Sex in the Wooden O: Exploring a Hetero v. Queer Matrix in the USF Productions of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*

James Wermers
University of Arizona

The Shakespearean plays performed during the 2010 summer season at the Utah Shakespearean Festival—*Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*—staged a sustained engagement with what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have called "public sex." All three productions relied on an implicit queer v. hetero logic by staging confrontations between the normative (hetero) and the deviant (queer) that expanded on and drove home themes already evident in the play-text. In the process, the queer was systematically associated with non-reproductive desire in the plays, and her censure by the hetero was accordingly a censure of queer desire qua non-reproductive and an affirmation of the heteronormativity of Shakespeare studies. Ironically, this seemingly focused celebration of heteronormativity in the 2010 season of the USF paradoxically participated in and undercut a tradition of heteronormative rhetoric in the west.

My understanding of the 2010 USF season as staging "public sex" is deeply indebted to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's articulation of "public sex" in their germinal essay, "Sex in Public."[1] In that essay, Berlant and Warner remind us that sex is not reducible to actions or identities; rather sex results from the convergence of numerous or paradoxical forces coming together in a matrix that normalizes heterosexual behavior.[2] While some such discourses are obvious, for example the conventions of

romantic-comedy that inevitably lead to a happy heterosexual conclusion, others, as Berlant and Warner note, are more subtle: "Heteronormative forms of intimacy are supported . . . not only by overt referential discourse such as love plots and sentimentality, but materially, in marriage and family law, in the architecture of the domestic, in the zoning of work and politics."[3] Berlant and Warner use this observation to construct a critique of hegemonic sexual relations in late twentieth-century America that recognizes the discursive creation of (hetero)normative sex in the public sphere and the obfuscation of that production. I want to suggest that this critique provides a valuable tool for examining 2010 USF productions of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*, and perhaps even Shakespearean Studies at large.

Seen through the lens constructed by Berlant and Warner, the articulation of public sex in the USF productions of *Much Ado about Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth* certainly relies at times on overt or "referential" discourses that are clearly aimed at establishing heteronormativity. It is hard not to see a heteronormative logic at work in the generic comedic endings of *Much Ado* and *Merchant*, and *Macbeth*'s clear championing of reproduction in its unabashed celebration of James I.[4] At the same time, these productions are equally reliant on more subtle "material" discourses as well.[5] Each of these productions uses the stage as a place to expand on the overt heteronormative content of the play by focusing our attention on a variety of material concerns (e.g., gestures, costume, etc.). The convergence of these referential and material discourses generates a normative public in the world of the play, and heterosexuality becomes both the endpoint and a default assumption along the way.

An unintended offshoot of the convergence of such explicit and implicit discourse and the formation of a heteronormative "public sex" is, as Berlant and Warner suggest, the simultaneous generation of the queer. Following Berlant, I want to suggest that the queer is outside of, and implicitly a threat to, the heteronormative matrix established by referential and material discourse. The consummation of queer desire in these productions is ostensibly obscene—this is, as I will show, especially the case in the USF production of *Macbeth*—and resists classification by dominant heteronormative discourses. The result is an understanding that

the queer is outside of or beyond the hetero and that "queer culture, by contrast [to hetero] has almost no institutional matrix for its counterintimacies."[6] Berlant and Warner's suggestion here seems to be that queer desire does not itself result from the quiet convergence of referential and material discourses in quite the same ways as the hetero. Rather, the queer emerges in a discursive relationship with that hetero.

This is not to say that the queer is reactionary. Rather, it is to say that the queer is queer by virtue of her exclusion from, and resistance to, the *telos* of heteronormative discourses.[7] This is often cashed out in sexual terms as it is in these plays, as the queer ostensibly desires sexual gratification without respect to reproduction, and that desire is seemingly censured by the productions. This focus on the queer's lack of concern with reproduction in favor of more explicitly sexual concerns is central to the argument that follows. Accordingly, this formulation of the queer helps us to read what is going on with the principle antagonists: the Macbeths, Don John and Shylock, all of whom are staged in the 2010 USF productions as queers working against the heteronormative and reproductive matrix carefully constructed by referential and material discourses. The USF productions of *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth* lead us to a heteronormative public sex that assumes a reproductive *telos* and to a formulation of queer as fundamentally outside of and in opposition to that *telos*.

