A Crisis of Friendship: Calculation and Betrayal in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello, the Moor of Venice*

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DEDICATION

To my parents for always believing that I could do anything I set out to accomplish.

To my children, Nick and Alli, for always encouraging me in my endeavor.

To my wonderful husband Michael Shannon Sexton for his love and unconditional support for twenty-five years.

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ABSTRACT

The idea that friendship is an illusory connection that may only exist in philosophers' writings was a subject of interest for many of the early modern writers. Writers like Thomas Elyot, Thomas Churchyard, and Michel de Montaigne attempted to uphold idealized traditions of friendship; conversely, Shakespeare, along with writers such as Francis Bacon, presented early modern perceptions of idealized friendship only to confront and challenge the precepts. In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, Shakespeare expresses a sometimes cynical yet realistic approach toward idealized friendship. He exposes the problem of upholding the idealized early modern version of amity in order to present a more realistic representation of friendship.

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INTRODUCTION

"Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, / Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel" Polonius advises Laertes in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1.3.62-3). In the same play, Hamlet declares to Horatio, his closest friend and confidant, "Give me a man / That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him / In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart, / As I do thee" (3.2.70-73). In *Hamlet* Shakespeare implies that friendship is both elusive and valuable. If Shakespeare's notions are accurate, what makes friendship difficult to obtain yet precious to possess? Is it that every individual longs for that special connection with another person, yet because humans are flawed creatures, they eventually abandon their idealistic notions of friendship since they are aware of their own shortcomings?

These questions are not easily answered, yet it is obvious by his works that Shakespeare considered friendship a relevant topic of his time. The idea that true friendship is an illusory connection that may only exist in philosophers' writings was a subject of interest for many of the early modern writers. Writers like Thomas Elyot, Thomas Churchyard, and Michel de Montaigne attempted to uphold the idealized traditions of friendship; conversely, Shakespeare, along with writers such as Francis Bacon, presented early modern perceptions of idealized friendship only to confront and challenge the precepts.

Over the course of this thesis, I demonstrate how Shakespeare exposes the problem of upholding the idealized early modern version of friendship specifically in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello, the Moore of Venice*. My argument, of course, is not the first of its kind. Laurie Shannon and Tom MacFaul, for example, have extensively explored in recent years the topic of early modern friendship. Whereas my thesis more closely

resembles MacFaul's opinions, my conclusions on the subject vary. In *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries,* MacFaul sums up his argument in the following lines: "Most of Shakespeare's plays and much of the writing of the period are shaped by the Humanist ideal of true friendship, even when they are aware that it is a will o' the wisp, but its main effect is to create a self assertive individuality coloured and limited by the failure of this ideal" (1). While I agree with MacFaul's assessment that Shakespeare is aware of the shortcomings of early modern idealized friendship, I differ on his conclusion that Shakespeare intended to "create a self assertive individuality (1)." While this may be a by-product of his works, I maintain that Shakespeare confronts and challenges the well-known tradition of idealized friendship in order to present a more realistic representation of friendship. While friendships may be both valuable and elusive, they are also made imperfect by the fallibility of its participants, and Shakespeare's intention is to reflect those imperfections.

Shakespeare himself gives some insight of his intention to reveal human nature as it is through one of his characters. In *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark,* Hamlet gives advice to a group of players on the proper way to perform a play:

> Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (3.2.17-24)

Though Hamlet is remarking on the actual performance of the actors, the implications of his words reach further. I argue by presenting the concepts of idealized friendship and exposing their unrealistic qualities, paradoxically Shakespeare is in fact holding a mirror up to reveal accurate portrayals of true-to-life friendships. While the realities of friendship may not correspond with the idealized version of amity, the relationships Shakespeare offers are in a sense "truer" than any model of perfect amity since they reveal what is instead of what could be.

Before Shakespeare wrote his famous tragedy *Hamlet*, however, conceptions of amity had permeated the humanistic schoolrooms of Renaissance England decades earlier through the writings of Aristotle and Cicero. Laurie Shannon maintains that Cicero's *De amicitia* served "an astonishingly key role in the school curricula formulated by humanist and education writers" (26-27). Tom MacFaul asserts in *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* that humanism shaped the concept of friendship, which ultimately took much of its ideology from the classical writer Cicero (7). He notes that while Cicero's writings owed much to Aristotle, Cicero "was often taken as an authority by early Renaissance Humanists" (7). Robert Stretter, however, maintains that Aristotle afforded ample inspiration for early modern writers with his *Nicomachean Ethics* (347-348). Likewise, Henry S. Turner declares of *Nicomachean Ethics*, "It was by far the most commonly owned of Aristotle's books, appearing in both public and private inventories two, three, or even four times as often as other Aristotelian works, including the *Politics*" (416). These classical writings, so ingrained in the fabric of Renaissance society, prompted many writers of the period to explore the highly idealized versions of friendship these writings presented.

Renaissance writers' view of classical friendship did not simply imitate their sources; their writings also attempted to serve as didactic models for relationships of amity. According to Lauren J. Mills, "When, thanks to the printing-press and the enthusiasm of the humanists, the philosophical and ethical aspects of classical friendship became familiar to a larger number of people—people who had embraced the Renaissance delight in the life here and now—the purpose of those who disseminated the classical ideas was didactic" (376). The idea that literature could function as a teaching tool was a popular notion borrowed from the classics and elaborated on by writers such as Sir Philip Sidney. In *A Defence of Poesy* he argues the purpose of poetry is twofold: "Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word *mimesis*—that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth—to speak metaphorically, speaking picture—with this end, to teach and delight" (217). While many of the writings specific to early modern friendship do not fall exclusively into the category of poetry, the view that literature in general should instruct the reader as well as entertain gave inspiration for some early modern writers to produce conceptions of amity that proposed possibilities rather than actualities. As Aristotle argues in *The Poetics*, "It is apparent from what has been said that it is not the business of the poet to tell what has happened, but what might happen and what is possible according to probability or necessity" (81). Therefore, the idealized version of friendship posited during the early modern period presented a model of friendship to be emulated, and many writers endeavored to show their friendships exemplified perfect amity. French philosopher Michel de Montaigne, for instance, incorporates and expands the ancient

philosophers' idea of friends as other selves[1] when he describes his relationship with Etienne de La Boétie:

> Our souls were yoked together in such unity, and contemplated each other with so ardent an affection, and with the same affection revealed each other right down to the very entrails, that not only did I know his mind as well as I knew my own but I would have entrusted myself to him with greater assurance than to myself. (213)

Montaigne's interpretation of his friendship with La Boétie presents not only a perfect friendship but also functions as a didactic tool for idealized friendship. David Schalkwyk asserts, "Montaigne's essay 'On Friendship' may be read as a conventional summation of almost all of the central precepts laid down by Aristotle and Cicero" (143).

Prior to Montaigne and Sidney, Thomas Elyot's idealized account of friendship in Renaissance England served as an early paradigm for perfect amity. In "The wonderfull history of Titus and Gisippus, and whereby is fully declared the figure of perfect amitie" in *The Boke Named the Governour,* Elyot remarks that his account "shall ministre to the redars singuler pleasure and also incredible comforte to practise amitie" (166). He uses Titus and Gisippus as examples of true friends who share so close a bond that Gisippus willingly relinquishes his bride-to-be to Titus when he learns that his friend has fallen in love with his fiancé. In return, when Gisippus is accused of murder, Titus saves him from certain

[1] Regarding friends as other selves, Aristotle claims, "A friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort" (176). Likewise, Cicero declares, "But besides, friendship is like a looking glass, which every time we view it, gives us a representation of our very selves" (15).

death.[2] Laurie Shannon presents Thomas Elyot's story of Titus and Gisippus as an example to show the instructional quality of Cicero's *De Amicitia*:

> Elyot himself provides an analysis justifying *De Amicitia's* special educational suitability as well as its popularity from a humanist viewpoint, whether in Latin, English, or even pictorial version. Friendship calls up a limited set of undisputed models (Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades, and Sometimes Harmodious and Aristogiton, Theseus and Pirithous, or Alexander and Hephaestion)...In these two respects, friendship especially rewards the humanist's familiar faith in the use of examples and his advocacy of pleasure and sweetness as spurs to learning. Friendship discourses seem perfectly cast to serve the reader as such pedagogical writers theorized him" (29-30).

The instructional quality employed by Elyot and other early modern writers demonstrates their goal to teach an idealized view of friendship using classical traditions. The likelihood that friendships could reach this idealized and therefore unrealistic portrait of amity created a tradition, as MacFaul contends, "ripe for debunking" (10).[3]

Before the debunking of idealized friendship, however, the writings of Aristotle and Cicero generated models of amity for early modern writers to follow. Since Cicero's concepts of friendship were intertwined with Aristotle's, both philosophers considered

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[2] John D. Cox argues Elyot's attempt at illustrating a model friendship is more about rivalry and less about perfect amity, "Though Eloyt [Elyot] repeatedly insists that the story illustrates perfect mutual friendship, what it really illustrates is Titus's surrender in the competition for moral perfection, when faced with Gisippus' superior ability to compete" (14).

[3] While I agree with MacFaul that these models of friendship were "ripe for debunking" (10), I would also argue that because of their didactic nature, these paradigms of amity were meant to be impossible to achieve. The unattainable qualities offered by classical and early modern writers served only as examples to follow. That being said, some writers, such as Montaigne, attempted to prove their friendships met or exceeded those unrealistic qualities of friendship. Their attempts, of course, left them open to "debunking."

some of the same attributes essential for true friendship to exist. In *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle identifies three basic kinds of friendship: friendship for good, friendship for utility, and friendship for pleasure (144). The most important of these friendships, according to the philosopher, is the friendship based on shared or mutual virtue: "Perfect friendship is the friendship of men who are good, and alike in virtue" (145). He argues while the other two friendships may exist between "bad men" (147), true friendship cannot last without virtue. Similarly, Cicero states, "Virtue is the product and preserver of friendship, both gives life to it, and preserves its existence. For friendship neither appears nor continues, where virtue is wanting" (13). Cicero's dialogue extols virtuous amity as the only true form of friendship. He warns against faults such as flattery[4] that could harm or potentially destroy a friendship. Aristotle's view of amity, however, conveys a more realistic approach. He recognizes that although the best kind of friendship is based on virtue, few friendships reach the pinnacle of perfect friendship status. He differentiates the friendships of utility and pleasure in terms of self-interest:

> Therefore those who love because of utility love because of what is good *for themselves*, and those who love because of pleasure do so because of what is pleasant *to themselves,* and not because of who the loved person is but in so far as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only incidental; for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but as providing some good or pleasure. (144)

[4] Concerning flattery Cicero declares, "Now counterfeit and flattery may serve a turn and gain the sycophant's ends: but in true friendship there is nothing of feint or the flatterer: for the nature of it is to be genuine and sincere, and then this is conviction enough to the world, that friendship rather seems to take its rise and spring from our natures, than owe its birth to a sense of want and indigence" (18-19).

Aristotle maintains that these flawed friendships eventually dissolve since their foundations cannot withstand the pressures of change. When the usefulness or the pleasure no longer exists for these friendships, they are doomed to failure. Conversely, the good and virtuous friendship, which promotes selflessness between friends, contains both usefulness and pleasure.[5] These kinds of friendships endure because of their virtuous nature. While Aristotle recognizes that inferior forms of friendship exist, he undermines his own observation by arguing that the friendships of utility and pleasure cannot last, which ultimately leaves virtuous friendship as the only true, enduring form of amity.

Early modern writers such as Walter Dorke and Thomas Churchyard echo the classical philosophers' sentiments regarding virtue as an essential, if not *the* essential, characteristic for true friendship. In Dorke's treatise *A tipe or figure of friendship,* he claims,

> Wherefore the friendship is spoken of in this place, is not the tirannicall friendship of the holy league, nor the filthie friendship, of the false named familie of loue, nor the forward friendship which a man may finde at Billingsgate for a boxe on the ear, nor the profitable friendship which is among Merchants, nor the pleasant friendship which is among Courtiers, nor the common friendship which is among Clownes: but it is the true, perfect, and vnfeyned friendship, which is neither for pleasure partely, nor for profit chiefely, but for vertues sake onely.

Dorke's description catalogues the various kinds of so-called friendships, yet the first part of his list reads like an indictment of harmful relationships: "tirannicall," "filthie," and

[5] "And each is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful to each other. So too they are pleasant; for the good are pleasant both without qualification and to each other, since to each his own activities and others like them are pleasurable, and the actions of the good are the same or like" (Aristotle 145).

"false." Reiterating Aristotle's three kinds of friendship, he dismisses all other forms of amity except the virtuous. By calling virtuous friendship the "true, perfect" form of friendship, he implies that the rest are imperfect at best or false at worst. Instead, his interpretation more closely resembles Cicero's reflections:

> Mistake me not, I am not describing that outward and shallow part of friendship which perhaps may please, and have its advantages too; but I am discoursing and speaking of the nature and constitution of perfect and ingenuous friendship, which is practiced and entertained but by an inconfideable part of the world. (15)

Dorke, like Cicero, does not view friendships other than virtuous friendship as alternative forms of amity. While Aristotle eventually argues that only virtuous friendship can last and therefore is the only true form of amity, he acknowledges that less virtuous forms of amity exist.

Thomas Churchyard in *A Sparke of Frendship* asserts that virtue is the preeminent characteristic required for genuine friendship,

> I say and proue that the same is true friendship that proceedes from virtue, and hath so noble a nature (by a diuine motion of goodnesse) that neither vice can corrupt, nor any kind of vanitie vanquish: For where it taketh roote, it buds so beautifully that it bringeth foorth an euelasting fruite, whose taste is more sweete and precious, than can bee easely imagined.

Although his description is similar to Dorke's in respect to virtue, Churchyard's vivid use of imagery appeals to the aesthetic quality that Sidney values. Specifically, fruit is both pleasant to look at and also useful to eat; therefore, Churchyard's description of true

friendship reiterates the pleasant and useful quality of amity that Aristotle suggests comes from a perfect friendship.[6] Nevertheless, both descriptions of true friendship model closely Aristotle and Cicero by emphasizing virtue as the central trait needed to experience true and lasting amity.

