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“Listen to Many”: Intersectionality, Tragedy, and William Shakespeare

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**“Listen to Many”:
Intersectionality, Tragedy, and William Shakespeare**

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Honors Thesis, Department of English
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Abstract

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Intersectionality, Tragedy, and William Shakespeare

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Union College, 2015

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Centuries after his own lifetime, William Shakespeare dominates the Western canon and continues to have a profound effect on Western society. As the values of that society shift and social movements progress, so too must critical reception of Shakespeare's work. The purpose of this thesis is to reexamine Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (1601), *Othello* (1604), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606) through a feminist lens in order to expose the larger societal issues addressed within the play. This thesis draws on Intersectionality, a modern branch of feminism, to discuss sexism, racism, classism, and homophobia within Shakespeare's texts and the way in which they function to create the tragic ending of each play.

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Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* feature the destruction of their lead characters. This destruction comes about at the hands of individuals, but it is also symptomatic of a larger, societal failing. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the power structures at work within these plays, particularly the systems of oppression inherent in patriarchal societies. Patriarchal societies are comprised of a male-dominated social order, the values of which permeate both organized society and individual relationships. Each of the plays under consideration demonstrates the destructive effects of patriarchal values, which result in the debasement and marginalization of all those who are not part of the dominant group. Shakespeare's plays use European structures in which wealthy, white males are the dominant figures and all others fall into various degrees of subordination and oppression. The way this systematic oppression works is through socialization begun at birth in order to inculcate toxic masculinity in males and passive femininity in females. Similarly, racial, gender and class prejudices are social constructs, the creation of which results in tragedy. Rather than the genre, I have chosen to focus on Jan Kott's definition of tragedy: "the annihilation of laughter" (140). Regardless of how these plays are categorized, by the end of the plays, all humor is eliminated. The unequal treatment of women, minorities and lower classes within these plays demonstrates the danger of a patriarchy and cries out for social reform.

In order to substantiate my argument that the values instilled in a patriarchal society cause the tragic ending of these plays, I employ intersectionality, a branch of feminist theory. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the

1990s in her article, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”. Her article provides insight into the origin and application of intersectionality, a feminist approach founded by women of color who felt underrepresented in mainstream feminism (Collins 450). Crenshaw uses this method to draw women of color and other marginalized women into feminist discussion and analyze violence specifically against women of color. Catharine A. MacKinnon provides a tidy definition of intersectionality, explaining that this method “both notices and contends with the realities of multiple inequalities as it thinks about ‘the interaction of’ those inequalities in a way that captures the distinctive dynamics at their multidimensional interface” (1019). Intersectionality can be defined as a method that acknowledges that inequality does not exist in a vacuum and that people are many things at once. Therefore, the female experience cannot be boiled down to the experience of any one woman, or even any particular group of women. Furthermore, while intersectional feminism is primarily concerned with women, this method applies to all groups marginalized under a patriarchal order.

Intersectionality also contends with the fact that oppression is not the same for every subjugated group. Those whose identities are composed of multiple oppressed or marginalized groups face oppression greater than the sum of its parts. So while experiences of oppression and marginalization overlap, the different aspects of a person's identity combine to form a unique experience. Intersectionality is a method of viewing the world in a way that reveals connections that are frequently overlooked.

Intersectionality has only recently been adopted into feminist criticism, and therefore is a relatively new theoretical methodology within feminism. By integrating

intersectional feminism into Shakespearean criticism, I endeavor to shift the way feminists view Shakespeare's works. Since Shakespeare's influence is widespread and he is considered to be part of the Western canon, the way his works are viewed affects academia and feminist criticism as a whole. If any author is accredited with shaping Western culture, it is Shakespeare. Therefore, because Shakespeare is such a major figure in the shaping of Western culture, my aim is to help shift the academic discussion of the female characters within these three plays.

Chapter 1, "What May You Be?": The Construction of Self-Hatred in Shakespeare's *Othello*," focuses on the creation of a patriarchal society in *Othello*, since the play initially begins with Othello as a successful and well-respected general. Iago introduces the concepts of 'Other' as well as racial and gender stereotypes. These concepts become internalized within the characters, eventually turning them into the very things Iago accused them of being. For Othello, this is a sexual predator and an abuser toward his wife, while for Desdemona it is a submissive woman without a voice. Therefore, *Othello* demonstrates that there are many ways in which a male-dominated society can be formed and, more importantly, how that society affects those oppressed by it. Othello and Desdemona's great tragedy is one of miscommunication. While the two begin the play in perfect synchronization, as their relationship deteriorates, so does their ability to understand one another. Desdemona is in a similar position, as she begins the play with a strong voice and steadily loses it as Othello is turned against her. This play is an important part of the thesis because it will involve not only the way social, political, and economic hierarchies work against Desdemona, but it will integrate a reading of her character with a reading of Othello's. Critics rarely address both characters with equal

attention, rather choosing one as their focus. Intersectionality, however, demands that attention be paid to Othello's status as a minority within Venetian society and how that affects the tragedy.

Chapter 2, “False, false, false!': Sexual Economics and Gender Performance in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*” contends with a tradition of critics who view the greatest tragedy of the play to be Cressida's betrayal of Troilus, rather than the senseless war or the trafficking of women. Gayle Greene claims *Troilus and Cressida* is a play filled with “a loathing of humanity, an aversion to sex and the physical, and more misogyny than is usual with Shakespeare” (133). This would be a more apt description of the decades of critics who defame Cressida while overlooking the destructive forces at work within the play. This chapter seeks to shift the perspective of those who condemn Cressida as the play's greatest evil and instead shines a critical light on the way women are traded like goods within the play, and the way men are conditioned to give their lives for a meaningless cause.

Chapter 3, “Easy Ways to Die': Bodied Politics in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*” deals with race as well as female power, since Cleopatra occupies a unique position as a monarch – Queen of Egypt. Despite her political power, Cleopatra is treated most frequently as a woman and a lover rather than a ruler. Within the play itself, Cleopatra's crown is often disregarded and she, as a woman, is advised not to appear on the battlefield for fear that she will distract the men. Discussion of Cleopatra's experience as a woman in a position of power concludes my argument on the destructive effects of patriarchy by demonstrating that even advancing woman's position in a patriarchal society is not enough to make any significant changes. Furthermore, Cleopatra's status as

queen jeopardizes her more than it protects her because it puts her in direct opposition to males interested in imperialism. Due to the prominent theme of imperialism in this play, I also draw on post-colonial theory to properly contextualize the characters. Characters and critics alike have maligned Cleopatra for her sexuality and her intellect, and these criticisms contain a racial dimension that needs to be addressed. It is important, therefore, to address how characters' responses to Cleopatra led to the play's tragic end as well as to address how critics continue to misinterpret her.

While the conversation taking place within Shakespearean criticism is certainly extensive and even overwhelming, it is not yet exhaustive. As feminist discourse evolves, so too must academic responses. While critics have made valid observations about the effects of patriarchy within Shakespeare's works, often the connections are overlooked. Examining a sole character within a play can often be reductive, because it tends to dismiss or deny the way in which power structures interact. By making a single individual the victim and every other character the aggressor, the play's larger themes are boiled down to an individual tragedy, rather than a tragedy of society. I will not only add to the current discussion, but I will address widely accepted critical reception which is genuinely harmful to our understanding of the overall themes of the text. Finally, while there is a distinction between intersectionality as a framework to understand social and political structures and intersectionality as a framework to catalyze social movements, it is my goal to do both.

Chapter One

“What May You Be?”: The Construction of Self-Hatred in Shakespeare's *Othello*

Shakespeare's famous "star-crossed lovers" might well be Desdemona and Othello. The two protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* are divided not by warring families, but by differences in age, race and social class, and traverse all of these boundaries in order to marry one another. The play begins immediately after their elopement and takes place in Venice where, despite his racial isolation, Othello is welcome and needed as a successful general. Shakespeare's characters are initially comfortable traversing racial and gender boundaries, able to exist simply as they are. While differences between race and gender are acknowledged in Venice they do not have the same stigmas attached to them that they do in modern society. Othello is not seen as a lesser being because of his race, nor does it detract from his success as a general. Desdemona is not seen as an object, nor do others restrain her from speaking. It is Iago, the villain of the play, who introduces those stigmas. Shakespeare chooses a masculine, white male as his villain, accurately reflecting those in charge of patriarchal societies. While Iago is an individually hateful person, as a larger metaphor he represents the entire concept of patriarchy, which functions through perpetuating social inequalities. He preys on those around him, using language to manipulate and ultimately influence the nature of others. Iago acts as an embodiment of patriarchal prejudices and introduces the fear and hatred of the 'Other', pitting characters against one another on the basis of race, gender and sexuality. Through the rhetoric of the 'Other', Iago creates a community from which to exclude those who do not fit into the dominant side of his strict binaries. Moreover, while Iago is able to make others believe that Othello should be feared and hated, the shift occurs in the play when he is able to make Othello believe it. The most dangerous aspect of a society based on inequalities is its ability to impose its views on those it

oppresses. Ultimately, Iago is able to force self-hatred and self-doubt into Othello, leading him to block out Desdemona's words. Shakespeare shows that a revolution is inevitable, because a society based on the oppression of an ever-growing group cannot sustain itself. By viewing *Othello* through the lens of intersectionality, this chapter examines *Othello* as a social critique which demonstrates that social inequalities are deliberately constructed by those in power to maintain their position, and therefore if these inequalities cannot be peacefully eliminated, a revolution must occur in order to achieve universal equality.

Throughout the beginning of the play, Shakespeare provides glimpses into the state of Venice prior to Iago's interference, proving it to be a fair society which does not discriminate against the protagonist. One of the most telling examples of Venice's prior equality is Othello's ability to advance within the society and become a well-respected general, something which would not be possible within a truly patriarchal society. Julia Kristeva defines patriarchy as “a political institution that channels sacred violence against scapegoats for the sake of social order” (Richter, 1503). Patriarchy is a male-dominated society based on a fabric of inequalities and therefore those that do not fit the model of male, white and wealthy must be subjugated to maintain order. While Othello is a male, he is also a Moor and therefore falls to the margins of a Western or European patriarchy. However, the most powerful man in Venice does not allow this to happen. Even as Iago is sowing seeds of discord in Brabantio and Roderigo, the Duke of Venice remains unaffected. As Othello enters the council-chamber, the Duke greets him with “Valiant Othello,” the first mention of Othello’s name despite him being the center of discussion (I.iii.50). It is significant that the first person to acknowledge Othello by name is the

highest ranking official in Venice. This illustrates that Othello is accepted and respected by society, and that even if individuals turn against him, the society as a whole supports him. The Duke also provides a calm and logical contrast to the hateful passion that Iago evokes in Brabantio. Despite Brabantio's wealth, race and status as a senator, the Duke sides with Othello. When Othello describes his courtship of Desdemona, the Duke goes as far as to say "I think this tale would win my daughter too," without any indication that he would object to such an outcome (I.iii.173). In fact, the Duke seems to recognize that Brabantio is wasting his time, as he offers no sympathy but the advice to move on. The Duke does not merely tolerate Othello for his skill on the battlefield, but rather values him for his merits as a person as well as a soldier. So while Othello is not discriminated against on a systematic, occupational level, Shakespeare later foreshadows Iago's widespread influence through the language used even by his protagonists.

Despite the fact that Othello is not institutionally discriminated against in Venice, the characters still employ the inequalities that are built into language itself, casually using language with problematic implications and thereby giving society the potential to be corrupted. Although the Duke does not give merit to such prejudices, Shakespeare works with a language that has prejudice built into it. When describing the difficulty of female authorship and ownership, David Richter claims that women's challenge is to navigate or overcome "words that have already been tainted with ideology" (Richter, 1612). Despite the fact that Venice is a patriarchal society, it does not have all the characteristics of a fully developed patriarchy. Feminist authors Gilbert and Gubar describe patriarchy as a "relentless and all-pervasive force," which indicates that in a true patriarchy, there would not be anything untouched by inequalities (Gilbert, 1512). Clearly

Othello is still able to advance, and Desdemona is able to choose her husband. However, both Desdemona and Othello are guilty of language that unwittingly degrades the other. The first time Desdemona ever refers to Othello she calls him “the Moor” as well as her lord, one title that degrades him and the other that degrades her (I.iii.191). Desdemona straddles these pronouns, referring to Othello both by name and by the title of 'The Moor', though she calls him by name twice as often. Similarly, Othello occasionally uses language that degrades Desdemona. When calling her to bed to consummate their marriage, Othello states, “Come, my dear love,/The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue:/That profit’s yet to come ’tween me and you” (II.iii.9-11). The words 'purchase' and 'profit' tread dangerously close to the same rhetoric used by Iago and Brabantio. While it is clear that neither become offended by the other’s language, it is still present, casual and problematic. Within *Othello*, language itself is the villain, building up throughout the play until it spirals out of control. Iago may introduce hatred into the Venetian society, but by using language he is only exploiting that which is already present. The setting of *Othello* acts as an in-between, capable of being either a utopian society or being dragged down into chaos.

The opening scene of *Othello* illustrates that the play's conflict is driven by Iago's fixation on an imaginary loss of power, an important theme as he tries to instate a new hierarchy based on misogyny and racism. Iago's first conversation is centered on and saturated with hatred. Iago explains to Roderigo that Othello appointed Cassio as Lieutenant despite the fact that “[t]hree great ones of the city” pled Iago's case (I.i.9). That Iago uses others in an attempt to further his own position demonstrates, despite his later assertion that he did not deserve to be appointed on merit. However, he follows this

up with the statement, “I know my price”, which is a clear show of pride and arrogance (I.i.12). Iago ironically then claims Othello made the decision only thinking of “his own pride and purposes” (I.i.13). He also claims that Cassio is “mere prattle without practice” when he is characterized by his use of language as opposed to action throughout the play (I.i.27). Iago’s accusations illustrate another important theme of the play, which is that Iago accuses and suspects others of the same negative qualities that he possesses. The faults he sees in others are in actuality present only in himself. Where Iago sees Othello as prideful, he himself is arrogant, and where he sees Cassio as unqualified he himself is undeserving. Iago spends the rest of his conversation with Roderigo criticizing Cassio, using telling language in that as well. When Iago claims that Cassio is an “arithmetician” rather than a soldier, he is challenging Cassio's masculinity (I.i.20). He claims, “[n]or the division of battle knows/More than a spinster” which continues the challenge of masculinity by comparing Cassio to a woman (I.i.24-25). Moreover, he compares him to a woman without a man to support her. He is able to simultaneously belittle Cassio for not fitting the traditional model of masculinity and mock women for a perceived lack of self-sufficiency. Shakespeare uses concise, yet loaded language within the first interaction of the play, setting the tone for Iago's character throughout the rest.

Iago's interaction with Brabantio demonstrates his mastery of language as he aggressively forces fear and suspicion into Brabantio, ultimately beginning the persecution of Othello. Iago approaches Brabantio's home with Roderigo and the two immediately greet him with the words, “Signior, is all your family within?” and “[a]re your doors lock'd?” (I.i.86-87). The two call to Brabantio in the middle of the night and speak in short, urgent sentences used to incite paranoia and fear. When Brabantio

questions the disturbance, Iago does not immediately elaborate, but rather leaves Brabantio shrouded in an uneasy ignorance. He tells Brabantio, “you're robb'd; for shame” (I.i.87). In this line, Iago refers to Desdemona as an object and introduces the concept of women as property. While it is too early in the play to know how Shakespeare's fictional Venetian society views women, it is important that Iago is the one to begin the long series of misogynistic metaphors. It is also significant that he is first seen with Roderigo, a man who is willing to go to any lengths to possess Desdemona.

Furthermore, Iago's use of 'for shame' is two-fold. It first implies that it is shameful for Brabantio not to know where his daughter is and not to have kept his eye on his property. Second, it implies that being robbed in itself is shameful, particularly since Brabantio allowed Othello into his home in the first place. Iago follows up all of Brabantio's interrogations with an insistence that his daughter and his honor are in danger. He claims, “[e]ven now, now, very now, an old black ram/Is tuppung your white ewe” (I.i.91-92). This aggressive repetition is used to force fear and disgust into Brabantio. It quickens the pace and insists upon attention. Similarly, Iago uses bestial language to refer to Othello and by extension Desdemona, who would be an animal for willingly marrying Othello. This language is both vulgar and graphic, reducing the love between the two to an act of 'tuppung'. Iago uses these words with Desdemona's father to force him to react in disgust. Iago dominates the situation with his manipulative language and ultimately is able to change Brabantio's nature.

Brabantio is used as an initial example of Iago's ability to alter the nature of those around as he rapidly transitions from a concerned father to a tyrant, mimicking Iago's sexist and racist rhetoric. When Brabantio initially sees Roderigo, he claims that his

presence makes it “[t]he worsser welcome” and follows it with “[m]y daughter is not for thee” (I.i.98-101). At this point, Brabantio does not welcome Roderigo because he knows that he has been pursuing Desdemona in vain, subsequently irritating both of them. He follows it up with the statement that Desdemona is not 'for' Roderigo. While this is in line with Iago's belief that women are property, Brabantio initially has good intentions in warding off Roderigo and is respectful of the fact that Desdemona has no interest in him. This is quickly followed by Iago interrupting their dialogue and asserting more forcefully that Brabantio has been stolen from. He continues with grotesque animal metaphors, as graphic and vulgar as his last. He implants the images of Desdemona “covered with a Barbary horse” and tells Brabantio that he will have “coursers for cousins [and] gennets for germans” (I.i.116-118). Iago demonstrates the power of language and exerts his influence over Brabantio. This illustrates that a prejudice perpetuated with enough frequency and ferocity can take root. Brabantio not only believes what Iago and Roderigo are telling him, he adopts their misogynistic and racist language himself. When he finds her gone from the house he cries, “[h]ow got she out? O treason of the/blood!” (I.i.168-169). Immediately it is as if she has been under lock and key the entire time, when Brabantio was completely unconcerned moments before. At the thought of his daughter not merely married, but married to Othello, Brabantio wishes Roderigo had married Desdemona, and he becomes “[g]ood Roderigo” (I.i.174). Brabantio's entire perspective shifts and he makes evident that any white man would make a better match for his daughter than 'The Moor'. This shows the magnitude of Iago's influence over Brabantio.

Amidst the budding chaos, Othello is introduced as a confident and self-assured man who is able to resist the influence of both Iago and Brabantio. Iago attempts to

convince Othello that Brabantio has sway over the Duke and because of his position will be able to force Othello to divorce Desdemona. However, Othello simply replies, “[m]y services...Shall out-tongue his complaints” (I.ii.18-19). Othello understands that his own service to Venice is worth more than wealth or position and does not allow Iago to incite fear or paranoia in him. Similarly, when Iago tells him to flee, Othello replies calmly, “I must be found” (I.ii.31). Not only is he confident that justice will be done and his wedlock will be upheld as legally binding, but he is honor-bound to let Brabantio find him. Then, when Brabantio does find him and draws his sword, Othello gently talks the men down and suggests they go to the Duke (I.ii.89-91). Brabantio immediately calls Othello a “thief”, an “abuser” and a “thing” (I.ii.64,71,74). He has entirely adopted Iago's language, challenging Othello's personhood as Iago did when he compared the general to an animal. Brabantio continues to tell Othello that Desdemona would not reject marriage with “[t]he wealthy curled darlings of our nation,” or run away from her father to Othello's “sooty bosom” (I.ii.68,70). Brabantio refers to Venice as 'our nation', referring to white Europeans only. Despite Othello being a general of Venice, Brabantio's language isolates him and tells him he does not belong because of his race. He also openly questions Desdemona and Othello's marriage based on their differences first and foremost in race, but also in wealth and status. However, Othello does not react with harshness, shock or worry. He only asks, “Whither will you that I go/To answer this your charge?” (I.ii.86-87). While Brabantio suddenly turns on him, Othello maintains his composure, consistently calm and secure.

In addition to Othello's good nature, his relationship with Desdemona is introduced as a positive one based on equality and trust which defies the opposition that

should drive them apart. In his lecture “Differance”, Jacques Derrida explains a quintessential aspect of language, that “[e]very concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system” and that in that system “there are only differences” (938). He explains that terms can only be understood in relation to their opposition, which links to binary opposition. These binaries upon which language is founded also provide the foundation for patriarchy, as one side of every binary is given a negative connotation, and those who bear that burden are marginalized. When Othello explains his courtship of Desdemona, he claims, “[s]he loved me for the dangers I had passed,/And I loved her that she did pity them” (I.iii.172-173). This seems to set up a traditional male-female dichotomy by casting Desdemona as the gentle caretaker and Othello as the brave warrior. However, Shakespeare subverts this expectation, illustrating Desdemona and Othello to be attracted because of their differences, but not strictly defined by them. Othello describes Desdemona’s reaction to his tale, elaborating, “yet she wish’d/That heaven had made her such a man: She thank’d me,/And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,/I should but teach him how to tell my story,/And that would woo her” (I.iii.166-170). This elaboration makes it clear that it was Desdemona who began their relationship, clearly hinting to him that she was looking for ‘such a man’ as him. Rather than passively waiting for Othello to court her or ask her father for permission to do so, she tells him that she’s already fallen in love with him. Furthermore, Othello does not allow others to treat Desdemona as an object. Before he even defends himself or explains himself to the Duke, Othello says, “I do beseech you,/Send for the lady...let her speak” (I.iii.118-119). Othello is the first to suggest that Desdemona be given a chance to speak

on her own behalf and defend her marital choices. He does not begin his story until Iago and attendants leave to get her.