Things Scene and Things Obscene

The Shakespearean play-texts underwriting the performances in the USF 2010 Summer Season are all decidedly concerned with a confrontation between the hetero and the queer, and this subtext is driven home by particular production choices in the Adams Theater. Even a cursory glance at the texts of *Much Ado*, *Merchant*, and *Macbeth* reveals a sustained focus in each play on a hetero v. queer dichotomy. Referential discourses structure our most basic understanding of the principle protagonists of the plays, as we cannot help but see characters like Claudio in *Much Ado* and Bassanio in *Merchant* as players in an explicitly heteronormative context. These referential discourses are amplified by a number of material discourses manifested in the staging of the productions,

for example, the construction of normative behavior cultivated by costume decisions in *Much Ado*. Both of these sets of discourses come together to embrace and help to cultivate heteronormative sex on the stage. The hetero characters in these productions have desires that will, of necessity, lead to heterosexual union and reproduction. Such characters stand in stark contrast to the Macbeths, Don John, and Shylock, who work to satiate desire that is fundamentally non-reproductive. The hetero v. queer dyad that is so clearly developed by referential discourses in the play-texts is thus amplified by the material nature of the USF productions. This, in turn, leads to the establishment of queer subjectivities which work in opposition to the heteronormativity of the plays, and recognizing that confrontation is key to understanding the USF productions.

As Shakespearean comedies, the central plots of *Much Ado about Nothing* and *The Merchant of Venice* move by default towards heteronormative resolutions at the end of the plays. This heteronormative logic is perhaps easiest to see in the "referential discourse"-laden *Much Ado About Nothing*. Here the genre of the play dictates that the action ultimately underwrites heterosexual marriage as the logical endpoint of the "much ado" in the play. Despite the trials and tribulations set into motion by Don John and Borachio, the play inevitably ends with the marriage of Claudio and Hero, and Beatrice and Benedick. The latter pair are perhaps the most obvious example of heteronormativity in the play as they perform with bravado for their respective companies time and time again in the early acts, only to have these performances break down when the two find themselves unlikely allies. What begins as mutual animosity for members of the opposite sex melts away to reveal hetero desires. The transformation is so complete that Benedick's penultimate act in the play is to suggest that marriage provides an answer to one's problems—"Prince, / thou art sad; get thee a wife, get thee a wife" (4.1.117)— which he follows with an ominous promise to censure the queer in the play by "devis[ing] . . . brave punishments for [Don John]" (4.1.122).[8]

Throughout the play, Don John works to undermine the marriage of Hero and Claudio. While he provides a rationale for this—he hates and desires to frustrate his brother, who has worked to secure this marriage—there seems to be another reason as well.

Don John is in many ways like Benedick at the start of the play. Both men prefer the company of their same-sex compatriots, and both delight in the torment of their adversaries. The difference is, of course, that Benedick's homosocial preferences are eventually revealed as juvenile and something that will be necessarily corrected by his entry into the heterosexual world. There is no indication that such an end is coming for Don John. Instead, Don John's focus moves from simply thwarting his brother, to thwarting heterosexual marriage *writ large*. To put it another way, Don John is doing his very best to realize queer desires that, of necessity, have the power to frustrate the generic aims of the play, including heteronormative reproduction. While this particular reading of Don John is already evident in the play-text, it is decidedly driven home by the USF production of the play.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example of a material discourse in the USF production of *Much Ado* amplifying the referential discourses of the text was the way costumes were designed and employed in the production. Throughout the play the vast majority of the cast was dressed in soft-hued and gender-specific costumes. The lightly colored, and oddly soft-looking, military uniforms of the men and the earth-toned rural dresses of the women clearly delineated gender, and did so in a way that was evocative of large scale stereotypes in the west. The men were located in a culture of military bravado, and the women were located in a culture of domesticity. Don John clearly did not fit into either world. Dressed in a long and conspicuously tight-fitting black leather jacket, Don John was attired as a kind of stage queer (see figure 1). In a play where costuming reaffirmed gender division and tacitly underwrote the seemingly necessary heteronormative discourse that grows out of it, this singular costume choice carried with it a host of counter-cultural association (e.g., bondage culture, etc.). While this association might seem a

Figure 1: Don John, Borachio and Conrade

stretch at first, it was hard to ignore the difference between Don John and everyone else in the play. So, too, was it hard to ignore the leather-wrapped Don John consistently staged in such a way that his opposition to heterosexual marriage is fronted. Whenever he was on stage, Don John was either directly opposite to the heterosexual couples—an opposing force—or separating the two members of a given couple as a kind of obstacle. Taken together, Don John's costume and staging came together to provide a visual image of Don John as queer—as working to separate himself from the heterosexual logical of the play. Don John was, in the USF production, a character who eschewed the hetero and is accordingly painted as a villain for that reason.

