

PASSION, VIRTUE, AND MODERATION IN SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA

by

Unhae Park Langis

A Dissertation Presented to the
FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(ENGLISH)

August 2008

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Unhae Park Langis

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge Bruce R. Smith, the chair of my dissertation committee. I am among the latest in a long line of undergraduate and graduate students who have benefited greatly from Professor Smith's wide-ranging knowledge, effective guidance, and congeniality. I am indebted to the other members of my committee, Professors Rebecca Lemon and Vincent Farenga, for their help and support. I would also like to acknowledge the many others who have offered guidance and feedback along the way: Professor Heather James, Andrew Escobedo, Henry Turner, Arthur Kirsch, Gary Waller, Sean Keilen, Gloria Johnson, Jeffrey Gauthier, Doug Eskew, and Andrew Griffin. As my project hopefully reveals, Harry Berger will always be for me the model of literary scholarship through his virtuosity in blending older and newer critical approaches, always with an acumen for close reading. His words of encouragement and faith in my work kept me at it more than he will ever know. I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Nicholas D. Smith, for his unstinting support both in the way of reading countless drafts and maintaining faith in me when I doubted myself most.

On a personal note, I acknowledge Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, who ensured that academic and moral encouragement were only a phone call away. Very importantly, I thank my husband and my daughter for their day-to-day support, affection, and comfort, without which I could not have written this dissertation, and without which life would be a "walking shadow." Lastly, with ineffable gratitude, I acknowledge my parents, whose immigrant dreams and aspirations, have sustained me through this project.

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Abstract

This study grounds itself in the humanist discourses of the passions, virtue, and moderation. By all accounts of English Renaissance literature and culture, virtue represented an important social ideal as the full realization of the human potential. Virtue, for the early moderns, entailed the interactivity of self-knowledge and moderation—the self-governance of the passions—towards the highest goods. Moderation, as broadly conceived for this study, includes both its dispositional and active forms: temperance and prudence, respectively. Drawn from the classical and humanist tradition, moderation becomes the marshaling of affect and action toward best ends.

To this effect, Shakespeare's conception of virtuous moderation, I argue, deploys rather than decries the passions towards the good. As richly illustrated throughout his plays, this integrative moderation also subsumes prudential action within virtue. Situated in the recent return to ethics and classical studies as well as interest in materialist and phenomenological studies of the early modern passions, my project tries to give a fuller account of moral agency by drawing from these various approaches. My neo-Aristotelian, situational method of interpreting human action, I believe, enables valuable, otherwise unattainable insights into character and action, and the early modern ethical and affective experience as it sheds light on twenty-first century grappling with identity and agency.

While grounded in humanist ethics, this study at the same time incisively revises conventional gender conceptions to present a dynamic countermodel to male-inflected virtue. Contrary to classical and humanist notions that moderation is the

property of the ideal man, this examination demonstrates abundantly that moderation is rather the special province of the virtuous virago. Such is the result when male-inflected virtue is re-defined as an integrative, human excellence, harmonizing passion and reason. Traversing through *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Othello*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, this project reveals the dynamic complexity and scope of Shakespeare's dramatization of moderation from the domestic, mercantile, and courtly spheres to the imperial and civic arenas.

Note on Citations

Citations of Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997).

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is abbreviated throughout as *NE*. All citations of Aristotle (*NE*, trans. W. D. Ross, revised by J. O. Urmson; *Politics*, trans. B. Jowett) are from the second volume of *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

All citations of Plato are from *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

Citations of Lodowyck Bryskett are from *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970).

Shakespeare Quarterly and *Renaissance Quarterly* are abbreviated as *SQ* and *RQ*, respectively.

I have regularized the spelling of all citations from early modern sources.

Introduction:

Passion, Virtue, and Moderation in Early Modern England

I. Virtue as the Rational Ruling of the Passions

In *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), Sir Philip Sidney asserts that “the ending end of all earthly learning” is virtue, in his words, “as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodging, can be capable of.”¹ By all accounts of English Renaissance literature and culture, virtue figured as an important social ideal. Conduct books from Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* (English translation 1588) to Henry Peacham’s *The Complete Gentleman* (1622) to Richard Brathwait’s *The English Gentleman* (1630) taught how to be the virtuous man in the best of humanist aspiration and self-amelioration. Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1596), presenting virtues as a fusion of classical and Christian ethics, is grounded on the importance of virtue in the education of a gentleman: the aim of his epic poem, as revealed in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh is “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline.”²

The early modern English conception of virtue derives from Latin *virtus*, literally signifying manly excellence by its root *vir* meaning man. In Renaissance iconography, Hercules became the prevailing symbol of virtue as manliness, courage, and strength. But as Eugene Waith and others have well noted, Hercules, at the crossroads of apparently conflicting values according to popular Renaissance mythology, also came to epitomize

¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Text and Contexts* (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2001), 71, 70.

² Edmund Spenser, *Edmund Spenser’s Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Hugh McClean and Anne Prescott (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 1.

the moral victory of virtue over pleasure.³ Virtue, embodying both physical and moral strength through the famous figure of Hercules, took on other values particular to civil life as the medieval warrior society gradually headed toward the modern civic state: courtly gentility and political prudence as reflected respectively in the conduct books and princes' manuals flourishing during the sixteenth century. As Michael Schoenfeldt argues, however, in his recent monograph, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, the early modern self, "is achieved not, as we might imagine, in the discovery of a hidden self buried deep beneath the encrustations and inauthenticities of civility; rather, it is achieved through discipline, through the forceful imposition of rational order on energies that tend naturally to the twin poles of tyranny and anarchy."⁴ Virtue in the early modern culture was largely understood as self-government, as a rational ruling of inordinate passions, or affections, deemed to be "perturbations of the mind."⁵

Thomas Wright, author of *Passions of the Minde in Generall (1604)*, describes the passions as "things ever in use, and seldom without abuse; ... daily, yea, and almost hourly felt, no less crafty than dangerous, much talked of, and as yet never well taught."⁶ In the same vein, Maister Spenser observes quizzically in Lodowick Bryskett's *A Discourse of Civill Life*: "how cometh it to pass ... that the soul being immortal and impassible, yet by experience we see daily, that she is troubled with lethargies, frenzies,

³ Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Jerrold E. Siegel, "Virtù in and since the Renaissance," *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 4:478, <http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/dhi.cgi?id=dv4-64> (15 June 2007).

⁴ Michael Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73.

⁵ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall (1604)*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 7.

⁶ Wright, p. liv.

melancholy, drunkenness, and such other passions, by which we see her overcome.”⁷

Fulke Greville’s “Chorus Sacerdotum” from his closet drama *Mustapha* (1609), likewise,

laments the great struggle with the passions:

O wearisome condition of humanity!
Born under one law, to another bound;
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity;
Created sick, commanded to be sound.
What meaneth nature by these diverse laws?
Passion and reason, self-division cause.⁸ (1-6)

In Act 4, scene 3 of Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That Ends Well*, the French lords, collectively, sound a similar note on the difficulty of harmonizing the self: like their martial comrade, Bertram, who “contrives against his own nobility, in his proper stream o’erflows himself,” so “we are ourselves .../ Merely our own traitors” (20-25) in our efforts to integrate the warring faculties of our nature. Despite this somewhat bleak view of human nature, humanists rallied for effective action, relying on their faith in human ability. Wright offered his treatise in the hopes that “every man may by this come to a knowledge of himself, which ought to be preferred before all treasures and riches.” Henry Peacham, likewise, argues: “And albeit true it is that Galen saith, we are commonly beholden for the disposition of our minds to the temperature of our bodies, yet much lieth in our power to keep that fount from empoisoning by taking heed to ourselves.”⁹ As Juan Luis Vives, the Spanish humanist and friend of Erasmus and More, put it, “[W]hat greater practical wisdom is there than to know how and what the human passions are:

⁷ Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 202.

⁸ Fulke Greville, *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 5th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 1:990.

⁹ Henry Peacham, *The Complete Gentleman, The Truth of Our Times, and The Art of Living in London*, ed. Virgil B. Heltzel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962), 144.

how they are roused, how quelled?”¹⁰ For the early moderns, grappling with the passions was synonymous with self-governance, or moderation, and self-knowledge, which interrelatedly constitute virtue.¹¹ As Bryskett affirms, the man of moderation “knoweth that he is not born to himself alone, but to civil society and conversation, and to the good of others as well as of himself...”¹²

Virtuous self-government was grounded on the contemporary Galenic physiology that order within both the microcosmic human body and in nature at large is maintained through proper mixture and balance of the four cardinal humors and of the matching natural elements, respectively:

Each humour corresponds to both a characteristic passion and an element of nature: choler, like fire, dry and hot, fuels anger; melancholy, like earth, dry and cold, embodies grief; the sanguinary humour, like air, is moist and hot, and leads to amatory passions; the phlegmatic, like water, is wet and cold, and if not inert, shows itself as fear or astonishment.... Ideal balance varies ... according to the individual *temperament*.¹³

The humors, functioning largely on the physiological plane, expressed themselves more visibly as potent passions on the psychological plane,¹⁴ the two interanimating each

¹⁰ Juan Vives, *On Education: a Translation of the De tradendis disciplines*, trans. Foster Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 232.

¹¹ See Wright, 2: “in fine, every man may by this come to a knowledge of himself, which ought to be preferred before all treasures and riches”; and p. 6-7: “But finally I will conclude, that this subject I entreat of comprehendeth the chief object that all the ancient philosophers aimed at, wherein they placed the most of their felicity, that was *Nosce teipsum*, Know thy selfe: the which knowledge principally consisteth of a perfect experience every man hath of himself in particular, and an universal knowledge of men’s inclinations in common; the former is helped by the latter, the which knowledge is delivered in this treatise.”

¹² Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 154.

¹³ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Scenes in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 39. I am indebted to Bruce Smith for introducing me to Roach’s work during a graduate course on Shakespeare.

¹⁴ Schoenfeldt, 65.

other.¹⁵ It is by this early modern understanding of Galenic physiology that Petruccio, in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, forbids Katherine to eat burnt meat:

For it engenders choler, planteth anger,
And better 'twere that both of us did fast,
Since of ourselves ourselves are choleric,
Than feed it with such overroasted flesh. (4.1.153-56)

Although Petruccio uses the overdoneness of the meat as an excuse to starve Kate into geniality, a psycho-physiological correlation between “grosse meates” and “cholerike stomackes”¹⁶ is, indeed, affirmed in early modern health manuals such as Thomas Elyot's *The Castel of Helthe*. As Wright observes, “There is no passion very vehement, but that it alters extremely some of the four humours of the body; and all physicians commonly agree, that among diverse other extrinsical causes of diseases, one, and not the least, is the excess of some inordinate passion.”¹⁷

The intense interest in the passions during the sixteenth century through the discourse of rational control, government, and discipline of the emotions reveals how acutely the early moderns understood their overwhelming power and the need to regulate them toward salutary ends.¹⁸ The “civil gentleman and prudent politician,” “by penetrating the nature and qualities of his affections, by restraining their inordinate motions,” Wright argues, “winneth a gracious carriage of himself, and rendreth his conversation most grateful to men,”¹⁹ thereby acquiring the gentility of virtuous men. Thus, upon his death in *Julius Caesar*, Brutus, who conscientiously aimed for the

¹⁵ See Wright, 46: the “Passions ingender Humors, and the humours breed passions.”

¹⁶ Thomas Elyot, *The Castel of Helthe (1541)*, ed. Samuel A. Tannenbaum (New York: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1937), 15v-16.

¹⁷ Wright, 4.

¹⁸ See Wright's dedicatory epistle, p. liv: “I was requested by divers worthy Gentlemen, to write briefly some pithie discourse about the passions of the mind....”

¹⁹ Wright, 6.

“common good” (5.5.71) in the name of the republic rather than self-interest, is eulogized as “the noblest Roman of them all.../ [Whose] life was gentle, and the elements/ So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up/ And say to all the world “This was a man!” (5.5.67-74). According to Cicero, the Stoic philosopher and statesman whose ethical works were widely influential during the Renaissance, Brutus exemplifies civic virtue as the proper conjunction of “honesty” and “profit”—two valences of what is “good.”²⁰ Within the early modern concern for self-governance, it is “the disordered, undisciplined self, subject to a variety of internal and external forces that is the site of subjugation, and the subject of horror,”²¹ thereby providing the rationale in Shakespeare’s early comedy for Petruccio’s and Kate’s mutual taming of each other and extirpating of their choleric humor.

II. Perfective Passion

Against the dominant model subjecting emotion to rational rule, humanist and the Reformation traditions within the contexts of both religious and secular life offered powerful validation of passion in its own right. One of the claims of this view gathering momentum in the seventeenth century was that postlapsarian reason was deficient for the attainment of the virtuous life. Even if we were able to “follow reason effortlessly, we could still fall short of virtue” on epistemological grounds, according to philosopher Susan James, “by failing to understand and act on these truths, which can only be derived from some extra-rational source of knowledge.”²² As critics such as Marion Müller,

²⁰ Cicero, *Marcus Ciceroes three books of duties to Marcus his sonne* (1556), trans. Nicolas Grimalde, ed. Gerald O’ Gorman (Washington, D. C.: Associated University Press, 1990), Book I, sig. P3^v.

²¹ Schoenfeldt, 12.

²² Susan James, “Reason, the Passions, and the Good Life,” *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2:1382.

Richard Schoek, and Gail Paster have noted, early modern moral writers have presented Christ as the supreme Epicurean (Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, 1539; *Encomium Moriae*, 1511) and the exemplar of perfect emotionality and right reason (Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, 1640) such that (godly) love, embodied in Christ's Passion, His suffering on the cross, contains the key to the mastery of the passions (Benet of Canfield, *The Rule of Perfection*, 1609; Jean Francois Senault, *The Use of Passions*, 1641; trans. 1649).²³ As Müller meticulously shows, Christian writers such as Wright, Benet, Senault, and Reynolds found a solution to the management of the passions and to self-discovery in the love of God, "the supreme good, who alone perfects man's potentialities and bestows happiness."²⁴ In the soul's *passive* self-abandon to God, "all the passions," according to Benet, "are calmed, all the affections mortified, and all movements stopped, love is ordered, desire bridled, joy moderated, hate put to death, sadness mitigated; vain hope is extinguished, despair repulsed, fear repelled, boldness repressed, and anger appeased"—all transformed into what he deems the true Passion, whereby the soul "does nothing but suffer [God's] inworking."²⁵ In Benet's pen, the ineffable mystical experience of the soul's union with God is expressed through the sensual language of human intimacy:

In this fulfillment [the soul] receives him within her, and by this vanishing, wholly stripped naked, she joins herself to him. All beauty is there shown to the

²³ See Marion Müller, *These Savage Beasts Become Domestick: The discourse on the passions in early modern England* (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2004), 108, 117-18, 147, respectively on Benet, Senault, and Reynolds; Richard Schoek, "English Humanism," *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, ed. Albert Rabil, Jr., (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), on Erasmus, 2:20; Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring The Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 6, on Reynolds.

²⁴ Müller, 71.

²⁵ Benet of Canfield, *The Rule of Perfection: A Translation and Study*, from *Renaissance Dialectic and Renaissance Piety*, trans. Kent Emery, Jr. (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987), 3.5.192.

eyes of the bride, ravishing her in wonder. All sweetness pours into her, imbuing her with gentleness ... What sweetness flows into all her powers, when the left hand of her spouse is under her head, and his right hand embraces her (Canticles 8:3), penetrates within her, and by a living and divine touching works in her innermost part?²⁶

All these writers concur that God's love, or "Charity is absolutely necessary for the governments of our Passions,"²⁷ because in this way, as Reynolds claims, fallible human reason transforms into right reason—that which "guideth the soul to God"²⁸ as the diverse passions are elucidated by the ruling passion of *amor Dei*²⁹ and man reconciled unto himself. They, along with others—the Cambridge Platonist John Smith, Nicolas Malebranche, Blaise Pascal—advanced the notion of passional knowledge gained through the constructive passivity of submission to God's grace.³⁰

Mindful of how strongly Christian ethics came to bear upon Renaissance virtue and its grappling with the passions, I am interested, nonetheless, in early modern representations of how passion is regulated in ethics understood rather in Aristotelian fashion as a course of practical action toward salutary ends in human interactions.³¹ I am fascinated by the exploration and validation of passion, not through the medium of Christian affect, but by its own virtue in the secular context of the humanist tradition. Folly, "in an uncharacteristically sober moment" in Erasmus's *Moriae Encomium*, gives a lucid account of passion: "the emotions not only act as guides to those who are hastening

²⁶ Benet, 3.5.192.

²⁷ Jean Francois Senault, *The Use of Passions (De l'usage des passions, 1641)*, trans. Henry Carey (London, 1649), C3v.

²⁸ Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise on the Passions and Faculties of the Soul*, vol. 6 of *The Works of Edward Reynolds* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1826, 1996), 281.

²⁹ Müller, 157.

³⁰ See James, 2:1385-86 on John Smith; 1383-84; on Nicolas Malebranche; 1387-91 on Blaise Pascal.

