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A Journal of Research and Inquiry
Dedicated to the Best That Has Been Thought and Said

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Epic of Sundiata
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INTRODUCTION

unique - of which there is only one
Oxford English Dictionary

Dear Community Member/Reader,

It is my honor to introduce the eighth issue of the *Great Books Symposium Journal* (*GBSJ*), a unique issue of a unique journal. The primary purpose of the *Symposium Journal* is to acknowledge and celebrate the exceptional analytical and critical research writing skills of community college students. The high quality of the essays published in the *GBSJ* is direct evidence of two-year students' capability to understand and engage with complex works and ideas. It also serves as a rebuttal of the misguided belief that a community college education lacks rigor and sophistication. The excellence of *GBSJ* scholarship bears witness and is largely attributed to the collaboration of individuals who possess diverse thoughts, cultures, and backgrounds. Indeed, this unity in diversity creates an ideal setting for unique opportunities and meaningful connections to root and bloom. This issue is the product of a collaborative perspective, as well as the dedication, diligence, and perseverance of each unique person involved.

I have valid reasons to emphasize the uniqueness of the *Symposium Journal*—and this issue in particular. To begin, the *GBSJ* is perhaps the only scholarly journal produced by students at a two-year institution. It is a magnet that attracts extraordinary and inspirational people. Second, all seven essays published in the *GBSJ* this year were produced amidst the challenging, unusual, and uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the entire issue was edited and prepared remotely. Third, our contributors and student editorial board consist of nine women who, while sharing a passion for literature, interestingly enough intend to pursue careers in divergent fields. There is not a single literature major among us, which speaks to the free spirit and the open-ended, interdisciplinary and expansive reach of the Great Books Curriculum. Finally, there is a perfect symmetry in the order of the works analyzed in this edition: Shakespeare, Chaucer, Kyd. These essays are not only beautifully ordered, they are beautifully written. I encourage you to read them all. Be prepared to delve into a range of intriguing and unexpected ideas that may just change your perception of well-known characters forever. While reading these essays, I guarantee that you will have several "of which there is only one" encounters.

I especially hope that you develop a connection and camaraderie with each contributor through these essays and that the immersive experience imparts feelings of safety and community—gifts of which the world felt a shortage during the worst of the pandemic, and yet, gifts each of us were privileged to share while working on this issue together. As F. Scott Firzgerald mused, “That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.” I want you, dear reader, to know that

you belong here, among these pages. I invite you to enjoy, to interpret, and to arrive at your own conclusions regarding what Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been thought and said in the world."[1] Your own unique stories and perspectives are necessary, celebrated, valuable contributions to the collective appreciation and understanding of the living texts that have inspired each of these essays. You are an integral member of our community, and we most warmly welcome you.

This issue would have never been possible without an outstanding team of remarkable people. Student contributors and student editorial board, I thank you for your devoted time, tireless efforts, and constant desire to improve. Thank you, faculty editorial panel—professors at Wilbur Wright College, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Austin (TX) Community College, Oakton Community College, and the University of California San Diego—you are all essential to the journal's success. To the Wilbur Wright College administration—President David Potash, Interim Vice President and Dean of Instruction Pamela Monaco—thank you for supporting and encouraging the growth and impact of the Great Books Symposium Journal. Finally and most importantly, special thanks to the *GBSJ* faculty advisor and editor, Dr. Michael Petersen, who made this opportunity possible for all of us. His help, guidance, kindness, wisdom, and understanding have had a tremendous impact on the eighth issue of the *Great Books Symposium Journal*. I am incredibly proud and extremely grateful to be a part of such a team. I dedicate this journal to all of you.

Yours truly,

Yaryna Dyakiv
Spring 2021 Editor-in-Chief, *Great Books Symposium Journal*

[1] C*ulture and Anarchy,* 2. http://public-library.uk/ebooks/25/79.pdf..

Othello's Cyprus: A Tempest Impossible to Bear Out

MELISSA GLONTEA

The significance of setting is paramount in William Shakespeare's *Othello* (c. 1603). It is the determinant contributing factor to the tragedies that occur in the play, at first supporting yet finally upending heroes and villains alike. The environment of Venice is conducive to the characters' strengths and successes. In the hostile context of Cyprus, however, those same strengths are subverted until they ultimately implode, claiming lives; even the brilliant scheming of Iago is no match for the bubbling chaos stewing within the claustrophobic confines of the Citadel. In transplanting his characters from Venice to Cyprus, Shakespeare sets Othello, Desdemona, and Iago on an accelerated course towards destruction, as their glowing strengths, clearly displayed in Venice, transform into mortal weaknesses in the militarized-domestic setting of Cyprus.

Othello, like many of Shakespeare's plays, has a split geography. The first act takes place in Venice, while the rest of the play occurs in Cyprus. Ayanna Thompson points out that "in a comedic structure, this type of geographic split usually emphasizes the licensing freedom that is enabled outside of the city walls" (21-22). She gives the example of the geographic split in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "in which Athens represents the world of law and patriarchal order […], and the woods represent the world of holiday and licentiousness," adding that, "[o]f course, tragic tales can contain a geographic split as well in order to mark a break from order into chaos" (22). The geographic split in *The Tragedy of Othello* indeed signifies such a break from order into chaos, and the ramifications of that split prove to be paramount to the play's tragic resolution. More significantly, the chaos which begins to unfold in Cyprus appears to be a direct result of the setting itself.

Othello, Desdemona, and Iago do not themselves undergo significant changes in character over the course of the play; rather, their strengths and their fates are contaminated through exposure to the very setting of Cyprus, which unleashes its own particularly subversive strain of chaos upon them, impeding their otherwise good Venetian fortunes. The move from Venice to Cyprus reflects a shift from safety to danger, as Cyprus imposes its uniquely treacherous natural order onto the transplanted characters. In Venice, the air is figuratively sweet, and while there Othello, Desdemona, and Iago are able to fully utilize and enjoy the fruits of their strengths. In Cyprus, however, the air is quite different, and those same fruits, once exposed to the island's corrosive properties, begin to quickly spoil.

The effects of the geographic split on the tragedies in *Othello* hinge on the varying historical contexts of the setting of both Venice and Cyprus. Shakespeare's fictitious Venice of *Othello* is very much anchored in historical reality. Shakespeare

based the social and political structure of *Othello's* Venice on texts such as Sir Lewes Lewkenor's English translation of Gaspar Contarini's *De Magistratibus et Republica Venetorum* (c. 1543), and *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599). *De Magistratibus* contains analyses of Venice's political, military, and social systems, which the English admired and used as a model for their own society. *Othello's* Venice significantly mirrors this text, particularly as *De Magistratibus* "romanticizes the Venetian state, explicitly painting a portrait of balance, fortune and evenhandedness" (Thompson 17-18). In choosing such a model as the springboard for his plot, Shakespeare creates an environment in which Othello, Desdemona, and Iago operate in the power of their respective strengths, as Venice indeed affords them "balance, fortune and evenhandedness."

When we meet Othello in Act 1, he is enjoying prominence and success in Venice. Othello has been masterfully steering his fortune despite past adversities and despite facing prejudice from the Venetians around him (1.3.77-95; 129-70). In Act 1, scene 2, Othello demonstrates his seasoned military authority and interpersonal skills when he de-escalates a potentially deadly, seemingly imminent physical altercation. He is in the company of Iago when Brabantio and his men, with Roderigo, arrive intending to engage him in combat, yet Othello calmly and confidently succeeds in convincing both sides to put up their swords (1.2.59). His oratory strengths are further demonstrated in Act 1, scene 3, when Othello eloquently defends himself against Brabantio's public and very sudden accusations regarding not only his character, but also his marriage to Desdemona.

Brabantio previously loved Othello, often invited him to his home, and treated him with kindness (1.3.129-30), and yet upon learning of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, he immediately changes his attitude towards his new son-in-law. Brabantio deems their marriage unnatural, asserting that Desdemona only could have married Othello because he abused, stole, and corrupted her with spells, medicines, and witchcraft (1.3.61-65). According to Brabantio's reasoning, Desdemona's age, her loyalty to her country, and her good reputation would have prevented her from marrying someone she "feared to look on" of her own accord (1.3.99). Othello's testimony in response to Brabantio's accusations secures Othello's already good reputation and the legitimacy of his marriage. Furthermore, his speech is so powerfully moving, the Duke remarks it would win over his own daughter, as well (1.3.172). Othello's deeply ingrained, commanding strength of character and the height and sum of his successes that he enjoys in Venice, including his excellent reputation, skills in self-expression, his relationship with his "gentle Desdemona," and his well-earned position of military status, are especially noteworthy considering that these achievements co-exist along with the ugliness of prejudice in a culturally diverse city (1.2.25).

The play's complete title, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, itself implies an othering effect that accompanies Othello's dual identity. Historical Venice was a cosmopolitan and diverse city, an established maritime power attracting many migrants arriving "from the hinterlands and cities of Padua, Vicenza, Verona,

Bergamo, Brescia, and Crema as well as the territories of Istria, Dalmatia, Albania, Greece, Germany, Flanders, Spain, Portugal, Armenia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Levant" (Ferraro 76). Joanne Marie Ferraro refers to Venice as a "world city," having developed into one of the "most industrialized cities" of Europe during the sixteenth century (75). She considers what it meant to be Venetian at that time:

> The population of Venice was fluid, and to be Venetian was often liminal. Far from insular, the population of this major port was part of a global economic system where peoples of varying origins circulated. It was home to foreign subjects, refugees, and tourists but also to Venetian subjects who had lived for lengthy periods in foreign lands and absorbed hybrid cultures. (77)

Despite the defining multicultural population and identity of Venice, Othello, whose birthplace is not revealed, experiences both direct and indirect prejudice against his perceived "otherness" as it relates to his ethnicity and his physical appearance – even though he is a successful, celebrated, and indispensable Venetian general and citizen.

Language throughout the play, beginning with its title, is one of the means by which prejudice and otherness are imposed upon Othello, "the Moor of Venice." Othello is both of Venice and not of Venice. His ethnicity and complexion are referred to by those who, perhaps, consider themselves as belonging in Venice more than Othello so as to portray him as an outsider to achieve their own ends. Iago, Brabantio, Roderigo, the Duke, and even Desdemona and Othello himself all partake in offensive attitudes and language when referring to Othello's Blackness. While Iago and Roderigo use the term "Moor" contemptuously and employ various racial slurs against him in Act 1, scene 1, Nicholas Potter argues that in Othello's appearance before the Senate, when the First Senator refers to Othello as the "Moor," the senator is not using the term as a means of disrespect (1.3.48). Potter interprets the First Senator's use of the term to mean that Othello is *the* Moor of Venice; he is not the *only* Moor in Venice, rather, he is *most prominent*. Potter reasons that Othello has achieved celebrity status, having become the most distinct and distinguished Moor of Venice, and, as such, there is no longer a need to refer to him by his name. While Potter offers this arguably positive explanation for Othello's being "othered" via the term *Moor*, one that highlights his prominence and success as an outsider in Venice, it is inarguable that the word is also employed with malice in other instances.

Othello's Venetian fortune is particularly poignant in light of the negative attitudes, prejudice, and imposed otherness that he overcomes in Venice but later tragically internalizes in Cyprus. Kiernan Ryan argues that Othello later (in Cyprus) points to his complexion as a reason for Desdemona's supposedly waning love for him: "Haply for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have" (3.3.267–69); and that Othello "instinctively employs his own Blackness as a metaphor for his wife's alleged depravity": "Her name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face" (3.3.389–91). Othello's growing, internalized bias against his own Blackness, which occurs on the

island of Cyprus, significantly contributes to his rapid unravelling. In contrast, while external, racially charged factors of prejudiced hatefulness also work against Othello in Venice, they do not affect him in the same way there; rather, he remains highly successful despite them. It is not until his arrival in Cyprus that Othello's success takes a tragic turn as he directs that same prejudice against himself to a fatal degree and his downfall begins.

Desdemona and Iago likewise enjoy the fruits of their strengths and power in Venice. In Venice, Desdemona's strengths, including her voice and her love for and devotion to Othello, act as buffers to the attempted thwarting of her happiness, and she is able to secure her own well-being while there. Desdemona not only knows her own mind and heart; she is also successful in exercising her own will. Her flourishing agency shines brightest when she delivers an impressive argument before the Senate in response to her father's opposition to her marriage (1.3.180-89; 249-60). Desdemona makes a clear case for her choice of husband: "That I did love the Moor to live with him / My downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world" (1.3.249-51). She commands her will and her voice in alignment with her love and devotion to Othello, successfully dismantling her father's attempts to disqualify her marriage. She has willingly transferred and has now secured the care and authority of her person from her father to her husband and "lord," Othello (1.3.252).

Although Desdemona successfully ensures her and Othello's marriage and happiness before the court, that happiness, as well as her safety, only remain intact while she remains in Venice. Desdemona is protected in Venice, first as the privileged daughter of Brabantio, an affluent, powerful Venetian senator, and then as the wife of Othello, the commanding General of the Venetian army. It is not until her ill-fated honeymoon in Cyprus that the orb of protection surrounding her swiftly deteriorates, her voice fails her, and her goodness, love, devotion, loyalty, and trusting nature prove to be her undoing. Unlike in Venice, in Cyprus Desdemona's strengths are subverted; she is no longer protected and her otherwise promising marriage suffers tragically as well.

Iago also operates in his strengths in the favorable atmosphere of Venice, where he is on track to reach the zenith of his tricksterdom. Iago is a confident, egotistical, master manipulator. When we meet him in Act 1, he is already brilliantly facilitating his own ends. He effortlessly performs and adapts different roles as needed, successfully chides Brabantio into seeking Othello's destruction, triumphantly swindles money and possessions from Roderigo, and delightfully shares with the audience his devious, unfolding plans to ruin Othello. Richard Raatzsch considers why Iago has long been seen as one of the foremost tricksters in literature, as well as an incarnation of evil itself. He contends that *Othello* "is really a glorification of Iago, a paean to ruthlessness, a song of praise for inconsiderateness raised to an absolute level" (13). Raatzsch points to Iago's general perversion, malice, and wickedness, arguing that Iago's representations of his motives cannot be trusted, truly known, or explained. They can only be understood to a degree. In Act 1, scene 1, when Iago tells Roderigo "I am not what I am" (l. 64), the audience is left with unanswered questions

regarding *who* and *why* Iago *is*: some might wonder whether Iago even understands himself.

The answers to those questions never quite materialize; rather, they serve to set the tone of Iago's antagonistic role in the play and also perhaps explain why Cyprus becomes a setting of such rapid destruction. There, even Iago loses his mark, and his schemes become increasingly less successful. His declaration, "I am not what I am," seems in Cyprus to reflect a newly unsettled Iago. His plotting gains substantial momentum in Venice and climaxes in Cyprus, where it ultimately entangles Iago in the inevitability of his own demise, too. The goals of his machinations seem at first to be separated only by the time it will take for the remaining acts of the play to unfold. However, Cyprus has its own stratagem in store, not only against Iago, but against Othello and Desdemona, as well. It is not until the characters reach Cyprus that their strengths and fortunes are subverted by their common, unsuspected enemy.