The movement towards establishing heteronormativity that underwrites *Much Ado* is complicated in the USF production of *The Merchant of Venice*. In the text of *Merchant*, the movement towards a heteronormative matrix is evident from the opening scene in which Bassanio employs the help of Antonio to help him woo a "lady richly left" (1.1.161). This begins an unmistakable arc towards the final scene in which Antonio is again put in service of the couple, this time as the bearer of Portia's ring back to Bassanio.[9] The play seems to be obsessed with subjecting the homoerotic to the heteronormative. The latter scene in particular is a testament not only to the default hetero assumptions of the play, but also of the seemingly paradoxical subtlety and violence with which those ends are achieved. Antonio and his desires are steamrolled by the plot that leads inevitably towards the ostensibly happy marriage between Portia and Bassanio, with the ring providing a simple material exclamation point.

While it might seem banal or even derivative to explore deviant sexual desire in a play that is with increasing frequency the focus of a wide array of LGBT[10] attention, this particular issue remains central to contemporary stagings of *Merchant*. It is almost two decades since Bruce Smith identified Antonio as "the most pathetic of [Shakespeare's] several friends. . . who hazards everything for his friend—and loses him to a woman,"[11] and over a decade since Steve Patterson echoed Smith's focus on Antonio's homoeroticism, placing the play in what he calls "an early modern tradition of homoerotic friendship, or amity."[12] And, despite the speed with which academic trends seem to develop and change,

this understanding of *Merchant* as intimately concerned with the violent powers of heteronormativity remains a central focus of contemporary scholarship.

This central confrontation between hetero and queer in *The Merchant of Venice* is highlighted again very near the start of the play-text, when Shylock suggests the "pound of flesh" as the penalty should Antonio forfeit the bond made to so handsomely outfit Bassanio. Following James Shapiro, I want to suggest that Shakespeare's audience would likely have heard a particular kind of threat in that suggestion. As Shapiro has pointed out, the fear that Jews would abduct and forcibly circumcise Christians was not uncommon in the early modern world.[13] At its core, that fear was not simply a fear of physical deformation or religious ritual. In the background was a far more compelling fear, that of queer desires. The subtext here is that Shylock is not concerned with financial gain, but rather with disrupting the heteronormative logic of early modern England. The lingering threat of circumcision, so often misread in the period as a kind of castration, removes the more obvious and stereotyped Jewish desire for financial gain, and replaces it with the fear of queer desire as necessarily frustrating heteronormativity that underwrites the anti-Semitic sentiment.

Given the above, it is perhaps unsurprising then, that the USF production made this a central focus as well. When Antonio, Bassanio and Shylock first negotiated the bond on stage at the USF, Shylock drove home his delivery of what I read as this threat of circumcision:

> . . .let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me. (1.3.149-52)

As he delivered these lines, Shylock leaned towards Antonio and made a snipping gesture in the direction of Antonio's genitals. This action highlighted what seemed to be a central concern of the play, as Shylock's snipping gesture threatened not only Antonio, but the heterosexual reproduction of the state and of the stage. This confrontation between heteronormative interests and queer desire was echoed at least twice near the end of the play: in the courtroom scene in act 4, scene1, and at the very end of the performance. As Shylock approached Antonio to remove

Figure 2: Shylock moves in for the pound of flesh

the pound of flesh in 4.1, and just before Portia, disguised as Balthazar, shouted out, Shylock took aim at Antonio's pound of flesh in a way that clearly recalled his suggestive gesture in 1.3 (see figure 2). This visual echo was compounded by the final scene of the production that gathered Portia, Bassanio, Nerissa, Gratiano, Lorenzo and Jessica on the stage in celebration. While most of the USF production eschewed apologist tendencies that riddle contemporary performances of *Merchant*, the final scene of this production seemingly moved in an apologist direction.[14] Seated downstage right, Jessica was set apart from the other characters on the stage as the performance ended, and a spotlight lingered on her as she wept uncontrollably for several moments after the rest of the lights on the stage had been cut. While this decision seemed to signal a kind of hindsight that revises Shakespeare's play so we, like Porita in 4.1, are not so sure "which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" (4.1.169), I think there was something more complex happening here as well.