While both Aristotle and Cicero regard virtue as a critical component of true friendship, their observations suggest that men must share some form of equality or likeness in order to sustain a friendship. Aristotle's view of men "alike in virtue" (145) recommends equality through goodness take precedence over other traits such as status or wealth. While social and economic equality encourages friendships between men, Aristotle believes virtue equalizes and helps sustain friendships. He queries whether truly good men—hence, happy men—actually need friends; he then answers his own query: "A friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort" (176). A friend acting as "another self" must also be good or virtuous since it is their likeness that gives them equality.[7] Anyone other than a virtuous man would have questionable motives. Aristotle does, however, offer concessions for friendships of inequality:

> In all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves, and so should the more useful, and similarly in each of the other cases; for when the love is in proportion to

[6] "Now those who wish well to their friends for their sake are most truly friends; for they do this by reason of their own nature and not incidentally; therefore their friendship lasts as long as they are good-and goodness is an enduring thing. And each is good without qualification and to his friend, for the good are both good without qualification and useful to each other. So too they are pleasant; for the good are pleasant both without qualification and to each other, since to each his own activities and others like them are pleasurable, and the actions of the good *are* the same or like. And such as friendship is, as might be expected, permanent, since there meet in it all the qualities that friendship should have" (Aristotle 145).

[7] "Each, then, both loves what is good for himself, and makes an equal return in goodwill and in pleasantness; for friendship is said to be equality, and both of these are found most in the friendship of the good" (Aristotle 148).

> the merit of the parties, then in a sense arises equality, which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship. (150)

If disparities exist between friends, love must compensate for the inequities. Love does not guarantee that the friendship will last since equality is a characteristic necessary for a true friendship. If the disproportion is too great for love to compensate for each other's deficiencies, the friendship will not survive.

Like Aristotle, Cicero takes a similar view of equality believing that a true friend will be a reflection of his friend: "Friendship is like a looking glass, which every time we view it, gives us a representation of our very selves" (15). This depiction of a friend as a mirrored image implies mutuality between friends. Specifically, Cicero argues intelligence, actions, and temperament as equalizers between men, but only for good men who respect each other.[8] He also concludes that equality will help sustain a friendship: "The strongest cement to preserve friendship when once united, is for both parties to be upon a level, and neither of them to claim a precedency, that possible may be due to their merit" (44). Like Aristotle, Cicero concludes that love, which is necessary for virtue, is the great equalizer between friends.[9] Both philosophers maintain that equality must exist in some form in order for friendship to endure.

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[8] "To which we may add another consideration of no small weight; namely, there is no cause so powerful in the production of its effects, as resemblance and conformity in mind and manners, is to create friendship. Conformable to which, we see good men to have a natural tendency, and respect one for the other; and from the natural likeness in their temper associate together as friends and kinsmen; for nothing gives greater proof of its tendency and love for similar qualities than nature" (Cicero 33).

[9] "It is love, the very being and soul of friendship, that is the principle of union and the foundation of good nature" (Cicero 18).

In the story of Titus and Gissipus, taken from the Boccaccio's *Decameron,* early modern writer Thomas Elyot undergirds and exceeds the idea of another self by emphasizing the matched perfection of the two friends,

> This Chremes hapned to haue also a sone named Gisippus, who nat onely was equall to the said yonge Titus in yeres, but also in stature, proporcion of body, fauour, and colour of visage, countenaunce, and speche. The two children were so like, that without moche difficultie it could not be discerned of their proper parentes, which was Titus from Gysippus, or Gysippus from Titus. These two yonge gentilmen, as they seemed to be one in fourme and personage, so, shortely after acquaintaunce, the same nature wrought in their hartes suche a mutuall affection, that their willes and appetites daily more and more so confederated them selfes whan their names were declared, but that they hadde had onely chaunged their places, issuinge (as I mought say) out of the one body, and entringe in to the other. (166-167)

Comparable to Montaigne's instantaneous friendship with La Boétie,[10] Elyot's description of Titus and Gisippus stresses their likeness in body, mind, and spirit. The equality paradigm Elyot presents served as an important contribution to the early modern readers conception of friendship. According to Mills, in England the story "gives the earliest fully elaborated friendship story to appear in the sixteenth century" (99).

Another essential component of classical and Renaissance friendship stressed almost exclusively male amity. The emphasis placed on male friendship likely stemmed

[10] "Having so short a period to last, having begun so late (for we were both grown men – he more than a few years older than I) – it had not time to waste on following the pattern of those slacker ordinary friendships which require so much prudent foresight in long preliminary acquaintance" (Montaigne 212).

from the classical curriculum of England's educational system and early modern thought regarding women. The belief that women's purpose in life was to marry, bear children, and be in subjection to their husbands was a common thread throughout Renaissance society. The mindset of the patriarchal system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries subjugated women with law and religion supporting their principles.

Montaigne contends that amity between men and women—specifically husbands and wives—cannot possibly meet the criterion for a meaningful friendship that only two men can experience:

> As for marriage, apart from being a bargain when only the entrance is free (its duration being fettered and constrained, depending on things outside our will), it is a bargain struck for other purposes; within it you soon have to unsnarl hundreds of extraneous tangled ends, which are enough to break the thread of living passion and to trouble its course, whereas in friendship there is no traffic of commerce but with itself. In addition, woman are in truth not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship, nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn. And indeed if it were possible to fashion such a relationship, willing and free, in which not only the souls had this full enjoyment but in which the bodies too shared in the union. . .where the whole human being was involved – it is certain. . .that the loving-friendship would be more full and more abundant. But there is no example yet of woman attaining to it. . . and by the common agreement of the Ancient schools of philosophy she is excluded from it. (210)

His argument stresses women's inability to encounter men with "mutual confidence" (210) which implies that they cannot respond on an intellectual level. Invariably, he reduces them to mentally dwarfed individuals with the incapability of understanding the depth of which two souls must mingle in order "to sustain that holy bond of friendship" (210). He also equates marriage with a form of institutional slavery. For him and his classical predecessors, friendships must come from a mutual agreement between two individuals who are not forced to remain friends,[11] and he deems marriage an obligatory relationship whereby men and women cannot escape. He concedes that if women were intellectually and emotionally capable of a lasting friendship, the relationship would exceed that of male amity since they would also connect on a physical level, which for Montaigne is not an option for two men. He believes a true comingling of souls between friends can only exist between two intellectually and emotionally equal people. Therefore, he excludes women from the possibility of forming lasting, true friendships.

According to MacFaul, the exclusionary aspect of male friendship during the early modern period was less about women and more about men's psyche:

> No one, in our society or Shakespeare's, feels much personal stake in a 'sum of male power'. If anything, humiliation at the hands of another man is more powerfully felt because more power is at stake...such relationships [of exclusion] are obviously not only about women; men do have direct needs for emotional support from other men, more so in the early modern world, owing to the relative powerlessness of women to help them in an unequal society. (3)

[11] This argument refers to the idea of equality between friends. If men are equal, they are not forced by lack of money or status to remain friends with someone that serves a utilitarian purpose.

Ironically, the idealized male bonds men so actively pursued and protected from outside forces eventually led to anxiety and disillusionment.

The leading precepts of perfect friendship—virtue, equality, and maleness—idealized by classical philosophers and early modern humanist writers eventually gave way to skepticism by the early 1590s.[12] The inconsistency between idealized qualities of amity and the realities of friendship created an atmosphere of suspicion for some early modern writers. Concerning this inconsistency, Stretter contends that "perfect friendship had become a rigorously theorized tradition with a canon of "laws" set down in proverbs . . .. These proverbs and their implications exerted a great imaginative force as writers struggled to reconcile the theory of friendship with its practice" (348). MacFaul describes friendship during this time as "increasingly untrustworthy" (1), and Robert C. Evans asserts, "Flattery and false friendships were topics that preoccupied many people during the Renaissance" (1).

Francis Bacon's essay "Of Friendship," for example, reflected the new growing skepticism of idealized amity. Though he recognized the importance of such an association—"I have given the rule, where a man cannot fitly play his own part: if he have not a friend, he may quit the stage" (86)—his reasons for friendship contradict the idealized qualities admired by other Renaissance writers. For Bacon, a friend's usefulness plays a significant role in his version of friendship. His description of the fruits of friendship is similar to Churchyard's,[13] yet his attitude varies by concentrating on the benefits of

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[12] MacFaul, Tom. "Friendship in Sidney's *Arcadias*." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900, The English Renaissance* 49.1 (2009): 17-33. *JSTOR*. Web. 28 Jan. 2016. (17).

[13] "I say and proue that the same is true friendship that proceedes from virtue, and hath so noble a nature (by a diuine motion of goodnesse) that neither vice can corrupt, nor any kind of vanitie vanquish: For where it

friendship instead of the unselfish relationship that Churchyard and his classical predecessors valued. Bacon's first fruit of friendship—"the ease and discharge of the fullness and swellings of the heart" (80)— highlights a friend's usefulness instead of mutuality between friends. He equates a friend to a priest by which the friend may unburden himself, "But a true friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession" (81). The "absolution" that the friend receives is not a reciprocal experience; instead, the burden resides with the friend. He cynically notes that "kings and monarchs" find this kind of friendship so indispensable that "they purchase it many times at the hazard of their own safety and greatness" (81). While he understands friendship is a necessary part of life, Bacon offers a rational approach to the qualities of amity praised by humanist writers. Unlike the high-minded conceptions of idealized friendship that extol close bonds, his words suggest a distrustful or perhaps realistic attitude toward human nature.

In the last part of his essay, Bacon reiterates Aristotle's idea of another self but for practical purposes. He argues that friends can serve as tools to implement even after death:

> Here the best way to represent to life the manifold use of friendship is to cast and see how many things there are which a man cannot do himself; and then it will appear that it was a sparing speech of the ancients, to say, *that a friend is another himself:* for that a friend is far more than himself. Men have their time, and die many times in desire of some things which they principally take

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taketh roote, it buds so beautifully that it bringeth foorth an euelasting fruite, whose taste is more sweete and precious, than can bee easely imagined" (Churchyard).

> to heart; the bestowing of a child, the finishing of a work, or the like. If a man have a true friend, he may rest almost secure that the care of those things will continue after him. (85-86)

Bacon's use of the words "almost secure" (86) paints a cynical picture when referring to what a "true friend" (86) is willing to do for his deceased friend. Even a genuine friend he holds up to scrutiny. His distrust suggests that no person can ever achieve perfect amity; however, his attitude toward man's limitations does not preclude him from experiencing a satisfying yet imperfect form of friendship.

In "Of Followers and Friends" Bacon reiterates his pragmatic approach to early modern friendship by taking to task the idealized characteristics of equality and virtue. He says of equality, "There is little friendship in the world, and least of all between equals, which was wont to be magnified. That that is, is between superior and inferior, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other" (147). While on the one hand he cynically notes the lack of real friendship, he also maintains that friendships of utility serve a purpose. Friendships of equality cannot further a friend's place in society; instead, the interests of people of different social standing may be mutually beneficial. And though he understands the importance of virtue, he also sees it as potentially problematic: "And besides, to speak truth, in base times active men are of more use than virtuous" (146). While virtue is a quality to be admired, he observes the benefit of a man of action over a man of integrity. Once again, Bacon emphasizes practical or useful friendships over philosophical constructs of idealized amity.

In several of his works, Shakespeare expresses a similar cynical yet realistic approach toward idealized friendship. At times he parodies friendships like that of Titus

and Gisippus, as he does in *The Two Gentleman of Verona.* At other times he sheds light on unrealistic expectations of perfect amity, or he exposes false friendship at its worst. In Chapter One, "An Exposition of Inequity: Disparities of Friendship in *The Merchant of Venice,"* I demonstrate how Shakespeare reveals his skepticism regarding the ability to uphold concepts of idealized friendship perpetuated by classical philosophers and early modern writers. He presents incongruities of affection between Antonio, the merchant of Venice, and Bassanio, the prodigal nobleman. He exposes the vulnerabilities of their friendship through the calculations of Shylock, the Jewish moneylender who seeks to destroy Antonio, and Portia, Bassanio's love interest who challenges Antonio's position with Bassanio. In Chapter Two, "False Friends: Betrayal of Friendship in *Othello, the Moor of Venice,*" I show how Shakespeare's character Iago abuses the idealized qualities of early modern amity in order to betray his commanding officer, Othello. He fashions himself as the perfect friend worthy of Montaigne's description of La Boétie, yet he perverts those idealized concepts so that he can destroy his so-called friend. Both chapters examine Shakespeare's dramatization of early modern idealized friendship and how he exposes its weaknesses through an accurate portrayal of true-to-life friendship.

CHAPTER 1

An Exposition of Inequity: Disparities of Friendship in *The Merchant of Venice*

On the subject of amity, Cicero and Aristotle afforded much inspiration for early modern writers. Their rigorous tenets of friendship, exclusive to male amity, created a tradition of perfect friendship that many writers attempted to imitate. While both Aristotle and Cicero regard virtue as a key element of true friendship, they contend that men must share some form of equality in order to sustain a friendship. Aristotle asserts, "A friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort" (176). Similarly, Cicero argues, "Friendship is like a looking glass, which every time we view it, gives us a representation of our very selves" (15). Their claim is that men who are "alike in virtue" (Aristotle 145) will make the truest friends.

By the time Shakespeare wrote his poems and plays, doubts regarding the ability to uphold these paradigms of early modern friendship began to permeate the literature of the day.[14] Writers like Francis Bacon viewed friendships not as idealized bonds but rather as realistic relationships between imperfect human beings.[15] Similarly, Shakespeare's characters reveal their inability to sustain the impossible precepts of idealized friendship, but they also demonstrate a faithful representation of human interaction.

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[14] Stretter contends that "perfect friendship had become a rigorously theorized tradition with a canon of "laws" set down in proverbs . . .. These proverbs and their implications exerted a great imaginative force as writers struggled to reconcile the theory of friendship with its practice" (348).

[15] "Here the best way to represent to life the manifold use of friendship is to cast and see how many things there are which a man cannot do himself; and then it will appear that it was a sparing speech of the ancients, to say, *that a friend is another himself:* for that a friend is far more than himself. Men have their time, and die many times in desire of some things which they principally take to heart; the bestowing of a child, the finishing of a work, or the like. If a man have a true friend, he may rest almost secure that the care of those things will continue after him" (Bacon 85-86).