Othello and Desdemona are capable of transcending the boundaries that might otherwise divide them by recognizing the differences between them and respecting one another despite them. This aspect of their relationship bears emphasis because without acknowledging that the two are physically and emotionally compatible *before* Iago's influence, the impact of his character is lost. As Desdemona explains how she fell in love with Othello, she states, "I saw Othello's visage in his mind,/And to his honour and his valiant parts/Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate"(I.iii.250-252). Edward Berry believes this line is a "denial of physical attraction" on Desdemona's part, because by seeing Othello's visage *in his mind*, she can see him as devoid of racial characteristics (321). He is not alone in this opinion. S.N. Garner claims Desdemona "married [Othello] *despite* his blackness" and views blackness as unattractiveness (241). Berry takes this further and claims that, despite Desdemona's best efforts, she demonstrates "awareness of the difference that estranges" and therefore contributes to Othello's alienation (322). Of course, this assertion is unfair because Desdemona could not be unaware that Othello is a Moor any more than Othello could be unaware that Desdemona is a woman. Furthermore, Desdemona's statement does not necessarily mean she does not find Othello physically attractive. She claims to see his "visage", meaning his face, within his mind. The significance of this is that, unlike Iago, Brabantio and Roderigo, she is capable of seeing both Othello's visage and his inner self. That's why she claims to see his face, a physical aspect, as opposed to seeing his soul or nature within his mind. Desdemona is, in fact, the only character who admires both Othello's internal and external characteristics.

Though Desdemona's admiration is not gratuitous, like the admiration men show her, she never expresses distaste at Othello's appearance. The only time this is even hinted at in the text is when Iago claims, “when she seemed to shake and fear your looks,/She loved them most” and Othello replies, “And so she did” (III.iii.210-212). Therefore, the only character to support Berry's assertion is “honest Iago”, who has already begun to infect Othello with self-doubt. Even if this statement were to preclude the possibility of physical attraction, Desdemona and Othello both deny their physical desires in front of the Duke. After all, though Othello's first order of business in Cyprus is to enjoy “the fruits” of his marriage, he explicitly tells the Duke that his youthful desires are “defunct”. Simply put, they both lie about a lack of physical desires in order to seem more virtuous, but when left to their own devices, they are perfectly capable of an indiscriminate love

When Desdemona is called upon to speak, she displays a deep understanding of patriarchal systems and actively navigates her way through them. Gilbert and Gubar explain that women searching for a voice must struggle with having “only one language at their disposal,”— a language which, like the society around it, was built by and for men (1534). Desdemona is similarly grappling with a language that was not created for her, but for the former half of the play, she is able to control it nonetheless. By understanding gender roles and the discrimination often present in laws, Desdemona refuses to be victimized by them. For example, when Desdemona attempts to reason with her father, she claims, “And so much duty as my mother showed/To you, preferring you before her father,/So much I challenge that I may profess/Due to the Moor my lord” (I.iii.188-191). While Desdemona does not necessarily agree with the logic that she must favor one man or the other, she navigates patriarchal logic and uses it to her advantage.

She continues to say, “My heart’s subdued/Even to the very quality of my lord”, meaning that she considers their union reason enough to consider herself part of Othello, and therefore possessing his qualities (I.iii.245-246). By using the logic of marriage as a union, the act of becoming one, Desdemona is able to express masculine qualities that she possesses, such as her desire to travel even to a battlefield with Othello, as a fellow warrior. In speaking, Desdemona “elevates herself from the status of transient goods to that of a free and loving wife” (Calderwood 353). The two transcend these barriers “by virtue of love freely given” and “a marriage of true minds” (Calderwood 354). The reason she is able to do this is both through her own convictions and through Othello's support of her. Both work together and actively resist placing Desdemona in the position of subservient wife. Her sentiments are echoed and validated in her later meeting with Othello in Cyprus. As he gets off the ship he calls out, “Oh my fair warrior!” calling her the warrior that she claims to be (II.i.166). Before Iago begins to influence the characters around her, no one scolds Desdemona for her outspoken nature. She is allowed to behave in any manner she sees fit, which includes mingling gender roles. Iago is the only one who opposes women occupying different roles This is evident when Iago describes the nature of women and claims that even a flawless woman, if she were to exist, would “suckle fools and chronicle small beer” (II.i.160). Iago holds the belief that even the best of women are only capable of nursing children and caring for the home, which is in sharp contrast to Othello calling Desdemona a warrior.

Before Iago alters Othello's nature, and subsequently Desdemona's, she is shown to be unwavering in her convictions and she does not shy away from conflict. Hélène Cixous claims that “[t]raditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by

coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity” (“Sorties” 92). According to these oppositions, Shakespeare has cast Desdemona in an active female role, defying gender roles with her frequently masculine behavior. Once Desdemona is called upon to speak, her words are uninhibited throughout the rest of the play. Even without Othello with her, Desdemona does not shy away from contradicting men. Before Emilia has spoken her first line, Iago criticizes her for speaking too much. Desdemona immediately replies, “Alas, she has no speech!” (II.i.112). As Iago continues to belittle Emilia and expands his language to encapsulate the entire female sex, Desdemona is once again the one to interrupt and scold, “Oh, fie upon thee, slanderer!” (II.i.119). For all of his fine manners, Cassio is entirely silent during Iago's misogynistic accusations and Desdemona is left to speak on behalf of Emilia and the female sex. When Iago finally does conclude that all women are the same, Desdemona replies, “O most lame and impotent conclusion! Do not learn of him,/Emilia, though he be thy husband” (II.i.). Desdemona's use of 'lame' and 'impotent' both act as a challenge to Iago's masculinity. Though Iago claims to be a capable warrior, Desdemona does not shy away from calling him exactly what she believes him to be. Here is also the first time that Desdemona gives a glimpse of what she believes marriage should be. While she refers to Othello as her lord more frequently than anything else, it is evident that she does not give him that name lightly. Desdemona is willing to tell Emilia to disregard Iago's words, to “not learn” of his instructions because she believes that he is unfair. Therefore, despite the dominant position that she gives Othello it is still Desdemona giving it. He is only able to be her lord if she is treated in a manner she agrees with, or else she would disregard him as she advises Emilia to.

Emilia initially appears to be passive and obedient to Iago, acting as a foil to Desdemona. In the beginning half of *Othello*, Emilia occupies the traditional role of an obedient wife who meekly allows her husband to dictate and control her. In “The Laugh of Medusa”, Cixous describes herself as a woman who “said nothing, showed nothing” and “didn't open [her] mouth” (1644). She explains this as a common state among women prior to channeling their anger and indignation into the act of writing or speaking their own history. Emilia begins the play in an unhappy, but resigned state. While Emilia does not agree with Iago’s words, her only protests are claiming, “[y]ou have little cause to say so” and “[y]ou shall not write my praise” (II.i.118&122). Ultimately, she is more resigned to his treatment than anything else, used to his belittlement and condescension. It is Desdemona who must speak on her behalf. When she later finds Desdemona's handkerchief, Emilia recalls, “My wayward husband hath a hundred times/Wooed me to steal it...What he will do with it/Heaven knows, not I/I nothing but to please his fantasy.” (III.iii.301-308). It is evident that Iago had a great deal of influence over Emilia prior to the events of the play and that Emilia is desperate to please him. If she were not truly hopeful of pleasing Iago and changing his opinion of her, she would not have been willing to put Desdemona through the anxiety of losing her handkerchief. However, Iago once more disappoints her by calling her a whore and dismissing her without any gratitude. In the scene immediately following, Emilia begins to display another attitude toward men and a more outspoken side. Regarding Othello's jealousy, Emilia tells Desdemona, “’Tis not a year or two shows us a man./They are all but stomachs, and we all but food./To eat us hungerly, and when they are full,/They belch us” (III.iv.92-95). This insight into relationships foreshadows Emilia's later shift in character as she takes on

Desdemona's role of outspoken defender. While Iago gives his attention to Othello and Cassio, Emilia spends the majority of the play in Desdemona's presence. Just as Iago's language has the power to infect, Desdemona is able to shape Emilia's later personality.

Iago begins to influence Othello, forcing a new view of his race and relationship upon him until Othello begins to see his differences from Desdemona as both inherent and insurmountable. After Iago suggests Desdemona has been unfaithful, he claims, "I see this hath a little dash'd your spirits" (III.iii.219). When Othello replies that it hasn't, Iago begins to insist, "you're moved" and "I see you're moved", with the same insistence he used on Brabantio (III.iii.223, 231). By continually asserting that Othello has been moved by his words, Iago attempts to make it into a reality. With Brabantio, Iago was able to force his own thoughts onto him with repetition and insistence. However, when Othello still remains unmoved, Iago launches into aggressive and graphic language similar to his earlier tactics, planting in Othello the idea that his marriage to Desdemona was one against nature. He claims that she turned down men "[o]f her own clime, complexion, and degree", recalling Brabantio's words, and then says that she would soon be "recoiling to her better judgment" and "happily repent" (III.iii.236-244). In the midst of planting these ideas in Othello's mind, Iago interrupts himself and claims, "Foh! One may smell in such a will most rank,/Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural./But—pardon me—" (III.iii.238-240). Iago pretends that he is confiding in Othello against his own wishes by sharing Desdemona and society's 'nature'. In reality, he is constructing this nature and forcing it upon Othello under the guise of inherent incompatibility. Thoughts that had never before occurred to Othello are brought to the forefront of his attention by

both Brabantio and Iago, both men he trusts. What Iago does with language is exactly what Cixous describes as the brainwashing of women:

As soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you're afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Most of all, don't go into the forest. And so we have internalized this horror of the dark. ("Laugh" 1645)

Cixous's language is particularly apt in describing the dehumanization and marginalization of black men and women. She uses 'Africa' as woman's continent, and calls women 'black', describing their education and socialization as learning the fear of their own darkness. While this does describe women, it also more accurately describes black men and women. In this scene, Othello is being forced to learn to fear his own blackness and to associate his race with unnaturalness.

As Othello succumbs to Iago's words, he begins to employ language that shows he has internalized Brabantio and Iago's accusations, illustrating how systematic discrimination can lead to complacency by those being oppressed. When describing the "deadly brainwashing" of women, Cixous claims that the worst part is that "[men] have led them...to be their own enemies" ("Laugh" 1644-45). She refers to the fact that the brainwashing ends with women internalizing misogyny and subsequently turning on themselves and other women. This mirrors the result of Iago's influence over Othello. Othello turns first on himself and then on Desdemona. As he's trying to reason why Desdemona would betray him, Othello begins, "Haply, for I am black/And have not those soft parts of conversation/That chamberers have, or for I am declined/Into the vale of years" before he trails off (III.iii.268-271). Othello now openly acknowledges and becomes hyper-aware of his race's role in his relationship with Desdemona. Similarly,

Othello used his age as a benefit, a reason why Desdemona should come to Cyprus with him, but now, as with his race and class, he sees it as a detriment. He claims that the image of Desdemona “is now begrimed and black/As mine own face” (III.iii.397-398). He dismisses love in favor of “black vengeance” and “tyrannous hate” (III.iii.457-459). From this point on, Othello uses the color of his skin as a metaphor for uncleanness and darkness, the same kind of degrading language that Iago uses and that is used in the larger scheme of patriarchy. He begins associating revenge with blackness, abandoning his love to tyranny and therefore abusing Desdemona as Brabantio predicted he would. Finally, when Othello describes the handkerchief that he gave Desdemona, he claims that “there’s magic in the web of it”, echoing Brabantio's accusation that he used magic to enchant Desdemona (III.iv.60). In the course of two and a half scenes, Othello fulfills all the predictions made of him by Brabantio. His conversation with Iago brought forth all of his insecurities and faults, depicting the ability of systematic oppression and hateful language to internalize.

Once Othello has been infected by Iago, he and Desdemona undergo a breakdown of communication. The elimination of trust in their relationship leads to inequality as Othello begins to force Desdemona into passivity with his bursts of violence. When Othello interrogates Desdemona on the location of his token, the two of them have entirely different conversations, demonstrating how their once understanding relationship has become disjointed:

OTHELLO. Fetch me the handkerchief: my mind misgives.

DESDEMONA. Come, come,
You’ll never meet a more sufficient man.

OTHELLO. The handkerchief!

DESDEMONA. I pray, talk me of Cassio.

OTHELLO. The handkerchief!

DESDEMONA. A man that all his time
Hath founded his good fortunes on your love,
Shared dangers with you-
OTHELLO. The handkerchief! (III.iv.80-90)

Othello fixates on the loss of the handkerchief, unable to think of anything else.

Similarly, Desdemona is used to being the dominant authority in their relationship, and does not address the handkerchief, despite Othello's commands. Instead, she tries to sway him to listen to her and is taken aback when this does not succeed. The communication that Othello and Desdemona prided in the beginning of the play breaks down to the point where Othello does not want to hear Desdemona's words and Desdemona no longer understands Othello. The two engage in a similarly disjointed conversation in front of Lodovico and Desdemona unwittingly angers Othello once more. Othello strikes Desdemona, to her shock and the shock of those around them. Desdemona's kin, Lodovico, follows it up by telling Othello, "My lord, this would not be believed in Venice" (IV.i.190). This scene demonstrates the depth of change in Othello, as he physically strikes Desdemona for the first time and is near unrecognizable to those visiting from Venice. Lodovico encapsulates the reaction of all those who know Othello when he asks in bewilderment, "[Is] This the nature/Whom passion could not shake?" (IV.i.). The transformation of Othello is complete and at this point he is capable of both emotional and physical abuse, forcing Desdemona to retreat from him and ponder ways to win back his favor.

Everyone within the public sphere who witnesses Desdemona's abuse fails to come to her aid, demonstrating that she is now surrounded by a society that views her as her husband's property. *Othello* is a domestic tragedy in the sense that it is driven by

issues usually confined to the domestic sphere- it is the tragedy of a disintegrating marriage that ultimately ends in violence. It is a domestic tragedy in which “the private is insistently made public” (Vanita 341). The greater part of Desdemona's abuse, prior to the bedroom scene, takes place in public, and yet no one comes to her aid. Ruth Vanita argues that this is because society views marriage as inherently private and that couples “even when literally in a public space, metaphorically inhabit a private space” (348). Therefore, Desdemona is truly let down by those “who act on the assumption that husband-wife relations are governed by norms different than those that govern other human relations” (Vanita 342). Desdemona explains Othello's mood to Lodovico and continues to say, in a hopeful tone, “you shall make all well,” but she is quickly let down by his lack of intervention (IV.i.219). After Othello hits Desdemona, Lodovico does react in surprise, but his rebukes are hesitant at best. He tells Othello, “[m]ake her amends: she weeps” and, when Othello sends her away, “I do beseech your lordship call her back” (IV.i.234, 240). However, even after learning how drastic the change in Othello's countenance is, Lodovico does not offer to take Desdemona home to Venice, or offer her any support whatsoever. The next time that Lodovico shares a scene with Desdemona, the only words they exchange are the overly formal, “Madam, good night; I humbly thank your ladyship” and “Your honour is most welcome” (356, IV.iii.2). So while Desdemona is provided with what should be a support system, she is isolated amongst men who refuse to intervene on a woman's behalf.

When she is physically abused, though her cousin does not offer her aid, Desdemona does seek out support from those closest to Othello, which is ultimately when Iago is able to use her new-found vulnerabilities to manipulate her. Berry portrays

Desdemona as a socialite of sorts, turning to her Venetian acquaintances for insights on her husband's behavior. What truly ruins Desdemona, he argues, is that "she turns not to [Othello] for explanation" (321). Of course, this excludes the fact that the very moment Othello begins to act strangely, Desdemona questions, "Why do you speak so faintly?/Are you not well?" (III.iii.285-286). Then her later question of, "Why do you speak so startingly and rash?" and the many times she turns to Othello and asks in puzzlement, "My lord?" (III.iv.78, IV.i.220). Of course, during the bedroom scene, Desdemona is all questions, but by that point it is far too late. What makes the disintegration of Othello and Desdemona's marriage so tragic is that prior to Iago's influence they *were* capable of communication. In fact, Desdemona seeks Iago's advice only after Othello strikes her. Until she is physically struck, Desdemona believes that she understands Othello better than anyone, so naturally she does not seek the council of others. To her detriment, Iago advises her, "I pray you, be content: 'tis but his humour;/The business of the state does him offence,/And he does chide with you" (IV.ii.165-167). Essentially, he calls for her to remain passive and claims that his anger is only temporary. Desdemona is in a vulnerable enough state to trust Iago, who is her husband's closest friend. Unfortunately, Iago's advice is as good as a death sentence.

Desdemona becomes passive, numb and childlike in response to her new situation, forced to give up her voice and masculinity in order to avoid further trauma. Othello then confronts Desdemona he gives her the opportunity to swear her honesty and faith toward him, but refuses to believe her when she does. At first Desdemona is able to retain her voice, and when he calls her false, she challenges him, "To whom, my lord? with whom? how am I false?" (IV.ii.40). However, Othello is deaf to her insistence and

begins to rave that she is a “commoner”, “strumpet” and “whore” before he storms out and leaves her (IV.ii.73,81,72). Othello's new violence and hyper-masculinity in turn forces femininity onto Desdemona. This process is similar to Cixous's description of brainwashing because it results in “internalizing self-hatred or...self-doubt” (“Laugh” 1505). Just as Othello internalized all of the accusations thrown at him, Desdemona is broken by Othello's harsh language and internalizes it, breaking down. Desdemona weeps at the treatment she is enduring and compares herself to a child, claiming that she is not used to being scolded. Particularly, Desdemona is not used to being treated like an object, having her words ignored and being struck on a whim. She tells Iago, “I am a child to chiding” and turns to him for explanation (IV.ii.114). After physical and emotional trauma Desdemona is no longer self-reliant, but dependent on Emilia and Iago. Since she is no longer self-assured, she asks, “Am I that name, Iago?” (IV.ii.118). Desdemona is unable even to say the word 'whore'. The next time that Desdemona sees Othello, she does not bring up their argument, but stands silently until Othello addresses her. When he commands her, “Get you to bed/On th' instant”, she immediately complies and exits. (IV.iii.5-6) Her only explanation to Emilia is, “[w]e must not now displease him” (IV.iii.15). She has found every previous method of calming Othello insufficient. Her last resort is to act as the passive wife in a final attempt to win Othello back and return him to his previous nature.

As Desdemona prepares herself for Othello, she is struck by the sense that she is about to die, and spends her final scene reflecting on her situation. Her final thoughts give insight into her self-perception and her perception of those around her. Desdemona sings the willow song, with thoughtful statements interjected between lyrics. Through her

willow tree song, Desdemona asserts her own innocence, as this was the song her mother's maid sang. As Desdemona explains to Emilia, "She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,/And did forsake her. She had a 'Song of Willow'" (IV.iii.25-26). Desdemona places herself in the position of an innocent woman betrayed, therefore representing herself as innocent of all of Iago's charges against her. Desdemona's view of herself, therefore, is that she never betrayed Othello's trust or gave him reason to suspect her of infidelity. However, as she sings, Desdemona interrupts herself and claims, "Lodovico is a proper man" (IV.iii.34). When Emilia suggests he is very handsome, Desdemona replies, "He speaks well" (IV.iii.36). S.N. Garner contends that "proper" is synonymous with "handsome" in this usage, meaning that Desdemona is expressing her attraction to Lodovico amidst her swan song. However, which definition of "proper" Desdemona uses is up for debate. While Emilia expresses that Lodovico is "very handsome" and women would make a pilgrimage to "touch his nether lip", it is obvious that she is admiring his physical attributes. Desdemona, on the other hand, claims he is "proper" and "speaks well", which disconnects her from Emilia's physical appreciation (IV.iii.37-38). It seems more likely that Desdemona is commenting on Lodovico's manners – the same manners that he uses to distance himself from Desdemona's abuse.

Critics debate the implications of Desdemona's comment about Lodovico, some claiming that it proves Desdemona longs for another husband while others assert she is speaking ironically; both of these views affect how readers interpret the end of the play and to what extent they view Desdemona as innocent. Garner states that, "[Desdemona] unconsciously longs for a man like Lodovico – a handsome, white man, with those attributes she recognizes as civilized. In her heart she must feel she has made a mistake"

(249). Vanita takes the exact opposite position, claiming that Desdemona is reflecting on Lodovico's "elaborately polite speeches that mask his fatal failure to act the proper role of a man" (347). According to these opposing views, Lodovico has either impressed Desdemona or failed her in the extreme. Based on what Desdemona says of Lodovico, he comes across as a passive gentleman of Venice. Certainly Garner is correct to state that he is the opposite of Othello, who won Desdemona over with his tales of adventure. Lodovico, a man who is "proper" and "speaks well" reminds the reader of the "wealthy curled darlings" Desdemona rejected, which raises the question of whether or not she now believes she should have married a man like Lodovico. Despite the scholarly debate, Desdemona herself explicitly answers this question. In her final discussion with Emilia, Desdemona proves that, regardless of what Othello does, she does not regret choosing him.

Just before Othello arrives, Desdemona explains that she cannot condone, or even conceptualize, infidelity, regardless of society's view. Soon after she brings up Lodovico, Desdemona asks Emilia if she would commit adultery "for all the world" (IV.iii.59). Emilia replies it is "a small vice" and goes on to ask, "who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for't" (IV.iii.65,70-72). Although Desdemona does not have a rebuttal, she also does not waver in her view of it as an inconceivable wrong. Emilia follows up Desdemona's insistence with, "the wrong is but a wrong i'th' world; and having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right" (IV.iii.75-77). Despite Emilia's own admission, Desdemona replies firmly, "I do not think there is any such woman" (IV.iii.78). Desdemona disregards Emilia's statement because she believes, given the

chance, no woman would betray her husband. Even after Othello's treatment of her, Desdemona cannot rationalize infidelity, and therefore clearly rejects the notion that she longs for Lodovico. While some may argue that Desdemona is merely repressing her desires by claiming she would never commit adultery, she makes it clear that she cannot even conceptualize it, which is why she refuses to even consider Emilia's argument. This conversation is reminiscent of Desdemona's struggle to even utter the word "whore". Even in a world where Desdemona dictated society's moral code, she would not be able to justify infidelity, and this innocence is at the core of the play's theme.

