worth no worse a place.
> But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
> Evades them with a bombast circumstance. . . .
> Nonsuits my mediators. . . .This countercaster,
> He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,
> And I – God bless the mark! – his Moorship's ancient.

(1.1.9-17 and 32-34)

By themselves these lines reveal the depth of Iago's desire to be Othello's lieutenant, as well as the measures he took to secure the position, which include enlisting the services of others to recommend him personally to Othello for the post. He feels, in addition, more than deserving and qualified of the lieutenancy. Then he accuses Othello of artful evasion and bemoans the fact that the general has chosen Cassio—a man with no real military experience whatsoever—for the job, instead of Iago himself who has served Othello so faithfully for so long as his ancient. Awareness of the homosexual valence that not only surrounds, but inspires, these sentiments renders Iago's decided abjectness here almost poignant. It also lends a great deal more depth, credibility, and reason to the vehemence of his language, as well as to the course of vengeance he chooses to pursue against Othello. At this point, two scenarios involving Iago and Othello emerge, both suggestive and intriguing. The first is that the relationship between these two men has already, in fact, surpassed the platonic and the professional, indeed, even the affective and the emotional, and includes the physical and the sexual. For all intents then, Othello's choosing of another man as his lieutenant could also signal to Iago that his superior has, effectively, unceremoniously, and perhaps even cruelly, ended their affair *and* replaced him (or will soon do so) in the bedroom with Cassio. No matter their sexuality, not many people—male or female—would be able to respond with something akin to equanimity in such personally humiliating circumstances. The other possibility is that Iago's deeper feelings for Othello have always been unrecognized and/or unrequited by the general, and with the out-of-the-blue promotion of Cassio, are destined to remain so. Although the latter seems more likely in regard to *Othello*, in either case Iago suffers the all-too

hideous pains of romantic, or potentially romantic, rejection in a manner worth exploring in more depth.

Unrequited love can be understood as the experience of someone who feels a romantic attraction, affection, and/or desire for another who does not reciprocate with comparable feelings. Baumeister and Wotman add that circumstances of this nature create a "personal disappointment and emotional trauma [accompanied] by a sense that one has failed in one of life's most important spheres" of human interpersonal relations (6, 10). Furthermore, the anguished emotions inspired by unrequited love "are sometimes intense. There is also anger. Some [describe] their intense, painful jealousy upon seeing their beloved with another partner" (54). Two factors seem to explain this depth of negative emotion: the first is that witnessing the object of one's desire in the company of another forces one to face the cold, harsh reality of the fact that one is *not* the chosen of the beloved, while the second is that being rejected in such a manner leads one to focus the entirety of one's hurt and betrayal upon this third person exclusively, rather than the beloved him- or herself (54). Arguably, this commentary on the concept of unrequited love describes both Iago's character and his behavior in *Othello* exceedingly well.

As we have already noted, the play commences with our immediate discovery of Iago's bitter, cynical, and self-righteous disappointment about not being chosen Othello's lieutenant despite his qualifications as a soldier and his years of military service. Soon thereafter, we learn that Iago has not one, but two, rivals for Othello's attention and love: Cassio and Desdemona. He must, in other words, endure the crushing weight of seeing his beloved with both of these individuals, in effect doubling the level of his pain, sense of inadequacy and loss, and jealousy.[1] Cassio and Desdemona thus serve as constant

reminders to Iago of his summary rejection by Othello. Iago seems, furthermore, and in direct contrast to the insights of Baumeister and Wotman, to demonstrate little reluctance in allowing himself to feel both anger and hatred toward his beloved Othello. Less than ten lines into the first scene of the play, Roderigo, commenting on Othello, says to Iago: "Thou toldst me thou didst hold him in thy hate," to which the ensign replies: "Despise me / If I do not," which marks the first instance we hear of Iago's derogatory feelings toward Othello (1.1.7-9). A short while later, in a brief discussion of Venice's need for Othello's military prowess, Iago explains to Roderigo:

> Another of his fathom they have none
> To lead their business; in which regard,
> Though I do hate him as I do hell pains,
> Yet for necessity of present life
> I must show out a flag and sign of love,
> Which is indeed but sign. (1.1.154-159)

Given its striking metaphorical comparison with the pains of hell, this reiteration of Iago's hatred proves even more virulent than its first expression. Greenblatt helps us to concretize this vehemence when he describes hell as a place where numerous tortures are "inflicted forever on different types of sinners—thieves hung over flames; the envious plunged first into vats of ice and then into boiling water; the angry stoned by raging demons; the proud stretched on rotating wheels, and so forth" (52-53). In slightly different terms, Greenblatt's insights allow us to imagine one's skin being fried by fire until it begins to melt off the bone and the unbearable stench of burning flesh fills the air; the numbing shock of being submerged in freezing cold, immediately followed by the

equally dizzying shock of being subjected to intolerable heat; being pummeled by an endless cascade of brutal stones hurled by cackling creatures of hideous description; and one's limbs being prodded and pulled beyond all rational comprehension. Thus we can understand Iago's hatred for Othello as the equivalent to the myriad unceasing pains inflicted by flames, ice, boiling water, stoning, and forced bodily contortion upon the unfortunate denizens of the Christian hell.

Iago's affinity with the precepts of unrequited love as detailed in the preceding paragraphs becomes most clear, however, in his treatment of Cassio and Desdemona, his competitors in the battle for Othello's heart. Without question, he reserves no scruple as he plots against them and proceeds to follow through on his designs:

> Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now:
> To get his place and to plume up my will
> In double knavery – How, how? – Let's see:
> After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
> That he is too familiar with his wife.
> He hath a person and a smooth dispose
> To be suspected, framed to make women false. . . .
> . . . .
> I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night
> Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.
> (1.3.375-381 and 386-387)

Iago, as the lines cited above make clear, knows that Cassio's upright nature and sterling reputation are formidable impediments to his plans for vengeance. After pondering his

options, he settles on the device of insinuating to Othello that Cassio has become too familiar with Desdemona—by which he means for Othello to conclude that Desdemona has chosen to cuckold him with Cassio. Furthermore, Cassio's good looks are more than enough to ensure Iago's success because they make Cassio both suspicious to other men and highly desirable to women, married or not. Like Athena sprouting full-grown from the head of Zeus in Greek mythology, or Sin emerging whole and complete from the mind of Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Iago's plot takes the form of a monstrous birth that will wreck havoc upon all caught in its web. Though it certainly appears that Iago intends to hurt Othello (or, at least, to reduce him to the level of brute beast) by framing Cassio and Desdemona as adulterers, this tactic also accomplishes another, unstated objective: it creates the circumstances in which Iago can be seen as the hero who saves Othello from the ignominy of being made a cuckold by his wife and his lieutenant. And heroes deserve nothing if not the utmost in gratitude, respect and, most importantly, the love of those they rescue from such a horrible predicament.

It seems appropriate at this point to consider the nature of Othello's attraction and desirability for Iago. Though obvious, Othello's being a man needs to be pointed out because, even in the first decade of the twenty-first century, many people still fail to comprehend the simple fact that one man can be alluring and intriguing to another man in a great number of ways, including physically and emotionally. As the play continues beyond its immediate opening moments, we are repeatedly reminded of Othello's martial prowess, not only by Iago, but other characters in the drama as well. The ensign, for example, notes:

For I do know the state,

However this may gall him with some check,
Cannot with safety cast him, for he's embarked
With such loud reason to the Cyprus wars,
Which even now stands in act, that, for their souls,
Another of his fathom they have none
to lead their business. (I.1.149-155)

Such words coalesce into an image of Othello as a warrior of singular accomplishment, stature, and ability. Given these qualities, in fact, he seems to feel no fear or concern when Iago informs him that Brabantio wants him imprisoned, or worse, for stealing his daughter Desdemona away from him:

Let him do his spite.
My services which I have done the seigniory
Shall out-tongue his complaints. 'Tis yet to know —
Which, when I know that boasting is an honor,
I shall promulgate — I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached. (I.2.18-24)

Not only does Othello have complete faith that his services to the Venetian state, in his role as a general, will render him irreplaceable and untouchable, he claims descent from royalty as a birthright that will also prove sufficient to protect him from the worst of his father-in-law's wrath.

In point of fact, we learn moments later from Cassio that Othello has "been hotly called for" by the Duke of Venice because the Venetian personnel currently on Cyprus "Have sent a dozen sequent messengers / This very night at one another's heels," all sounding the alarm of possible attack and begging reinforcements (1.2.44, 41-42). The very next scene opens with dire news: it seems that the infidel Turks are sending an armada of nearly two hundred ships with conquering and plundering "purposes toward Cyprus," thus, as soon as Othello arrives in the council's chamber, the Duke proclaims: "Valient Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman," all of which serves as a significant reiteration of Othello's crucial importance as the key leader of Venice's military affairs (1.3.1-41 and 50-51). And, indeed, his ability to successfully lead troops and wage battle against the enemies of the Venetian state ultimately saves him from prosecution for his role in Desdemona's defection from her father. The Duke himself explains it thus:

> The Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus. Othello, the fortitude of the place is best known to you; and though we have there a substitute of most allowed sufficiency, yet opinion, a sovereign mistress of effects, throws a more safer voice on you. You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition. (1.2.224-229)

And, like a consummate soldier, Othello acquiesces immediately to the Duke's order. This dedication to the cause of military service, in tandem with his status as a male soldier and a leader of other men, forms *the* major part of Othello's attractiveness and desirability for Iago. Othello takes his place, in other, more colloquial terms, as the

Renaissance equivalent of the contemporary "man-in-uniform" figure so many, male and female, find erotically appealing. Meanwhile, in his oddly compelling autobiography we find yet another source of Othello's appeal for Iago. Soon after his arrival in the Venetian council chamber, Othello has this to say in his own defense:

> Rude am I in my speech,
> And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace;
> For since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
> Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used
> Their dearest action in the tented field;
> And little of this great world can I speak
> More than pertains to feats of broils and battle,
> And therefore little shall I grace my cause
> In speaking for myself. Yet, by your gracious patience,
> I will a round unvarnished tale deliver
> Of my whole course of love — what drugs, what charms,
> What conjuration, and what mighty magic,
> For such proceeding I am charged withal,
> I won his daughter. (1.3.83-96)

Thus Othello belies his remark about the rudeness of his speech, and his eloquence only continues, with even more force, as he recounts the events and circumstances leading to his marriage to Desdemona. This wondrous story, told to Brabantio at his request and, in stealth, to his future bride, includes "the battles, sieges, fortunes" he lived through, "disastrous chances" and "moving accidents by flood and field," "hairbreadth scapes

i'th'imminent deadly breach," "being taken by the insolent foe" then "sold to slavery," his travels amongst the "Cannibals" and the "Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.130-146). Upon concluding, the Duke himself says: "I think this tale would win my daughter too," indicating not only his understanding of Desdemona's falling in love with Othello, but also how deeply the general's history has affected him, too (1.3.173). I would insist, furthermore, that Iago's reaction to Othello's life story was full of as much awe and respect as Desdemona's and the Duke's. In fact, we would be closer to correct in thinking that Iago's response was even more visceral, more vital, precisely because of the fact that he shares a military background with Othello.