In his sonnets, for example, Shakespeare explores among other things a friendship between an older man—the speaker—and a younger man, the object of the speaker's affections. Unlike the ideal friendship described by early modern writers such as Michel de Montaigne who views genuine friendship between men as the mingling of souls "confounded in so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joints them together so that it cannot be found" (212), the relationship between speaker and object reflect an unequal friendship in terms of age and social status. The older man longs for the young man's affection yet realizes that the young man may be incapable of experiencing the depth of friendship he feels. In Sonnet 71, for example, he urges the young man, "No longer mourn for me when I am dead" (1). Paradoxically, by cautioning the youth to forget him so that others will not "mock" (14) him for his sorrow, the older man in fact yearns for the young man to remember him. This contradictory reminder to forget demonstrates the speaker's apprehension regarding the young man's true affections toward him. He refuses, however, to explicitly ask the young man to remember him for fear of what his answer might be since he has proven to be, if not entirely in the eyes of the speaker but in the eyes of the audience, a self-loving, self-serving individual. Though the speaker attempts to circumvent the young man's character flaws, the fact that he must remind the young man to forget him shows that the speaker recognizes his shortcomings but refuses to accept them.

Comparably, in Sonnet 35 the bond between the speaker and the young man is tested, yet the older man still makes excuses for his friend's disloyalty. The young man has apparently stolen someone from the speaker. Although the reader does not know for sure the specific transgressions of the youth, the speaker does refer to his lapse as a "sensual fault" (9). Whether this is a reference to the dark lady or some other sexual indiscretion,

the speaker does not make clear, but once again the likelihood that it is a woman that has come between them seems probable. However, even though the speaker feels betrayed by the young man, he not only pardons his behavior but also plays his judicial advocate by exonerating him of any blame and becoming his accomplice after the fact. He sides with the young man and justifies his conduct by expressing the idea that nothing or no one is perfect. The speaker consoles him, "No more be grieved at that which thou has done. Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud, / Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun" (1-3). Regarding the older man's actions, Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick maintains, "The Sonnets' poetic goes to almost any length to treat the youth as a moral monolith" (41). The speaker is willing to corrupt himself by relieving the young man of any fault, yet he may suspect that that the young man is not truly repentant of his actions, even though he implies at the beginning of the poem that the he is "grieved" (1) by his actions. In the last line of the sonnet, the speaker notes that the "sweet thief" has "sourly" (14) robbed from him. The word *sour* is ambiguous, but it could imply intentionality on the part of the young man. Regardless, the speaker cares more for the young man than any betrayal that he might have committed.

The speaker renews his doubt regarding the young man's love for him in Sonnet 93. He has resigned himself to pretend that the young man is "true" (1), even though he knows he is deceiving himself. He compares his relationship to the young man in terms of marriage, except that this "marriage" is one of love, not the kind of convenient relationship with a woman the speaker suggests for the young man in Sonnet 1 and 3. The speaker becomes like a willingly deceived spouse who knows that his "wife" is untrue, yet he chooses to ignore the signs and remain ignorant. He says, "Like a deceived husband; so

love's face / May still seem love to me, though altered new, / Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place" (2-4). The possibility of losing the young man's affections keeps the speaker from confronting the reality that the young man feels something significantly less than he does. In these sonnets, then, Shakespeare's speaker addresses the issue of friendship not fully reciprocated and demonstrates the lengths that he will go to in order to experience some recognition of affection from his beloved, regardless how the youth may abuse or ignore their relationship. Although the speaker exonerates the young man from any wrongdoing, the young man's actions speak to his self-centeredness and his lack of affection toward the speaker. The speaker longs for a friendship of mutuality, but the inequity of age, status, and love precludes any possibility for an idealized friendship.

The imbalance of affection between male friends and the challenges of outside forces that undermine the friendship, which he addresses in his sonnets, Shakespeare portrays in his tragicomedy *The Merchant of Venice.* Like the older speaker of the sonnets who displays a disproportionate affection for a young nobleman, Antonio, the merchant of the play's title, shares a friendship of inequality with the young gentleman Bassanio. And like the young man of Shakespeare's sonnets, Bassanio exhibits some of the same self-serving, self-loving tendencies.

In Sedgewick's argument, "Swan in Love: The Example of Shakespeare's Sonnets," regarding male homosocial bonds, she contends that male relationships often configure structurally as a triangle with a woman serving as a channel in which the two men may express their male bonds (33). No love rivalry for a dark lady occurs in *Merchant*, but there does exist two triangular structures that undermine the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio. The first consists of Antonio, Portia, and Bassanio. Although a woman does come

between the two friends, the juxtaposition of the characters differs. Ironically, it is Bassanio who is the object of affection and Portia and Antonio are rivals for his love. In the second configuration, the female is excluded entirely; instead, Antonio and Bassanio are linked by Shylock, the merchant's antagonist. The bond Antonio makes with the moneylender on behalf of the young man places Shylock in a position of power over Antonio and Bassanio, which threatens their friendship. Though the calculations of Shylock and Portia expose the vulnerabilities of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship, it is the inequities of their friendship that weaken their relationship and prevent them from experiencing the idealized friendship that Montaigne describes as "one soul in bodies twain" (214).

Antonio, the Venetian merchant, sets himself apart from the other characters at the start of the play through his melancholy temperament. He admits to Salerio and Solanio,

> In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
> It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn;
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
> That I have much ado to know myself. (*Merchant* 1.1.1-7)

Unlike the two men who, according to John R. Cooper, "find Antonio's melancholy amusing" (119), Antonio cannot share in their disposition. Although it appears that Antonio is friendly with several of the young men of Venice, he stands apart from them in age[16] and

[16] Although no specific age is given for Antonio, his monetary wealth and standing in the Venetian community suggest that he is older than Bassanio. Bassanio, on the other hand, refers to himself as a "willful youth" (1.1.146). Also, when Portia-as-Balthasar asks, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.172), it

temperament. Instead, he sees himself as an actor playing a part; he is the melancholy Jacques-like character who views life in terms of performance as he tells Gratiano, "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano—/ A state where everyman must play a part, / And mine a sad one" (1.1.77-79). Antonio claims that he has no notion of the origin of his gloomy temperament, which opens the issue up to both other characters and scholars.

Salerio and Solanio offer several reasons for Antonio's sad demeanor. At first Salerio suggests that Antonio is preoccupied with his ventures at sea. When Antonio rejects the idea that his argosies are the reason for his sad behavior, Solanio submits love is the cause for his disposition. Antonio's denial to Solanio is an emphatic "Fie, fie!" (1.1.46). Solanio then proposes that Antonio is sad for no particular reason: "Then let us say you are sad / Because you are not merry"(1.1.47-48). The most telling indication of Antonio's depression, however, occurs when Salerio watches Antonio say goodbye to Bassanio when he leaves for Belmont, and he describes the encounter to Solanio:

> I saw Bassanio and Antonio part.
> Bassanio told him he would make some speed
> Of his return; he answered, "Do not so.
> Slubber not business for my sake Bassanio,
> But stay the very riping of the time;
> And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me,
> Let it not enter in your mind of love.
> Be merry and employ your chiefest thoughts
> To courtship and such fair ostents of love

implies that Antonio and Shylock may be close enough in age to merit the question. Shylock, of course, has a grown daughter and Portia describes him as "old" (4.2.11).

> As shall conveniently become you there."
>
> And even there, his eye being big with tears,
>
> Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,
>
> And with affection wondrous sensible
>
> He wrung Bassanio's hand; and so they parted. (2.8.35-49)

Antonio's instruction to Bassanio is reminiscent of the speaker's advice in Sonnet 71 to the young man. The unspoken yet unmistakable longing for the young man to remember him after he is gone is the same yearning Antonio apparently has for Bassanio. Thus Antonio's words and actions lead many critics to speculate that his demeanor stems from his feelings for Bassanio. Steve Patterson, for example, interprets Antonio's feelings as lover like:

> The merchant's pursuit of Bassanio is wearisome and circular in a way reminiscent of Sir Thomas Wyatt's exhausted hunter in "Whoso List to Hunt": like that frustrated lover, Antonio makes bids for a love quarry he cannot touch. It is as if *noli me tangere* demarcates Antonio's object of desire as it had the hunter's hind. (16)

Other critics echo Patterson describing Antonio's feelings as "a dying homoerotic or homosexual attachment" (Gagiano 61), "homonormative" (Geisweidt 10), or "filled with sexual shame" (Kleinberg 113). While Antonio's regard for Bassanio does seem disproportionate for that of mere friendship, the leap from friendship to would-be lover seems unlikely considering Solanio refers to Bassanio as Antonio's "most noble kinsman" (*Merchant* 1.1.57). Although Harry Berger presents the notion that the word *kinsman* may serve as "an overpolite synonym for 'lover'" (25), the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *kinsman* as "A man of one's own kin; a relative by blood (or, loosely, by marriage)." Also,

considering the overwhelming number of biblical allusions in *Merchant,* the plausibility that Shakespeare takes the connotation for the word *kinsman* from the Bible—which implies relation by blood or marriage—seems more likely.[17] If this is the intended meaning by Solanio, then a lover-like relationship between the two men seems less probable, though not impossible.

Instead, Bassanio himself introduces another possible scenario for the men's bond. Speaking to Antonio, he says,

> Tis not unknown to you, Antonio,
> How much I have disabled mine estate
> By something showing a more swelling port
> Than my faint means would grant continuance.
> Nor do I now make moan to be abridged
> From such a noble rate; but my chief care
> Is to come fairly off from the great debts
> Wherein my time, something too prodigal,
> Hath left me gaged. (*Merchant* 1.1.122-130).

A biblically-literate Elizabethan audience would have understood the word "prodigal" as an allusion to the prodigal son of Luke 15:11-32. If Bassanio is identified with the biblical prodigal son, the natural position for Antonio to hold would be that of Bassanio's loving father who, like the parent in Luke 15, gives freely of his money only to have his "son" squander his inheritance. Yet the father never denies him love or money. Antonio, who is older than Bassanio and has no children of his own, perhaps recognizes that he is, in fact,

[17] See Numbers 5:8, 27:11; Ruth 2:1, 3:9, 3:12-13, 4:1 (KJV).

playing a part—the part of a loving parent to a wayward son. Charles Pastoor's argument reinforces the notion of Antonio as substitute father: "The pattern for Antonio is that of the father of the prodigal, who instantly and without qualification forgives his wayward son and restores him to his former position in the household"[18] (4).

Although the pattern of Antonio's behavior may appear fatherlike, descriptions by Solanio and Salerio give some indication how other characters view the two men's relationship. As previously mentioned, Solanio calls Bassanio Antonio's "most noble kinsman" (1.1.57), and Salerio describes him as the "worthier friend" (1.1.61). The words "noble" and "worthier" likely indicate Bassanio's social status, and "kinsmen" and "friend" denote relationship status. While Solanio and Salerio may view Bassanio as Antonio's social better, Solanio supports Antonio's worthiness as a friend when he declares, "The good Antonio, the honest Antonio—oh, that I had a title good enough to keep his name company" (12-14). While others, such as Shylock, may view Antonio in a less complimentary light, Solanio and Salerio believe Antonio is Bassanio's worthy friend.

Antonio's earnest regard for Bassanio also reflects an idealized tradition of early modern friendship. For example, the love Montaigne expresses for his friend La Boétie mirrors the same kind of devotion Antonio conveys to Bassanio: "For the perfect friendship which I am talking about is indivisible: each gives himself so entirely to his friend that he has nothing left to share with another: on the contrary, he grieves that he is not two-fold, three-fold or four-fold and that he does not have several souls, several wills, so that he could give them all to the one he loves" (215). By his actions toward Bassanio, Antonio appears to long for this kind of perfect amity and acts toward his friend accordingly.

[18] Susan McLean also notes that Antonio "is identified more closely with the father of the parable" (49).

Therefore, there are several possible explanations for Antonio's melancholy: he is saddened by Bassanio's frivolous living, he is afraid he might lose Bassanio's friendship, and/or he is "grieved" that he cannot do more for his friend. Regardless of the exact characterization of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship, one thing is clear: Antonio's feelings of friendship for Bassanio run deep.

Because he is a merchant, Antonio expresses his feelings of amity toward Bassanio in economic gestures. He gives without reservation, and Bassanio's extravagant living makes him rely heavily upon Antonio's generosity. Antonio tells Bassanio, "My purse, my person, my extremest means / Lie all unlocked to your occasions" (1.1.138-139). Bassanio in turn readily acknowledges his fiscal failings, but unlike the prodigal son of the New Testament, he shows little to no remorse for his actions. Instead, he envisions a way to pay back his debts by risking more of Antonio's money in an attempt to attain Portia, a rich woman who is bound by her father's will in order to marry. Bassanio knows from past experience that his friend will not deny him. Using the metaphor of an arrow, he entreats Antonio to fund this venture:

> I owe you much, and, like a willful youth
> That which I owe is lost; but if you please
> To shoot another arrow that self way
> As I will watch the aim, or to find both
> Or bring your latter hazard back again
> And thankfully rest debtor for the first. (1.1.147-152)

Bassanio also considers his relationship with Antonio in financial terms. He knows that Antonio values their friendship, and he uses that information to his advantage. In "Love and

Friendship in *The Merchant of* Venice" John D. Hurrell contends that Bassanio is aware of the "great disparity in the degree of friendship between them" (334) and attempts to "misrepresent his motives" (334) by reinforcing the idea that he wishes to marry in order to pay his debts to Antonio. This way, Bassanio gives Antonio the impression that he means more to him than Portia and her fortune. At this point, even though Bassanio regards Antonio as a friend, his depth of feeling towards the merchant remains suspect. His selfish motivations prompt him to accept Antonio's generosity.

While critics such as Gagiano see Antonio and Bassanio's friendship as "mercenary" (65) and Antonio's generosity toward Bassanio as nothing more than a feeble attempt to keep Bassanio indebted to him, according to Unhae Lagis, Antonio's largess stems from his purity of friendship,

> Unlike the friendship of utility, this finest kind of friendship to which Antonio aspires with regard to Bassanio is grounded in gift exchange: actions and objects freely rendered upon a friend solely for his benefit. According to Seneca's *De Beneficiis...*the gift exchange of virtuous friendship involves a spiritual usury, spawning an infinite cycle of benefits directed toward the other. (20)

While he may not be completely aware of his motives, Antonio no doubt loves Bassanio if only because he willingly risks his fortune and his life for him. To see Antonio as a pathetic character grasping for Bassanio's love and attention devalues the amity he feels. He may have feelings of jealousy towards Bassanio's new love interest, but that does not negate his desire to see Bassanio happy.