During her final scenes, Desdemona proclaims her innocence, both of the act of adultery and the desire to commit it, pitting her self-perception against Iago's construction of her. Although Desdemona does not know Iago is responsible for her fate, she understands that Othello will not believe her, and entrusts her words to Emilia and to the audience. It is the reader's responsibility, therefore, to defend Desdemona's innocence. Weighing in on this, W.D. Adamson asserts that Desdemona's innocence is integral to the theme of Othello and states, "She must be read as having been unwaveringly faithful to the Moor...or Iago begins to seem correct in principle when he makes obscene slanders against her, Othello begins to appear justified in murdering her as an unfaithful wife, and the play's entire structure of meaning collapses like a house built of sand" (Adamson 173-174). Regardless of whether or not Desdemona committed adultery, she would not be a whore and Othello would never be justified in murdering her; however, Adamson is correct in his thematic assessment. To interpret Desdemona as unfaithful, even in thought, destroys the play. To argue that Desdemona views Lodovico as a preferable husband is to argue that she has the *potential* for adultery, something she herself denies,

and gives merit to Iago's assertions. Suddenly, the entirety of the blame would shift onto Othello, and Iago's role as villain would shift to that of the fool who makes crude assertions, though with a hint of truth. Furthermore, interpreting Desdemona as potentially unfaithful contradicts her own statement and needlessly dismisses her self-definition. Desdemona defines herself as a woman who cannot bear to say the word 'whore' and who, for the whole world, would not betray her husband. The only evidence to the contrary is Iago's word and the reader's own prejudice. To believe Desdemona capable of an act she can scarcely name is to ally oneself with Iago and be led by the nose like Othello.

In the final scene of *Othello*, the damage created by Iago reaches its height with Othello and Desdemona representing different poles of the gender binary and Othello unable to overcome his self-hatred. Othello's language during their last scene together makes evident that he still retains a love for Desdemona; it is simply overcome by the self-loathing and self-doubt introduced by Iago. His language shows that he hates himself more than he hates Desdemona, and that ultimately he kills her because he is unable to believe that she could love him. Entering their bedroom, Othello says to himself, "Yet I'll not shed her blood,/Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow/And smooth as monumental alabaster" (V.ii.3-5). He is still fixated on Desdemona's whiteness, which now inevitably calls attention to his own blackness. Since Desdemona's whiteness is now revered in his mind, his own skin is vilified. Still, it is not only Desdemona's appearance that Othello has consideration for. He does not want to scar her skin and he also does not want to mar her soul. He instructs Desdemona to pray and tells her, "I would not kill thy soul" (V.ii.34). Even when he considers her to be the devil he does not want to damn her.

Similarly, every time Desdemona asks that God or heaven help her, he replies with 'amen'. Othello is caught in a contradiction of murdering Desdemona, but wanting her to find salvation. Even as he strangles her, he tells her, "I would not have thee linger in thy pain" (V.ii.99). When Cixous describes the hierarchy of binary opposition she explains that binary opposites cannot coexist, but rather, "the masculine term is forced to 'kill' the feminine one" ("Laugh" 1614). This binary plays out literally in the final scene of *Othello*, as both characters have been pushed to the poles of this opposition. Othello is hyper-masculine and imposes passivity on Desdemona, holding her down and stifling her voice until he's killed her. This is the climax of a patriarchal order. The height of masculinity results in the stifling and destruction of the feminine. Not only is Desdemona killed, but Othello takes on the role of her murderer as Iago intended, fully internalizing the racist rhetoric used against him throughout the play.

For her part, Desdemona expresses forgiveness toward Othello and even tries to mask his role in her murder, which illustrates both her fatal passivity and her knowledge of Othello's true character. While Desdemona is taken aback and horrified by Othello's behavior, she does not condemn him. In fact, she protects him with her last breath. This could be read as problematic, as *Othello* endorsing women's submission. However, Desdemona's inaction does not merely contribute to the tragedy of the play and the theme of internalized prejudices. Her defense of Othello reflects her awareness of an outside force which contributes to the irreconcilable alteration of his character. Desdemona is passive and confused, because over a small space of time, she must come to terms with the loss of her husband and her own impending death. What remains the same is that she views Othello as part of herself and seeks to protect him against the words of others, just

as she did in Venice. Calderwood explains, “Had the love she bore Othello been less unfaithfully true, more prudently prepared to alter when it alteration found, she might well have lived” (370). Emilia affirms that Desdemona's sole crime is that “[s]he was too fond” of her husband, even when he proved mad (V.ii.155). Desdemona's character need not encourage such love, but merely reflect it. Desdemona knows she is going to die. Desdemona is aware that her continued love for Othello is fatal. She cannot leave him, but she does not believe her love or innocence can save him. Othello tells her, “Think on thy sins” and she replies, “They are loves I bear to you” (V.ii.40-41). Then, as Desdemona lies dying, Emilia asks her who performed the deed. Desdemona replies, “Nobody – I myself” (V.ii.124). Though Desdemona wishes to live, she does not wish for Othello to die. Although this may be seen as naivety on Desdemona's part, perhaps it is better read as foresight, knowing that Venetian society could not judge him kindly, nor would they search for any other rational than Othello being a barbarian by nature. Desdemona, who has always seen Othello's inner qualities, could not be content with such an outcome.

The conflict of the play is only resolved when Emilia defies Iago's authority and speaks, representing an overthrow of the patriarchal order and a demand that the voices of those once oppressed be heard. Emilia's dialogue in her final scene is saturated with the word 'speak'. Just as repetition served as a weapon for Iago's influence, Shakespeare recalls it in Emilia as she demands that Desdemona's story be told and that her own voice be heard. While earlier it was Othello who encouraged Desdemona to speak, Emilia now insists upon it, pleading with her, “O lady, speak again!” and “O sweet mistress speak!” (V.ii.134-135). Upon realizing that Desdemona has been murdered, Emilia recovers from

her shock only to tell Othello, "I care not for thy sword; I'll make thee known" (V.ii.177). When previously Emilia recoiled from Iago's chiding, she now speaks boldly in front of the armed general who murdered her mistress. She has entirely taken on Desdemona's role as an outspoken, masculine heroine and speaks for both of them, as Desdemona once did for her. She also disregards Iago's status as her husband and when Iago tells Emilia to hold her tongue and go home, she replies, "Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (V.ii.209). While she recognizes that he is still her husband and as such society dictates he has authority over her, the time for that authority has passed. Emilia disregards Iago's threats and his insistence and does not even care that she speaks in a room full of officials. Instead, she challenges them to oppose her and claims, "I will speak as liberal as the north:/Let heaven and men and devils, let them all,/All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak" (V.ii.232-234). Cixous describes woman's ability to write herself as marking a transformation in history: "marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*" (1647). Emilia embodies that revolution as she refuses to be silenced by anyone and it is when she speaks that Iago loses control. With his secret exposed, he can no longer manipulate his way out, and in desperation, he kills Emilia. However, Emilia dies content and claims, "So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true;/So speaking as I think, I die, I die" (V.ii.265). While she had to sacrifice herself to do it, Emilia never gave Iago back the control she had seized and he is detained for his crimes.

Othello's final speech and subsequent suicide demonstrate that, although Iago can no longer manipulate him, the damage is irrevocable and, without careful attention, could easily happen again. After Emilia gives her speech, Othello looks at Desdemona's body

and says, “O ill-starr'd wench,/Pale as thy smock, when we shall meet at count,/This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,/And fiends will snatch at it.” (V.ii.271-274).

Othello claims that when he dies, the look on Desdemona's face will be enough to send him to hell. He continues this notion with, “O cursed, cursed slave!/Whip me, ye devils,/From the possession of this heavenly sight!/Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,/Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!/O Desdemon! Dead Desdemona! Dead!” (V.ii.275-280). Although Othello's remorse does nothing to excuse his actions, his regret is palpable. It is also still tinged with racist language, showing that Iago's influence remains. Othello curses himself as a “slave” and wishes to be “whipped” in hell for his crimes. Although he now knows he was manipulated, Othello retains his self-loathing, and in fact it is stronger for his crimes. However, with his new awareness, Othello is divided between his identity as the general who loved Desdemona, and the barbarian who killed her. He reflects this fractured self-identity just as he stabs himself, claiming, “a malignant and a turban'd Turk/Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,/I took by the throat the circumcised dog,/And smote him, thus” (V.ii.352-355). He is both the murdering “turban'd Turk” and the Venetian who avenges his victim. Othello reaffirms his love for Desdemona by kissing her before he dies, and expresses his remorse in the most potent way – but the damage is not undone. Desdemona, Emilia and Othello lie dead, while Iago bleeds, but is not killed.

Just as Shakespeare chooses Iago to represent patriarchy, he chooses Emilia to represent the oppressed and uses a woman's voice to end Iago's control. It is only through taking center stage and seizing command of the situation that Emilia is able to unravel all that her husband has done. This establishes that a power system based on inequalities is

not only destructive, but in the long term collapses. Once those suppressed by the structure rise against it, it is unable to sustain itself. However, bringing the structure crumbling down does not eliminate the causalities left in its wake. Even once Emilia has collapsed Iago's new order, the damage is done. Shakespeare created *Othello* as a tragedy and, as such, that characters who suffer the worst fates are those that the audience is meant to identify with, root for and ultimately regret the loss of. The ending to *Othello* is bittersweet at best, because while Othello realizes his mistake and Emilia is able to expose the truth, it's at the cost of all of their lives. This ending supports the overarching themes of the play because it reflects reality. Having hierarchies where large groups in a society are marginalized and persecuted cannot result in anything positive. The 'happiest' ending achievable is only one where such a structure is overthrown. Shakespeare does not offer an alternative to this order, only a potential solution: those suppressed in a society must be allowed to speak or they must seize the stage themselves.

Chapter 2

“False, false, false!”: Sexual Economics and Gender Performance in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Troilus and Cressida takes place in a society already steeped in corruption. The play centers around the love affair of Prince Troilus and Cressida, a priest's daughter, which results in tragedy when Cressida betrays Troilus for the Greek Diomedes. Troilus

and Cressida's affair is set amidst the Trojan War, which is fittingly predicated on the struggle between Paris and Menelaus for the possession of Helen. With this backdrop for the play, *Troilus and Cressida* deals with a military culture underpinned by a perverse sexual economy, both of which function to destroy the characters within the play.

Military culture refers to the male-dominated set of values that arise during wartime, where masculinity is prized above all else, which results in a disregard of women and a devaluation of femininity. 'Sexual economy' refers to the way in which a society regulates sexual relations. In this case, it is the commodification of women, who are reduced to and transported as merchandise for the gratification of the men receiving them. By linking the private affair of Troilus and Cressida with the larger conflict of the Trojan War, Shakespeare's play is able to address a wide variety of sociopolitical issues. The Trojan War is a particularly useful setting for a commentary on the objectification of women because it suggests a connection between the way in which Helen was transported to Troy and treated as a war trophy with the way Cressida is transported to the Greek camp at her father's behest. Similarly, the relationship between masculinity and femininity is addressed not only in heterosexual relationships within the play, but through the treatment of feminine males in times of war. Shakespeare draws on the potentially sexual relationship between Achilles and Patroclus to serve as a contrast to the primary, heterosexual relationship of the play. *Troilus and Cressida* thus examines the way in which wartime affects familial relationships, gender roles and sexuality, particularly the way in which war degrades men and women who do not conform to masculine standards. Through this depiction of the commodification of women, the often disjointed dialogue and the juxtaposed world views of his main characters, Shakespeare's play produces a

harsh critique of the wartime values, which reaffirm patriarchal authority and lead to the destruction of men and women alike.

While Shakespearean plays are often polarizing, *Troilus and Cressida* is even more so, resulting in a sharp division of critical reception toward the main characters which shifts in tandem with social justice movements. The evolution of Cressida's position in academic discussion is an ongoing process, which progresses alongside the feminist movement, and critical reception is generally divided into those who vilify her as a whore and those who are sympathetic toward her circumstances. Critics of the early to mid-twentieth century harshly condemn Cressida for being unfaithful to Troilus, targeting her sexuality and using misogynistic language. To George Wilbur Meyer, she is a “whore”, to Robert Ornstein she is a “slut” and to A.P. Rossiter she is a “chatty, vulgar little piece.” Those who do not outright condemn her sexuality still view Cressida as “unstable and fickle,” “weak and trying” and “resigned” (Smith 21; Barber 529; McAlindon 32). Such pronouncements served as the foundation of Cressida's critical reception and pervade her treatment in later decades. In the late twentieth century, feminist criticism caused a shift in perception of Cressida with many feminist critics coming to her defense. Unfortunately, defenses of Cressida focus primarily on condemning Troilus and though critics explain Cressida's actions, they rarely have anything complimentary to say about her character. However, Gayle Greene calls her “fascinating and sympathetic”, while Carolyn Asp offers that she is “a complex woman in a complex situation” (417). While such feminist reception is refreshing, critics like Greene and Asp do not go far enough to rebuke those who view falling short of Troilus'

ideals as the ultimate crime, or to demonstrate the broader effect patriarchal values have on the play.

Entering the twenty-first century, criticism of Cressida is generally devoid of misogyny and Cressida's character is even admired by some critics. Jan Kott explains that there is a “beauty” to Cressida and defends her actions throughout the play (144). Janet Adelman notes Cressida's refreshing wit and claims she is “more love than craft” (49). However, though opinions of Cressida have shifted to incorporate examinations of her social and political status, the twenty-first century still retains remnants of the previous appellations. Although they defend her, Kott and Adelman both refer to Cressida as a “whore” multiple times throughout the text. It is not intended as an attack on her character, but rather as a description of it, which, perhaps, is worse. Furthermore, David Margolies refers to Cressida as “a rather knowing character, witty but with somewhat sluttish overtones” (118). He later drops the “somewhat” and refers to Cressida as “coy and sluttish” (132). Margolies’s writing seems an apt metaphor for reception of Cressida as a whole. As gendered insults become less tolerated, “slut” is watered down to “sluttish” and though the critics change, the argument remains largely the same.

Critics similarly malign Troilus, though it is predominantly feminist critics who find fault in his behavior. Feminist critical reception of Troilus frequently wars with the more classical readings of the character, dividing reception into those who view Troilus as the catalyst of Cressida's betrayal and those who view him as a helpless victim of her licentiousness. Barbara Heliodora C. de M. F. de Almeida, for example, refers to Troilus as “haughty” and “morally ineffective” (331). Mihoko Suzuki calls him “melodramatic” and refers to his love as an “obsession with Cressida” (216, 219). When Gayle Greene

calls Cressida “just as exploitative” as Troilus is, she is hinting at a larger part of her argument, which is that Troilus' behavior is a significant cause of Cressida's infidelity. In fact, Greene claims the Trojan prince displays “predatory attitudes [that are] masked by his exalted idealism, but emerge inadvertently through his language and imagery” (Greene 137). Simply put, Troilus uses poetic, romantic language in order to hide his “predatory” intentions toward Cressida. However, Troilus frequently objectifies Cressida or expresses entitlement toward her as well, which Greene reads as unintentional slips in Troilus' “mask”. Greene argues that, in reality, Troilus is as “scheming” and “cold-blooded” as Cressida is accused of being. In contrast to these views, non-feminist critics such as Brian Morris express a reverence for Troilus, as shown when he claims the following:

Those very qualities which make [Troilus] a great warrior, his passion, ruthless single-mindedness, his refusal to compromise, cannot but destroy him if he should fall in love with a woman who is less than his ideal. The superlative nature of his qualities marks him as of the house and lineage of heroes. (488)

Just as feminist critics have a tendency to condemn Troilus in order to absolve Cressida, those who admire Troilus usually couple this admiration with a disdain for Cressida. Morris argues that Troilus' heroic qualities, such as his passion, only serve to ruin him when he is met with a woman like Cressida, who falls short of his idealization. This logic absolves Troilus of his later warmongering and places all of the blame squarely on Cressida. Just as this is wrong, so is blaming Troilus for Cressida's infidelity. It is a disservice to Troilus and a misreading of his character. A recurring problem with criticism of *Troilus and Cressida* is that critics feel they must damn one character in order to save the other and when the characters are equated it is only for the purpose of

claiming that they are equally awful. A better understanding of both characters requires that the reader examine the society in which the characters exist and analyze their behaviors as products of both their individual character and their broader socialization.

“Do you know what a man is?”: Gender Performance and Military Courtship

The performance of gender, based on socialization and societal expectation, appears throughout *Troilus and Cressida* through the pressure to properly conform to gender roles, and the mistreatment of those who do not. Judith Butler created the term “gender performativity” in her book *Gender Trouble*. In the book, Butler defines gender as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler 35). So, rather than a natural state of being, gender is a constructed, performative act. While sex is the body's natural, biological state, gender is something that one constructs based on societal expectations. A sexed body can be either, both or neither gender depending on the performance of the individual. Butler describes a “rigid regulatory frame” which, in this case, is the military culture within *Troilus and Cressida*. For the male soldiers there is no flexibility in the gender they may perform; they must be hypermasculine in order to be valued. This rigidity within the military extends to the entire society because, although masculinity is prized, women are expected to be feminine. The war-torn society within *Troilus and Cressida* demands a strict gender dichotomy. The Greek soldier Patroclus explains this to Achilles, stating, “A woman impudent and mannish grown/Is not more loathed than an effeminate man/In time of action” (III.iii.216-218). Femininity is equated with inaction. Therefore a feminine man, who is incapable of being a soldier, is even worse than an insolent, masculine woman. In

the first scene of the play, Troilus bemoans love for making him feminine and weak. Soldiers who do not fight, such as Achilles, are called “dainty” or effeminate. In Achilles' case, this is a tactic used to incite him to battle. Since Achilles is, in reality, the best of the Greek soldiers, he is pressured with gendered insults to reenter battle. On the other hand, soldiers who do not like fighting, such as Patroclus, are regarded as “feminine” and are loathed. It is this strict gender performance that guides Troilus when he courts Cressida and later, when he discovers her infidelity.

The play begins with Troilus facing the dilemma of Cressida's chastity and immediately establishes the conflict between romantic love and lust. In the first scene, Troilus is trying to convince Cressida's uncle, Pandarus, to continue helping him win Cressida's favor, despite her multiple rejections. Pandarus thus acts as a go-between for the two. Troilus explains to Pandarus that he cannot continue fighting in the war because he is lovesick and has become “weaker than a woman's tear,/Tamer than sleep, fonder than ignorance,/Less valiant than the virgin in the night,/And skillless as unpracticed infancy” (I.i.9-12). Troilus' language reveals the feminine-masculine dichotomy and how gender roles are regarded in wartime. 'A woman's tear' is viewed as the epitome of weakness and 'the virgin in the night' as the height of timidity. Femininity and 'infancy' are equally weak and unskilled, useless against the Greek army. Essentially, Troilus is feminized by love and therefore views himself as worthless to the war effort. Furthermore, while Troilus' words are poetic, they are saturated with entitlement. Speaking of his attempts to woo Cressida, Troilus laments, “Patience herself, what goddess e'er she be;/Doth lesser blench at suffrance than I do” (I.i.27-28). Just as Troilus later claims that he is truth embodied, here he claims that he has been more patient with

Cressida than Patience herself could be. He is pleading with Pandarus because his patience is wearing thin and Cressida is “stubborn-chaste against all suit” (I.i.95). Troilus' feelings for Cressida are a mixture of romantic love and sexual desire. What is noteworthy about this mixture is that Troilus speaks very romantically, but is predominantly driven by his sexual urges. As M.M. Burns notes, critics often overlook this scene when analyzing both Troilus and Cressida's characters. While Cressida is associated with wantonness and unfaithfulness, Burns points out that “the substance of his scene with Pandarus [is] Troilus' efforts to get Cressida into bed with him” (Burns 106). Troilus' flowery language makes it easy to gloss over the fact that in his first scene within the play he is begging Pandarus to procure Cressida for him. The introductory scene gives insight into many of the complex themes working within the play, such as devaluation of femininity and the procurement of women.

Pandarus is a key figure in the sexual economy within *Troilus and Cressida* and actively works to procure his niece for the prince, exposing Cressida to the very dangers from which he should have protected her. While Troilus pleads with Pandarus, the latter feigns disinterest in Troilus' pursuit. Pandarus consistently insists that he will not be involved, claiming “[f]or my part I'll not meddle nor make no farther” and again, “I'll not meddle in it” (53,55). Despite repeating his disavowal several times, Pandarus is highly invested in Troilus and Cressida's relationship, to the point where it's unsettling. Since Cressida's father is in the Greek camp, Pandarus is the only family member and only male on whom Cressida can rely. Yet he dismisses her rejections as womanly fickleness and works with Troilus to overcome her chastity. When he complains that he has “gone between and between” the two, Pandarus hints at the amount of time they have been

working to sway Cressida, which is later revealed to be two months (I.i.70-71). Therefore, for two months Pandarus actively attempts to sway Cressida's opinion. He even concludes the conversation saying, "I will leave all as I found it," only to continue influencing her in the very next scene (56). More depressing for Cressida's character, however, is a throwaway line Pandarus delivers: "Let her be as she is." (55). If Pandarus did not live up to his name, he might have been sincere when he tells Troilus to let her be. Unfortunately, Troilus dismisses this idea with a protest of, "how now, Pandarus!" and Pandarus himself exits the scene to immediately pick up where he left off with Cressida (I.i.68). While ultimately Cressida *does* love Troilus, her uncle does not know this and he pressures her to accept the prince anyway. Similarly, Troilus agonizes over her chastity and pleads with her uncle to work against the wishes she's vocalized. Neither is content with letting Cressida make decisions in her own time and neither will accept that her decision may not be Troilus.

Cressida is introduced to the play with two defining characteristics, her wit and her profound understanding of power dynamics, both of which help the reader to understand her deeper motivations and the way in which she interacts with other characters. While Cressida does not have many lines before her first conversation with Pandarus, her introduction is still an important insight to her character. She listens to her servant, Alexander, as he relays Hector's battle with the Greek Ajax. Cressida asks what Ajax's reputation is, and Alexander replies, "They say he is a very man, *per se*/And stands alone" (I.ii.15-16). This means that Ajax is reputedly extremely masculine, 'very man', and that he needs to reinforcements in battle: he 'stands alone'. However, Cressida replies, "So do all men unless they are drunk, sick or have no legs" (58). She is neither

impressed by his military reputation nor permissive of Alexander's use of 'man' as an accolade. Cressida's awareness of the gender dynamics within her society and within military culture are immediately established by her wit.