This is perhaps most clearly set in relief when we consider how *Merchant* leaves Antonio and Shylock at the end of the play. At the end of *Merchant*, Antonio's homoeroticism is recouped by the heteronormative *telos* of the state when he is made to serve as the ring-bearer for the newly sealed bond between Portia and Bassanio. Antonio is accordingly brought into the heteronormative matrix of the play in a move that ostensibly celebrates the value of heteronormativity. However, the same cannot be said of Shylock. While Shylock is forced to convert at the end of the trial in 4.1, such a conversion would likely have fallen on deaf ears in an England where Elizabeth I demanded only outward compliance. Bearing this in mind, it seems clear that this simple staging decision had less to do with a personal threat than it did with fears that Shylock's queer desire could sterilize the nation. It was the failure to effectively recoup Shylock that provides whatever power

there may have been in the USF's singular staging of Jessica. The tragedy was not simply that both Jew and Christian have behaved badly, but also that the heteronormative power of the state failed to stem Shylock's power which seemed to continue to disrupt heteronormativity by preventing the happy consummation of the marriage of Christian and Jew. As with *Much Ado*, *Merchant's* referential and material discourses generate a hetero matrix, and, as we saw with Don John in *Much Ado*, Shylock's queerness in the USF production was in turn figured materially as an exclusion from and challenge to that matrix.

While part of a different dramatic genre entirely, *Macbeth* provides what is, in many ways, a variation on the heteronormative theme underwriting *Much Ado* and *Merchant*. While there is no happy ending replete with heterosexual marriage at the end of the play, the plot is nonetheless one that is in service to heteronormativity. This is so much so that the central crime in the play—Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's unnatural grasping for power—is repeatedly tied to queer desires that would flout a default heteronormative *telos*. The first indication of this is Lady Macbeth's curious reference to having "given suck" in act 1, scene 7. This passage has drawn a variety of responses from critics who have suggested that it perhaps stems from a loss of a child earlier in the pair's marriage, or even that it provides us the first glimpse into unstable characters.[15] Whatever the case, the violence of this moment suggests that all is not well here:

> I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,
> Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
> And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
> Have done to this. (1.7.54-59)[16]

Violence against children is often used as a shorthand for the fears elicited by queer desire in the western tradition. Or, as Lee Edelman puts it, "whatever refuses this mandate [to reproduce] by which our political institutions compel the collective reproduction of the Child must appear as a threat not only to the organization of a given social order but also, and far more ominously, to social order as such."[17] The queer's focus on satisfying her own desires

whatever the cost to others and to the state is very often, as it is here, expressed as a desire to willfully harm children in pursuit of queer ends. This theme is further explored later in the play when Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's designs on the crown lead them to kill Banquo's son as well as Macduff's family.

The murder of Macduff's family was perhaps the clearest staging of the hetero v. queer dichotomy that I suggest is structuring the 2010 USF productions. Once again, the materiality of the USF productions helped to generate a heteronormative matrix, and the exclusion of the queer from that matrix was visually signified on the stage. While the play-text for Macbeth calls for the murder of Macduff's wife and son—a move that was designed to shore up Macbeth's hold on the throne by continuing to eliminate the most immediate successors—the USF production adds two other small children and one child *in utero* to the family (see figure 3). Enlarging Macduff's family served to amplify the crime being committed by Macbeth and his allies at this point. This was no longer merely a political crime with immediate implications; rather this was a crime against the heteronormative family and thus against nature.

Figure 3: Macduff's wife and extra children.

The impact of this crime was registered in the decision to remove the actual act of murdering Lady Macbeth and her unborn child from the stage. In the USF staging, Lady Macduff was surrounded by a group of figures in dark robes. The robed figures encircled Lady Macduff and her children, and then slowly contracted the diameter of that circle until they were right on top of Lady Macduff. Then the lights cut, and a chilling scream filled the theater. Rather than show the crime itself, the staging suggested that what is about to happen was simply too horrible to be shown. This movement of the action off the stage suggested that what was occurring was truly obscene. As Madhavi Menon and LindaWilliams have both pointed out, *obscene* literally means

"off-stage," and those things that we think of as obscene are accordingly those things that we feel the need to hide from view.[18] This was certainly the case here. And, it is important to note that the obscenity here has just as much to do with the nature of Macbeth's desire as it did with the actual murder of the pregnant Lady Macduff. The movement off-stage was a tacit reminder that queer desire is satisfied by actions and events that were not fit for public consumption.

