"In Quarter and in Terms like Bride and Groom": Reconfiguring Marriage, Friendship, and Alliance in *Othello*

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In act 2, scene 3 of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Iago describes the outbreak of violence between Montano and Cassio as unprecedented in view of their prior relationship, which shows the respect that two men, in the service of their nation, would afford each other during wartime. When Othello asks, "Who began this?" (2.3.172), Iago responds, "I do not know. Friends all but now, even now, / In quarter and in terms like bride and groom / Devesting them for bed" (173-75).[1] Iago's choice of simile, of course, reminds the audience that the play's actual bride and groom, Desdemona and Othello, have recently undressed themselves for bed, leaving the public world of the Venetian military and retiring to the privacy of their bedchamber. Although Iago shapes for his own ends our perceptions of a male political alliance as a friendship that resembles a marriage, the similarity between marriage and friendship is indeed disquieting in *Othello*, partly because the characterization of Othello's marriage to Desdemona and friendship with Cassio are strikingly similar, but also because both kinds of relationships at times appear to transcend the traditional boundaries set for them by the state. Both marriage and male friendships in the play are shaped by dynastic expectations, whether familial or political, and both seek to embrace more flexible models that replace duty to family and nation with personal self-fulfillment.

What is in evidence throughout the majority of *Othello* is the intensive disruption of the dynastic and contract-oriented rule that structures human relations through the privileging of the affective and largely clandestine nature of the relationships that the play produces. This rejection of tradition is set against the military needs of Venice: a desire to defeat the Turks and keep Cyprus under

Christian rule. Because the bulk of these struggles are set not in Venice but in Cyprus, the dynastic marriage and the military alliances that resemble it are placed in a context that has the potential to elude the mechanism of the state. By grounding its action in a public military setting rather than a more isolated domestic scene, the play's privileging of affective relationships over traditional dynastic alliances allows for certain problematic role reversals—in particular, Desdemona's supplanting of Cassio's place as Othello's friend and lieutenant, and Cassio's assuming (and anticipating) Desdemona's role as Othello's abandoned beloved. Although *Othello* never quite succeeds in validating private affective relationships over those informed by the more public dynastic concerns, in rejecting the latter the play draws attention to the instability of dynastic models and, at the same time, the ambiguous nature of the idea of affection or emotion, whether that term is applied to marriage or male friendship. What *Othello* cannot escape is the dynastic forces that shape the text: try as it might to elevate affective relationships over dynastic alliances, the text and its characters ultimately fall prey to the resilience of the latter.

In its treatment of marriage, *Othello* introduces and creates tensions between two models of marriage: the dynastic or lineal marriage and the "companionate" or affective marriage. The traditional discourse of dynastic marriage reflects larger concerns regarding the necessity of marriage to what Lisa Jardine describes as the "long term objectives of lineal family": the production of heirs and the ability to supplement the family with the offspring of other powerful houses through the exchange of women,[2] an activity implicitly linking the success of the family to the health and security of the state. An early modern literary example of this model at its most politically urgent is the marriage of Antony and Octavia in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, a match suggested by Agrippa in order "to hold" Antony and Octavius Caesar "in perpetual amity, / To make you brothers, and to knit your hearts / With an unslipping knot" (2.2.133-35). After the match is agreed upon, both men acknowledge the benefits such an alliance will provide Rome. Anthony declares to Octavius that "from this hour / The heart of brothers govern in our loves / And sway our great designs" (2.2.156-58); Octavius replies, "Let her [Octavia] live / To join our kingdoms and our hearts" (2.2.160-62). Both men acknowledge the precise relation of woman to the dynastic model marriage: she is an object of exchange, serving either to rehabilitate male alliances or to help forge new bonds between men.[3] Following Pierre Bourdieu, Stephanie Chamberlain uses the

term "symbolic capital" to describe the "invaluable properties of exchange within a marriage market based on familial status and domestic alliances."[4] In the case of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the state depends on a political strategy that will bring Antony in line with Rome's political objectives, with Octavia functioning as the symbolic capital that, theoretically, will enable Octavius to gain the upper hand.