Cressida proceeds to unravel the pretense of masculine superiority that military culture is founded upon, using wordplay to undermine the gender hierarchy. She understands that being 'very man' is the greatest compliment one can receive during wartime, yet she dismisses it as meaningless. Cressida's intellect is further expanded upon when Pandarus enters the scene. It is important to note that Cressida is accustomed to Pandarus imploring her to meet with Troilus and does not show resentment toward him until later in the play. While Pandarus' involvement in their relationship is alarming from an outside perspective, Cressida does begin the play with a positive, bantering type of relationship with her uncle. For example, the moment she notices Pandarus approaching, she comments to Alexander, "Hector's a gallant man," simply because she knows Pandarus will overhear (I.ii.37). Moreover, she knows how this simple comment will affect him. Since 'man' is the greatest compliment a man can receive, she baits Pandarus, who reacts accordingly. Cressida then relies on her wit to deflect Pandarus' entreaties and their bantering takes up the remainder of the scene. When Pandarus insists "Troilus is the better man of the two", Cressida replies with, "O Jupiter! There's no comparison!" (I.ii.58-60). This revisits Cressida's earlier commentary on 'man' as an achievement and the irony is that regardless of how 'man' is defined, Hector is the better man. Morally, he is a better human being because he values mercy and rationality over blindly battling the Greeks, but he is also a better warrior than Troilus is, making him the better man. So Cressida's laughing response rings true. Similarly, she matches him measure for measure

when Pandarus tries to devalue Hector, stating, “Hector shall not have his wit this year”, “He shall not need it, if he have his own”, “Nor his qualities”, “No matter”, “Nor his beauty”, “’Twould not become him; his own's better” (60). Fittingly, Cressida never attacks Troilus' qualities. She is merely telling Pandarus that the two men cannot be compared. Cressida is not taken in by Pandarus' boasts because she is aware that Troilus is human, and not the epitome of manhood, as Pandarus would have her believe. While this exchange serves to characterize Cressida as quick-witted, it also establishes how heavily Cressida relies on wordplay. She uses banter to deflect topics she would rather not engage in, but also as a defense mechanism.

Although it is a sign of her intellect and understanding, Cressida's use of wit as a means of defense has been criticized as a destructive trait, which obscures her true voice and leads to her oppression. Grace Tiffany cites this scene as an example of Cressida's self-destructive silence. Tiffany states that “Cressida suppresses the voice of choice” by hiding behind banter and a false interest in Hector (Tiffany 48). Tiffany rebukes Cressida for not directly rejecting Troilus, and instead using a more roundabout means of rejection. However, Cressida presumably uses this strategy for months and it is entirely possible that this is not the only strategy she employs. Even assuming that Cressida always relies on banter places too much blame on Cressida for Pandarus and Troilus' inability to “let her be as she is”. Furthermore, expressing interest in another man, even if it is not a genuine interest, is a choice. So while Cressida is voicing her choice, it's not the one Pandarus wants to hear. He disregards it with an incredulous, “Do you know a man if you see him?” and concludes, “[y]ou have no judgment, niece” (59-60). Even more striking is when Pandarus tells Cressida, “You are such a woman, a man knows not at

what ward you lie". Cressida strikes back, punning, "Upon my back, to defend my belly; upon my wit, to defend my wiles; upon my secrecy, to defend mine honesty; my mask, to defend my beauty; and you, to defend all these: and at all these wards I lie, at a thousand watches" (66). The first line of the speech is striking, because Cressida claims that she lies 'upon her back, to defend her belly'. This means both to defend her most vulnerable spot as well as to defend herself from intercourse and subsequent pregnancy. Obviously, she cannot achieve this lying upon her back. While she does effectively use wit, secrecy and a metaphorical 'mask', the last defense is striking as well. Cressida replies that she relies on Pandarus to defend all of her. Burns states, "this entire speech relates solely that, in fact, Cressida has no defenses" (110). In actuality, Cressida has many defenses, such as her wordplay, but Pandarus is not one of them. It is both ironic and tragic that Cressida counts Pandarus among her defenses, as he is the very same man trying to break them down. Their final exchange in the scene makes Cressida's fate abundantly clear. Pandarus promises to return with "a token from Troilus" and Cressida informs him, "By the same token, you are a bawd" (I.ii.266-267). This conversation makes it painfully clear that Pandarus considers Cressida as fickle and would disregard her voice no matter how she expresses herself.

Cressida ultimately is in love with Troilus and chooses to meet with him, revealing that she values potential happiness with him over the potential loss of social status. When Cressida meets Troilus face to face, she finally gives in to her affection for him, showing that her feelings for Troilus are sincere. Once Pandarus leaves, Cressida delivers a soliloquy where she confesses, "more in Troilus thousandfold I see/Than in the glass of Pander's praise may be./Yet I hold off: women are angels, wooing:/Things won

are done- joy's soul lies in the doing./That she beloved knows nought that knows not this:/Men prize the thing ungained more than it is” (I.ii.270-275). Although she does love Troilus, Cressida purposefully puts off meeting with him because she believes that once they have slept together he won't care for her anymore. Gayle Greene, whose reading is one of the few sympathetic interpretations of Cressida, in fact condemns her for these tactics. She claims that this soliloquy reveals Cressida as “a deliberate exploiter of Troilus' illusions, as exploitative of him as he is of her” (Greene 139). Greene argues that Cressida, aware of the sexual economics of her time, delays Troilus in order to heighten his desire and, by extension, her own value. While Greene makes an excellent argument, she overlooks the fact that Cressida gains nothing from *succumbing* to Troilus. Cressida succeeds in heightening her extrinsic value so, following Greene's logic, she should then attempt to extract from Troilus a promise of marriage, money or security. Instead, when Cressida meets with Troilus, she abandons rationality. Troilus claims that there will be none “truer than Troilus” and this is enough to convince Cressida to tell him, “I have loved you night and day/For many weary months” (III.ii.92,107-108). She then sleeps with Troilus with only the promise of his fidelity and ends the scene less secure than ever. Cressida's entire motivation for delaying Troilus is that she never actually intends to meet with him, but her uncle persists over months until she finally gives in to her romantic inclination. Cressida risks losing her reputation and sexual value by sleeping with Troilus and gains nothing except his love. The only reason for Cressida to risk this is that she is as genuinely taken with Troilus as he is with her.

Cressida's love for Troilus is complicated by gender roles, which put Cressida in a vulnerable position when she sleeps with Troilus. Carol Cook gives a more charitable and

humane reading of Cressida's soliloquy, explaining, "Cressida's desire is to sustain Troilus' desire, but his desire depends upon her masking her own" (Cook 192). This is a more valid reading of the scene, though there is one caveat: Cressida only *believes* Troilus' desire depends upon her masking her own. Cressida draws this conclusion from her own observations and it is both her belief and fear that once she is won she will be 'done'. Cressida's fears are a commentary on courtship as a whole and the vulnerable position in which an affair puts a woman. Though she is referring to her own situation, Cressida's soliloquy cautions all women when she says, "that she beloved knows nought that knows not this," meaning that even the most beloved woman knows nothing if she is not aware that men "prize the thing ungained more than it is". What's truly heartbreaking about this is that Cressida is convinced Troilus believes she is worth more than she actually is. Grace Tiffany explains that "[Cressida] presents herself as something fundamentally other than she knows herself to be" and interprets this as a form of "self-rejection" (Tiffany 48). Cressida does exhibit thoughts of self-rejection, but not for the reason that Tiffany cites. By hiding her feelings, Cressida is not rejecting them. After all, she accepts her feelings for Troilus privately, but does not wish to risk her reputation being tarnished by meeting with him. However, her feelings for Troilus are accompanied by a sense of self-disgust, particularly during the following exchange with Troilus:

TROILUS. What offends you, lady?

CRESSIDA. Sir, mine own company.

TROILUS. You cannot shun yourself.

CRESSIDA. Let me go and try. (III.ii.134-137)

This poignant conversation demonstrates that Cressida does feel a sense of disgust at succumbing to her feelings for Troilus. Her very desire to shun herself reflects the 'self-

rejection' Tiffany argues for. Despite being witty and charming, Cressida's character also shows vulnerability and anxiety. Rather than feeling reassured by Troilus' love, Cressida initially draws back. However, this 'self-rejection' functions as a larger rejection of gender roles as a whole. Cressida is only sickened by herself because she has given in to her affections for Troilus, which she views as a fatal mistake and it is a mistake only because, as a woman, she has so much to lose. Cressida does not wish that she were not in love with Troilus, but rather tells him, "I wished myself a man./Or that we women had men's privilege/Of speaking first" (III.ii.120-122). Because she is a woman, Cressida bears a disproportional burden in their tryst. If they are discovered, she is the one who will suffer.

Just as she is condemned for being calculating, Cressida is maligned for being emotionless when in reality she displays the same romantic ideals as Troilus and even more emotional complexity. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, prominent critics such as E.M.W. Tillyard and Frederick S. Boas provided analyses of Cressida's character that reflect the views of the time period, which were dominated by a patriarchal, often sexist, critical approach. Indeed, Tillyard refers to Cressida as "an efficient society woman without depth of feeling" and, in the same vein, Boas calls her "a scheming cold-blooded profligate" (54, 375). While opinions such as these have shaped readings of Cressida's character for generations, they are startlingly unfounded. The image of a "scheming" Cressida "without any depth of feeling" cannot be reconciled with the one that Shakespeare presents. First, it is noteworthy that Shakespeare never gives Cressida an aside or a soliloquy to reveal the plans she is accused of 'scheming'. Similarly, she never gives any indication that her feelings for Troilus are insincere. In

fact, when Cressida meets with Troilus, she is overcome by emotions that mirror his own. She admits to Troilus that she was “[h]ard to seem won” despite loving him from the start and continues to say, “If I confess much, you will play the tyrant”. Cressida is neither exploitative nor scheming, because she confesses to Troilus what tactics she used and the reason she used them. Even as she confesses to him she's worried that he will use her affections against her. Finally, Cressida matches Troilus' idealism with vigor. Troilus delivers several romantic monologues, one of which ends with, “I am as true as truth's simplicity,/And simpler than the infancy of truth!” (III.ii.159-160). Although Troilus goes down in history for his truthfulness and Cressida for her falsehood, Cressida declares, “In that I'll war with you” (III.ii.161). Only a page later, Shakespeare foreshadows their fates—Troilus to be true, Cressida to be false and Pandarus to be the one who brought the unhappy pair together. For that moment, however, Cressida's throwaway line indicates her own desire to be “true as truth's simplicity”. At least while she was with Troilus, Cressida's only desire was to be as true to him as he would be to her. Without understanding Cressida's character, the larger social and political commentary within the work is obscured. If Cressida begins the play as a scheming villainess, then her character transformation is rendered meaningless. Rather, it is critical to bear in mind that Cressida begins the play just as truthful and loving as Troilus, but has her options forcibly limited because of her sex and social status.

Understanding Troilus and Cressida's dialogue is paramount to understanding the way the characters behave because their conversations illuminate the way both characters are socialized. M.M. Burns explains that Troilus' diction “virtually forbids Cressida's constancy” (Burns 112). There are two noteworthy occasions of this being the case. The

first is when Troilus and Cressida meet and confess their affection for one another. Both characters vow their constancy, but in different terms. Troilus declares that he *will* be true and that others throughout history will “[a]pprove their truth by Troilus” (III.ii.165). This role taken, Cressida must take the opposite approach claiming, *if* she is false, “let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood, / As false as Cressid” (III.ii.185-186). It may not be Troilus' intention, but his language necessitates that Cressida speak as if she is already false. This is an interesting exchange because it also emphasizes their gender roles and foreshadows the way they are perceived. Troilus speaks in positive terms, with aggression and self-assurance, while Cressida replies in negative terms, submissive and unsure. Troilus approaches their affair with optimism because he can only gain from it, so Cressida looks to his example for emulation and reassurance. The second time such an exchange occurs is when Troilus is informed that Cressida is to be traded to the Greek camp. Troilus seeks out Cressida and relentlessly insists she vow constancy, despite having already done so. Immediately after Troilus informs Cressida she is being sent away, he tells her, “Hear me, my love: be thou but true of heart-” (IV.iv.57). Cressida replies with alarm at the implication, questioning, “I true! How now! What wicked deem is this?”, but Troilus continues on his line of thought (IV.iv.58). He tells her that he will only seek her out at the Greek camp if she is faithful to him, so Cressida promises she will be true. Even then, Troilus continues on in paranoia, insisting, “yet, be true” and “be not tempted”. Throughout their parting scene, Troilus rejects Cressida's constancy and proves that he does not trust her.

One of the reasons why feminist critics condemn Troilus is because of his speech, which frequently demeans or objectifies women. This criticism ignores the fact that

Troilus' language is a symptom of larger societal issues, much like Cressida's self-disgust and later infidelity. Troilus' opening scene, as discussed, links femininity with weakness, which is a result of the military values prominent throughout the play. Troilus is far from the only male to use such language in *Troilus and Cressida*. Hector echoes Troilus' opening dialogue when he claims, "There is no lady of more softer bowels,/More spongy to suck in the sense of fear,/More ready to cry out 'Who knows what follows?'/Than Hector is". To emphasize the fact that he is apprehensive and fearful, he compares himself to a woman. This is not an individual phenomenon, but rather a cultural trait that recurs throughout the play. When Achilles wishes to meet Hector before he fights him, he describes it as "a woman's longing". Since Patroclus does not relish fighting, he is considered "an effeminate man", which is even worse than a "mannish woman". While the pervasiveness of these comparisons does not make them right, it certainly shows how men in Trojan and Greek society have been socialized. This is further explored through the objectification of Helen and Cressida, which relates to military culture and the sexual economy. When Troilus explains to Hector why they cannot give Helen up, he tells him, "We turn not back the silks upon the merchant/When we have soiled them; nor the remainder viands/We do not throw into unrespective sieve/Because we are now full". Through his speech, Troilus dehumanizes Helen, comparing her to soiled clothes and half-consumed foods. Objectifying Helen and appraising her value makes it easier to justify taking her from her home and waging war for her. Treating her as a valuable object rather than a human being is a key factor in the play's sexual economics. Troilus' objectification of women is not confined to Helen, though; he extends the same insult to Cressida. Troilus refers to Cressida as "a pearl" while he is the merchant and Pandarus is

the vessel to get him to her (I.i.98, 101). Troilus uses an apt comparison, because Cressida's situation is akin to human trafficking. She is relentlessly pursued and finally obtained only to be traded for an imprisoned warrior. Helen and Cressida's treatment illustrate how military and sexual culture are inextricably linked. Women are devalued in wartime, which makes it easier to treat them as objects and currency, trading them in a flagrant disregard of their personhood.

Shakespeare draws a parallel between Helen and Cressida, who are both transported from their homes at the behest of men, in order to examine the value of human beings during wartime. In the first scene of the play, Troilus exclaims to the warring soldiers, "Helen must needs be fair,/When with your blood you daily paint her thus" (I.i.88-89). He compares blood to rouge and claims that every day the Trojans and Greeks make Helen more beautiful than she is by 'painting' her with their blood. In saying this, Troilus addresses a central theme to the play, which is the worth of a human being, intrinsic or extrinsic. Since the Trojan War is fought over Helen, several characters address exactly what makes her worth fighting for. When the Trojans receive an offer to make peace if they return Helen to the Greeks, Hector states that they must let her go because "[e]very tithe soul 'mongst many thousand dismes/Hath been as dear as Helen"(II.ii.18-19). Hector's argument is that Helen is intrinsically worth as much as any other human being, so it does not make sense for countless men to die for her. Hence his explanation of "she is not worth what she doth cost/The keeping" (II.ii.50-51). Troilus' response to the dilemma is especially interesting in light of his earlier comment about Helen. Rather than expressing contempt for the men who've died for Helen, as he does earlier, Troilus tells Hector, "Is she worth keeping? why, she is a pearl,/Whose price hath

launch'd above a thousand ships,/And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants” (II.ii.80-82).

Essentially, Helen is worth whatever the Greeks are willing to pay. The fact that Agamemnon and Menelaus are willing to launch a fleet of ships to recover her is enough to convince Troilus she is worth keeping. This argument refers to Helen's extrinsic, perceived value. As long as others are willing to fight for her, she is worth keeping. Moreover, he considers it a matter of honor and manhood to continue fighting for Helen. To give her up merely because the Greeks formally demand it would be cowardice in his eyes, though he does not believe she is intrinsically worth fighting for. When a similar fate befalls Cressida, however, she does not receive a similar support.

Shakespeare deviates significantly from Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* in Cressida's departure from Troy, eliminating Troilus' participation in the Trojan Council as well as eliminating Cressida's support system. Chaucer gives a clear look at Troilus' mindset when he learns that the Greeks have demanded Cressida in exchange for Antenor. The narrative explains that his thoughts are divided into “[f]irst, how to save hire honour, and what weye / He myghte best th'eschaunge of hire withstonde” (IV. 159-160). Troilus' thoughts are consumed with two desires: to save Criseyde's honor and to keep her from being traded. When he participates in the council, Troilus ultimately remains silent because he does not know if Criseyde wants their affair made public just to keep her in Troy. In Chaucer's poem, Troilus hesitates because he is unsure of what *she* wants. Shakespeare condenses the time frame within his play by omitting the Trojan Council scene altogether. As a result, Troilus and Cressida are harried and do not have time to consider alternatives. It also shows how, regardless of his status as prince, Troilus' individual feelings are dismissed in favor of what's best for the military. Paris, out of

everyone, knows that Troilus loves Cressida and yet he approves the trade anyhow. Furthermore, Shakespeare's omission isolates Cressida from society. In Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, it is Hector who stands and tells the Trojan Council, “Syres, she nys no prisonere,'... / 'I not on yow who that this charge leyde, / But, on my part, ye may eftsome hem telle, / We usen here no wommen for to selle.” (*Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 179-182). In this statement to the council, Hector not only explains that Criseyde is not a prisoner, but he goes on to say that Trojans do not trade or sell women. Therefore, he publicly objects to trading Cressida for Antenor. This is a stark contrast to Shakespeare's play where no one speaks up on Cressida's behalf and the decision is made offstage. Even in Chaucer's poem, however, Cressida is not saved from her fate. Since she is a woman she is regarded as having a lower worth than an accomplished warrior like Antenor. Therefore, the council demands that she be traded. By deviating from the source material in order to eliminate Cressida's only support, the play shows the way the governing body devalues an individual woman in favor of the larger war effort. This reflects the way civilians and particularly women bear the burdens of wars waged by men.

“She shall be prized”: Sex Trafficking and Critical Consent

From the moment Cressida is traded, the play shifts in tone from comedic to tragic and a small exchange with Diomedes demonstrates the danger Cressida is in when she is transported to the Greeks. Shakespeare continues with the analogy between women and tradable goods during the conversation between Troilus and Diomedes, during which Cressida is entirely silent. Troilus tells Diomedes, “here is the lady”, “we deliver you” and “I'll give her to thy hand”, highlighting the fact that Cressida doesn't have a choice in the matter (IV.iv.107,108,109). Rather, she is like currency, handed from her current

owner to her next. This also echoes Pandarus' dialogue with Troilus, where he tells Troilus "I'll bring her straight" and "I'll fetch her" (114, 115). Cressida is treated either as an object or as a prostitute and this is the second time that she is passed from one male who should protect her to the next. In this case, though, Cressida is unwilling and Diomedes is a more insidious owner. Diomedes initially ignores Troilus, telling the silent Cressida, "to Diomed/You shall be mistress, and command him wholly" (IV.iv.117-118). Diomedes begins making advances on Cressida, ignoring the fact that she is obviously in a relationship with Troilus. He is willing to flirt with her right in front of Troilus, showing his utter disregard for either of their feelings. What is truly alarming, however, is Diomedes' reply when Troilus tells him in anger, "I charge thee, use her well" and threatens Diomedes that he will cut his throat if he treats Cressida poorly (IV.iv.124). Diomedes' reply sets the tone for Cressida's life in the Greek camp: "When I am hence,/I'll answer to my lust: and know you, lord,/I'll do nothing on charge. To her own worth/She shall be prized" (IV.iv.129-131). Diomedes essentially tells Troilus that once he's left Troy with Cressida, he'll be ruled by his lust and disregard any demands for courtesy. The latter half of his statement, "to her own worth she shall be prized" seems to promise Cressida will be treated with some dignity, but in reality it only means that he gets to decide what she is worth.

Cressida's treatment Greek camp gives context to her later betrayal of Troilus by establishing her precarious social status among the Greeks, and the endangerment that leads her to accept protection from Diomedes. Cressida is greeted by every named member of the Greek army, who all proceed to compete over kissing her. In the span of two pages, Cressida is kissed five times, none of which she initiates or gives a direct

reaction to. The word 'kiss' is used in some variation fourteen times throughout this exchange. Cressida uses the word only three times. Shakespeare's use of the word is pervasive and Cressida's limited use of speech reflects her status as an outsider. All of the Greek soldiers are playing a game in which Cressida is only an object. Critical response to this scene widely varies from Tillyard's "broadly comic" to O'Rourke's "stylized gang rape" (74;154). O'Rourke's reading is more accurate of the scene itself, because Cressida is surrounded by men who make a game out of kissing her while she stands in utter silence. While O'Rourke's assessment is hyperbole, it better reflects the danger of Cressida's situation and gives insight as to why Cressida ends up betraying Troilus. Without understanding Cressida's mindset, this scene instead becomes the first sign of her descent into promiscuity. For example, although Greene is one of Cressida's defenders, she is unforgiving of Cressida in this scene. She claims, "Cressida is quick to live down to their view of her [as a whore], allowing herself to be 'kiss'd in general'" (Greene 143). Grace Tiffany, a fellow feminist critic, goes further and states, "Cressida participates in the sexual game initiated by the Greek commanders, tacitly enabling Ulysses's malicious assessment of her" (Tiffany 50). Looking at the context of the scene, it is clear that Cressida is overwhelmed. She is hurried to a new location where she is immediately met by every powerful man in the Greek army. Her father, despite demanding her presence, is nowhere to be seen and she is set upon by the Greek men who are all eager to outdo one another as they kiss her. Yet, somehow, because Cressida does not speak, she is a whore. Her silence is interpreted as both consent and enjoyment within the play and within criticism. As soon as Cressida exits, a trumpet sounds. The Greeks all announce, "The Trojans' trumpet", punning on "The Trojan strumpet" (IV.v.64). Greeks and critics alike

are willing to take Cressida's silence as consent and call her a whore, and both similarly dismiss her rejection when she does speak up

Cressida's dialogue with the Greeks is the inversion of her banter with Pandarus, highlighting the fact that while the first half of the play could be seen as comedic, she is now in true danger. When Menelaus and Ulysses actually ask Cressida if they may kiss her, she finally speaks. She turns to her defense mechanism, wordplay, and outwits Menelaus and Ulysses. However, it is no longer the playful outmaneuvering she used with Pandarus. It reflects bitterness, anger and hurt. When Cressida replies to Menelaus, this dialogue ensues:

CRESSIDA. In kissing, do you render or receive?