Following this murder, Macduff was the only possible hero remaining. This, too, was amplified by the staging decisions at the 2010 USF. Where Lady Macduff had been surrounded by a throng of figures in dark robes at the moment before her death, we found her husband in decidedly different circumstances when he is told of the crime. Macduff, standing where his wife had been when the murder scene went to black out, was dressed in a white robe surrounded by a ring of candles. The soft light that bathed the stage at this point coupled with the loose-fitting frock on Macduff provided a stark contrast. Where Lady Macduff's murder was cast as a kind of pagan ritual, Macduff's circumstances seem almost monastic. The queer perversion of the murder was thus replaced by a quiet and reflective solitude. Here again we find a commonplace shorthand for the obscenity of the queer and the centrality of the hetero, as these two scenes stage the difference between uncontrolled desire for satiation in the present and the measured, rational rhetoric of the hetero embodied in Macduff.

At the heart of the USF production of *Macbeth* was a dichotomy between what I want to suggest is the scene and obscene. The hetero impulses of the play were staged in confident and soft lighting, like the scene in which Macduff learned of his wife's fate. What we saw on the stage in such decidedly hetero moments was a focus on responsibility to family and to country. Following the murder of his wife and family, Macduff recognized his responsibility to his dead family and to his country to rise up against *Macbeth*. This leads to the end of the play, which, given the defeat of Macbeth and his allies, was a celebration of heterosexual reproduction. The resultant logic was one in which the state would continue, and would blossom in the state that underwrote the original production of *Macbeth* when Banquo's supposed progeny James I ruled in the seventeenth century.

I am not, of course, suggesting in the above that we should see Don John, Shylock or the Macbeths as anything but villains. My aim here is simply to demonstrate the extent to which the deviance of these characters relies on the heteronormative matrix constructed by the referential and material discourses of play and production. All of the above helps us to understand the extent to which the hetero v. queer dichotomy structures the USF productions of *Much Ado*, *Merchant*, and *Macbeth*. The central antagonists of these productions are queer figures. Each of them embraces a drive to satisfy explicitly non-reproductive ends in the immediate future. This focus on pleasure of procreation has been a key defining characteristic of queer desire in scholarship during the last twenty years. The queer nature of these antagonists' desires is no doubt authorized by the Shakespearean play-texts that underwrite the USF performances. But the USF productions also go beyond the explicit dictates of the play-text, and deploy queer desire in conflict with heteronormativity in a way that makes the motivations of the Macbeths, Don John and Shylock more explicitly legible.

A Heteronormative Juggernaut?

Near the end of his essay on the invention of the heterosexual in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Stephen Guy-Bray notes that at the end of the comedy, "The triumph of heterosexuality, a juggernaut destroying everything in its path, appears to be complete."[19] However, as Guy-Bray goes on to note, the ostensible triumph of heterosexuality in *Two Gentleman* has to be qualified, as what we really have is "a narrative in which same-sex and mixed-sex relationships can co-exist."[20] I want to suggest that Guy-Bray's textured understanding provides a useful context in which to read the hetero v. queer dyad I discuss above. While there is certainly a history of epistemological violence that underwrites notions of the hetero that I suggest are so central to *Much Ado*, *Merchant*, and *Macbeth*, we must be careful not to read this as a simple heteronormative program crushing everything in its path. Rather, the extent to which these plays and productions have to work to demonstrate heteronormativity is suggestive of a more complex and nuanced world.

There is to be sure a western obsession with queer—non-reproductive—desire that stretches back at least a millennium, and

the rhetoric of the western tradition has, in large part, been the rhetoric of reproduction. As Mark D. Jordan has noted in his *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, this process is underway in earnest as early as the 10th century when accounts of St. Pelagius focus on the saint's supposed impenetrability in the face of the sodomitical desires of 'Abd al-Rahman III.[21] As Jordan notes, this celebration of Pelagius' chastity is in many ways a thinly veiled political commentary that seems to be concerned as much with domination and miscegenation as it is with Pelagius' own purity. Pelagius, says Jordan, was celebrated by medieval Christian authors because he refused to partake in the kind of non-reproductive sexual acts we have since come to associate with the queer. This loaded focus on Pelagius' supposed chastity was evident throughout the following centuries in writings by Peter Damian and Albert the Great. The sum of this process, says Jordan, is the gradual understanding of the sodomitical—non-reproductive and queer—desires of 'Abd al-Rahman III as constituting a threat to Christian interests. 'Abd al-Rahman III's desires thus become the subject of Christian derision and the story of Pelagius a way to stage a hetero response.