³¹ Bryskett, 18-19, 32, concerned with Aristotelian practical wisdom, the knowledge of how to secure the virtuous ends of human life, judiciously distinguished this "active or practical" end as "civil felicity" from "man's [ultimate] felicity ... placed only in heaven."

towards the haven of wisdom, but also wherever virtue is put into practice they are always present to act like spurs or goads as incentives towards good deeds.”³² In this regard, Bishop Reynolds, despite his ultimately Christian understanding, offers a wonderfully expansive definition of passion, which will serve as my point of departure:

Passions are nothing else, but those natural, perfective, and unstrained motions of the creatures unto that advancement of their natures, which they are, by the wisdom, power and providence of their Creator, in their own several spheres, and according to the proportion of their capacities, ordained to receive, by a regular inclination to those objects, whose goodness beareth a natural convenience or virtue of satisfaction unto them;—or by an antipathy and aversion from those, which bearing a contrariety to the good they desire, must needs be noxious and destructive, and, by consequent, odious to their natures. This being the property of all unconstrained self-motions, it followeth, that the root and ground of all passions, is principally the good; and secondarily, or by consequent, the evil of things: as one beareth with it ‘rationem convenientiae,’ a quieting and satisfactory,—the other, ‘rationem disconvenientiae,’ a disturbing, nature.³³

This “perfective” passion which stirs within the fallible human³⁴ is my particular interest.

Passion is “the fountain and origin of all external actions,”³⁵ and “its indifferency ... is altered into good or evil, by virtue of the dominion of right reason, or of the violence of their own motions.”³⁶ Being “the original of merit,” Senault claims, “it is ... the spring-

³² Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly and Letter to Maarten Van Dorp 1515*, trans. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994), 45. Wright, 17, also argues their beneficial use: “Passions, are not only, not to be extinguished (as the Stoics seemed to affirm) but sometimes to be moved, & stirred up for the service of virtue.” Reynolds, 46, argues similarly: “I cannot think on any other general effect which belongeth equally unto them all, but that only which Tully hath observed, out of peripatetics, of anger, that they are the sharpeners, and (to keep his phrase) ‘the whetstones’ of virtue which make it more operative and fruitful.... Aristotle, speaking of these two elements and principles of all passion, pleasure and grief ... makes them the rules of all our actions.... Thus, anger, zeal, shame, grief, love, are, in their several orders, the whetstones whereon true fortitude sharpeneth its sword....”

³³ Reynolds, 28-29.

³⁴ See Plato, *Symposium and Phaedrus, Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997); see also Erasmus speaking of Plato’s conception of love in Richard Strier, “Against the Rule of Reason,” *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion*, ed. Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe, and Mary Floyd-Wilson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 28: “the madness of lovers is the height of happiness.”

³⁵ Wright, 174.

³⁶ Reynolds, 35.

head either of wickedness or goodness.”³⁷ “[T]hough of virtue,” Reynolds writes, passions are like fire in “adding spirits and edge to all good undertakings, and blessing them with a happier issue than they could alone have attained unto; yet if once they fly out beyond their bounds, and become subject only to their own laws and encroach upon reason’s right,—there is nothing more tumultuous and tyrannical.”³⁸ Thus, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, this emotive intensity presents itself as both positive and negative, depending on its motive: on the one hand, a “noble passion, child of integrity” (4.3.115-16) proving Macduff’s loyalty, and, on the other, the perturbations of Macbeth’s evil actions that his wife tries to downplay to the other lords: “If much you note him/ You shall offend him, and extend his passion” (3.4.55-56).³⁹ Tragedy, as the depiction of *ethos* in action, is, in essence, the dramatic account of how the protagonist’s perfective passion goes awry.

Specifically examining the enactment of passion through an ethical lens, this project with its focus on character turns primarily to drama rather than to lyric or epic poetry or prose romance, which likewise address virtue. Though one may fruitfully examine virtuous character and action, for instance, in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, as I have done elsewhere,⁴⁰ the allegorical restraints upon character make the epic romance less congenial to this project than plays within the Shakespearean canon, the reservoir of psychologically complex, well-developed characters, a primary factor in my choice of

³⁷ Senault, sig. K2. For other metaphors, “buds of virtue” and “lamps and beacons to conduct and excite us to our journey’s end,” see Henry More (1690) in James, 91, 76.

³⁸ Reynolds, 37.

³⁹ See Keir Elam, “Inelocutio: Shakespeare and the rhetoric of the passions,” *Shakespeare: Rhétorique du texte et du spectacle*, ed. M. T. Jones-Davies (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992), 147.

⁴⁰ Unhae Langis, “Boldness, Chastity, and Virtue in Book III of Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*,” (paper presented at the 5th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities, Honolulu, HI, January 12-17, 2007).

texts. For much the same reason, within the dramatic genre itself, the single-minded pursuits of Marlovian overreachers and the heroic passion depicted in Beaumont and Fletcher's plot-focused tragi-comedies are less suited for my purposes of examining how strong, well-developed characters interact with other characters with varying degrees of moderation through changing circumstances towards good ends. It is Shakespeare who consistently depicts psychologically nuanced characters engaged in complex action ripe for ethical examination. Representing virtuous moderation as a potent integration of passion and reason in the largely secular contexts of his plays, Shakespeare prefigures through drama the integrative theories of the passions advanced by the Christian writers and philosophers of the seventeenth century.

III. The Player's Passion and the Theatrical Controversy

In Everyman's concern of managing passions, as Wright urged, in the aim of virtue, the theater, in its reliance on passion as its special medium, served as the public arena offering vivid models and countermodels to behold and examine, emulate and eschew. Akin to the passions upon which it is grounded, the theatrical spectacle was a morally indifferent institution becoming an agent of good or evil, depending on the judiciousness of its creator and its audience. Consequently, the stage, like our modern-day television, had its proponents and detractors regarding its social influence. With regard to the learning of virtue, Petrarch, reflecting the humanist leaning toward rhetoric, avowed: "It is one thing to know, another to love; one thing to understand, another to will. [Aristotle] teaches what virtue is, I do not deny that; but his lesson lacks the words that sting and set afire and urge toward love of virtue and hatred of vice, or ... does not

enough of such power.”⁴¹ What ties rhetoric, furthermore, to drama, explains Keir Elam, “is not simply that they are two modes of verbal and corporeal performance . . . , but that the drama . . . is itself dedicated to the representation and achievement of pathos. . . .”⁴² If “it is not *gnosis* but *praxis* must be the fruit,” Sidney, following Aristotle, affirms that “*praxis* cannot be, without being *moved* to practice”⁴³ (last italics mine), that is, stirred to motion via emotion. The delightful imitation of virtue in dramatic poetry most effectively moves the audience to *praxis* through “the affects of admiration and commiseration.”⁴⁴ Sidney holds the poet, thus, superior to the philosopher and the historian in his sovereign ability to teach, delight, and move his audience to virtue:

Now therein of all sciences . . . is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it. Nay, he doth, as if your journey should lie through a fair vineyard, at the first give you a cluster of grapes, that full of that taste, you many long to pass further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue.⁴⁵

Within poetic drama, Sidney praises tragedy most highly in representing “whatsoever is most worthy to be learned in that it “openeth great wounds and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue, that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest

⁴¹ Francesco Petrararch, *On His Own Ignorance, The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer and Paul Oskar Kristellar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 103.

⁴² Elam, 148.

⁴³ Sidney, 83.

⁴⁴ Sidney, 90.

⁴⁵ Sidney, 84-85.

their tyrannical humors, that with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration teacheth the uncertainty of this world....”⁴⁶

Early detractors of the stage like John Northbrooke and Phillip Stubbes in his first edition of *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583), Jonah Barish notes, excepted the use of play in schools from their lashing, indicating that they might serve to educate if properly used.⁴⁷ In exempting “some kind of plays, tragedies and interludes” “of great ancientie,” as “very honest and very commendable exercises,”⁴⁸ Stubbes’s qualifications regarding the theater align with Sidney’s call for “the right use of comedy” instead of its “odious” abuse by “naughty play-makers and stage-keepers.”⁴⁹

As the anti-theatrical movement gathered momentum, the religious opposition against play performances became more virulent. In the influential *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), Stephen Gosson ruthlessly dismantles the edifying effect of plays:

The argument of tragedies is wrath, cruelty, incest, injury, murder, either violent by sword or voluntary by poison; the persons, gods, goddesses, furies, fiends, kings, queens and mighty men. The ground-work of comedies is love, cozenage, flattery, bawdry, sly conveyance of whoredom; the persons, cooks, queans, knaves, bawds, parasites, courtesans, lecherous old men, amorous young men.... The best play you can pick out, is but a mixture of good and evil, how can it be then the schoolmistress of life?⁵⁰

Sidney’s answer to the presence of evil in plays is that drama presents “an imitation of the common errors of our life”: “as in geometry, the oblique must be known as well as the right, and in arithmetic, the odd as well as the even: so in the actions of our life, who

⁴⁶ Sidney, 90.

⁴⁷ Jonah Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 83.

⁴⁸ Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomy of the Abuses in England* (London, 1583), sigs. 5v-6, A Preface to the Reader.

⁴⁹ Sidney, 89-90.

⁵⁰ Stephen Gosson, *Markets of Bawdrie: The Dramatic Criticism of Stephen Gosson*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney, vol. 4 of *Salzburg Studies in English Literature* (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1974), 160.

seeth not the filthiness of evil, wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue.”⁵¹

Sidney’s call for moral open-mindedness for the sake of attaining truth is akin to both Wright’s and Reynolds’s view of the perfective passions as morally indifferent and later John Milton’s argument in his famous treatise against censorship, “Areopagitica,” that all the consumables of the world—“not only meats and drinks but all kinds of knowledge”—are literally *goods*, hence, good not evil of themselves: “knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defiled. For books are as meats and viands are—some of good, some of evil substance, and yet God in unapocryphal vision said without exception, ‘Rise, Peter, kill and eat,’ leaving the choice to each man’s discretion.”⁵² Instead of presenting sanitized pictures, Shakespeare offers in his drama “a mingled yarn, [of] good and ill together,” ethically faithful representations of “the web of our life” (*All’s Well That Ends Well*, 4.3.69-70), poetically rendered to uplift his audience through pleasure and insight. Shakespeare’s plays in the coexistence of good and evil weave elusive but ever dynamical interactions of stage persons with each other.

In objecting to the ill effects of tragedies and comedies on playgoers, Gosson implausibly assumes the theater’s unequivocal power through the medium of imitation to reproduce behavior represented on stage among its spectators in their own life:

The beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in tragedies drive us to immoderate sorrow, heaviness, womanish weeping and mourning, whereby we become lovers of dumps and lamentation, both enemies to fortitude. Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vein, that they make us lovers of laughter and pleasure, without any mean, both foes to temperance. What schooling is this?⁵³

⁵¹ Sidney, 89.

⁵² John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), 727.

⁵³ Gosson, 161.

Such a reductive, monkey-see-monkey-do account of the theater's influence on the daily conduct of its spectators across society assumes a rather low opinion of the general public as to their intelligence and abilities, and their susceptibility to abuse, anti-social behavior, and general licentiousness. Gosson invokes the reverent ethical ideals of fortitude and temperance from antiquity at the same time that he would prohibit people from cultivating the golden mean by beholding the undesirable extreme—since he categorically denounces tragedies and comedies as provoking emotional excesses. The “schooling” that Gosson advocates is prohibition, or censorship of all knowledge of the world to the strictly wholesome and respectable. In particular, it betrays the humanist rhetorical strategy of *utramque partem*—the ability to argue on both sides—training that assumes that sound education must entail the exercise of critical evaluation, the discrimination of good from bad, and the reasons therefore.

Thus, Sidney argues that “speaking pictures”⁵⁴ of poetry and drama can provide knowledge to help us to sort out confusions in our practical life:

This doth the comedy handle so in our private and domestic matters, as with hearing it, we get, as it were, an experience what is to looked for of a niggardly Demea, of a crafty Davus, of a flatter Gnatho, of a vainglorious Thraso, and not only to know what effects are to be expected, but to know who be such by the signifying badge given them by the comedian. And little reason hath any man to say that men learn the evil by seeing it so set out, since ... there is no man living but by the force truth hath in nature, no sooner seeth these men their parts but wisheth in *pistrinum* [i.e., prison], although perchance the lack of his own faults lie so hidden behind his back that he seeth not himself to dance the same measure, whereto yet nothing can more open his eyes than to find his own actions contemptibly set forth.⁵⁵

Perhaps holding too much credence in man's perfective nature in counterpoint to

Gosson's skepticism, Sidney, nonetheless, highlights how theater, through its mirroring

⁵⁴ Sidney, 66.

⁵⁵ Sidney, 89-90.

function, can promote self-knowledge, given a certain truth of human nature—that we are often most blind to our own faults.

Gosson, however, throws the following rebuttal at the instructive power of dramatic representations:

paradventure you will say, that by these kinds of plays the authors instruct us how to love with constancy, to sue with modesty, and to loath whatsoever is contrary unto us. In my opinion, the *discipline* we get by plays is like to the *justice* that a certain schoolmaster taught in Persia, which taught his scholars to lie and not to lie, to deceive and not to deceive, with a distinction how they might do it to their friends, and how to their enemies; to their friends, for exercise; to their foes, in earnest. Wherein many of his scholars became so skillful by practice, by custom so bold, that their dearest friends paid more for their learning than their enemies. I would wish the players to beware of this kind of schooling, lest that whilst they teach youthful gentlemen how to love and not to love, how to woo and not to woo, their scholars grow as *cunning* as the Persians.⁵⁶ (my italics)

Despite Gosson's complaint that some of the Persian students came to wield the art of politic dealing without an adequate system of moral self-restraint in place, such discipline, justice, or cunning is akin to what Aristotle counseled in his celebrated *Nicomachean Ethics* as practical wisdom, a knowledge of the right response of emotion and motion for a particular situation, in a word, moderation:

both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with right motive, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue.⁵⁷

The standard text in moral philosophy at the universities, with more than sixty editions published before 1600,⁵⁸ Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* "emerged from the

⁵⁶ Gosson, 161.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.1106b17-23.

⁵⁸ Albert D. Menut, "Castiglione and the Nicomachean Ethics," *PMLA* 58.2 (1943), 317.

Reformation struggles as a keystone of both Catholic and Protestant education,”⁵⁹ with the golden mean as a cultural staple of the Renaissance.

Such a discipline of moderation was exercised by the actor, who, according to early modern thought, was able to marshal the passions of the mind—so called because roused by the mental functions of the imagination, memory, and perception—through “their bodies—larynx, limbs, torso, and head together—thereby transforming invisible impulse into spectacle and unspoken feeling into eloquence.”⁶⁰ Seventeenth-century theories of acting were grounded not on dramaturgy *per se*, but rather on a physiological understanding of how the passions operate on the human body.⁶¹ Intense emotion, Joseph Roach explains, is a “reaction of volatile inhalations on the blood,” which the ancients and the early moderns believed to be “copiously present in the chest around the heart as a congregation of *humours* and *spirits*.”⁶² The actor is one especially attuned to the bodily workings of passion, applying this knowledge to dramatic self-transformation, “‘fashion[ing] all his active spirits’ into some shape he has imagined.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Charles B. Schmitt, “Aristotle’s Ethics in the Sixteenth Century: Some Preliminary Considerations,” *The Aristotelian Tradition and Renaissance Universities* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979, 1984), 94. See also Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, *A History of Western Philosophy: Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3:778. See William R. Elton, “Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58.2 (1997), 337, n. 2, for a copious bibliography. See Henry S. Turner on *NE*’s influence on poetic discourse, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580–1630*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 47–50, 62–63, 65.

⁶⁰ Roach, 32.

⁶¹ Roach, 30.

⁶² Roach, 26.

⁶³ Roach, 30. Early modern understanding of the bodily motion of emotion ascended through Galen to the classical notion of *pneumatism*, the association of spirits with psychic phenomena. According to this ancient Greek conception, intense emotion, Joseph Roach explains, is a “reaction of volatile inhalations on the blood, which [the ancients] believed to be copiously present in the chest around the heart as a congregation of *humours* and *spirits*” (26). The ancients’ association of breath with psychic phenomena is more familiarly known in the notion of ecstasy as enthusiasm, or divine possession, through literal inspiration by Apollo, the god of divination and aesthetic creativity. By the time of Quintilian, the primary mediator of the rhetoric of the passions from the ancient to the early modern times, these supra-rational workings manifested themselves inherently within the body itself (27).