Disseminated widely in sermons and conduct books in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the discourse of affective marriage emphasizes the importance of companionship in marriage rather than political and economic gains.[5] In Edmund Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship*, an early modern dialogue on marriage, Master Pedro describes the ideal marital relationship as consisting of a "perfite love [that] knitteth loving heartes, in an insoluble knot of amitie," emphasizing mutual affection as well as friendship.[6] This new model continued to stress equality in terms of birth, but acknowledged the importance of choice in betrothal, which, theoretically, would result in a marriage that consisted of friendship, and, potentially, a more equal partnership between husband and wife. In Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, for example, kinship ties are acknowledged at the play's opening, but more central to the description of the newly married couple is their compatibility. Sir Charles Mountford recognizes the marriage of Anne and Frankford as based on an affective model that has its roots in Protestant ideas about the nature of matrimony: "There's equality / In this fair combination; you are both scholars, / Both young, both being descended nobly" (1.69-71).[7] He concludes, "There's music in this sympathy; it carries / Consort and expectation of much joy" (72-73). Sir Charles's use of the words "equality" and "consort" implies a mutuality to the marriage contract that is not necessary in the dynastic model. Similarly, in *Othello* Iago points out to Roderigo that Othello lacks the "required conveniences" (2.1.234) necessary to fulfill the companionate marital ideal: "loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties" (2.1.231-32). Although Iago's illustration of ideal partners is introduced as evidence against the marriage of Othello and Desdemona, like Sir Charles he articulates the more agreeable possibilities that marriage might contain.[8]

Both lineal and affective marriages can be founded upon a legal contract sanctioned by kinsman, church, and state; however, non-lineal marriages can assume a clandestine nature in which the "contract" is motivated primarily by affection. While a companionate marriage can emphasize both dynasty and amity, as

does the marriage in Heywood's play, the clandestine relationship depends almost exclusively on the personal desires of the couple. As Lisa Jardine notes, "Whereas 'alliance' and its contractual undertakings rested squarely in the public domains (its negotiations formally recorded and witnessed), 'affection' and individualized emotional attachment establish private and invisible bonds which escape the terms of recognized kinship relationships" and "might be entirely undetectable in the public domain."[9] For Jardine, this applies equally to marriage and friendship, both of which have the potential to be transformed by the absence of formal contracts—in the case of *Othello* with disastrous results. Like the unsanctioned relationship between Antony and Cleopatra, a marriage based on affection (or desire) over strictly dynastic concerns can prove disastrous for the state's management of both partners in that relationship. Anthony, for example, is entirely unmanned in his submission to Cleopatra—and Octavius sees this arranged marriage between his political colleague and his sister as a means through which he, on behalf of the state, can attempt to refocus his new brother-in-law on politico-dynastic concerns. In *Othello*, undetectable clandestine bonds are always dangerous, potentially disruptive of not only valuable kinship ties, but also of the state's political and economic interests.

This privileging of affection over political and economic demands provides the source of conflict in Shakespeare's *Othello*, where a clandestine marriage thwarts the lineal expectations of the father of the bride, who must defer to the state's judgment regarding the legitimacy of what he sees as a misalliance. *Othello* introduces in Desdemona a heroine who is socially rebellious within the confines of her father's household, somehow managing to engage in a clandestine courtship and to marry without his consent. Iago reveals this news to her unsuspecting father, emphasizing the nature of Desdemona's actions as disruptive of lineal conventions. Roderigo characterizes her elopement as "a gross revolt" (1.1.137) against her father, and when her absence from her father's household is confirmed, Brabantio characterizes her actions as "treason of the blood!" (1.1.173): in other words, a clear disruption of the lineal expectations of both the individual family and society at large. As Sandra Logan points out, economic forces within the emerging concept of the modern state demand "a focus on external or international interests as more significant than internal or domestic concerns," even the interests of the lineal family, which in *Othello* is rendered "antithetical to the emergent state formation."[10] When Brabantio makes this grievance public,

interrupting the military counsel of the senate, he reveals not only the private nature of his disappointment, but also what he perceives to be the political nature of Desdemona's infraction. While the "gross revolt" of Desdemona demonstrates the vulnerability of the senator's symbolic property to Othello, who can claim neither lineage nor citizenship within the social structure of Venice, this breech goes unpunished because the state must depend on the offender, Othello, to protect its international interests.

If, as Jardine suggests, there was a growing concern about a disruption of the dynastic line in early modern England, then *Othello* provides an ideal canvas for exploring these issues.[11] Not only does Othello and Desdemona's marriage flout Brabantio's desire to exercise paternal authority in the dispersal of his property, but Othello's designation as the play's "racial other" also concentrates the more pedestrian anxieties regarding non-lineal marriage—those, for example, that cross lines of class or nation or fail to contain fears of unbridled female sexuality. Desdemona has tied "her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes / In an extravagant, and wheeling stranger / Of here and every where" (1.1.139-40), eschewing a legitimate alliance with a countryman for an illegitimate coupling with a foreigner. When Iago informs Brabantio that "an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.90-91) and "your daughter and the Moor are [now] making the beast with two backs" (1.1.119-20), he plays into cultural fears regarding racial difference, miscegenation, and unbridled female desire. Warning Brabantio that he will "have [his] daughter covered with a Barbary horse" and "have your nephews neigh to you" (1.1.114-15), Iago feeds the senator's most grotesque anxieties about the disruption of the dynastic line. Iago's representation of this clandestine marriage displays a total perversion of the contractual, lineal marriage, which, he asserts, will produce an unintelligible succession of heirs crossing not only boundaries of race, but also refiguring the black Othello and the allegedly hypersexual Desdemona and their offspring as beasts.[12]