Iago, as much as Othello himself, would have known the harsh reality of what it was like to survive battles, sieges, fortunes, disastrous chances, moving accidents, and hairbreadth scapes, providing both of them with a set of experiences in common that they could share with each other without fear of being misunderstood or underestimated in regard to the level of danger they faced. Mallet and Hale, for example, describe one of the sea fights that took place during The War of Cyprus between the Venetian state and its supporters and the Ottoman Turks in 1570-1573, and that Shakespeare may have been drawing on as a whole for the background conflict that informs *Othello*:

> The opposing fleets used similar tactics with vessels comparably designed and crewed; the only major discrepancy was the allies' possession of the Venetian galliasses, whose superior firepower helped to shake the otherwise parade-ground regularity of the oncoming Turkish lines of battle. It was, indeed, the last great confrontation of floating

> armies, rowed methodically into formation, firing artillery as the distance between them narrowed but relying in most cases on closing to board infantry for the *coup de gráce*; contemporary descriptions dwell on the flashing helmets and armour and bristling weapons of the troops and their officers and say little of the men who worked them into action. (238)

Although the original chroniclers of this particular battle do not detail the fighters themselves, we can well imagine that it was men like Othello and Iago boarded the ships of the enemies in order to engage the infidel in hand-to-hand combat, that they wore the gleaming helmets and armor as bodily protection, that they skillfully brandished the weapons of war against the invading Turks in order to repel them and to keep Cyprus in the hands of the righteous Christians. However, this account leaves out the fact that, as Sherman reveals, "war is the ultimate test of undaunted courage. And undaunted courage, some would add, leaves little room for fear. It requires being tough, unflappable, and steady, even in the face of life-threatening danger and terror" (101). Nevertheless, "those who have fought in war," like Othello and Iago, "know that all sorts of fears can visit the minds of even the toughest warriors" (101). Given the, until recently, all-male nature of military forces, in tandem with the deadly perils of warfare, it seems not at all unreasonable to imagine soldiers, after the heat of the battle has subsided, turning to one another, in the tented field Othello waxes so poetic about in his initial speech to the assembled Venetian council, for the kind of comforts that encompass the emotional and the psychological, as well as the physical and the sexual.

But, of course, the significant problem of Iago's hatred for Othello remains to be dealt with. During his lengthy and stern admonishment of Roderigo, Iago claims: "I retell

thee again and again, I hate the Moor. My cause is hearted; thine hath no less reason. Let us be conjunctive in our revenge against him. If thou canst cuckold him, thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport" (1.3.351-354). Alone moments later, Iago tells himself:

> I hate the Moor;
> And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets
> He's done my office. I know not if't be true;
> But I, for mere suspicion of that kind,
> Will do as for surety. He holds me well;
> The better shall my purpose work on him. (1.3.369-374)

Although, in the subsequent act of *Othello*, Iago insists, in regard to his superior officer, that he endures "him not" and that he wishes to "make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me / For making him egregiously an ass," we must be cognizant of the fact that never again as the play unfolds does he use the term hate or its derivatives in association with Othello (2.1.268 and 288-289). Nevertheless, given its virulence and repetition, the preponderance of evidence on the side of hatred would seem sufficient to defeat an argument intent on exploring Iago's intense homoerotic attraction to, desire, and love for, Othello. In my view, however, such a judgment seems premature. Another look at the passages cited above reveals a significant fact: Iago expresses his hatred of Othello *only* to Roderigo or himself in soliloquy. He never directs such specific and particular language to Othello, the object of his seething disapprobation. Of course, Iago would abrogate entirely his ability to manipulate Othello and, undoubtedly, he would also lose all hope of forming an affective and romantic relationship with him, if he chose honesty over seeming deceptiveness. Even so, Iago's failure to confront Othello directly with his

hatred, in tandem with the reasons that inform it, ought not to lose its potential interpretive impact. This allowance becomes especially crucial because, as will be seen shortly, that he *loves* him proves all that Iago ever tells Othello plainly in regard to his deeper feelings for him.

After revealing to Roderigo that he has been passed over for promotion in favor of Cassio by Othello, Iago says: "Now, sir, be judge yourself / Whether I in any just term am affined / To love the Moor" (1.1.39-41). Approximately twenty or so lines later Iago proclaims:

> It is as sure as you are Roderigo
> Were I the Moor I would not be Iago.
> In following him, I follow but myself –
> Heaven is my judge, not I for *love and duty*,
> But seeming so for my peculiar end.
> For when my outward action doth demonstrate
> The native act and figure of *my heart*
> In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
> But I will wear *my heart* upon my sleeve
> For daws to peck at. I am not what I am. (1.1.58-67)

Ostensibly at least, these words seem to reveal Iago's intention to act sans the love and duty Othello demands of him both professionally and personally by virtue of his military standing as a general in the armed forces in which they both serve. On this point, Barret reminds us that a Renaissance soldier such as Iago

> shall bear a great love and true affection unto his Captain, and obey him, and the other officers of the camp, with great respect . . . [for] the true order of war is a very resemblance of true religion, ordained of God, which bindeth the soldier to observe Justice, Loyalty, constancy, patience, and silence, and above all, obedience, through the which is easily attained the perfection in arms, and means to achieve great enterprises (as quoted in Hall, 302).

Soldiers like Iago were, therefore, expected and required to be both servile and single-mindedly—if not mindlessly—devoted to their superior officer(s). If, however, as Smith writes, "To love a woman was, or so it could feel, to *become* a woman" during this period, then Iago, presumably, does not have to conform to such normally expected martial niceties precisely because Othello has transgressed the military and, more importantly, the male codes of honor by seeking permanent companionship outside of the manly realm in the form of his marriage to Desdemona (2000, 107). Love and duty, in other words, need no longer apply as the guides to, or the determiners of, Iago's conduct and behavior, given the specificity of these particular circumstances.

Iago then explains, however, that he will make it seem as if everything he does extends from the love and duty his subordinate position requires of him in relation to Othello. But, at the end of Iago's speech above appears the short, declarative sentence: "I am not what I am," which Bevington glosses as, "I am not one who wears his heart on his sleeve" (48). Within the current context, we have the right and the obligation to challenge this assessment. The "I am not what I am" pronouncement pertains to something other than where, or where not, Iago wears his heart. This statement functions, rather, as an

unmistakable rhetorical signal that Iago's actions do indeed proceed directly from the love and duty he still feels for Othello rather than the opposite. Love for Othello then takes its rightful place as the true native act and figure of Iago's heart, which appears in prominent display on his sleeve and in his words in the union scene in Act 3, as well as in the exquisitely drawn out moments that precede it. Hence it takes nary an imaginative leap to understand that Iago's peculiar end involves securing Othello's attentions for himself and none other. And the daws that may peck at him, instead of the "small crowlike birds, proverbially stupid and avaricious" Bevington describes, are in fact those who would seek to condemn and destroy the bond of love, affection, and commitment that two men can share with one another on both the emotional and physical levels (48).

On the latter topic, Bray writes with crucial insight. According to this historian, "The term 'homosexual' did not exist" during England's early modern period; thus, for him, the crucial question becomes: "did its equivalent? Only two of the possible candidates, 'bugger' and 'sodomite,' were in general use and neither was synonymous with homosexuality alone. 'Buggery' could be used with as equal ease to mean bestiality as homosexuality, [and] 'Sodomy' was a concept at least as broad" (1982 and 1995, 13-14). After settling on the latter term as an adequate linguistic bridge between the Renaissance and the present, Bray rightly cautions us to bear in mind that "the Elizabethan 'sodomy' differed from our contemporary idea of 'homosexuality'" in that it

> covered more hazily a whole range of sexual acts, of which sexual acts between people of the same sex were only a part. It was closer to an idea like debauchery. But it differed more fundamentally also in that it was not only a sexual crime. It was also a political and a religious crime and it was

this that explains most clearly why it was regarded with such dread [and] a readily expressed horror (1994, 42 and 41).

On the other side of the spectrum, platonic masculine friendship was regarded as an ideal, both sought after and encouraged. This is in direct contrast to the utter abhorrence with which the isolated deviant acts of sodomy and buggery (homosexuality in late twentieth and early twenty-first century terms) were viewed in early modern England. From this perspective, it seems not unreasonable to suppose that similar dynamics could have been operative within the military and political realm occupied by Iago and Othello.

Without question this intriguing notion of the masculine friend, with its curious mixture of same-sex patronage and intimacy, finds expression in *Othello*, most notably, perhaps, in the overall depiction of Cassio's relationship with the general (which, in turn, throws the bond between Iago and Othello into relief). After Iago skillfully engineers the drunken brawl between Roderigo and Cassio, Othello, newly arrived at the scene, says: "Honest Iago, that looks dead with grieving, / Speak. Who began this? On *thy love*, I charge thee" (2.3.155-156, emphasis mine). Iago responds with:

> I do not know. *Friends* all but now, even now,
> *In quarter and in terms like bride and groom*
> *Divesting them for bed*; and then, but now –
> As if some planet had unwitted men –
> Swords out, and tilting one at others' breasts
> In opposition bloody. (2.3.157-162, emphasis mine).

Let us not, first of all, overlook the fact that Othello orders the ensign to explain the current circumstances on the sole basis of the love Iago feels toward him. He has thus, in

effect, called attention to the actuality of two men loving one another in a public forum. Just as significantly, none of the company of men that surrounds him at this moment objects to such a specific characterization of men's relationships with each other. Indeed, with his next interjection, Iago manages to extend the men-loving-men metaphor into the unmistakable territory of marriage, with all of its inherent sexual connotations, when he describes Roderigo and Cassio as friends who were apparently so compatible that they seemed like a newlywed husband and wife preparing to spend the night together in the same bed. And once again, such a blatant allusion to the intimacies men can share with one another receives no censorious comment from the other men present.

As Hammond points out, the

> Renaissance male was brought up within a society where many of his most important relationships were with other men, and within this masculine culture the bonds of affection, loyalty and obligation were often passionate [and, as *Othello* itself attests, it seems more than possible that] a range of emotion and erotic feeling was allowed, and seen as enhancing rather than endangering the masculine milieu. (1996, 27)

Of course, those caught in the grip of a homosexual panic would, in their fear, be anxious to insist that Shakespeare's use of the word love, or its close cognates, such as friend, as we have detailed thus far, does not *always*, if at all, signify something unwholesomely homoerotic between men, and we would be quite correct to agree with such an objection. But, the civil and criminal penalties for sodomy were so severe in Renaissance England that it proves little wonder that dramas such as *Othello* "sometimes blurred distinctions between different kinds of male relationship [since] the capacity to deny that anything

untoward was intended could be (quite literally) vital" to the lives and souls of flesh and blood individuals (1996, 28). With such insights in mind, we may note that the rhetoric of love between men becomes even more prominent, indeed, more urgent, as *Othello* continues.