Historical Cyprus is the keeper of a tragic, tumultuous history; *Othello's* Cyprus draws heavily from that history and malignantly applies it to unsuspecting Othello, Desdemona and Iago. Historical Cyprus is situated in the Mediterranean Sea between Asia and Europe. It has been fought over and controlled by many peoples throughout the ages on account of its strategic location and valuable economic resources, such as wheat, olives, wine, and extensive copper deposits: "The ancient writer Ammianus Marcellinus noted that Cyprus was so fertile that it could completely build and stock cargo ships solely from its own resources" (Moore 1). Several empires sought to control Cyprus due to its many assets, and, as a result, "Cypriots would not be left alone to be Cypriots – like a planet that comes too close to two stars, it has been repeatedly pulled apart by the rival gravitational attractions" of opposing forces that have composed Cyprus's cultural history from classical times to the British occupation (Madigan 841). This residual state of gravitational chaos twists and pulls at the internal threads of Othello, Desdemona, and Iago, who in their communion with Cyprus similarly are not left alone to be as they are. The soil and spirit of Cyprus, heavy with the blood and angst of battles past, stands firm and indomitable in comparison to Othello, Desdemona, and Iago, whose own resilience begins to diminish soon after their arrival on the island.

The Cyprus of *Othello* buzzes with a chaos and tension reminiscent of historical Cyprus, generating the undoing of Othello, Desdemona, and Iago. As many people died in the quests of dominion over Cyprus, one might imagine its inhabitants sat with a foreboding sense that the next battle for the island was always looming. Perhaps Cyprus came to embody the violent anxiety and fear that accompanied such constant threats to its stability, safety, and freedom, and this same intrinsic volatility served to upend Othello, Desdemona, and Iago:

> Cyprus is the contested ground over which empires battle, but it also serves to highlight the problems inherent in those empires. After all, the Turkish threat is destroyed by the natural forces of the storm, but the island releases the violence lurking beneath the surface of the Venetian defenders of the Christian

> faith. The place seems to be asking if the violence was inherent to them in the first place, or if there was something about Cyprus that made them change. (Thompson 24)

Cyprus does not intrinsically change Othello, Desdemona, and Iago; rather, its very soil changes the rules and course to which their fortunes have been hitherto ascribed. Considering each character as being a separate empire, Cyprus effectively activates within each of them the inherent, negative aspects of their own strengths. Othello, Desdemona, and Iago each arrive in Cyprus with their own intents and purposes. Othello is there to defend Cyprus, Desdemona is there to relish the spoils of her victorious marriage to Othello, and Iago is there to advance his plan to wreak havoc on Othello. Much as Cyprus highlighted the inherent problems of its warring empires, it also highlights the already present and potential problems and violence lurking within Othello, Desdemona, and Iago, setting the characters' strengths against them: Othello's strengths as a warrior, soldier, general, and loving husband and friend betray him; Desdemona's strengths as a good hearted, trusting individual and a loving, devoted, and loyal wife to Othello betray her; and Iago's strength as a brilliant trickster betrays him, as well. All these strengths benefit each character in Venice and work against them in Cyprus, which directly leads to their demise.

One might wonder if the "natural forces of the storm" responsible for destroying the Turkish are not also triggered by the island itself. Cyprus gives the transplanted Venetians a false sense of security after obliterating their Turkish enemy in the tempest on the Mediterranean Sea. They do not realize the storm is coming for them, as well. Othello, Desdemona, and Iago are wholly unaware of their own impending doom, which is foreshadowed upon their arrival to the island in the destruction of the Turkish fleet, as described by Montano and two gentlemen:

> MONTANO. Methinks the wind hath spoke aloud at land,
> A fuller blast ne'er shook our battlements:
> If it hath ruffianed so upon the sea
> What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them,
> Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?
> 2 GENTLEMAN. A segregation of the Turkish fleet:
> For do but stand upon the foaming shore,
> The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds,
> The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane,
> Seems to cast water on the burning bear
> And quench the guards of th'ever-fired pole.
> I never did like molestation view
> On the enchafed flood.
> MONTANO. If that the Turkish fleet
> Be not ensheltered and embayed, they are drowned.
> It is impossible they bear it out. (2.1.5-19)

The storm that destroyed the Turkish fleet, which intended once again to take Cyprus, can be considered a defensive maneuver employed by the island. Rather than being subjugated yet again, Cyprus employed an annihilatory tempest against the Turkish fleet. The sheer force and violence of the storm's wind is described by Montano as having originated on the island, or "spoke[n] aloud at land" and then "ruffianed so" upon the sea," destroying the fleet. Although editors often choose the 1623 First Folio's descriptor of the "foaming" shore (2.1.11), the 1622 Quarto's "banning" shore (defined by E. A. J. Honigmann as "cursing or chiding") suggests Cyprus indeed curses and chides not only the Turkish fleet, but also the key Venetian players who have made it to the certain, menacing shore that itself has conjured a "billow" that "pelt[s] the clouds" so violently that the "enchafed," (glossed as "excited, furious") floods "cast water" even onto constellations (116, n. 11 and n. 17). Cyprus's "monstrous," "wind-shaked surge" is unrivaled; the island is responsible not only for the Venetians' temporary victory, but for their ultimate defeat, as well. The essence behind Cyprus's leveling violence is impartial, soon to be unleashed on the unsuspecting Venetians themselves. Much as the Turkish fleet found, the tempest that is Cyprus will prove impossible to bear out for Othello, Desdemona, and Iago, as well.

The Citadel in Cyprus allows for a specialized assault on Othello, Desdemona, and Iago through a chaotic marriage of military and domestic schemes and action. "Just as the play's military spaces are domesticated, so too are its domestic spaces militarized" (Tvordi 95). The Citadel not only houses the soldier's quarters; it also encamps the wives of two of its most influential men. Desdemona and Emilia's seminal presence in Cyprus disrupts the fragile personal and military dynamics that exist within the head of the Venetian ranks, a disruption which in turn gives way to a key mode of Cyprus's impending attack. The potential for corruption is maximized as the already existing military dynamics at play in Othello and Iago's relationship are set against Othello's underdeveloped marital trust in Desdemona; and that corruption materializes as tragedy as the militarized-domestic setting of Cyprus accommodates only one victor on the battlefield for Othello's trust. Iago, too, loses command of his otherwise controlled, devious prowess in the convoluted environment of the Citadel in Cyprus, where the remainder of the play and the imminent unraveling of each character takes place.

Othello's martial moral code is deeply embedded in his character, and his commitment to soldierly trust has served him well his entire life thus far, until Cyprus. Jonathan Shaw refers to Othello as a "military orphan" whose "moral code is derived entirely from his martial upbringing within a culture which is based on trust; for trust is the basis of all soldiering" (2). Shaw also indicates that betrayal is the most heinous of military sins - and the last to be suspected. Othello and Iago's rapport has been developed long before they reach Cyprus. These two soldiers have been in many combative, life-and-death situations in which each has entrusted their safety to the other. As Shaw points out, Othello has every reason to implicitly trust Iago, who has repeatedly proven his "honesty" on the battlefield. Othello declares Iago a man "of honesty and trust" (1.3.285). Unfortunately, Iago takes perfect advantage of the

general's established military trust, making full use of it as well as of the personal bond they share. This combination proves to be deadly when stacked against Othello's domestic trust in Desdemona, who has unfortunately accompanied her husband on his mission to isolated, vengeful Cyprus and unknowingly entered herself into a mortal competition against Iago for Othello's confidence.

Othello's deeply rooted military code takes precedence in the militarized-domestic setting of Cyprus. Unfortunately, Othello's military trust in Iago all too easily trumps his domestic trust in his new bride, with whom he has yet to develop a significant rapport of intimacy. Othello's trust in Iago is further aided by the fact that although the Turkish fleet has been destroyed in the storm, the Venetian soldiers remain on active duty in Cyprus. Another Turkish attack is possible at any time, and as the general of the army, Othello must be ready and at full attention at all times to answer any coming threat. He has no reason to suspect that his trusted subordinate, Iago, is lying to him regarding anything at all, including the domestic matter of Desdemona's fidelity. Desdemona's very presence in Cyprus puts her in grave danger. There, working against her are the militarized-domestic setting; her own good, trusting nature which prevents her from suspecting Iago; her blind love, devotion, and loyalty to an unravelling Othello, which in Cyprus prevents her from effectively advocating for herself; Othello's military moral code and status; the military dynamics that exist between Othello and Iago; Iago's masterful scheming; and Cyprus itself.

Iago cleverly weaves Othello's imbalance of domestic and military trust into his web of destruction. While Shaw argues that Iago's acute feelings of betrayal in response to Othello passing him over for promotion in favor of Cassio are understandable from a military perspective, Iago's actions are certainly not excusable. Shaw also draws a parallel between Othello and Iago in their extreme reactions to having their trust betrayed. Othello's sense of betrayal and his fall from grace occur during the play, while Iago's fall occurs before the play begins, but both men are given over to the poison of their resentment on the vengefully fertile soil of Cyprus, where, due to the presence of their wives, all hell is willing and most able to rapidly break loose in the hybrid military-domestic setting.

It is clear that domestic and military life do not mix well in *Othello* and that the militarized domesticity in the garrison in Cyprus plays a significant role in the destruction of Othello and Desdemona's marriage. Another contributing reason behind this is that, "soldiers do not go on operations with their civilian spouses and partners, based on the long-held view that the two strongest human urges – for sex and violence – should be kept apart" (Shaw 4). This view proves true for Othello and Desdemona, who do not survive Cyprus and Iago's combined assault on their union. The urgings of cuckoldry against Desdemona by Othello's trusted fellow soldier, Iago, during an active mission inspire a targeted and misplaced violence against their otherwise protected union. Iago is able to unleash a perfect storm upon Othello and Desdemona's marriage on the volatile, domestic-militarized soil of chaotic Cyprus where sex and violence converge.

Emilia's domestic presence in militarized Cyprus also proves to be

dangerously out of place, contributing to tragedy in the convoluted quarters of the island as she finally and fatefully decides to do her husband's bidding. Emilia steals Desdemona's handkerchief and gives it to her husband; while her actions initially allow Iago's scheme to move forward, sealing Desdemona and Othello's fate, they seal Emilia and Iago's fate, as well. Emilia attempts to set things right, confessing her own crime and accusing Iago of being responsible for orchestrating Othello's murder of Desdemona, but this accusation prompts Iago to kill her in a defensive rage. Desdemona and Emilia arrive with their husbands in the contained and isolated world of tempestuous, militarized Cyprus where domesticity, regardless of its motives or intentions, is unprotected and denatured by the heated, violent chaos of the island. Desdemona and Emilia are at the mercy of the men around them, most notably their husbands, who are ready and available for the actions of war. Those actions of war are, instead, unleashed against Othello and Iago's own domestic partners. In Cyprus, rather than being protected by their husbands, Desdemona and Emilia are murdered by them.

Language within the play serves to further emphasize militarized domesticity in Cyprus. Othello calls Desdemona his "fair warrior" (2.1.180), Desdemona refers to herself as an "unhandsome warrior" (3.4.152), and Cassio calls Desdemona "our great captain's captain" (2.1.74). Desdemona is not a warrior, however, and she is certainly not Othello's captain. There is no evidence that Desdemona is familiar with the inner workings of military life or strategy, and although her motives in petitioning Othello for Cassio's reinstatement are noble, she crosses the line of civilian domesticity directly into Iago's trap, inserting herself into militarized, political territory in which she does not belong by virtue of lack of knowledge, experience, and military status. Furthermore, she is wholly unaware that her willing, well-intentioned interference is an orchestrated ambush against her, carefully planned by Iago. Desdemona does not succeed in having Cassio reinstated. Instead, her repetitive pleadings on Cassio's behalf only serve to stoke the fire of Othello's growing rage against her, which is kindled by Iago and fanned by the winds of Cyprus.

Desdemona's strengths, which ensured her safety and happiness in Venice, prove to be her downfall in Cyprus as she stubbornly continues to trust in the strength and safety of her and Othello's union despite his apparent unravelling and growing cruelty toward her. Othello is unrecognizable in Cyprus. In Act 4, scene 1, he becomes enraged, striking Desdemona in front of her cousin Lodovico (l. 239), who, shocked at this uncharacteristic behavior on Othello's part states, "[T]his would not be believed in Venice / Though I should swear I saw't" (ll. 241-42) and soon after asks,

> Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
> Call all in all sufficient? This the nature
> Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
> The shot of accident nor dart of chance
> Could neither graze nor pierce? […]
> Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain? (ll. 264-69)

During Othello's later verbal assault on Desdemona, he calls her an "impudent strumpet" (4.2.82) and a "cunning whore" (4.2.91).

Othello becomes unhinged before her very eyes, yet Desdemona's sense of impending doom does not overpower her devotion and love for Othello or her trust in him. She verbalizes her intuition, instructing Emilia to "shroud [her] / in one of these same [wedding bed] sheets" (4.3.22-23) should she die, and then proceeds to discuss and sing the foreboding "Willow Song" (4.3.24-56). Desdemona is unable to successfully plead the case of her innocence and love for Othello; her words and her love serve instead to seal her own demise. As Desdemona is dying, when Emilia asks, "who hath done / This deed?" Desdemona replies, "Nobody. I myself. Farewell" (5.2.121-22). Tragically, her trust proves fatally misplaced in Cyprus, as the laws which govern both Desdemona and Othello's love, along with their respective strengths, betray the couple and keep justice well out of their reach.

Unlike in Venice, in Cyprus Desdemona's strengths become a vehicle of her destruction as she loses her ability to effectively navigate them, and they quickly become her undoing. Desdemona can no longer wield her voice in Cyprus. Her words, which were so effective in Venice, fail her both in her domestic and military campaigns in Cyprus. Unknowingly and with the best of intentions regarding her advocacy to Othello for Cassio's reinstatement, motivated not only by her trust and goodness, but also by her love, devotion and loyalty to Othello, she talks and pleads her way onto the path of her own demise, which she is then unable to talk or plead herself off of. In Act 5, scene 2, despite vehemently insisting on her love, loyalty, and innocence and passionately begging for his mercy, Desdemona is murdered by Othello.

Justice and the lines between the domestic and the military are critically blurred in Cyprus, resulting in devastation. Timothy Turner illustrates the impact which this military justice has on Desdemona's untimely fate:

> Military justice governs Cyprus. […] Othello, for a brief time, is sovereign of the "warlike isle" [2.1.43; 2.3.54], including its "town of war" [2.3.2109], and its "general camp" [3.3.348]. The play accordingly depicts an episode of summary justice. When Othello suspects Desdemona has committed a crime, he demands "ocular proof" [3.3.363] that in his mind justifies her execution. In act four, scene two, he interrogates her and demands that she confess her infidelity. When Desdemona declares her innocence, Othello refuses to believe her. Only one answer will satisfy him, and her refusal simply confirms her guilt and justifies her death. This execution is, in a sense, the enforcement of Othello's obligations and powers as the military governor of Cyprus. (114)

Desdemona's love-inspired words of defense, which prevailed in Venice, fail her in Cyprus, where Othello's political power substantially increases and his proclivity towards "balance, fortune and evenhandedness" is dismantled completely. Unfortunately, the admirable traits he displayed throughout his life and certainly in

Venice are inverted into a fatal poison in a matter of days in Cyprus. Desdemona does not understand military dynamics, she is unaware of Othello's potent military compass, and she is ignorant of the festering, rapidly growing danger posed by a husband afflicted by Iago's poisonous cunning. Desdemona's civilian and domestic attitudes and actions in militarized Cyprus unwittingly challenge Othello's instinctive military focus on the Venetian mission and simultaneously feed the misplaced, unjustified, growing outrage and impatience he develops towards her in those few days, courtesy of Iago and the astounding setting of charged confusion and tension provided by Cyprus.