Desdemona and Othello, however, represent their feelings for one another within the Protestant paradigm of companionship and affection, which at its most elevated usually downplays strictly lineal concerns. When questioning Othello about the match, the First Senator inquires whether Othello's attentions were "by request, and such fair question / As soul to soul affordeth?" (1.3.115-16). Othello claims, "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd, / And I lov'd her that she did pity them" (1.3.169-70). Othello explains that Desdemona falls in love with him out of admiration and pity

for the many trials he has faced over the course of his life, and she confirms her commitment to his person when she remarks, "My heart's subdued / To the very quality of my lord" (1.3.253-54). In spite of Iago's claims, there is little evidence in the text to corroborate the existence of excessive sexual passion on either Othello's or Desdemona's part. Othello challenges Iago's charges of sexual excess, albeit to reassure those who may disapprove of the match or question his fitness for military action, when he claims he wishes Desdemona to accompany him to Cyprus, not

> To please the palate of my appetite,
> Nor to comply with heat (the young affects
> In [me] defunct) and proper satisfaction
> But to be free and bounteous to her mind. (1.3.265-68)

Although Iago uses sex to incite anxiety about Desdemona and Othello's relationship, even he admits that it is Othello's "soul" which she has "enfettered" (2.3.338), implying that the body is not the actual site of Othello's weakness.

The First Senator's emphasis on the relationship of soul to soul, as well as Othello's interest in Desdemona as an individual with a mind worthy of his "bounty," certainly represents the companionate ideal at its height, especially given that marriage counsel in this vein often warned against excessive passion.[13] Despite Iago's representation of Othello and Desdemona's relationship as hypersexualized, the physicality of this alliance is largely limited to one brief reference by Othello to the wedding bed, when he says to his new bride, "Come, my dear love, / The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue; / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you" (2.3.8-10). These "fruits" are not easily interpreted: has the marriage yet to be consummated, is Othello eager for a sexual reunion with his wife, or is he thinking of reproduction? This is the only explicit reference to the marital bed while the integrity of this marriage, at least for husband and wife, is still intact. Until Othello's jealousy is unleashed through Iago's manipulations, the marriage of Othello and Desdemona would seem to represent companionship—and possibly friendship—over sexual desire.

Yet as Thomas Luxon points out, the humanist ideals that informed marriage are nonetheless at odds with the spiritual doctrine about the relationship of husband and wife: "Being married still meant being made 'one flesh' with a woman," while "being friends with a woman would have meant sharing 'one soul in bodies twain,' a relationship that supposedly transcended the flesh and lasted forever, even (especially) beyond the grave."[14]

Although Othello's emphasis on the soul over the body invites us to examine this marriage as similar to masculine friendship, we should be aware that companionate marriage, if similar to friendship, might work to promote a woman beyond her perceived spiritual and intellectual limits. In elevating the marriage of Othello and Desdemona to a relationship that transcends the flesh, *Othello* invites a comparison to the "friendship doctrine" of the period, which Luxon describes as "unlike marriage or brotherhood" because it "insists that the most 'complete' or 'virtuous' friends locate their similarity on a spiritual plane."[15] Yet in *Othello*, marriage begins to impinge upon the plane reserved for the doctrine of friendship, and friendship takes on some of the features—both dynastic and companionate—of the very models of marriage that *Othello* fails to reconcile.

In *Othello* the organization of marriage, both in its dynastic and companionate forms, finds a multifaceted parallel in the structure of friendship. Male alliances function similarly to the marriage alliance in *Othello*, whether the marriage is the lineal and contractual one denied Branbantio or the affective and clandestine ideal of the play's central couple. Just as Desdemona denies Brabantio his paternal rights, Othello similarly circumvents an established social practice, that of military promotion, by elevating a man who has demonstrated loyal friendship, Michael Cassio, over one with a proven military record, Iago. The play's treatment of marriage or friendship reveals a sanctioned or expected alliance rejected publically, with a covert relationship based largely on affection assuming its place. While the clandestine affective alliance of Othello and Desdemona is exposed quite early in the play, the non-kin male alliances in *Othello* come under scrutiny more slowly as the plot progresses. The relationship between Othello and Cassio—which, although characterized in part by a professional alliance, is rooted in a personal friendship—is perhaps more mysterious as even the audience does not know what, prior to the beginning of the play, actually motivates it. This friendship is bound by an "indebtedness" that is invisible in the public domain and, as a result, both are able to undermine more formal, sanctioned male alliances upon which an orderly society depends. *Othello* begins, then, by acknowledging not one, but two clear betrayals of the lineal model in favor of an affective one: in both cases a long-standing hierarchy is dismantled, in which a much anticipated reward—whether it be the exercising of paternal rights or the promise of professional advancement—is withheld.