The idea of gift reciprocity, however, does not extend to Bassanio. His wish to repay his debt to the merchant does not constitute a gift exchange; instead, it is designed to give him freedom from his financial obligation to Antonio. According to Jan Lawson Hinely, "Bassanio's ties to Antonio have been financial as well as emotional, and the winning of the wealthy Portia will not only provide a competing emotional bond, it will also remove this reassuringly tangible financial dependence. The friendship will then be forced to endure on emotional strength alone" (232). Since Bassanio's attachment to Antonio does not equal that of his friend's, the lack of emotional reciprocity jeopardizes their tenuous bond of friendship.

According to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (which is the basis for much of the early modern writings of friendship)[19] Antonio and Bassanio's friendship must develop a form of equality in order to survive:

> In all friendships implying inequality the love also should be proportional, i.e. the better should be more loved than he loves, and so should the more useful, and similarly in each of the other cases; for when the love is in proportion to the merit of the parties, then in a sense arises equality, which is certainly held to be characteristic of friendship. (150)

If Aristotle is correct, their friendship cannot survive because Antonio, being the "better" and "the more useful" in terms of his love and generosity toward Bassanio should be loved by his friend more than he loves. Yet that contradicts the foundation of their friendship. It is Antonio who demonstrates that his love far exceeds anything Bassanio feels for him. Bassanio, on the other hand, displays no form of affection for his friend except when he

[19] See (Stretter 347-348) and (Turner 416).

believes Antonio's life is in jeopardy. In Act 4 he offers Shylock a generous six thousand ducats for Antonio's life, but the gift does not come with the same sacrifice as Antonio's since it is Portia who offers to pay his friend's debt. Bassanio is merely the emissary for Portia's generosity, which she does for his sake. She tells Bassanio, "Double six thousand, and then treble that, / Before a friend of this description / Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault" (3.3.300-302). Her generosity stems from her wish that Bassanio will not feel any guilt for his friend's predicament. Even though he wants to save Antonio, Bassanio sacrifices little for his friend.

Bassanio's relationship to Antonio more closely resembles one of Aristotle's three kinds of friendship, which includes friendship for good, friendship for utility, and friendship for pleasure (144). Bassanio's relationship with Antonio shows signs of a friendship of utility. According to the philosopher, friendships of utility and pleasure are based on self-interest.[20] When the usefulness or the pleasure no longer exists for these flawed friendships, they eventually wane since their foundations cannot bear the weight of change. Hence, if Bassanio's friendship is based solely on his need for Antonio's fortune, their friendship will most likely fail.

Although Antonio agrees to help Bassanio in his pursuit of Portia, Bassanio's opportunity to win Portia and obtain financial freedom lies in the hands of Shylock, the Jewish moneylender. Because his fortune is tied to his argosies at sea, Antonio has neither "money nor commodity / To raise a present sum" (1.1.178-79); therefore, he urges

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[20] "Therefore those who love because of utility love because of what is good *for themselves*, and those who love because of pleasure do so because of what is pleasant *to themselves,* and not because of who the loved person is but in so far as he is useful or pleasant. And thus these friendships are only incidental; for it is not as being the man he is that the loved person is loved, but as providing some good or pleasure" (Aristotle 144).

Bassanio to find a moneylender with whom Antonio's name will carry weight. Unfortunately for Antonio, Bassanio finds Shylock, a man who is the antithesis of prodigality and has no love for Antonio; indeed, he agrees to fund Bassanio for three thousand ducats merely for vengeful reasons. He negotiates a contract with him and stipulates Antonio's flesh as collateral. Before Antonio accepts the terms, however, Shylock verbalizes his intentions toward the merchant:

> How like a fawning publican he looks!
> I hate him for he is a Christian,
> But more for that in low simplicity
> He lends out money gratis and brings down
> The rate of usance here with us in Venice.
> If I can catch him once upon the hip,
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him. (1.3.38-44)

Even though his expression "feed fat" refers to his longstanding bitterness toward Antonio, Shylock's language evokes the imagery of a sacrificial lamb that is being fattened for the slaughter. This sacrificial animal imagery is reinforced in Act 4 by Antonio's submission to the forfeiture of his bond when he says, "I am tainted wether of the flock / Meetest for death" (4.1.114-115). In terms of friendship, Joan Ozark Holmer contends, "The sheep metaphor also appropriately describes Antonio who, for love of his friend, can be seen as a type of sacrificial lamb to Shylock's hatred" (310). Likewise, Paul A. Cantor describes Antonio's willingness to prove his love to Bassanio as a kind of "martyr complex" (248). Yet Antonio's lighthearted response in Act 1—"Content, in faith. I'll seal to such a bond / and

say there is much kindness in the Jew" (1.3.151-152)—towards Shylock's contractual terms directly contradicts his sacrificial words and actions later in the play.

Ironically, although Antonio is eventually laid upon Shylock's altar of revenge, it is the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio that is sacrificed. Because of his love for the young man, Antonio offers his body as security to Shylock. Even though Bassanio tells his friend, "You shall not seal to such a bond for me! / I'd rather dwell in my necessity (1.3.153-154), his concern for Antonio appears contrived since he eventually agrees to let Antonio risk his life for his scheme regarding Portia. In "The Rival Lovers in *The Merchant of Venice*," Lawrence W. Hyman claims,

> To him [Bassanio] the friendship is best represented by a monetary loan which could be easily repaid with the money he would gain by marrying Portia. But to Antonio the link between the money that could be returned and the feeling 'nearest his heart' (that unfortunately could not be returned by Bassanio) is not so clearly separated. (111)

Antonio equates love and friendship with gift giving. He sees that Bassanio has a need, and he wishes to fulfill it. In contrast, Bassanio's self-interest proves greater than his friendship for Antonio. Although it may be Shylock's vindictive terms of his bond with Antonio that exposes the fractured foundation of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship, it is Bassanio's indifference toward his friend's welfare that has compromised the foundation of their relationship from the beginning.

Though Shylock's vengeful speech regarding Antonio indicates monetary greed and religious hatred, his animosity does not occur without provocation. Antonio's aggressive behavior towards Shylock's usury in terms of his Christianity proves severe when no other

Christian in Venice appears troubled enough by his moneylending practices to abuse him physically. Yet for all of Antonio's righteous outrage over Shylock's business, he readily abandons his own religious convictions for Bassanio's sake and consents to Shylock's terms. He tells the moneylender, "Shylock, albeit I neither lend nor borrow / By taking nor giving of excess, / Yet, to supply the ripe wants of my friend, / I'll break my custom" (1.3.58-61). Antonio's love for Bassanio borders on idolatry when he places Bassanio's wants above his own Christian principles. Like the speaker in Sonnet 35, he willingly corrupts himself for the sake of the young man. To soothe his own conscience, Antonio tells Shylock to regard him as his "enemy" (1.3.133) rather than his friend, for as Deuteronomy 23:20a commands, "Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury" (KJV). Antonio recognizes that his agreement with Shylock betrays his beliefs, yet his excessive devotion for Bassanio proves stronger than his convictions, and he freely offers his body—a much more excessive form of "interest"—to Shylock for Bassanio's sake.

Antonio's generosity and devotion only magnify Bassanio's selfish tendencies and his attitude toward their friendship. He willingly gambles Antonio's life and livelihood and his own posterity to regain his wealth by attempting to win Portia's hand in marriage through a game of chance. Like Petruchio who wishes to "wive it wealthily in Padua" (*The Taming of the Shrew* 1.2.75), Bassanio's monetary reasons for marring Portia reveal his gold-digging propensities. Though he maintains that Portia is "fair and, fairer than that word of wondrous virtues" (1.1.162-163), his first description of her is "a lady richly left" (1.1.161). His initial inclination toward Portia is not one of love but of the necessity to pay

his debts and maintain his lavish lifestyle. Bassanio will soon trade one financial backer—Antonio—for another—Portia.

Bassanio gives Antonio the impression that Portia means little to him except as a way to recoup his losses, yet soon after arriving at Belmont, he hastily declares his love to her. Gagiano remarks on Bassanio's apathy towards his friendship with Antonio and his willingness to make Portia his new benefactor: "Bassanio's easy and predatory transference of 'affections' to Portia shows in the way he 'sells' his project to Antonio" (66). Though his declaration of love may indicate his financial reasons for marrying have altered, his mercenary purpose for seeking Portia's hand remains. Until now he has depended on Antonio for his means of support, but when he chooses the lead casket and finds within it Portia's portrait, Bassanio exchanges his friendship of economy with Antonio for a marriage of economy with Portia. He happily relinquishes his debt to Portia; she dissolves his monetary obligation to Antonio and becomes his only means of support.

Bassanio's acknowledgment of Antonio's love and friendship comes when news of Antonio's forfeiture of his bond reaches them. He realizes the extent to which Antonio has sacrificed for their friendship and the extent to which he has exploited it. Only after Antonio's letter arrives does Bassanio reveal to Portia the nature of his relationship with the merchant. His earlier declarations of his poverty pale in comparison to what he really owes his friend. He tells her,

> Rating myself at nothing, you shall see
> How much I was a braggart. When I told you
> My state was nothing, I should then have told you
> That I was worse than nothing; for indeed

I have engaged myself to a dear friend,

To feed my means. (*Merchant* 3.2.257-263)

At this point, Bassanio feels the great weight of his debt to Antonio. He shows to Portia how inept he is at finances and frugality. He also attempts to describe to Portia what kind of man Antonio is:

The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,

The best-conditioned and unwearied spirit

In doing courtesies, and one in whom

The ancient Roman honor more appears

Than any that draws breath in Italy. (3.2.292-296)

Even when Bassanio attempts to declare his friendship with Antonio, he continues to see him in terms of economy. The "courtesies" that Antonio has shown to him comprise the merchant's gift giving. He does, however, recognize that the merchant's actions toward him are a result of his love and amity. He perceives no other ulterior motive from Antonio.

In response to Bassanio's announcement, Portia willingly offers to pay more than what Antonio owes. Although generous, her motives for erasing Antonio's debt may be less than altruistic. By absolving Bassanio of his culpability in regards to Antonio's predicament, she not only gains Bassanio's gratitude but also usurps Antonio's position as benefactor. This is why she insists that they marry before he leaves for Venice. In this way the money Bassanio intends to use to clear Antonio's debt will belong to him; he will be his own master and no longer need to depend on Antonio's generosity. Portia has eliminated his monetary obligation and contracted her own bond with Bassanio, a bond of marriage;

however, the bond must be fulfilled for it to be binding. Martin D. Yaffe argues concerning Portia and Bassanio's marriage,

> Antonio's shadow hangs over the newlywed's marriage, as it has over their courtship. There it will hover till the play's final scene. As his charitable contribution to Bassanio's prodigality has delayed the consummation of their courtship, though ultimately it furthers it, so too it will delay the consummation of their marriage bond. Everything, as it were, awaits Antonio's fate. (60)

As mentioned previously, Portia's benevolence comes out of love for Bassanio and not genuine concern for Antonio; until the letter, she was unaware of Antonio's existence. But her intrusion into Antonio and Bassanio's relationship eventually widens the gap of inequity between the two friends. She restores Bassanio's place in society by replenishing his fortune. He is no longer the nobleman beggar. He is capable of breaking the mercantile bonds that hold together his friendship with Antonio. Furthermore, by offering to pay the merchant's debt, Portia transfers Bassanio's obligation from Antonio to herself. Antonio too will be in her debt; consequently, he will be forced to respect their marriage bond.

The letter that Antonio sends Bassanio is more than an announcement of his circumstances; it is an entreaty by the older man for the young man's recognition of their friendship:

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

> see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter. (3.2.315-322)

Again Antonio's plea closely resembles that of the older speaker in Sonnet 71 when he urges the young man not to mourn him when he is dead, while at the same time yearning for any hint of the young man's love. Antonio catalogues the terrible circumstances of his situation in his letter to Bassanio, clearly hoping he can compel the young man to his side. Until now, Antonio has not been certain that Bassanio feels any real amity toward him. He knows that his financial assistance is the foundation of their friendship. The only proof that Antonio has regarding Bassanio's love for him is his presence at the trial. Regarding Antonio's request Hyman notes, "What may seem desperate or effeminate devices to ensnare a man are heroic actions in the friendship tradition. Antonio wants Bassanio to be present at his trial as a sign of their love, perhaps in hopes of having his friendship, like the amity between Elyot's twins, 'througout the city published, extolled, and magnified'" (23). While he does wish for Bassanio to prove his love to him by being present, Antonio does not want to force Bassanio to come; he desires that the young man's actions come as result of his feelings for him. Antonio demonstrates his altruism by cancelling the debt Bassanio owes him even if Bassanio does not comply with his wishes. Nevertheless, by absolving the debt, Antonio manages to undermine his self-sacrifice. If he dies without Bassanio seeing him, Bassanio will forever have to mourn Antonio for his blame in the merchant's demise.

The two triangular relationships merge during Antonio's trial in which Shylock demands that the court grant him his bond. Jointly, Shylock's intrusion with the bond and Portia's intervention at court help reveal the inconsistencies of Antonio and Bassanio's friendship. Initially, it appears that Shylock's demand brings the two men closer together

by making Bassanio verbally express to Portia his love for Antonio. His declaration, however, prompts Portia to disguise herself as a young doctor of law to save Antonio from Shylock's revenge. It must be she and no other judge who saves Antonio from certain death since her actions eventually lead to both men owing her a debt they cannot repay. She breaks the financial bond Bassanio has with Antonio so that Bassanio is free from any guilt caused by his actions for Antonio's plight.

In order for Portia to become Antonio's savior, she must render Shylock's bond worthless. As the young judge Balthasar, she begins her examination of the witnesses by beginning with the question, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.172). For her, both men represent the same obstacle that she must overcome in order to live with Bassanio as a true husband and wife. Her annihilation of Shylock does not represent her primary objective, yet he becomes collateral damage in her strategy to loosen the bond of friendship between Antonio and Bassanio.