In Cyprus, Othello falls prey to the subversion of both his own strengths, as well as Iago's schemes. As a confident, experienced, warrior general running the garrison on Cyprus, Othello finds himself under significant, conflicting psychological pressures arising from military dynamics present both in his own character and in the bizarre domesticated operational circumstances into which he and the other characters are thrust. Had the lines between the domestic and the military not been so unceremoniously crossed, Othello would have prevailed in this mission, as he had prevailed in so many other missions thus far in his life. While the military dynamics of Cyprus are not understood by Desdemona, and although they are understood to a point by Othello, they are best understood and manipulated by Iago, who uses the domestic-militarized setting of Cyprus to exploit Othello's trust and advance his own vengeful plot.

The seemingly invulnerable Iago also falls victim to the perfect pandemonium of Cyprus. His own tricksterly brilliance, which worked very well for him in Venice, traps him in his own ruse in Cyprus, where "events spiral out of his control and his gambles get more extreme" (Shaw 2). This sloppiness is uncharacteristic of Iago. Having pledged to "[practice] upon [Othello's] peace and quiet / Even to madness" (2.1.308-09), Iago's success in doing so ultimately destroys him as well in Cyprus. Although he is able to successfully ensnare Othello and Desdemona in his web, he soon after entangles himself in it by making a series of increasingly frantic, poorly executed moves, beginning with haphazardly killing Roderigo, then Emilia. These actions lead one to believe Iago also is swiftly unraveling, losing the upper hand in the game of destruction to Cyprus. It becomes inarguably apparent he has missed the zenith of his villainous greatness while running himself ragged along the coordinates of the Citadel on Cyprus.

While Iago's designs initially succeed in militarized Cyprus due to the domestic presence and unknowing participation of Desdemona and Emilia, the women's presence also simultaneously traps Iago in his own game. In a mad explosion of uncalculated desperation, in a room full of important witnesses, Iago murders a grieving, impassioned Emilia for exposing his schemes. Justice for Iago's victims is immediately vowed by the witnesses. There is no way Iago can possibly talk his way out of this, nor does he attempt to. He has resigned himself to defeat, bested by Cyprus. Iago, too, along with Othello and Desdemona, is foiled by his own subverted strengths, which are warped by the close quarters and chaos of Cyprus.

If one were to measure by blood and body count, Cyprus emerges as the conquering victor of *Othello*, having ravaged Turks and Venetians alike. Othello, Desdemona, and Iago find themselves too far from the safety of the favorable atmosphere of Venice, which had been conducive to their strengths and well-being; instead, they suffer indefensible attacks from dangerously menacing and malignant Cyprus. Had Desdemona stayed behind in protective Venice, the chain reaction of events that culminate in the tragedies of *Othello* would have been avoided: Emilia would have stayed behind with Desdemona; Iago's self-destructive machinations against Othello might not have been so expeditiously successful; Desdemona would not have had the opportunity to fail so miserably in her ill-fated domestic and military dealings in Cyprus; and Othello's as yet developing trust in Desdemona would not have rivaled his soldierly trust of Iago while under the duress of active duty.

Othello's indomitable character and military prowess, Desdemona's potent voice and loving nature, and Iago's brilliance and perfect, villainous tricksterdom endured unmitigated corruption under Cyprus's unrelenting offensive siege. The island expertly ambushed each character in its vengeful grip. Even loquacious Iago has been silenced, vowing in his last line never to speak again - forgoing his final opportunity to break the fourth wall (5.2.301). He imparts no further confidence to his audience, leaving them evermore without closure. Cyprus has left Iago speechless. And yet, *what we know, we know*. Iago will follow Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, Roderigo, and the decimated Turkish fleet unto death and extinction. Cyprus has proven to be an unsuspected, merciless opponent, wielding the subversive weights of its violent history and its deadly, confined, militarized-domestic setting against heroes and villains alike. Finally, we know that having bested the otherwise unmatched Iago, the greatest of all of Shakespeare's tricksters is the island of Cyprus – which has shown itself to be a tempest impossible to bear out.

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“Who Invented the Typical Girl?”: Geoffrey Chaucer’s the Wife of Bath as Punk Icon

SARA WALLS

The Wife of Bath is a controversial character, perhaps the most controversial out of Geoffrey Chaucer’s pilgrim pantheon. Her fiercely radical ideology inherently falls outside the proposed, socially acceptable, established mode of thought, pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable within medieval society. This rejection of social norms is especially remarkable considering the Wife’s social status and gender. Through Mary Wolf’s dissertation, *We Accept You, One of Us?: Punk Rock Community and Individualism in an Uncertain Era, 1974-1985*, we come to understand that the difficultly-defined punk ethos is closely tied in philosophy to other progressive movements that empowered women and centered their experiences. Punk’s philosophical ties to second-wave feminism set the tone for how these same traits are expressed within the Wife’s character. Her intentional nose-thumbing and wicked parody of popular romantic tropes within her *Tale* boarder on the anarchic and mirror the rebellious qualities of punk, utilizing these irreverent qualities to maintain her position as a powerful married woman within medieval society. In *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), the Wife of Bath subverts medieval expectations of married women by being individualistic and candid, by embracing non-conformity, and by holding a determined cynicism of societal authority. These antiestablishment qualities, tenants of the punk movement of the late twentieth century, characterize her as ultimately a feminist, proto-punk icon for the Middle Ages.

To understand The Wife, or Alisoun (or Alice as critics and scholars often call her), through the lens of punk she must be established as a feminist character. Wolf notes, “we must recognize that women in the subculture built upon not only important female predecessors in popular music but also social developments like second-wave feminism” (259). It is often argued that Alisoun is a feminist character in her own right, so the connection between feminism and punk is not a difficult one to make. Punk is “in many ways…an ‘anti’ movement: anti-hippie, anti-corporate establishment, anti-suburban middle class” (Wolf 11). This “anti” philosophy is therefore not hard to apply to Alisoun’s own divergent “anti’s”: anti-patriarchy, anti-perfection, anti-sexual suppression. Evidence of Alisoun’s ties to feminism are obvious, or at least ties to an argument of female empowerment, a goal of second-wave feminism. Specific to the music scene in the late twentieth century, punk worked to liberate and empower women within the scene, similar to how Alisoun worked to liberate and empower herself: “[T]he substratum of Alice's argumentation is the morally revolutionary concept of sexual equality. She argues from equality in ‘debitum’ to equality in grace (in the ‘gentillesse’ passage), to equality in power, to equality in happiness” (Long 275). In fact, the arguments within her prologue are theorized to be “built up from a vast medieval repertoire of anti-feminist literature and

theorized to be "built up from a vast medieval repertoire of anti-feminist literature and debate" (Kolve and Olson 387). Some contemporary thinkers of the Middle Ages and before considered women to be preoccupied with vain, earthly matters, and they accused women of being jealous and shrew-like in such pursuits. One such thinker is Theophrastus (c. 371-287 BCE) in his *Golden Book on Marriag*e, a text which vilified women and argued against the institution of marriage. Theophrastus categorized them as thoroughly vexing creatures who exist to torment the likes of men, making for a severe review of women altogether. (The work was, perhaps, actually written by St. Jerome in his treatise *Against Jovinian* [c. 393 CE], wherein *Golden Book on Marriage* was first published). St. Jerome's *Against Jovinian* is mentioned and discussed within the Wife's prologue, which Alisoun categorizes as a "book of wikked wyves" (l. 685). The Wife goes on to critique the work, stating that "By God, if wommen hadde writen stories, / As clerkes han withinne hir oratories, / They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse" (ll. 693-95). She orates a scathing review of St. Jerome's work, reducing him to a clerk and dismissing his ideas as nothing more than baseless wickedness. The ideas presented by St. Jerome are directly addressed within her prologue, making the prologue an anti-patriarchy response to the abject misogyny displayed. This fierce reaction by Chaucer for Alisoun solidifies her as a feminist, or at least a pro-woman, anti-misogynist character. This characterization is additionally reinforced by the traditionalist reaction to her and Chaucer's ideas by modern critics. Walter Long cites critic David Reid, in his commentary on Alisoun's radical behaviors and ideas:

> The last main idea held in common by traditionalists is that the Wife, in her "ludicrous" attempt to subvert the "natural" order, is immoral. Reid asserts this with a vengeance. Citing a "post-Coleridgean" "Romantic transvaluation of all values, by which cupidity becomes the root of all morality" through "the eternal feminine," [Reid] claims that it is only by means of this perspective that the Wife's immorality can be excused. But, he says, such a viewpoint "must be indeed hermetic" to find any "redeeming" virtues in the Wife. He argues that such a perspective is either extravagant irony, which holds that she is a special, irreducibly individual case, a "scandal," except in her own terms, or it is "somehow crooked," and should be dismissed. He dismisses it, suggesting that "Chaucer meant her for a bad lot." (275)

Reid's reaction to Alisoun's counter-culture ideas not only reduces her character to nothing more than an amoral simpleton, completely erasing her incredibly sharp intelligence; but to categorize Alisoun as "immoral" for subverting the "natural" order is to de-legitimize the entire female gender. Further, to define the "natural" order in such a way is to legitimize a male supremacy over women as a whole, a dangerous and archaic ideology. However, traditionalist reaction to Alisoun as radical and unnatural defines her character as being anti-traditionalist and therefore pro-feminist. Establishing Alisoun as a feminist allows us to contextualize her within the framework

of twentieth-century punks. Utilizing ideology from progressive pro-woman movements, women in punk continues to subvert the traditional ideal much as Alisoun does within her prologue.

Alisoun's individuality is shown in her personality and actions, which sometimes border on the selfish and self-obsessed. Similarly, focus on the self is key to the identity of those in the punk movement. Wolf states, "Generally punks can agree to the loose notion that 'punk is an attitude/individuality is the key.' It was a yearning to be different, to distance oneself from the mainstream mass of society" (1). She explains that the punk ethos begins at the personal, revolving around what the singular participant does for the community and how they can challenge the mainstream through their individual action. The individuality Wolf mentions is evident within Alisoun's behavior, especially when compared to the attitudes of women within the punk movement, who often "adopted outrageous stances that challenged traditional feminine roles" (259). One of the major ways we see this "[challenge of] traditional feminine roles" in Chaucer's Wife is through her disregard of society's judgement.

When we are first introduced to Alisoun in "The General Prologue" of *The Canterbury Tales*, a picture of a woman free of shame and self-consciousness is conjured from Chaucer's description. She is described as: well-dressed, amply skilled — but not a tradeswoman—well-travelled, wealthy, proud, and ready for a good time. Alisoun appears to the reader almost larger than life and in deep contrast to the quiet and pious women in the pilgrim's company. The two characteristics that stand out most strongly from her description are her deep pride and her love of "companye" (ll. 461). Chaucer describes her performative generosity in church:

> In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon
> That to the offering bifore hir sholde goon;
> And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
> That she was out of alle charitee. (ll. 449-52)[1]

Here it is described how angry she becomes if another wife within her parish went before her to the offering during church services. Here Alisoun's pride eclipses her desire to conform to social norms, a selfish example of her individuality. The second characteristic is her love of "companye" (l. 461) Within the text Chaucer describes her as bold, fair, and red faced (l. 454); he continues describing her married life:

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[1] It is important to note that Chaucer's "chairitee" and charity for the use of this essay hold different meanings. "Chairitee" for Chaucer's purpose translates as outward love, most directly "Love for her neighbor" ("Interlinear," "General"), whereas the modern use of charity as utilized within this essay is defined, in the Oxford English Dictionary, as "without any specially Christian associations: Love, kindness, affection, natural affection: now esp. with some notion of generous or spontaneous goodness" (2. a.) or "as manifested in action: spec. alms-giving" (4. b.).

> Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde five,
> Withouten other companye in youthe—
> But therof nedeth nat to speke as nouthe— […]
> In felawschipe wel coude she laugh and carpe.
> Of remedyes of love she knew per chaunce,
> For she coude of that art the olde daunce. (ll. 460-62; 474-76)

From this description the reader learns more about her past and some of her more salacious behaviors, specifically, the double-entendre of the word "daunce." The proximity of the word coupled with the line above, "in felawshipe wel coude she laugh and carpe," carries the obvious, surface-level meaning of an actual dance amongst people, in "fellowship" ("Interlinear," "General"). But a more sexual double-meaning exists. When Chaucer writes, "Of remedyes of love she knew…" and follows with the mention of "that art the olde daunce," a more sexual connotation arises. A few lines before Chaucer describes her as a married woman and curiously mentions, "Withouten [Not to mention] other companye in youthe" followed by an aside to the reader translated to "But there is no need to speak of that right now" ("Interlinear," "General"). This mention of "companye" by Chaucer is an allusion to extramarital affairs, or at the very least romantic dalliances in her youth, and, as Paul Olson notes, female sexual desire was heavily suppressed and deemed sinful (99). Embracing her sexuality and pride goes against the accepted behaviors of the time, which adds another aspect to her individuality.

The Wife continues to display her unapologetic individualism through the treatment of her husbands. Within her prologue she continuously regales her dominant experiences and preaches the need for women to hold "sovereyntee" (l. 1038), over men, specifically within marriage:

> An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette,
> Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
> And have his tribulacioun withal
> Upon his flessh, whyl that I am his wyf.
> I have the power duringe al my lyf
> Upon his propre body, and noght he. (ll. 154-159)

Alisoun's dominance, emphasized by her words "an housbonde…shal be bothe my dettour and my thral [slave]," demonstrates a power imbalance, which is evident not only in her decision making, as she proclaims with her argument for "sovereyntee," but financial matters as well. Dolores Palomo posits that "Medieval Christianity extol[s] the virtue of virginity while the social order forced upon women the necessity of marriage," which causes "an increasingly money-conscious society [transforming] marriage into commercial arrangement at the expense of sexual and emotional values" (305). Alisoun displays "shrewish" behavior toward her husbands by "feign[ing] satisfaction and abandon[ing] her search for sexual fulfillment. [She]

triumphs in marital bickering, gossiping, skittering after social diversion, grasping for money and luxuries" (Palomo 307). The connection between general martial dissatisfaction and the abuse of her martial privileges are certainly evident. These kind of selfish acts, or at least selfish (perhaps even sinful) by medieval standards, indicate Alisoun's dismissal of medieval social ethics and creates a character that is far more interested in assuming power within her relationships than following contemporary moral and ethical codes. The focus upon her own success rather than the socially-prescribed, traditional need to be an obedient wife exemplifies how individual she truly is.

A third aspect of Alisoun's individuality is her clear independence. Abandonment of the fear of unescorted travel plays an important role for women within punk. Wolf notes that "In addition to being scene-makers, women in punk asserted their power and broke new ground by claiming street culture for themselves. Both literally and figuratively, the 'street' traditionally has been seen as male terrain… urban streets [were seen] as grimy, dangerous, and debasing," similar to the reputation of roads in medieval Europe (282-83). Wolf continues, "In [the] dominant mainstream take, women should be sheltered from the life of the street. And good girls certainly did not seek out street culture. In contrast, punk women embraced street life, actively inserting themselves into it" (283). This independence of punk women to embrace the street, or road, and travel without an escort parallels Alison's own independence to move freely throughout the continent. In "The General Prologue," the Wife is described as travelling all over Europe:

> And thryes hadde she been at Jerusalem.
> She hadde passed many a straunge streem:
> At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
> In Galice at Seint Jame, and at Coloinge;
> She coude muchel of wandringe by the weye. (ll. 463-67)

Despite travelling to Canterbury within a group, the Wife travels alone, without a personal companion or husband. Additionally, Chaucer's distinct mention of her knowledge "of wanderinge by the weye" implies she not only travels internationally alone, but also seems to take her time and has worthy experience in "wandering." Women often avoided roads, as they were dangerous. Highway men or ruffians often preyed upon travelers, robbing, raping, and usually murdering them. As a singular woman Alisoun would make an easy target. The implication that she travels all these places unaccompanied is evident to her independence (and bravery), as she trusts herself to stay safe and avoid such dangers rather than relying upon the added security of a man to escort her. These three attributes showcase Alisoun's individualism. She "fights to be a human self," Palomo states, and "we cannot decide whether [Chaucer] has created a bad example of intemperate womanhood or a woman admirable in herself affirmation against the constrictions of medieval society" (317). This observation typifies the same argument held about women in the early punk;

embracing individuality moves the Wife of Bath outside of society.