MENELAUS. Both take and give.

CRESSIDA. I'll make my match to live,

The kiss you take is better than you give;

Therefore no kiss. (IV.v.37-41)

What makes her wording so potent is the fact that she states that Menelaus is not worthy of her kiss. This is not haughtiness on Cressida's part, but wistfulness. Troilus is the only man throughout the play that Cressida kisses willingly. Despite the assumed betrayal, she never kisses Diomedes, and she never consents to kissing any member of the Greek army. Troilus is the only one who gives a kiss equal to the one he takes, because he is the only one Cressida loves. Of course, even Cressida's refusal to kiss is used against her, once again both within the play and in critical response. Despite the fact that Tiffany acknowledges that Cressida “says nothing but ‘no’”, she continues to claim that it is too obscure a refusal to be of any value (50). Somehow Cressida did not say 'no' clearly enough, or loudly enough, and this translates to support of the game which the Greeks

play at her expense. Since Cressida relies on her wit as opposed to a “straightforward refusal”, Tiffany believes that Cressida herself “prevents her ‘no’ from being heard” (51). If Cressida's response of “no kiss” is not a clear enough refusal, her response to Ulysses should be. It is clear in the caustic way she replies that Cressida is not amused by the Greek army. She does not banter with them the way she does with Pandarus or Troilus. Cressida is not playful – she's venomous. This is demonstrated clearly when Ulysses asks if he may “beg a kiss” from Cressida, to which she snaps, “Why, beg, then” (IV.v.45,48). With her reply, Cressida emasculates Ulysses in front of the other soldiers, demanding that he literally beg for the kiss that she never intends to give. This causes Ulysses to resent Cressida for the remainder of the play, bitterly declaring her “sluttish spoils” (IV.v.62). Cressida exits the scene having rejected the two Greeks but also having experienced firsthand what lifestyle she can expect in the Greek camp.

Cressida becomes torn between her love of Troilus and her need to be protected, which is demonstrated in her final scene of the play when she turns to Diomedes and betrays Troilus. As the scene begins, Cressida calls to Diomedes with, “Now, my sweet guardian!” and later she chides, “Guardian! Why, Greek!”. She uses the epithet “guardian” to describe Diomedes because she is seeking someone to protect her while she is displaced among the Greeks. These are the first words Cressida speaks to Diomedes and they contrast with her utter silence in their previous two scenes together. Shakespeare does not include any background information from Cressida's perspective or how her relationship with Diomedes develops. Rather, he allows the camp scene to linger in the reader's mind. With no exposition, the only possible conclusion is that the camp scene solidified what Cressida already knew: she needs a male protector if she is to survive her

time with the Greeks. Chaucer's poem provides insight into Cressida's relationship with Diomedes. Of particular use is the fact that Chaucer's Diomed reminds Criseyde that "she was allone and hadde nede / Of frendes help" (P.367.V.1024-1025). Shakespeare's play does not deviate from this aspect of the source material. In fact, Shakespeare omits the loving relationship that Criseyde and Diomed have in the poem and instead casts Diomedes as the manipulative protector. He is willing to defend Cressida, but this defense comes at the price of her body.

Troilus, Ulysses and Thersites all observe the exchange, unbeknownst to Cressida, and their commentary largely influences how Cressida is perceived. They all condemn her betrayal. Unsurprisingly, it is Ulysses who guides Troilus to Calchas' tent, already priming Troilus with accusations against Cressida. Though there is no reason for them to hide, Ulysses suggests they "[s]tand where the torch may not discover [them]". Because of Ulysses' decision, he and Troilus, as well as Thersites, hide themselves from Cressida and Diomedes. As the other men look on, Diomedes first asks Cressida to remember so unnamed vow, and she replies, "Sweet honey Greek, tempt me no more to folly" (IV.v.19). As he continues to ask for her reassurance, Cressida says, "I prithe, do not hold me to mine oath;/Bid me do anything but that, sweet Greek" (IV.v.26-27). The implication seems obvious, but it is interesting that Cressida's betrayal is never spoken or witnessed, only assumed. The scene is structured in such a way that it is hard not to condemn Cressida. Her interactions with Diomedes are framed with and colored by Ulysses, Thersites and Troilus' inflammatory comments. For example, Ulysses follows her whisper by telling Troilus, "She will sing any man at first sight" (IV.v.9). Thersites claims Cressida's soliloquy would be more accurate if she said, "My mind is now turn'd

whore.” (IV.v.111-112). With their influence, Troilus follows up Cressida's every statement with Othello-esque cries of, “O plague and madness!” and “O withered truth!” (IV.v.34,43). Despite their reactions to Cressida, the scene illustrates Cressida's uncertainty. Though she is driven to protect herself, Cressida is also still mourning her separation from Troilus. Cressida wavers in her decision-making, and changes her mind four times in the five-page exchange. While this seems to support the classical interpretation of what Tillyard calls Cressida's “female fickleness”, Cressida is never unsure of her feelings for Troilus (Tillyard 49). Nor does she express love for Diomedes. Rather, she is unsure of whether she can have both love and safety.

Cressida's divided desires culminate in her handing over Troilus' sleeve, his own token of love, to Diomedes as proof of her affection. Cressida purposefully presents Diomedes with Troilus' token as if to permanently sever her connection with him. However, she tells Diomedes, “You look upon that sleeve; behold it well./He loved me-O false wench!- Give't me again!” (IV.v.68-69). It is only when she gives it to Diomedes that Cressida realizes what she's letting go of and demands to have the sleeve back. Cressida refers to herself as a “false wench”, condemning herself just as the men do. She recognizes that she is betraying Troilus and resents herself for it, regardless of intention. When Diomedes asks who gave her the sleeve, Cressida replies, “It is no matter, now I have't again./I will not meet with you tomorrow night./I prithee, Diomed, visit me no more” (IV.v.71-73). Two things are striking about this statement. The first is that, despite betraying him, Cressida is adamant about keeping Troilus' identity a secret. She refuses to give a name for Diomedes to target on the battlefield. The second is that the sight of Troilus' token is enough to give Cressida more resolve than she previously had. However,

Diomedes is not willing to let her keep the sleeve. While Cressida thinks of Troilus and kisses the sleeve, Diomedes snatches it from her grasp. He demands to know who gave it to her, but all Cressida reveals is that “[t]was one's that loved me better than you will./But now you have it, take it” (IV.v.87-88). So, once more, Cressida loses her resolve. She tells Diomedes that he can keep the sleeve, but she remains firm in hiding Troilus' identity. Once Diomedes takes the sleeve, Cressida gives up. She chooses protection from Diomedes over love from Troilus. It is clear from her language that Cressida still loves Troilus and thinks on him fondly, but she is grounded in the reality that she may never see Troilus again.

Despite Cressida's genuine love for Troilus, she recognizes what he does not; her choices are limited by her circumstances and, regardless of her own desires, she is not free to choose whether she wants to remain with Troilus or Diomedes. Before he leaves, Cressida tells Diomedes, “Ay, come. O Jove! Do come. I shall be plagued” (IV.v.104). So while she agrees to meet with him, and presumably sleep with him, Cressida resigns herself to it. If she were truly interested in him, she would not be so miserable to leave Troilus. Instead, it is a match of necessity. When Diomedes leaves, Cressida delivers a brief soliloquy saying, “Troilus, farewell! One eye yet looks on thee,/But with my heart the other eye doth see./Ah poor our sex! This fault in us I find,/The error of our eyes directs our mind;/What error leads must err- O, then conclude/Minds swayed by eyes are full of turpitude” (IV.v.105-110). Colin Butler reads this soliloquy as the height of Cressida's “shallowness” and “the start of a slippery slope” to becoming a whore (Butler 155-156). Taken out of context, this seems to be the case. Cressida states, “with my heart the other eye doth see,” which seems to mean that Cressida holds Diomedes in her heart.

Yet, the entirety of her scene with him proves otherwise. She feels “plagued” by him, a sharp distinction from the fearful joy she feels with Troilus. Rather, what Cressida sees with her heart is what she has always seen: the unfortunate circumstances that surround her -- lack of freedom in love.

These same circumstances account for why Cressida faults womanhood itself for her betrayal; rather than denying her own culpability, she is mourning the fact that she is denied the opportunity to be both faithful and safe. With the lines “Ah poor our sex! This fault in us I find,” Cressida seems to claim fickleness is an attribute of all women, a fault she finds in the entire sex. Yet, the entire play leads up to her cursing the circumstances of womanhood. It takes the reader's awareness that Cressida is disregarded, transported and accosted because of her sex in order to understand why she blames all of womanhood for what appears to be her own fickleness. Cressida's soliloquy is filled with her disgust at the choices she has to make because she's a woman. What really highlights this is a vow Cressida makes when she is about to be taken from Troy. She claims, “[t]ear my bright hair and scratch my praised cheeks,/Crack my clear voice with sobs, and break my heart/With sounding 'Troilus'. I will not go from Troy.” (IV.11.105-107). When Cressida tells Pandarus that she will sooner ruin herself than leave Troy, she is not being dramatic. She is illustrating the only other option she has. She must destroy herself or be taken from the city. She chooses to leave Troy. When she arrives at the camp, she must decide between waiting for Troilus and risking sexual assault or seeking a guardian and being called a whore. Cressida is not a passive victim – she does make a choice. But her choices are limited.

Despite the context, even feminist critics find fault with Cressida's actions and would sooner consider her 'complex' than justified. Tiffany claims that in her final scene Cressida “relinquishes authorship over her own identity” through the “surrender of her voice” and that her final speech is “her flight from decisive self-creation” (45, 53). Turning to Diomedes does not mean Cressida prefers passivity – she is simply left with no other options. Tiffany further claims that critical reception of Cressida demonstrates “the destructive effects of female nonassertiveness on interpretations of female character” (51). Of course, Tiffany is among the critics contributing to these destructive effects by claiming that Cressida needs to be more assertive in order to be taken seriously. In reality, Cressida is not in a position to assert herself and every time she attempts to, she is quickly reminded of her vulnerable position. There is one final scene that makes it clear that Cressida does not willingly surrender her voice. In claiming that Cressida ultimately silences herself, Tiffany ignores the crucial moment when Troilus tears Cressida’s letter without divulging its contents; this moment is paramount to both Cressida’s character and the theme of silencing within the play. After overhearing her with Diomedes, Troilus receives a letter from Cressida. When asked by Pandarus what Cressida said, Troilus replies, “Words, words, mere words”. Of course, these words were Cressida’s final chance at voicing herself and, though they are never repeated, the letter itself attests to Cressida’s feelings for Troilus. What seems to be a farewell letter is in fact a love letter, as Troilus states, “My love with words and errors still she feeds,/But edifies another with her deeds”. Essentially, Troilus claims that Cressida’s letter still fills him with love, but that he cannot take her seriously knowing she has betrayed him. Cressida must be held responsible for her own actions, but by the same token she must not be held accountable

for the actions of others. It is Troilus who tears the letter and refuses to allow even the audience to know Cressida's true last words.

Tiffany's argument hinges on the belief that excusing Cressida's actions as products of the commodification of women similarly erases Cressida's personhood. By absolving Cressida of responsibility for her unfaithfulness, Tiffany argues, critics dismiss her choices and objectify her in the same way men throughout the play have. This is true to a point. It is evident that Cressida chooses to engage in a relationship with Diomedes and, therefore, chooses to be unfaithful to Troilus. However, Tiffany's argument does not take into account that Cressida's options were forcibly limited. Cressida's situation rapidly evolves and the amount of danger she is in increases exponentially. It is not a coincidence that Cressida chooses Diomedes to be her protector. She does not choose him because he is the kindest soldier – she chooses him because he is the most dangerous one. Not only does Diomedes all but say he will take what he wants from her, but he visits her tent at his leisure. Diomedes evidently has unlimited access to Cressida as Calchas, who is never even shown speaking to his daughter, welcomes the man to be alone with her. In fact, throughout the entire play, Cressida never seeks out the company of a man, yet always manages to be in a man's company. Cressida does not surrender; she is outmaneuvered. *Troilus and Cressida* is not about female non-assertiveness, nor is it about the dangers of female passivity. *Troilus and Cressida* is about the fact that when Cressida speaks up, Ulysses calls her “sluttish spoils” – and, for decades, critics agreed she was.

“Sport and Pleasure”: Chivalry, Femininity and the Military

Troilus' rivalry with Diomedes is based on chivalry, reflecting one way in which soldiers perform gender roles. When Diomedes takes the sleeve from Cressida, he remarks, "Tomorrow I will wear it on my helm, /And grieve his spirit that dares not challenge it" (V.ii.92-93). Since Diomedes does not know Troilus is listening, the only reason Diomedes says this to Cressida is to assert his masculinity. He believes that if he defeats her former lover on the battlefield, he will have proved himself to her. He assumes that her lover will be honor-bound to challenge him for wearing the token. This sparks Troilus' anger and he comments aside, "Wert thou the devil, and wor'st it on thy horn,/It should be challenged" (V.ii.94-95). Just as Diomedes views it as his duty to challenge Cressida's former lover, Troilus views it as his obligation to accept the challenge and defeat Diomedes, despite the fact that he has given up on Cressida. This echoes Troilus' earlier decision to keep Helen in Troy out of a sense of "[m]anhood and honour" rather than reason (II.ii.46). So while Diomedes fights for Cressida to win her favor, Troilus fights because his manhood and honor are at stake. Finally, Troilus' word choice echoes another motif within the play. By claiming that he would challenge Diomedes even if he wore the token on his "horn", Troilus calls to mind the 'cuckold'. A cuckold is the lover or husband of an adulteress and is often depicted with horns.

The image of the cuckold, which recurs throughout *Troilus and Cressida*, entwines the treatment of women with the performance of masculinity. The prologue of the play underscores the role of sex in the Trojan War, stating, "The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,/With wanton Paris sleeps; and that's the quarrel" (Prologue 9-10). The prologue establishes that Helen is "ravish'd", playing on the multiple meanings of 'abducted', 'raped' and 'filled with joy'. This word choice alone sets the stage for the

treatment of women and calls attention to the fact that Helen was never asked where she would rather be. Further, she is established as “Menelaus' queen” despite the fact that she is sleeping with the “wanton” Paris. Since this is the foundation of the Trojan War, Thersites is accurate when he echoes the sentiment, stating, “All the argument is a whore and a cuckold” (100). While Helen is not a whore, Thersites is correct to say that the entire war is the result of one man being cuckolded.

The image of the cuckold is prominent particularly within the Greek camp itself. As Menelaus walks by him without a word, Achilles asks, “What, does the cuckold scorn me?” (III.iii.64). When Patroclus interrupts Menelaus from kissing Cressida he claims, “Paris and I kiss evermore for him” (IV.v.35). Regarding Cressida's wit, Ulysses remarks, “It were no match, your nail against his horn” (IV.v.44). Every soldier makes jokes at Menelaus' expense. Despite the fact that they fight for Menelaus' cause and that he outranks them, the Greeks constantly ridicule him. This ties into gender relations, because Menelaus is seen as unmanly for losing Helen to Paris. Ultimately, cuckoldry comes down to the possession of women. In order to avoid humiliation, it is a man's responsibility to keep track of his lover. With the pervasive image of the cuckold it is impossible not to draw the parallel between Menelaus and Helen and Troilus and Cressida. This background also provides a valuable context for Troilus' actions. The fact that the entire war is premised on adultery and the disdain of cuckoldry explains Troilus' fervent request that Cressida remain faithful and why he is so susceptible to Ulysses when he claims she is not. Despite the fact that Ulysses is the enemy, Troilus values his word enough to spy on Cressida. This is because he already feared the worst when Cressida was taken to the Greek camp. Troilus is so surrounded by cuckoldry that it

infects his relationship with Cressida. Troilus and Diomedes' quarrel is the micro version of the Trojan War itself.

Since Troilus idealizes his relationship with Cressida, playing the role of the chivalrous lover, he is unable to reconcile Cressida's behavior with his idealized version of her and falls into immense despair. This is shown through relentless repetition as Troilus asks, "Was Cressid here?" only to answer himself, "[s]he was not, sure" (V.ii.123,125). While Troilus holds Cressida to her vow of constancy, he also has preconceived notions of how she should behave. Troilus is infatuated with Cressida long before he meets her face-to-face. In fact, the meeting Pandarus arranged is the first time the two lovers speak with one another. Before meeting Cressida, Troilus states, "Expectation whirls me round./Th'imaginary relish is so sweet/That it enchants my sense" (III.ii.16-18). This "expectation" of "imaginary" love is what drives Troilus to pursue Cressida. While it is not unusual for the time period that Troilus instead woos her through letters and a mediator, it still illustrates how much Troilus values Cressida without knowing her personally. Before he even meets her, he idolizes her, which leads to the fervent denial that it is Cressida with Diomedes. Troilus adopts Cressida's line of thinking, claiming, "Let it not be believed for womanhood!/Think we had mothers. Do not give advantage/ To stubborn critics...to square the general sex/By Cressid's rule; rather think this not Cressid" (V.ii.127-129, 131). Troilus views Cressida as the embodiment of ideal womanhood. Therefore, her betrayal represents the fall of womanhood. Just as Cressida bemoans her sex, Troilus applies Cressida's behavior to the entire female sex, including his own mother. Troilus puts himself wholeheartedly into the

role of the chivalrous lover. When Cressida betrays him for Diomedes, he becomes disjointed.

Troilus and Cressida's shifts in characters represents a divided sense of self that occurs when their personal desires must be stifled because of societal expectations, illustrating the danger of a rigid regulatory frame. In his stupor, Troilus continues to deny Cressida's presence, stating "this is not she" and "[t]his was not she" until he finally concedes, "This is, and is not, Cressid" (V.ii.135,140,144). Troilus settles on the conclusion that Cressida is no longer wholly his. Rather, she has changed in an irreconcilable way. Troilus rationalizes her as both his Cressida and Diomedes' Cressida. Troilus claims, "Within my soul there doth conduce a fight/Of this strange nature, that a thing inseparate/Divides more wider than the sky and earth" (V.ii.145-147). Troilus cannot comprehend how different his Cressida is from Diomedes', despite being one individual. Yet as the scene continues, Troilus begins to experience a similar split in his own actions. Until this point, Troilus has acknowledged manhood and honor, and even fought in battle, but by his own admission he doesn't have the heart for it. This is because Troilus is more fixated on love and courtship. However, his grief leads him to seek vengeance, the more masculine pursuit. Troilus concludes the scene stating, "As much as I do Cressid love,/So much by weight hate I her Diomed" (V.ii.165-166). In order to transform the weakness of his grief into strength, Troilus discards his love for hate. He turns to what he believes is the proper outlet for his sorrow and anger. Just as Cressida abandons her desire to be true, Troilus abandons his role as a chivalrous lover. He shifts away from love and grief, which he believes feminize him, and turns to the ostensibly masculine pursuit of hatred and violence.

Troilus returns home filled with bloodlust and scorns Hector's chivalry, illustrating the mercilessness that a military culture encourages. Rather than killing soldiers on the battlefield, Hector disarms them, a tactic Troilus berates him for. Troilus tells his brother, "you have a vice of mercy in you...[y]ou bid them rise and live" (V.iii.37,42). This is a stark contrast to the Troilus who is "weaker than a woman's tear" in the first scene of the play. Almost instantaneously, Troilus discards his former identity and takes up the role of a warrior in order to get revenge on Diomedes. The role of gender in his behavior becomes more defined when Troilus says, "Let's leave the hermit Pity with our mother" (V.iii.47). Troilus relies on the gender dichotomy when he scolds Hector, claiming pity as a feminine emotion, which must be left out of battle. Hector acts as Troilus' foil once more. Just as he wished to release Helen to the Greeks, Hector is taken aback by Troilus' behavior and bids him not to go to battle. Despite the fact that soldiers die daily in the Trojan War, Hector does not want someone so vicious fighting for the Greeks. Unfortunately, Hector is an individual, and the larger society is not on his side. Troilus asks him, "Who should withhold me?" (V.iii.51). Society as a whole is on Troilus' side. Since Troilus is a young male, and a Trojan prince, he is expected to fight. Once more, Hector's wise council is ignored. Troilus goes to battle.

In contrast to Troilus' performance of masculinity, Patroclus and Achilles do not perform their proper roles in the army and therefore they represent a threat to patriarchal order. Though Achilles is introduced as the strongest of the Greek soldiers, "[t]he sinew and the forehead of our host", he also refuses to battle (I.iii.142). The Greek generals attribute this to his pride and also to Patroclus, with whom Achilles lies "[u]pon a lazy bed" (I.iii.146). They do not condemn Achilles and Patroclus for their relationship, but

rather for refusing to fight. However, what truly bothers the Greeks is that the two spend the entire day mocking them. Patroclus “pageants”, or imitates, his fellow soldiers and even King Agamemnon (I.iii.150). The conversation between Agamemnon and his men then turns to a long discussion of Patroclus' jests and their power to “infect” others to similar boldness (I.iii.186). The true fear, then, is not that Achilles won't fight, but rather that his position might encourage others to question the war. The entire Trojan War relies upon a soldier's willingness to die as a perceived “proof of men” (I.iii.33). Agamemnon, brother to Menelaus, claims that the seven years they have spent at war have merely been “the protractive trials of great Jove/To find persistive constancy in men” (I.iii.19-20). Just as the Trojans emphasize “man” as an accolade, something one must earn, the Greeks rely upon this propaganda to justify the long siege of Troy. Essentially, it is in the governing body's best interest that manhood itself is so highly valued that men will die for it without question. The commanding Greek officers (Agamemnon, Nestor, Ulysses, Menelaus) are products of this socialization themselves. This cyclical socialization comprises the “repeated acts” of gender performance which “congeal over time”. Of course, this authority is threatened when Patroclus mocks their performance.