When Shylock refuses Portia's last plea for mercy for Antonio, she asks the merchant if he has anything to say. Instead of speaking to the general assembly, Antonio speaks directly to Bassanio. He says,

> Commend me to your honorable wife.
> Tell her the process of Antonio's end,
> Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;
> And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge
> Whether Bassanio had not once a love. (4.1.271-275)

Antonio's impassioned speech indicates his willingness to sacrifice himself for his friend, but it also implies that his love is the only real love Bassanio may ever possess. It is

significant that Antonio specifically asks Bassanio to relate his words to Portia. His sacrifice, he hopes, will prove to Bassanio that his love as his friend exceeds that of husband and wife. At the point of death, Antonio demonstrates his unwillingness to surrender Bassanio completely to Portia. Instead, he wants to be remembered as the person who loved Bassanio best.

Antonio's view of friendship closely resembles that of Montaigne's opinion regarding a woman's ability to maintain a lasting bond with a man: "Women are in truth not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship, nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn" (210). Antonio knows Bassanio's initial mercenary motive for marrying Portia, regardless of what might have transpired between the couple after the fact. His request for Bassanio to praise him to his wife declares to her and the rest of the court how much he has sacrificed for their friendship. Contrary to his previous requests that Bassanio be under no obligation to him, here Antonio wishes for his friend to remember him after death. He is proclaiming to Portia that her love can never exceed his, and he is attempting to exemplify for her the way in which she should love Bassanio. Regardless of his motives, Antonio makes it evident to both Bassanio and Portia that he has made the ultimate sacrifice. His actions represent the love of a friend as measured in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (KJV).

Bassanio's reaction to his friend's words seals both the fate of Shylock and Antonio. He declares to Antonio and everyone else in the courtroom:

> Antonio, I am married to a wife,

Which is as dear to me as life itself;

But life itself, my wife, and all the world

Are not with me esteemed above thy life.

I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all

Here to this devil, to deliver you. (*Merchant* 4.1.280-285)

Bassanio's zealous words prove to Portia that he has yet to appreciate fully the relationship between man and wife. While he offers his life, his wife's, and everyone else's in order to save his friend, Bassanio once again displays his recklessness by offering individuals in addition to himself for the life of Antonio. His offer, while heartfelt, holds no real value since he cannot sacrifice himself or anyone else to save his friend. Portia must sever the bonds between the two men if she ever hopes to achieve the marriage she desires. She accomplishes this by prolonging the outcome of the trial and preventing Antonio from becoming the sacrificial lamb. By allowing Antonio to reach the point of death, she solidifies her position as savior to both Antonio and Bassanio. She has already saved her husband from certain financial ruin; now she saves his friend from certain death. At the precise moment before Antonio is to be flayed alive, she invalidates Shylock's bond, thus conquering the moneylender's position of power over Bassanio and Antonio.

In her final calculation to make Bassanio comprehend the significance of his marriage bond, Portia uses the ring she gave Bassanio as a wedding gift. Her plan will ultimately break the friendship bond between Antonio and Bassanio. When Bassanio offers Portia-as-Balthasar the three thousand ducats for services rendered, her refusal prompts him to offer some "remembrance" (4.1.420). Since Bassanio verbally acknowledged in court that Antonio means more to him than his wife, Portia seizes the opportunity to test

Bassanio's loyalty and educate him that his marriage must have precedence over his friendship. When Portia asks Bassanio for his wedding ring, he refuses the request, but it is Antonio who urges him to concede to the young lawyer's wish. He says, "My lord Bassanio, let him have the ring. / Let his deservings and my love withal/Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment" (4.1.447-449). Antonio shows little respect for Bassanio's marriage vows. He speaks of the ring and Portia's "commandment" as a mere trifle in comparison to the deed that Balthasar performed in saving his life. By encouraging Bassanio to break his vow, Antonio becomes complicit in Bassanio's disloyalty to Portia.

The conclusion to Portia's plan to subordinate Antonio and Bassanio's friendship to her marriage happens after everyone returns to Belmont. Portia and Nerissa challenge their husbands about their missing wedding rings. When Bassanio confesses to giving away the ring and begins to swear once again his fidelity to her, Portia stops him with her words,

> Mark you but that!
> In both my eyes he doubly sees himself;
> In each eye, one. Swear by your double self,
> And there's an oath of credit. (5.1.243-346)

Antonio also admits his part in Bassanio's actions and swears to her, "My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord / Will nevermore break faith advisedly" (5.1.252-253). Antonio again promises himself as collateral for Bassanio's sake. When Portia hands him the ring to give back to Bassanio, Antonio relinquishes his position of power over to Portia. He realizes that his friendship cannot withstand the marriage bond since it is based mostly on money, and Bassanio no longer needs his.

Like Petruchio, Portia has tamed Bassanio, at least for the moment, to eschew his prodigal ways and embrace his new role as husband. As a good Christian husband, it is Bassanio's duty to leave Antonio, his surrogate "father" and, "cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24 KJV). While Antonio is present at the play's end, his lack of usefulness places him outside the sphere of participation; he remains the only one not satisfactorily matched. The merchant has served his purpose as Bassanio's benefactor, and Portia has taken his place. The insurmountable inequities of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship dash any hope Antonio had for a perfect friendship. This leaves the merchant once again the solitary figure of the play.

Like the complicated relationship exhibited between two unlikely friends in the sonnets, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* explores the friendship between two improbable friends and the challenges that undermine their relationship. He demonstrates that the early modern idealistic qualities of equality and virtue, that writers such as Aristotle and Cicero insist is needed for a meaningful friendship, have merit. Although Antonio proves his amity and loyalty to Bassanio many times over, the young man's selfishness keeps him from ever having a meaningful connection with the merchant. It is not the inequality of age and social status that ultimately damage their relationship; it is the inequity of their commitments that keep them from experiencing a friendship such as Montaigne describes. Consequently, when outside forces such as Shylock and Portia put pressure on their relationship, it merely exposes the gap of inequity that exists already between the two men. Their friendship, at least on Bassanio's part, is one of utility; therefore, since Bassanio no longer needs Antonio, the friendship, as Aristotle argues, cannot survive.

CHAPTER 2

False Friends: Betrayal of Friendship in *Othello, the Moor of Venice*

As noted in the introduction, the concept of friendship for the early modern period was defined in various ways by different sources. Tom MacFaul asserts in *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* that humanism shaped the concept of friendship during the early modern period, which ultimately took much of its ideology from the classical writer Cicero (7)[21]. In *Laelius: or a discourse upon friendship,* Cicero deems virtue to be an essential component of friendship (11). Robert Stretter, on the other hand, maintains that Aristotle afforded inspiration for early modern writers in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (347-348), which comparable to Cicero states that true friendship exists between "men who are good, and alike in virtue" (Aristotle 145). Furthermore, relationships of amity explored by Renaissance writers such as Michel de Montaigne considered only male bonds of friendship which, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, were the only friendships male writers considered "stable" (45) as opposed to the "volatile" (45) bonds that existed between men and women. Montaigne's writings reinforce Sedgwick's claim: "Women are in truth not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship" (210). Montaigne views the perfect male friendship as spiritually interdependent or as he terms it, "One soul in bodies twain" (214). Consequently, the idealized qualities for the early modern male friendship included virtue, equality, symbiosis, and stability.

MacFaul contends, however, that these ideals were unrealistic and by Shakespeare's time were "on the wane" (1) and "becoming increasingly untrustworthy" (1). Francis

[21] John Cox also notes, "Cicero's treatise on friendship became one of the earliest affirmations of humanism in English" (2).

Bacon's essay "Of Followers and Friends" demonstrates this skepticism of idyllic friendship by noting that friendships based on equality are rare; rather, men longing for social mobility desire friendships of reciprocity with men of higher social standing (147). Concerning these early modern untrustworthy friendships, Robert C. Evans argues, "Flattery and false friendships were topics that preoccupied many people during the Renaissance, a period in which private connections were even more important than today in determining a person's economic success, social status, and even his deeper sense of self-worth" (1). Likewise, John Cox concludes that "social inequality and competitive rivalry" (3) made the classical ideal of friendship "impossible to achieve" (3).

Shakespeare explores the complications that undercut the early modern ideals of friendship, including untrustworthy or false friendships in his poetry and plays. He portrays relationships of false amity between men that are at times treacherous but nonetheless an integral part of the human condition. In *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, for example, Shakespeare explores the betrayal of friendship on multiple levels through the protagonist Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Richard exploits the tenets of friendship in order to achieve his goal of becoming king of England. He abuses his familial relationships with his brothers Edward IV and the Duke of Clarence—whom he murders—and his friendship with his political ally Buckingham, who also falls prey to Richard's duplicity. Similarly, yet for a different motive, in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* Proteus betrays Valentine, his closest friend, for the love of Valentine's beloved, Silvia. Although the comedy ends in reconciliation between the two men, Proteus nonetheless abuses his friendship with Valentine for selfish reasons. In these two plays Shakespeare demonstrates that intimate

friendships between men can come into question when presented with enticing motives such as political or personal gain.

No play of Shakespeare's, however, epitomizes betrayal of male friendship as does *Othello, the Moor of Venice.* Unlike the unequal bonds of amity between the men in the *Sonnets* and *The Merchant of Venice* that attempt to embrace and preserve their friendships which eventually wane, the friendship between Othello and Iago seems at first to correspond on several levels. Both Othello and Iago are men of action; they are seasoned soldiers who maintain a reputation of valor and honesty. They confide in one another to the exemption of all others. They reverentially pledge to honor kill for the other. To most everyone around them, their bond appears unbreakable. As Montaigne so eloquently describes the truest of friendships, their souls are "mingled and confounded so universal a blending that they efface the seam which joins them together so that it cannot be found" (212). Even MacFaul notes that Othello and Iago's friendship is "the truest relationship either man has" (169). Yet for all its equality and closeness, the friendship that Iago offers Othello is nothing more than exploitation and betrayal. Furthermore, he maneuvers his friendships with Roderigo and Cassio to advance his agenda of duplicity with Othello. The principal betrayal of friendship occurs, of course, between Iago and Othello. Iago, the overlooked ancient of the Moor, fashions himself as the ideal friend to Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello only to pervert those friendships to ultimately manipulate Othello's perception and self-doubt regarding his wife and his place in society in order to destroy him.

Whereas the characters of Richard III and Proteus have more defined motives for their betrayal, Shakespeare's antagonist Iago lacks the explicit motivation for his perfidy. For centuries critics have attempted to explain the motives behind Iago's traitorous actions

toward Othello. As early as the nineteenth century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes Iago's actions as "motiveless malignity" (53), while other critics have labeled his actions Machiavellian (Spivak 423-424), Vice-like (Silver 288), and psychopathic (West 27). Janet Adelman argues that racism drives Iago's actions: "[It is] Othello as progenitor that first excites Iago's racializing rage" (129). These multiple explanations for Iago's motives originate from his sadistic machinations toward Othello when no overt reason appears to justify his actions.

Iago, however, claims he has valid reasons for wanting to destroy Othello. At the beginning of Act 1, he discloses to Roderigo, Desdemona's rejected suitor, that he hates the Moor because he selects the Florentine Michael Cassio instead of him to be his lieutenant (1.8-33). At the close of Act 1, Iago offers another reason why he detests Othello: "And it is thought abroad that twixt my sheets / He's done my office" (1.388-389). He maintains that his wife Emilia has committed adultery with Othello. Iago's third reason involves Desdemona; he claims to love her but for vengeful motivations:

> Now, I do love her too,
> Not out of absolute lust—though peradventure
> I stand accountant for as great a sin—
> But partly led to diet my revenge
> For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
> Hath leaped into my seat. (2.1.293-298)

Iago offers public and private reasons why he hates his commanding officer and seeks to destroy him, but according to Daniel Stempel, Iago's reasons for hating Othello "are flimsy rationalizations that have little do with either fact or logic; they are flotsam tossed up from

depths that even his subtle intellect cannot plumb" (262). The supposed scores of people who think Emilia has cuckolded Iago never materialize; and although the loss of the lieutenancy constitutes a tangible slight, Iago's actions regarding Othello surpasses extreme retaliation. Iago claims, "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.44), but his actual motives remain equivocal at best. A.D. Nuttall argues that Iago "is not motivated like other people. Instead, he *decides* to be motivated" (143). Similarly, Fred West maintains, "His [Iago's] motives—or excuses—come more as afterthoughts, not as stimuli towards the heinous actions he perpetrates" (29-30). Regardless of his motivations or lack thereof, Iago chooses to abuse his friendships with Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello for his own purpose.

Iago's manipulation of his three supposed friends does not begin with Othello but rather with Desdemona's spurned suitor Roderigo. Roderigo falls into the category of the young, lovesick swain who never quite understands that he as no chance of winning Desdemona's love. MacFaul notes that "shared enmity" (182) is at the core of Roderigo and Iago's friendship. This may be the reason Roderigo desires a relationship with Iago, and while Iago does hate Othello, Roderigo's friendship is merely a means to an end. He feels no real regard for Roderigo. In Act 2 he refers to the young man as a "snipe" (2.1.386) who falls for his ploy. Roderigo functions merely as a puppet whose strings Iago can pull to further his own selfish scheme.

At the beginning of Act I, Iago has already begun tugging Roderigo's strings by swindling money from the young man and provoking him to rouse Brabantio from his bed to enlighten him of Othello and Desdemona's elopement. Iago, however, cannot resist covertly degrading Othello with his sexual innuendos he hurls at Brabantio. Concerning Iago's need to be privy to Othello's degradation, Adelman claims, "Iago legitimizes and

intensifies Brabantio's racism through his initial sexualizing and racializing invocation of Othello" (126). While this is certainly true, Iago also knows that Roderigo lacks the nerve to confront Brabantio on his own. Iago must serve as the young man's courage by proxy. Roderigo's presence also allows Iago to maintain his anonymity. With the exception of Roderigo, no one else knows that he instigates the search for Othello and Desdemona. This allows Iago to play the outraged friend as he describes Brabantio's reaction to Othello and Desdemona's elopement:

> Nay, but he prated,
> And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
> Against your honor
> That, with the little godliness I have,
> I did full hard forbear him. (1.2.7-11)

Not until Act 5 does anyone realize that Iago even knows Roderigo, but by then, Iago has done irreparable harm to both him and Othello.