In addition to valuing her individuality, Alisoun is extraordinarily candid, almost scandalously so. Candor also was highly valued and encouraged within the punk movement: "[Y]oung people could be sincerely genuine in expressing their emotions" (Wolf 5). Such emotional outbursts would exemplify the culture, from angry, explosive musical acts, to being politically vocal, or projecting contrarianism for the sake of contrarianism. Alisoun certainly embraces this aspect; her entire prologue is a verbal manifesto on the rights of wives and a detailed recounting of her risqué adventures in marriage. The candor displayed by Alisoun is often translated by critics as example of "her bawdy and raucous character" (Pugh 115), not, as Long would write, an example of Alice, the "master rhetorician," and Alice, the "wys woman." He goes on to state, "the Wife displays extraordinary argumentative ability, exemplified in her[…] marriage 'debitum' […], in her drawing of fine distinctions (as between apostolic precept and counsel), and in her sarcasm (for example, against friars)" (273). Long's statements are demonstrated in her prologue, most predominantly when she discusses her husbands. Alisoun says,

> How pitously a-night I made hem swinke,
> And by my fey, I tolde of it no stor.
> They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;
> Me neded nat do lenger diligence
> To winne hir love, or doon hem reverence. (ll. 202-06)

Openly mocking her husbands, Alisoun confesses to a group of strangers, predominantly men, that she took their "lond [land] and…tersoor [wealth]." Her use of the word "swinke" in connection to "a-night" also lends a sexual connotation. The implication she seduced her husbands out of house and home would have been revolting to her companions. She continues by detailing the abuses she made against her husbands, "I governed hem so wel after my lawe / […] I chidde hem spitously" (ll. 219; 23). This excerpt typifies her treatment of her spouses, or how she "maintained the upper hand" within their unions (Palomo 306).

The candor within her speech intensifies as she openly discusses her sexual appetites. Throughout her prologue the reader gathers a very clear picture of how the Wife sees her own sexual prowess and how she embodies her sexuality, eventually "proclaiming her natural lustiness and announcing her disdain for status in choosing a mate. Short or tall, black or white, poor or wealthy, of low rank or high --no matter to her as long as she is pleased" (Palomo 309). Her attitude, however, changes with the entrance of her last, or rather most recent, husband, Janekyn, of whom she professes to the pilgrims:

> God lete his soule nevere come in helle!
> And yet was he to me the moste shrewe.
> That fele I on my ribbes al by rewe,

> And evere shal unto myn ending day.
> But in our bed he was so fresh and gay. (ll. 504-08)

Regardless of her love for her fifth husband, these innuendo-laden expressions and outright confessions press the boundaries of social norms. Relating the intimate details of her love life, regarding Janekyn's "shrewe"-like behavior within their union, creates an uncomfortable mix of confession, conflict, and reminiscence. Diametrically opposite behaviors, care and violence, showcase how she "exploits to the hilt the masculine fear of female sexuality" by speaking so openly about it (Long 276). Where some critics use these statements to attack her "immoral" character, others reference "her long speech…as another example of her aggressive self-defensiveness. When thwarted, she hits back with whatever is handy" (Palomo 306). Palomo suggests a picture of a wild creature pushed into a corner by the atrocities of the patriarchal society rather than a tight-fisted shrew, but however Alisoun's words are politicized, the truth of her words can only be characterized as outspoken and indeed candid. Such frankness fits well into the expressive qualification Wolf puts forth regarding the punk movement: Alisoun is indeed "sincerely genuine in expressing [her] emotions" and unabashedly speaking her mind regardless of the content or her audience (5).

Alisoun's brazen individualism and bright candor forms a strong base for another characteristic, her drastic opposition to social conformity. This notion in particular was very important to the punks, as "the [punk] ethos grew out of a deep sense of boredom with mainstream popular culture. The subculture celebrated effort and sincerity over professionalism and polish; it called for people to do it now rather than wait to be able do it perfectly" (Wolf 4). The deviation from conformity is most evident in Alisoun's rejection of medieval religious perfection. Donald Howard addresses how the Wife "attempts to undermine the medieval idea of perfection." He finds:

> "Perfection" was, in short, a relative term. […] Accordingly, in the various means by which perfection could be cultivated—poverty, virginity, prayer, and so on—there were degrees or grades.
>
> This principle of grades underlies the medieval attitude toward marriage. There were three grades of chastity—marriage, widowhood, and virginity; these were said to produce various rates of return […]. In this way the Pauline view that it is better to marry than to burn (I Cor. 7:9) was developed into a system where marriage was an allowable and righteous state but less meritorious than widowhood or virginity. […] And on such grounds Augustine had written that, although remarriage was not condemned, it was more desirable for a widow not to remarry. (225)

Alisoun does not follow this doctrine of perfection but instead rejects it, continuing to re-marry for her own gain and seeming to play a game of moral mathematics to justify her "imperfection." She calls into question the logic of needing to strive for virginity:

> For hadde God commanded maydenhede,
> Thanne hadde he dampned wedding with the dede.
> And certes, if ther were no seed y-sowe,
> Virginitee, thane wherof sholde it growe? […]
> But this word is nat take of every wight,
> But ther as God list give it of his might. […]
> Al nis but conseil to virginitee. (ll. 69-72; 77-78; 82)

Her reaction to popular doctrine about this subject is a clear deviation from the social norm, calling out these teachings with her statement, "Al nis but conseil to viginitee", which translates to, "All is nothing but advice to adopt virginity" ("Interlinear," "Wife"), as virginity propaganda. Questioning religious doctrine, and socially accepted truths about how to achieve "perfection" or rather holiness and godliness, further supports her opposition to these kinds of social rules.

Alisoun's blatant snubbing of medieval social order is shown also in her way of dress. Within "The General Prologue" we see her dressed in defiance of her social class, and the appropriation of clothing is similarly central to the "punk sensibility." Wolf describes the phenomenon as a "love affair with pastiche" (5). Drawing from postmodern ideas, punks parodied various aspects of high and lowbrow culture to "Frankenstein" their image. Alisoun exhibits the same kind of parodying in her own dress; Chaucer describes her as wearing:

> Hir covercheifs ful fyne were of ground;
> I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
> That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.
> Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
> Ful streite y-tyed, and shoos ful moiste and newe. (ll. 453-57)

Chaucer's description of her garments adds important context to Alisoun's character. During the Middle Ages social class ruled society, and garments were an expression of someone's class and occupation. Often, garments, such a veils and wimples of fine cloth, and clothing dyes directly indicated a person's status. Alisoun is here described as wearing clothing of an upper-class lady ("fyne…covercheifs" and "reed…hosen"), even someone of royal importance or belonging to the nobility at that time (Piponnier and Mane 71). Although wealthy, the Wife is not, of course, nobility. Chaucer describes her as a (talented) seamstress along with her position of "wyf." Her lack of breeding and manners would also be a clear indication of her social status. The pastiche of clothing and behavior is overt, as she appears in the costume of the elite but displays manners of someone of far less repute. The image also is quite scandalous, and it aligns Chaucer's character even more with the socially deviant image of punk when we consider that Alisoun's manner of dress is in fact breaking the law. Sumptuary laws prohibiting English subjects from dressing outside of their own social class were first passed by Edward III under his reign (1312-1377), ten years

before Chaucer began writing *The Canterbury Tales* (Piponnier and Mane 83).

Alisoun's mockery of the law and those outside of her social class indicates her determined cynicism toward societal authority. For punks, their expression was "often tinged with irony because – especially in early punk – they did not believe that society would change for the better. […] Punk rock was one of the many ways in which Americans reconfigured community as they lost faith in authority figures, including politicians, the church, and their elders" (Wolf 5, 8). This "lost faith" is evident within Alisoun's prologue, especially in reference to the church and her elders; she spends much of her prologue challenging their authority within society. She first takes issue with "the notion that virginity, being a higher state than marriage, should be held up as an ideal of conduct" (Howard 224), and puts forth the argument,

> By expres worde? I pray you, telleth me.
> Or where commanded he viginitee? […]
> Men may conseille a womman to been oon,
> But conseilling is no comandement. (61-62, 66-67)

Bringing the reader and pilgrim's attention to this religious and social disconnect highlights her cynicism and lack of faith by arguing that "advice is no commandment" ("Interlinear," "Wife"); it is a reminder to her audience that "the highest counsel of perfection is virginity but…not everyone is expected to follow it" (Howard 224). Alisoun's reminder questions the rather unequal standards for men and women within medieval society, where men are not held to the standard of virginity. (Whether this standard originates from the 'sins of eve' argument or a convenient advantage exploited by the socially powerful, the patriarchy, is yet to be addressed). This inconsistency regarding the standards of virginity appears in the Wife's thoughts surrounding marriage. She addresses the problem of marriage within the Bible, the same doctrine which bade her cling to perfection, using the story of Cana of Galilee and the Samaritan and King Solomon's wives:

> But that I axe, why that the fifthe man
> Was noon housbond to the Samaritan?
> How manye might she have in marriage? […]
> Lo, here the wyse king, daun Salomon;
> I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.
> As wolde God it leveful were unto me
> To be refresshed half so ofte as he! (ll. 21-23; 35-38)

Alisoun's examination of the Bible and how and when it's used to police social behavior stems from an intelligent reading of the original text, which demonstrates Alisoun's independence of thought. This facet of her character has often been overlooked: "Most critics […] privilege the 'wys woman' aspect of Alice's persona over the 'rhetorician.' That is, they subsume her rational argumentative side under her

supposed avaricious nature. In doing so, they" align themselves with the "traditional patriarchal" line of thought (Long 273).

An unconventional but timely way the Wife subverts societal expectations is her appropriation of confession. The concept of "confessional" is a part of "The sacrament of confession [that] serves the Church and its representatives as a technique of power and control, but it also serves the individuals who confess" (Root 254). Alisoun takes and misuses the "authority" of the church by using the pilgrims as her priest. "In her case, it is a question of an unauthorized use of authorities and of manipulating sacramental confession to her own needs, taking it outside the 'way' of salvation and into the marketplace" (Root 254). This kind of selfish confessional is seen in her prologue as she challenges the authority of the church in its knowledge and teachings, as well as flaunts her subversion of her husbands. Jerry Root continues, stating, "her confession is both an appropriation of the word and a lesson in interpretation. She voluntarily, indeed, strategically, reveals her 'privetee' as a way to control and manipulate the conditions of representation" (255). In this selfish co-option, a well-established mode of communication and repentance is truly turned on its head. The Wife of Bath's misappropriation of confessional practice is further evidence to her more radical and antiestablishment character. She completely disregards the authority of the church, who at that time held supreme power over many aspects of life. Considering these actions, and the "breaking [of] 'traditional boundaries' of her society, Alice [proves to be an] Dionysian iconoclast, a 'muraloclast' (one who tears down walls). Yet at the same time that she is destroying, she is beginning to build, in Apollonian fashion, a new moral paradigm" (Long 275). This radical embodiment of traits perfectly frames Alisoun's iconoclastic and anti-patriarchal characteristics as fitting into the punk mold.

While Alisoun's "equalitarian idea is a scandal… that does not necessarily make it immoral" (Long). This view of Alisoun as "equalitarian moral revolutionary accomplishes a unification of the text which cannot be accomplished from within the framework of the conservative, or patriarchal, critical tradition." (Long 282), which is plainly evident from Reid's traditionalist commentary. Alisoun's radical "muraloclastic" perspective aligns with that of women within punk, fully embodying the philosophical ideologies behind the culture as put forth by Mary Wolf. Through defying social norms, relentlessly questioning authority, taking back power within her relationships and parodying the upper classes; she is a chaotic powerhouse willing to break rules and utilize whatever tools she has at her disposal to achieve her goals. Fierce cunning and bold bravado typify the punk spirit, truly categorizing her as an icon for the Middle Ages.

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Judicial Injustice in Elizabethan and Jacobean Theatre

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In Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies, there is a standard narrative of corruption within the court system, evoking a feeling of obligation for the lead avenger to seek a form of justice known as private revenge. I will examine works by Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Middleton to establish that Elizabethan and Jacobean authors channeled moral conflict and the classic revenge qualities, such as those presented in Seneca's *Thyestes* (c. 54-65 CE), to bring attention to their legal and political commentary. Given the thematic prominence of injustice and the vast popularity of revenge tragedies, these plays served as political statements against the social and political injustice within the failing legislative system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England.

Private revenge is a type of justice achieved without legal authority, often through an act of violence. Although the Tudor monarchy moved toward centralized power in sixteenth-century England, private revenge persisted well into the 1600s.[1] Biblical and early modern English law explicitly delineates that revenge is solely reserved for higher power and is out of limits otherwise.[2] According to Derek Dunne, the need to correct the flawed justice system overpowered the consciousness of morality: "Elizabethans knew revenge was wrong, but because of this deep-seated inheritance of revenge, '[t]here would be a few Elizabethans who would condemn the son's blood-revenge on a treacherous murderer whom the law could not apprehend for lack of proper legal evidence'" (17).[3] With poorly developed forensics and the typical mishandling of evidence, murders and crimes were difficult to prove, often allowing the perpetrator to be set free.

In response to ongoing frustration, revenge tragedies acted as a medium to illuminate the flawed justice system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England. The criticism of England's court proved to be popular among audiences and elevated the role of revenge tragedies: "However, in reality, far from unleashing a 'general disrespect for for law,' the treatment of revenge in the early modern theatre tends to replicate, modify and critique legal procedures" (Dunne 17). Playwrights during this

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[1] According to Hannah Lavery, "Quite apart from the threats to public order presented by an individual seeking justice for themselves, such actions presented both a theoretical and a literal challenge to Elizabeth I's legislative bodies." Despite the Tudor monarchy's attempts to centralize power, private revenge continually occurred throughout England.

[2] For the biblical prohibition of private revenge, see Deut. 32:35 and Rom. 12:19: "Dearely beloved, avenge not yourselves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord."

[3] Dunne quotes Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642*, Princeton, 1940, p.11.

era had vast social influence; in utilizing their platform while simultaneously "giving the audience what they want," English playwrights could promote the issue of judicial inefficiency. As this criticism became mainstream within Elizabethan theatre and society, it is apparent how profoundly audiences related. Although revenge was considered morally unjust, audiences nonetheless understood the dangers of public vengeance and projected the need for change. Public revenge inevitably became a common theme of the period.