In order to proceed beyond this seeming impasse between love and hate then, let us look again at Iago's declaration, "Though I do hate him as I do hell pains." We must analyze this sentiment even more closely than before and from a somewhat different perspective. Iago's proclamation here does not appear in a vacuum. Indeed, the following lines accompany it: "Yet for necessity of present life / I must show out a flag and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign" (1.1.157-159). A strictly conventional, heterosexist reading of this passage would content itself with a conclusion that accords neatly with Iago's penchant for dissembling. An entirely different interpretation results when we forgo the compulsion to be seduced by mere irony. If, in other words, we take Iago literally, he must, in order to survive his existence, reveal his flag and sign of love for Othello that is indeed but sign of his devotion to, and desire for, Othello. Of course, a bawdy approach to this citation allows Iago's flag to morph into a penile erection that, in turn, signals the palpably erotic nature of his attraction to his general. With either scenario, as Mann reveals, "It is through the transactions of love that the individual comes to be" (12). Thus Iago's quest to secure Othello's affections takes its place as a public and private battle for the survival of his very self.

As we have also seen, Iago tells us outright that his intentions involve compelling "the Moor [to] thank me, love me, and reward me" (2.1.288). Here, the love he envisions receiving from Othello mingles closely with his hatred since he hopes it will result from

his having made his superior egregiously an ass and from disturbing his peace and quiet to the point of madness, both by virtue of transforming his superior officer into a real or imagined cuckold (2.1.289-291). It would seem, in fact, that the gulf between Iago's love and hate for Othello stands at its widest point in these lines. But when we recall the notion that love and hate exist on two sides of the same coin, the distance between these two emotions suddenly collapses. Once again, Mann tells us that the things or people "we love and hate are often closely linked" (7). In Iago's case, they are one and the same: Othello. Significantly, Mann also explains that "the passion of hate tends to burn itself out, either becomes cold or exhausts itself as life takes over" and love replaces it as experience and feeling (8). Without question, these dynamics play out in exactly this manner in *Othello*. In the preceding pages of this study, we have documented the operation of Iago's hatred in some detail. By the time we reach the third act of the tragedy, however, Iago begins to openly declare, proclaim, and invoke his love for Othello.

"If thou dost love me," Othello vehemently insists at one point comparatively early in the long and highly dramatic Act 3, scene 3, "Show me thy thought," and Iago replies: "My lord, you know I love you" (3.3.127-129). Later, after Othello promises not to be ruled by "the green-eyed monster" as far as the immediate expression of his rage and anger over the mere possibility that Desdemona has cheated on him, Iago says: "I am glad of this, for now I shall have reason / To show the love and duty that I bear you / With franker spirit" (3.3.180 and 208-210). We would be well-advised not to overlook the reiteration here of the phrase love and duty that was discussed above in regard to the first act of the play. Since the impact of the clause, "I am not what I am" has not

dissipated, we can understand that Iago speaks the simple truth about what he feels for Othello in this passage. In effect, Iago has now placed his heart on his sleeve for the world—and most of all Othello—to see and to read its contents of longing and desire and love. As the scene continues, Iago notices Othello's distress and insists: "But I am much to blame. / I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much of loving you," to which, curiously, Othello responds: "I am bound to thee forever" (3.3.226-229). Even so, Iago deems a repetition of his loving sentiment quite necessary: "I hope you will consider what is spoke / Comes from my love" (3.3.232-233). When Othello threatens to damn Iago if he proves a slanderer of Desdemona and torturer of the Moor, Iago immediately cries foul and retorts: "I'll love no friend, sith love breeds such offence," to which Othello quickly says by way of an attempt at conciliation: "Nay, stay. Thou shouldst be honest" (3.3.385-389 and 397-398). Perhaps feigning, perhaps actually feeling, bitterness, Iago remarks, "I should be wise, for honesty's a fool / And loses that it works for," and a short while later he repeats his foolish honesty and love phrase as a prologue to recounting Cassio's dream of longing for Desdemona, one of the most explicitly homoerotic moments in the entire play (3.3.399-400 and 429). Thus, within the space of some three-hundred or so lines of drama, Iago expresses his love for Othello at least a half dozen times and almost in succession. Indeed, with the potentiality of triumph in his sights, Iago never again uses the word hate in regard to his superior officer as the balance of *Othello* unfolds. It demands arguing that these demonstrable factors confirm that Iago's hatred has, in fact, metamorphosed itself into, or reasserted itself, as love for Othello.

The shift from hate to love on Iago's part for Othello detailed above need not seem either jarring or implausible. Smith identifies "six separate myths of homosexual desire, each of which involves a different combination of characters and plot, a different set of ideas about sodomy, [and] a different way of enacting homosexual desire in imagination" (1991 and 1994, 20). As such, these archetypical narratives involve, respectively: Combatants and Comrades, The Passionate Shepherd, The Shipwrecked Youth, Knights in Shifts, Master and Minion, and The Secret Sharer. For Smith and for us, "Ardent combatant and ardent comrade: the two roles converge in Iago" (61). First and foremost,

> Iago is a *soldier*. He belongs to an all-male world in which women have no place [because of their ability to] destroy the bonds that men form with men. Iago defines himself totally in terms of that world, and when the newly married general passes over him and names as his lieutenant a man who is almost damned in a fair wife, Iago's very identity is shaken. (63)

These significant insights demand extension in the present context. Iago reacts to this challenge to his self-conception *exactly like a combatant on the battlefield would*: by transforming his failure to be promoted into an all-out war of seeming hatred with Othello. As we have explored previously, his weapons include dissembling and manipulation, while his offensive tactics encompass the repeated verbal denigration of those of his superiors he holds responsible for his plight, and the plotting of a revenge centered around the notion of cuckolding that will, effectively, cast Othello as an utterly common fool both publicly and privately. But, as we have also detailed above, almost as soon as Iago's campaign of hatred begins to yield the first fruits of the results he so

desperately desires, i.e., Othello's disassociation from Desdemona because of her presumed lack of chastity to him, Iago's language unmistakably morphs from the rhetoric of hatred into the rhetoric of love: "My lord, you know I love you" (3.3.129). In fact, the sheer suddenness of this reversal allows the hatred Iago claims to feel for Othello—no matter how oft repeated—to be, crucially, understood as an equivocal rather than a fixed or inalterable element of his emotional and affective mindset; as merely one side of the proverbial two-sided coin representative of love and hate. And the further developments in Act 3 of *Othello* only serve as positive confirmation of these hypotheses.

Not only the homosocial or the homoerotic, but the homosexual itself manifests in Act 3 of *Othello*, in a palpable and astonishing manner. Spurred by his "foolish honesty and love," Iago confides to Othello: "I lay with Cassio lately" (3.3.429-430). While they were in the same bed, Iago claims:

> I heard him say, "Sweet Desdemona,
> Let us be wary, let us hide our loves!"
> And then, sir, would he grip and wring my hand,
> Cry, "O sweet creature!," and then kiss me hard,
> As if he plucked up kisses by the roots
> That grew upon my lips; then laid his leg
> Over my thigh, and sighed, and kissed, and then
> Cried, "Cursèd fate that gave thee to the Moor!" (3.3.435-442)

Smith reminds us that two men sharing a bed was "a common enough happenstance in the sixteenth century" of early modern England (1991 and 1994, 61). But Cassio and Iago do far more than merely occupy the same sleeping area. Indeed, Cassio grips and wrings

Iago's hand, he also kisses the ensign with such force that it seems to Iago that Cassio "plucked up kisses by the roots / That grew upon my lips," then he places his leg across Iago's thigh and presses his lips to the other man yet again. It demands asserting that the passionate physicality of Cassio's actions as Iago minutely describes them here cannot be more evident of the fact that these two men are having intimate sexual relations with one another.

Of course, the text of *Othello* does not provide us with irrefutable evidence that Iago actually engaged in intimate relations with Cassio. That fact does not, however, diminish the homosexual ethos that emanates from the passage discussed above. Indeed, quite the opposite occurs when we seriously consider the lines cited as a highly elaborate, not to mention almost painstakingly detailed, fantasy of Iago's. For instance, and presuming his heterosexuality, serious difficulties arise with trying to conceive of someone like Iago crafting such an accurate description of two men engaged in sex with each other unless his own sexual experiences and desires encompass comparable same-gender relations. Whether in the Renaissance or the present, it seems rather unlikely that a man solely interested in women in terms of relationships of any kind would be able to envision a sexually intimate encounter with another man, much less openly discuss such an explicit fantasy with one of his fellows—no matter how determined to revenge himself on the other. Nevertheless, whether fantasy or reality, Iago's erotic tale reveals further, surprising and unexpected, insight into his audacity, for it demonstrably subordinates the heterosexual in the service of the, ultimately, homosexual.

Within the larger matrix of detailing his sexual acrobatics with Cassio, Iago also describes Cassio's seemingly tormented declarations about Othello's wife: "Sweet

Desdemona, / Let us by wary, let us hide our loves!," "O sweet creature!," "Cursèd fate that gave thee to the Moor!" (3.3.435-436, 438, and 442). As the recipient of Cassio's hand grips, kisses, and entangling leg maneuvers, Iago functions as an erotic substitute for Desdemona to both Cassio and Othello. This strategy succeeds, furthermore, in arousing Othello homosexually, so much so, in fact, that he soon pledges all of his affective and emotional allegiance to Iago in the final portion of Act 3 using terms that Smith describes as a "parody of a [heterosexual] marriage rite" that will prove "all the more grotesque because Iago will use Othello's trust to destroy him" as the play works toward its close (1991 and 1994, 63). Hence, determined to murder Desdemona for the infidelity he thinks she has committed against him with Cassio, Othello initiates the following rather curious exchange with Iago:

> Now, by yond marble heaven,
>
> [*Kneeling*] In the due reverence of a sacred vow
>
> I here engage my words.
>
> Iago: Do not rise yet.
>
> [*He kneels.*] Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
>
> You elements that clip us round about,
>
> Witness that here Iago doth give up
>
> The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
>
> To wronged Othello's service. Let him command,
>
> And to obey shall be in me remorse,
>
> What bloody business ever. [*They rise.*]
>
> Othello: I greet thy love,

Not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous,

And will upon the instant put thee to't.

Within these three days let me hear thee say

That Cassio's not alive.

Iago: My friend is dead;

'Tis done at your request. But let her live.

Othello: Damn her, lewd minx! Oh, damn her, damn her!

Come, go with me apart. I will withdraw.

To furnish me with some swift means of death

For the fair devil. Now art thou my lieutenant.