When Roderigo realizes that Desdemona is actually married, he reacts like the lovesick Petrarchan stereotype that he is and tells Iago, "I will incontinently drown myself" (1.3.308). Iago, making light of his misery, advises Roderigo to amass as much money as he can so as to impress Desdemona after she sates herself with Othello's body and realizes that she that no longer wants the Moor for a husband (1.3.342). MacFaul likens the Roderigo and Iago exchange to Sir Toby and Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night*: "In both cases the gull thinks he can get a woman through his friend and spends money to do so" (182). Iago's advice to impress Desdemona with wealth is only a ruse; his motive is to filch the rest of Roderigo's fortune. In Act 5 when Iago plans for Roderigo to murder Cassio, he notes that if

Cassio does not kill Roderigo, he will have to answer to Roderigo for the "gold and jewels that...[he]...bobbed from him as gifts to Desdemona" (5.1.16-17). Iago's self-serving attitude toward the death of Cassio and Roderigo demonstrates his lack of conscience in destroying the lives of the men he pretends to befriend. As Aristotle posits in *Nicomachean Ethics* regarding friendships of dishonorable men, "Wicked men have no steadfastness (for they do not remain even like to themselves), but become friends for a short time because they delight in each other's wickedness" (152). Even though Iago's insincere friendship with Roderigo allows him to take advantage of Roderigo's naivety and swindle him out of his money, his own motives toward using Roderigo's friendship to promote his agenda with Othello remains unclear. Iago himself cannot decide for what reasons he pursues his cruelty towards Othello. Perhaps it is the "delight" (152) in his own wickedness that fuels Iago's desire to continue gulling Roderigo under the pretense of amity.

After Roderigo's breakdown regarding Desdemona, Iago reiterates his friendship to the young man: "I have professed me thy friend" (1.3.339). He declares this to Roderigo only because Iago wishes to keep him invested in his love for Desdemona for his "sport and profit" (1.3.387). Iago soon realizes, however, that the young man functions as the perfect dupe to aid him in discrediting Cassio in the eyes of Othello. Iago fuels Roderigo's rage against Cassio by insisting that Cassio and Desdemona are lovers. This allows Iago to exploit the young man's desperation in order to persuade him to kill Cassio while Iago agrees to kill Othello. He convinces Roderigo that murder is the only way he can obtain Desdemona.

In contrast, Roderigo views Iago as a sympathizing confidante who shares his animosity toward Othello. Their mutual hatred binds the two men and allows Iago to

fashion a distorted friendship of reciprocity. They both wish to destroy Othello for their own selfish agenda. As Aristotle claims, even men who lack virtue may share friendships of "utility" (146), but the friendship only lasts as long as "some advantage come from the relation" (146). Iago, however, never actually considers Roderigo a friend; he lacks the ability to form any honest connection with another person. But because Iago plays the role of the commiserating friend in such convincing terms, Roderigo never questions his motives, even though he is privy to Iago's machinations for plans to kill Cassio and destroy Othello. Instead, Roderigo views Iago as his avenging angel who possesses the power to destroy the black devil Othello; he becomes his "second" in the duel with Othello for Desdemona's love. Because Roderigo believes the Moor has wronged him and Iago, he views their collusions as justified. He never realizes that Iago's friendship is nothing more than an exploitation of his gullibility until Iago pulls the sword from his body.

Iago's manipulation of friendship continues with Michael Cassio. The Florentine's promotion as lieutenant to Othello serves as Iago's inciting incident. Prior to Othello choosing Cassio as his second in command, Iago had been lobbying for the position with "three great ones of the city" (1.1.9). When he discovers that he has been passed over for advancement, he cites favoritism over substance. He tells Roderigo that Cassio is nothing more than a "great arithmetician" (1.1.20) who "never set a squadron in the field" (1.1.23). He declares indignation that he must resort to being "his Moorship's ancient" (1.1.34).

Even though Iago claims, "Preferment goes by letter and affection, / And not by old gradation," (1.1.37-38), Othello's selections aptly fit both men's dispositions. In Leonard Digges's 1579 *Stratioticos*, he describes the offices of both lieutenant and ensign:

> As it is conuenient for euery Souldior to stand upon hys credite and reputation, accounting no losse of goodes comparable to a dishonorable foile: so out especiallye this Officer to whom the charge of *Ensigne* is committed, aboue al other to haue honorable respect of his charge...Let the *Ensigne* be a man of good account, honest and vertuous....The Lieutenants office, as it is of credite and reputation, so it is also an office of great toile and paine, the which he ought willingly to suffer, as wel to discharge his Captaine of toile, as for his own reputation...He should in all factions and questions among the souldiers be altogither *Neutrall*, and lovingly to worke with them for *pacification,* if he cannot by curtesie frame, let him communicate the matter with his Captaine, and then faithfully execute his Captains direction (93-94).

The most notable description of the ensign is "honest" (93). Iago upholds a reputation for honesty but not neutrality, which, according to Digges, is a prerequisite for a lieutenant. Although considered forthright, Iago's honesty borders on rudeness. Cassio refers to him as "bold Iago" (2.1.77), while Desdemona considers him a "most profane and liberal counselor" (2.1.163-164). Even Iago says of himself, "For I am nothing if not critical" (2.1.121). Cassio, in contrast, is a man of learning, good breeding, and courtly manners. At one point he apologizes to Iago for his "bold show of courtesy" (2.1.101) towards his wife Emilia. Even though Iago refers to Cassio as "rash and very sudden in choler" (2.1.274), his description lacks creditability since he is speaking to Roderigo. Iago's honest persona he has created for himself backfires; he has made himself worthy of the position of ensign. Nevertheless, Iago refuses to acknowledge Cassio's abilities and his own shortcomings; instead, he believes himself superior to Cassio if not in education but in manipulation, and

he seeks retribution against the man who occupies the position that he believes only he deserves. Ironically, Iago manipulates his and Cassio's notable characteristics to form an unlikely bond of friendship between them. Iago's "honesty" influences Cassio to confide in the ensign when he disgraces himself with Othello. He seeks Iago's counsel to help him re-establish his relationship with the general. Iago, however, plays upon Cassio's reputation with the ladies to discredit him in the eyes of Othello. When Cassio displays courtly courtesy to Desdemona, his overt attentiveness does not go unchecked by Iago: "He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said whisper. With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio" (2.1.167-169). Iago's perceptiveness regarding the lieutenant's unconcealed admiration for Desdemona allows him to take full advantage of Cassio with him none the wiser. This also gives Iago the opportunity to manipulate Othello's perception of Cassio and Desdemona's relationship by introducing the idea of impropriety to him, not through explicit words but by innuendo. By the end of Act I, Iago formulates his strategy to destroy Othello by discrediting not only Cassio but also Desdemona:

> Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now:
> To get his place and to plume up my will
> In double knavery—How, how? —Let's see;
> After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
> That he is too familiar with his wife.
> He hath a person and a smooth dispose
> To be suspected, framed to make women false.
> The Moor is of a free and open nature,
> That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,

> And will as tenderly be led by the nose
>
> As asses are. (1.3.393-403)

Before he can become Othello's only confidant, however, Iago must sour Othello's good opinion of Cassio's judgment and leadership ability, which consequently will make Iago's lies and insinuations of the alleged affair more credible to Othello. Iago must taint Othello's friendship with Cassio in order for Iago to commiserate with Cassio and to fashion himself as Othello's only trustworthy friend. Iago's friendly invitation to Cassio to join him for a drink with him and some "Cyprus gallants" (2.3.28) sets the stage for his betrayal. Moments before Iago's offer, Othello reminds the young lieutenant of his duty: "Good Michael, look you to the guard tonight. / Let's teach ourselves that honorable stop / Not to outsport discretion (2.3.1-3). For Othello, duty and honor come before revelry, and as Othello's second-in-command, he fully expects Cassio to act appropriately. As Julia Genster argues,

> The lieutenant is the place holder for his commanding officer. The lieutenant is at once a sign of his commander's power and a powerful reminder of his potential absence, since the lieutenant either receives the commands of his superior officer or substitutes for him. In choosing a subordinate a captain is, in effect, choosing a second self; he is empowering someone to play him, to be him in his absence. (786)

The importance Othello places on Cassio's position gives Iago the opportunity to disgrace Cassio and elevate himself in the general's estimation. When Iago's lackey Roderigo instigates a confrontation with the drunken lieutenant and Montano's good-willed interference leads to a brawl between the two men, Othello relies on Iago's honesty to give him an accurate account of the skirmish. Iago, claiming he would rather experience bodily

harm than "do offense" (2.3.216) to Cassio, grudgingly recounts the events of the night to Othello. While Iago gains favor with Othello for his "honesty," Cassio, in turn, loses his reputation with the general. Although he still considers Cassio a friend and regrets having to punish him, Othello does not hesitate to strip him of his title: "Cassio, I love thee, / But nevermore be officer of mine" (2.3.242-243). Since Cassio is the general's "second self" (Genster 786), Othello's strong sense of integrity cannot allow a man to represent him who does not exercise good judgment. Although Othello's anger toward Cassio's lapse incites him to remove him from his position, Othello does not immediately bestow Cassio's title to Iago. Cassio's humiliation, however, places Iago a step closer to becoming Othello's only confidant and ultimate betrayer.

Because he feigns remorse over his testimony that facilitates Cassio's demotion, Iago preserves his friendship with the young man. Iago commiserates with him over his loss and manipulates him into petitioning Desdemona for help to regain Othello's favor. Employing the same tactic he uses on Roderigo, Iago expresses his devotion as a friend in Cassio's bleakest moment by declaring, "I think you think I love you" (2.3.305). This declaration, while seemingly conveying feelings of amity toward Cassio, actually demonstrates Iago's contempt for Cassio's gullibility regarding their relationship. Cassio does not consider that Iago may resent him for being chosen for the lieutenancy. While in his drunken state, Cassio even jokes with Iago about his position of authority over him. He lightheartedly reminds Iago, when speaking to him about the salvation of souls, "The lieutenant is to be saved before the ancient" (2.3. 104-105). He never views Iago as a legitimate contender for the position, and Iago hates him for it. From the beginning, Iago has viewed himself as superior to Cassio and Othello. As Ken Jacobson argues, "Iago criticizes Othello and Cassio,

respectively, on two points where he believes himself to be their superior: rhetoric and strategy" (497). Consequently, Iago's strategy consists of manipulating both men through the rhetoric of friendship, which is why Cassio believes Iago is merely assuring him of his affection toward him as a friend. For this reason, Cassio heeds Iago's advice to speak with Desdemona in hopes of restoring his reputation with Othello.

Iago's suggestion for Cassio to plead his case to Desdemona sets both people on a path of destruction they do not choose for themselves. Unwittingly, Cassio's eagerness to bring himself once again into Othello's good graces clouds his judgment when he implores Desdemona to intervene on his behalf, and Desdemona's desire for Othello and Cassio to reconcile will muddy hers to the possible appearance of impropriety when she so fervently entreats Othello to restore Cassio to his position. With their energies focused on one another, Iago seizes the perfect opportunity to poison Othello toward both his wife and his friend by insinuating there is more than friendship between them. Like Claudius, Iago plans to "pour pestilence" (2.3.350) into the ear of the Moor.[22]

By involving Desdemona in his plan, Iago plots to disgrace her and to usurp her position as Othello's intimate. He acknowledges Desdemona's sway over Othello; she is the general's general (2.3.308-309). Moreover, Iago understands that Othello's trusting nature will permit him to deceive Othello by convincing him by a series of "proofs" that Desdemona has cuckolded him with Cassio. Othello's wife and closest friend will be disgraced; he will have no other person in which to confide. Because of his "honest" reputation and his supposed loyalty to his general, Iago will serve as Othello's only confidant by default; he will become the general's general.

[22] See John Wall's "Shakespeare's Aural Art: The Metaphor of the Ear in Othello" for an in depth look regarding the significance of the ear in *Othello.*

Iago's plot to poison Othello toward Desdemona and Cassio begins not with accusations but with feigning friendship and insinuations. His insinuations are so slight that Othello at first ignores them. When Iago sees Cassio and Desdemona talking together, he utters in front of Othello, "Ha? I like not that" (3.3.35) indicating that something seems amiss between the two. Like his ploy to appear uncomfortable when recounting the lieutenant's indiscretion with Roderigo and Montano to Othello, Iago pretends not to want to draw attention to Cassio's behavior with Desdemona; yet by this pretense, he intentionally brings their actions to the foreground where Othello notices and causes him to question what he sees and hears regarding the lieutenant and his wife. His pretense of being the caring friend gives credibility to his intimations.

The uncertainty that Othello feels toward his wife and Cassio does not originate with Iago's intimations but rather with his own insecurities. Cassio, arguably Othello's closest friend, was an integral part of his courtship of Desdemona; he actively participated in her acceptance of Othello's suit, which suggests that he spent time alone in Desdemona's company. As Harry Berger Jr. notes, "Othello resorts to a go-between because he's an outsider who lacks confidence and who sees in Cassio everything that he himself is not: white, young, handsome, elegant, always at ease among the likes of Desdemona" (11). Cassio's involvement in Othello and Desdemona's relationship, which once produced a seeming intimacy among the three friends, now generates suspicion for Othello regarding Cassio's true intentions toward Desdemona. Berger explains the threesome as a "triangular structure of fantasy, desire, and distrust...already in place before the play began" (12). This distrust sets the stage for Iago to transform himself from honest soldier to trustworthy friend of Othello by manipulating Othello's anxiety toward Cassio and Desdemona's

relationship. Unfortunately, when Desdemona attempts to intercede on Cassio's behalf, she only exacerbates Othello's misgivings when she speaks of the lieutenant's assistance in winning her love:

> Michael Cassio,
>
> That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
>
> When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
>
> Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do
>
> To bring him in! (3.3.76-80)

Desdemona's repeated attempts to facilitate reconciliation between her husband and his friend make her appear overeager on Cassio's behalf. While her intentions are pure, her execution lacks discernment regarding Othello's uncertainties about her love toward him. This lack of judgment only aids Iago's scheme by making her appear guilty of indiscretions in the eyes of Othello. Later in the play, Iago suggests Othello observe carefully her desire to have Cassio reinstated, "Note if your lady strain his entertainment / With many strong or vehement importunity; / Much will be seen in that" (3.3.266-268). Although Iago goads Othello into believing that impropriety exists between Cassio and Desdemona, his manipulations would not have worked so adeptly had not Othello already felt some anxiety about the relationship between Cassio and his wife.