The popularity of revenge tragedy stemmed from more than solely elevating judicial injustice; the revenge tragedy genre also allowed audiences to confront their political discomfort. As England faced political difficulties, "revenge tragedy provided a way of indirectly addressing the repressed guilts and anxieties arising from the crises of Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the oscillating political fortunes with which they were associated" (Neill 330). With the ongoing political pressure and strain occurring during the Reformation (1517-1648), revenge tragedies served as an outlet that obliquely confronted political components presented during the era. The tragedy genre tackles systematic government issues and the root of frustration for those who have fallen victim. Michael Neill describes the profound influence of revenge tragedy on audiences: "The exceptional power of the genre to compel the early modern imagination, then, had much to do with its ability to mobilize conflicting attitudes toward the subversiveness of personal vengeance." The revenge tragedy genre was not solely recognized for its popularity but for its ability to address how Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences may have felt about the option of private revenge in achieving justice. Although the commentary in revenge tragedies did not create a full-fledged movement for political change, it did allow for audiences to witness private revenge pursued to the fullest extent.

To further understand the popularity of revenge tragedies, we must consider the extent of early modern audiences' distaste for their judicial inequality. According to Tanya Pollard, various societal factors led to the revenge genre's popularity: "Social and political changes in Elizabethan England created a heightened demand for it. Revenge redresses injustice caused by abuses of power, and the distribution of power in this period was not only hierarchical, but increasingly unstable" (59). Given the classism throughout sixteenth-century England, a void was filled by the fictional dramatization of court members facing the consequences of their behavior. Instead of illustrating a perfect judicial system that satisfied the needs of Elizabethans and Jacobeans, "[t]he genre offered the gratifying spectacle of power for those who lacked it and reassured the injured that somehow justice could and would be done" (60). The revenge tragedy genre accomplished both the ideal and impossible for English audiences.

The Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedy has its origins in Seneca's *Thyestes* (c. 62 CE), which became the revenge tragedy template utilized by authors. Aside from *Thyestes's* entertaining moral and dramatic conflict, the play effectively illustrates just how corrupt court members could be. Jessica Winston notes the major fallacies within a hierarchical power system: "As Thyestes reaches its horrifying

conclusion, one sees that riches, crowns, ambitions, and evil hearts do make kings" (39). Contrary to court members' conventional glorification, *Thyestes* brings forward the crown's poor political leadership and personality. King Atreus demonstrates inadequate authority as he believes, "[t]he best thing about being king is making folks accept whatever you do, and even praise it" (205-07). For a king to verbalize his disregard for the morality of his actions and declare absolute power suggests Seneca's sentiments regarding a monarchy. Given how the English early modern court system was *also* committing injustices, this almost satirical narrative presented by King Atreus closely reflected the English audience's view of their monarchs, too. As the demand grew for revenge tragedies, and considering the consensus against the court system, Elizabethan and Jacobean authors subsequently utilized the revenge genre to depict their disadvantaged and inequitable political circumstances. Seneca's social and political implications resonated with these audiences, as they felt their monarchy was failing them, as well.

When considering famous tragedies of the era, such as *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1587), the various integrations of judicial language that describe legal abuse indicate Kyd's undertones of political commentary. The mistreatment and consequence of ineffective law can be seen in *The Spanish Tragedy* when Hieronimo says, "For blood with blood shall, while I sit as judge, / Be satisfied, and the law discharged" (3.6.35-36). Frustrated at being unable to achieve justice for his son, Hieronimo alludes to seeking private revenge with his words, "For blood with blood," by suggesting that one who kills must be killed himself. Hieronimo's remarks demonstrate that he believes defying the law is the only manner of truly achieving justice, despite initially believing the opposite. As Thomas Kyd develops Hieronimo's distaste for the unfair judicial process and embeds the idea of a failing judicial system, Kyd exemplifies how Elizabethan authors integrated social and political commentary into their written works.

In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the internal conflict between private revenge through human self-governance and revenge determined by God becomes increasingly pronounced in a failed judicial system. In Hieronimo's desire for justice, he does not *initially* pursue private vengeance. However, the injustice that consistently occurs *because* of the inadequate judicial system provokes Hieronimo to feel as if he is obligated to avenge his son's death himself. The failure of the court as seen in *The Spanish Tragedy* was common in the English legal system of the time: "In an age in which England lacked an efficient police system, it would have been difficult to detect crimes while they were unfolding, which would have led, in turn, to a number of legal cases whose outcomes hinged upon largely unverifiable accusations" (Semenza 54). Given the inability to verify Horatio's murder suspects, this legal environment, like England's flawed and unadvanced system, leads directly to Hieronimo's madness and murder.

As the ineffective court in *The Spanish Tragedy* epitomized a common circumstance for Elizabethans, it also idealized the conditions for pursuing private revenge. The overwhelming resentment toward the consistent injustice further

promoted other avenues of achieving legal equity. According to Gregory Semenza, "Kyd's play argues that—regardless of either God's or gods' roles in the cosmic scheme of things¬—the absence of effective *human* justice systems leads to destructive forms of self-government" (58). If an effective judicial system is not in place, individuals often find alternatives that accomplish the same result. Private means of justice occur when Hieronimo cannot accept Isabella's words that God is the only revenger. He soon realizes he cannot achieve justice through legal means:

> Thus must we toil in other men's extremes,
> That know not how to remedy our own,
> And do them justice, when unjustly we,
> For all our wrongs, can compass no redress.
> But shall I never live to see the day
> That I may come, by justice of the heavens,
> To know the cause that may my cares allay?
> This toils my body, this consumeth age,
> That only I to all men just must be,
> And neither gods nor men be just to me. (3.6.1-10)

Hieronimo seems to understand the irony in his position as a judge who seeks justice for others but cannot achieve justice for himself. Although Hieronimo "to all men just must be," his dispensation of justice is unrequited, as "neither gods nor men be just" to him. Through his frustration, he only accomplishes revenge after determining he cannot achieve it through God's will. Through Kyd's characterization of Hieronimo and his inability to seek legal revenge, Kyd channels Elizabethan audiences' potential frustration at the time.

As *The Spanish Tragedy* laid the framework for Elizabethan revenge tragedy, it influenced the works of Shakespeare and Middleton. For example, Shakespeare's first revenge tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* (c. 1590-93), presents a more gruesome storyline that channels the original Senecan drama. Given the injustices performed by the heads of the English court, Shakespeare highlights both the ineffective judicial system and flaws in the distribution of power. Derek Dunne discusses how *Titus Andronicus* comments on the failing judicial system of Elizabethan England: "*Titus Andronicus* responds perceptively to the dangers of a weakened jury, in particular the jury's role as interpreter of the available evidence" (50). Just as Titus' oldest sons face baseless accusations for a murder they did not commit, the existing Elizabethan English system did not rely on concrete evidence and allowed for incorrect court rulings. *Titus Andronicus* allows for a dramatized scenario that further explores the threat of the ineffective judicial system of sixteenth-century England. In the play, equilibrium and satisfying the need for retribution are attained after much suffering and death. Kenji Yoshino discusses the consequences of pursuing private revenge: "*Titus* is representative of Elizabethan revenge tragedy in depicting wild justice as the natural choice, but a choice that necessarily dooms the revenger and his society" (209). As

Titus accomplishes revenge, he and many others face their gruesome execution. A practical and unbiased justice system would have prevented multiple unnecessary deaths. In these ways, *Titus Andronicus* is a hyperbolized depiction of the consequence of a weak judicial system, including that of Elizabethan England.

Shakespeare's revenge tragedy *Hamlet* can be seen to criticize English law, as well. Thomas Regnier notes that the "law of the foreign setting may be a factor in some plays, but most of the legal rules and jargon are from English law" (108). Throughout *Hamlet*, there are various instances of legal terminology and ideas, including both statutory and common law of England. Specifically, when considering the law of suicide or Hamlet's property, *"Hamlet* contains legal issues that parallel watershed events, particularly [those] that concerned homicide and property law" (Regnier 107). Understanding the connection between English law and *Hamlet*, despite the difference in setting, is pivotal in deciphering Shakespeare's political commentary against the increasingly unstable power dynamic in Elizabethan England. Queen Elizabeth I held a close connection with Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584), a possibly libelous criticism of Dudley, speculated that he had poisoned individuals in order to get closer to the crown. Regnier discusses the possibility of a real-life Claudius that inspired *Hamlet*: "Might Leicester thus be a partial model for King Claudius, who poisons his brother to gain the crown?" (124). It is compelling enough to consider that Shakespeare may have written *Hamlet* as a political statement against the acts that occurred in the Elizabethan court. Nevertheless, Shakespeare repeatedly integrates the idea of injustice due to a power dynamic and failing judicial system.

From the beginning of Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy,* it is evident that an injustice has been committed at the highest levels. In the first five lines, Vindice says, "Duke, royal lecher. Go, grey-haired adultery; / And thou his son, as impious steeped as he; / And thou his bastard, true-begot in evil; / And thou his duchess, that will do with the devil. / Four exc'llent characters" (1.1.1-5). Vindice explicitly expresses his hatred for these characters and provides instant background on his motive for revenge. Middleton similarly shows how private revenge decreases the value of justice: "The play's sententious moralizing thus serves as a kind of debased currency of moral commentary in an immoral society, similar in this respect to the way private vengeance serves as a debased form of justice" (Engle 1300). Although private revenge did not necessarily achieve justice, it was the only manner of attaining a form of retribution in a weakened judicial system. *The Revenger's Tragedy* emphasizes a corruption within the court system that consequently prevents justice from occurring in an organic and public manner. Middleton, like Kyd, strategically places the weight of initial crime on court members, such as the Duke, perhaps as a political statement against England's failing judicial system.

The social and political climate in Elizabethan and Jacobean England created a collective sentiment within the audience against the judicial system. As revenge tragedies thrived, they increasingly offered an outlet that illustrated justice against high society members. Due to English classism, however, justice was unattainable for

many in the early modern period, as the court often disregarded the common class. The plays of Thomas Kyd, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Middleton contemplate the consequences of private revenge and established not only an outlet for Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences but also a relationship for those who experienced injustice.

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William Shakespeare's *Othello*: Iago's Art

SOFIE KELLAR

He does mischief to himself who does mischief to another, and evil planned harms the plotter most.

Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 23

In William Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* (c. 1603), Iago the villain dominates each scene with a manipulative power, driving every twist and turn and remaining unsuspected until the end. He steers the other characters' choices with an uncanny intuition, allowing him to shape the trajectory of *Othello* until it spirals into chaos and entropy; indeed, he works with cruel pleasure. But in the final scene, Iago is unmasked by another intuitive power like his own, but one profoundly different. Iago, the scheming trickster, warps the perspectives of the other Venetians, yet he is undone by that "Virtue" exemplified in a single character whom he greatly underestimated (1.3.320).

The trickster archetype, arguably, suits Iago best. Paul Radin describes his trickster as "at the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself. […] He possesses no values, social or moral, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being" (xxiii). Iago is certainly a creator of Brabantio's anger and Othello's jealousy, and he also negates trust or peace for Othello concerning his love. And Radin's use of the verb "dupes" pinpoints Iago most directly. He tricks every character with whom he comes in contact. In fact, deception is so ingrained in him that eventually Iago seems to have duped himself. His profound ignorance is revealed by the intuitive power embodied in his wife, who turns out to be a different character than he thought she was.

Iago fails to suspect Emilia has virtue; in fact, if he possesses no moral values, naturally he would struggle to recognize them in others. He treats virtues, he says, like tools to be picked up when they are needed and thrown away when they are not, indicating that Iago does not see how such a thing would have merit in itself. Instead, all must feed his own fancy and power lust. Virtues are useless except as pretense. When, for example, Roderigo admits he is embarrassed to be infatuated with Desdemona but lacks any virtue to fight it, Iago gives him this opinion: "Virtue? A fig! […] Our bodies are gardens, to which our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop or weed up thyme, […] why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills" (1.3.320-23; 326-27). Iago believes one's will, even if used for evil, should control what they value.

This view is comparable to that held by Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), whose best-known work, *The Prince* (1532), led to his reputation as an immoral cynic and advocate of the view that one's power over a situation gives one the right to use it. Whether such actions are moral is irrelevant, but behaving in a moral way to further

one's power is acceptable—even admirable. As Ken Jacobsen explains, Iago's conduct in the play lines up with Machiavelli's as exemplified in *The Prince* (498). One example of this conduct is Iago's exhortation to Roderigo as he prepares to attack Cassio: "Come, be a man!" (1.3.336). This is a strategy specifically mentioned by Machiavelli, says Jacobsen. In another instance, Iago averts Othello's suspicion by making himself look like a victim of love and loyalty (3.3.378-83) and by using what Jacobsen describes as blunt, soldierly speech that is supposed to be, to the other Venetians, inherently honest (508). *The Prince* teaches the traits of Machiavelli's ideal general. It works as a practical, and sometimes violent instruction guide to those lucky and skilled enough to be leaders. However, as many tragedies such as *Othello* show, it is the luckless man, the tragic hero and the victim of happenstance, whose choices reveal virtue and vice. Yet Iago, who is the opposite of this heroic victim figure, disregards the difference.

Iago, latching on to whatever truths suit him best at any moment, falls into his own elaborate series of lies and seems to enjoy the ensuing confusion. He wants "to plume up [his] will in double knavery" (1.3.392-3). Knavery is his area of expertise, and he pointedly derides Cassio and Othello for their lack of it. Of Cassio he says, "mere prattle without practice is all his scholarship" (1.1.25-26); and he says Othello is "[h]orribly stuffed with epithets of war" (1.1.13). Iago is different—he is immersed in action. His core motivation must be intrinsically linked to how he does what he does. He uses more trickery than needed to get the job done because he seems to enjoy it, such as the instance in which he talks about his snare for Cassio. "He takes (Desdemona) by the palm; ay, well said, whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio. Ay, smile upon her, do: I will gyve thee in thine own courtesies. […] Yet again, your fingers to her lips? would they were clyster-pipes for your sake!" (2.1.167-70; 175-77). Iago is wildly ambitious in his high self-esteem. He uses his Machiavellian-like philosophy to guide the plot, where his skill appears to be a major source of pride.

Iago's pride may be what causes him to convince Othello to kill Desdemona. Pride would allow him to deceive others unhindered by obligation to anything other than self-esteem. It also would allow him to work without honesty nagging in his ears, to hear only his own murmurs of self-satisfaction. Even Roderigo at least knows his fault and seems ashamed of it. But Iago needs no excuse for his actions, no vice like lust or revenge, only pride. A. C. Bradley argues that during his soliloquies, Iago suggests the possible motivations that may work as an excuse but remains faithful to none of them. For example, Iago seems to want vengeance on Othello for not promoting him ("And I, God bless the mark, his Moorship's ancient!" [1.1.32]) and mentions that he suspects Emilia and Othello have had a relationship behind his back ("For that I do suspect the lusty Moor \ Hath leaped into my seat" [2.1.293-94]), but these concerns are hardly mentioned again. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge notes, Iago's actions spring from a "motiveless malignity" (qtd. in Bradley 209). When the play climaxes and the fatal result occurs, Iago remains unfixed to any clear motivation. Iago is proud of his abilities, but to what end? Since he never asks what virtue and

right action are, he cannot say what his wrong action was meant to be.

Iago has deceived not only others, but ultimately himself. This is the cause for his silence at the end of the play: although he knows well what he has done, he does not know why. Daniel Stempel, who makes this argument, suggests further that Iago's malevolence does not come from the execution of his powers but from the manner in which he savors the result (262). He senses the degradation that occurs in the minds of his victims and revels in it; but he possesses little insight into his own mind. Towards others, his mind-reading becomes a monstrous power that draws Iago further from himself:

> For when my outward action doth demonstrate
> The native act and figure of my heart
> In complement 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. (1.1.60-64)

Acting under a veil of deceit trains Iago to abandon his individuality. In many soliloquies, Iago is absorbed by the spiritual entropy in his victims, which also causes him to lose a sense of his own spirit, as well as his motives. Paul Cefalu states that Iago's "hyperbolic mind-reading [is] not a manipulable talent as much as the unavoidable cause of his seemingly motiveless evil" (266). This "hyperbolic mind-reading" certainly turns upon his own mind with a disturbing energy. But mind-reading alone probably does not cause his evil ambition. Without pride or a sense of pleasure in his conceits, Iago would not likely have said something so ominous and close to the truth. Pride and self-deception warp his goals and even his individuality by the end of the play.