The actor's art, in Roach's words, "requires him to discover a *via media* between the Scylla of spirit and the Charybdis of humours," between purposeful passion and aimless disorder: "His art requires him to set his bodily instrument in expressive motion, not by freeing his actions, but by confining them in direction, purpose, and shape. He has to keep his flammable inner mixtures stable even in the heat of passion."⁶⁴ As Hamlet advises the players, "in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say the whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness," and this moderation promotes the "purpose of playing"—"to show virtue her own feature" (*Hamlet*, 3.2.5-7, 19-21). Cleopatra's consummately controlled play-acting in another Shakespearean tragedy, leading to her psychic victory over imperialist Octavius, serves as prime instance of the actor's virtuosity deployed in the service of virtue. This "prudent mediocrity," which, Wright claims, "best ... marked in stage players,"⁶⁵ constitutes precisely the virtue of moderation that spectators could potentially take away from the theater and apply judiciously in their own lives.

Gosson's caution regarding the Persian scholars' immoral conduct should concern not the knowledge nor its creators and purveyors but rather the receivers of knowledge themselves for not properly applying it. A discussion of theatrical debate in Philip Massinger's metadramatic play, *The Roman Actor* (1626), reinforces this view. Like Sidney, Paris, the title character of Massinger's play, defends theater for promoting virtue: "All that have any spark of Roman in them,/ The slothful arts laid by, contend to be/ Like those they see presented."⁶⁶ In practice, however, the effects of drama seem to

⁶⁴ Roach, 52.

⁶⁵ Wright, 179.

⁶⁶ Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002), 14.

be morally ineffectual. The first play within a play, performed as an object lesson on greed, fails to dissuade its intended viewer from miserliness. Through the second play, the Empress falls in love with Paris, thereby inducing adultery. In the last play within a play, Paris meets his death in the hands of the murderous Domitian, who uses theater as a cover for his vicious vengeance. Appearing at first glance to undercut Paris's apology for actors, all these instances, in fact, however, reinforce the idea of the spectator's sovereign will in moral actions: in the first, to reject the moral lesson ineptly forced upon him; in the second, to pursue desire beyond the bounds of discretion in a willful substitution of theater for reality; and in the third, to execute vengeance in an active exploitation of theater. These instances of individual will directed toward vicious acts are, in fact, consistent with further points of Paris's oration. Theater being the accurate representation of reality, Paris pleads, "we cannot help it,"⁶⁷ if individuals in the audience see their vices faithfully mirrored on stage. The implication, here, is that theater does not engender but simply reflect the already existing vice.

In sum, Sidney, instead of reducing comedies to "mere trifles, or Italian bawdry, or wooing of gentlewomen," as Gosson does, speaks ultimately to their right use, leading not to emotional excess, but rather the just integration, or "heavenly mingle" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.1.58) of pleasure and profit⁶⁸:

all the end of the comical part be not upon such scornful matters stir laughter only, but, *mixed* with it, that delightful teaching which is the end of poesy. And the great fault even in that point of laughter, and forbidden plainly by Aristotle, is that they stir laughter in sinful things, which are rather execrable than ridiculous, or in miserable, which are rather to be pitied than scorned.⁶⁹ (my italics)

⁶⁷ Massinger, 15.

⁶⁸ With regard to the tragic genre, Sidney speaks of the "sweet violence of tragedy" (90).

⁶⁹ Sidney, 118.

The abuses associated with the theater, both at the productive and receiving end, do not detract from the potential of theatrical performance, employing the passions as its primary medium to instruct its audience on how to marshal the powerful emotions toward best ends. Iago of Shakespeare's *Othello* epitomizes the vicious character who furthers his evil purposes through consummate acting and thereby highlights the moral perils that false "mediocritie" presents to the theatrical audience. Nonetheless, the censorship of vicious conduct from the stage does not promote the proper ethical education of the spectators, which requires, instead, that they be given the opportunity to judge the right response that a situation demands in theater as in life. The ethical evaluation incumbent upon dramatic characters and their spectators is profound and rigorous. This study explores the phenomenological complexity of situational ethics within the framework of virtuous moderation.

IV. Virtuous Moderation as Disciplined Passion

Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, the major ethical text of university curriculum, defines moderation as a disposition to choose the just mean between excess and deficiency in affect and action as a response to varying circumstances and relative to each particular person.⁷⁰ As a situational ethic, moderation can only be limned "in outline and not precisely,"⁷¹ but that didn't stop the golden mean from becoming a powerful cultural commonplace as Joshua Scodel affirms in his recent groundbreaking study, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature*:

Early modern English authors of different religious, political, and social commitments and backgrounds often espouse the mean as a norm for everyday life. "The golden mean is best" is one of numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-

⁷⁰ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.1106a28.

⁷¹ Aristotle, *NE*, II.2.1104a1-8.

century proverbs in this vein. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers frequently extol “moderation,” often equated with the Aristotelian mean. The popularity of books on courtesy and manners, both homegrown and translated from continental sources, attests to the massive early modern concern with the regulation of behavior. Influenced by Aristotle, Seneca, and especially Cicero, such works invoke the mean as a guide to well-nigh every aspect of gentle behavior. Heavily indebted to Aristotelian notions, Protestant ministers and Galenic doctors alike preach the mean in conjugal love and sexual activity, diet, labor and recreation.⁷²

Despite its ubiquitous invocation as an ideal, there was a great divergence in how this ethical principle was to be construed or applied to the various facets of early modern life.⁷³

Given his complexity of thought, Shakespeare, throughout his corpus, presents diverse representations of moderation, reflective of various contemporary views. For one, he presents moderation, or rather its lack, as (Aristotelian) (in)temperance with regard to bodily appetites, for instance, through the speaker of Sonnet 129,⁷⁴ the lascivious Goth brothers in *Titus Andronicus*, or the bawdy characters in the comedies. This temperance in Octavius, (“I had rather fast from all, four days,/ Than drink so much in one” [*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.7.96-97]), however, also becomes linked with his political virtuosity, revealed in the following dialectical exchange between him and his imperial co-ruler: when Antony lulls him to “Be a child o’th’ time,” Caesar reveals his unrelenting determination: “Possess it, I’ll make answer” (2.7.94-95). What Louis, the French dauphin, in *King John* remarks about the English king’s swift approach echoes Antony’s

⁷² Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 3.

⁷³ Scodel, 3.

⁷⁴ This sonnet with the beginning line, “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame,” depicts the all-too-familiar male ambivalence towards shameful lust.

subsequent surprise that the hostile Octavius has crossed the Ionian Sea and taken Tolyne with such “celerity” (3.7.24):

So hot a speed with such advice disposed,
Such *temperate* order in so fierce a cause,
Doth want example: who hath read or heard
Of any kindred action like to this? (*King John*, 3.4.11-14; my italics)

Here, temperance signifies the cool-headedness enabling one to choose and pursue the best course of action. The mean, in this manner, further becomes a kind of self-promotion through deft strategists like Octavius and Henry V in the high-powered political arena and fatuous gallants in the comic courtly scenes, like Boyet, who “can sing a mean most meanly” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost* 5.2.327-28).⁷⁵ Moreover, moderation, gender-inflected, appears in Shakespearean drama as the conduct book ideal of feminine virtue, for instance, in Lucentio’s first description of Bianca, “Maid’s mild behaviour and sobriety” (*Taming of the Shrew*, 1.1.70-71) as opposed to Constance’s ranting, “Ay, who doubts that? a will! a wicked will:/ A woman’s will; a canker’d grandam’s will!”, which prompts the following chiding from King Philip: “Peace, lady! pause, or be more *temperate*:/ It ill beseems this presence to cry aim/ To these ill-tuned repetitions” (*King John*, 2.1.93-97, my italics).

⁷⁵ For other examples of the mean conceived as self-advancement, see Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (1561), trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, ed. Walter Raleigh (London: David Nutt, 1900), <http://www.darkwing.uoregon.edu/~rbear/courtier/courtier2.html> (11 April 2008), 2.7: “to get him praise worthily and a good estimation with all men, and favour with such great men as he shall attend upon, ... it [is] behooveful [the courtier] have the understanding to frame all his life and to set forth his good qualities generally in company with all men without purchasing himself envy.... Therefore it behooveth our courtier in all his doings to be chary and heedful, and what so he sayeth or doeth to accompany it with wisdom, and not only to set his delight to have in himself parts and excellent qualities, but also to order the tenor of his life after such a trade, that the whole may be answerable unto these parts, and see the self same to be always and in every thing such, that it disagree not from it self, but make one body of all these good qualities, so that every deed of his may be compact and framed of al the virtues, as the Stoics say the duty of a wise man is: although not withstanding always one virtue is the principal, but all are so knit and linked one to an other, that they tend to one end, and all may be applied and serve to every purpose”; see also Scodel, 52-54 on Francis Bacon.

Among Shakespeare's various depictions of the mean, none, I believe, is as innovative and potent as virtuous moderation, deploying rather than decrying passion towards salutary and excellent ends. In this sense, Shakespeare distinguishes himself from most of his contemporaries, who pitted passion against moderation, extreme against a "lukewarm" mean, as meticulously detailed in Scodel's book.⁷⁶ Shakespeare's conception of integrative moderation proves faithful to the Aristotelian mean as a situational ethic, which comprehends powerful affect and action. Moderation is a virtuous extreme in value and an instrumental mean in practice, involving the entire range of intense and moderate passion and action: an excellence of disciplined passion.⁷⁷ In Aristotle's famous illustration of moderation as the action of a skilled archer aiming at his target,⁷⁸ the mean and the extreme converge literally in the bull's eye. As Aristotle suggests, discerning and aiming for the target in real life is much more complex than in archery in that the just mean is a moving target—not a simple arithmetic mean—varying by person, by circumstance, by emotion. Despite the difficulty of this ongoing project of human perfectibility, moderation, as the original meaning of *hamartia* suggests, is a demanding but forgiving taskmaster, requiring—in the case of failure given our inherent fallibility—that we aim better next time. As Shakespeare so richly shows, this perfective moderation, in harmonizing passion and reason, fuses effective strategy with virtue. The virtuous mean comprehends rather than eschews the sometimes extreme measures required of prudence; affectively, moderation, as situation demands, might entail an

⁷⁶ I am borrowing a term from the early seventeenth century religious controversies regarding fundamental doctrines, pitting the "zeale" of the Puritans against the "lukewarmnesse" of their moderate opponents. See Scodel, 6.

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.1107a6-8.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, I.2.1094a23-24.

intense expression of passion (e.g., anger) or a submerged one (e.g., love), without ever extirpating it.

Metadramatically underpinning this disciplined passion is the actor's "mediocritie," his ability to control his actions in the heat of passion, precisely what Hamlet urges on the Player: as Roach incisively notes, a "whirlwind of your passion" simultaneously played with a "temperance that will give it smoothness" (*Hamlet*, 3.2.7-9).⁷⁹ Shakespeare's plays show how this "Well temper'd Zeale"⁸⁰ may successfully guide protagonists' endeavors, passions, and pursuits of self-knowledge and self-governance from sites of domestic comedy to the arenas of civic organization and imperial politics. Through the dramatic medium grounded in controlled passion, Shakespeare effectively articulates the Renaissance ideal of "mediocritie" as excellence in guiding passion toward salubrious ends instead of a lackluster state as described in "In Praise of a Contented Mind":

Some weigh their pleasure by their lust,
Their wisdom by their rage of will,
Their treasure is their only trust;
And cloaked craft their store of skill.
But all the pleasure that I find
Is to maintain a quiet mind.

My wealth is health and perfect ease;
My conscience clear my chief defense;
I neither seek by bribes to please,
Nor by deceit to breed offense.
Thus do I live; thus will I die.
Would all did so as well as I!⁸¹ (37-48)

⁷⁹ Roach, 33.

⁸⁰ This term is taken from Richard Whitlock, who responded to the religious debates during the Interregnum "by distinguishing a 'Well temper'd Zeale,' the virtuous mean, from the deficient extreme of [Arminian] 'Lukewarmnesse' with which it was falsely identified by the overzealous." See Scodel, 7.

⁸¹ Anonymous, *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 5th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1986), 1: 995.

The anonymous speaker here exalts mediocrity not as excellence but as the bland, moderate value, by which we understand the word today. The last line's smugness belies his claim to virtue. The facile rhyming underscores the simplistic reduction of the vastly complex and ever flexible conduct of virtue into epigrammatic triteness: "My wealth is health and perfect ease"—no virtue this! The "mean estate" of virtue is not to be sought for the sake of deprivation, self-restraint, or by pretensions of excellence as vividly embodied two centuries later by George Eliot's Casaubon, the mediocre scholar moldering away in "middle march"; rather, moderation entails rational action fueled by perfective passion, aimed at the good. The deliberately active life that constitutes virtue abhors complacency and requires constant modulation toward perfection. As E. K. notes in the emblem closing the July eclogue of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579), "Albeit all bounty dwelleth in mediocrity, yet perfect felicity dwelleth in supremacy."⁸²

V. Gender Bending

Virtue described thus far referred to the excellent action of those allowed to participate fully in the public sphere, i.e., male citizens, with the exclusion of women and slaves. Women, subject to patriarchal control, were relegated to a different, passive conduct of virtue. By Shakespeare's time, virtue had divided along gender lines to designate female chastity (OED 2c) and manly excellence including courage and valor (OED 7). Early modern literature ranging from drama and poetry to conduct books and marriage manuals attest to these norms of gendered virtue. Countless manuals on female conduct, such as Juan Luis Vives's *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1523, trans. 1540),

⁸² Edmund Spenser, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, 1579.

enjoined women to be chaste, silent, and obedient, mirroring their husbands' wills.⁸³

Nonetheless, descriptive as opposed to prescriptive writings, Phyllis Rackin argues, directs us to compelling evidence that women's activities in public and political arenas, including playgoing, were more widespread than we would otherwise believe.⁸⁴

With respect to virtuous moderation, women were considered less capable of exercising self-control because through their "loose, soft and tender" flesh, they were humorally "subject to all passions and perturbations," in the words of the Dutch physician, Levinus Lemnius.⁸⁵ According to early modern medical opinion, women's bodily coldness—their having less natural heat than their male counterparts—was responsible, Gail Paster explains, for their "limited capacity for productive agency, individuality, and higher reasoning."⁸⁶ Explanations of the psycho-physiological differences between the sexes cut both ways, however. Anthony Gibson, for instance, in a treatise on women's behalf, presents quite the opposite conclusions from the normative discourse of male superiority based on greater rational faculty:

The nature of a woman being inclined to sadness, discovers wisdom, makes her prudent and apprehensive: whereas men are commonly rash and unruly, because diverse appetites transport them, to many frivolous and fleeting considerations, which mighty fault you shall find few women, or none at all infected with.⁸⁷

With regard to intelligent productivity, Wendy Wall, in her recent work, *Staging Domesticity*, presents historical and literary evidence for women's substantial agency in the family economy and household businesses through an expansive understanding of

⁸³ See Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 117.

⁸⁴ Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.

⁸⁵ Levinus Lemnius, *Secret Miracles of Nature* (London, 1658), 274, 273.

⁸⁶ Paster, 79.

⁸⁷ Anthony Gibson, *A woman's worth, defended against all the men in the world*, translation of Alexandre de Pontaymeri's *Paradoxe apologétique, où il est fidèlement démontré que la femme est beaucoup plus parfaite que l'homme en toute action de vertu* (London, 1599), 21v.

early modern female “housework” to include butchery, cheesemaking, and medical care.⁸⁸

Aligned with these latter views of greater female agency in early modern life, Shakespeare advances the marginal female protagonist rather than the dominant male protagonist as the agent of virtuous moderation. Contrary to social expectations, he presents the *virago*, the bold female, as more congenial to virtue than her male counterpart, traditionally associated with *virtus*, manly excellence. Such is the result when male-inflected virtue is re-defined as an integrative, human excellence, harmonizing passion and reason. In tempering the rule of reason, Shakespeare rescues the *virago* from patriarchal condemnation, validates her as an agent of good, and thereby also recuperates the term of rebuke into its literal sense of a maid acting as man, i.e., exercising the agency traditionally associated with men.

It is difficult to assess what may have been Shakespeare’s personal views—feminist or misogynist—about women and their abilities based solely on his diverse representation of women in his plays and poems. It is generally known, however, that Shakespeare, as a skillfully collaborative playwright, readily created female roles around the particular skills or limitations of his boy actors.⁸⁹ From the early modern perspective on gender differences, one could argue from the theatrical convention of boy actors playing women that extraordinary women characters are the product of feminine emotionality as expected of female roles superposed upon the given rational abilities of astute boy actors. Despite the prescriptive ideology of the hierarchy of being by which

⁸⁸ Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁸⁹ See James L. Hill, “‘What, are they children?’: Shakespeare’s Tragic Women and the Boy Actors,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 26 (1986): 256.

male movements toward the female are viewed in terms of lack and female movements toward the male, in terms of wholeness, the boy actors become the embodied agents by which females are made whole without males necessarily experiencing lack.⁹⁰ Shakespeare's integrative virtue, as modeled through viragos of disciplined passion, exposes the patriarchal myth of maleness as wholeness for what it is—in Harry Berger's words, “the structure of suspicion and castration . . . known as manhood.”⁹¹ Instead of men who guard their socio-political, economical, and legal prerogatives in a constant defensive state, it is the women, having less to lose and more to gain in their subordinate position, who are thus motivated for expansive action. In a gorgeous flight of empathic imagination linking two kinds of fledglings, Shakespeare, empowering his boy actors in expansive dramatic roles, also came to empower women characters in some of the most memorable, charismatic female roles in literature. Despite the early modern aspiration to be the complete man—both the courtly lover and the valiant warrior⁹²—male protagonists in Shakespearean drama fall behind their female counterparts in such an integrative enterprise. Among the men, few, for example, Henry V and Orlando, attain measurable success in this endeavor. The female protagonists who attain or measurably attain rational/passional integration—among them, Helena, Portia, Kate, Rosalind, and Cleopatra—exceed their male counterparts in both quantity and quality of their virtue. It is these virtuous viragos, who, in effectively enacting disciplined passion, present

⁹⁰ My thanks to Andrew Escobedo for guidance in sharpening this idea. See also Scodel, 145, who argues that some Elizabethan poets “idealized women [like Elizabeth I and Mary Sidney (Samuel Daniel's “Delia”)] as men's spiritual superiors, thus rejecting the traditional denigration of erotic devotion to women as shamefully effeminizing.”