Another indication of Othello's reservations regarding Cassio and Desdemona occurs in Act 1 when the Duke instructs Othello, "Leave some officer behind, / And he shall our commission bring to you" (1.1.183-184). Othello, instead of choosing Cassio to protect Desdemona, selects Iago to safeguard his wife. He never explains why he does not choose his second-in-command and closest friend to protect the person he loves more than his

own life. Cassio is the logical choice since he is both friend to Othello and Desdemona, yet Othello is also aware of his friend's amorous reputation. Othello's decision may simply be one of convenience since it is Iago's wife Emilia that attends to Desdemona; however, it could indicate that he does not completely trust the handsome lieutenant with his new wife. As in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, a triangle of love does not end well for at least one person involved. Perhaps Othello sees Cassio as the young, beautiful man who could threaten his relationship with Desdemona. Othello's friendship with Cassio does not withstand the pressure of possible cuckolding. Instead, Othello chooses his "honest" ancient, a married man and a person with whom Desdemona would undoubtedly never cheat.

Although Desdemona appears by all indications to love Othello completely, both her father and Iago question her trustworthiness, which eventually arouses Othello's already present fears. When he chooses to marry Desdemona, Othello's decision to elope likely stems from his fear of rejection. He understands that Brabantio would never consent to their marriage for at least three reasons: he is much older than Desdemona, he is not of the same social status as she, and most importantly, he is not of the same race as she. Brabantio's reaction to their marriage confirms his fears. Although his decision to elope contradicts his sense of honor, Othello's need for Desdemona's love supersedes any loyalty of friendship he feels towards Brabantio; however, it might also indicate that Othello is not as confident of Desdemona's love as he professes. On some level of consciousness, he must acknowledge that he has wooed a young, impressionable woman who falls in love with him for the dangers he has survived. He must also recognize his outsider status in society and know the only way he can possess Desdemona is through deception, which she

wholeheartedly supports. The fact that Desdemona willingly betrays her father gives Brabantio opportunity to sow a seed of doubt in Othello's mind when he cautions his new son-in-law, "Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.195-196). Brabantio's warning concerning Desdemona's faithlessness will later haunt Othello's suspicious mind when Iago presents the idea of his friend Cassio and Desdemona committing adultery. The uncertainty of Cassio's loyalty as a friend when it comes to wooing women leads Othello to second-guess the relationship between his lieutenant and his wife. Brabantio's prediction also provides Iago the opportunity to reinforce her father's prediction of her betrayal when he reminds Othello, "She did deceive her father, marrying you; / And when she seemed to shake and fear your looks, / She loved them most" (3.3.19-21). Iago capitalizes on the insecurities Othello already feels toward his new bride to highlight the picture he eventually paints of his best friend cuckolding his new wife.

Nevertheless, despite his reservations, Othello agrees to hear Cassio's plea for reinstatement solely for Desdemona's sake. This is the moment when Iago begins fashioning himself as Othello's confidant by displaying concern over what he supposedly sees happening between Cassio and Desdemona. He begins by asking Othello a seemingly innocuous question: "Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady, / Know of your love?" (3.3.103-104). Iago's supposed innocent inquiry brings Othello's suspicions to the surface. When Othello asks him the purpose for his questions, Iago downplays his reasons, which only fuels Othello's curiosity to the point of anger as he retorts,

> Think, my lord?" By heaven, though echo'st me,
> As if there were some monster in thy thought

Too hideous to be shown. Thou doest mean something.

I heard thee say even now, though lik'st not that,

When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?

And when I told thee he was of my counsel

In my whole course of wooing, thou cried'st "Indeed?"

And didst contract and purse your lips together

As if though then hadst shut up in thy brain

Some horrible conceit. (3.3.118-127)

At first Othello appears not to hear Iago's offhand remark, or he does not deem it significant enough to respond. Iago's lack of communication, however, provokes Othello to admit that he not only heard Iago but also shares his misgivings regarding the exchange between Cassio and Desdemona. Iago's brief questions supports what Othello already thinks, which is why he reacts so forcefully towards Iago's evasiveness. Othello cites their bond of friendship as a reason to gain access to Iago's opinions when he says, "If you dost love me, / Show me thy thought" (3.3.127-128). Unlike with Roderigo and Cassio, Iago has no need to bring friendship into the equation as a way to influence Othello; instead, Othello himself demands that Iago prove his devotion to him by revealing his thoughts about Cassio and Desdemona. Later in Act 3 Othello declares, "Though dost conspire against thy friend, Iago, / If though but think'st him wronged and mak'st his ear/ A stranger to thy thoughts" (3.3.155-157). This is the first time the word *friendship* is used to describe their association, and Othello is the one to utter it. For Othello, Iago is becoming the only individual he can trust. He needs reassurance from Iago that their relationship serves as his anchor in a sea of uncertainty.

Iago's assurance of his love, however, provides only more doubt for Othello. When Iago says, "My lord, you know I love you" (3.3.129) Othello replies, "I think though dost" (3.3.130) indicating that he finds it difficult to know for certain if he can rely on his own judgment. The wife and friend he thought he could trust show signs of disloyalty, which gives rise to his uncertainty about Iago. Still, Othello clings to Iago's reputation as an honest man to tell him the truth, yet paradoxically he fears what Iago will say.

Whereas Iago belittles the need for reputation with Cassio when he tells him, "Reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost without deserving" (2.3.262-264), with Othello he claims that he does not wish to lose his reputation by speculating about Cassio and Desdemona's relationship. He tells Othello,

> Who steals my purse steals trash; tis something, nothing;
> 'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
> But he that filches from me my good name
> Robs me of that which not enriches him
> And makes me poor indeed. (3.3.170-174)

Iago knows that Othello's character insists on honesty and integrity, and he wishes to underscore the fact that while *his* reputation is intact, Cassio's status as a man of honor is in question. Cassio's reputation already suffers from his predilection for the fairer sex, but Iago succeeds in blemishing his name further as Othello's disgraced lieutenant. By putting so much emphasis on his own "honest" character, Iago reinforces Othello's need to rely on his friendship since he cannot rely on Cassio's, which in turn permits Iago to lead Othello "by the nose / As asses are" (1.3.402-403).

From the onset of the play, to help him become both Othello's sole confidant and surrogate "wife," Iago has been skillfully leading Othello down the path of alienation while playing the loyal friend. He employs Othello's own isolating qualities to sever him completely from the Venetian community. He begins by using the Venetians' already prejudiced view of Othello's blackness to taint his character for all to see while he, Iago, hides in the shadows. Starting with Desdemona's father, Iago racializes Othello and Desdemona's marriage to him and incites Brabantio to bring to light what he views as the black monstrous conjurer who has bewitched his innocent daughter with his demonic charms. The confrontation that ensues between Othello and Brabantio in front of the Duke and his court further alienates Othello from the Venetians. Even though the Duke makes a calculated decision to absolve Othello based upon his and Desdemona's testimony and the Duke's need for Othello's assistance to eradicate the more dangerous threat of the Turks, the Venetian community now has justification to partake of the prejudice they already feel toward the outsider who has absconded with one of their own. Adelman notes, "Iago needs to make him into a black monster, invading the citadel of whiteness" (129). According to Iago, Brabantio's friends have supported him in his case against the Moor, and others of the court likely resent Othello for eloping with a young white woman of means, regardless of the Duke's judgment. Through Iago's interference, Brabantio reinforces Othello's otherness and sets him further apart from Venetian society.

Although Brabantio alienates Othello through the manipulations of Iago, it is Othello who unconsciously sets himself apart from Venetian society in terms of his own abilities. According to MacFaul, "Othello's greatness separates him from the rest of mankind, accentuated in his case by his racial difference from the play's other characters" (186).

When Brabantio accuses him of sorcery, Othello is unconcerned. He believes his reputation will exonerate him from any penalty. He says as much to Iago, "Let him do his spite. / My services which I have done the seigniory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (1.218-19). Othello cites his military prowess as proof that his worthiness outweighs Brabantio's disapproval of his marriage to Desdemona. He refuses to rely on any kind of friendly affiliation to keep the Duke from punishing him; instead, he relies upon his own performance as military leader to exonerate him of any misdeeds. Othello wishes to remain independent and complete in his own right; but by doing so, he exposes himself to conjecture and speculation from the Venetian community about him as a person and a husband to Desdemona. According to Edward Berry, "Once the Turkish threat is removed, Othello is left vulnerable both within and without, prey to the complex interaction of psychological and social forces that occasion his downfall" (325). Iago, of course, is the progenitor of those forces that ultimately bring about Othello's downfall, and he accomplishes this under the guise of friendship.

Iago solidifies his position as Othello's only true friend by promising to produce visual proof that Desdemona has cuckolded Othello with Cassio, and his *pièce de résistance* culminates with Desdemona's handkerchief. The handkerchief, a wedding gift from Othello given to him by his mother, signifies more than just a token of affection. It is the object Othello claims will magically secure his love to Desdemona (3.4.57-70), and it is the final link in Iago's chain of deception that will tether the "green-eyed monster" (3.3.179) that Othello becomes and will lead him to the brink of madness. Almost from the beginning, Iago has planned to use the handkerchief as proof of Desdemona's infidelity. Iago's wife Emilia, when finding the lost article, remarks, "My wayward husband hath a hundred times /

Wooed me to steal it" (3.3.308-309). Iago's insinuations have ignited a jealous fire in the Moor, and Othello's token of affection becomes the catalyst for which his jealousy will burn out of control. Iago declares, "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proof of Holy Writ" (3.3.338-340). Even though the "ocular proof" (3.3.376) of the handkerchief is circumstantial at best, by the time Othello sees the so-called evidence in Bianca's hands, he is primed to convict his wife and friend because of Iago's deception.

Before Othello sees Desdemona's handkerchief in the possession of Cassio's paramour, Iago's eyes serve as Othello's surrogate vision. Because he has transferred all the trust he once had for Cassio and Desdemona to Iago, Othello indicts the couple on what Iago *tells* him, not shows him. The visual imagery Iago calls forth of Cassio's supposed dream in which he plies Desdemona with sweet words and kisses is enough to eradicate any doubt Othello has of their innocence. When Iago reassures Othello, "Nay, this was but his dream" (3.3.442), Othello replies, "But this denoted a foregone conclusion" (3.3.443). Iago drives the arrow of his revenge home to the heart of Othello when he asks him if he has ever noticed the "handkerchief / Spotted with strawberries" (3.3.440-450) that Desdemona sometimes carries. When Othello replies that he gave it to her, Iago says, "I am sure it was your wife's—did I today / See Cassio wipe his beard with" (3.3.353-354). This fictional evidence of Iago's pinpoints the moment of no return for Othello. He does not wait for actual visual proof; instead, Othello calls on the forces of the underworld to turn his love to hate: "Arise black vengeance, from the hollow hell! / Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne / To tyrannous hate!" (3.3.462-464). Othello's unnatural hatred toward Desdemona likewise plunges him over the precipice of insanity.

Othello's violent reaction to Iago's evidence does not stem from his wife's infidelity alone. Othello appointed Cassio his "second self" (Genster 786)—a concept of friendship presented by Aristotle[23]—and by Iago framing him as the fictitious lover of Desdemona, he creates a betrayal for Othello so immense that his sense of honor cannot process it. For Desdemona to cuckold him with another man is unforgivable, but to commit adultery with Cassio is a betrayal of both a marriage and a friendship. In Othello's eyes, Cassio has replaced him in the one position that he has no right to fulfill, that of Desdemona's lover. Every doubt and insecurity that Othello has ever felt about his wife and Cassio comes rushing to the surface, and his extreme reaction is one of desperation. According to Felicity Rosslyn, "His [Othello's] violence is really a side-effect of that frenzied search for security" (9). Losing the sanctuary of his marriage leaves Othello alone and seeking someone to punish, and the obvious choice is the two people he believes is responsible—Desdemona and Cassio.

Reminiscent of Macbeth's incapability of erasing his bloody deeds against Duncan with "all great Neptune's ocean" (*Macbeth* 2.2.64), Othello cannot stem the flood of his bloody vengeance against Cassio's supposed betrayal as his friend and his wife's alleged infidelity as he vows:

> Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course
> Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
> Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace

[23] "A friend, being another self, furnishes what a man cannot provide by his own effort" (176).

Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,

Till that a capable and wide revenge

Swallow them up. (3.3.469-476)

Othello's need for retribution arises from his own strict sense of honor, his impaired judgment regarding Desdemona's innocence, and his own insecurities. Even though she has proved her love for him by deserting her father, rejecting other suitors such as Roderigo, and pronouncing her love for him in front of the Venetian court, Iago's fabricated evidence has so corrupted Othello's mind that Desdemona's virtuousness only enrages him further since he cannot reconcile what he knows of her and what "honest" Iago has produced as proof of her perfidy. According to Berry, "Othello projects his self-loathing upon her. In his diseased imagination she becomes, paradoxically, the stereotype of the Moor: cunning, 'black,' sexually depraved, and diabolic" (328). Othello's own anxieties about himself spills over into a deluge of anger for being deceived by one so seemingly innocent yet so apparently false as Desdemona. For such a deception, Othello believes he must exercise what he considers justice; that is, he will sentence to death the black-hearted sorceress who has bewitched him body and soul. Only then can he be free of her charms. That Othello so easily believes Iago's lies demonstrates his compromised judgment but only because he feels the loss so much more deeply since he literally has no one except Iago on which he can rely. The security to which Othello clings will be the friendship and loyalty Iago offers.

Iago's perverted form of amity he initially offers Othello resembles that of a confidant, an Horatio-like position of subordination which offers a trustworthy ear on which Othello can depend. Iago's resemblance to Horatio, however, ends there. Whereas Horatio acquiescently supports Hamlet's actions, Iago *leads* Othello by declaring to his

general that even though Othello commands, "I prithee, speak to me as to thy thinkings" (3.3.144), Iago claims he is not obliged to verbalize his thoughts, "Good my lord, pardon me. / Though I am bound to every act of duty, / I am not bound to that all slaves are free to" (3.3.146-148). Iago adeptly provokes Othello to beg him to speak his mind. This is his way of convincing Othello that he is an unwilling participant in Desdemona and Cassio's disgrace, which makes him a more reliable witness to their supposed adultery.