For instance, if Iago's goal is revenge against Othello for promoting Cassio, would not this goal be achieved with a simple murder of them both? Why does Iago spin a complicated plot, riddled with lies and trickery? His decisions seem to be motivated by his ambition as a trickster because he so often seems to revel in his power over the other characters. As he plots, he ruminates:

> I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin
> And let him find it. Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmations strong
> As proofs of holy writ. (3.3.324-27)

First, Iago makes his plan; next, he reflects on Othello's jealousy. In the third sentence he moves on from the plan and its backbone to what it all means: "This may do something," he says, but this statement is vague (l. 327). Then,

> The Moor already changes with my poison:
> Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons

Which at the first are scarce found to distaste
But with a little art upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulphur. (ll. 328-32)

Iago has shown that what interests him above all is not precisely what will happen in the end, but instead, he is absorbed by the process, the entropy he creates. Here he makes his most elaborate statements on this developing evil, and his only consistent delight is that he causes Othello to change and "burn."

As Iago ruminates, he calls his conceits "art" (l. 331). Indeed, Iago seems to imitate the art of a writer. As Bradley observes, there is a "curious analogy between the early stages of dramatic composition and those soliloquies in which Iago broods over his plot" (231). Iago has achieved a hold on the other characters, similarly to the playwright, who can exercise a level of tyranny over the characters. Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1966), for example, illustrates the tyranny of the author over the helpless characters in his invented world. In the play, two confused and aimless side characters in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are led to their inevitable deaths. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are secondary characters and trapped, tragically it seems, where they are. Iago is different from them not only because he is a primary character and a stronger agent in the play, but because he works almost as a sub-author, sharing some of Shakespeare's relationship to the world of the play and the characters. Unlike Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Iago manipulates the plot; he is simultaneously an unstable, impulsive trickster and an artful strategist. In *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* according to Stoppard, Shakespeare merely manipulates and abandons those characters. In a similar way, Iago manipulates Roderigo and then kills him as a means of abandonment or silencing.

Iago works with an artist's balance of impulse and deliberation, which allows him to twist the plot around other proactive characters if he can get close enough to influence them. "If I can fasten but one cup upon him…," says Iago when trying to put Cassio into an compromising situation (2.3.45). A playwright must also think along the same lines in order to manipulate a world with concrete internal rules. Although Iago is vulnerable to events like the storm that delays Othello's ship, he is also as much in control of things as is possible (2.1.1-17). Iago's craftiness, competence and proactivity make him in a sense the sub-author of the play. Part of the real author's job is "predicting" what this trickster will do next to decide the plot.

Clearly, Iago's art is tinged with a darker impulse, almost madness, while the playwright's art includes a higher method, Aristotle's mimesis, an imitation of things "as they could be, not as they are," a process that achieves its end "by action rather than narration" (Poetics 37). Mimesis focuses on the speculative and metaphysical rather than the strictly chronological; its point is dialectical. That is, the aim and drive of mimesis is the philosophical rather than the historical, and its climax is the conclusion to which all the other incidents are premises. Mimesis elaborates what Iago rejects, acting with a philosophical motive of aspiring for virtue, which is why the final plot point of *Othello* catches him by surprise.

Iago's actions, this essay attempts to show, reveal that motiveless facades lead to his loss of identity and virtue. Throughout the plot Iago tries to degrade Othello from his noble self, "practicing upon his peace and quiet / Even to madness" (2.1.308-9). But as a result, Iago experiences some of the entropy he creates in Othello so that he too becomes deluded and, at last, caught unprepared by the climax. He is surprised that virtues are not trifles, that Othello possesses enough strength to see his error, and that Emilia is loyal to the truth.

Emilia seems to represent the opposite of Iago in her embodiment of morality. In *Othello* morality centers on virtues, such as the prudence of Desdemona when she attempts to reconcile her father and Othello in her first speech in the play (1.3.180-189). Desdemona is faithless to neither her father nor her husband but calmly observes this "divided duty" and finds a balance between them in an act reminiscent of the "Golden Mean," Aristotle's widely acknowledged definition of morality.[1] Ayanna Thompson, however, argues that the play speaks against moralism, but in doing so she changes its definition (14). She points out that Othello is a literary response to the source tale in Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi* (1565), whose moral is that ladies should not marry "a man whom Nature, Heaven, and all manner of life separate" them from (Cinthio 389). This morality centers on race, social status, and temporal ideals, an unstable and impermanent morality as compared to that based on honesty and loyalty in tragedies like *Othello*. Thompson points out the simplicity of the moral of Cinthio's tale, but morality in a larger sense refers, or ought to refer, to ideas of virtues and justice that transcend time and space. These ideas cannot apply to Cinthio's moral. Immanuel Kant described morality in the categorical imperative: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" ("Duty"). Kant's is the morality that underscores Iago's defeat. By loudly disregarding virtue, Iago ironically heightens the audience's awareness of virtue in the play (1.3.320-21). John Roe argues that Shakespeare often registers "at the height of the crisis, a strong counter-thrust, which affirms his belief in the efficacy of the traditional, ethical scheme" (xi). This "counter-thrust" in *Othello* is the voice of Emilia, vehemently decrying the treachery that has come to light (5.2.187-90). In this way, she exemplifies the virtues of honesty and loyalty that Iago has attempted to erode.

Iago does not appear to understand his wife any more than he understands himself. While it may be obvious that she is loyal to Desdemona, he does not guess to what extent; he does not know her motives. Each is so ignorant about the other that her surprise upon learning his true nature is equal to Iago's surprise upon learning hers. Emilia asks in disbelief, "My husband?" when she learns the truth (5.2.138; 142; 145); and Iago exclaims, "What, are you mad?" when Emilia, instead of submitting to him, will not cease decrying him (l. 191). Although Iago possesses an uncanny

[1] "[E]very ethical virtue is a condition intermediate (a "golden mean" as it is popularly known) between two other states, one involving excess, and the other deficiency" ("Ethical").

insight into everyone else, he seems to underestimate Emilia. His ignorance of his own motives is like his ignorance of his wife's; he asks no questions of himself, just as he asks none of her. At the climax, therefore, Iago is dumbfounded by her bleak counterattacks. "Villainy!" (5.2.187-88; 90) she cries, a concept which Iago more often describes as "knavery" (2.1.310), "art" (3.3.331) or "wit" (2.3.367).

Iago's adeptness in twisting the meaning of words reveals a significant aspect of his decline. Throughout the play Iago tries to twist language, as he tries to twist the people and the circumstances around him. Shakespeare often utilizes a character's use of language to show their level of spiritual growth. However, Iago's use of language demonstrates a spiritual degradation, as he often uses words in ways that subvert their meaning to make Othello change with the "poison" of his language (3.3.328). Iago is unable to speak "the language of affection": "In every dimension of his identity—metaphysical, psychological, social—Iago asserts an absolute separation between language and meaning. […] In a sense, then, Iago is the antitype of the romantic dream of growth through and beyond language" (Zender 327). Whereas other characters' words grow a subtlety in meaning, Iago's "words and performances are no kin together," and he tricks others to fall in this same way, deceiving them into acting contrary to their own words (4.2.185). The contrast between high poeticism and subjugating language, layering meanings and nullifying them, characterizes Iago's demise.

The fall of Iago begins with his search for a motive. Yet as he searches, he lies to himself and in this process develops a taste for wily deception. As he follows this impulse, his victims' degradation becomes his own. In deceiving them he clouds his own acutely sharp vision until Emilia slips through the curtains. For Iago has not only lied to Othello about his wife but to himself about his own wife, leading to Iago's humiliation and ultimate fall at Emilia's hand. A seemingly trivial woman's outcry undoes all his work. As a result, Othello suddenly understands his tragedy. Now everyone knows the truth despite Iago's villainous art.

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Alisoun's Critique on Virtue and Sovereignty in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*

DINAZ WADIA

In Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400), the narrator Alisoun's unique portrayal of literature archetypes expresses and challenges social expectations of power and morality. The Wife of Bath's character has received much critical interpretation and has been considered a voice for feminism by many audiences, including in analyses by Susan Carter and Stewart Justman. These interpretations often focus on the Wife's subversion of gender roles and dynamics within her tale, particularly those expressed through the hag character (Carter 329). Furthermore, these interpretations focus on Alisoun's desire to maintain sovereignty over men, essentially challenging the overbearing patriarchy present within the story, as seen in the tale's inclusion of matriarchal power (Justman 345). However, Alisoun's use of gender dynamics instead serves to impart an even more expansive criticism of society, not only applicable to one gender. She demonstrates that power is transcendent, always changing and questionably valid. Alisoun's narrative is an extension of her perspective on the attributes of *gentillesse* and sovereignty introduced in her tale's prologue.[1] In her tale, she expresses these opinions through the choice of setting, representation of legislation and court, and characterization of the Knight. The use of paradigms in the tale displays Alisoun's cynicism toward nobility and inherent power, additionally focusing on how birthright does not determine virtue.

The prologue to "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is lengthy, and it reveals Alisoun's nature and directly informs the themes within the tale. In her introduction, Alisoun describes her five marriages. Alisoun's first marriage at age twelve introduces her as a character shaped by her unions, as they encompass the majority of her life experience (Carruthers 216). She is even identified as such by her nickname, "Wife of Bath." Alisoun's knowledge about marriage also demonstrates her experience with the medieval legal system: "Though court appearances are never explicitly mentioned, Alisoun's business ventures and numerous dowers identify her with legal activities and evoke the prospect that she has witnessed the pleading procedure" (Houser). Due to Alisoun's experiences within the legal setting, she can speak with authority and garners attention with her ability to debate with efficacy, an attribute observable within the structure of her tale, as well as in her criticism of clerical authority. The prologue is much longer than her tale, but the tale continues to express these opinions regarding *gentillesse* and sovereignty and establishes her stance on social power based on her experiences with patriarchal authority. The tale may be seen as the solidification of her

[1] *The Oxford English Dictionary,* "gentilesse." "The fact or condition of being of gentle birth or rank. Also: courtesy, graciousness, or refinement, esp. as considered to be qualities associated with people of gentle birth or rank; an instance of this," 1. a.

critiques of virtue and sovereignty as influenced by the nature of her relationships to men, which the prologue illustrates as volatile and inconsistent.

It is important to briefly consider the nature of Alisoun's various marriages, as her tale manifests her experiences and the opinions gained from them. These five unions are described as difficult and cruel at times, often including torture caused by her hands:

> But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
> And sith they hadde me yeven all hir lond,
> What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,
> But it were for my profit and myn ese? (ll. 211-14)

As the prologue continues, she focuses on her most recent and volatile marriage to Janekyn:

> He nolde suffre nothing of my list.
> By God, he smoot me ones on the list
> For that I rente out of his book a leef,
> That of the strook myn ere wex al deef? (ll. 633-36)

The upper hand that Alisoun struggles to obtain (and retain) is illustrated by her relationships, most notably that with Janekyn. One may gain from the prologue that the inherent nature of the union involves some levels of power struggle between husband and wife, either from a legal standpoint or that of combating lifestyles and relationship preferences. Yet, her viewpoints regarding sovereignty, learned from the nature of her relationships to men, are manipulative and inconsistent. Alisoun's behavior in her own marriages serves to depict the instability of power within the institution of marriage while simultaneously upsetting the social norms of Chaucer's time.

Alisoun seemingly makes intentional choices regarding the structure of her tale that further her observations on the nature of sovereignty. She does this primarily through the choice of the tale's setting, England during early medieval and mythological times: "In th'olde dayes of the King Arthour, / Of which that Britons speken greet honour…" (ll. 857-58). Alisoun is aware of King Arthur's notability within the culture and assumes her audience's knowledge of this in their subsequent interpretation of the tale. King Arthur is often associated with a time of nobility and chivalry, with knights among the highest social rankings. The primary character of the play is a knight, a title that tends to be associated with positive internal qualities and high social status.

Consistent with Alisoun's actions, the Knight does not meet the expectations of nobility that her audience might have expected, further supporting her viewpoint that virtue is not inherent of title. The Knight is instead introduced to the audience as a rapist, invalidating any perception of goodness: "In 'The Wife of Bath 's Tale' their

counterpart is, in stark contrast, a rapist disgracing the order of knighthood; this doubtless represents a reversal of character from source and prototype" (Puhvel 291). As Martin Puhvel notes, Alisoun establishes this attribution of "honour" only to illustrate violence against women, thereby subverting the archetype that she hopes is familiar to her audience. To further solidify the corrupt and sinful characterization of the Knight, Alisoun includes the description of his victim's virginity, signifying a purity that has been violated by force. (This purity has been established in the Wife's prologue through the biblical significance of virginity, as Alisoun relates the opinions of St. Paul: "This al and som: he heeld virginitee / Moore parfit than wedding in freletee" [ll. 91-92]).[2] The Knight exercises his power over his victim in a way that invalidates this part of her identity and trivializes its significance in religious context. The rape establishes the forceful nature of sovereignty and maintains the idea that sovereignty is something that can be both taken or given away.

When the Knight is introduced, it is assumed that he holds sovereignty due to his title, particularly as a member of King Arthur's "hous" (l. 883). However, he quickly loses this power after the rape and, significantly, remains nameless throughout, which leaves him lacking in individual identity and notability. The Wife also reminds the audience of her control over the narrative in this characterization; her description lacks acknowledgment of a social expectation, as she pegs him "a lusty bacheler" (1. 883). The Knight displays an absence of internal virtue, and there is no attempt to humanize him: "He remains nameless throughout the tale, but his particular brand of 'lustiness' is quickly demonstrated; returning from the wholesome knightly pastime of hawking, he commits the distinctly unknightly and unwholesome act of rape of a country maid he chances to meet" (Puhvel 291). This dehumanizing characterization of the Knight is purposeful and necessary in expressing Alisoun's desired social critiques. His title is invalidated by his sinful actions, devaluing the prestige associated with being a "Knight" and thereby making the title just as secondary as his name. The Knight's character represents Alisoun's challenge of accepted presumptions that equate power and social status with virtue and honor.

Alisoun's tale comments on virtue as applicable to social justice and morality, illustrated in her depiction of the Knight's punishment. After Alisoun establishes the Knight's reprehensible character, she revokes his otherwise assumed power through the punishment that he is served. During the time that the Wife's tale is set, it would be unlikely for a knight to appear in court because of rape charges or allegations: "In Arthurian romance the violation of a country girl by a knight, while a serious breach of the code of chivalry, hardly constitutes a capital offense; indeed, sometimes knights get away with it scot-free" (Puhvel 292). Despite the social perspectives of the punishments (or lack thereof) that a rapist might receive during this specific time, the tale establishes Alisoun's intolerance of sexual violence. The Knight uses his power in a brutal fashion, establishing that power and *gentillesse* are not indicative of each

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary,* "frailty." "Moral weakness; instability of mind; liability to err or yield to temptation," 2. a.

other and that it is dangerous to assume that they are. Also implausibly for Arthurian times, he faces death as a punishment for rape: "That dampned was this knight for to be deed / By cours of lawe, and sholde han lost his heed" (l. 891-92). Alisoun, consistent in her narrative thus far, disregards expectations and carries the tale forward through the Knight's punishment.