⁹¹ Harry Berger, Jr., “The Spectre of Contaminated Intimacy in *Othello*,” *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 4 (1999): 258.

⁹² See Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002), 61.

themselves as the promoters of traditionally male virtue, not its inhibitors as charged by patriarchal authorities. Shakespeare's virtuous viragos, deftly navigating between the gendered roles of female passivity and male activity, promote excellence both in the personal and civic spheres. Shakespeare's virtuous women resist the constraints of these socially constructed roles, invoking the early modern generic definition of virtue as excellent *human* activity: "superiority or excellence, unusual ability, merit, or distinction, in some respect" (OED 5a). With regard to the dramatic convention of boy actors playing female parts, gender bending on stage may have serious consequences for gender roles in real life: if males can plausibly incorporate emotional to their rational qualities, females could vice-a-versa plausibly incorporate rational to their emotional qualities. In either case, men and women are striving toward a human excellence, accessible to both sexes.

VI. Moderation within the Scheme of the Four Cardinal Virtues

Because Shakespeare and his humanist contemporaries understood human excellence within the ancient discourse of virtue, it behooves us further to consider moderation as one of the four cardinal virtues, alongside courage, justice, and prudence. The cardinal virtues, according to classical tradition, are the hinges on which all moral virtues depend (Latin *cardo*, meaning "hinge").⁹³ These four do not constitute some sacred and definitive tetrad of a transhistorical ethical system; at the same time, however, no serious ethical study can do without closely examining this tetrad, the keystone of secular virtues in the Western tradition. Lodowycck Bryskett provides a helpful commentary on the interrelationship among the four virtues in his *A Discourse on Civill*

⁹³ A just society, according to Plato, *The Republic*, IV.427e, mirroring the well-ordered tri-partite soul on a civic level, was "wise, courageous, moderate, and just." See also John Rickaby. "Cardinal Virtues," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03343a.htm> (2 June 2008).

Life. Bryskett's treatise, as its full title suggests, is a "discourse, containing the ethic part of moral philosophy: fit to instruct a gentleman in the course of a virtuous life,"⁹⁴ identical in aim with Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, its epic romance counterpart. Moral philosophy, according to humanist thought, "frameth men fittest for civil conversation, teaching them orderly what moral virtues are, and particularly what is the proper action of every one, and likewise what vice is, and how unseemly a thing, and how harmful to a good mind the spot and contagion thereof is."⁹⁵ Aiming to expand the knowledge of ancient ethics in England, Bryskett's *Discourse* offers a "translation of ... choice grafts and flowers, taken from the Greek and Latin philosophy" for the "culturation and manuring" of English minds.⁹⁶ With engaging conversation framing the three-day discourses, a Boccaccian model popular among Elizabethan prose dialogue writers, the treatise, heavily indebted to contemporary Italian commentaries on Aristotle and Plato, discourses upon the moral virtues, as interlocuted by eight English speakers.

In this endeavor, the *Discourse* provides an insightful commentary on the interrelationship among the four cardinal virtues. The first, courage, was essential in the physical protection and preservation of the polity.⁹⁷ The second, moderation, or temperance, involving the "*concupiscible* appetite ... is exercised specially about the senses of tasting and feeling, but chiefly about the wanton lusts of the flesh...."⁹⁸

Bryskett adverts that temperance does not "ruleth & bridleth the inordinate delights, ... for this virtue ... is the mean in all actions, and a seemliness in all things appertaining to

⁹⁴ Bryskett, 4.

⁹⁵ Bryskett, 16.

⁹⁶ Bryskett, 5-6.

⁹⁷ See Plato, *The Republic*, IV.429c-d, who associates courage with the auxiliary class, responsible for the preservation of the city-state.

⁹⁸ Bryskett, 162.

civil life....”⁹⁹ Not limited to “things appertaining to the appetite,” temperance “stretcheth her power to those actions that appertain to fortitude also. For she teacheth man to know the mean of fearfulness in cases of danger apparent, & in what measure pain or trouble is to be endured.” Thus strives moderation for the well-ordered soul and forwards the just affect and action as situation demands. And in this manner are the four virtues “happily linked together in such sort as they cannot be severed.”¹⁰⁰

“But to excel in justice is a thing most glorious” because the just person is “void of all vice, and furnished with all other virtues.”¹⁰¹ Accordingly, justice can be considered both specifically as one of the four virtues and generally as the supreme virtue in which all others are subsumed. As a distinct virtue, justice

distributes to everyone that which is his due. She produceth laws, by which virtue is rewarded, and vice punished. She correcteth faults and errors according to their equality. She setteth us in the direct way that leadeth to felicity.... Justice is she that maintaineth common utility, that giveth the rule, the order, the measure and manner of all things both public and private, the band of human conversation and friendship. She it is that maketh man resemble God, and so far extendeth her power in the conjunction of men’s minds, that she not only knitteth honest men together in civil society, but even wicked men and thieves, whose companies could not continue, if among their injustices justice had not some place.¹⁰²

It is a virtue that pervades all the other moral virtues; accordingly, s/he who enacts justice as it permeates the distinct virtues is truly just, and thereby an eminently virtuous person.

⁹⁹ Bryskett, 164. See also Cicero, Book I, sig. E8^v: “we [are] not this end engendered of nature that we should seem to be created for play and jest: but we [are] rather born to sagement, and to certain graver and greater studies. Yet we may lawfully use jesting, and pastime: but even as we do sleep, and other restings: at such time as we have sufficiently ended grave and earnest causes.”

¹⁰⁰ Bryskett, 185.

¹⁰¹ Bryskett, 185.

¹⁰² Bryskett, 183-84.

Despite the pre-eminence of justice, the virtues in practice reveal their encatenation and interdependence: just as moderation is “the conserver of prudence,”¹⁰³ prudence, “aptly called the eye of the mind,” is the “conserver” of justice:

Prudence is most necessary to discern what is just from what is unjust; and a good judgment therein can no man have that wanteth prudence: without which judgment, justice can never rule well those things that are under her government. And ... if she be not guided by prudence ... she works more harm than good.¹⁰⁴

Prudence is the Latinized humanist term for Aristotelian practical wisdom, the perfected ability to secure the best ends in life. As “the light of reason,” prudence is “the rule and measure of all the moral virtues concerning our actions and affects.”¹⁰⁵ The theater presents itself as the special arena dramatizing the interactivity of the passions and ethical action; prudence therein becomes the special focus of this exploration of Shakespearean drama. Prudence, however, possesses modern-day negative connotations of excessive caution, bland temperance, hesitation, a lack of imagination—all of which run counter to the self-expansion and flourishing that virtue entails.

This study, for this among other reasons, is structured upon moderation expansively understood as encompassing prudence. Moderation also provides for my purposes a better framework for exploring early modern affective experience. In classical and humanist ethics, prudence is virtue enacted, and moderation, or temperance, is its dispositional basis; in this study, moderation will comprise both the dispositional and active manifestation of virtue. To this effect, the term “prudence” is limited to the historicist context of humanist ethics or to its modern meaning of cautious decision and action. On the contrary, in Chapter 4 showcasing Helena of *All's Well*, the most adept

¹⁰³ Bryskett, 164.

¹⁰⁴ Bryskett, 185.

¹⁰⁵ Bryskett, 186.

model of virtue, I introduce the term “virtuosity” as a synonym to practical wisdom and prudence because its linguistic affinity to virtue. Virtuosity in this study will be ethically grounded to mean great technical skill applied towards a perfective end.

VII. Critical Contextualization

Engaged in ethical criticism, my study is indebted to and imbricates with Scodel’s expansive work on moderation. Scodel masterfully examines the wide range of responses to moderation, showing how English writers “used the ancient schema of means and extremes in innovative and contentious ways hitherto ignored by scholars.”¹⁰⁶ His discussion largely omitting Shakespeare, “whose treatments of means and extremes,” Scodel avers, “deserve a book unto themselves,”¹⁰⁷ leaves an opening for my own examination of a particular construal of virtuous moderation in Shakespearean drama. My work also extends and distinguishes itself from *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*, Michael Schoenfeldt’s important psychophysiological study of early modern self-governance through temperance. Schoenfeldt commendably corrects an anachronistic misconception of temperance and self-control: “modes of constraint we construe as unhealthy repression are coveted as acts of self-government necessary for the maintenance of the self and the protection of others.”¹⁰⁸ I am indebted to his groundwork in validating an integrative paradigm more pertinent to Renaissance humoral psychology than the anachronistic mind-body dualism and in valorizing the early modern regime of bodily self-discipline as a means of empowerment.¹⁰⁹ More specifically, Schoenfeldt, as one of his claims, argues that digestion is “not simply a function of some lower bodily

¹⁰⁶ Scodel, from book jacket and 8-11.

¹⁰⁷ Scodel, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Schoenfeldt, 84.

¹⁰⁹ Schoenfeldt, 11.

stratum ... but a central process of psychological and physiological self-fashioning” because the stomach “is the primary organ through which one can actually alter the temperature of the body—a concept which is at once physiological and psychological.”¹¹⁰ Although he asserts that the “passions are ... part of a larger systemic ecology of digestion and expulsion,”¹¹¹ the linkage that he demonstrates between the body and the emotions is not amplified further beyond the opaque term “temperature” or against the alienating effects of allegorical symbolism, for instance, “the irruptive forces [arising from melancholy] that Maleger and his troops represent”¹¹² in their assault on the Castle of Alma, symbolizing the organic soul¹¹³ in Spenser’s Book II, “Of Temperaunce,” in *The Faerie Queene*. Schoenfeldt, hence, makes larger claims to the integration of the passions with the humoral body and to the ethical implications of bodily processes than he can, in fact, demonstrate within the narrow scope of temperate health.

My project can be understood, in one sense, as giving fuller play to Schoenfeldt’s initiative in the integrative and the ethical discourses, logically by examining not so much the nutritive but the emotional and intellectual economies naturally grounded on the first. My study, through the discourse of virtue and moderation, focuses on the ethics of human action examined as the dynamic, performative interaction of the rational and emotional faculties rather than through the discourse of humoral physiology insightfully pioneered by Michael Schoenfeldt and Gail Paster. This broader scope for examining ethical action

¹¹⁰ Schoenfeldt, 60.

¹¹¹ Schoenfeldt, 66.

¹¹² Schoenfeldt, 61.

¹¹³ This term from Renaissance philosophy refers to the part of the tripartite soul governing the passions—“organic” because physiologically, a different organ corresponds to a different psychological function. See Katherine Park, “The Organic Soul,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 469.

also supports my argument for a more constructive view of moderation, as fueled by perfective passion, than Schoenfeldt's alimentary discourse allows him. To wit, although he argues compellingly that Spenser "situates the passions at the heart of his temperate self, as spurs to the very virtue he depicts rather than as forces opposing it,"¹¹⁴ Schoenfeldt's account of early modern self-governance is grounded in an essentially negative model of temperance as a constant martial state of alertness, "a dynamic, even frantic maintenance of order in the face of perpetual insurrection."¹¹⁵ Twice quoting "Attempred goodly well for health and *for delight*" (Spenser, *FQ*, 2.11.2), a token reminder that the immoderate rather than salutary pleasure is to be resisted, Schoenfeldt is far more concerned with the passions as "temptations"¹¹⁶ to evil rather than as the spurs of virtue—my particular interest. My project also imbricates with Gail Paster's seminal work, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage*, on the "ecology of the passions." Through "their close functional relation" to the humors, passions, Paster argues, are literally the "liquid states and forces of the natural world,"¹¹⁷ their effects expressed through "the great activity of spirits moving between heart, brain, and body."¹¹⁸ Attending closely to humoral, thermal, and natural discourse in the texts, Paster's account of early modern affective experience entails a pneumatological, psycho-physiological interactivity of self and world.¹¹⁹ My interest in the passions is rather their interaction with reason in a particularly passion-affirming account of virtuous moderation as an early modern ideal.

¹¹⁴ Schoenfeldt, 49, 65.

¹¹⁵ Schoenfeldt, 73.

¹¹⁶ Schoenfeldt, 44, 46, 48.

¹¹⁷ Paster, 4.

¹¹⁸ Paster, 30.

¹¹⁹ Paster, 44.

Within early modern scholarship, my project best approaches the recent ethical criticism of Mustapha Fahmi, grounded in the concepts of perspectivism and self-interpretation. Fahmi draws on the neo-Aristotelian philosopher Charles Taylor's conception of the human agent as a "strong evaluator" whose identity is associated with his [ethical] orientation and defined in dialogue, or dispute"¹²⁰ with those who matter to them. Shakespeare's characters, he argues, enact "their own image of the good,"¹²¹ and if we are to read their actions well, it behooves us first to understand how they "interpret" themselves, i.e., choose and pursue a certain good deemed higher than the others. Such an approach is consistent with Aristotle's notion of virtue as both accountable to external judgment (i.e., the opinion of ethical peers) and adjusted to one's own faculties, abilities, and material situation. The problem in character criticism is that it bears too heavily on external judgment without sufficiently considering the individual perspective of the contextualist approach. Fahmi begins rightly with the premise that the Shakespearean characters he examines are evaluators of the good. This meta-ethical approach is key to counteracting what is so prevalent in literary criticism: all too often our judgments about the characters tell more about us than the characters. As Fahmi explains, "when Alfred Harbage says, for example, that Henry V is a 'virtuous' king (Harbage 1961:67), and W. B. Yeats declares that he is a king of 'gross vices' (Yeats 1998:181), it is obvious that we are told more about Yeats and Harbage themselves about Henry."¹²² Hence, character criticism, Fahmi proposes, should "concern itself a bit less with the action than with the

¹²⁰ Mustapha Fahmi, "Man's Chief Good: The Shakespearean Character as Evaluator," *Shakespearean International Yearbook* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, forthcoming 2008); Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord: Anansi, 1996), 33; *Philosophical Papers 1: Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 17.

¹²¹ Fahmi, *The Purpose of Playing: Self-Interpretation and Ethics in Shakespeare* (Quebec, QC: Two Continents Publishing, 2008).

¹²² Fahmi, "Man's Chief Good," forthcoming 2008.

ethical purpose that directs a character's action."¹²³ My own study endeavors in the best of moderation to bring together the two aims in an examination of virtue and virtuosity, the good the characters pursue and how they do it.

VIII. Chapter Overview

The Taming of the Shrew in Chapter 2 opens up the ethical issues involving the passions, virtue, and moderation when young Lucentio's plan to "study,/ Virtue and that part of philosophy/ ... that treats of happiness/ By virtue specially to be achieved" (1.1.18-20) gets diverted by love. Virtue, however, is the key guiding force in Petruccio's wooing and socializing of Kate. Contrary to the standard critical view, Petruccio's extreme means of taming constitutes virtuous moderation. His ranting is not uncontrolled anger, but skillful, controlled acting deployed towards the virtuous end: Kate emerging from behind her shield of shrew. The result is stunning: the virago Kate presents herself at the play's close as the supreme model of virtue over the manly Petruccio, who surpasses both the youthful Lucentio and the elderly Baptista. Virtue-aimed prudence in Renaissance iconography is often pictured with a looking glass in her hand: "as the glass being clear showeth a man his face, Bryskett explains, "so prudence well used shows to him himself, making him to know what he is, and to what end created."¹²⁴ Thus, at the same time that she is growing in moderation and dealing with Petruccio with increasing *savoir-faire*, Kate grows in self-knowledge, coming into her virtuous power. Kate and Petruccio's affectionate and respectful partnership in marriage, is grounded in the love of

¹²³ Fahmi, *The Purpose of Playing*, 23.