The elements of dynastic marriage in contest at the play's opening function as a model to structure all relationships between men, not just those kinship alliances forged through the exchange of women. The root of Iago's hatred for Othello is Othello's choice of Cassio for his new lieutenant, and initially it is this breech in the lineal military system that is the driving force of Iago's desire to punish Othello: "Preferment goes by letter and affection, / And not by old gradation, where each second / Stood heir to th' first" (1.1.37-39). Likening himself to an "heir" cheated of his dynastic rights, Iago rebukes Othello for both ignoring the hierarchy that guarantees promotion by seniority and trading his professional affiliation with Iago for his personal attachment to Cassio. In his bid for the lieutenancy, Iago appears to have relied on his military record and on more traditional and "public" methods of recommendation in his quest for advancement: Iago petitions "three great ones of the city" (1.1.9), for example, to put political pressure on Othello, who "evades them" (1.1.14), advancing Cassio instead. The highly politicized public domain of military advancement, in which elite men trade favors, fails Iago, who, in turn, demonstrates his flexibility by publically accepting the limits of his professional alliance, while at the same time making himself indispensible as Othello's advisor in private, domestic matters.[16]

Just as the dynastic alliance applies to both marriage and male alliances, its affective alternative shapes both types of relationships. Luxon points out that classical teaching on male friendship "insisted that the most virtuous sorts of friendships could only grow between men similar in age, education, station, and virtue."[17] Moreover, this classical friendship doctrine is not specifically lineal, suggesting that friendship at its most elevated is something very separate from the tradition of dynastic marriage with its usual concern with forging familial alliances. Michel de Montaigne privileged non-kin male friendship over those based on a lineal alliance, whether through blood or marriage. While he recognizes male kinship ties as "friendships which the law and dutie of nature doth command us," he describes male friendship as allowing for an exercise of "our genuine libertie" by allowing men to enjoy "affection and amitie" where they choose. Montaigne also asserted that "all those amities nourished by voluptuousnesse or profit, publike or private need, are thereby so much the less faire and so much the less true amities, in that they intermeddle other causes, scope, and fruit with friendship, than it selfe alone."[18] While male friendships in *Othello* are not burdened by kinship connections, neither are they privileged as centers of private solace free from political complications.

Whether we consider the earnest friendship of Cassio or the false friendship of Iago, in each case Othello's experience of male amity is complicated by social, economic, or professional expectations. Although Iago casts the friendship of Othello and Cassio as one defined first and foremost by affection, it is also informed by a professional relationship that, when breeched, undermines the underlying friendship.

Initially, the friendship of Cassio and Othello is based not on public displays of loyalty and professional recognition, but rather on a private, affective, and, to some extent, clandestine relation that is cemented through Cassio's assistance in the "wooing" of Desdemona. Prior to the unveiling of this aspect of their relationship, we have little idea of what bond existed between them or even what brought them together in the first place, given Cassio's alleged lack of actual military experience. The fact that the relationship has no legitimate public face until Othello names Cassio his lieutenant lends credibility to the suspicion with which Iago regards that alliance. Moreover, the friendship of Othello and Cassio is clearly distinct from the professional alliance enjoyed by Othello and Iago prior to the play. Even though it is Iago who first introduces the concept of "affection" existing between the general and his lieutenant (1.1.37), it is most emphatically confirmed when Othello dismisses him: "Cassio, I love thee, / But never more be officer of mine" (2.3.242-43). The play displays the intimacy of their relationship—specifically, that Othello entrusts Cassio with the wooing of Desdemona—only *after* Cassio has already lost his place. As a result, the friendship is defined more in the past than in the present, and is represented throughout much of the play as a painful loss.[19]