The court's punishment strips the Knight of the established sovereignty he abuses when he commits the crime of rape. Though the Knight is not killed, his punishment is a mission through which he must learn to yield his sovereignty and understand the mandatory respect due to all women: "I grante thee lyf, if thou canst tellen me / What thing is it that wommen most desyren" (ll. 904-05). The declaration of his punishment also establishes a matriarchal court that renders King Arthur's authority irrelevant in the tale; the power the Knight initially held over the woman is metaphorically reclaimed by the collective sovereignty of the court: "Til he his lyf him graunted in the place, / And yaf him to the quene al at hir wille" (ll. 896-97). Though the brutality of rape seems to require a similar brutality in its punishment, the court's decision to save the Knight displays the compatibility of *gentillesse* and sovereignty. Importantly, the court does not yield its power while acting with mercy; Alisoun demonstrates that two concepts can be effectively compatible in making judgments. In the punishment Alisoun creates for the Knight, she shows that virtues are not inherent of title or rank. Instead, she depicts her belief of virtue's learnable nature, that there exists the ability to develop an understanding of *gentillesse* and sovereignty. Even a rapist knight is not beyond the cultivation of honorable morality.

Aside from the Knight, Alisoun's tale makes use of another archetype to promote her worldview—the hag—who is connected to several characters, specifically the Irish Sovranty Hag (Carter 330 ff.). The hag's role in the tale follows the same basic movements that are observed in other representations of this character. The hag represents freedom from the structures of social expectations, signified by the wilderness in which she exists, a lack of recognition of gender expectations, and semi-divine abilities. When hags are depicted in literature (and lore), they often exist to impart some moral truth upon a king or knight in exchange for sexual engagement, and the Wife's tale follows these general guidelines in her own depiction of the hag (Carter 329). The hag is a perfect vehicle to impart the Wife's message, as she has access to power and gentleness, and she disregards traditional gender dynamics, much like Alisoun. However, the hag's representation in the tale deviates from the archetype, as the hag engages with marriage as a form of payment leading to a more extended form of control rather than temporary sexual control. The Wife manipulates the depiction of the hag archetype to focus on the idea of control as significant to her narrative: "The combination of godlike control over a mortal man and prolonged enforced intimacy reformats the significance of the stock characterization of the Irish Sovranty Hag" (Sylvester 253). As noted by Ruth Sylvester, the hag is given greater sovereignty, certainly over the Knight, which allows Alisoun to further subvert gender and sexual dynamics first established through his rape.

The hag additionally serves as a mouthpiece for Alisoun's views of society and

virtue, allowing these critiques to be more impactful and meaningful in a storytelling setting. The customization of archetypes to fit the demands of Alisoun's intended message demonstrates her overarching ability to maintain control over narrative. Alisoun establishes her own moral ideology through the hag, which is observed in lengthy speeches she imparts upon the Knight about sovereignty and virtue, directly connecting to her prologue. The hag's speech regarding *gentillesse* is fueled by Alisoun's own perspectives on virtue: "Yet may they nat biquethe, for no thing, / To noon of us hir vertuous living / That made hem gentil men y-called be" (ll. 1121-23). The hag voices Alisoun's own opinions on the futility of assigning virtue based on an individual's birthright. The speech may seem to be ironic to the audience, as the wife does not appear to be concerned with *gentillesse* and virtue: "By God, in erthe I was his purgatorie, […] For God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song […] In many wyse how sore I him twiste" (ll. 489; 90; 94).

However, the prologue's inclusion of the cruelty that Alisoun enacted upon her husbands does not at all invalidate the message she hopes to convey. The Wife is depicted to be many things, including manipulative, immoral, and sometimes greedy, but nonetheless she is aware of her own shortcomings: "The Wife freely admits her frailty and moral ugliness, joins in applauding those more perfect than herself, and greedily exploits the concessions of the [Church] Fathers [regarding remarriage]" (Justman 348). Alisoun's ability to admit to her own imperfections gives the hag's speech its impact, as it seems to stem from honest self-criticism and observations about the nature of virtue in a societal context. The tale's subversion of the virtue and power dynamic, hag over knight, makes this speech more poignant. The hag imparting moral righteousness to the Knight furthers indicates that social status has no relationship to virtue.

Within the hag's lecture to the Knight, she establishes that *gentillesse* is not determined by wealth, social status, or family: "Thy gentillesse cometh fro God allone. / Thanne comth oure verray gentillesse of grace: / It was nothing biquethe us with oure place" (ll. 1162-64). The inclusion of this speech clarifies the choice of the Knight's punishment, as it serves as a moral teaching that the hag establishes as the only means by which virtue is to be attained. The Knight is born into a title of honor but displays he has none by his act of rape. His understanding of mastery is the first step in transformation, as he must forfeit his illusion of sovereignty due to his gender and social status.

As the tale draws to a close, the Knight is presented with a decision, whether he prefers the hag as a wife to be fair and unfaithful or ugly and faithful. This decision challenges the authenticity of the Knight's transformation (gained through his yearlong punishment) and serves as a test of Alisoun's belief that virtue is learnable. The Knight submits his mastery over the hags' appearance into her hands, and she thereafter choses to be faithful and fair to the Knight. Some critics believe the hag loses some of her mastery over the Knight in allowing him to choose her final form—even if he allowed her to decide in the end (Eckert 378). Instead, the hag's decision to be faithful and fair is another expression of the idea Alisoun hopes to convey: power

can stem from many different internal and external attributes, and it cannot be determined simply by social class or gender. Additionally, Alisoun places the Knight in a relationship where he will remain submissive, and the idea of sexuality as a form of control recurs, though differently than the rape in the beginning: "All this is, of course, part of the process of 'taming' this somewhat brutish young man […] bringing him full circle from enforcer of one woman to domestic underling of another" (Puhvel 294). Although the hag now is fair and faithful, she still retains a sense of divinity and power over the Knight due to her ability to shift shapes and because he is indebted to her for saving his life.

The hag retains her sovereignty in this new form of beauty and faithfulness, indicating both can be used as a means of mastery. As Louise O. Fradenburg notes, "Social realities persuade us that they are real, that they are all there is, by distinguishing themselves from lost, absent pleasures, from a fantastic past" (217). This concept of power's transient nature is expressed both in the tale and prologue. Just as Alisoun struggled to maintain sovereignty in her marriages, the Knight struggles to retain his. This emphasis on the volatility of power and its validity displays that no one is exempt from its effects, neither knight nor seamstress. As such, the Wife does not invest in the idea of power stability. Her representation of the various ways one attains power also shows that it can be taken away just as easily, bringing the reader to question what makes any power valid.

Alisoun's incorporation of archetypes within her narrative serves to break the reader's expectations of the archetypes' internal virtues in order to comment on the legitimacy of power. Though the tale may be interpreted as an establishment of Alisoun's desire to hold sovereignty over her husbands, it is instead an illustration of her idea that power does not recognize gender, social status, or class. Within the hag's mastery over the Knight, there is disregard for traditional gender roles and social roles, and one can understand that Alisoun views power as a transient concept, independent of birthright.

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Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*: Hieronimo's Duty

CASSANDRA LAGUNAS

Religious influence is not only evident in a general population's behavior but in the conduct of literary characters, as well. During the sixteenth century, when Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) was written, revenge was forbidden by both the church and the law, and (in theory) just, unbiased judges determined punishments. In *The Spanish Tragedy,* because Hieronimo must be ethical enough to punish fairly those who have committed crimes, his knowledge of the law and right from wrong causes him to reflect deeply as to whether he should seek revenge for his son's murder. Although the other characters assume he is mad, Hieronimo is still sane enough to pursue justice through the law before he tries private revenge. However, as the King dismisses Lorenzo's crime out of nepotism and carelessness, Hieronimo realizes the current monarch's ineptitude. Because Hieronimo is not taken seriously and sees the likelihood of Lorenzo's rise to the monarchy, he takes matters into his own hands. To Hieronimo, Lorenzo's ambition and crimes are reason enough to kill him and Balthazar. Preventing Lorenzo's rise to power and his chances to ruin other people's lives changes the narrative from a revenge tragedy to a heroic one. Considering the religious influences during the sixteenth century and the duty of each citizen to their country, Hieronimo's murders at the end of the play are not exclusively for revenge but also for the integrity of Spain.

Kyd's version of the revenge play became the blueprint for future playwrights, introducing many plot devices that formed the basic structure of the revenge tragedy, including elements seen in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (c. 1600) and Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606). One of the most common elements of the revenge tragedy is the presence of religion, often used to analyze a character's conscience. Kyd is clever in including Christian belief systems into his play, as they give insight into Hieronimo's convictions. Gregory Semenza writes, "In theory, then, there was little confusion in the sixteenth century regarding the lawfulness of *private* revenge. Illegal in the eyes of both God and the monarch, it must be avoided at all costs; if enacted, the perpetrator of the crime must be punished swiftly and severely" (53-54). Revenge is therefore illegal in the eyes of God and the law in Hieronimo's time, making his vengeful actions at the end of the play inexcusable. Steven Justice explains that English society did not respond well to people who sought revenge, disapproving of it "unanimously" (271). Thus, writers including revenge in their stories had to tread carefully when there was a possibility of offending Christian audiences. After Seneca (c. 4 B.C.E. - 65 A.D.), few writers created plays centered on revenge, and Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* became the pioneer for the revenge tragedy during the Elizabethan era (Hacht 284). Kyd's main character performs questionable acts against the law and God yet manages to bring the audience to excuse

his actions. Kyd's inclusion of religion, corruption, incest, and moral contemplation in Hieronimo's story allows readers to understand the characters' legal and religious wrongdoings.

When *The Spanish Tragedy* was first performed in 1587, the play was "new and shocking on the largest scale" (Lamb 309). Although familiar plays at the time were Tudor or Latin comedies (Lamb 309), those not remotely similar to revenge tragedies, Kyd's play became one of the most popular of its time. Semenza argues that its popularity is due to the audience's desire to enact revenge themselves because it was forbidden during the sixteenth century: "The suggestion here is that art, like revenge—but unlike the law or even the gods—is capable of satisfying our desire for essential equilibrium" (58). Just as Hieronimo's play *Soliman and Perseda* is created to enact justice on behalf of Horatio, *The Spanish Tragedy* provides the audience the consequences of seeking private revenge through the excuse of injustice (Semenza 59). Hieronimo's actions result in several gruesome deaths, including his own, demonstrating these consequences of revenge. However, the audience is also provided with an opportunity for satisfaction as they sympathize with Hieronimo because he sacrificed his life for justice, making him a martyr. The inclusion of religion is an acknowledgement to the audience, a way to give them an explanation and excuse for Hieronimo's indecent acts, and Hieronimo's contemplation and guilt over his desire for vengeance offer the possibility of forgiveness from the audience.

However, Kyd not only includes Christian elements but pagan ones, as well (those often having to do with Greek Mythology), which put into question Semenza's argument. Hieronimo is a martyr because he risks his life and eternal damnation for justice. Throughout the play, Christian ideals are referenced by the characters, especially Hieronimo:

> Confused and filled with murder and misdeeds!
> O sacred heavens, if this unhallowed deed,
> If this inhuman and barbarous attempt […]
> Shall unrevealed and unrevenged pass,
> How should we term your dealings to be just
> If you unjustly deal with those that in your justice trust? (3.2.4-6; 9-11)

Hieronimo acknowledges that God must enact revenge, not himself. Even if the King does not provide justice for Horatio's death, which he does not, Hieronimo must put his faith and trust in God. In this way, Hieronimo's vengeance is not only a journey of deep contemplation of morality but a rejection of Christianity and God.

If the English audience is mindful of their Christian values, as Justice and Semenza note, then it can also be assumed that the punishment for revenge, if left unpunished in life, is eternal damnation. According to Eleanor Prosser, the "most frequently cited Scriptural text" against revenge is Romans 12:19-21, including line 19: "Dearly beloved, avenge not your selves, but give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord." God must therefore pursue

revenge, and eternal damnation is expected for Lorenzo, Balthazar, and even Hieronimo, as their crimes are left unpunished in life. However, although audiences might expect Hieronimo to spend the afterlife in hell, Kyd uses pagan ideologies to save him. Revenge, Proserpine, Cerberus, and other Greek mythological beings, the first characters introduced in the play, are mostly on the sidelines until the end. Their presence allows for divine intervention from mythological and supernatural figures, as God is no longer the only higher power able to alter the physical world.

It is Andrea, the ghost who watches the events of the play with Revenge, who determines Hieronimo's fate and not God: "I'll lead Hieronimo where Orpheus plays, / Adding sweet pleasure to eternal days" (4.5.23-24). Hieronimo is rewarded for his actions and spends his afterlife in "sweet pleasure." The central message seems to be that private revenge has benefits without consequences. As noted, revenge would not have been accepted in English society, yet *The Spanish Tragedy* was popular with audiences. Justice is the dominant theme in the play, and injustice is often caused by corruption, such as when Horatio is murdered, but also in the corruption present in the Spanish court, which is the final spark in Hieronimo's decision to pursue revenge. Thus, Hieronimo is unpunished and rewarded in the afterlife not because he seeks out private revenge for his son's death but because he destroys corruption in Spain.

Some readers may argue that the intention to save the Spanish court is not excuse enough for murder. Hieronimo appears to play God, determining who rules Spain and who does not. However, although his judgments seem unasked for, Hieronimo's profession as a judge revolves entirely around enforcing the law. As Michael H. Levin suggests, "Hieronimo has a preternaturally acute sense of right and wrong; he is Chief Magistrate of Spain, and his life has been devoted to administering the law" (308). Hieronimo internally struggles between responding to impulse and emotion and acting on logic and level-headedness. David Laird proposes that Hieronimo's madness is the constant fight within himself and not a psychological insanity at all (142-143). Before he learns of Spain's corruption and partiality, Hieronimo, after much deliberation, chooses to obtain justice the correct way: through the law. Hieronimo's decision affirms his logical state of mind even though he is grief-stricken.

The scene in which the King ignores Hieronimo's request for justice is pivotal. Initially, Hieronimo plans to avenge his son's death, but he makes the difficult choice of asking for justice through the King, a request that goes against the expectations of his wife and Bel-Imperia. When his request is not granted and he is denied justice, his purpose shifts: "But reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell" (3.12A.162-163). In Bel-Imperia's eyes, it is a dishonor not to seek vengeance for Horatio's murder:

> From this dishonour and the hate of men,
> Thus to neglect the loss and life of him
> Whom both my letters and thine own belief
> Assure thee to be causeless slaughtered?

> Bel-Imperia Hieronimo, for shame, Hieronimo
> Be not a history to aftertimes
> Of such ingratitude unto thy son! (4.1 10-16)

Bel-Imperia grows impatient with Hieronimo's hesitancy and inaction. As Steven Justice writes, "In this world, Hieronimo's tragedy is not so much that of a man who makes the wrong choice as that of a man to whom the right choice is unavailable" (278). Hieronimo must either be seen as a coward and live knowing that justice does not exist in the Spanish court or sacrifice everything to purify the country of corruption. Thus, the King's ignorance regarding Hieronimo's grief and needs is to blame for Lorenzo and Balthazar's deaths. Hieronimo then becomes the means through which God himself will avenge.