The focus on the ostensible perversity of sodomy that structures the accounts that Jordan examines is echoed by Cynthia Herrup's discussion of the Castlehaven scandal in early seventeenth-century England. As Herrup notes in her *A House in Gross Disorder*, the Castlehaven scandal of the early seventeenth century resulted in large part from a conflation of the Catholic and the sodomite.[22] The Second Earl of Castlehaven had been accused of sexual deviance, and the often trumped-up stories of his dalliances with his social and political inferiors were a major scandal during and after his trial. Herrup points out that whatever the actual nature of Castlehaven's crimes, there is little doubt that the Privy Council that heard the case linked the sexual crimes with which Castlehaven was charged to his well-known Catholic leanings. Castlehaven was officially censured because of his sexual acts, but the real crime, says Herrup, was his well-established adherence to Catholicism.

In both Jordan's and Herrup's accounts, the religious and the sexual are conflated in such a way that the real issue is non-reproductive desire. We need to note the extent to which this

deviance is part of a larger cultural program that has at its core a confrontation between the Christian west and the Islamic east, and of Proto-Anglican England and Catholic England. 'Abd al-Rahman's sexual proclivities are thus tacitly linked to his status as a religious and geographical "other." And, in much the same way, the Earl of Castlehaven finds his sexuality linked to his Catholicism. In both cases then, religious difference and sexual deviance are intimately intertwined. This is, I want to argue, because both are expressions of non-reproductive desire. As we see with the fear of Antonio's circumcision at the hands of Shylock in *Merchant*, religious difference is converted in to the fear of non-reproductive, that is queer, desires. In both Jordan and Herrup's work religion serves not as the locus of concern, although it may seem that way as first, but as a way of highlighting the non-reproductive nature common in queer religious and sexual acts.[23]

All of this helps us to understand the USF productions as, at least in part, a product of a very long discourse on queer desire in the west. And while the productions might seem to uphold the *status quo*, I want to suggest that something very different is going on. Recent criticism in queer studies has laid bare the constructed nature of heteronormative discourse, and it is now almost a banal statement to note that the heteronormative nature of contemporary western society is a kind of historical accident that could have been other. Every production of a play, and particularly one that so unabashedly sets up the hetero v. queer dyad so apparent in the USF productions, needs to be taken with a critical grain of salt. It would, no doubt, be easy to see the USF productions as a discursive contribution to shoring up the heteronormative default of western culture. After all, the very name of the academic conference associated with the USF, the conference for which I prepared an earlier version of this paper, affirms the USF's tense relationship to what Madhavi Menon has recently called heterohistory.[24] The "Wooden O" names not only a theater but also an historical fantasy of Shakespearean production. It invokes the slang name for Shakespeare's Globe—the theatre in which Shakespeare came into his power as a "mature" dramatist penning the propagandist Henry V and the tersely reproduction-obsessed *Hamlet*. And, this historical fantasy affirms the kinds of teleological assumptions that underwrite the western obsession that is at the heart of reproduction *qua* normative.

This particular logic of reading is tempting, but I think it misses the point. It is, of course, the case that any production of a play requires the director and cast to make a large number of interpretive decisions, and in this sense the 2010 USF productions of *Much Ado*, *Merchant*, and *Macbeth* are no exception. Like any plays, these productions are an amalgam of interpretations and decisions on the part of everyone involved with the production. What sets the decisions I highlight above the bevy of directorial decisions that are part of any play, is their applicability to contemporary, our contemporary and Shakespeare's contemporary, debates about sex in the public sphere. The USF playing up of hetero v. queer dyad is part of an ongoing debate about queer desire that has reached a head in twenty-first-century America. As such, the stress that the USF productions put on the hetero v. queer subtext of Shakespeare's plays is either unwittingly, and clumsily, part of a heteronormative world building in line with the invocation of Pelagius purity and the focus on Castlehaven's deviance, or it is indicative of productions that understand the power of the heteronormative *telos* of the western tradition and stage it as simultaneous and paradoxical affirmation and challenge.