¹²⁴ Bryskett, 188.

virtue and is achieved through moderation. In such a manner does “prudence guid[e] us to happiness of life, and imprudence ma[k]e us miserable and unhappy.”¹²⁵

Such a dispensation of prudence, or virtuosity, is linked with the generic distinction between comedy and tragedy. One has but to look to *Othello* in Chapter 3, the only other Shakespearean play which depicts how newlyweds sort out their dual life, to see a tragic version of *Taming*: how insufficient moderation and virtuosity on the part of both Othello and Desdemona doom their marriage. My reading highlights sameness in Othello’s and Desdemona’s unaccommodating virtue rather than difference of sex, race, and age as the root of their demise. The effort to coordinate a dual life together reveals on either side an incomplete self-knowledge, which feeds and is fed by imprudence, leading to tragedy despite their genuine love of the good.

Chapter 4, *in medias res*, presents also the culmination of moderation in the convergence of virtue, prudence, and knowledge in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, a title that begs a discussion of means and ends. Here, the extraordinary Helena marshals knowledge and practical action towards amatory and salutary ends. As both an autonomous and a professedly providential/prudential agent of virtue,¹²⁶ Helena brings together personal and civic well-being. Mutually sustaining prudence and self-knowledge “work in [her such] that as [s]he travels to attain for [her]self profit & goodness, so acknowledging[her]self to be borne for the good also of others, [she] endeavoreth to direct the affairs also of his parents, friends and commonweal to the same end of profit &

¹²⁵ Bryskett, 188.

¹²⁶ Etymologically, *prudence* derives from the Latin *prudential*, the contraction of *providential*, both meaning foresight (OED).

goodness.”¹²⁷ Helena through her supreme moderation and virtuosity avoids both the extremist attitudes of other comic protagonists—Orsino, Olivia, Claudio, Angelo, Isabella—towards love and sex and the common pitfall of the tragic characters—Othello, Desdemona, Antony, and Coriolanus—unaccommodating virtue which works against its own aims. The implications of Helena, as the paradigm of moderation in its doubly intermediary and excelling actions, are twofold. First, Helena reveals herself as the comic triumph of prudence, thereby reinforcing the link between gender and genre, between comedy and virtuoso women. At the same time, *All’s Well*, as a “tragicomedy,” exposes the tenuousness of the generic balance that Shakespeare, as artist, has deftly achieved. To wit, Helena is not immune to the vagaries of fortune. A play metadramatically critiquing the comic “happily ever after,” *All’s Well* butts Helena’s supreme virtuosity up against the conflicting will of the erotic other. While Helena in comedy, unlike Desdemona in tragedy, single-handedly succeeds in establishing the foundation for companionate marriage, her achievement comes again at the price of erotic friction so fatally depicted in *Othello* and here in muted form signaling the play’s infamously troubling ending. Whereas tragedy tends to play out male insecurity to its doom, restorative comedy ends on a promising note. The play’s integrity, I argue, requires that we see Bertram, through Helena’s amatory eyes of faith, as an aspirant to virtue through his newly learned knowledge.

Chapters 2 through 4 have explored the Aristotelian convergence of virtue and effective action in the domestic, mercantile, and courtly spheres of *Taming*, *Othello*, and *All’s Well*; chapter 5 explores how prudent statecraft operates as the practical grounding

¹²⁷ Bryskett, 188.

of virtuous moderation in *Antony and Cleopatra*'s realm of imperial politics. As the tragic genre and historical fact indicate, the imperial lovers are no match for Octavius, the supreme strategist, and hence fail to integrate love, selfhood, and power in their pursuit of the complete life. The play ostensibly suggests that imperial politics is a zero-sum game and that virtue and prudence are mutually exclusive ideals: Antony and Cleopatra achieve noble love and Octavius, supreme rule. While none of these three principal characters achieve the complete life through virtuous moderation, Cleopatra, Caesar's prisoner at the play's end, comes closest to achieving the "heavenly mingle" of love, personal honor, and power by successfully marshalling the actor's "mediocritie" to "[take] her own way" (5.2.325–27), her final and finest moment of self-integration.

The previous chapters have suggested in tentative, partial ways the connection between personal and civic good. The two comedies, *Taming* and *All's Well*, present Kate and Helena as the informal moral heads of their respective social circles in Padua or the French courts at Paris and Rousillon. Within the two tragedies, in *Othello*, Othello and Desdemona, as the military governor of Cyprus and his wife, fail to manage affairs successfully at the junction of the marital and martial spheres; *Antony and Cleopatra* present the eponymous characters not just as potentates in quest of love and power of the highest rank, but also as rulers loved and respected by their subjects. In act 2, scene 2, the Egyptians flock to see their extraordinary queen floating in a barge in full pageantry; in a moving pre-battle speech of act 4, scene 2, Antony evokes civic and martial unity by conjuring the following image of incorporation: "I wish I could be made so many men,/ And all of you clapped up together in/ An Antony, that I might do you service/ So good as you have done" (4.2.16–19). Their victory a few scenes later result in an extraordinary

image of individual and collective flourishing as Antony and his men, “all Hectors” celebrate a rare triumph with their wives and friends (4.9.8-11).

Prefaced by these partial examples, Chapter 6 presents a more sustained study of the relation between individual and civic good. In *Coriolanus*, Caius Martius, Rome’s first citizen as its greatest warrior, presents himself as the play’s archetype of immoderation, highlighting Rome’s endemic disorder: the lack of self-control in its individual citizens signifies the collective immoderation of the polity, its inability to bring its constituent parts into salutary corporate balance. A parody of Plato’s tripartite polity in the *Republic*,¹²⁸ the belly parable of act 1, scene 1, through the symptoms of physiological imbalance within the body politic, highlights Rome’s civic injustices, which the plebeians try to redress by amputating its most virtuous member. Coriolanus’s sacrifice signals the urgent need of on both sides of the class divide to subordinate partisan politics and self-interest to the higher goal of the public good. The headlessness of the Roman polity, the clearest symbol of civic immoderation, underscores the continuing challenges of the republican endeavor to the present: to establish both an educated citizenry and effective leaders with the right balance of ethics and politics, character and political prudence, to guide policies toward the human good.

Coriolanus, moreover, engages important gender issues as it sets its most virtuous character, Virgilia, alone against the dominant martial ethos of Rome. While feminists might censure her for weakness, Virgilia, in fact, as proof of virtuous moderation, boycotts the martial world to guard the sacred hearth while fulfilling her wifely devotion. The personal and civic tragedy of *Coriolanus* lies in that despite Coriolanus’s verbal

¹²⁸ Plato, *Republic*, Book IV, from *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 440-41.

expressions of love, Virgilia, like her epic forbear, Dido, is ultimately powerless against the imperatives of his hypervirtue. *Coriolanus*, following in the footsteps of *Othello*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, shows emphatically how failed gender parity has operated as the principal cause of the tragic or tragicomic issue of these plays.

This study examines moderation dramatized in Shakespeare's plays as the marshaling of affect and action toward best ends. In the classical tradition as revived by humanist thought, moderation is the disposition and action aimed at virtue and self-knowledge intertwined. Contrary, however, to classical and humanist notions that moderation is the property of the ideal man, this examination demonstrates abundantly that moderation is rather the special province of the virtuous virago. The ethical lens of moderation contributes to a sharper understanding of Shakespeare's plays in conjunction with further insights into his subtle revisions of gender and genre, of social roles and dramatic forms. Revealing the impact of classical revival and contemporary socio-political currents upon their conception, the plays, as great literature, illuminate the culture whence they spring even as they promote continuous examination of excellence in our own lives. Moderation as disciplined passion offers an effective, holistic interpretive lens to examine human action and aspiration in literature, attuned to the endeavor in our own lives to harmonize the seemingly opposing faculties of the human being.

Chapter 2

How Petruccio Is Domesticated: Revisions of Virtuous Moderation

Lucentio's well-aimed but short-lived declaration in act 1, scene 1, to "study,/ Virtue and that part of philosophy/ ... that treats of happiness/ By virtue specially to be achieved" (1.1.18-20) immediately establishes the play's ethical context of moderation. But whereas this young man swings violently from philosophy to love (1.1.32-33), at the first sight of fair Bianca, the play's more successful models of virtuous moderation, Petruccio and his moral superior, Kate, harmonize love and philosophy, passion and reason in the tempered communion¹ of marriage. The initial crude opposition of Aristotle against Ovid, ethical against amorous pursuits (1.1.32-33), sets the stage for the play's gradual unfolding of a more satisfying comic resolution of happiness, one that reconciles love and virtue. Indeed, the play's theme, the taming of a shrew, directly involves moderation as the marshaling of passions toward best ends. In *Taming*, moderation entails the transformation of anger into love towards conjugal happiness. The choleric figures in need of humoral balance are the feisty pair, Kate and Petruccio. Despite the gender inflection of "shrew" towards the female in a patriarchal society, the taming that the play promotes is the civilizing of all shrews—female and male—that is, all persons "given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behaviour" (OED 3a).

Though both are equally disposed to ranting, the strong-willed Kate, by the inequity of gender expectations, is emotionally and psychologically damaged by the choleric label while Petruccio's bullying ways with his servants have not affected either his self-confidence nor his reputation among his social circle. Understandably, it is the

¹ Harry Berger, Jr. *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1988), 22.

respected merchant prince Petruccio, who first tackles the management of (a prospective wife's) anger as a means to economic and social advancement through marriage. His desire to "wive it wealthily" (1.2.72) provides the impetus to socialize Kate into a proper wife or "helpmeet," for him. But the endeavor to turn the spousal other into a gentle woman turns per force into a project of self-improvement for the manly Petruccio. The psychologically astute Petruccio employs an effective double-sided strategy to marshal Kate's choler into productive passion. On the one side, Petruccio, consistently using gentle speech, provides a model of civility for Kate to emulate. On the other side, he simultaneously performs the words and actions of the choleric wo/man, to show Kate unremittingly a picture of her own vicious conduct. It is in this manner against the standard critical response, that I assert, as the first part of my argument, that *Taming's* "mad-cap" Petruccio with his extreme means of taming enacts moderation. Not uncontrolled anger, his famous ranting is, instead, skillful, controlled acting deployed towards the virtuous end: the emergence of a virtuous Kate from behind a shield of defensive shrewishness. Petruccio's appreciation for Kate's spiritedness and his effort to modulate her speech rather than to *silence* her shows Shakespeare's great distance from the morality prescribed by early modern matrimonial tracts.

In this comedy, the merchant prince Petruccio adroitly marshals disciplined passion to establish tempered communion in marriage. This moderation, key to his success in transforming Kate, entails an acute sense of the right emotive response in each varying situation: which action to take and with what intensity of emotion. The mean, according to Lodowick Bryskett,

is found, when a man doth what he ought to do, when time serveth, in manner as he should, for such as becometh him to do, and for causes honest and convenient. And whosoever setteth this rule to himself in all his actions, which being so conditioned, shall be far off from the extremes, and near unto virtue.²

Outwardly modeling gentility, Petruccio employs extraordinary means, however, to channel Kate's anti-social violence into productive passion, beneficial to her individual self and her community. His command of theatrics and rhetoric so as to modulate his actions effectively between hyperbolic rant and gentle speech entails the same governance of passions practiced by skilled early modern actors, who, according to contemporary thought, exercised such mastery over their internal and external bodily movements to be able to produce the expressive motion required by art.³ This particular virtuosity, or "prudent mediocritie," which Thomas Wright observed specifically among "stage players"⁴ constitutes precisely the virtuous moderation of Petruccio.

On behalf of Kate, Petruccio enacts allegorical Prudence, which, according to Bryskett,

is commonly set with a looking glass in her hand: which by all likelihood is done to give us to understand, that as the glass being clear showeth a man his face; so Prudence well used shows to him himself, making him to know what he is, and to what end created. The knowledge whereof works in him, that as he travels to attain for himself profit & and goodness; so acknowledging himself to be born for the good also of others, endeavoreth to direct the affaires also of his parents, friends and Commonweal to the same end of profit & goodness.⁵

When she comes around thanks to Petruccio's effective strategy, this is precisely what Kate does as she steps into her sovereign role as moral leader.

² Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 150. Bryskett's moral treatise is in large part a translation of Giraldi's Italian dialogue of civil life—on the "Ethick part of Moral Philosophy" (22-23).

³ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Scenes in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 52.

⁴ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall (1604)*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 179.

⁵ Bryskett, 188.

Initially motivated by “profit”—marriage to a wealthy and beautiful woman and all the advantages thereof—Petruccio’s necessary intervention in Kate’s social and emotional development engages him in collateral “goodness.” What Petruccio, as the patriarchal enabler of female virtue, doesn’t foresee is how the consummation of Kate’s virtue would redound in his own ethical improvement. The tamer’s smashing success comes with a twist, signaling the second part of my argument: Petruccio himself is Kated as the former virago takes virtue to an even higher order, calling the merchant prince to domestic *noblesse*, an old world ethic in a new world household economy. In *Taming*, Bianca presents herself as this conduct-book model of feminine virtue, but it is her sister, Kate the virago, who more successfully integrates feminine modesty and male assertiveness as the true exemplar of human virtue. Kate inverts the traditional gender order in a *moral* hierarchy, which situates her at the top, above the manly Petruccio, who, despite his virtuous taming of Kate, could well take physic from his own disciplinary regime and modeling of gentility. Petruccio has successfully deployed his choleric disposition towards transforming Kate into a gentlewoman, but once these draconian measures of taming are no longer needed, the “mad-brain rudesby full of spleen” (3.2.10) must himself walk the talk, i.e., become the true man of moderation, enacting virtue for itself rather than for expediency.

I. Petruccio: Moderation as Disciplined Passion

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, all the suitors for the daughters of Baptista Minola desire his favored, younger daughter, Bianca, for her sweet beauty” (1.1.161) and mild manner: as the young Lucentio of Pisa explains, in her “silence do I see/ Maid’s mild behaviour and sobriety” (70-71). In other words, these men desire the pliant wife of the

marriage tracts, one amenable to their will and authority. A newcomer, Petruccio of Verona, aiming to “wive it wealthily in Padua” (1.2.72), is drawn, however, to the wealthy and “young and beauteous” (82) older daughter, the “shrewd ill-favoured” (1.2.57) “Katherine the curst” (1.2.122), “Renowned in Padua for her scolding tongue” (1.2.96). Instead of being daunted by his friend Hortensio’s caution, “Her only fault—and that is faults enough—/Is that she is “intolerable curst/ And shrewd and froward so beyond all measure” (1.2.85-86), Petruccio seeks a woman with spirit to match his own strong-headedness. When Hortensio, during Kate’s music lesson, indiscreetly insults her by telling her “she mistook her frets” (2.1.147), Kate retorts, “Frets, call you these? ... I’ll fume with them” (2.1.150), striking the lute on his head. Instead of being repelled by her recalcitrance, Petruccio delights in her wit and energy: “Now, by the world, it is a lusty wench!/ I love her ten times more than e’er I did./ O, how I long to have some chat with her” (2.1.158-60).⁶

Clearly, Petruccio does not want merely the sweet, submissive wife, who obediently mirrors his pleasure,⁷ but a (wealthy and beautiful) woman with a nimble mind with whom, as John Milton was to argue later in his “Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” he may carry on a conversation.⁸ He does not want a cookie-cutter wife stamped out of the molds of conduct books or Petrarchan poetry; unlike the other suitors and the tragic Othello, he seeks a woman whom he can address eye-to-eye as a thinking,

⁶ See also David Daniell, “The Good Marriage of Katherine and Petruccio,” *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed. Dana E. Aspinall (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 79-80.

⁷ Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 118.

⁸ Interpreting from the Genesis the notion that God made a “helpmeet” for Adam so that “man should not be alone,” John Milton, “Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,” *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), 707, claims that “in God’s intention a meet and happy conversation is the chiefest and the noblest end of marriage.”

desiring person. In a society in which marriage is dictated by socio-economic status and courtship by artificial conventions, it would seem difficult, as Bianca states, to find “that special face [person]/ Which I could fancy more than any other” (2.1.11-12). Even at their first meeting, Kate and Petruccio fare much better than the other suitors and their wives—bound in a mesh of sterile stereotypes—because the “madly mated” (3.3.115) couple face in each other strong, unconventional personalities, conducive to their engagement with each other as thinking and desiring individuals, the basis for love and meaningful connection. Katherine’s frowardness, ill-favored among insecure men trying to protect the authority that comes with maleness, is exactly the raw passion that Petruccio requires in a wife, violence that he seeks to regulate and channel into conjugally harmonious and socially productive virtue.⁹

Through its comic treatment about gender relations in marriage, *Taming* dramatizes the clash in contemporary debates between the dominance model premised on male supremacy and wifely subservience and the conscience model based on consensual, companionate marriage.¹⁰ The notion of taming a wife presupposes the traditional hierarchy within marriage, aligned with Christian doctrine, namely, the Pauline teaching that “the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church ...” (Ephesians 5:23). This axiom undergirds the doctrine of wifely obedience as enjoined by “A Homily of the State of Matrimony” promulgated by the Church of England:

Ye wives, be you in subjection to obey your own husbands. To obey is another thing then to control or command, which yet they may do, to their children, and to their family: But as for their husbands; them must they obey, and cease from commanding, and perform subjection. For this surely both doth nourish concord

⁹ See Daniell, 81, for an argument along these lines with a focus on acting.