Patroclus' situation is further complicated by the fact that he is perceived as feminine and submissive to Achilles, which leads others to treat him with derision. Achilles receives similar treatment for abstaining from battle, but insults directed at him do not reference his sexuality. Instead, because Patroclus is both feminine and sleeping with Achilles, he endures a different treatment. Thersites takes particular pleasure in this and refers to Patroclus' sexuality on multiple occasions. For example, as Thersites is insulting Ajax and Achilles, Patroclus interjects with, “No more words, Thersites;

peace!” (89). Thersites replies indignantly, “I will hold my peace when Achilles' brach bids me, shall I?” (89). Aside from Ulysses mentioning the two lounging in Achilles' tent, this is the first reference to a potential sexual relationship between the two soldiers. Thersites, true to his vulgar nature, calls Patroclus a 'brach', meaning bitch or prostitute. Despite the coarseness of the remark, neither objects to the insinuation. Achilles even expresses his amusement with, “There's for you, Patroclus.” (89). Still, Thersites' comment reflects the view of gender within the military. Thersites links femininity with homosexuality and submissiveness. Thersites reserves this derogatory language for Patroclus because he is the more feminine of the two and therefore endures insults usually reserved for women. While Achilles and Patroclus are equal participants in their relationship, Patroclus' perceived femininity puts him in the more vulnerable position.

Due to his femininity, critics tend to interpret Patroclus' character in the same way they interpret female characters within the play, often to the detriment of Patroclus and Achilles' positive relationship. Gary Spear is among critics who view Patroclus as functionally identical to female characters. Spear analyzes the cultural formation of gender codes and inherent vulnerability of male power present in the play. Essentially, he examines the way that the male characters attempt to regulate female sexuality because of a fear of becoming effeminate, just as Troilus claims to be feminized by his love of Cressida. After examining heterosexual relationships, Spear comes to Patroclus and Achilles. While Spear notes that there is no direct correlation between femininity and homosexuality, he continues to say that the vulnerability of masculinity is highlighted through the “homosocial and homoerotic military exchange” and repeated images of the “penetrated male body” (418). However, since Achilles and Patroclus are the only ones

actually implicated in sodomy, it is impossible to separate their relationship from the fear of effeminacy. Despite this, Achilles and Patroclus have no such anxieties. Though they threaten social order within the play, Achilles and Patroclus' relationship is depicted as a healthy, positive contrast to the many negativities of Troilus and Cressida's. Shakespeare juxtaposes the understated affection between Achilles and Patroclus with Troilus and Cressida's dramatic vows. Spear argues that the play shows “the effeminacy and emasculation of nearly every central male figure”, including Achilles due to “Patroclus sapping Achilles' manly strength through a restraining 'great love'” (Spear 412). So just as female characters emasculate male characters, Spear considers Patroclus functionally female, feminizing Achilles with his love. This argument overlooks the fact that Patroclus petitions Achilles to reenter the war. He pleads with Achilles, telling him, “I stand condemned for this:/**They** think my little stomach to the war/And your great love to me restrains you thus./Sweet, rouse yourself, and the weak wanton Cupid/Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold/And, like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,/Be shook to air” (III.iii.216-224, emphasis mine). So even if Patroclus is responsible for Achilles abstaining from war, he is also the one who convinces him to rejoin. Furthermore, Patroclus does not feel responsible for Achilles refusing to fight, nor does Achilles accuse him of being responsible for it. Just as in criticism, it is outsiders gazing in who blame Patroclus for Achilles' actions.

Furthermore, integrating Patroclus into the category of women disregards the effect of male socialization and oversimplifies Patroclus' position as both a male warrior and a feminine lover. James O'Rourke examines the sexual economy within *Troilus and Cressida* and the way in which the play critiques patriarchal values. However, his

analysis tends to generalize the effects of the sexual economy. When O'Rourke addresses Patroclus in his article, he gradually integrates the warrior into the feminine gender. The reason O'Rourke compares Patroclus to the women of the play is because he views Patroclus as a similar product of the sexual economy, transformed into a whore due to his 'lack of stomach' for battle (154). The argument is that if Patroclus abstains from battle and has a sexual relationship with Achilles, this puts him on the same level as Helen and Cressida. Interestingly, O'Rourke's categorization changes throughout the article. At first, he is comfortable stating that Patroclus "play[s] the role of woman" and that Patroclus is "made a sort of woman" because of his relationship with Achilles (141). However, as he fleshes out his argument, O'Rourke eliminates the 'sort of' and states, "women- a category that includes Thersites and Patroclus..." (156). O'Rourke sweeps Thersites and Patroclus not only into the same category as one another, but into the category of women. In some instances, Patroclus endures comparable treatment to a woman, since he is viewed more often as Achilles' lover than a warrior in his own right. This provokes scorn from the other soldiers and contempt from Thersites, who labels Patroclus a 'brach' and a 'whore'. However, despite demonstrating elements of femininity, Patroclus ultimately still participates in the male military culture. His potential sexual relationship with Achilles does not define his gender. Though Patroclus is often feminine, he also participates in masculine military behavior. To put Patroclus into the same category as Helen and Cressida ignores the fact that Patroclus is a key perpetrator in Cressida's potential 'gang rape'. Despite his own treatment, Patroclus still makes a sport of women, just as the other men do. Being called a 'whore' does not make Patroclus a woman, not even a 'sort of' woman.

It is this pressure to conform to masculine gender roles that drives Patroclus to battle, and his death serves as the impetus for Achilles to reenter the war, driven by the same lust for vengeance that overcame Troilus. Patroclus' death serves as a catalyst, because the final action of the play begins as soon as his body is recovered. Nestor, a Greek adviser, orders that Patroclus' body be brought to Achilles. When Ulysses enters the scene, he relates, "Great Achilles/Is arming, weeping, cursing, vowing vengeance;/Patroclus' wounds have roused his drowsy blood" (V.v.30-32). Achilles' campaign is one of few that is not fueled by honor or obligation. Rather, Achilles is driven by raw emotion. There is no logic in his actions, rather Achilles is "arming", "weeping", "cursing" and "vowing vengeance" in a flurry of emotions. Ulysses describes Ajax's reaction to losing a friend in battle, claiming he "foams at the mouth" and "is armed and at it,/Roaring for Troilus, who hath done today/Mad and fantastic execution" (V.v.36-37). Contrasted with Achilles' response, Ajax displays more typical masculinity, expressing sheer anger as opposed to the devastation of Achilles. As Achilles enters the battlefield, he still cries out, "Where is this Hector?/Come, come, thou boy-queller, show thy face;/Know what it is to meet Achilles angry;/Hector! Where's Hector? I will none but Hector" (V.v.46-49). The phrase "boy-queller", or killer of boys, emphasizes Patroclus' youth. Prior to Patroclus' death, the soldiers dying in the Trojan War were nameless, faceless victims. However, Patroclus is ever-present at Achilles' side from the start of the play, and his death begins the play's spiral into tragedy. Furthermore, his repetitive language shows how clearly single-minded he is; he has not truly rejoined the battle against Troy. His sole purpose is to kill Hector as revenge for his loss.

From Hector's mercy to Achilles' dinner invitation and, finally, Troilus and Diomedes' mock duel, *Troilus and Cressida* infuses chivalry and courtesy into the Trojan War only to obliterate them in the final battle scene. While Troilus visits his execution on all those who crossed his path, Achilles emphasizes that he will kill none but Hector. However, his execution is no less horrific. Despite his reputation as a fantastic warrior, Achilles does not even kill Hector himself. In fact, he is beaten by Hector in battle, but allowed to live. In this anticlimactic scene, Hector shows Achilles mercy and bids him to leave the battlefield and regain his strength for another day. Before he leaves, Achilles replies, "I do disdain thy courtesy, proud Trojan" (V.vi.15). This line becomes important in retrospect once Achilles abandons moral codes and honor in favor of killing Hector at any cost. Immediately, he gathers his men, the Myrmidons, and tells them, "when I have the bloody Hector found,/Empale him with your weapons round about" (V.vii.4-5). When Achilles meets Hector for the second time, Hector tells him, "I am unarm'd; forego this vantage, Greek" (V.viii.9). He expects the same courtesy that he gives to the Greeks and asks that Achilles not take advantage of the fact that he is unarmed. Achilles responds with, "Strike, fellow, strike; this is the man I seek", and the Myrmidons impale Hector (V.viii.10). Shakespeare does not have Achilles kill Hector on his own, or with godly intervention, but through outnumbering him with the Myrmidons. With these underhanded tactics, Achilles' earlier line illustrates the function of Hector's death within the play. The death of Hector is violent, cowardly, dishonorable and largely symbolic. Although Hector did not abstain from the war, he spoke out against it and encouraged fair play on the battlefield. Hector's death is the death of the military's courteous pretensions.

It is the ultimate proof that there is no chivalrous war. Achilles' rampage represents the truth of the war; people are dying daily for a meaningless cause.

This thesis hinges on the fact that the central tragedy of *Troilus and Cressida* is avoidable. Unlike *Othello*, the corrupting values present are not concentrated in a single character whose removal would change the course of the play. *Troilus and Cressida* does not show the origin of oppression, but its result. However, it is still external, rather than internal forces, that lead to each character's downfall. Cressida's betrayal is not caused by an inherent falsity in female affection, Patroclus' death is not the result of emasculation, and Troilus' war-mongering is not because violence is in his nature. While each character is accountable for the part he or she plays, focusing solely on individual accountability silences discussion of the larger social, political and economic structures that shape the individual. While Cressida makes the decision to be unfaithful to Troilus, she would not have had to make that decision if not for the fact that she is a female born into a society that objectifies, commodifies and sells female bodies. Similarly, were Troilus not born into a society that glorifies war and demeans femininity, he would not be so ill-equipped to handle Cressida's betrayal and he would not view slaughter as his only alternative to love. *Troilus and Cressida* is a play about the vulnerability of masculine authority which creates a single standard for all humans to strive toward. This ultimately leads to the endangerment of the female body, the destruction of femininity and the degradation of the Other. *Troilus and Cressida* is a play about exploitation which, fittingly, masquerades as a love story. It is a "problem play" in the sense that it provides many problems and gives no easy solutions. No small measures can be taken to fix the tragedy of this play. Instead, it demands new structures, built from the ground up.

Chapter 3

“Easy Ways to Die”: Bodied Politics in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*

Even when women come to power within a patriarchal society, they are not about to work within political structures to achieve the same authority or respect. *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrates this through the experience of Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt. This play combines historical drama and tragicomedy through the warring forces of the Second Triumvirate and the love story of Mark Antony and Cleopatra. Antony is a member of the Second Triumvirate, which consists of the three most powerful men in Rome, but he abandons his political responsibility to stay in Egypt with Cleopatra. Eventually, this tense situation culminates in a war between Antony and Octavius Caesar for control of Rome. Cleopatra dedicates her forces to Antony, embroiling Egypt in a war that is not its own. Despite this, she is blamed both within the play and within criticism for Antony's ultimate defeat. Prior to the events of the play, Cleopatra is involved with Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great, two members of the First Triumvirate. Cleopatra's sexual history follows her throughout the play, and is brought up by Romans in order to undermine her political power and call into question the sincerity of her affections for Antony, the latest in a line of Roman liaisons. Her situation is further complicated because of her physical appearance. She is regarded as dangerous and exotic, but desirable as well. Since her political power is limited, she must out-manuever the designs of ambitious Romans in order to survive. While Antony risks his life in war with Caesar, Cleopatra also risks being taken as a trophy. Through this war, as well as the political and personal alliance between Antony and Cleopatra, this play deals with issues of imperialism, Orientalism, gender fluidity and the representation of Eastern women in the western narrative. The Western dialogue that frames Cleopatra, as well as Antony and Caesar's threats against her body, exemplifies the unique risks of female sovereignty in a

patriarchal society and demonstrates that, within Western patriarchy, true female empowerment is impossible.

Antony and Cleopatra divides critics between those that favor the male lead and those that favor the female, and the opinion of one generally adversely affects the opinion of the other. A.P. Riemer explains the divide between critics, claiming, “[the play] can be read as the fall of a great general, betrayed in his dotage by a treacherous strumpet, or else it can be viewed as a celebration of transcendent love” (Riemer 82). In more recent times, critical reception of *Antony and Cleopatra* is further split by the development of feminism. Scholarly opinion of Cleopatra is more widely divided than ever. Carol Cook calls Cleopatra the “epitome of the feminine,” while Joan Lord Hall says Cleopatra is “mutable” and “often fickle” (243; 65). Rabindra Kumar Verma describes Cleopatra as “meek, graceful and subservient to Antony” (35). Still others consider her the trickster incarnate and “the trap [Antony] cannot avoid” (Hillman 206; Berlin 95). Janet Suzman is reverential when she calls Cleopatra a “superhuman human” and explains that Cleopatra's part is “the richest, most varied, most misunderstood part that Shakespeare wrote” and “it’s quite impossible to get it all” (1). For Antony, however, Suzman can only spare that he is “a once-mighty hero obsessed by the Queen of Egypt, an obsession so fatal that it drags him to his doom” (1). While the war between critics over Cleopatra is ever-developing, opinions of Antony remain largely the same. There is a consensus that Antony is a great general driven to folly by his love for Cleopatra. To some he is “simultaneously a moral allegory and a grand human being” (Kluge 324). To others he is “a man of reason, honor, and integrity” until Cleopatra transforms him into “a man of weakness, irresoluteness, and cowardice” (Cluck 146-147). Really, the greatest debate

involving Antony's part is how much to blame Cleopatra for his erring. While some critics contend that Antony ruins himself, others maintain that there is something innate in Cleopatra that drives men to ruin.

Shakespeare structures the opening of the play with a conversation about the eponymous characters, which characterizes them by their affair and the detrimental effect it has on Antony, forcing the audience to question Cleopatra's morals from the start. Philo and Demetrius discuss Antony's deteriorating leadership qualities and immediately cite his infatuation with Cleopatra as the cause. Specifically, they blame the fact that he has turned his once wise eyes "upon a tawny front" (I.i.6). Cleopatra is first introduced by her skin color, a brownish hue, separating her from her Roman lover. Furthermore, Philo claims that Antony's once brave heart "is become the bellows and the fan/To cool a gypsy's lust" (I.i.9-10). This verse shows how Romans view Antony and Cleopatra, a view which recurs throughout the play. Cleopatra is established as a threatening outsider because of her 'tawny front' and 'gypsy lust'. Her sexuality and therefore morals are called into question. It is noteworthy that Antony's prior disposition is praised, but Cleopatra's rank and achievement are entirely disregarded. She is mentioned only in terms of her skin color and sexuality. Furthermore, neither Cleopatra nor Antony are named in this exchange. Rather, they are referred to in the way Romans perceive them. Antony is the fallen general and Cleopatra is lustful gypsy who has ensnared him. In this narrative, Antony is the victim, and it is Cleopatra who brings about his ruin. Although Cleopatra has done nothing wrong, she is slandered by Romans in order to justify Antony's failings. This opening conversation, therefore, lays the foundation for the play's male-dominated discourse.

“She Would Catch Another Antony”: The Orient and the Female Body

Cleopatra shares the fate of her country, as both she and Egypt embody the 'Other' and are treated as exotic entertainment, to their detriment. The Western narrative that conflates the East with mystery and exoticism constitutes Orientalism. Edward Said was a prominent scholar whose definition and analysis of Orientalism can help situate *Antony and Cleopatra* in post-colonial theory. Integrating his work with feminist theory and applying it to Cleopatra allows for a broader understanding of the way that the East and West interact within the play, and why, despite being a queen, Cleopatra's situation is so precarious. Said explains that the Orient is one of Europe's “deepest and most recurring images of the Other” as well as “its contrasting image, idea, personality [and] experience” (1-2). The West, therefore, uses the Orient to define itself. The East is not treated as itself, but rather, as the antithesis of the West. Said argues that the Orient does not exist independently, but is created through a European narrative in order to maintain dominance over Eastern nations. By presenting the East as a conglomeration of exotic, but undeveloped societies, Western culture can maintain a narrative of superiority. Orientalism, therefore, is the prejudiced way that the West portrays the East. This argument can be traced throughout *Antony and Cleopatra* in the way that Romans portray both Egypt and Cleopatra. While Egypt is part of the Orient and is treated as a mysterious and foreign land, this reputation extends to Egyptians as well and to no one more than Cleopatra. Romans and Egyptians alike conflate Cleopatra with Egypt. Since she is the sole sovereign of Egypt, Egypt is Cleopatra's, and Cleopatra is Egypt. This is shown both through the similar reputation they share, and the fact that Antony, Caesar and Iras all

refer to Cleopatra as Egypt. Due to this conflation, slander against Cleopatra affects the standing of her country and conquest of her country is conquest of her body.

Orientalism benefits Antony when he describes Egypt as a land of pleasure, explaining his idleness as a result of some inherent difference in Egyptian lifestyle. When Pompey comments that he did not expect to see Antony at the negotiations, Antony replies, “The beds i'th'East are soft; and thanks to you/That called me timelier than my purpose hither –/For I have gained by't” (II.vi.51-53). Antony claims to have lost himself in the pleasurable life of the East, and thanks Pompey for drawing him away from its influence. He then spends the entirety of the feast with Caesar and Pompey, regaling the Romans with strange tales of the East in order to win their favor. In doing so, Antony is taking advantage of Orientalism, because the audience knows that Antony is responsible for his own idleness. Cleopatra, in fact, insists that Antony listen to the messages he receives from Rome, and Antony refuses. He tells the queen, “Let's not confound the time with conference harsh;/There's not a minute of our lives should stretch/Without some pleasure now. What sport tonight?” (I.ii.47-49). Antony considers discussion of his political responsibilities to be “harsh” conference, and argues that not a minute of their lives in Egypt should pass without pleasure. He then changes the subject to what “sport” he and Cleopatra can amuse themselves with. This repetitious use of pleasure demonstrates the prejudices Antony enters Egypt with, and the narrative he uses to try to win Caesar and Pompey's favor. He views Egypt as a land of pleasure and attempts to shape it into one while he is with Cleopatra. Then he attempts to use the influence of the exotic land as an excuse for having been remiss as he reenters the political sphere. Unfortunately, Antony is only looking out for himself when he does so, and perpetuates

the image of Egypt, and Cleopatra, as the exotic 'Other'. This subsequently undermines Cleopatra's personhood and Egypt's political standing.

In constructing the Orient, the West also constructs the women of the Orient, who are viewed as either silent and subservient, or *femme fatales*, both of which attempt to stifle the voice of women. Said discusses the way in which Orientalism intersects with gender relations. He describes an encounter between a French writer and an Egyptian woman, stating:

Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence or history. He spoke for and represented her. He was foreign, comparatively wealthy, male, and these were historical facts of domination that allowed him not only to possess Kuchuk Hanem physically but to speak for her and tell his readers in what way she was 'typically Oriental'. (Said 6)

This description of the “typically Oriental” woman is the antithesis of Cleopatra, who has nothing if not presence, and never stifles her emotions. However, defying this narrative is not enough for Cleopatra to escape the effects of it. According to the Western narrative, females of the East are either the “guileless young girl” or the “Fatal Woman” (Said 182, 180). Cleopatra is a clear example of the fatal woman, who is “legendary” and “richly suggestive” (180). Regardless of which category suits her, it is still a male narrative attempting to confine her. When confronted with Cleopatra within the play, Romans are struck by her beauty, but disgusted with her behavior. Therefore, they still attempt to define her, but switch tactics. If they if they cannot have a meek, subservient Cleopatra, they vilify her as a gypsy and a whore. They describe her by her 'tawny front' and 'gypsy's lust,' attempting to demonize her sensuality. Romans further attempt to dehumanize Cleopatra, referring to her as Antony's “Egyptian dish,” and land that “cropped” when

Caesar “ploughed her,” (II.vii.125, II.ii.236). Through this dialogue, male figures throughout the play attempt to damn Cleopatra for her sexuality and subsequently put her in the position of a common whore.

Since Cleopatra's beauty receives such emphasis within the play, critics debate exactly what makes her so capable of seduction. Some critics entirely attribute Cleopatra's attractiveness to physical beauty, which is complicated by the fact that she doesn't receive a specific physical description. For example, McCombe fixates on Cleopatra's body. He states that the “absence of her body directs us away from any inherent attractiveness of Cleopatra” and that “the body itself, despite the intimations of sexuality and allure, is never presented to us in full” (31, 34). McCombe suggests that Cleopatra's body is absent because no one describes her and that, without an attractive physical appearance, she cannot be considered inherently attractive. Of course, no body is presented in full, as long, physical descriptions are not necessary in the text of a play. The only difference is that there is a constant emphasis on Cleopatra's desirability, and therefore McCombe demands to see a body. This is a miscalculation on his part, not a cunning refusal on Shakespeare's. The fact that Cleopatra is desirable and full of variety need not translate to physical beauty. As he analyzes the barge scene where Antony first encounters Cleopatra, McCombe is disturbed by the lengthy description of Cleopatra's possessions and the simultaneous lack of description of Cleopatra herself. He explains, “What surrounds the potentially unsettling figure of the African female body are all of the trappings of the Oriental sexual fantasy,” while Cleopatra herself “disappears from the text and is either reduced to a fetishized body part or completely replaced by commodities” (33). This would certainly be a valid interpretation if it were supported by

the rest of the text, but it relies on only this scene, indeed, only this passage. The first problem with this interpretation is that, in the original play form, this would also not pose a problem for Cleopatra's stage presence because the audience is well-acquainted with Cleopatra's appearance. There are still other valid reasons that Cleopatra's physical description is omitted. For one thing, absence of Cleopatra's description at this crucial point allows the reader's mind to fill in the missing details and subsequently allows Cleopatra her "infinite variety." Another interpretation is that because Cleopatra "beggars all description" she is able to escape "the language that would fix her as a spectacle" (Cook 251). There is a strong argument for this interpretation because Cleopatra spends the duration both dreading and denying being a spectacle. Cleopatra presents herself on a golden barge in one instance and dons the garb of Isis in another because she chooses to frame herself in richness and legend. Cleopatra escapes Roman description during the moments when she creates her own narrative.