Iago: I am your own forever. *Exeunt.* (3.3.477-495)

Thus, Smith's assertion of male/female marriage-rite parody begs something of a good-natured disagreement. Disregarding—but only momentarily and with specific purpose—the homicidal inflections the plot of *Othello* demands, this passage offers nothing less than a serious rendition of what a wedding ceremony between two men might well have been like if such unions had been allowed to take place in Renaissance England.

Othello begins the formal exchange cited above with an appeal to heaven itself to oversee and bless all that next takes place. Then he kneels in a wholly singular action that renders these moments between himself and Iago appropriately solemn. Once upon his knees, Othello pledges to express his sentiments with all the reverence of a sacred vow meaning, in one sense, at least, that what he speaks henceforward constitutes what he considers a sanctified bond with Iago. Given how intensely and deeply Iago loves Othello, the former requests that the latter remain kneeling and, immediately afterward,

joins him in that prostrate position. This gesture only invigorates the palpable aura of ceremony attendant upon the circumstances these two men find themselves sharing at this point in *Othello*. Within moments, Iago calls upon the stars and the planets to function as celestial witnesses that he willingly bequeaths the management of his wit, hands, heart to Othello, and then swears that he stands at the ready to fulfill the general's every command, wish, and desire. Indeed, he proclaims that his obeisance shall be in me remorse for, we can surmise, the hatred—as well as its literal effects—he has directed toward Othello because of his previously unrequited love. Having exchanged such promises, the two men rise to their feet, and Othello welcomes Iago's love unreservedly. But, Othello soon reveals additional conditions to their union: Iago must kill Cassio and assist the other man in crafting a suitable means of dispatching Desdemona. After agreeing to such murderous terms, Othello bestows the lieutenancy he so longed for upon Iago who, in turn, insists that he now belongs to Othello forever. Thus bound together until the proverbial end of time, rather than attempting to destroy Othello, the man he loves, Iago tries to save him in the remaining acts and scenes of the play.

Iago's strategy for rescuing Othello takes the form of reminding the general, more and more desperately, of his masculinity; of his status as a *man*. When Othello rises from his epileptic fit, Iago asks him:

> How is it, General? have you not hurt your head?
>
> Othello: Dost thou mock me?
>
> Iago: I mock you not, by heaven.
>
> *Would you would bear your fortune like a man!*
>
> . . . .

Good sir, be a man.

Think every bearded fellow that's but yoked

May draw with you. There's millions now alive

That nightly lie in those unproper beds

Which they dare swear peculiar . . . .

. . . .

Stand you awhile apart;

Confine yourself in a patient list.

Whilst you were here o'erwhelmed with your grief—

A passion most unsuiting such a man —

Cassio came hither. I shifted him away,

And laid good 'scuse upon your ecstasy,

Bade him anon return and here speak with me,

The which he promised . . . .

. . . .

I say, but mark his gesture. *Marry, patience!*

Or I shall say you're all-in-all in spleen,

And nothing of a man. (4.1.57-89, emphasis mine)

If Othello were to bear his fortune like a man, as Iago insists, he would simply deal with being cuckolded by his wife and former lieutenant in an appropriately wrathful, violent, vengeful, and conclusive manner—and without making a public spectacle of himself by revealing his anger and his self-pity to those capable of censuring him. Othello's responses and actions at this point in the play force Iago, however, to go so far as

threatening to ridicule Othello by openly proclaiming him less than a man if he does not keep his boiling rashness in some sort of check. When we recall Smith's notion that, during the early modern period, loving a woman could transform a man into a womanish thing precisely because of the lack of self-control such relations intrinsically demand of their participants, we begin to understand the dire nature of Othello's, and Iago's, predicament. But, it must be noted, Iago's verbal intervention comes too late to make much of a difference in the final outcome, because his own machinations spiral as out of control as Othello.

Shortly following Iago's scolding of Othello, Cassio enters the scene, and Iago commences producing "the ocular proof" of Desdemona's infidelity that Othello demanded of him (3.3.377). Of course, the cunning reappearance of the handkerchief embroidered with strawberries that Othello gave to Desdemona as a wedding gift proves the *pièce de résistance* of Iago's parody of a dumb show. "How shall I murder him" Othello asks Iago in an utter rage after Cassio's departure, and Desdemona herself fares little better: "Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone; I strike it, and it hurts my hand" (4.1.160 and 170-171). So resolved, Othello not long afterwards commits the exact mistake Iago warned him not to: he unleashes his undeniably manic hostility in a public that now includes a number of key emissaries of his employers in Venice. Indeed, after witnessing the normally unflappable general strike Desdemona, Lodovico entreats Iago with:

> Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate
> Call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature
> Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue

The shot of accident nor dart of chance

Could neither graze nor pierce? (4.1.257-261)

And Iago can only reply with: "He is much changed," and the following expression of concern about Othello's behavior: "yet would I knew / That stroke" upon Desdemona "would prove the worst!" (4.1.261 and 266-267). These lines more than suggest that the ensign knows his efforts to secure Othello for himself by creating an entirely believable fantasy of cuckoldry have probably gone too far, and he will have to take drastic measures to salvage anything of his dreams and desires.

An almost dizzying array of events and circumstances follows. Not long after the pivotal moment discussed above, Iago, somewhat improbably, finds himself comforting an understandably distraught Desdemona. "I pray you," he tells her, "be content. 'Tis but his humor. / The business of the state does him offense, / And he does chide with you" (4.2.172-174). Iago must then deal with the highly incensed Roderigo, which he barely manages to do by convincing the heartsick man that, if he were to kill Cassio, he would be able to enjoy Desdemona's love without impediment all the sooner. The ensign's justification for this latter plot lies in the fact that both Roderigo and Cassio could expose his dastardly deeds one and all to the wrong people at the wrong time:

I have rubbed this young quat almost to the sense,

And he grows angry. Now, whether he kill Cassio

Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,

Every way makes my gain. Love Roderigo,

He calls me to a restitution large

Of gold and jewels that I bobbed from him

As gifts to Desdemona.

It must not be. If Cassio do remain . . . .

the Moor

May unfold me to him; there stand I in much peril.

No, he must die. Be't so. (5.1.11-18 and 20-22)

As Roderigo and Cassio struggle with one another, Iago hides his guilt behind a perfect mask of innocence, and pretends to be a bystander trying to help. Yet, his desperation fails to evaporate completely. When neither Roderigo nor Cassio dies immediately as a result of their engineered confrontation, Iago adds two more layers to his infamy and outrage by himself stabbing Roderigo to death, and then singling out the courtesan Bianca as the mastermind behind these terrible happenings. But, despite such (from his point-of-view) necessary and extraordinary measures, Iago arrives too late at Othello's residence, for Desdemona has already been strangled by Othello, and a horrified Emilia stands at the ready to expose him in all his villainy. Inevitably, perhaps, Iago loses Othello forever when the general turns his sword upon himself, and dies after bestowing a final kiss upon the cold lips of his wife's corpse. That the innocent Desdemona dies at the hands of her duped and maddened husband ensures *Othello*'s status as a tragedy. What it presents us with, then, is the larger and more horrific calamity of what happens when human beings are not allowed to love as their hearts' truly desire, whether that love is between a man and a woman, two women, or two men.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: SCREENING THE MALE HOMOEROTICS OF SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

Proem

For nearly three decades, studies of literature have been guided by the desire, as Stephen Greenblatt has famously described it, to speak with the dead.[1] This is, of course, a comment on New Historicism, a mode of literary criticism that seeks to illuminate the past by exploring the dynamics of power and its exercise by those privileged enough to wield it over others, such as in the case of the colonized and the colonizers, men and women, and the monied and the poor, to name but three examples. While New Historicist inquiries have, without question, enriched understanding of the past immeasurably, they also, by their nature, overlook what effects that understanding of the past can have on the present. According to Terence Hawkes, one of the imperatives of presentist literary criticism, in contrast to New Historicism, "is scrupulously to seek out salient aspects of the present as a crucial trigger for its investigations" (22). Thus, the salient aspect of the present driving this study is my interest in—as I noted in the "Introduction" and as, specifically, a gay man in the twenty-first century United States—the male homoerotics of Shakespearean drama.

Given our situatedness in the present moment, and the fact that the plays of Shakespeare were first staged some four-hundred years prior, I use critical analysis of contemporary films of Shakespeare's plays to bridge the distance between our own time and the past of Renaissance England in as meaningful and productive a manner as possible. In particular, I consider Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice* (2004), Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night* (1996), and Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995), each of which presents the male homoerotic elements evident in their respective Shakespearean source texts as seamlessly and naturally as possible. Indeed, the argument developed in the pages that follow engages with the notion that the moments and scenes that depict such homoeroticism are as organic and necessary to these late twentieth and early twenty-first century films as they are to the original dramas from which they derive.

Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*

Immediately following the collage of anti-Semitic scenes that mark the opening of Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*, we see the merchant Antonio (Jeremy Irons) in the midst of a group of other Christian men in attendance at an evening mass. As the service ends, Antonio stares fixedly at a gondola filled with three men dressed in masks as if for a night of reveling as it drifts by on the nearby canal. Before long, one of the men lifts his mask and calls out from the shadows the name "Antonio." To this greeting, Antonio, his eyes still riveted on the craft slowly floating below, responds, "Bassanio," as if seeking confirmation of the other man's identity. Bassanio (Joseph Fiennes) smiles at the older man standing on the quay, then drinks deeply from his goblet as a sort of silent toast to Antonio. This singular action on the part of Bassanio causes Antonio to smile briefly, but

with unmistakable contentment, in return. Indeed, the lingering, almost intimate look Antonio and Bassanio share during these brief seconds surpasses recognition, friendship, and camaraderie to encompass the affection, love, and desire possible between one man and another. As such, from almost the very beginning of his cinematic narrative, Radford creates a plausible homoerotic context for the characters of Antonio and Bassanio. Of course, such a scene as that discussed above does not appear in Shakespeare's play. It exists, then, in Radford's film as a conscious and deliberate choice on the part of the director. That Irons and Fiennes play the scene with believable, but not overwhelming, homoerotic aspects, also reflects a distinct determination on their part.[2] For director and actors alike, such a representation could not have been arrived at without serious consideration of Shakespeare's dramatic text.