The perceived value of friendship in the play, with Othello entrusting first Cassio and later Iago with help in the management of his personal affairs, produces a strange triangularity to the male relationships throughout the play, with male characters functioning as substitutes for one another in a complex matrix of male alliances. Although Iago's relationship with Roderigo is based on mutual hatred of the Moor, and is a "false" friendship that Iago manipulates for his own gain, it is nonetheless rather similar to the "wooing" partnership established by the friends Othello and Cassio. Similarly, Othello is as dependent on Iago in his testing of Desdemona as he was on Cassio in his initial wooing of her; instead of this dependency growing out of trust in friendship, however, it grows out of desperation and rage. During the course of the play's action, Desdemona is central to the forging of male bonds, whether as

the object of desire that necessitates Roderigo's alliance with Iago, as the source of reconciliation for Othello and Cassio, or as the pawn that Iago uses to exact his revenge on Othello. As old public bonds and private friendships are abandoned and new ones forged, Iago moves from his position as rejected candidate for the lieutenancy to Cassio's replacement as Othello's chief officer. Iago is now not only second in command, but he is also Cassio's emotional successor, serving not as a loving accomplice to the bond of Othello and Desdemona as Cassio had so recently done, but rather as the one who brings about the marriage's absolute destruction. Although this shift in alliances, along with the movement away from lineal dynastic alliances toward affective clandestine ones, began in Venice, it is crucial that these movements occur in the post-war, yet still militarized, public space of Cyprus.

As the birthplace of Venus, Cyprus might seem an ideal location for the flowering of a clandestine marriage, yet throughout *Othello* it is more closely associated with the military world of her consort, Mars. This tension between love and war is evident throughout the text, particularly as the more public, politicized, and masculine spaces of the play become the staging ground for more personal, domestic conflicts. The text betrays an anxiety about the domestic invading the public sphere upon the arrival of the play's wives in Cyprus, when Iago delivers his infamously misogynist tirade near the quay. It would seem that the dangerous presence of women exhibits the same force it had back in the senate's council chamber—where Othello assured the senators that his wife's presence in battle would not "scant" the important duties of state:

> No, when light-wing'd toys
> Of feather'd Cupid seal with wanton dullness
> My speculative and officed instruments,
> That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
> Let huswives make a skillet of my helm. (1.3.271-75)

Othello acknowledges here the effeminizing presence of women in a military zone, arguing that the failure to meet his military charge should result in a comic, yet emasculating, female punishment. Similarly, in an attempt to rid himself of the clingy Bianca, Cassio reveals the implications of being found in her company: "I do attend here on the General / And think it no addition, nor my wish / To have him see me woman'd" (3.4.194-96). Clearly, the presence of a woman in the context of state military business is seen as a detriment, a mark of dishonor, and Bianca's presence might work to undermine Cassio's plan to reconcile with Othello.

As Julia Genster notes, early modern manuals on military discipline single out soldiers who consort with women other than their wives, linking the presence of women in military settings to the absence of "moral conduct."[20] Cassio's concern about being seen with a woman confirms the problematic status of woman—whether wife or courtesan—within the militarized space of Cyprus, and it exposes the vulnerability of men to women who occupy the public sphere.

Just as the play's military spaces are domesticated, so too are its domestic spaces militarized. While *Othello* is often read as a domestic tragedy, there is little of the play to associate it with the physical household, an important feature of the companionate marriage as it was explored in early modern texts, whether polemical or dramatic.[21] As Lorna Hutson reminds us, early modern polemical writings on marriage focused as much on household management and economics as they did on compatibility in marital relations.[22] If *Othello* is read as a domestic tragedy, its domestic conflicts are largely played out in an increasingly public environment, one in which issues of household management, not to mention the women's role as the rightful steward of her husband's property in his absence, are virtually absent. The private interactions of Desdemona and Othello are invisible to the audience except when Othello's jealousy has increased to the breaking point. The public appearance of Desdemona in the first two-thirds of the play figure her more as a military spouse taken up with her husband's political concerns than a housewife wrapped up in domestic affairs. If anything, the play details—at least prior to the unraveling of her marriage—an escape from the domestic world in which Desdemona is exclusively bound to paternal authority. In Venice she occupies the predictable position of the sheltered woman isolated from individuals outside her father's world, except through the occasional dereliction of her household duties in order to hear her future husband's autobiographical narrative (1.3.149-52). In Cyprus Desdemona is neither confined to or by the household because it is absent.