¹⁰ Sara Munson Deats, *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 233-34.

very much, when the wife is ready at hand at her husband's commandment, when she will apply herself to his will, when she endeavoureth herself to seek his contentation; and to do him pleasure; when she will eschew all things that might offend him.¹¹

Although husbands were encouraged to use peaceful means to inculcate their wives in these hortatory treatises, wife-beating was, nonetheless, a legal means of “correction.” In the case of a wife in danger of having “her brains knocked out,” William Whateley, author of *A Bride Bush* (1623) generally sympathetic to women, explains that she may take recourse of the law for safety “with the purpose of returning upon such security.”¹² Accordingly, the issue of Petruccio's taming tactics has generated resistance within feminist scholarship. As Jean Howard points out, “while Kate's taming does not involve the kinds of physical brutality in the ‘Merry Jest’ ballad, one must nonetheless remember that in Petruccio's farmhouse Kate is deprived of sleep, food, and the protection of family and female companionship—techniques akin to modern methods of torture and brainwashing.”¹³ No one can deny the violent practices of discipline in early modern culture. Nonetheless, I argue that overreading Foucauldian notions of social surveillance¹⁴ into *Taming's* representation of early modern marriage deprives it of the very humanity and spirit of mutuality which Shakespeare infuses into the contemporary gender hierarchy towards a vision of marital and personal flourishing. One night's physical deprivation at the farmhouse is arguably less harmful than the longstanding

¹¹ “A Homily of the State of Matrimony,” *Certaine Sermons or Homilies Appointed To Be Read in Churches, in the Time of Queen Elizabeth I (1547-71)*, (London: 1623; reprinted Gainesville: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), 242.

¹² William Whateley, *A Bride Bush or A Direction for Married Persons* (London, 1623), sig. Ee3^v.

¹³ Jean Howard, Introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt *et al.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 139.

¹⁴ Barbara Hodgdon, “Katherina Bound, or Play(K)ating the Strictures of Everyday Life,” *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, edited by Dana E. Aspinall (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 354.

social brainwashing the effects of which Petruccio is trying to undo in Kate through his rough methods.

Unfortunately, *The Taming of the Shrew* in performance has persistently reproduced the signs of female subjection to male dominance. On the eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century stage, Petruccio often carried a whip, “symbol of his power to control his wife and servants with physical force.”¹⁵ On the modern stage, Petruccio may “carry a whip, wear a boxing glove, spank Kate, gag and tie her with ropes and chains.”¹⁶ These, surely, are misleading theatrical interpretations of Shakespeare’s text, in which scholars have noted that Petruccio never touches Kate in physical abuse; rather Kate slaps him, and as A. D. Nuttall points out, the answer to the question, “Who in the plays of Shakespeare binds a woman, strikes her, and makes her cry?” is not Petruccio, but rather Kate victimizing her sister in act 1, scene 2.¹⁷ Lynda Boose’s seminal essay did much to place the play in the early modern social context within which outspoken shrews were punished and silenced with cucking stools and scold’s bridles.¹⁸ However, Petruccio’s appreciation for Kate’s spiritedness and effort to modulate her speech rather than to *silence* her shows Shakespeare’s humanized rendering of the asymmetry of early modern marriage. In this respect, Petruccio and Kate, by the play’s end, come to embody the ideal of companionate marriage, which by uniting “‘esteem’ and ‘desire’ in an amorous

¹⁵ Howard, 137.

¹⁶ Hodgdon, 352.

¹⁷ A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 71. To show how the narrative of female abjection has been distorted, let me note that some feminist critics have gone so far as to read sadomasochistic fantasy into the Petruccio-Kate relationship, even going so far as to see “a mild ‘sadie-max’ lesbian [not to mention incestuous] fantasy” regarding the Kate-Bianca scene and associating anachronistically Petruccio’s “taming school” with the country houses “reminiscent of remote Sadean territories” (Hodgdon, 353).

¹⁸ Lynda E. Boose, “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman’s Unruly Member,” *SQ* 42.2 (Summer 1991): 179-213.

mutuality, had become the dominant social ideal, if not always the reality, by the late sixteenth century.”¹⁹ Even this more equitable model, however, could not completely rid itself of the conjugal symmetry—perhaps because in marriage or in political governance, sole authority, as a practical necessity, has advantages of more efficient decision-making over dual authority.²⁰ Yet Kate and Petruccio, through virtuous moderation, demonstrate how the joint marital being can work effectively as a mutually respectful and loving partnership despite its nominal male headship, thereby harmonizing the dominance and companionate models.

Accordingly, critics of the “humanist” strain have seen Petruccio’s taming strategy in more positive light as an “unconventional application of contemporary humanist thought and marital reform circulating around him.”²¹ Dana Aspinall gives a helpful overview of the critical stances sympathetic to Petruccio:

M. C. Bradbrook (1958) admires Petruccio’s unique ability to “pierce below the surface of Kate’s angry, thwarted, provocative abuse to the desire to be mastered and cherished which her conduct unconsciously betrays” (142). E. M. W. Tillyard (1964) locates Katherine’s improved state in Petruccio’s enactment of a “more kindly and educative method” (113). Alexander Legatt (1974) attributes Kate’s “transformation of character” (41) to Petruccio’s teaching her an “inner order” (49) and a sense of “conventional decent behavior” (53). Wayne believes Petruccio tames Katherine “for her own good” (171), and Camille Wells Slight (1989) argues that Shakespeare “is less interested in suggesting the proper distribution of power between men and women than in exploring the comedy inherent in the human desire for both individual freedom and fulfillment as a social being” (169).²²

¹⁹ Deats, 235. See also Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1982), 90-94.

²⁰ This is Coriolanus’s argument against “double worship” (3.1.145)—the patrician Senate sharing power with the plebeians.

²¹ Aspinall, 14.

²² Aspinall, 13-14.

Extending the “pro-Petruccio” stance of this second group, I argue that Petruccio’s tyranny, much like Kate’s shrewness, is largely a bluff, exhibiting an emergent form of virtuous moderation, later refined by Kate. Despite his rough ways, Petruccio, as evidenced by his knowledge of classical literature and Galenic science, exhibits a humanist side, disposed towards virtue. As he explains presciently to Baptista,

I am as peremptory as she proud-minded.
And where two raging fires meet together
They do consume the thing that feeds their fury.
Though little fire grows great with little wind,
Yet extreme gusts will blow out fire and all.
So I to her, and so she yields to me (2.1.129-34)

Such is Petruccio’s “taming of the shrew,” towards a partnership in marriage, grounded on disciplined passion.

The opening scene of act 1 reveals the harmful effect on Katherine of her father’s consistent preference for his younger, (seemingly) docile daughter, Bianca. His hostile favoritism and invidious comparison has turned her into a hostile shrew, having to defend herself against an unloving father, a goody-goody sister, and suitors who view her as “ill-favoured” (1.2.57), an inferior article, thanks to her father and a pervasive male attitude of rebuking the self-assertive female.²³ So ingrained is this view that in welcoming Petruccio, Baptista discourages a willing suitor for Kate despite his professed desire to wed her off so that Bianca can marry: “for my daughter, Katherine, this I know:/ She is not for your turn, the more my grief” (2.1.62-63). In addressing Bianca’s ardent suitors, Baptista tries to cast Kate off as the decoy:

Gentlemen, importune me no farther,
For how I firmly am resolved you know:

²³ See also Margaret Lael Mikesell, “Love Wrought These Miracles,” *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, ed. Dana E. Aspinall (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 115.

That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter
Before I have a husband for the elder.
If either of you both love Katherina,
Because I know you well and love you well
Leave shall you have to court her at your pleasure. (1.1.48-54)

Kate politely but wittily reacts to this affront: “I pray you, sir, is it your will/ To make a
stale of me amongst these mates?” (1.1.56-57). The script shows no response from
Baptista, reinforcing his neglect of her. When he does speak, it unsurprisingly concerns
Bianca and only confirms the truth of Kate’s blunt appraisal of her predicament:

Gentlemen, that I may soon make good
What I have said—Bianca, get you in.
And let it not displease thee, good Bianca,
For I will love ne’er the less, my girl. (1.1.74-77)

The triple address (“Bianca,” “good Bianca,” “my girl”) reinforces the love he showers
upon his second daughter, reassurance which would better serve the neglected Kate.
Instead, Baptista abandons her so that he may attend further to his adored Bianca:
“Katherina, you may stay,/ For I have more to commune with Bianca” (1.1.100-01).

The first thing that Petruccio does as a suitor for Kate, favoring her over the
conventionally sweet but comparatively bland Bianca, is to undo her “ill-favoured” status
from the moment of his introduction to Baptista:

I am a gentleman of Verona, sir,
That hearing of her beauty and her wit,
Her affability and bashful modesty,
Her wondrous qualities and mild behavior,
Am bold to show myself a forward guest
Within your house, to make mine eye the witness
Of that report which I so oft have heard.... (2.1.47-53)

In this manner, he deploys a tactic of positive imaging, which he consistently reinforces in an effort to get Kate to fulfill this expectation. As he explains, he will deflect all her brawling actions into ones she should enact in time:

Say that she rail, why then I'll tell her plain
She sings as sweetly as a nightingale.
Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear
As morning roses newly washed with dew.
Say she be mute and will not speak a word,
Then I'll commend her volubility
And say she uttereth piercing eloquence. (2.1.168-74)

When he actually speaks to Kate, he endearingly rhapsodizes on her name, again correcting her father's minimal addressing of her:

Petruccio: Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear.
Kate: Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing.
They call me Katherine that do talk of me.
Petruccio: You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst,
But, Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation.
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded—
Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs—
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife. (2.1.180-92)

Petruccio's use of the more intimate, diminutive form, "Kate," indicates both his amorous intentions and a deliberate distinction from the formal appellation by which her father coldly calls her and the town knows her as a formidable shrew. He shows his awareness of this reputation—at the same time that he softens the epithet—to signal that far from being a fool, he knows what he's about, mad though he may seem.

Kate, true to her reputation of a "brawling scold" (1.2.182), only insults him, comparing him to a joint stool, an ass, a jade, a swain, and a buzzard in the next dozen

lines. In this rapid duel of wit, Kate has met her match, and even in irritation, must find it exhilarating. When Petruccio tries to appease her, Kate resists and unwittingly falls into his trap:

Petruccio: Come, come, you wasp, i' faith you are too angry.
Kate: If I be waspish, best beware my sting.
Petruccio: My remedy is then to pluck it out.
Kate: Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.
Petruccio: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?
In his tail.
Kate: In his tongue.
Petruccio: Whose tongue?
Kate: Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell.
Petruccio: What, with my tongue in your tail? Nay come again.
Good Kate, I am a gentleman—(2.1.207-14)

In a rapid exchange of wit filled with gender bending and punning, the wasp changes in referent from Kate to male insect and then to Petruccio through Kate's dismissive retort. But Petruccio has the last word, shielding his impudence in gentility—and earns the first slap for his victory!²⁴ Slaps or not, Petruccio proceeds with providential assurance, telling Kate:

... will you, nill you, I will marry you....
Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn, ...
For I am he am born to tame you, Kate,
And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate
Conformable as other household Kates. (2.1.263-70)

Notwithstanding the sexual innuendo here, characteristic of comedy, this speech underscores the particularity and personal quality of Petruccio's wooing. Not only does he resonantly reiterate her name, he claims the singularity of their union—"Thou must be married to no man but me" (2.1.267)—approaching love's ideal of finding what Bianca

²⁴ See Nuttall, 73.

calls “that special face” (2.1.11), which Bianca herself has incompletely found in her Lucentio.

Petruccio sees beneath Kate’s defensive shield of a sharp tongue into her true worth, and taming, transcending its offensiveness to modern sensibilities, is the process to unveil her hidden virtue. Indeed, Petruccio is Kate’s champion before a world that misprizes her:

I find you passing gentle.
'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen,
And now I find report a very liar,
For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers.
Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
Nor bite the lip as angry wenches will,
Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk,
But thou with mildness entertain’st thy wooers,
With gentle conference, soft and affable.
Why does the world report that Kate doth limp?
O sland’rous world! Kate like the hazel-twig
Is straight and slender, and as brown in hue
As hazelnuts and sweeter than the kernels. (2.1.235-48)

Despite the irony of these lines, Petruccio describes in truth Kate’s potential, what she will come to enact shortly as soon as she has overcome the handicap that the world has imposed upon her. Petruccio describes her in expressions of more personal, homely beauty, more sincere than the Petrarchan clichés of “coral lips” and perfumed breath “Sacred and sweet” (1.1.168, 170) by which Lucentio “loves” Bianca.²⁵ Notwithstanding his aim to marry a rich and beautiful woman, Petruccio’s insight into Kate’s inner beauty beneath her bluff and his desire to release that beauty is surely the essence of love. Besides courtly wooing, Petruccio intends by this speech gradually to restore Kate’s

²⁵ See Nuttall, 74; also Mikesell, 111.

damaged sense of herself, the root of her anti-social conduct. Such self-knowledge would lend her the poise to interact with others in a gentle, prudent manner.

Petruccio's adroit strategy to civilize Kate is two-tiered. The outer layer of gentle comportment and positive self-imaging—what she will be—is complemented by his railing conduct, a mirroring of what she presently is. Seemingly hypocritical, his strategy of “kill[ing] a wife with kindness/ ... [to] curb her mad and headstrong humour” (4.1.189) is, in fact, his dexterous move to co-opt the shrewish role so completely that she is forced into kinder and more reasonable comportment. Unlike the self-focused Othello, who wipes all his blackness onto Desdemona, Petruccio absorbs Kate's “curst” temperament in order to exorcise it out of her. Thus, when he sweeps her away from her own wedding banquet, Petruccio does so in the manner of both a boorish tyrant and a hero of courtly romance. Addressing the wedding party, Petruccio, as head of the joint marital being, roughly seizes control over his wife's body:

Be mad and merry, or go hang yourselves.
But for my bonny Kate, she must with me.
Nay, look not big, nor stamp, nor stare, nor fret.
I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels. She is my house,
My household-stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything,
And here she stands, touch her whoever dare.
I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
That stops my way in Padua. Grumio,
Draw forth thy weapon, we are beset with thieves.
Rescue thy mistress if thou be a man.
Fear not, sweet wench. They shall not touch thee, Kate.
I'll buckler thee against a million. (3.3.97-110)

Though bullying tyrants of husbands may abuse their power over their wives, as evidenced in many early modern domestic tracts,²⁶ Petruccio here asserts his legal authority to take his wife away from the source of harm, a familial and social circle inimical to her development as a human being. Thus, he rescues Kate from the metaphorical ogres and monsters reigning in her social realm.

Along with the deleterious gender stereotypes and literary conventions that stigmatize and imprison those, like Kate, who deviate from them, Petruccio also satirizes society's inordinate emphasis on outer beauty rather than inner substance by coming to his wedding monstrously attired. Whereas the others set too much store on respectable clothing, Petruccio, through his "mean apparel" (3.2.67), points to "that within" for the true article:

To me she's married, not unto my clothes.
Could I repair what she will wear in me
As I can change these poor accoutrements,
'Twere well for Kate and better for myself. (3.2.110-13)

Even as he alludes to the "wearing" process of civilizing Kate—bringing out her virtue to public view—Petruccio underscores how the others rely too much on external qualities.

As Tranio concedes, "He hath some meaning in his mad attire" (117).

Petruccio's strategy of railing in the name of "perfect love" is his "politic" (4.1.169) way to socialize Kate. Aristotle's situational ethics of practical wisdom through moderation comprises of such calculation combined with the right emotional response towards the virtuous end. The virtuous mean in action varies by person, circumstance,

²⁶ According to Jordan, 294, wife-beating was regarded as a perfectly acceptable means of resolving domestic disputes, legally not constraining even such brutal wife-beating to the point of having "her braines knocked out" (William Whateley, *A Bride Bush or A Direction for Married Persons* [London, 1623], sig. Ee3^v); she may take recourse of the law for safety "with the purpose of returning upon such securitie."

and emotion.²⁷ The “peremptory” Petruccio, given the particularities of his situation, may dissemble anger in the virtuous aim of directing the “proud-minded” Kate towards productive passion. Petruccio “rails and swears and rates” (4.1.165) “all ... in reverent care of her” (185)—for her good—incidentally, making sure to deflect his choler onto his servants. In this way he deftly models the gentility for Kate to imitate at the same time that his brawling, by negative example, disposes her towards kindness. Seeing Petruccio punish his servants for the slightest fault, Kate tries to placate her husband from further railing: “Patience, I pray you. ’Twas a fault unwilling” (137) and “I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet./ The meat was well, if you were so contented” (149-50). Curtis’s curious question to Grumio, “Is she so hot a shrew as she’s reported?” (4.1.17) implies that Petruccio might have prepped his servants on what to expect upon the arrival of their new mistress and how to play along in his taming scheme. Petruccio’s choleric performance, nonetheless, is too real for Kate not to sympathize with his servants playing along as whipping boys. As part of his strategy to “man my haggard” (4.1.174), Petruccio deprives Kate of food that evening and of two nights’ sleep. Such tactics to break Kate in—like a wild horse—according to some critics, resemble modern methods of torture and brainwashing. Despite some similarity as to the brutality of method, the comparison is flawed because unlike prisoners in military camps subjected to torture and brainwashing, Kate is not truly in fear of her life and is aware of the performative aspect of Petruccio’s “reign of terror.” Though this lion roars very loudly and persistently to get his way, there is no real danger of harm here. Despite his attempt to deprive Kate of food because of her lack of cheer (who can blame her?), he does not object to Hortensio’s kind

²⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.1106b17-23.

intervention—“Signior Petruccio, fie, you are to blame./ Come, Mistress Kate, I’ll bear you company” (4.3.48-49)—and encourages her to “eat apace” (52).