Within the idiosyncratic temporal and spatial scheme of Radford's film, the "I know not why I am so sad" scene that opens Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* takes place the next day and in Antonio's home (1.1.1-68). Solanio (Gregor Fisher) and Salerio (John Sessions) are eating and drinking heartily while Antonio paces the floor in front of a collection of large, intricately-paned windows set flush against one another. At one point, Antonio looks through the glass and spies a gondola containing a number of indistinct individuals fast approaching, while Solanio and Salerio speculate on the reasons behind Antonio's self-admitted sadness. When Antonio claims no concern whatsoever about the fate of his ships, Solanio suggests, "Why then, you are in love," which causes Salerio, followed by Solanio himself, to burst into riotous laughter and Antonio to disavow such a notion decisively with the words, "Fie, fie, fie" (1.1.46). But when Antonio turns back to the window, his attention is arrested by Bassanio, who rises

to a standing position in the gondola as it closes on the dock outside. At the same time, Salerio, who has come up behind Antonio and seen Bassanio for himself, says matter-of-factly, "Not in love neither? Then let us say you are sad / Because you are not merry" (1.1.47-48). Antonio does not respond to this remark. Instead, he continues to look through the pane of glass at Bassanio. His gaze at the other man, in fact, becomes even more intense and, before the scene ends, Antonio smiles, as if the mere sight of Bassanio fills him, once again, with contentment and satisfaction. The overall impression this scene leaves supports the idea that Antonio's distress, in direct contrast to his disavowal, does indeed emanate from the cause of love, love for Bassanio, in particular, rather than having anything to do with the status of his ships or the merchandise they carry in their respective holds. Bassanio, in other words, means far more to Antonio than any kind of material goods. Meanwhile, the textual study of the scene discussed above in Chapter 2 noted that the "Fie, fie!" utterance stands as Antonio's admission of being in love with someone *and* it displays his disconcerted surprise at his friends' quick and unexpected discovery of that fact. Shakespeare's plays, as countless others have noted, are notoriously void of stage directions. Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*, however, with Antonio's significant and strategic gazes at Bassanio, allows audiences to both see and to understand the obvious implications inherent within the text: that it is Antonio's love for Bassanio that is making him a want-wit for sadness.

On the subject of the mechanics of moviemaking, Magnus notes that "while film's condensations can streamline its narration and make its action more symmetrical, more focused on the central characters, its substitutions of visuals for words can also cut to the chase too immediately, plucking the heart out of a character's mystery" (111). In

regard to Radford's depiction of the scene discussed above, Magnus finds "this sort of visual oversimplification" in the manner in which the film presents "Antonio's glimpse from the casement window of his beloved Bassanio seated below in a gondola, [because] it prematurely connects his sadness and its most likely cause; we see it emanating from what his eyes have lit upon and cannot have" (111). Magnus, it seems, would have preferred no excision of Shakespeare's lines from this scene which, when played in full, allow "the audience to conjure both the ancient pride and the anxieties of the Renaissance venture capitalist" (111). What he does not say, of course, is that such a strategy would also serve to obscure, if not obliterate, the homoerotic nature of Antonio's attraction to Bassanio–at this point in the film, at least. I would argue, however, that Shakespeare's text invites consideration of the possibility of the homoerotic nature of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship at precisely this point in both the play and Radford's cinematic adaptation. Indeed, as Shakespeare and Radford make clear, Antonio's melancholy emanates more from concern about Bassanio than any concern about the fate of his ships.

Following the departure of Solanio and Salerio from Antonio's house, Bassanio's expression registers his mortification when his friend Gratiano (Kris Marshall) launches into his "You look not well" admonition of Antonio (1.1.73). Before long, in fact, Bassanio—in another example of improvised and inspired stage direction—throws his napkin at Gratiano, which startles him into ending his, more-than-likely unintended, impertinence. Upon Gratiano's leave, Bassanio shakes his head ruefully and apologizes to Antonio for his friend's rude behavior: "Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all of Venice" (1.1.114-115). Thus Bassanio betrays not only his awareness of Antonio's sadness, but also his sensitivity and understanding of the other

man's dilemma. We may suspect, in addition, that Bassanio knows that he himself is the cause of Antonio's melancholy, hence his careful and solicitous treatment of him in this regard. In any case, Antonio merely gazes at Bassanio for some moments before saying, "Well," with a questioning lilt to his voice (1.1.118). After a brief pause, the two men rise from the table and walk side-by-side into Antonio's bedroom. There, Antonio requests that Bassanio tell him that which he promised to speak of earlier.

Reflection at this point allows for the realization of just how extraordinary the moments considered above are in Radford's film. First, according to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, this scene takes place outside and on a street in Venice, not in Antonio's house. Second, Radford extends the pause between Antonio's "Well" and his "tell me. . . ." lines far beyond what the comma between the two in the actual text seems to suggest in terms of pacing. Of course, during this lengthy break, Antonio and Bassanio leave the dining room for Antonio's bedroom, where their conversation continues. This brings us to the third and final point: that this discussion does, in fact, occur in a place long-associated with closeness, intimacy, privacy, and sexuality between individuals: the bedroom. And, in this case, the individuals in question happen to be two men: Antonio and Bassanio. Despite knowing that members of the same sex routinely shared beds in Shakespeare's day,[3] the implied homoerotics of this scene as Radford presents it, could not be any clearer.

Nevertheless, Bassanio, who has positioned himself on the other side of the room from Antonio and, more significantly, next to the ornate, canopied bed draped with rich, red-velvet coverings, evinces a curious mixture of repentance and guilt on his youthful face. He paces and removes his cloak as he speaks. By the time he says, "To you,

Antonio, / I owe the most, in money and in love," he is lying in Antonio's bed (1.1.129-130). Antonio's next words are delivered as he, himself, walks toward the bed. Indeed, he smiles and strokes Bassanio's shoulder when he states, "And if it stand, as you yourself still do," then he, too, sits on the bed, right next to Bassanio and with his back pressed against the headboard. Though still fully clothed, neither seems the least disturbed by the fact that he is in the same bed with another man. Antonio merely explains to Bassanio that he can "be assured / My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.136-138). We ought not to fail to note, furthermore, that when Antonio speaks the words "my person" here, he smiles broadly at Bassanio, an action which only serves to underscore the bodily intimacies these two men have shared, and continue to share, with one another. So encouraged, Bassanio rises to his knees on the bed and proceeds to tell Antonio about the rich and beautiful heiress, Portia (Lynn Collins).

Upon hearing of Bassanio's attraction to, and desire for, Portia, Antonio drops his eyes away from Bassanio's face and swallows deeply. These actions do not, however, indicate either dejection or despair. In fact, Antonio merely—and not surprisingly—falls into thought here, and without doubt he is thinking about how he can best help his friend and lover in the current circumstances. He soon reminds Bassanio of the fact that his fortunes are tied to the sea at the present moment. After contemplating the situation for a short while longer, Antonio leaves the bed, and Bassanio's side, for a desk situated at the other side of the room. After hastily scribbling a note of authorization, Antonio suggests that Bassanio investigate what Antonio's credit can do in terms of securing sufficient funding for Bassanio's venture "to Belmont, to fair Portia" (1.1.181). By this point,

Bassanio has also left the bed and walked to where Antonio stands at the desk. For this kindness and generosity, Bassanio first kisses Antonio's hand. As Antonio smiles, Bassanio places his hand gently upon Antonio's cheek, and then cups his chin in fingers. Then Bassanio kisses Antonio full on the lips. And Antonio returns the kiss from Bassanio with his eyes closed in obvious pleasure and contentment.[4] Depicting two men kissing in this manner not only confirms the nature of their relationship as homoerotic, but also makes such a homoerotic relationship unavoidable and real through visual representation in film.

Later, during their visit with Shylock (Al Pacino), the irascible moneylender agrees to loan Antonio three-thousand ducats on the condition that, should he fail to repay the money according to the term limit of the deal, Antonio will forfeit a pound of his flesh to Shylock. Bassanio's horror at the imposition of such a caveat registers immediately upon his face, and he tells Antonio, "You shall not seal to such a bond for me!," both highly significant indicators of how much Bassanio cares for Antonio, despite his selfish desires (1.3.146). But Antonio counters with the confident statement, "Why, fear not, man, I will not forfeit it" (1.3.148). Nevertheless, when Antonio assents to "seal unto this bond" with Shylock, an obviously distressed—and guilty—Bassanio averts his eyes.

In Act 2, scene 8 of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Salerio, in a conversation with Solanio, reports on Bassanio's departure from Venice for Belmont and fair Portia. In his film version, however, Radford shows us this leave-taking rather than providing the information secondhand. The scene begins with Bassanio reaching out to embrace Antonio while a heavy rain falls and lightning flashes. After Bassanio jumps

aboard his ship, Antonio tells him: "Be merry, and employ your chiefest thoughts / To courtship and such fair displays [ostents] of love / As shall conveniently become you there" (2.8.43-45). Upon receiving such counsel, Bassanio blows Antonio a kiss from the boat as it starts to pull away from the dock. Antonio, in turn, "catches" Bassanio's kiss between his clasped hands and then presses them against his lips. He closes his eyes as if savoring the kiss, opens them again, and then raises one hand in farewell to Bassanio as the multi-manned craft carrying him pulls away and into the ever-flowing canals of mighty Venice. Once again, no stage directions in the Shakespearean playtext call for the exchange of air-kisses on the part of Antonio and Bassanio. Yet, without question, this scene, in all of its exquisite particulars, fits perfectly within the context of Radford's film. It serves, in fact, as nothing less than a pointed reminder of the homoerotic nature of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship, even as Bassanio heads off to claim a rich and beautiful heiress-wife for himself in Belmont. In another, similar, improvised departure from Shakespeare's text, Radford shows us a portion of the wedding of Bassanio and Portia. This scene lasts only a few seconds, but in that brief amount of time, Bassanio's face never quite loses its stricken quality, suggesting, yet again, that his thoughts are almost exclusively with his lover, Antonio, in Venice rather than with Portia and the marriage at hand.

Reasoned words on the subjects of killing and love, directed toward Shylock, mark Bassanio's arrival at Antonio's trial in Venice. Later, when Portia, dressed as the young lawyer Balthasar, inquires as to whether or not Antonio can pay the debt owed to Shylock, Bassanio leaps from the crowd to kneel at the feet of the Duke (Anton Rodgers), then passionately insists that he himself will "tender it for him [Antonio] in the court" or

he "will be bound to pay it ten times o'er, / On forfeit of my hands, my head, my heart" which, as evidenced by his smile, offers Antonio nothing if not some measure of comfort (4.1.204 and 206-207). Later still, as the attendants strap a bare-chested Antonio to the chair in which he will give up a pound of his flesh to Shylock, Antonio says, "Give me your hand, Bassanio," which the latter does immediately (4.1.260). Antonio clutches Bassanio's hand as best he can, given the straps securing him to the chair, and kisses it while trembling with fear. Bassanio proceeds to embrace Antonio, who tells him "fare you well," with fatalistic resignation (4.1.260). Bassanio then has to be restrained from attempting to free Antonio by Gratiano. Several moments of tense, heart-stopping drama follows as Shylock comes as close to slicing into Antonio's chest with his knife as he ever will before Balthasar/Portia intervenes by calling a halt to the proceedings. Even more time elapses prior to Shylock's unwitting legal downfall and Antonio's release from the straps binding him to the chair of justice/vengeance. Throughout the remainder of this stunning denouement, Bassanio remains standing behind Antonio—like a husband or a lover more than a mere friend—supporting him figuratively and literally by the position of himself at his back and, more significantly, by the placement of his hands on either of an exhausted Antonio's shoulders.