Not content to be only Othello's friend and confidant, Iago must also usurp Desdemona's place as "wife" to Othello. From the beginning of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, Iago has recognized Desdemona's power over the Moor. As long as she is in Othello's good graces, her opinion and counsel matter to him; however, by discrediting her completely, she can no longer influence Othello, which allows Iago to slip easily into her position as Othello's surrogate "spouse." When Othello kneels and swears a "sacred vow" (3.3.477) to seek revenge for Desdemona and Cassio's betrayal, Iago seizes the opportunity to kneel in unison and make his own vow to Othello. Like a bride to a groom, he pledges,

> Witness that here Iago doeth give up
> The execution of his wit, hand, heart,
> To wronged Othello's service. Let him command,
> And to obey shall be in me remorse,
> What bloody business ever. (3.3.480-485).

Iago's promise reflects a perverted form of the marriage vows.[24] Here he presents his body and soul for Othello to command. By Othello agreeing "with acceptance bounteous" (3.3.486) to Iago's pledge, the two men consciously become "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24KJV)

[24] Critics such as Robert C. Evans (16), John N. Wall (362), and Tom MacFaul (188) all refer to the resemblance of Othello and Iago's vows to that of a wedding ceremony.

in their bloody vow of murder. Although Iago places himself in the "female" position of subordination by promising to obey Othello, it is Othello who will satisfy the role of submissive "wife." According to Iago, Desdemona has already usurped Othello's position as general to the general (2.3.308-309). Even Cassio refers to Desdemona as "our great captain's captain" (2.1.77). Finally, Othello himself declares of Desdemona, "Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! And when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (3.3.98-100). Othello has consistently surrendered his position of power to Desdemona, and without her, his world is anarchy. With Iago supplanting Desdemona, he will rule Othello's heart and mind by pretending to help restore order to Othello's universe by ridding it of Desdemona and Cassio.

Although the idea of Iago and Othello becoming "one flesh" constitutes a subversion of the marriage vows, it mirrors an ideal quality of friendship offered by Michel de Montaigne. In his essay "On affectionate relationships" Montaigne describes the perfect friendship between two men as "souls...yoked together" (213) and "one soul in bodies twain" (214). While "one flesh" and "one soul" may not be explicitly equivalent, to be of "one flesh" implies more than the physical; it transcends if not to the spiritual at least to the emotional. Accordingly, this mingling of souls that Montaigne portrays as the ultimate form of friendship transcends any relationship between men and women since women's souls, according to him, are incapable of an enduring the "holy bond of friendship" (210). Hence, Iago's subversion of the marriage vows, although not obviously similar, is in fact a manipulation of this ideal symbiotic relationship between two men. It is also a perversion of the relationship, however, since they establish this unholy bond of friendship on the blood of Desdemona and Cassio. Nevertheless, their blood oath is enough for Othello to see

Iago as his "second self" (Genster 786), which is why Othello declares, "Now art thou my lieutenant" (3.3.494), effectively establishing Iago as both his right hand and his soul mate.

Once Iago successfully gains Othello's complete devotion, he again abuses his friendship with Cassio to present the visual confirmation of Desdemona and Cassio's infidelity that Othello demands. Playing the part of the comrade, Iago teases Cassio about Bianca, all the while permitting Othello to believe that Desdemona is the topic of their conversation. With Desdemona's handkerchief in hand, Cassio laughs to scorn the rumor Iago repeats regarding possible nuptials between him and Bianca. Iago's ease of camaraderie with Cassio allows him to manipulate the young man into incriminating himself in the eyes of Othello by joking about his paramour.

Othello's reaction to the scene Iago sets is unexpected. Cassio's apparent indifference to Desdemona's love actually leaves Othello feeling compassionate toward his wife, and it is up to Iago to dispel any thoughts of sympathy Othello experiences. When Othello says of Cassio, "I would have him nine years a-killing. A fine woman! A fair woman! A sweet woman!" (4.1.180-181), Iago tells him, "Nay, you must forget that" (4.1.182). Othello immediately reverses his sympathetic attitude and says, "Ay, let her rot and perish, and be damned tonight, for she shall not live" (4.1.184-185). Iago's rule over Othello is supreme; he can no longer think for himself. Like an obedient beast, he submits to Iago without question. Even when Othello proposes poison to murder Desdemona, Iago instructs him, "Strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated" (4.1.209-210), reversing his earlier position from not harming Desdemona to sexualizing her assassination. Transforming into the mindless monster that Iago has birthed through his machinations of deceit, Othello disregards any possible signs that Desdemona is innocent of

Iago's accusations. When Othello confronts Emilia about Desdemona's fidelity, he ignores her vehement denial and accuses her of acting as Desdemona's bawd. Through Iago's influence, Othello transforms into the vulgar, lascivious individual that Iago has always been. In a perverse way, Iago and Othello have never been closer. They are becoming one in mind, yet ironically Othello believes they are one in honesty, loyalty, and justice. He cannot fathom that Iago's mind is set on annihilating him, yet he is the eager participant of his own demise.

Their single-minded efforts come to a head when Othello and Iago set their plans in motion to kill Cassio and Desdemona. Characteristic of his duplicity, Iago manipulates Roderigo to kill Cassio so that either Cassio or Roderigo or both will die thereby keeping his treachery hidden. When Othello hears Cassio cry, "I am maimed forever. Help, ho! Murder! Murder!" (5.1.27), he feels a deep affection for Iago's sacrifice for him, and it motivates him to honor his blood oath. He says,

> 'Tis he. O brave Iago, honest and just,
> That hast such noble sense of thy friend's wrong!
> Thou teachest me. —Minion, your dear lies dead,
> And your unblest fate hies. Strumpet I come.
> Forth of my heart those charms, thine eyes, are blotted;
> Thy bed, lust-stained, shall with lust's blood be spotted. (5.1.32-37)

Iago's presumed success in killing Cassio leaves Othello no choice but to murder Desdemona since he is too honorable to renege on his promise. Iago's actions give Othello the courage to finish what he thinks Iago has initiated on his behalf.

For Othello, the revelation of Iago's deceit strikes him almost as deeply as the murder of Desdemona. After he strangles his wife in her bed and admits freely to Emilia his complicity in her death and Iago's assistance in revealing her adultery, Emilia realizes in horror the extent of her husband's treachery. She questions Othello repeatedly asking, "My husband?" (5.2.156). Exasperated by her response, Othello replies, "He, woman; / I say thy husband. Dost understand the word? / My friend, thy husband, honest, honest, Iago" (5.2.159-161). Even after Desdemona's death, Othello feels only justification for his actions and believes Iago has done him a faithful service. It is not until Emilia exposes her husband for his deceit in discrediting Desdemona that Othello realizes the extent of Iago's deception. What he believed to be a justified killing has now become a brutal homicide. Othello cannot reconcile his faithful friend with the traitorous, false individual that stands before him, but even after Emilia's revelation Othello calls Iago, "Precious villain!" (5.2.243) as he tries to run him through. The oxymoronic description of Iago represents Othello's binary emotions of love and hate that he experiences as he attempts to reconcile at that moment Iago's culpability in his downfall. He asks of Lodovico, "Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?" (5.2.310). Like Brabantio's accusations of devilry toward Othello, Othello now accuses Iago of bewitching him. How else could Iago deceive him so effortlessly? Iago, however, refuses to explain his actions. Like every other motive in the play, the audience and Othello will remain ignorant of his actual provocations. It is as though Iago himself cannot fully comprehend his reasons for wanting to destroy so many lives. On the one hand, Iago's hatred for Othello is evident, yet he seems to need Othello's approval even while he is trying to destroy him. He purposely becomes Othello's closest friend and confidant, which seem to suggest that on some level of

consciousness he longs for a intimate relationship with Othello, yet he recognizes his inability to experience a genuine connection to another human being. This inability to connect, in turn, feeds his rage and hatred toward the person his both admires and envies; therefore, he will remain forever silent and leave Othello to contemplate and profoundly regret his friendship with him.

When Othello describes himself as "one that loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.354), the audience naturally assumes that he is speaking of his love for Desdemona, and he obviously is; yet his words could certainly characterize his feelings toward Iago. No doubt Othello loved Iago for his supposed commitment to their friendship. His willingness to kill for Othello's honor linked them in a close-knit bond of mutuality. So while his love for Iago was foolish, the fact that Othello experienced what he thought was "one soul in bodies twain" (Montaigne 214) is a relationship that any human being endeavors to achieve. His suicide, while representing his regret for his horrible actions toward Desdemona, could also symbolize not only his shame for not recognizing Iago's feigned friendship but also his regret over the loss of that friendship. As Francis Bacon surmised, "For there is no man that imparteth joys to his friend, but he joyeth the more; and no man that imparteth his griefs to his friend, but he grieveth the less" (83). Othello's grief is two-fold: the loss of both his wife and his best friend plunges him into the depths of heartache from which he cannot return. Indeed, Othello "loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.354).

Shakespeare's exploration into friendship betrayed in *Othello* demonstrates the tenuous position of the idealized qualities of amity embraced by early modern writers. Of the qualities of friendship venerated by the early modern man—virtue, equality, symbiosis, and stability—*Othello* undercuts them by exposing the vulnerabilities of man's

capability to distinguish between a faithful friend and a self-serving individual willing to take advantage of a person's weaknesses to further his own agenda. *Othello* posits the question as to whether authentic friendship actually exists. If a character such as Iago can deceive an honorable man such as Othello to such a degree, what hope exists for true amity? Shakespeare does not leave the audience empty-handed, however. Cassio's faithfulness to Othello gives a glimmer of hope that although individuals may not adhere to every idealistic quality of friendship, true friendship does exist. Walter Dorke, an early modern writer, once noted in *Tipe or Figure of Friendship*, "A man may as soone see a black Swan as find out a faithfull friend" (4). Yet the yearning for true friendship spurs every human being to search for that mingling of souls that the early modern writers such as Montaigne revered.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate how Shakespeare presents early modern perceptions of idealized friendship only to confront and challenge the precepts in order to present a realistic representation of real-life friendship. In Chapter One, "An Exposition of Inequity: Disparities of Friendship in *The Merchant of Venice,"* Shakespeare presents disproportions of affection between Antonio and Bassanio and exposes the vulnerabilities of their friendship through the calculations of Shylock and Portia. In Chapter Two, "False Friends: Betrayal of Friendship in *Othello, the Moor of Venice,*" Shakespeare's character Iago exploits the idealized tradition of early modern amity in order to betray Othello. These chapters present imperfect or false forms of friendship; paradoxically, they also reveal an authentic view of true-to-life friendship.

By exposing the limitations of idealized friendship, Shakespeare indicates that there is no idealized friendship. He is not, however, suggesting that friendship itself is an illusion; rather, the constructs for perfect friendship are fictional. If the constructs are fictional, then, how do we discern true friendship? When we consider *The Merchant of Venice,* for example, how do we know that Antonio's affection for Bassanio is genuine? We know because of his actions toward the young man. He freely gives Bassanio money with little to no hope of repayment. He bargains his own flesh as collateral for Bassanio's loan. He willingly sacrifices himself for his friend. As John 15:13 says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (KJV). Time and again, Antonio proves himself a friend to Bassanio, yet he receives no tangible reciprocation of affection from the young man.

Although Bassanio declares that he loves Antonio, "But life itself, my wife, and all the world / Are not with me esteemed above thy life" (*Merchant* 4.1.281-283), his actions belie his words. Like the prodigal son of the New Testament, Bassanio squanders not only his money but also Antonio's. He has no way to repay his debts except to gamble more of his friend's money. When Bassanio leaves for Belmont in hopes of winning Portia's hand in marriage, he forgets Antonio's existence until the merchant's letter arrives requesting some sign of Bassanio's affection before he dies. By all indications, Bassanio has no real, lasting love for Antonio.

In juxtaposing the actions of Antonio and Bassanio, Shakespeare presents the audience with an imperfect friendship that seems doomed to failure because of the disparity of love between the two friends. Yet by exposing the realities of friendship, Shakespeare gives us a glimpse of what true-life friendship could possibly be if love between friends were fully reciprocated. Ironically, the mutuality of affection needed to sustain a friendship is part of the "fictional" construct Shakespeare exposes.

Shakespeare again presents idealized friendship in *Othello, the Moor of Venice* only to undermine the tradition. We must ask ourselves, how can Shakespeare give a faithful representation of the nature of true friendship in a play about betrayal between friends? From the beginning of the play, we are aware of Iago's machinations toward Othello, and we watch in dread as he abuses his friendships with Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello in order to promote his twisted vendetta. We fear him because his actions so closely resemble that of a true friend. We are troubled that his outward show of affection is only a thin veneer covering the darkness of his intentions. How can we discern genuine amity when someone

so malevolent can deceive an honorable man such as Othello to such a degree? What hope exists for genuine friendship?

Although Iago feigns his affections toward his so-called friends, he plays such a convincing role that if we were not aware of his intentions, he would epitomize the perfect friend. MacFaul notes that Othello and Iago's friendship is "the truest relationship either man has" (169). Though I agree with his assessment, it is difficult to comprehend how a friendship that is not real can be considered true, but we have to remember how Othello views Iago. After believing Desdemona is unfaithful with Cassio, Othello turns to Iago for support and friendship; he becomes Othello's lifeline. In a distorted version of honor, Iago "proves" his love to Othello by agreeing to kill for him. Though he is only pretending to be his friend, in a perverse way, Iago experiences a friendship of mutuality with Othello. The words that pass between the two men and the moments of intense honesty, at least on the part of Othello, creates an illusion of friendship that when it is gone, the loss plunges Othello into the depths of heartache from which he cannot return. When Othello demands to know why Iago betrayed their friendship, his response is one of silence. There are no words when the friendship is destroyed. Although it seems unlikely that Shakespeare can use betrayal between friends as way to express qualities of genuine friendship, he shows that even a false friendship has moments of mutuality. If nothing else, Shakespeare's gives us relationships that are more authentic than any model of perfect amity since they reveal what is instead of what could be.

In *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello, the Moor of Venice,* Shakespeare holds up a mirror for us to see the good, the bad, and the ugly of human friendship. While he presents us with early modern perceptions of idealized friendship, his intention is for us to see them

as fictions of amity. He is not disregarding the importance of virtue and mutuality between friends; he is merely providing us with realistic expectations of friendships between imperfect human beings. Friendships do exist, but they do not occur in a vacuum. They must live and breathe, and sometimes they must die. While they are illusive and sometimes difficult to sustain, they are as precious as life itself. To reiterate Polonius's quote from *Hamlet*, "Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, / Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel" (1.3.62-3).

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