Other critics associate Cleopatra's beauty with her extreme femininity, which overlooks Cleopatra's more masculine traits and her utter disregard for gender roles. When Mecaenas suggests that Antony, after marrying Octavia, must give Cleopatra up, Enobarbus' reply perfectly summarizes how Cleopatra's character is perceived by both characters and critics. He tells Mecaenas, "Never. He will not:/Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale/Her infinite variety; other women cloy/The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry/Where she most satisfies; for vilest things/Become themselves in her" (II.ii.241-246). This description is one that critics use to support Cleopatra as 'femininity embodied', the ultimate woman capable of entrancing any man. Particularly her 'infinite variety' makes it seem as if Cleopatra can appear as any number of women, constantly

reawakening the appetite of her partners by promising a new experience. However, Cleopatra is not the epitome of femininity, and Enobarbus does not imply she is. Only when she needs it most does Cleopatra portray herself as soft, gentle or submissive- traits commonly associated with femininity. The fact that the 'vilest things become themselves in her' means that Cleopatra can be as feminine or masculine as she pleases at any given time, because something about the way she presents herself makes those traits desirable. Since she is a queen, Cleopatra demands that she be able to act however she sees fit, and her Egyptian subjects allow her to do so.

One of the reasons Cleopatra is so attracted to Antony is because of the fluidity of their gender roles. Cleopatra adopts whatever role suits her at any given time “precisely in order to transform conventional definitions, role and boundaries into objects of play” (Cook 261). One of the most telling examples of this is when Cleopatra wistfully shares an intimate anecdote of when she led an intoxicated Antony to bed and “[t]hen put my tires and mantles on him, whilst/I wore his sword Philippan” (II.v.22-23). While many critics consider this symbolic of the way that Cleopatra emasculates Antony, it is much more playful than demeaning. It is a good example of how Antony and Cleopatra are able to play with gender boundaries when they are together. Furthermore, Cleopatra is clearly proud enough of this story to share it with her handmaidens, illustrating how much she enjoys sexual freedom. Just as Cleopatra claims “Antony/Will be himself,” she is allowed to be herself around him (I.i.43-44). With Antony, she does not have to demean herself by feigning submissiveness in order to keep his interest. Instead, Cleopatra experiences a freedom of expression because she is able to behave outside of the gender binary and define herself.

Not only does Cleopatra define her own conduct, but she describes herself as beautiful, even though her appearance contrasts the Roman standard of beauty, which is shown in Octavia. Rarely do characters within the play refer to Cleopatra's physical features and when her physical attributes are discussed in detail, it is usually to the detriment of her attractiveness, because her 'tawny front' is the antithesis of Roman beauty. Despite this, Cleopatra's body is not absent. To argue that it is never presented overlooks a passage where Cleopatra describes herself. By Cleopatra's own account, she is tall, with a long face and high forehead. The key to Cleopatra's attractiveness, however, is not in her physical features, but rather in the other traits she demands the messenger to describe. Cleopatra is attractive because she is sharp-tongued, quick-minded and there is "majesty" in her gait (III.iii.17). The physical traits Cleopatra emphasizes about herself are imposing, intimidating and sensual. Her height and her gait combined with her speech and mind make Cleopatra one of history's greatest beauties. This is made evident when a messenger tells Cleopatra that Octavia "shows a body rather than a life" (III.iii.20). This is key to Cleopatra's attractiveness. It is not her body that men are attracted to; it is the life imbued in it. Rather than a fortunate combination of physical features, the most attractive thing about Cleopatra is the way she presents herself. The reason "the vilest things [b]ecome themselves in her" is because Cleopatra, unlike the "statue" of Octavia, is full of life and presence. She does not allow her charms to be overlooked.

While Cleopatra has several detrimental reputations, she manages to express herself in a powerful way, and it is through her own words that Cleopatra's character can best be understood. In order to analyze Cleopatra's character, Verma traces the opinion of male characters and contends, "Cleopatra's various images are created and celebrated by

her male counterparts in the play” (Verma 34). Verma performs all the correct calculations, only to come to the wrong conclusion by upholding the image Romans construct of Cleopatra. It is true that male characters throughout the play create their own image of Cleopatra and celebrate that image, but that does not mean it is an accurate reflection of Cleopatra. The various images created by men reject Cleopatra's own self-representation and substitute constrictive stereotypes to define her. To view these images as an accurate representation of Cleopatra's character is to disregard her voice and subscribe to slander, precisely what Caesar and Enobarbus would like. In the conclusion of her article, Verma states that Cleopatra is “described”, “presented”, “associated” and “considered” to be a certain way (Verma 38). However, Verma views Cleopatra's character through the male lens of the Romans who discuss her. These Romans have an agenda and a bias when they discuss Cleopatra, so listening to their dialogue is hardly a way to analyze her character. It is much more profitable to look for the moments when Cleopatra represents herself. Despite the constant attempts made by male characters to define her, Cleopatra has a strong tendency for self-definition. Cleopatra uses the phrase “I am” seventeen times throughout the play, more than any other character. She uses this phrase both to identify herself and give strong expressions of emotion. She speaks authoritatively, asserting, “I am Egypt's queen,” “I am marble-constant,” “I am fire and air” (I.i.32, V.ii.240, V.ii.288). Using such definitive language, Cleopatra claims her status as Queen of Egypt, denies the accusation of fickleness, and announces her rejection of mortal life.

“I Do Not Greatly Care To Be Deceived”: Cleopatra and the Trickster

Cleopatra has also obtained the reputation among critics of being a trickster, betraying Antony for her own gain, which is another aspect of the fatal woman archetype¹. Many who don't use the term 'trickster' still allude to this concept through the phrase “feminine wiles,” which carries the same implication of strategic manipulation. However, to refer to Cleopatra merely as a trickster does not help to situate one's argument, because the trickster archetype varies vastly between cultures. Depending on the culture, the traits of the trickster can range from comical to sacred to malicious. Different cultures also define the trickster by traits that, taken together, would be contradictory, such as foolishness or cunning (Evans 110-111). Knowing this, to refer to Cleopatra as a trickster without explication does more harm than good in establishing her motivation and function within the play. So, rather than reducing Cleopatra to “a woman who plays tricks on Antony and betrays him,” it is important to define what type of trickster she is (Verma 33). Cleopatra is a more serious character than the often clown-like tricksters, though she adheres to several frequently cited traits of the trickster. She is associated with animals, shape-shifting, manipulation and deceit. Cleopatra is capable of shape-shifting in several forms, as her mutability is one of her most prominent characteristics. Enobarbus cites her “infinite variety” as the reason men never tire of her, while Cleopatra evokes this sentiment in her dying speech when she claims to transcend earth to become “fire and air”. This is connected with Cleopatra's association with animals. Antony refers to Cleopatra as his “serpent of old Nile,” and Cleopatra kills herself with an Asp, forever entwining her with the snake (I.v.25). Furthermore, Cleopatra treats human boundaries, such as gender roles, as playthings, as evident when she declares she will “[a]pppear...for a man” or when she wears Antony's sword

(III.vii.18). Finally, Cleopatra's manipulation and deceit are at the foreground of her character, and the reason why Antony is quick to believe she has betrayed him. The traits that define Cleopatra as a trickster, therefore, are her mutability and cunning deceit. A crucial difference between the clown-like trickster and Cleopatra, however, is that her most significant tricks are performed out of necessity.

While this epithet is frequently used for Cleopatra, there is no discussion of Antony or Caesar as literary tricksters, despite the fact that both play tricks and attempt to deceive. Antony spends the length of the play deceiving wives and even after he marries Octavia, he returns to Cleopatra. Caesar bids his messenger to “try thy cunning” on Cleopatra, and tries his own in the final act (III.xiii.32). Though Cleopatra is in good company when it comes to deceiving, the two men are not considered tricksters for several reasons. The first is that they do not need to rely on their cunning to overcome adversity. Both are powerful men, capable of single combat, and command large armies. Though Cleopatra also possesses a powerful naval force she is, by comparison, in the weaker position. Therefore, their tricks are used to maintain dominance as opposed to overthrowing those in the dominant position. The second reason these men do not fit the trickster archetype is that they lack multiplicity in their character and motivations. Tricksters are often associated with fluidity in all aspects of their character, from fluidity of gender to fluidity of appearance. Caesar is grounded in secular ambitions, as he seeks to consolidate power in Rome and expand to the surrounding countries. He is entirely masculine in his behavior and motives, lacking the abundant variety of Cleopatra. Antony is somewhat in between Caesar and Cleopatra, as his relationship with Cleopatra offers him a chance at fluidity and an escape from stifling Roman expectations, but he

ultimately aligns with Caesar's performance of masculinity. Finally, neither man is cunning enough to fit the trickster archetype. Even though they each attempt to deceive, Antony is overcome by Caesar and Caesar, in turn, is overcome by Cleopatra. They are her adversaries and the targets of her cunning rather than fellow tricksters.

Part of the negative valuation of Cleopatra's character is because of the fact that she uses deception on Antony, but a closer examination of these scenes reveals that Cleopatra only truly deceives Antony out of necessity. The first instance that Cleopatra can be called manipulative is when she attempts to manipulate Antony's mood on a whim. Cleopatra tells one of her servants to find Antony and orders them, "See where he is, who's with him, what he does:/I did not send you. If you find him sad,/Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report/That I am sudden sick. Quick, and return" (I.iii.2-5). She uses her servant as a spy to see what Antony is doing without her and tells him to lie to Antony depending on what his mood is. She will brighten his mood with dancing if he is sad without her, but will feign sickness if he is happy without her. This example is likely characteristic of Cleopatra's behavior when she worries she is losing Antony's affections, but such trickery only occurs once. However, even in this benign case, it is impossible to determine if Cleopatra does trick Antony. While she does send her messenger, Antony enters the scene soon after, without any concern for Cleopatra's declaration that she is "sick and sullen". He determines to leave Egypt to make peace with Caesar and none of Cleopatra's stalling techniques succeed. While she claims wavering emotions constantly, Cleopatra is only reacting to Antony's infidelity. She pretends to waver in health and emotion as he does in love. This incident aside, Cleopatra only definitively tricks Antony once throughout the play. After Antony's second defeat against Caesar, he is convinced

that Cleopatra has betrayed him to assure Caesar's favor. When she enters the scene, he raves at her, “Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving,/And blemish Caesar's triumph,” meaning he will kill her and deny Caesar the pleasure of taking her captive (IV.xxiii.32-33). Cleopatra runs away in fear and once she has left the scene, Antony claims in a monologue that he will kill her. Cleopatra then begs her handmaidens for help, and sends word to Antony that she has killed herself. She orders, “tell him I have slain myself;/Say that the last I spoke was 'Antony',/And word it, prithee, piteously” (IV.xv.7-9). While this is reminiscent of her earlier 'trick', it is of a much graver magnitude. She only sends word because she has never seen Antony so angry at her and she fears for her life. She intends for him to be so overcome with grief that he will forgive her her supposed betrayal.

Unfortunately, Antony often perceives Cleopatra as untrustworthy, which leads to her reputation as a betrayer. The first time that Cleopatra supposedly betrays Antony, she flees from battle at sea and Antony follows her, and subsequently loses the battle. Cleopatra briefly explains her motives as she cries, “O my lord, my lord,/Forgive my fearful sails! I little thought/You would have followed” (III.xi.54-56). However, Antony replies, “Egypt, thou knew'st too well/My heart was to thy rudder tied” (III.xi.57-58). As Antony continues to admonish her for her apparent betrayal, he insists that she must have known he would follow, telling her for a second time, “thou knew'st” and continuing to say, “you did know/How much you were my conquerer” (III.xi.60,68-69). From the reader's perspective, it seems obvious that Antony would follow Cleopatra out of battle. The entire first half of the play is predicated on Antony making poor military decisions when he is in Cleopatra's presence. Other characters continually comment on Cleopatra's unending influence over him. However, Cleopatra is the sole character who does not

understand the extent of the power she has over him. It is more likely that Cleopatra is being honest when she claims that fear was her only motive for fleeing the battle and that she did not realize her ships and Antony's would follow. While she is the queen of Egypt, Cleopatra's conquests are of a more personal nature. There is no reason to believe that Cleopatra has war experience and that she did not fear for her life on the battlefield. At the very least, she had hoped Antony would remain behind and fight. Eventually, Antony tells her, "Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates/All that is won and lost: give me a kiss;/Even this repays me" (III.xi.73-75). Losing everything does not weaken Antony's love for Cleopatra. Instead of disavowing her, he tells her that even a kiss will repay her transgression.

The stark contrast between how Antony reacts the first and second time he believes Cleopatra betrayed him can be traced to his belief in her infidelity, which leads him to think she betrayed him to incur Caesar's favor. Between battles, Caesar sends a messenger to speak with Cleopatra, attempting to sway her to banish Antony from Egypt, leaving him vulnerable. Caesar's messenger, Thidias, offers Cleopatra an audience with Caesar, claiming, "He knows that you embraced not Antony/As you did love, but as you feared him" (III.xiii.56-57). Thidias tells her that Caesar views her as a victim of Antony, only aiding him because she feared him. Caesar does not truly view Cleopatra as a victim, of course, but he uses Thidias in an attempt to manipulate Cleopatra. Cleopatra responds with, "O" (III.xiii.58). Her response is key, as it expresses both surprise and realization. Rather than being taken in by Caesar, Cleopatra quickly turns the tables. Since Antony no longer has any political power, Cleopatra is responsible for both his fate and her own. She has only moments to assess the situation, understand how Caesar plans

to treat her and use that information to the best of her ability. While Cleopatra possesses, or previously possessed, a powerful navy, her greatest asset is her beauty. She realizes, with that slight exclamation, that she might be able to charm Caesar. This realization colors the rest of her exchange, as she tells the messenger that Caesar “is a god” and that she intends to “kiss his conquering hand” and “lay [her] crown at's feet” (III.xiii.60,76). This is clearly not how Cleopatra behaves when she is truly taken with someone, as she is with Antony. Earlier, Cleopatra snapped at her handmaid that such submission was the way to lose a man. Now, in fear and desperation, she uses this exact tactic, and even offers her hand to the messenger. As she extends her hand to let the common envoy kiss it, she tells him, “Your Caesars's father oft,/When he hath mused of taking kingdoms in,/Bestowed his lips on that unworthy place,/As it rained kisses” (III.xiii.83-86). Cleopatra, when she is being sincere, would never call herself “unworthy”. Instead, she is trying to play into Caesar's lust and egotism to save Antony and herself. It is at this point that Antony enters the scene and is overcome by jealousy at the sight of Cleopatra and Thidias. He immediately believes that Cleopatra has switched alliances and is trying to gain Caesar's favor. It is this scene that truly dissolves the trust between Antony and Cleopatra.

Cleopatra's reputation as a trickster is heavily entwined with her reputation as a seductress, because both are characteristic of the fatal woman and serve to reduce Cleopatra's character to an Orientalized stereotype. Cleopatra, as an Egyptian woman, “represents darkness” and “a devouring sexuality” to the Romans (McCombe 24). She is viewed by Romans and by select critics as “a purely sensual Orientalized body” or a “form of contagion capable of causing Mark Antony to “go native” and indulge in carnal

pleasures.” (McCombe 25). When Antony sees Cleopatra offering her hand to Thidias, he orders the messenger to be whipped and turns on Cleopatra, telling her, “You were half blasted ere I knew you” (III.xiii.105). He references her previous sexual partners, telling her she was a cold “morsel” and a “fragment” when he found her, because she had been with Caesar and Pompey (III.xiii.118,119). He uses the same logic that Philo and Demetrius used in the first scene, and the same logic that male figures do throughout the play. Cleopatra's prior relationships are mentioned continuously, but she is never shown to have a relationship with anyone other than Antony during the course of the play. Antony is the one who makes marriages of convenience; he marries Caesar's sister for the sole purpose of rekindling his partnership with Caesar and then proceeds to neglect her. If anything, Antony is the opportunist, and Cleopatra is doing the only thing she can to try and save his life after his poor decision to fight at sea. However, the same standards do not apply to Antony. It is Cleopatra who is the Other, weighed down by a racist reputation that diminishes her personal and political relationships. Antony, despite loving her, is often the worst offender when it comes to demeaning her.

Though she occasionally uses seduction to her advantage, Cleopatra does not always enjoy this tactic and recognizes that her female body puts her in continual danger as Romans attempt to conquer Egypt. Even in modern feminist criticism, there are those who claim that Cleopatra “believes in male supremacy” and that “her desire maintains her subservience to him” (Verma 33). Of course, male supremacy is a reality, regardless of whether or not Cleopatra “believes” in it, but it is a possible interpretation that Cleopatra enjoys being a trophy for Roman rulers. When she is alone, however, Cleopatra contradicts such interpretations. Long before Antony calls her a cold morsel, Cleopatra

wistfully comments on her past relationships, claiming that for Julius Caesar she was “[a] morsel for a monarch” (I.v.31). It is a compliment to her own beauty, but also the reality of her circumstances as a female ruler. While Cleopatra takes pride in her renowned beauty and the fact that she is beloved by kings, she also recognizes that being a queen puts her in a unique position. She is powerful and respected in her kingdom, but threats to her kingdom are also threats to her body. If she does not maintain good relations with the Romans, she risks her kingdom falling and her body being taken as a spoil of war. While Antony also experiences the threat of being humiliated and having his bound body on display, Cleopatra's race and sex complicate this. Calling herself a morsel emphasizes that Cleopatra is consumed by monarchs. While she is appreciated and savored, she still must give up a part of herself in this unequal exchange. Furthermore, if she is not coupled with a powerful man, she risks another invasion. Some claim that if Cleopatra had not killed herself, she likely would have transferred her affection “to the next powerful Roman to set foot in Egypt” (Hillman 311). However, this assessment disregards the difference between genuine affection and political necessity on Cleopatra's part.

Cleopatra is well aware of the narrative that frames her and, when it suits her, she uses that reputation to her advantage, which explains why she attempts to seduce Caesar and why she is disappointed with Antony for reacting with anger. As he begins to berate her, Antony asks Cleopatra, “To flatter Caesar, would you mingle eyes/With one that ties his points?” (III.xiii.158-159). She in turn asks, “Not know me yet?” (III.xiii.160). Cleopatra certainly would charm Caesar's servant just for a chance to flatter him. However, Antony misunderstands her reason for doing so. At this point, Cleopatra knows that Caesar wants Antony beheaded and seduction is the only way she can deal with such

a powerful threat. After his victory at sea, Caesar becomes the most powerful man in the western world and the only way Cleopatra can overcome him is if she gains influence over him through 'enchantment'. If Cleopatra purposefully sabotaged Antony, there is no reason for her to have done so. She does not use her influence over Antony to turn him over to Caesar, nor does she tell Caesar she is responsible for his victory. She secures no benefits for herself through Antony's ruin. Rather, Antony's loss puts Cleopatra's crown and life in jeopardy. Just as Grant L. Voth and Oliver H. Evans note of critics who wish to establish Cressida's wantonness, those seeking to prove Cleopatra's betrayal must “[shift] the discussion to *function* instead of *motive*” (239). Those who claim Cleopatra genuinely betrays Antony can only point to what function this serves for the plot of the play, because there is no underlying motivation. Therefore, such an assessment reduces Cleopatra's character, eliminating her realistic motivations in favor of propping up Antony. It is easier to take Cleopatra's actions at face value, as Antony does, than to critically evaluate her motives to determine whether she adheres to or defies the stereotype attributed to her.

“Hear Me, Good Friends”: Roman Masculinity and the Performance of Brotherhood

Cleopatra is Shakespeare's most theatrical heroine and she considers the proper performance of emotion to be just as important as the sincerely felt emotion. One of Cleopatra's best and worst traits is that she is theatrical and this trait is at times comical or malicious depending on her mood. Therefore, when Cleopatra is angry, she performs anger in the extreme. When a messenger announces that Antony is married, Cleopatra strikes him twice before she drags him by the hair and threatens, “Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,/Smarting in lingering pickle” (II.iv.66-67). This threat of

torture is intended to get the messenger to admit he has lied. When the messenger refuses to change his message, Cleopatra draws a knife and threatens to kill him. It is not until Charmian chides her that Cleopatra acknowledges that the messenger is honest. There is a consensus among critics that Cleopatra is a performer. Even though I argue that she experiences genuine emotion, Cleopatra enjoys putting on a show. Critics have noted that Cleopatra “is nothing without an audience” and that “we are never quite sure whether this is 'real' emotion or a performance” (Hillman 328). It is clear that Cleopatra performs many roles throughout the play. As she draws a knife on the messenger, she is performing the role of a scorned lover. To both the messenger and her handmaidens, Cleopatra proves her love for Antony by an excellent performance of that scorn- the deeper her anger, the deeper her love for Antony. However, it is incorrect to assume that Cleopatra's performance is unconnected with her real emotions. In fact, Cleopatra's exaggerated emotions connect with her desire for self-representation. She chooses the roles she plays because she knows how she wants to be viewed. She feels deeply betrayed by Antony and, through her performance of scorn, she is able to communicate her feelings to her audience and even evoke empathy. This by no means excuses Cleopatra's violence, however. In fact, this reasoning predicts her potential for destruction. Even her suicide, after all, is somewhat of a performance.