The militarized nature of the domestic and the domestication of a military zone work to destabilize clear distinctions in *Othello* between public and private contexts and, inevitably, female and male roles. This intermingling of domestic and military is especially evident in the substitution of roles by Desdemona and Cassio, with the play's transformation of Desdemona into Othello's lieutenant (or Captain) and Cassio into his rejected lover. In the course of the play, Desdemona manages to transcend the definition

of wife as symbolic capital by becoming, in some regards, a spiritual equal to her husband akin to that symmetry found in male friendship, a repositioning which enables her to claim more freedom and authority when she arrives in Cyprus. Yet contradictory and competing representations of Desdemona confuse our understanding of her from the start: Brabantio, for example, describes her as already potentially rebellious to his authority ("so opposite to marriage that she shunned / The wealthy curled darlings of our nation" [1.2.68-69]) and yet an appropriately submissive and chaste daughter ("A maiden never bold; / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself" [1.3.96-98]). Othello describes her as appropriately feminine and obedient ("the household affairs would draw her hence" [1.3.149]), yet clearly willing to imagine the possibilities for experiences denied her sex: according to Othello, she "she wished / That heaven had made her such a man" (1.3.163-64). While it is possible that Desdemona is hinting for a suitor with Othello's qualifications, it is equally possible that she imagines herself experiencing a life of trial and adventure that only a man can experience. While Cassio dubs her "our great captain's captain" (2.1.76), perhaps gallantly suggesting her "mastery" over her husband, Othello greets her as "my fair warrior" (2.1.182)—a statement far more difficult to entangle within the representational matrix in which Desdemona finds herself throughout the play. It seems clear, however, that whatever Desdemona's function in Venice, whether in her father's household or in the senate chamber, she is described in terms of war upon her arrival in Cyprus—either as her husband's superior or as his equal.

In what sense might Desdemona be a "warrior" within the context of her positioning as wife to a military commander?[23] Regardless of how she is represented by others or how she represents herself, Desdemona ultimately assumes the structural position of second to Othello, creating a parallel between her lieutenancy in the barely present domestic sphere and Cassio's in the domesticated political sphere. Moreover, she anticipates Cassio's concerns, speaking for him before he has barely determined to speak for himself. Desdemona agrees to play the role of his ardent "solicitor" (3.3.27), and, instead of wifely pleading, she resorts to a friendly bullying of her husband to come to his decision within a set number of days. In effect, Desdemona comes close to giving Othello an ultimatum, and her projected strategies of persuasion are unwifely, to say the least: "His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift" (3.3.24), she boasts to Cassio, emphasizing her power

role as tutor-priest to her husband's inferior role as schoolboy-penitent. As long as the domestic and military spheres are separate, any authority Desdemona holds within her husband's symbolic household is appropriate and non-threatening. By allowing Desdemona to join him in Cyprus, however, Othello enables her to cross the threshold of the domestic, which, in turn, enables Iago to intervene even more aggressively in Othello's domestic affairs.

Conversely, Cassio's loss of honor and the loosening of the bond he shares with Othello render him as impotent as an abandoned wife. Throughout much of *Othello*, Cassio plays the role of the penitent lover, who, despite his own keen sense of dishonor, nonetheless pleads to be readmitted into Othello's favor. His courtly attitude toward Desdemona—displayed in both her absence (2.1.63-67, 73-75 and 2.3.12-25) and in her presence (2.1.167-70)—is resurrected in his more urgent dealings with her as her husband's surrogate. The scene in which he approaches Desdemona for assistance places him in the role of supplicant to Othello, while she functions as the one who holds, at least symbolically, the power to grant his request. Although Emilia has already assured him that his banishment is temporary, as well as necessary to placate the Cyprians for the time being, Cassio still seeks "the advantage of some brief discourse / With Desdemona" (3.1.55-56). Cassio, like a lover uncertain of his beloved, expresses his fear to Desdemona that her husband "will forget my love and service" (3.3.17-18) and that in his absence another will fill his place. Desdemona later describes him to Othello as a "suitor," a man "languish[ing] in your displeasure" (3.3.44-45) and, indeed, when Desdemona makes clear in act 3, scene 4, that she can no longer aggressively put forward his petition, Cassio notes that all he has left "to ransom me into his [Othello's] love again" (120) is the record of his former honor and friendship.

Although Desdemona and Cassio are not competitors for Othello's love in a romantic sense, their functional similarity to each other reveals the ways in which the presence of friendship within marriage can create complications. As presented by Iago, it looks like the classic homosocial triangle in which two male friends compete for the favors of the same woman, yet in actuality it is Othello's love and preferment, not Desdemona's, upon which the successes of both Cassio and Iago depend. Desdemona's vowing of friendship to Cassio in act 3, scene 3, might seem harmless enough, but it is exploited by Iago to suggest, not a shared allegiance—that both Cassio and Desdemona admire and "love"