Despite the continual sensitivity and attention to the male homoerotics of *The Merchant of Venice*, Radford's film significantly missteps in this regard not long before the closing credits scroll. After Portia says, "It is almost morning, / And yet I am sure you are not satisfied / Of these events in full. Let us go in; / . . . . / And I [we] will answer all things faithfully," Bassanio slowly follows her into the house in Belmont as if he is in a daze (5.1.293-297). Furthermore, he quite clearly and deliberately "forgets," or "ignores,"

Antonio, as he walks past him and after Portia. Then, the last time we see Antonio in the movie, he steps toward an open window through which the rays of the rising sun can be seen, without saying a word or betraying any kind of emotion. Given Radford's penchant for creating scenes that do not, technically, exist in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, as well as for depicting stage directions that make logical sense in tandem with the context—and particularly the homoerotic context—of the play, such an ending of his film seems rather odd. Textual study in Chapter 2 has shown that Antonio, and therefore the homoerotic, remain very much a part of the fabric of the play in its conclusion. We do not hear any mention of exiling him from Belmont, and we know, too, that Bassanio foresees absenting himself from Portia and her estate from time to time. We have more than sufficient reason to suspect that Bassanio will be in Venice, and in the arms of his beloved Antonio, during the course of his wanderings from home. Would that Radford had created a scene or set of scenes for the end of his version of *The Merchant of Venice* that capitalized on these elements and was as attentive to the homoerotic as the rest of his film so demonstrably and consistently is.

Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night*

On a dark night wracked by a powerful storm, a ship bound for Messaline makes her way through treacherous seas. Two young twins, both dressed exactly alike in rather exotic and androgynous outfits—complete with veils covering their faces—entertain a company assembled in the ballroom with a lively ditty. A bearded man attired in the livery of a seaman stands at the edge of the crowd, his unsmiling gaze riveted upon the two performers. Voice high jinks soon reveal that one of the twins is, in fact, a man, and

the other a woman. Before their true gender identities are exposed, however, disaster strikes as the vessel runs into submerged rocks, tearing fatal holes into its hull. Chaos reigns on the deck of the ship when the twins—who, the narrator tells us, are brother and sister—finally arrive there. Before long, the sister is swept off the deck and into the sea, despite her brother's attempt to hold onto her in the violence of the wind. Seconds later, the brother is prevented from hurling himself into the ocean by none other than the seaman who lately observed the performance of the twins with such peculiar intensity. But the brother struggles blindly against the seaman, escapes his well-meaning grasp, and dives into the roiling waters below in search of his sister. Brother and sister manage to find one another under the surface of the sea, but the cruel current very quickly thereafter rips them apart and separates them for good. Both reach the stormy surface, but neither can determine the whereabouts of the other. Then we see the seaman throwing himself off the sinking ship in order to save the brother, while the sister receives assistance from the captain. And the gasping screams of the sister bring the heart-rending scene to an end. So commences, with flair, panache, and high drama (if not melodrama), Trevor Nunn's superb film production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Some time later, at an outdoor place of ship-building, one man walks quickly away while another man chases after him: "Will you stay no longer?" the latter asks plaintively (2.1.1). The former not only refuses to remain at this location, but also insists that he will not reveal to the other man his destination. Upon a bit of reflection, however, the determinedly reticent man confides to Antonio (Nicholas Farrell)—recognizable now as the bearded seaman from the ill-fated ship at the beginning of the film thanks to a closer camera shot of both characters—that his name is Sebastian (Steven Mackintosh)—

also recognizable at this point as one half of the brother and sister performing duo the seaman took such note of prior to the vessel's destruction in the storm—and that his father was Sebastian of Messaline of whom he is sure Antonio knows of. A tearful Sebastian proceeds to tell Antonio of his sister Viola, who was drowned the night Antonio saved Sebastian from the ravages of the sea. Antonio's face evinces the distress he feels for the grieving Sebastian: "Alas the day!," he says as he moves to sit next to Sebastian (2.1.16). Sebastian's feelings overwhelm him as he continues to recount his story, and he bursts into full-blown tears and buries his face in Antonio's chest. For his part, Antonio wraps the other man in his arms while closing his eyes in shared anguish. Shortly thereafter, when a horse-drawn carriage arrives, Sebastian wipes his face with his hand, then leaves the safety and comfort of Antonio's arms, and resolutely makes his way across the green toward the conveyance.

Antonio hurries after Sebastian. "O good Antonio," Sebastian says over his shoulder, "forgive me your trouble" (2.1.25). When Antonio catches up with Sebastian he grabs his arm, forcing him to stop and face him. "If you will not murder me for your love," he pleads, "let me be your servant" (2.1.26). Sebastian tells him not to wish for such an arrangement, then turns again and walks to the carriage. When situated in his seat, Sebastian looks at Antonio for a moment or two, then sighs and reveals that his destination is the court of Count Orsino. As the vehicle pulls away, Antonio's expression displays a mixture of concern for Sebastian's welfare and dismay that Sebastian has left him. Antonio calls upon God's beneficence to protect Sebastian, then softly proclaims that he, too, would venture to Orsino's court were it not for the many enemies that await him in Illyria. Anyone familiar with Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* will quickly realize that

here Nunn has excised two significant lines of Antonio's following Sebastian's departure: "But come what may, I do adore thee so / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go" (2.1.35-36). Of course, Antonio's adoration of Sebastian comes across visually in the film via his continuous looking at (which the audience sees taking place onscreen) and his overall deferential and solicitous treatment of the other man. The elimination of the last line makes even more sense because it creates a tangible sense of surprise when Antonio does, in fact, show up in Illyria and reunites with Sebastian.

Thus, Nunn's *Twelfth Night* depicts the male homoerotic in much the way the previous textual analysis of Shakespeare's play in Chapter 3 suggested was possible. Indeed, homoeroticism pervades the representation of the scene with Antonio and Sebastian discussed above. Evidence of such an assertion appears, for example, in the manner Antonio observes Sebastian throughout their moments together in the shipyard—with a potent mixture of tenderness, compassion, understanding, love, and desire; in the open and solicitous manner of Antonio's addresses to Sebastian; and, perhaps most of all, in Antonio's longing to remain nowhere but in Sebastian's company and service. At the same time, however, confirmation of the male homoeroticism also appears in Sebastian's behavior and actions: in, for instance, the tearful admission of his true identity and the revelation of the loss of his sister; in his willingness to bury his face in another man's chest—to be held by another man, in other words—in his profound bereavement; and in his decision to disclose, finally, the terminus of his journey to Antonio.

"In line with many contemporary interpretations of *Twelfth Night*," Jones writes, Nunn's "Antonio displays an obvious longing for Sebastian . . . This potentially gay relationship, however, is doomed from the start by cluelessness on Sebastian's part, who

senses something odd in Antonio but seems never to have considered the possibility of a man desiring another man" (27). Jones proceeds to describe Antonio as "closeted by necessity, [having] to live a cycle of intimations and unspoken rejections, a hard fate made memorably visual by the sad-sack countenance that Nicholas Farrell brings to the part" (27). While it is true that Nunn's *Twelfth Night* is attentive to, and respectful of, contemporary interpretations of the play, particularly in regard to sexual orientation, there is no reason to characterize Antonio and Sebastian's potentially gay relationship as doomed. Sebastian is not clueless about Antonio's interest in him, and he most definitely does have an understanding of men desiring other men. Serious doubts arise, after all, that the three months Antonio and Sebastian have spent day and night in each other's company have been platonic to the point of emotional, affective, and physical celibacy. Being of a somewhat higher class than Antonio, it is far more likely that Sebastian's circumspectness in regard to his feelings for Antonio is the result of his upbringing rather than naïvete or lack of interest. Furthermore, the sadness that Antonio—as projected by Farrell—exhibits in the film always results from the fact he feels deeply for Sebastian in his suffering for the loss of his sister. It is not the product of Antonio's imprisonment in the closet where all he can ever do is pine without any real hope for a relationship with young men like Sebastian.

As in Shakespeare's play, we do not see Sebastian again until he arrives in Illyria proper. At this point in the film, Nunn creates a scene with intriguing, though short-lived, suspense: Sebastian, while walking through the streets of the city, acts as if he is being followed. His self-defensive movements seem justified when the camera shows us a man dressed in the vague habit of a parson trailing behind Sebastian. Within moments, this

oddly-clothed individual catches sight of Sebastian among the throng of the marketplace and, as the tension-inducing music surges, he rushes toward him, removing the hat and glasses he has donned to disguise himself as he does so, thus revealing none other than the seaman Antonio.

"I could not stay behind you," Antonio admits to Sebastian, who is surprised to see him but, nevertheless, says with a bit of a laugh in his voice, "My kind Antonio," then throws himself into an embrace with the other man (3.3.4 and 13). For as long as they hug, Antonio's eyes are squeezed tightly shut, signaling just how much it means for him to be in Sebastian's arms. Once they part, Sebastian, with a look of happiness on his face, thanks Antonio for seeking him out, then suggests that Antonio accompany him on a sightseeing tour of Illyria. That is when Antonio confesses that he is a man wanted by Count Orsino and his men and, therefore, dares not to walk about too openly for fear of capture. Sebastian's expression upon hearing this revelation registers his concern for Antonio's welfare, as does his sincere verbal exhortation for Antonio to keep himself well-concealed so as to avoid discovery. "You shall find me," Antonio says while putting the glasses and the hat of a parson back on, "at the Elephant," then he takes Sebastian's hand and places his purse into it (3.3.38-42). When a puzzled Sebastian asks Antonio why he has given him his purse, Antonio explains that he wants Sebastian to have enough money to purchase anything he desires, should he find something that strikes his fancy, but exceeds his own means which, Antonio suspects, are "not for idle markets" (3.3.46). As evidenced by his smile, Antonio seems, in fact, to be very happy that he can give such a gift of himself to Sebastian. In any case, Antonio starts to walk away after explaining his motives in regard to the giving of his purse, but he stops after only going a few feet

and turns back to Sebastian. He reaches out and touches Sebastian with both hands and says anxiously, "To th' Elephant," to which Sebastian responds with a laugh: "I do remember" (3.3.48). Hence, this scene plays out in Nunn's *Twelfth Night* as the textual study in Chapter 3 suggested was possible, but with one noteworthy exception: when Antonio actually leaves the area, Sebastian shakes his head in a manner that implies he thinks Antonio's behavior has been excessive, odd, or both. This seems incongruent with the way the balance of the scene is played, which is with an unselfconscious attendance to the underlying homoerotic attraction between Antonio and Sebastian on the part of the actors playing these two characters.