There is no issue of brainwashing because Kate intelligently see through Petruccio’s “madcap” (2.1.280) strategy as she reveals in soliloquy the following morning: “that which spites me more than all these wants [of food and sleep]/ He does it under name of perfect love,/ As who should say, if I should sleep or eat/ ’Twere deadly sickness or else present death” (4.3.11-14). The marital battle of the sexes between Petruccio and Kate has come down to the issue of who can put up the bigger fuss and win the title of petty tyrant. Kate makes her last gestures to fight back when she tries to express her desire to keep the fashionable cap and dress the tailor had delivered. Kate dilates on her right to speak:

Why, sir, I trust I may have leave to speak,
And speak I will. I am no child, no babe.
Your betters have endured me say my mind,
And if you cannot, best you stop your ears.
My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break,
And rather than it shall I will be free
Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words. (4.3.73-80)

Here, when she asserts her right to the free and unrestrained expression of anger, Petruccio disarms it by giving her a perfunctory nod and then proceeding as though she is of his mind regarding the cap. In this regard, he is not simply trying to silence Kate in the misogynistic tradition but rather to guide her towards disciplined speech. Petruccio masterfully caps his authority with a morally irreproachable speech exhorting inward-looking honor:

Well, come, my Kate, we will unto your father’s,
Even in these honest mean habiliments.

Our purses shall be proud, our garments poor,
For 'tis the mind that makes the body rich,
And as the sun breaks through the darkest clouds
So honor peereth in the meanest habit.
What, is the jay more precious than the lark
Because his feathers are more beautiful?
Or is the adder better than the eel
Because his painted skin contents the eye?
O no, good Kate, neither art thou the worse
For this poor furniture and mean array. (4.3.163-74)

As has often been noted, Kate's performative verve in addressing the old Vincentio as a virgin in act 4, scene 5, signals her willing consent to participate in a marital partnership in which man is legally the head. Her skillful self-control in acting, or as Thomas Wright calls it, "mediocritie,"²⁸ reflects precisely her attainment of virtuous moderation. If Petruccio is displaying himself as a willful, petty tyrant in presuming to preside over celestial motions, he does so in this outlandish way precisely to assert the male principle, to establish his superior authority as husband, already sanctioned by law and social convention. His extremist tactics *ad absurdum*, once the issue of nominal head is resolved, moreover, signals a conjugal camaraderie rather than tyranny. Kate's response to Petruccio's test of wills predicates this understanding, finally releasing the virtuous gentlewoman from within the crippling shell of rebellious shrew:

Then God be blessed, it is the blessed sun.
But sun it is not when you say it is not,
And the moon changes even as your mind.
What you will have it named, even that it is,
And so it shall be so for Katherine. (4.5.19-23)

Because the role of "shrew" was one she unwillingly came to play, Kate comes to realize that she may now wear roles more natural to her inner self and to the social conduct regarding marital respect: as Petruccio claims, "[T]hus the bowl should run./ And not

²⁸Wright, 179.

unlikely against the bias” (4.5.25-26). Nonetheless, her transformation into a modest gentlewoman is clearly underscored in 5.1 when Petruccio playfully asserts his authority to get a kiss from her:

Petruccio: What, art thou ashamed of me?

Kate: No sir, God forbid, but ashamed to kiss.

Petruccio: Why, then let's home again.

Come sirrah, let's away.

Kate: Nay, I will give thee a kiss. Now pray thee, love, stay.

Petruccio: Is not this well? Come, my sweet Kate. (5.1.124-30)

This scene reveals a marked change in Kate's attitude towards Petruccio from a shrew's overt scorn to a gentlewoman's respect and affection for her husband. As a shrew, Kate would readily speak out her mind and voice her discontents; her new persona of feminine modesty prevents such ready access. Kate present opacity tempts us to fathom her psychic transformation. It behooves us to examine the momentous change in her sense of self as linked to her conception of the good. Outwardly, it looks as though Kate has merely replaced an unacceptable female role for an acceptable one; nonetheless, the traverse from shrew to gentlewoman implies a fundamental revision in her view of her world, induced by Petruccio. Despite the rough going of the last two days, Kate seems to have come to the understanding that Petruccio, beyond his roaring façade, is her ally, friend, and husband, who not only sees and appreciates her worth but wants her to do the same. If Kate now presents herself as a modest gentlewoman, it must be because she no longer needs to put up a combative front against an inimical world. And that is so because her newfound self-possession has dispelled the bugbears of male detractors; Kate has regained a world in regaining herself.

By overruling Kate's show of feminine modesty for a kiss in public, Petruccio offers her one final lesson in moderation. By demanding a kiss in public against conventional decorum, he keeps her from swinging too far to the side of modesty, thereby auspiciously upholding private over public, partnership over inequality in their conjugal relations. This kiss of affection publicly seals both their personalized approach to marriage and the tempered communion they have achieved therein, contrasting the intrigue and deception surrounding Lucentio and Bianca's elopement. Kate in the previous "sun and moon" dialogue, indeed, confirms the accord requisite in marriage. Such restrained conjugal love presents itself as part of the "merrye meane" estate, according to a Tudor poem.²⁹ Simultaneously, however, she manages to disparage Petruccio's inconstancy in asserting absurdly that it will be day or night according to his will. In this manner, Kate subverts the traditional hierarchy of sun above moon corresponding to man above woman,³⁰ thereby laying the groundwork for her virtuous ascendancy in act 5.

II. Kate, Virtuous Virago

The play's finale showcases Kate as the exemplar of virtue, transcending both the female-female and female-male politics to a new vision of human virtue, available to both sexes. In act 5, scene 2, in the banter after the wedding banquet over husbandly authority or its lack, Petruccio's teasing that "Hortensio fears his widow" (5.2.16) provokes the "loving widow" (7) to retort with a catty insinuation: "He that is giddy

²⁹ Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 146.

³⁰ See William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: 1622), sig. Aa3^{r-v}: "for fellowship hath respect to the thing itself, inferiority to the measure and manner ... in giving light the sun and the moon have a fellowship, but in measure and manner the moon is inferiour."

thinks the world turns round.... Your husband, being troubled with a shrew,/ *Measures* my husband's sorrow by his woe,/ And now you know my *meaning*" (26-30; my italics).

Thus ensues a dialogue punning over "mean":

Kate: A very mean meaning.

Widow: Right, I mean you.

Kate: And I am mean indeed, *respecting* you. (31-32; my italics)

"Mean" here can signify both "spiteful" and "moderate." The way these meanings resonate in actual performance would undoubtedly depend on directorial decision. A skillful actor playing Kate, I believe, would deliver the line with *measure*, that is, calm firmness in vocal and moral tone, respecting the judicious restraint of virtue, not simply delivering a matchingly vicious "measure for measure," as the widow does. Despite interpretive possibilities here, when Petruccio and Hortensio goad their wives as though placing bets on a cock fight—consistent with the association of women with birds and their acting as stand-ins for sparring male egos—the text indicates a suggestive silence, the least of which is that Kate has decisively rejected, as a guiding ethos, retributive justice by equal measure.³¹ Instead, Kate responds sovereignly with her epideictic speech on wifely duty, a striking enactment of virtuous moderation.

Taming situates itself in the contemporary debates on proper marital relations, specifically the tension between the dominance and the companionate model of marriage. Shakespeare's comedy shows how the two approaches may be compatible, supported by contemporary Puritan treatises on marriage and the general caution that "repressive

³¹ The intra-female rivalry between Kate and the Widow spurred by their assimilation of male-derived notions of female virtue prompts the question of whether it is possible to read *Taming* without situating it within a patriarchal master narrative. To what extent is Kate's speech, as repartee to the Widow's insult, complicit in or counteractive to patriarchal ideology? Is the Widow, on her side, getting bad press? Does she act aggressively towards reputedly shrewish Kate in an effort to defend the more positive view of the virago that she represents as an economically autonomous woman?

prescriptions should not be regarded as descriptions of actual behaviour”³² in early modern marital relationships. Although formal headship in the eyes of society resides in Petruccio, moral authority, in fact, resides in Kate, as she brilliantly demonstrates through the ethical and rhetorical power of the final speech—in the terms of early modern domestic discourse—advocating the doctrine of conscience in the guise of female obedience. One might claim that her speech is merely an adept theatrical response, a kind of parody of marital unanimity. It would not be wise, however, to be misled by binary oppositions. Kate’s hyperbolic speech as social performance does not have to be read as either wifely submission or female resistance. Instead, Kate’s response is both performance and ethical action rejecting the combative structure of gender disparity for a new conception of marriage based on virtuous companionship—both from ancient models of male-male friendship and Protestant notions of conjugal partnership grounded in spiritual equality. The two-in-one reconstitution of single subjects into the dual state of enduring matrimony can only succeed on the foundation of friendship, nurturing “the communion and equality of minds, between which neither anger, dissension, nor ingratitude can grow.”³³ Accordingly, reading her speech as a clever feminine ruse to have the last word in the gender power play is not only incompatible with the genuine modesty and respect she shows her husband in the kissing scene and, consistent with that moral disposition, the her gesture of placing her hands beneath Petruccio’s feet as one of gratitude, in response to a virtuous husband’s performance of duties to his wife. Seeing this gesture as an act of “stooping to conquer” would also deny the tremendous ethical power of her speech, the longest in the play. To modify Oliver Goldsmith’s phrase, Kate

³² Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19.

³³ Bryskett, 168.

stoops to raise herself and Petruccio (and others) to virtue, the basis of private friendship and companionate marriage as well as of a flourishing civil society. This is how Kate outtames the tamer himself, who, in gloating over Kate's performative collaboration and of all the play's characters, best discerning into her latent gentleness, yet never perceived the ethical power behind her decorous gestures. Kate's virtuous moderation, indeed, surpasses both Petruccio's pursuit of conjugal peace through male tyranny and the Widow's retributive justice by impulsive retaliation. In the *tour de force* of her final speech, she calls bossy men like Petruccio and catty women like the Widow to conduct themselves in ways reflective of a truly *civil* society.

Critics have argued, however, that this *tour de force* is achieved apparently through her formal submission to the patriarchal order, a cost that is glossed over by farcical banter and comic union.³⁴ Kate's uxorial mirroring of her husband's moods and will underscores at worst the arbitrary tyranny of patriarchal control: Petruccio and Kate's sun/moon dialogue, an exquisitely performed burlesque before the old Vincentio, ironically alludes to the so-deemed superior radiance of the husband/sun in relation to his wife/moon, which "so bedazzle[s]" Kate to provoke her outrageous "error" of mistaking the old man for a young maiden. *Taming* engages the broad challenges of feminist critique: how to comprehend women's power and women's resistance without exaggerating or romanticizing them in ameliorist narratives. Despite its apparent assimilation with the patriarchal ideology as in the sun/moon dialogue, Kate's final

³⁴ See Aspinall, 11: "Like many students of the play, [E. K.] Chambers recognizes and acknowledges the brutality that permeates *Shrew*, yet attributes its presence to the "tradition of farce" (1925; 45). This 'tradition' of farce also precludes, in its 'genially diffusive guise' (Moisan 1995, 110), any humanized 'characterizing' (Van Doren 1939, 38) whereby we may sympathize with Kate's situation or ironize her final speech."

speech, I argue, transcends the pitfalls of female in-fighting symptomatic of a minority group within a dominant culture and attains the mark of human integrity and excellence beyond and above the feminine ideal enjoined by male authority. In this manner, Kate achieves the just mean of greater female agency without undue submission to patriarchal constraints.

Her (in)famous final speech, ostensibly addressing proper female conduct with “Fie, fie, unknit that threatening unkind brow” (5.2.140), subtly echoes Petruccio’s bravura speech on male *virtus* concluding with “Tush, tush, fear boys with bugs” (1.2.205) and, likewise, reveals her self-command and control of the immediate scene. Despite her external aim to rein in deviant female behavior and her apparent accommodation of distinct gender expectations, Kate subtly gives equal time to proper male conduct, thereby commixing the complementary male and female virtue into a “heavenly mingle” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.1.58) of human excellence. In her homage to the ideally paternalistic, protective man, Kate cunningly enumerates his contractual duties, the default of which would relinquish her from his authority: as Henry Smith explains in “A Preparation to Marriage” (1594), “if [the husband] let [his wife] be better than himself, he seems to free her from her obedience, and bind himself to obey her.”³⁵ Kate’s exaggerated compliance with ideal female submissiveness, moreover, reveals its apocryphal nature, undermining the argument of physical strength as rationale for superiority and exposing the defects of natural law and the arbitrariness of positive law as

³⁵ Henry Smith, “A Preparation to Marriage,” *The Sermons of Master Henry Smith* (London: Thomas Man, 1594), 21.

based upon “custom, education, fortune, and a certain tyrannical occasion.”³⁶ In performance, Kate’s ending gesture of placing her hands “below [her] husband’s foot” (5.2.177), if enacted as seizing his Achilles’s heel, would be momentous, signally both her wifely obeisance and her queenly checkmating of Petruccio through his *de facto* moral inferiority despite his *de jure* superiority.

While Bianca rightly carps on Lucentio’s foolish betting on her duty, Kate goes further constructively to model before her audience virtuous moderation as the effective art of living: the Platonic fusion of love and the good producing salutary ends in the world through Aristotelian practical wisdom. In *A Discourse on Civill Life*, Lodowick Bryskett explains that because the virtuous person

knoweth that he is not borne to himself alone, but to civil society and conversation, and to the good of others as well as of himself, he therefore doth his endeavour with all care and diligence so to carry himself in words and in deeds, as he might be a pattern and example to others of seemly and virtuous speeches and honest actions, and do them all the good he could in reducing them to a good and commendable form of life.³⁷

Even as Kate enacts this example of virtue publicly, she calls upon the others, notably her husband, to join her as her consort in virtuous conduct. If the merchant prince Petruccio has thus far demonstrated gentle speech toward a mundane goal of marital peace, Kate has now groomed him further into a wholesale adoption of *noblesse*, beyond mere speech to the unconditional action of the ideal husband, who, as the woman’s lord, is also her protector, “that cares for thee,/ And for thy maintenance commits his body/ To watch the night in storms, the day in cold” (5.2.151-54). Beneath the ironic blazoning of the ideal

³⁶ Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De nobilitate et praecellentia sexus foeminei* (1509), trans. H. C. *Female pre-eminence, or The dignity and excellency of that sex above the male an ingenious discourse* (London: 1670), sig. F7.

³⁷ Bryskett, 154.

man's qualities lies the ethical imperative to become the Adam of their earthly paradise of marriage, who, as described in the hortatory pamphlet, *The Glasse of Godly Love*, shows her

most fervent love and affection, all gentle behavior, all faithfulness and help, all comfort and kindness, as to himself, his own flesh and body; so that under God there is no love, no affection, no friendship, no nearness of kin, to be compared unto this, nor any one thing under the Sun, that pleases God more than man and wife that agree well together, which live in the fear of God.³⁸

The subtle satire imbedded within Kate's final speech gestures toward symbolic androgyny, counteracting "a degenerate kind of masculinity—the cruelty ... of the bully and tyrant—and its deleterious effects on the family and the state."³⁹ This feminization of society, promoting virtues traditionally associated with femininity—mercy, patience, temperance—is endorsed by the views of contemporary writers of moral treatises such as Le Sieur Vigoureux, who "saw the obedience enjoined of a wife the pretext for a universally salutary humility and proposed it as a model for her husband and society in general."⁴⁰ Necessarily effected from *within* the patriarchal society, such a countermodel of gender relations should be seen as subtly transformative rather than merely submissive to the existing dominant ideology.

Petruccio's response to Kate's supreme oration is "Why, there's a wench! Come on and kiss me, Kate" (5.1.184). Quite apart from the fact that the last phrase becomes famous through a musical version of the play, Petruccio's answer, as a last reflection, prompts us to examine the possibility of moral transformation in the merchant prince—as

³⁸ Hermann von Wied, *The Glasse of Godly Love, A briefe and a plaine declaration of the duty of married folks*, trans. Haunce Dekin (London: 1588), sig. Bi.

³⁹ Jordan, 137.