Othello, thereby justifying their friendship—but a conflict of interest: Cassio and Desdemona may have betrayed Othello. The fear, of course, is that Desdemona's "vow" could potentially surpass her marital vow. Despite the potentially transgressive nature of Desdemona's promise, she ultimately serves the function in the world of male alliances that, as a woman, she was always intended to. Instead of cementing a bond between her father and her husband, she ultimately functions as a "moth of peace" (1.3.258), a role she herself rejects early in the play. In Iago's words, she is a mender of the "broken joints" of Cassio and Othello's friendship, which she alone can "splinter" (2.3.316-17). This mockery of the dynastic character of the marital contract in its most public of forms reminds us yet again of the endurance of lineal models despite their lack of affective appeal. There is an alliance to be forged, and Desdemona is positioned ideally to finesse it. That Desdemona fails to mend these rifts, however, seems less important than her repositioning by the play's end as the wife who is as much victimized by the resilience of dynastic models of marriage as she is by individual men.

In *Othello* two important social structures—dynastic marriage and military promotion—are essentially dismantled, yet by the play's end the male affective alliances are restored as Iago's false friendship is revealed and Othello is able to ask pardon from Cassio (5.2.305-308). Yet the play concludes with a reversion to the dynastic-lineal structure: Othello is, post-mortem, incorporated into the lineal family that he at least publically eschewed, with his wealth (and presumably Brabantio's) bypassing the dead Desdemona to be enjoyed by her kinsman, Gratiano. As Othello's murder-suicide ends the play, together with Iago's murder of Emilia, both the benefits and inconveniences of marriage are eclipsed by the necessity of punishment for the "hellish villain" (5.2.379) and Lodovico's return to Venice to bring news of this "heavy act" to the Duke and senate (5.2.382). In the end, Desdemona's isolation from Venice is evident in her estrangement from her male kinsmen, who, although expressing dismay at her husband's treatment of her, fail to redeem her from the fate of the woman in domestic tragedies that privatize marriage to the extent that female characters have no male protection other than that afforded them by their husbands.[24] Although in some sense the central marriage and friendships that had been complicated by Iago's plots are validated at the play's conclusion, ultimately both of the play's marriages are utterly destroyed, and Cassio's friendship, dismantled yet somehow recouped, plays second fiddle to the reestablishment of the state-

family partnership at play's end. What will be remembered are the unsettling manipulations of Iago, whose adherence to older political structures is ultimately upheld by the plays' conclusion, making his own fate irrelevant within the broader context of both the Turkish conquest and the domestic justice that the play enacts.

The marriage of Othello and Desdemona is abhorred by Brabantio and Roderigo and tolerated by the state, but only one character other than the married couple themselves in the play seemed to have celebrated this match. Courteous Cassio, who invokes "Great Jove" (2.1.79) to protect Othello at sea, reconfigures the dynastic politics of the play when his asks the deity to "swell his [Othello's] sail with thine own powerful breath," so that he may "Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms, / Give renewed fire to our extincted spirits, / And bring all Cyprus comfort" (2.2.80-84). That Cassio invokes this appeal, not on behalf of a dynastic marriage and Venice, but on an unsanctioned marital relationship and the safety of a vulnerable Venetian colony, is interesting to say the least. While the failure of the affective, unsanctioned alliance of Othello and Desdemona reveals the vulnerability of the dynastic structure that enables Venice as a colonial power, Cassio's presence as the sole survivor of the human emotional bond that once encompassed husband, friend, and wife reminds us that the affective ideal may still resonate for one of the play's central characters. The marriage bed of Othello and Desdemona brings neither them nor Cyprus any lasting comfort, yet the play's ending may well invite nostalgia over what, in Cassio's intercession, may have been. In the end Cassio's odd yoking of an image of sexual consummation with the comfort and security of the nation confirms the unresolved ambivalence with which this play alternately treats marriage—and its problematic counterpart and co-conspirator—friendship.

Notes

1. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 5th ed. (New York: Longman, 2004).

2. Lisa Jardine, "Companionate Marriage versus Male Friendship: Anxiety for the Lineal Family in Jacobean Drama," in *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown*, ed. Susan Dwyer Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 234.

3. Although anthropologist Gayle Rubin offers a framework to understand women as objects of economic exchange in kinship relations, recent scholarship has attempted to complicate our understanding of women's function within marriage, specifically with regard to legal and property rights maintained after marriage. See, for example, Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), especially 39-47; and Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the

Political Economy of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210.

4. See Stephanie Chamberlain, "Resolving Clandestine Disputes: Narrative Strategy and Juridical Authority in *Othello*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2005), 263.