When we next see Antonio, he comes upon Viola dressed as Cesario (Imogen Stubbs) as she/he parries with Sir Andrew Aguecheek (Richard E. Grant) in the sword fight Sir Toby Belch (Mel Smith) and Fabian (Peter Gunn) have expertly engineered between them. Shocked by what he sees happening, Antonio leaps on top of the stone wall separating the orchard where the duel is taking place and the road, and yells: "Put up your sword" (3.4.255). In the surprise of his arrival, all desist from their activities. Antonio, as he enters the orchard proper, says, "If this young gentleman / Have done offense, I take the fault on me," then he takes Viola/Cesario's weapon as his own and places the "young gentleman" behind him in order to protect and defend him properly (3.4.255-256). Clearly, Antonio believes that Viola/Cesario is his beloved Sebastian. Moments later, Antonio proclaims to Sir Toby that he is "One, sir, that for his love dares yet do more / Than you have heard him brag to you he will," then begins to parry with Sir Toby with the sword he appropriated from Viola/Cesario. Within seconds, however, Orsino's troops arrive on horseback and proceed to surround and arrest Antonio. As he is

being bound in the chains of a prisoner, Antonio looks at Viola/Cesario and says: "This comes with seeking you," meaning Sebastian, of course, then asks for some of the money that was in his purse (3.4.273). An extremely confused Viola/Cesario offers to loan Antonio some money for his kindness which, in turn, baffles and enrages Antonio, who asks incredulously, "Will you deny me now?" before using both of his bound hands to knock Viola/Cesario's bag, and all the coins it contains, to the ground (3.4.288). Then Antonio allows himself to be led away by Orsino's men.

Antonio's anger, however, flares again when he is brought before Viola/Cesario and Duke Orsino (Toby Stephens) himself a short while later. "A witchcraft drew me hither," Antonio says with obvious anguish when questioned by the count about his unfortunate presence in Illyria, "That most ingrateful boy there by your side," then he yells, "His life I gave him . . . For his sake . . . [faced] the danger of this adverse town" (5.1.64, 68, 70, and 72). When Orsino asks Antonio to explain when Viola/Cesario came to the city, Antonio responds: "[Yesterday] . . . and for three months before . . . Both day and night did we keep company" (5.1.83 and 85). Of course, for Orsino and Viola/Cesario, this is an impossibility because Viola/Cesario has been serving the Duke for the past three months, an intelligence which only confuses Antonio further.

In the particulars discussed in the two preceding paragraphs, Nunn's *Twelfth Night* follows Shakespeare's text closely. As noted in Chapter 3, Viola's disguise as Cesario has proven so effective that no one recognizes her for what she really is, least of all Antonio. Of all the characters in *Twelfth Night*, Antonio ought to know the difference between his beloved Sebastian and Viola/Cesario; between a man and a woman. Alas, however, he is unable to tell the difference and, as a result, he suffers a great deal of

distress when Viola/Cesario—whom he thinks of as Sebastian—cannot help him nor acknowledge their past relationship. And it bears repeating that, given all his efforts and sacrifices on Sebastian's behalf, Antonio has more than a right to feel both angry and betrayed at this point—feelings which Nunn's film depicts masterfully and believably, and without losing sight of the homoeroticism at the heart of Antonio's relationship with Sebastian.

The arrival of the Countess Olivia (Helena Bonham Carter), sends the scene in a different trajectory entirely that, ultimately, leads to the story's denouement. Indeed, her new husband—the real Sebastian—soon appears, and does so with apologies to Olivia for hurting her kinsman, Sir Toby. After kissing his wife, Sebastian takes note of, first, Orsino, and then the shackled Antonio. The second he recognizes him, Sebastian runs toward Antonio—leaving Olivia behind, significantly—saying: "Antonio. . . .my dear Antonio!," immediately prior to throwing his arms around the other man in a happy greeting (5.1.202). "How have the hours racked and tortured me," he gushes, "Since I have lost thee!" (5.1.203-204). If nothing else, this moment in the movie reconfirms the homoerotic nature of the relationship between Sebastian and Antonio, despite his very recent marriage to Olivia. A still confused Antonio inquires: "Sebastian are you? . . . How have you made division of yourself? . . . Which is Sebastian?" (5.1.205, 207, and 209). After the utterance of these words, follows the emotional and affecting reunion of the twins—Viola and Sebastian—separated by the shipwreck at the beginning of the film.

Like Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*, Nunn's *Twelfth Night* displays continual sensitivity and attention to the male homoerotics evident in its Shakespearean source text. However, like Radford's, Nunn's film also significantly missteps in this regard in its final

treatment of Antonio. Indeed, Nunn presents a collage of scenes immediately prior to the scrolling of the credits. Most prominent among these images are those that depict the double wedding celebration of the couples Sebastian and Olivia and Orsino and Viola. At the same time, we are also made privy to the silent departures of Feste, Malvolio, Sir Toby and Maria (Imelda Staunton), and Antonio from the Countess Olivia's (and now, presumably, also the Count Sebastian's) mansion. It is, of course Nunn's depiction of Antonio's leaving that raises concern in the present context. When we see him, Antonio appears utterly alone on the path leading from the estate. He pauses long enough to bundle himself further into his coat as defense against the cold. Given the evident fog and dampness, it cannot but be a raw and inhospitable time of day. Thus fortified, Antonio trudges on his way and without looking back at the house where, presumably, his lover Sebastian remains with Olivia in wedded bliss. In its specificity, such a depiction of Antonio's fate comes across as the cinematic equivalent to a slap-on-the-face directed toward the film's queer viewers. As discussed in detail in Chapter 3, there is no mention of Antonio's departure from Olivia's domain. Although I disagree with Sinfield's[5] notion that Antonio, Sebastian, and Olivia would live and love together in some kind of harmony within the expansive confines of the latter's residence, I do not believe, either, that the marriage of Sebastian and Olivia signals the death knell of Antonio and Sebastian's relationship. With his penchant for inventiveness, I feel that Nunn could have included a scene or scenes in the collage that ends his *Twelfth Night* that shows Antonio and Sebastian not only embracing as the former prepares to depart, but agreeing to meet in Messaline, perhaps, where they, once again, enjoy all of the emotional, affective, and erotic pleasures that two men can share with each other during the time that they are

privileged to be together. As is, the conclusion of Nunn's *Twelfth Night*—despite its overall excellence—leaves its queer audience with a distinct longing for what could have been.

Oliver Parker's *Othello*

Oliver Parker's *Othello* begins in Venice and in the rather disturbing gloom of night. Gondolas furtively skirt the waterways of the city, and we first encounter Iago (Kenneth Branagh) with Roderigo (Michael Maloney) as they witness, in stealth, Othello's (Laurence Fishburne) marriage to Desdemona (Irene Jacob). After bride and groom kiss, Iago launches into his complaint about Othello's promotion of Cassio (Nathaniel Parker)—instead of himself—to the position of lieutenant in the military organization in which they serve. Though Shakespeare only mentions it in his play, Parker actually shows us Cassio's elevation in a ceremony that Iago remembers in his mind's eye; it includes Othello's giving of an ornate knife to Cassio, as well as the embrace of the two men as Cassio is welcomed into Othello's service. The following moments include Roderigo and Iago's sadistic taunting of Brabantio (Pierre Vaneck) about the absence and elopement of his daughter. When we next see Iago, he is standing next to, and looking very intently at, Cassio; when Cassio turns suddenly, Iago winks at him, then smiles. In and of themselves, of course, a hug between two men observed by another man, and a wink and a smile between one man and another, can be understood as purely platonic actions. But, given that the textual analysis of *Othello* in Chapter 4 has established Iago as what we would term in the twenty-first century a bisexual, if not an exclusively homosexual, male, his observations and gestures in the early moments of

Parker's film demand further consideration. Hence, Iago's remembrance of the embrace Othello and Cassio shared suggests that Iago understands he will never again experience such an intimacy with the general because of Cassio's selection as Othello's right-hand man. That we later learn of Iago's night spent entwined in the same bed with Cassio transforms his wink from the merely sly, to the sly *and* the homoerotic. Although Iago loves and desires Othello, he is not—as this scene attests—at all immune to, or incapable of noticing, Cassio's attractiveness which, in turn, ties into his later lines that express his jealousy of Cassio's daily beauty.

The homoerotic nature of Iago's character becomes even more explicit as Parker's *Othello* continues. For instance, a portion of what corresponds to Shakespeare's Act 2, scene 1, involving Iago and Roderigo, takes place underneath a large cart at night during the celebration of Othello and Desdemona's marriage on the island of Cyprus. While Iago and Roderigo talk as they lie next to one another on the ground, a male and female couple enjoys rather energetic and noisome sexual relations in the cart directly above their heads. In reference to the relationship between Desdemona and Cassio he is in the process of fabricating, as Iago says the line, "An index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts," he moves his face slowly, and ever closer, to that of Roderigo (2.1.244-245). Indeed, Iago's actions here become so intimate that it seems as if he is about to kiss Roderigo full on the lips. Alas, however, Iago does not kiss Roderigo, he merely continues speaking: "They met so near with their lips that their breaths embraced together. Villainous thoughts, Roderigo! When these mutualities so marshal the way, hard at hand comes the master and main exercise, th'incorporate conclusion" (2.1.245-248). Although he does not, in fact, kiss Roderigo, it is nevertheless intriguing that Iago

allows their "breaths to mingle" just as he has suggested Desdemona's and Cassio's have done in an illicit sexual encounter. Furthermore, when he says the words "hard at hand" (of course, in itself a bawdy pun on male arousal), Iago slowly and deliberately places his right hand on Roderigo's thigh, then continues to move that hand until it cups Roderigo's penis. For his part, Roderigo is either so distraught about the fact that Desdemona does not love him that he fails to notice the touch and/or location of Iago's hand, or being groped by another man in such a manner is so commonplace an occurrence for him that the sensation no longer registers upon his consciousness. The former supposition is, by far, more likely. But, in either case, the homoeroticism Parker depicts here cannot be overlooked or dismissed—regardless of the fact that Iago is only ever using Roderigo for his own ends. That Iago *might* consider Roderigo an extraneous sexual partner in addition to his dupe only adds another layer to the overall maliciousness of his persona while simultaneously confirming the non-normative nature of his erotic desires.

As in the play itself, the male homoerotic reaches its peak in Parker's *Othello* during the depiction of Othello and Iago's bonding in Act 3, scene 3. This scene takes place upon the battlements of a castle on Cyprus, and it includes the exchange of a blood vow between the two men which is not mentioned in Shakespeare's text. First, Othello cuts a gash in his palm with his knife, and Iago follows suit immediately after. Then they clasp their bleeding hands together in complete solidarity with one another, and Othello says, "Now art thou my lieutenant" (3.3.495). At this point, both men are on their knees and, significantly, they embrace. First, we see this embrace happen from a distance, then the shot changes to a near close-up of Iago as he is held in Othello's arms. The look on Iago's face is one of almost painful, yet at the same time exquisite, relief. It is as if he

cannot believe that he is, once again, being held by his beloved Othello. "I am your own forever," Iago says, and it is as if each word is being ripped from the very depths of his soul, then he squeezes his eyes shut, as if to hold back his tears (3.3.496). Textual study in Chapter 4 suggested that these moments in Act 3, scene 3 might well present a same-sex union or wedding between Othello and Iago, had such ceremonies taken place in Renaissance England. And Parker's film thus both capitalizes on, and makes vivid and real, the homoerotic potentiality inherent within this portion of Shakespeare's play.