My goal in the preceding has been threefold, as I worked (1) to suggest that there is a heteronormative subtext in *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*; (2) to demonstrate how the USF productions of these plays worked through referential and material discourse to establish a heteronormative matrix in the productions, as well as a queer subjectivity that emerged in a discursive relationship to that; and (3) to suggest that this complex navigation of hetero v. queer dyad places these productions in dialogue with a western tradition that has a very complex relationship to what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have called "public sex." My hope is that such a discussion serves a stimulus for further thinking about the Gordian relationships between hetero and queer in Shakespeare's plays and in adaptations of those plays. Such thinking must be, I think, at the center of scholarship in Shakespeare Studies.

Recent trends in feminist and queer theory have continued to problematize popular, and often overly simply and expressly hetero, notions of the past. My hope is that this article builds on that trend by suggesting that sex is a public construct in

Shakespeare's plays and adaptations of those plays that emerge out of discursive relationships between polymorphous desires on the stage. While there is certainly a heteronormative matrix constructed by referential and material discourses in Shakespeare's plays, this simultaneously gives rise to a queer subjectivity that necessarily challenges the necessity of and stability of the heteronormative matrix. This is not to suggest, as is sometimes the case, that Shakespeare has offered a prescient insight on the need for sexual and social harmony. What I do want to suggest is that reading and watching Shakespeare as an author who is part of a rhetorical history of constructing normative sex should necessarily include a recognition that such sexual categorization is just that: a construction.

Notes

1. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 547-66.

2. Berlant and Warner are careful to note that they "will be talking not about the sex people already have clarity about, nor identities and acts, nor a wildness in need of derepression; but rather about *sex* as it is mediated by publics" (547), and my use of sex in this paper follows their careful delineation of the term.

3. Ibid., 562.

4. It is commonplace to associate Shakespeare's writing of *Macbeth* with James I's claim to be descended from Banquo. This critical tradition goes back at least as far as Henry N. Paul's *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1950), 1.

5. My use of "material" here differs slightly form Berlant and Warner's use in "Sex in Public," as my use of the term focuses particularly on the materiality of the stage. However, despite my focus on the stage, my analysis keeps the spirit of Berlant and Warner's distinction between referential and material discourse as a distinction between those overt discourses that obviously construct heterosexuality and more subtle discourses that are not normally connected with sex.

6. Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," 562

7. This particular understanding of *queer* is not only at the heart of Berlant and Warner's article, but has structured a great deal of queer theory in the past two decades. For a more complete articulation of the queer in terms of reproduction, see Michael Warner's introduction to his edited collection, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), vii-xxxi; and Lee Edelman's introduction to his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 1-32.

8. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Taylor, Gary Wells, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). All in-text citations refer to this edition.

9. William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Taylor, Gary Wells, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). All in-text citations refer to this edition.

10. *LGBT* has designated since the 1990s what was formerly known as the "gay community," referring respectively to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

11. Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Renaissance England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 67; see also 31-78.

12. Steven Patterson, "The Bankruptcy of Homoerotic Amity in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (Spring, 1999): 10.

13. James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), esp. 113-30.

14. For a discussion of the role of apologist tendencies in recent adaptations of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, see Monique L. Pittman's "Locating the Bard: Adaptation and Authority in Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 13-33.

15. A simple search of the W*orld Shakespeare Bibliograpy* for "Macbeth, Children" reveals more than a dozen monographs or articles from the last decade that deal with the problem presented by this scene in a variety of ways.

16. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Taylor, Gary Wells, et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). All in-text citations refer to this edition.

17. Edelman, *No Future*, 11.

18. See Madhavi Menon, *Unhistorical Shakespeare: Queer Theory in Shakespearean Literature and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 43; and Linda Williams, *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3-4.

19. Stephen Guy-Bray, "Shakespeare and the Invention of the Heterosexual," E*arly Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 16 (October, 2007), 12-26. <URL:http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/brayshks.htm>.

20. Ibid., 28.

21. Mark D. Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 10-44.

22. See Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

23. My discussion of Jordan and Herrup is not meant to be exhaustive, and I merely use the pair to indicate what seems to be a trend in the construction of heterosexuality in the western tradition.

24. See Menon, *Unhistorical Shakespeares*, esp. 1-36.