5. In her introduction to Edmund Tilney's *The Flower of Friendship*, Valerie Wayne paints a complex picture of companionate discourse, noting that the writings of influential humanists, such as Desiderius Erasmus (*Encomium*), Juan Louis Vives (*Instructions for a Christian Woman*) and Pedro di Luxon (*Coloquios matrimoniales*), were widely adapted during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and often drastically revised the original source to promote emergent Protestant and puritan ideologies of marriage and, in some cases, equality for women (in *The Flower of Friendship: A Renaissance Dialogue Contesting Marriage*, intro. and ed. Valerie Wayne [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992], 1-38). For a discussion of how conduct books addressed changes in the institution of marriage at this time, see Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15-31.

6. Edmund Tilney, *The Flower of Friendship*, 110.

7. Thomas Heywood, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, ed. Brian Scobie (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985).

8. Although there has been debate regarding whether early modern conduct books reflected a shift in practice that afforded women real power, Martha Howell argues, "European marriages were being more explicitly defined as voluntary bonds between spouses who regarded their unions . . . as the principle site of their emotional lives" (*The Marriage Exchange: Property, Social Place, and Gender in the Cities of the Low Countries, 1300-1550* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 236).

9. Jardine, "Companionate Marriage," 236.

10. Sandra Logan, "Domestic Disturbance and the Disordered State in Shakespeare's *Othello*," *Textual Practice* 18, no. 3 (2004): 355, 362-63. For further discussions of symbolic versus economic capital in theatrical texts of the period, see also Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*, 55-71, and Lyn Bennett, "The Homosocial Economies of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 35-61.

11. Jardine, "Companionate Marriage," 234.

12. For discussion of race in relation to anxieties regarding gender and female sexuality, see Patricia Parker, "Fantasies of 'Race' and 'Gender': Africa, *Othello* and Bringing to Light," in *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (New York: Routledge, 1994), 84-100; Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), especially chapter 1; and Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1989).

13. Tilney, for example, counsels, "Hastie love is soon gone. And some have loved in post haste, that afterward have repented them at leisure" (*Flower of Friendship*, 110).

14. Thomas Luxon, "Humanist Marriage and *The Comedy of Errors*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 49.

15. Luxon, "Humanist Marriage," 58.

16. For a reading of this scene as an example of Iago's disempowerment, see Logan, "Domestic Disturbance," 363-65.

17. Luxon, "Humanist Marriage," 48-49.

18. Michel de Montaigne, "Of Friendship," *Florio's Montaigne*, intro. George Saintsbury (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 199, 197-98.

19. Although I read this relationship between Othello and Cassio as homosocial rather than homoerotic, it shares a common bond with many of the female homoerotic alliances in Shakespeare: Celia and Rosalind, Hermia and Helena, and Emilia and Flavina. Speaking of James Holstun's claim that female homoerotic desire is often described in an elegiac fashion ("'Will you Rent Our Ancient Love Asunder?' Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton," *ELH* 54, no. 4 [Winter 1987]: 835-67), Valerie Traub notes that in these female alliances in Shakespeare, "nostalgia circumscribes the possibility, in particular, of 'feminine' female intimacy, limiting it to a mournful expression of what was rather than what is or might be" (172). See Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbiansim in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

20. Genster cites the 1586 treatise *Army Orders, Lawes and Ordinances set down by Robery Earle of Leycester* as a text possibly relevant to Cassio's situation. Among fifty-five articles of conduct, the fifth prescribes "whipping or banishment" (790) for men who consort with women other than their wives or those legitimately associated with the Army: nurses or launderers. See Genster, "Lieutenancy, Standing In, and *Othello*," *ELH*, 57, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 785-809.

21. For discussion of domestic tragedy on the Renaissance stage, see Lena Cowen Orlin, "Domestic Tragedy: Private Life on the Public Stage," in *A Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 367-83; Peter L. Rudnytsky, "*A Woman Killed With Kindness* as Subtext for *Othello*," in *Renaissance Drama: Relations and Influences*, New Series 14, ed. Leonard Barkan (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1983), 103-105; and Julia A. Carlson, "Like Me: An Invitation to Domestic/Tragedy," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 332-53.

22. See Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 19-22.

23. Joan Ozark Holmer reads Desdemona as a warrior "in the secular sense since her tongue is her sword or her only weapon, used defensively against Othello and offensively on behalf of Othello"; however, she also resembles the Christian warrior of Erasmus's *The Handbook of the Christian Soldier* "with her faith as a shield (Eph. 6.17)" (133). See Holmer, "Desdemona, Woman Warrior: 'O, These Men, These Men!' (4.3.59)," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* 17 (2005): 132-64.

24. For a discussion of how Desdemona's kinsmen, Lodovico and Gratiano, neglect an opportunity to intervene on her behalf, see Ruth Vanita, "'Proper' Men and 'Fallen' Women: The Unprotectedness of Wives in *Othello*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1995): 341-56.