However, Parker offers one additional homoerotic moment in his *Othello* that warrants attention. In the penultimate scene of the film, after the deaths of Desdemona, Emilia and, finally, Othello himself, an angry Lodovico (Michael Sheen) forces Iago, who is on his knees and bleeding from his wounds, to gaze upon the heinous outcome of his deeds: "Look on the tragic loading of this bed. / This is thy work" (5.2.374-375). And Iago does look at the three lifeless bodies spread before him. Then, in silence, Iago forces himself upward, onto the bed, and lays his head in the crook of Othello's leg. Though undeniably grotesque, this singular action of Iago's reveals nothing if not the fact that his attachment to the general—to Othello—lingers, even in the chaos of destruction and the finality of death.

In Finis

American films, supposedly reflecting the society-at-large they seek to entertain, all too often, and for far too long, have either ignored the male homosexual or portrayed him in the most offensive and stereotypical manner possible. Such representations both emanate from, and serve to perpetuate, the irrational homophobia employed to maintain

the dominance of heterosexuality within our patriarchal culture.[6] Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*, Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, and Parker's *Othello* thus serve as significant correctives to oversight, ignorance, inaccuracy, and injustice, among other negatives. In fact, these movies allow gay men like myself to connect with their history in a way that informs their present. In other words, they can see for themselves that they are not, nor have they ever been, the freaks or abominations others, in their fear, have sought to condemn them as; they can see that they are not alone; and they can see that they are as human in their wants, needs, and desires as any other group of people.

Furthermore, it can be stated that, singularly and in tandem, Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*, Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, and Parker's *Othello*, function as cinematic exemplars because they demonstrate how plausibly and effectively the male homoerotics of Shakespeare's plays can be represented on movie screens of the contemporary times. In fact, we ought not to lose sight of the fact that the filmmakers of these recent productions felt compelled, not only by the source material, but also by an understanding of sexuality in Renaissance England that continues to gain depth, nuance, and significance, to render the male homoerotic visible and integral to their individual and collective works. In a very real sense, Radford, Nunn, and Parker bring what has been deliberately buried or overlooked for centuries in regard to male same-sex relations into the present in a manner that leaves no room for further avoidance, equivocation, or rationalization. It can only be hoped that future films of Shakespeare's works are as attentive as presentist literary criticism is to their respective male characters, such as Antonio and Bassanio, Antonio and Sebastian, and Iago and Othello, who happen to desire and love other men.

NOTES

Chapter 1

1. In regard to the notion of the present as I mention it here, see the "Introduction" to Terence Hawkes's *Shakespeare in the Present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-5. "History," Hawkes writes, "is far too important to be left to scholars who believe themselves able to make contact with a past unshaped by their own concerns . . . The present ranks, not as an obstacle to be avoided, nor as a prison to be escaped from. Quite the reverse: it's a factor actively to be sought out, grasped and perhaps, as a result, understood" (3). Indeed, if "an intrusive, shaping awareness of ourselves, alive and active in our own world, defines us, then it deserves our closest attention" in all of our critical-analytical endeavors (3).

2. On queer theory, the editors of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* note that it "begins by criticizing the dominant heterosexual binary, masculine/feminine, which enthrones 'the' two sexes and casts other sexualities as abnormal, illicit, or criminal;" thus this school of thought poses significant challenge to "the homophobic and patriarchal basis of heterosexuality" (25). Using similar language, Jonathan Culler explains that queer theory "uses the marginal—what has been set aside as perverse, beyond the pale, radically other—to analyse the cultural construction of the centre:

heterosexual normativity" (127). He adds, moreover, that queer theory "has become the site of a productive questioning not just of the cultural construction of sexuality but of culture itself, as based on the denial of homoerotic relations" (128). Thus, my invocation of the term queer in "The Male Homoerotics of Shakespearean Drama" indicates my intention to challenge the almost always-assumed heteronormativity of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Othello*. For additional insight into the concepts of queer, queering, and queer theory as a whole, consult the following specialized studies: Donald E. Hall's *Queer Theories* (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), Annamarie Jagose's *Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), Nikki Sullivan's *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), and William B. Turner's *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000). Readers may also find useful the respective "Introductions" to *Queering the Renaissance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), edited by Jonathan Goldberg, and *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), edited by Glenn Burger and Stephen F. Kruger.

3. For a book-length treatment of the subject of male friendship from the Renaissance to the present, see Bray's posthumously published monograph, *The Friend* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

4. Rackin's article is entitled "Androgyny, Mimesis, and the Marriage of the Boy Heroine on the English Renaissance Stage," and appeared in *PMLA* 102.1 (Jan. 1987): 29-41. See

also the pair of letters published later that year under the organizing title "Boy Heroines," the first of which is Michael Shapiro's response to Rackin's original article, while the second is Rackin's rebuttal to Shapiro's response (*PMLA* 102.5 [Oct. 1987]: 836-838). Howard's piece, "Crossdressing, The Theatre, and Gender Struggle in Early Modern England" appeared in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (Winter 1988): 418-440. Elam's essay, "The Fertile Eunuch: *Twelfth Night*, Early Modern Intercourse, and the Fruits of Castration," appeared in a later issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* (47.1 [Spring 1996]: 1-36).

5. The final words in this citation are Charles's (re-)quotation of phraseology from Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 237.

6. Schalkwyk also writes about love, from a comparative perspective, in Shakespeare's sonnets and plays—including *Twelfth Night*—in the earlier article "'She Never Told Her Love': Embodiment, Textuality, and Silence in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays" (*Shakespeare Quarterly* 45.4 [Winter 1994]: 381-407).

7. Shannon's piece, "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," appeared in *Modern Philology* 98.2 (Nov. 2000): 183-210. Lindheim's essay, "Rethinking Sexuality and Class in *Twelfth Night*," was published in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* 76.2 (2007): 679-713.

8. Of course, Hyman builds his repressed love interpretation on the work not only of Freud, but other literary, theatre, and psychoanalytic scholars, as well. See pp. 120-121 of *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of his Motivation*, where he briefly discusses the work of his predecessors in regard to Iago's "latent homosexuality." These include, Sir Laurence Olivier, as recounted in Marvin Rosenberg's *The Masks of Othello*, Martin Wangh in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, F.L. Lucas in *Literature and Psychology*, Gordon Ross Smith in *American Imago*, Robert Rogers in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, J.I.M Stewart in *Character and Motive in Shakespeare*, Enrique Racker in *Revista de Psicoanálisis*, and A. Bronson Feldman in *American Imago*.

Chapter 2

1. A comparison of Antonio's rhetorical strategy here with that of the speaker in Shakespeare's "Sonnet 72" proves illuminating:

> O, lest the world should task you to recite
> What merit lived in me that you should love,
> After my death (dear love) forget me quite,
> For you in me can nothing worthy prove;
> Unless you would devise some virtuous lie
> To do more for me than mine own desert,
> And hang more praise upon deceased I
> Than niggard truth would willingly impart;
> O, lest your true love may seem false in this,

That you for love speak well of me untrue,

My name be buried where my body is,

And live no more to shame nor me, nor you:

For I am shamed by that which I bring forth,

And so should you, to love things nothing worth. (255)

In both cases, Antonio's and the speaker's, each uses guilt as reverse psychology in an attempt to manipulate their respective lovers to do what they want, which is to remember them always, either in person or by the composition of posthumous obsequies of praise. These are the actions, of course, of characters who are insecure and uncertain of their partners' feelings for them. Though all may be fair in love and war, the manipulative aspect of Antonio's and the speaker's tactics cannot be denied.

Chapter 3

1. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses such triangular relationships involving two males in competition for one female in her *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

2. On this point, see Kleinberg, who explains, "All upper-class men married. Their duties to property, propriety, and posterity demanded an heir. After that, their romantic predilections were less important socially as long as they were reasonably discreet" (116).

Chapter 4

1. The dynamic here is suggestive of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 144":

> Two loves I have, of comfort and despair
> Which, like two spirits, do suggest me still:
> The better angel is a man right fair,
> The worser spirit a woman coloured ill.
> To win me soon to hell my female evil
> Tempteth my better angel from my side,
> And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
> Wooing his purity with her foul pride;
> And whether that my angel be turned fiend
> Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;
> But being both from me both to each friend,
> I guess one angel in another's hell.
>
> Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
> Till my bad angel fire my good one out. (403)

Without question, however, Iago's "bad angel" has not only fired, but obliterated, his good one out, as the actions he takes against Othello prove.

Chapter 5

1. This phrase forms a portion of the very first line of Greenblatt's "The Circulation of Social Energy," Chapter One of his *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*: "I began with the desire to speak with the dead" (1).

2. In "*The Merchant of Venice*: Shakespeare through the Lens," one of the special features on the DVD version of Radford's film, Jeremy Irons comments: "He [Antonio] finds himself very happy in the company of young men . . . ah, particularly one young man [Bassanio], who is sort of everything he'd like to be." However, a short while later Irons insists: "I didn't play Antonio gay." Rather, he portrayed Antonio as merely a very great friend of Bassanio's, nothing more, nothing less. Since, as I argue in these pages, both Shakespeare's text and Radford's film version of it evidence an unmistakable male homoeroticism via the characters of Antonio and Sebastian, Irons' remarks here prove ironic in the extreme.

3. On this point, see Alan Bray's "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 40-61, especially pages 42-44.

4. Magnus notes that, "Fiennes's star power makes it easy to overlook Bassanio's mindless initial prodigality, his careless reliance on Antonio's generosity, the grubby

materialism of introducing Portia as an answer to his bankrupt state, and his willingness to risk not his own fortune (which he has already squandered) but his friend's. One even forgives the kiss on the lips that he bestows somewhat too knowingly upon Antonio" (114). Hopefully she means only that Bassanio's kiss requires forgiveness because of what she considers to be its calculated quality, not that it requires forgiveness because it is a kiss between two men. In either case, she fails to take into account the possibility that Antonio and Bassanio do, in fact, have an affective, emotional, and physical relationship. Doing so, I would argue, might alter her interpretation of the kiss in Radford's film.

5. I refer here to pages 65-66 of Sinfield's "How to Read *The Merchant of Venice* Without Being Heterosexist," which appears as Chapter 4 of his *Shakespeare, Authority, Sexuality: Unfinished Business in Cultural Materialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 53-67.

6. On the irrationality of homophobia, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion of the subject in the "Introduction," and Endnote #1, to her *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press), pages 1 and 219.

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