Although Ian McAdam suggests the play centers around "the uncontainable nature of desire," *The Spanish Tragedy* demonstrates the consequences of decisions based on desires. These characters' fates reflect the intentions of their actions (39). If Hieronimo's actions could be excused by considering Spain's best interests, then Lorenzo's actions could be, too. As Heather J. Murray proposes, "The court of Spain is an aristocracy, not a meritocracy, and the liaison Horatio is entering into could prevent a dynastic marriage that will unite his country […] with Portugal" (47). Horatio's courtship with Bel-Imperia jeopardizes conciliation between Spain and Portugal, a union that would benefit both countries. Lorenzo decides to take matters into his own hands, like Hieronimo, and kill the person who is preventing the beneficial union: "And better 'tis that base companions die / Than by their life to hazard our good haps" (3.2 115-116). In action, Hieronimo and Lorenzo are similar, but their intentions are vastly different and therefore their fates are, as well.

Hieronimo sacrifices his morality and identity to protect the court of Spain from further injustice. As Chief Magistrate, he must use the law to find the correct punishment for offenders. However, no law in the Spanish court will hold Balthazar and Lorenzo accountable because of their ties to the King. Although *Soliman and Perseda* contradicts what Hieronimo has worked for his entire life, he is not presented with a "right choice." Hieronimo declares, "heaven will be revenged of every ill" (3.13 2), suggesting he will act on behalf of God after Lorenzo and Balthazar have cheated the law. Hieronimo himself will not benefit, as he compromises his life for the sake of saving Spain and avenging God. As a Christian, he knows revenge will compromise his afterlife, thus prompting him, at first, to seek justice through the law. Not granted impartiality and fairness, Hieronimo's dilemma in avenging his son becomes greater than solely pursuing private revenge. The corruption in the Spanish court and the possibility that the offenders will not pay for the consequences of their actions disturbs Hieronimo's conscience, leading to revenge in this story as a sacrifice for God and Spain.

Lorenzo's acts of revenge, however, are not as selfless as those of Hieronimo, making the characters complete opposites through similar actions. Although Lorenzo's actions are for the benefit of Spain, he also will reap the rewards. Being the nephew of

the King and a potential future King of Spain, the union between both countries will benefit Lorenzo in the future. Whereas Hieronimo suffers at the brink of insanity in considering revenge, Lorenzo wastes no time in contemplating the effect murder will have on his morality: "Live, heart, to joy at fond Horatio's fall" (2.2 23). His alliance with Balthazar, the future ruler of Portugal, also proves his loyalty and strengthens the countries' union. Lorenzo's every move is calculated, aligning more closely to a king's behavior. He, too, is thinking of his own future when he acts, whereas Hieronimo considers the future of Spain and its people. Lorenzo's selfish actions result in his eternal placement on "Ixion's wheel," (4.5 33). Hieronimo's selfless acts result in "sweet pleasures" (4.5 24) for eternity. Furthermore, whether it is God, the pagan gods, or karma, the characters' fates at the end prove each one of their faults and the price they must pay for them. Lorenzo is a selfish and power-hungry murderer. His fate is in the pagan version of hell. Hieronimo, also a murderer but one who does not kill selfishly, is awarded for his sacrifice with eternal bliss.

Focusing on the Christian belief system on revenge, *The Spanish Tragedy* provides loopholes for the audience to sympathize with, and even admire, Hieronimo. If his story were only about seeking vengeance for the death of his son, then English society during the sixteenth century might not have identified with the character and the play might not have been as popular. However, Thomas Kyd creates a complex character in Hieronimo, and he provides situational challenges which question morality and the definitive Christian rejection of revenge. Hieronimo does not consider private revenge until he is denied justice from the King, after which his revenge is justified by the corruption in Spain and his moral obligation to God and Spain. He repays the offenders who were never punished. His eternal fate attests to his selflessness, proving he did not succumb to the desire of private revenge, thus making him a hero.

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Subverted Gender Roles in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

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A Midsummer Night's Dream (c. 1595) by William Shakespeare is a comedy that examines relationships between men and women, as well as gender roles. Some influential scholars, like Sukanta Chaudhuri and James Calderwood, view *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a celebration of patriarchy where women's opinions and desires are neglected and either mortal or fairy men make decisions for them. These critics see marriages at the end of the play as a patriarchal victory, taking the power of a woman from one man (father) and giving it to another (husband). Furthermore, Oberon and Theseus, the strong rulers of Athens and the fairy world, are usually those who are blamed for the miserable fates of women in the play. However, recent research in folklore studies has shown that the fairy world is a matriarchal society, which makes Oberon a subordinate character, takes away the suggested power, and gives him a unique perspective into the societal constraints placed on mortal women. Shakespeare subverts traditional gender roles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through Oberon and Titania by depicting Oberon as a feminine character who acts in the best interests of the mortal women in the play and cannot exert control over his wife, Titania, who does not conform to early modern assumptions about women.

Feminine characteristics in contemporary society differ from those that dominated in early modern England when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written. To analyze and understand *A Midsummer Night's Dream* properly, one should consider the play through the lens of an early modern audience's assumptions. Ann Rosalind Jones explains that "in Renaissance gender ideology, fame was not *for* women. […] [T]he proper woman is an absence: legally she vanishes under the name and authority of her father and her husband […]. She is silent and invisible: she does not speak, and she is not spoken about" (74).[1] The less the woman expresses her thoughts and reminds others of her presence, the more she conforms to early modern assumptions about female behavior. Hippolyta serves as a good example of such conduct. After being conquered by her husband, Theseus, she loses her fame as an Amazon queen and embodies the stereotypes of a perfect woman during the Renaissance. Her lines make up less than two percent of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; Hippolyta's silence and relative invisibility is proven by having only fourteen pieces of dialogue (speeches) while her husband has forty-eight. She appears only at the play's beginning and end, never being a central figure (Schwarz). In contrast, Titania, the queen of the fairy world, has almost the same number of speeches as Oberon, the king and her husband (twenty-three and twenty-nine respectively). Furthermore, Titania is not afraid to voice her opinions and dares to disobey Oberon's orders. During the major

[1] Jones's emphasis.

conversation between the fairy rulers in the act 2 scene 1, Titania speaks twice more often than her husband, subverting Renaissance views of women.

Titania lacks the traits that could allow readers to consider her a feminine character who "just vanishes under the name of her husband" (Jones 74). Regina Buccola confirms that "Titania's conduct poses a direct challenge to the early modern rubric for the good wife, chaste, silent, and obedient." She does not let Oberon control her and is not concerned about being an exemplary wife, either. "I have forsworn his [Oberon's] bed and company," states Titania, threating Oberon to never sleep with him or talk to him again (2.1.62). In response, Oberon tries to show his superiority by saying, "Tarry, rash wanton. Am not I thy lord?" (2.1.63). Titania's response is anything but obedient and submissive. She never agrees that Oberon is her lord but conditionally says that if he were, he would be faithful to her. Titania continues with accusations of Oberon's infidelity and calls his accusations "forgeries of jealousy" (2.1.81). Yet according to Oberon, Titania ruined several of Theseus's affairs in order to seduce him herself,

> Didst not thou lead him [Theseus] through the glimmering night
> From Perigenia, whom he ravished?
> And make him with fair Aegles break his faith,
> With Ariadne, and Antiopa?" (2.1.77-80)

Titania's sexual taste for mortal men shows that she has been neither chaste nor faithful. Her willingness to betray Oberon and her own sexual unruliness are signs of power which signify the absence of Oberon's dominance over Titania.

Titania neither prioritizes Oberon nor performs his commands. Her devotion to the votaress's child is much stronger than to her husband and indicates a higher priority. This devotion could be due to close relationship with the mother of the Indian boy. Sukanta Chaudhuri states that "there is the sense of a fulfilled, self-sufficient female bonding" between Titania and her votaress (85). Only Titania's dominance over Oberon could allow this bonding and responsibility toward a mortal woman more importance than fulfilling Oberon's orders or at least trying to achieve a compromise. Titania clearly realizes that the cause of chaos in the world is a lack of peace and understanding between fairy rulers, but she will not sacrifice custody of the Indian boy as her husband demands, even for the sake of order and the well-being of her dependents. Titania acknowledges that their argument causes a world where "the winds,"

> […] have sucked up from the sea
> Contagious fogs, which, falling in the land,
> Hath every pelting river made so proud
> That they have overborne their continents (2.1.88-92);

that is, the world has become full of diseases and altered seasons. Titania further admits that the chaos is happening because she and her attendants have not met "since the middle summer's spring" to dance their "ringlets to the whistling wind" without Oberon's "brawls" disturbing their "sport," but again, she is not going to cede to Oberon (2.1.82; 86-87).

Furthermore, while Titania appears with multiple fairies throughout the play, Oberon has only one servant that the readers know of – Robin Goodfellow. Titania's multiple subordinates also indicates her importance in the fairy realm. Given this apparent status, as well as her defiant behavior, Oberon appears much less powerful. Yet Mary Ellen Lamb argues that "the patriarchy is restored as Oberon overcomes Titania's brief rebellion against his wishes," and the magic juice is a justified tool in the hands of the king (309). In this analysis, Lamb assumes Titania's behavior is a challenge for Oberon's power, not vice versa. However, an early modern audience would have considered Titania the ruler of the fairy world and Oberon as a rebellious husband who tries to usurp the queen's role and power.

Just as Theseus is considered the ruler of the Athenian world, Oberon is respectively thought to be the authoritative figure in the fairy world. James L. Calderwood states that the fairy world is "all Athens in another key or mode," and Oberon and Titania are Theseus and Hippolyta's "Athenian counterparts," assuming that Oberon, like Theseus, is in the position of power (411). Hence, Titania's refusal to obey her husband is seen as a rebellious action for which Oberon must punish Titania to restore his power over her. However, recent developments in the study of folklore have demonstrated that, for an early modern audience, fairyland would have been recognized as a domain where the queen has the exclusive authority, or was at least a figure who dominated her partner, the fairy king (Buccola). Usually, the fairies' government is represented as matriarchal, ruled by the queen alone. According to the *Standard Dictionary of Folklore*, the fairyland is ruled over by a king and queen, but generally the queen is dominant (Leach and Fried 363).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* such a pattern may not be obvious at first. However, a close analysis of Oberon and Titania's lines proves not only that early modern audiences would have considered Titania the dominant figure, but that both rulers know their status and position in the fairy world. When Titania is drugged, she still has the power to silence and dominate Nick Bottom. She warns him not to leave the woods and threatens, "*I* am a spirit of no common rate" (3.1.148), demonstrating her supremacy and setting herself apart and above other spirits. In comparison, Oberon says, "*We* are spirits of another sort," without emphasizing his authority, uniqueness, or importance but making a collective reference about all the fairies (3.2.388).[2] The differences in how Oberon and Titania refer to themselves indicate an understanding of their roles in the fairy realm dominated by Titania.

During the play, Titania never wants more power or control, and her refusal to be bribed with possession of the fairy kingdom is ironic, as she already controls the

[2] Emphases mine.

kingdom. For example, when Oberon asks Titania to give up the Indian boy, saying, "Why should Titania cross her Oberon? / I do but beg a little changeling boy / To be my henchman," she fearlessly responds, "Set your heart at rest. / The fairy land buys not the child of me" (2.1.119-22). Further, he commands again, "Give me that boy," and Titania says again, "Not for thy fairy kingdom" (2.1.143-44). Considering that the fairy realm was dominated by Titania, those responses appear to be aimed at teasing Oberon and demonstrating Titania's superior status. While Oberon is begging for the Indian boy, Titania communicates with him using an ultimatum: "If you patiently dance in you round / And see our moonlight revels, go with us; / If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts" (2.1.140-42). Titania not only shows her dominance in her speeches but also in her actions, abruptly ending the conversation with Oberon and leaving without a farewell.

For his part, Oberon is unable to control Titania. His behavior does not conform to early modern understandings about masculinity and even resembles some Renaissance assumptions about women – in particular, women's tendency to get what they want using insidious and treacherous ways due to an inability to achieve it straightforwardly. Oberon's cunning behavior and choice of methods to achieve his goals show how his character coincides with early modern stereotypes about women being "disorderly, unruly, untrustworthy," and "crooked by nature" (Walters 158). Since the fairy king is unable to exert control as a husband and king through the power of his words or other masculine methods (such as Theseus's victory of Hippolyta), he attempts to achieve his goals through trickery and deception.

Oberon creates political and sexual chaos by drugging Titania and making the queen fall in love with a "lion, bear, or wolf, or bull, / On meddling monkey, or on busy ape" (2.1.180-81). According to Lisa Walters, because of such behavior, "under early modern law, he [Oberon] could be designated a sodomite or at least as causing sodomy" (158) because the first English sodomy law would punish with death those found guilty of the "detestable and abhomynable vice of buggery commytted with mankynde or beaste" ("Buggery"). Alan Bray explains that sodomy "in the early modern period was a general notion of debauchery linked to politically dangerous behavior," and Oberon's rebellion against the fairy queen would most likely fit into that category (16). None of his choices indicate masculine principles of rationality and wisdom; Oberon is not the "king or father who exercises order over the kingdom or household," but he is rather "the subversion of good order," the phrase that, according to John Knox, describes any woman in a position of political authority and rulership (Walters 158). Oberon not only represents early modern feminine traits; he also takes care of mortal women, guides them in the fairy world, and satisfies their wishes.

Desperately wanting to be together with objects of their affections, Hermia and Helena act according to previously mentioned stereotypical assumptions about women. They both use deceptive and insidious ways to achieve their goals; Hermia deceives her father and runs away with Lysander to secretly marry him, and Helena betrays her friends, Hermia and Lysander, in the hope of winning Demetrius. Despite the unworthy methods they choose, at the end of the play, the women's wishes are

satisfied because the fairy king assists in actualizing them. Perhaps one of the reasons why Oberon helps these women is his similarity with them – all of them know how it feels to be in a subordinate position and none of them can achieve their goals without trickery due to their circumstances. Neither Egeus's desire for Hermia to marry Demetrius, nor Demetrius's wish to be with Hermia is considered by the fairy king while he is trying to "fix" the mortal world. At the beginning of the play, it is very unlikely that women will get what they want, especially Helena due to the opposition of the duke and Demetrius's rejection of her in favor of Hermia; Hermia, at least, has Lysander on her side.

Interestingly, Oberon is the one who forges a connection with Helena as soon as he finds her in the woods and decides to create a happy ending for her. Significantly, at precisely the moment when he takes pity on her, Oberon calls Helena a "nymph": "Fare thee well, nymph. Ere he do leave this grove, / Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love" (2.1.245-46). Regina Buccola explains that by calling Helena a "nymph," "Oberon aligns Helena by name with the fairy realm he inhabits as he echoes her promise to change not just myth but her own story to its diametrical opposite." When Oberon observes Helena, his initial impulse is to help her fight against the social structures that limit her ability to get the man she wants on her terms. By promising to help Helena, Oberon devotes his actions to the happiness and well-being of the women in the play. Regina Buccola confirms that "The lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are ultimately united by a fairy force aligned with the female desires of both Helena and Hermia." At the end of the play, Oberon manages to accomplish his promise, as both Hermia and Helena are comfortably settled into the relationships they want. He also makes peace with Titania, who is finally restored to her rightful role as the queen.

Considering the early modern audience's views on authority, rulership, and feminine and masculine characteristics, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play full of subversion. Oberon cannot control his wife, Titania, who has much more power and authority than he in the fairy world and lacks conformity to early modern views on women. Oberon also does not conform to an early modern understanding of masculinity. Oberon is the one who resembles assumptions about women, guiding female characters during the play, providing them with happy endings, and proving the subversion of gender roles in the play.

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