Although Cleopatra is the most successful performer, a similar combination of characteristics and performativity can be found in Antony, who is narcissistic, theatrical and passionate. Cleopatra goads Antony to be more expressive, following up his declarations with, “Excellent falsehood,” “You can do better yet; but this is meetly,” and “But this is not the best” (I.i.43, I.iii.81, I.iii.84). She prompts him to perform the role of

a lover as well as she does, and he frequently complies. When Cleopatra demands a measurement of their love, Antony tells her that she would need a “new heaven” and “new earth” to measure his love for her (I.i.17). This sort of dramatic language illustrates the way that Cleopatra's relationship with Antony “brings together true love and mere performative love” (Hillman 333). However, Cleopatra is not the only one who performs her emotions, and it is not Cleopatra's influence alone that makes Antony theatrical. He often uses dramatic language within roles that have nothing to do with Cleopatra, such as his role as a soldier. In fact, it is frequently to Cleopatra's detriment that Antony plays his role well. When he returns to Rome, for example, Antony plays the role of a dutiful soldier and comrade to Caesar. He tells Caesar he did not ignore his duty to respond to his messages, but rather neglected them “when poison'd hours had bound me up/From mine own knowledge” (II.ii.95-96). This returns to Orientalism, as Antony blames the indulgent lifestyle of Egypt for making him neglect his duties. Antony's position as a soldier is multifaceted. He acts a certain way with Caesar when he is attempting to rekindle their alliance, but he performs the role differently when he is opposing Caesar. He later performs the role of a war hero, telling Cleopatra, “If from the field I shall return once more/To kiss these lips, I will appear in blood;/I and my sword will earn our chronicle:/There's hope in't yet” (III.xiii.174-177). This language still reflects the brutality of his position, but he mingles it with the role of the lover. The best example of Antony's dramaticism, however, is when Antony gives a farewell speech to his servants. Cleopatra asks what he means by it, and Enobarbus replies, “To make his followers weep” (IV.ii.23). Just as Cleopatra performs for an audience, so too does Antony. Unlike Cleopatra, Antony does not use his performance to create a cohesive image. Rather, he

manipulates the way people view him in accordance with the situation. He wishes to be perceived as a leader, strategist and tragic hero, so he alters the way that he presents himself depending on the audience.

Antony also has a violent temper, but unlike Cleopatra, Antony directs his toward those he claims to love, and his violent actions are directly linked to his masculine, Roman persona. Once he learns of the chaotic state he has left Rome in, Antony blames Cleopatra's influence for his short-sightedness, and uses the same language as her detractors. Antony listens to the account of the uprisings against Caesar, led by Fulvia and his brother, and declares that he must return to Rome. Though she is the one who encourages him to hear the messengers, Antony claims he is shackled by Cleopatra's "strong Egyptian fetters" which keep him in "dotage" (I.ii.116-117). This is the typical logic used by the Romans, as evidenced in the first scene of the play. Just as Philo and Demetrius consider Antony a great general influenced by Cleopatra, Antony justifies his own failings at her expense. Immediately after, another messenger informs him that Fulvia is dead. At this point, Antony entirely shifts the blame for his inaction onto Cleopatra, declaring Fulvia a "great spirit" and Cleopatra an "enchanted queen" (I.ii.123,128). While the latter statement may seem flattering, Antony is claiming that Cleopatra has an unnatural hold over him and links it with an enchantment. This is reminiscent of the accusation Brabantio makes against Othello for courting Desdemona. This is characteristic of Antony, who is quick to believe the worst of Cleopatra. Without proof of his accusations, he will later call Cleopatra a "witch" and a "spell" without giving her the opportunity to speak and defend herself. This behavior is more jarring than Cleopatra's because, unlike Cleopatra, Antony levels his violence and threats at the

person he claims to love. Furthermore, it is disturbing to observe Antony directing sexual slurs and threats against Cleopatra because he could likely overpower her, and at the end of the play she fears for her life. Antony's behavior is dictated by his different obligations and social relations within Rome and within Egypt. While Egypt represents femininity and fluidity, Rome represents masculinity and rigidity. The more closely involved Antony is with Rome and the military, the worse he treats Cleopatra.

Military culture makes a strong reappearance in *Antony and Cleopatra* as Antony takes advice from the misogynistic Enobarbus, who draws a strict divide between the role of men and women in wartime. As Antony discusses leaving for Rome, Enobarbus tells him that the news will kill Cleopatra. However, he does not say it for serious consideration, but instead ridicules her theatrics, stating, "I have seen her die twenty times upon far poorer moment" (160). In his mockery, Enobarbus provides an account of the effect war has on women, who stay behind as men leave to fight. Enobarbus sums up his opinion with, "Under a compelling occasion, let women die" and "between them and a great cause, they should be esteemed nothing" (160). While he does not mean to let women literally die, Enobarbus makes clear that women are worthless compared to whatever men deem "a great cause". This reassures Antony that he should not feel guilty for abandoning Cleopatra, regardless of the effect it has on her. When Antony finally does return to Cleopatra, she combines her forces with his to aid him in the war. Despite Cleopatra's impressive naval force and her willingness to support Antony in battle, Enobarbus attempts to bar her from joining one of the ships on the battlefield. Enobarbus explains to Cleopatra that because of her Antony's reputation suffers and her presence would only make it worse. He states that Antony "is already/Traded for levity; and 'tis

said in Rome/That Photinus an eunuch and your maids/Manage this war” (III.vii.12-15). Regardless of Cleopatra's military provisions, Antony is seen as frivolous for his alliance with her. Furthermore, the image of Cleopatra leading a war is as ridiculous to the men as a eunuch managing it. Only intact men are considered capable of waging war, and Cleopatra's sovereignty is once again disregarded as a ridiculous oddity.

In contrast to Antony and Cleopatra's leadership, Caesar represents the rigid structure of Rome that Antony attempts to escape, and his politics are closely entwined with gendered expectations. Caesar describes Antony's faults, stating, “he fishes, drinks, and wastes/The lamps of night in revel; is not more man-like/Than Cleopatra; nor the queen of Ptolemy/More womanly than he; hardly gave audience, or/Vouchsafed to think he had partners: you shall find there/A man who is the abstract of all faults/That all men follow” (I.iii.4-10). Among Antony's faults are that he “fishes”, “drinks” and “wastes” the night in Egypt. These offenses are relatively benign, but they are a transgression against their pact. Antony and Caesar's alliance states that Antony will provide Caesar with arms and support whenever he requires it. Although a violation of their alliance is Caesar's pretext for going to battle, his description of Antony as the “abstract of all faults” makes no mention of disloyalty or unreliability. Rather, Caesar's condemnation is directed at Antony's indulgence and enjoyment of the Egyptian lifestyle, which is both foreign and shameful to Caesar. While he once admired Antony as a man similar to himself, Antony's lax leadership is now the inverse of Caesar's bold leadership and swift action. Essentially, Antony comes to represent the aspects of the East that Caesar is repulsed by. He even brings up the perceived femininity of the East when he claims that Antony is “not more man-like” than Cleopatra, who simultaneously is “not [m]ore

womanly than he". He degrades Antony, both bringing up the concept of 'man' as an accolade, and the perception of the East as emasculating. At the same time, he diminishes Cleopatra's femininity because she is a queen and can act outside of the gender roles that bind Roman women. While Antony and Cleopatra represent fluidity, indulgence and insulation, Caesar represents the Roman values of structure, moderation and expansion. Since Caesar is the foil to both Antony and Cleopatra's leadership, his villainy demonstrates the destructive elements of Western masculinity and militarism.

Many aspects of Caesar's strategy to overcome Antony, an objectively more talented general, involve deceiving Cleopatra and facilitating Antony's betrayal. This is one aspect of Caesar's character that makes it clear that he is not only the antagonist, but the villain of the play. Undoubtedly, Caesar is a better leader than Antony, because he does not abandon his allies or allow his own desires to cloud his judgment. However, Caesar is also underhanded and malicious. As pointed out earlier, Cleopatra's deception was never out of malice – Caesar's certainly are. Caesar instructs his messenger, "From Antony win Cleopatra: promise,/And in our name, what she requires; add more,/From thine invention, offers: women are not/In their best fortunes strong; but want will perjure/The ne'er-touched vestal. Try thy cunning, Thidias" (III.xiii.28-32). Though both oppose him, Caesar has two very different intentions for Antony and Cleopatra. At this point, he wants Cleopatra to give up Antony and turn him out of Egypt so that he will have nowhere to hide. He instructs his messenger to cunningly deceive her by making promises he will never fulfill. Caesar contends that necessity will make her unfaithful. This strategy continues throughout the play, even when Caesar has defeated Antony. He instructs an Egyptian to tell Cleopatra that he will treat her honorably and kindly, "For

Caesar cannot live/To be ungentle” (V.i.58-59). Furthermore, when he meets with Cleopatra, he tells her not to fear because she will soon know his intentions, “[w]hich towards you are most gentle” (V.ii.127). All of these promises are undermined by the fact that the audience is privy to Caesar's true intentions. Toward the end of the play he sends another messenger to Cleopatra, instructing, “Go and say/We purpose her no shame; give her what comforts/The quality of her passion shall require,/Lest in her greatness by some mortal stroke/She do defeat us – for her life in Rome/Would be eternal in our triumph” (V.i.61-66). His true intentions remain the same as they ever were. Just as he wished to deceive her into betraying Antony, Caesar will promise Cleopatra anything to keep her alive long enough to take her to Rome. It is clear that, regardless of his facade as a gentle ruler, Caesar uses any means to achieve his goals.

Although Caesar claims he seeks peace, his treatment of Antony and Cleopatra demonstrates that any peace he achieves is at the expense of those he defeats. From Caesar's perspective, his ultimate goal is “universal peace”, which alludes to the future *Pax Romana* Caesar achieves after he defeats Antony (IV.vi.4). However, his later success is tainted by the unnecessary wars and treachery Caesar uses to attain his sole rule of the Roman Empire. Caesar eliminates the other members of the triumvirate first by locking Lepidus away and then by slandering Antony and going to war. After losing the battle at sea, Antony sends word to Caesar, requesting to be permitted to live in Egypt with Cleopatra or, failing that, be permitted to “breathe between the heavens and earth/A private man in Athens” (III.xii.15-16). At this point, if Caesar truly desired peace or felt brotherhood toward Antony, as he later claims, he could have ended the fighting. However, he replies, “I have no ears to his request” (III.xii.21). He will not even allow

Antony to live. Despite his desire for peace, Caesar continues the cycle of violence by forcing Antony into another battle. Even if these are understood as necessary actions, Caesar's gendered treatment of Cleopatra is not. Cleopatra, as an Egyptian queen, does not represent the same obstacle as Antony. Antony is one of the three great leaders of Rome and, after his transgressions, Caesar seeks to kill him. While it could be argued that Cleopatra also opposed Caesar, Caesar does not seek to kill her. Unlike Antony, Caesar wants to take Cleopatra alive, which undermines his potential status as a symbol of peace. This distinction highlights why it is impossible for Cleopatra to exist safely in the male-dominated political world. Since she is a female, Cleopatra is not even permitted to die as men are – a much worse fate is reserved for her. Caesar's universal peace does not include fair, or even humane, treatment of women. Therefore, Caesar's brutal, treacherous behavior, highlighted by his dismissal of Antony and pursuit of Cleopatra, mock his future reputation as a peaceful ruler.

Upon hearing the news that Antony has killed himself, Caesar gives a eulogy explaining both his love of Antony and his motives for going to war with him. When the messenger arrives and tells him of Antony's death, Caesar states, “The breaking of so great a thing should make/A greater crack. The round world/Should have shook lions into civil streets,/And citizens to their dens. The death of Antony/Is not a single doom, in the name lay/A moiety of the world” (V.i.14-19). Despite the fact that throughout the play, Caesar denies Antony's requests and seeks to eliminate him as a competitor, Caesar laments his passing. He passionately claims that the world should fall into chaos when such a great man passes. He expresses regret at having put Antony in the position of having to commit suicide. Since Antony is part of the triumvirate and one of the pillars of

the world, Caesar considers Antony a part of him. He bemoans that the two men were so similar and filled with the same imperialistic ambition that they could not both exist in the world without interfering with the other. He refers to Antony as a “brother”, “competitor”, “mate in empire” and “[f]riend and companion in the front of war” (V.i.42-44). However, Caesar precedes this speech by vaguely blaming Cleopatra's influence, alluding to Antony having been infected by her and becoming a “disease” in their shared body (V.i.37). By averting blame onto Cleopatra for Antony's demise, Caesar downplays his own involvement. He justifies himself by stating that Antony had been irrevocably infected by the Eastern lifestyle. Furthermore, despite his show of respect to Antony, he immediately goes on to pursue Cleopatra as a trophy of war. The divide between Caesar's words and his actions amply demonstrates the fact that real bonds of brotherhood do not exist under a patriarchal order. Even the closest allies are considered competitors for power.

“O, Break! O, Break!” : Female Friendship and the Tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*

Unlike Antony and Caesar, Cleopatra never betrays the close bonds that she establishes and in return she earns the loyalty of her subjects. Cleopatra's strongest relationships are the ones she has with her handmaidens, Charmian and Iras, both of whom are devoted to her. Though these women have comparatively few lines, they are a constant presence. Charmian, in particular, is always at Cleopatra's side, and Cleopatra calls to her for answers, reassurance and aid. They also provide comic relief in an early scene in the play when they are visited by a soothsayer. Charmian and Iras ask about their futures, particularly whether or not they will remain beautiful, and what type of men they will meet. It is during this scene that the soothsayer predicts Charmian will “outlive”

Cleopatra, and that she and Iras share a similar lot (I.ii.31). This foreshadows their loyalty to Cleopatra and their deaths, which happen in succession. This scene also provides context for the female view of sex, particularly the view shared by Cleopatra and her handmaidens that sex is for pleasure and should not be taken so seriously. Iras claims that “as it is a heartbreaking to see a handsome man loose-wived, so it is a deadly sorrow to behold a foul knave uncuckolded” (155). Their views provide a stark contrast to the views previously discussed in this thesis. Desdemona could not imagine a woman who would betray her husband, even for the whole world. Men in *Troilus and Cressida* consider this a devastating act of emasculation and go to war over the offense. Iras and Charmian's humor shows that, to women, such an act may be irrelevant, or even comical. This lightheartedness about sexuality aids in bonding Cleopatra with her handmaidens because, unlike Roman men, Iras and Charmian are not disgusted with Cleopatra's sexuality. In fact, they respect Cleopatra regardless of her sexual history or her temperament.

Despite Cleopatra's dangerous capacity for emotion, Charmian is comfortable enough to tell Cleopatra when she is wrong, and tease her about her shortcomings. For example, Cleopatra sends twenty messengers at once to assure that Antony receives a message from her. She asks Charmian to comment on how well she loves Antony, and the following exchange takes place:

CLEOPATRA. Did I, Charmian,/Ever love Caesar so?

CHARMIAN. O that brave Caesar!

CLEOPATRA. Be choked with such another emphasis!/Say, the brave Antony.

CHARMIAN. The valiant Caesar!

CLEOPATRA. By Isis, I will give thee bloody teeth,/If thou with Caesar paragon again/My man of men.

CHARMIAN. By your most gracious pardon, I sing but after you. (I.v.66-72)

While Cleopatra does threaten to give Charmian “bloody teeth”, Charmian continues teasing her, and Cleopatra never lays a hand on her. Despite the fact that Cleopatra is volatile enough to draw a knife on a messenger for delivering bad news, Charmian does not falter at the threat. She has been with Cleopatra long enough to know her sexual history and her tendency to lavish her partners with repetitive praises. However, unlike Roman men, Cleopatra's handmaidens do not condemn her for this. They are bonded by their shared experience as women, and Cleopatra's handmaidens understand her better than Antony can. This is why Cleopatra is able to seek them out for help when Antony threatens her life.

Charmian and Iras' constant presence and support culminate in Cleopatra's suicide, where they aid their queen and die by her side. While they hide in the mausoleum, Cleopatra tells Iras and Charmian what their fate will be if they are taken prisoner by Caesar. She understands that she will be paraded through Rome, her skin will be gawked at, and she will be treated as less than human. Furthermore, her body will be passed between noblemen until they tire of her before she will finally be killed. Her handmaidens are also in danger of such a fate, but they are more disturbed by the idea of Cleopatra being degraded. When Cleopatra describes the “squeaking Cleopatra boy” who will play her, Iras tells her determinedly, “I'll never see 't! For I am sure my nails/Are stronger than mine eyes” (V.ii.222-223). While they are all in danger of being misrepresented on stage, it is only when Cleopatra tells Iras that she will be performed in “the posture of a whore” that Iras threatens to gouge her eyes (V.ii.219). Cleopatra spends the entirety of her life perfecting her self-presentation, only to tell her handmaidens that someone else will perform her throughout history and they will debase

her². Iras adores her queen to the point that she would sooner put out her eyes than see someone else perform her. Both Iras and Charmian then commit suicide with Cleopatra. It is not merely out of duty that they do so, but out of a genuine love for Cleopatra, as demonstrated by their reactions to Cleopatra's impending death. At the end of her farewell speech, Cleopatra kisses Charmian and Iras, and Iras falls dead, presumably overcome with grief. Charmian, however, waits until Cleopatra applies the asp and stays with her until she dies. She cries out in grief as Cleopatra dies and, once she has passed away, calls Cleopatra a "lass unparallel'd" and claims the sun will never be seen by "eyes again so royal" (V.ii.316,314). In a touching final moment she tells Cleopatra, "Your crown's awry; I'll mend it, and then play" (V.ii.316-317) Charmian makes sure that Cleopatra looks royal and radiant in death before she applies the asp to herself. Unlike the fragile bonds established by Antony and Caesar, Cleopatra, Charmian and Iras remain together until death, and Charmian looks out for Cleopatra even after death. Despite the fact that Caesar wins the war, Cleopatra is the only ruler to establish true bonds with those around her.

After discovering Cleopatra's suicide, Caesar is given the final words of the play. As he did with Antony, Caesar expresses a reverence for the actions Cleopatra took in order to evade him. He states, "She shall be buried by her Antony:/No grave upon the earth shall clip in it/A pair so famous" and then declares, "Our army shall/In solemn show attend this funeral" (V.ii.356-358, V.ii.361-362). In the final speech of the play, Caesar repeats the word "solemn", emphasizing the dignity deserved by Antony and Cleopatra as well as the grief he feels for their loss. Considering the integral part Caesar plays in their death, however, the words come across hollow. Just as he wanted to be

“eternal” in his triumph by bringing Cleopatra back alive, Caesar crafts a legacy around Antony and Cleopatra as a “pair so famous”, thereby placing himself within a legend. Caesar simply changes his tactic and plays the dignified leader as if it was all a game. As evidenced by the previous two chapters, the tragic outcome in several of Shakespeare's plays can be directly linked with the destructive elements inherent in a patriarchal society. However, some critics claim that *Antony and Cleopatra* complicates such an argument because Cleopatra rules Egypt, where the majority the action takes place. The argument is that, in plays besides *Antony and Cleopatra*, “the tragic actions all take place in societies dominated by males and male attitude” (Levin 127). However, there is no reason to treat Antony and Cleopatra differently than any of the plays where the tragic actions occur under a male ruler. After all, the tragedies are the result of Antony, Caesar and Pompey's politics, not Cleopatra's. Furthermore, it is the imperialism of Egypt by Rome and the potential imperialism of Cleopatra by Caesar that causes the “annihilation of laughter”.

Antony and Cleopatra combines all of the elements that I sought to examine in this thesis. Cleopatra combines the experience of being a woman of color and a sovereign ruler, caught between the military struggles of powerful men. Antony is the potential tragic hero whose claims to great love are undermined by his simultaneous desire to be a leading figure in a world that endangers women by nature. Caesar is the embodiment of what patriarchy masquerades as: peace, structure and stability. The combination of these figures is what makes *Antony and Cleopatra* such a rich experience. As with the previous plays I've examined, this one ends in the destruction of the characters who do not fit within the rigid binary of Western patriarchy. In the final speech of the play, Caesar

rewrites history and portrays himself as a sympathetic figure, heralding Antony and Cleopatra as famous lovers, and having them buried together. By focusing only on their tragic love, however, one misses all of the other elements working within the play. By focusing on Cleopatra only as she relates to Antony, one erases the tragedy of her individual life and the very reason for her death. Unlike Antony, Cleopatra's suicide was not solely motivated by love. As with Desdemona and Cressida, Cleopatra was isolated and put in a situation where only death could liberate her.

Coda

Through this thesis, I have demonstrated several aspects of patriarchal society at work within Shakespeare's plays. In my first chapter, I addressed one of the ways that a patriarchal order is constructed, as well as the way its values are internalized by those it oppresses. In my second chapter, I analyzed some of the more insidious qualities of a patriarchal society, which commodifies and kills those it promises to protect. Finally, I

sought to disprove the theory that females in a position of power within patriarchy can make a difference. The last point is, perhaps, the most important. A patriarchal society is one that values masculinity over female bodies. It is a global phenomenon of male violence and domination that can only be properly understood in relation to those it subordinates. This definition bears repeating because these values are not held on an individual level, but on a global scale. Toxic values are ingrained in the patriarchal system, and it is corrupt to its foundation. There is no fixing such a system. Even by electing women to positions of power, we are only equipping them to fight on patriarchal terms, terms which have worked against them their entire lives. It is not enough to give women a position in man's society.

The only way forward is to speak out. To speak “as liberal as the north”, to tear down myths perpetuated at the expense of women and openly discredit a system built against them. Being outspoken enough to name the problem is the first step to dismantling it. Once women are able to achieve collective speech, they can achieve collective action. What I hope to achieve with this thesis is a dialogue between feminists. I urge feminists to include women from all walks of life, to listen to voices with different experiences and, most importantly, to be relentless in their pursuit of equality.

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Endnotes

1 Richard Hillman *Shakespearean Subversions: The Trickster and the Play-text*, Maynard Mack *Everybody's Shakespeare: Reflections Chiefly on the Tragedies* , Alexander Leggatt *English Drama: Shakespeare to the Restoration*

2 Cleopatra's fear of the male gaze and misrepresentation resonates particularly powerfully knowing that Shakespeare's Cleopatra was played by male actors. Since women were not permitted on stage in England until 1660, Shakespeare knew her lines would be performed by a male actor- actualizing Cleopatra's greatest fear of being written and represented by a male.