⁴⁰ Le Sieur de Vigoureux, *Défense des femmes* (1617), sig. B5^v, I9^{r-v}, H4^v, quoted in Jordan, 294. See also 277-79, 137.

suggested by the play's allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and through Cambio's name. In performance, it would take a skillful actor of Petruccio ideally to intimate something—beyond solipsistic pleasure—in the registers of quasi-religious wonder, evoked by the uncanny power of Kate's awesome virtue. Such an actorly interpretation would enhance the play's material and mercenary grounding with ethical import, leaving viewers with a satisfying promise that the power of love and virtue would awaken higher moral aspiration in Petruccio than the mere reversal of expectation, the “wonder ... she will be tamèd so” (193) that Lucentio expresses in the play's concluding line. Yet the play does not give us that satisfaction, ending with Petruccio's expression of contentment: “Come, Kate, we'll to bed./ We three are married, but you two [Lucentio and Hortensio] are sped./ ‘Twas I won the wager, [to Lucentio] though you hit the white,/ And, being a winner, God give you good night” (5.2.188-91). Deceptively straightforward, Petruccio's comment lends itself to more complex interpretation. First, this final exchange rounds out the play's famous sexual banter: while Petruccio and Kate look ahead to the delights of marital consummation, the other two couples “are sped” not only in their erotic energies but also in hasty, imprudent courtship. Despite the sexual and gender themes, the language of archery—Aristotle's famous metaphor in situational ethics for enacting the just response—subtly suggests something more than the physically erotic—a more sublime or heroic eros (in the Platonic mode), laced in virtue. In this regard, Petruccio alludes to his virtuous moderation, by which he has successfully hit the mark while his male peers have apparently missed. Yet Lucentio's bewildered remark that Kate “be tamèd so” (5.2.193), at the same time, questions to what extent she has been “tamed”—in the male perspective, submissive to patriarchal authority. It seems, instead, that Kate has

latched onto a standard of human virtue by which she will elevate Petruccio and others. The ambivalence of Lucentio's comment suggests that Petruccio is not fully aware of his involvement in Kate's ethical project, something to be amicably and deftly sorted out in the "happily-ever-after" of their conjugal life.

Just as she integrates the two models of conjugal relations, Kate successfully harmonizes reason and passion within herself in the practice of virtuous moderation towards personal and civic well-being. As a foil to Lucentio, who exemplifies Aristotle's youth not amenable to philosophy,⁴¹ she is, indeed, "Kate of [his] consolation" (2.1.188) in more senses than Petruccio realized.⁴² This is how Kate virtuously domestiKates her Petruccio and the private and public economies of gender relations of both her immediate household and larger social circle. If in the first part of the play, Petruccio acted, according to Elizabethan homilies on matrimony, as the moral superior in "increasing concord" through moderation, by the end of the play we see this hierarchy overturned with Kate on top, grounded on an opposing paradigm of women idealized as men's spiritual superiors.⁴³

Critics, especially from performance studies, might be less convinced of this ethical reading than one which sees the work primarily as a stage play to entertain

⁴¹ Aristotle, I.3.1095a2. Shakespeare need not have consulted Aristotle's work since this idea was part of the stock knowledge of the Renaissance.

⁴² Heather James, "Shakespeare's Learned Heroines in Ovid's Schoolroom," *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 70, meticulously argues that Bianca's command of Ovid in the wooing scene of 3.1 is noticeably superior to that of her male counterpart, Lucentio. We can plausibly infer that the very literate Kate, benefiting from the same tutors as Bianca, was a good student of the classics, mastering her Ciceronian ethics in addition to Ovidian poetics. Kenneth Charlton, "Women and Education," *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Anita Pacheco (New York: Blackwell, 2002), 13, attests, in this regard, that "some [humanist] families, notably those of Thomas More, Edward Seymour and Anthony Cooke, engaged their daughters in the study of Latin and Greek."

⁴³ Scodel, 145.

audiences with all the devices and conventions of comedy—farce, disguise, deception—drawing from classical and continental models of Ovidian transformation, New Comedy, and Italian comedy. Invoking the Horatian ideal of profit and pleasure, I hasten to remind, however, that the two perspectives are ideally complementary. The ethical reading is all the more necessary for a richer engagement with the play in the light of the tendency of modern-day performances of the play to focus too much on the gender issue at a cost to the play's complexities. Whether one chooses to read *The Taming of the Shrew* as a representation of or corrective to early modern practices of marital discipline, Shakespeare incomparably imbues the interaction between Petruccio and Kate with earthbound humanity and a sensitivity to the lived experience that both mitigates the harsh morality of early modern domestic conduct books and eludes the implausible idealism of romantic comedy. The delight and satisfaction of the play resides uncannily in the dynamic sparring and magical transformations that Petruccio and Kate work upon each other as the best testament of human connection, sympathy, and conjugal love.

Chapter 3

Othello: The Perilous Traverse from Two to One

Unlike the romantic comedies which deal with courtship and end in marriage, Shakespeare's early comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and his tragedy, *Othello*, present glimpses into newlyweds experiencing the uneasy adjustment from single personhood to the joint state of marriage. The entry of two individuals into joint being follows the Biblical blueprint of two-in-one marital union: "no more twain, but one flesh" (Matthew 19.6). This holy union ratified by God was also sanctioned by common law, which ruled that the legal personhood of marriage obtained solely in the man, and that the woman, through coverture, became civilly dead.¹ The traverse from two to one becomes fraught with tension by the very nature of the transition from single to dual being and through the gender power play within marriage.

Even as couples continue to grapple with these challenges in the modern era, the examination of the traverse from two to one situates itself historically in the early modern discourses and debates on marital conduct. *Taming* and *Othello*, indeed, dramatize the clash between the dominance model and the companionate model of marriage. This tension between the two models correlates with the crucial contradiction within the Biblical injunction: a wife is a spiritual equal yet submissive to the husband as the church is subject unto Christ (Ephesians 22:24). At the surface, the plotlines of both plays—in one, a husband's taming of his shrewish wife and, in the other, a husband's murder of his supposedly unfaithful wife—suggest that both works dramatize the dominance model upholding male authority. I argued in Chapter 2, however, that in Petruccio and Kate's

¹ Meg Lota Brown and Kari Boyd McBride, *Women's Roles in the Renaissance* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2005), 54.

conjugal relationship, the dominance and the companionate models harmoniously co-exist through the deft actions of virtuous moderation. This chapter presents further subtle integrations of the dominance and the conscience models now in the tragic mode through an analysis of Othello and Desdemona's fatal relationship. Although Othello and Desdemona each traverse from two to one in distinctly gendered forms of idealized joint being, their unremitting devotion to personal virtue hinders them from acting sensitively and sensibly to safeguard and promote their dual being. In other words, their inability to enact virtuous moderation in daily exchange proves tragic for their marriage, which requires a working love through "the discipline of tempered communion."²

The late A. D. Nuttall once described Shakespeare's *Othello* as a play about "a hero who went into a house."³ In this tragedy, Othello, a Moorish commander, relinquishes his "unhousèd free condition" (1.2.26) for the love of a woman, his self-sufficient, masculine state of one exchanged for the interdependent marital state of two-in-one. Can the valiant man be a good husband? While ostensibly dealing again with the theme of taming—this time of the man—it would be more accurate to describe the play as Shakespeare's further experimentation with integrative conceptions of being. Here in a marriage of Mars and Venus, Othello's move into the domestic sphere is complemented by Desdemona's hopes of being more engaged within the masculine sphere of action. These gender negotiations play out in the intersections of public and private and black and white within the permeable space of Venice, ethnically diverse through her mercantile tradition, and richly divergent in her symbolic associations with both sensual

² Harry Berger, Jr. *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1988), 22.

³ A. D. Nuttall. *A New Mimesis* (London: Methuen, 1983), 134.

Venus and Virgin Mary from pagan and Christian mythology respectively.⁴ The promises of this dynamic space towards a brave new world of virtuous, interracial love are thwarted by an inherent inability on the part of the two protagonists to rule their passions in the light of real and perceived differences emerging between them, an inability masterfully exploited by the fiendish Iago. Desdemona, the fairest of Venice's noble ladies, upon hearing of Othello's harrowing adventures, falls in love with the virile Moorish commander over "the wealthy curled darlings" (1.2.69) of Venetian court.⁵ The play's wondrous effect lies in this marvelous union that transpires against all perceivable obstacles. Othello and Desdemona's extraordinary relationship, depicting the magic and misery, the enchantment and torment issuing from erotic desire as a so-called "attraction of opposites," explores to what extent difference enhances an amorous relationship and at what point it can prove deleterious. By generic imperative, the tragedy examines both the internal and external, the characteral and cultural conditions by which Othello and Desdemona's marriage works its way to doom.

Despite their external differences in skin color, age, and social class, Othello and Desdemona are alike in one respect: both are, in the eyes of others, exemplars of virtue and self-dignity: he, through his martial prowess and commanding ability that constitute

⁴ Margaret Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 12-13.

⁵ Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 122, 106, argues that Desdemona shows "virginal reluctance" in shunning the Venetian noblemen. Paster invokes Burton to bolster her claim that Desdemona fits the greensickness profile: "noble virgins, nice gentlewomen, such as are solitary and idle, live at ease, lead a life out of action and employment, that fare well in great houses and jovial companies, ill disposed peradventure of themselves, and not willing to make any resistance, discontented otherwise, of weak judgment, able bodies, and subject to passions" (Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], 1:416-17). I remain unconvinced: Desdemona was so far from idle that her constant household chores prevented her from granting Othello her undivided attention. Moreover, the conviction of her love belies the weak-willedness of the greensick virgin. Lastly, there is no textual evidence of Desdemona's sadness before her marriage to Othello.

masculine virtue, and she, through maidenly chastity and social grace that constitute feminine virtue. Yet within that extraordinary match, both Othello and Desdemona, in their transition from one to two, fail to modulate the demands of individual being with those of the joint marital being. The clash arises when Desdemona's generosity, linked to self-expansion, swells to the edge of feminine grace, which turns into wayward wantonness in the eyes of insecure Othello, his jealousy piqued by Iago's pernicious prodding. His personal integrity thus threatened, Othello reins her in, thereby literalizing the legal personhood of marriage as obtaining solely in the husband. Despite this marital breach triggered by the devious Iago, the cause of tragedy lies not so much in difference but in sameness: Othello's and Desdemona's hypervirtue—failure on both sides to temporize their idealism so as to bridge emerging conflicts instead of aggravating them. Both exhibit what Aristotle calls incontinence in respect to honor,⁶ which, albeit not a vice, works ruinously in *Othello* against the very virtue it aims to promote. Bound by idealized projections of each other, neither is able to confront the other flexibly and sympathetically as a human—hence, fallible—being as the inner sanctum of marriage suddenly turns into a terrain of terror. Othello and Desdemona fall victim to the blindness of heroic virtue.

In their joint being, Othello takes an insinuation of Desdemona's adultery as an actual assault upon his "pure soul" such that in the most visceral terms, he "had rather be a toad,/ And live upon the vapour of a dungeon/ Than keep a corner in the thing I love/ For others' uses" (3.3.274-7). To Desdemona's departing words in act 3, scene 3, "Be as your fancies teach you./ Whate'er you be, I am obedient" (89-90), Othello exclaims in

⁶ Aristotle, *NE*, VII.4.1148b15, 1148a8.

self-reflection: “Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul/ But I do love thee, and when I love thee not,/ chaos is come again” (91-94). Though the epithet ostensibly regards Desdemona, it equally suits Othello, caught between perdition and chaos, between loving and not loving, in a new, confounding world in which his well-being hangs on his beloved’s regard. For all his acclaimed self-sufficiency in the larger world of braving war and nature, a “happy and proper self-regard,” for Othello, is “impossible without the adoring approval”⁷ of Desdemona, or to modify David Bevington’s claim, impossible with the slightest belief of her inconstancy. Hitherto having aspired to valor grounded on perseverance and autonomy of action, Othello in marriage suddenly finds himself bound to the vagaries of love. The normally composed Othello, once piqued by jealousy, reveals by his chaste nature a total incapacity to struggle with the tides of passion, hence an incapacity to be in an intimate relationship. More vital to his well-being is a narcissistic guarding of his inviolate self rather than the virtuous integration with another, by which, in Edmund Spenser’s words, “simple truth and mutuall good will/ Seekes with sweet peace to salve each others wound” (*Amoretti*, 65,11-12).⁸ Hence, Othello’s half-morbid, marbleizing thought, “If it were now to die/ ’Twere not to be most happy, for I fear/ My soul hath her content so absolute/ That not another comfort like to this/ Succeeds in unknown fate” (2.1.186-89), counterpointed with Desdemona’s life-embracing reply: “The heavens forbid/ But that our loves and comforts should increase/ Even as our days do grow” (190-92).

⁷ David Bevington, “*Othello*: Portrait of a Marriage,” *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York: Routledge, 2002), 221-232: 225.

⁸ All citations are from *Edmund Spenser’s Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Hugh McClean and Anne Prescott, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993).

Because Othello, by a core of masculine constancy (as opposed to feminine flux), cannot abide the variability of erotic desire, Iago needs only to plant a mere kernel of jealousy which so consumes him that self-preservation will require that he expunge the alleged cause. “[H]aving [his] best judgment collid” (2.3.189), the passion of jealousy, “the green-eyed monster which doth mock/ The meat it feeds on” (3.3.170-71) “shapes faults that are not” (3.3.153): the jealous Othello, at Iago’s incitement, himself irrationally produces “the poisonous image of [Desdemona’s] infidelity”⁹ out of malignant nothing. Iago’s specious suggestion that Desdemona would soon tire of Othello and revert “naturally” to “proposèd matches/ Of her own clime, complexion, and degree” (3.3.234-35) resounds with a particular racial twist the cautions of marriage manuals advising men not to marry above their social rank lest they lose their “natural” superiority.¹⁰ Central to the play is understanding how and why a calm, judicious commander devolves into a zealous murderer of his own virtuous wife. In his own final reckoning, Othello describes himself as “one that loved not wisely but too well” (5.2.353). Disagreeing with both parts of his account, I argue that his feelings do not constitute love towards a beloved as a respected, self-standing human being. His “love” is more an issue of power, a defensive fixation on his self-integrity vis-à-vis the erotic other. The “noble Moor”’s esteemed *virtus*, his “all-in-all sufficiency” (4.1.262), deforms into an intolerable anguish of sexual and racial insecurity. The uncontrolled passion of jealousy arising from a self-regard threatened by intertwined specters of cuckoldry and

⁹ Daniel J. Vitkus, “The ‘O’ in *Othello*: Tropes of Damnation and Nothingness,” *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 350.

¹⁰ Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 146.

ethnic inferiority¹¹ exposes what Othello deludedly calls (heterosexual) love: not a mutually giving relationship but the one-sided female propping of anxious male selfhood¹² upon which the relationship is grounded. Indeed, his account of their courtship seems notably unilateral: “She loved me for the dangers I had passed,/ And I loved her that she did pity them” (1.3.166-67). While Desdemona admires his honorable character and his valiant feats with feelings of wonder and sympathy, Othello’s “love,” instead of projecting outward towards the beloved, returns solipsistically back to him, dependent on his increased self-regard.

In this respect, the play’s action takes place aptly in Cyprus rather than in Venice because this tale recounts not a happy union of Mars and Venus but rather the destruction of Venus, as represented by Desdemona, the “fair devil.” In the “misogynist discourse ... that expresses the structure of suspicion and castration known in Venice as manhood,”¹³ the venereal Desdemona emits a threat of castration, mythical residue of the white foam surrounding the dismembered and castrated Uranus out of which Aphrodite/Venus came to life.¹⁴ Othello’s demonization of Desdemona as the female other entails valuing her only as an enhancing extension of himself rather than respecting her as a human being. The debacle, for theatrical purposes, is accelerated through Iago’s subterfuge. The master

¹¹ See also Emily C. Bartels, “Improvisation and *Othello: The Play of Race and Gender*,” *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare’s Othello*, ed. Peter Erickson and Maurice Hunt (New York: MLA, 2005), 72-79: 73. I agree with Emily Bartels’s claim that gender, rather than race, played out in the couple’s domestic dispute, is the grounding issue: “It is precisely because Othello’s too easy ingestion of the ‘green-eyed monster’ (3.3.168) is framed by the domestic dispute that his transformation appears as the exclusive result neither of an extraordinarily persuasive insider (Iago) nor of an extraordinarily vulnerable outsider (Othello).”

¹² Bevington, in Kolin, *Othello: New Critical Essays*, 222-26.

¹³ Berger, “Three’s a Company: The Spectre of Contaminated Intimacy in *Othello*,” *Shakespearean International Yearbook* 4 (2004): 258.

¹⁴ From Hesiod’s “Theogony,” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm> (30 July 2007); Hesiod, “Theogony,” *The Homeric Hymns and Homericica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1914).

manipulator, exploiting the weak spots of others, skillfully maneuvers a toxic mix of male homosociality and black inferiority to drive a wedge between Othello and his Desdemona. Yet *Othello* is not “the story of an easily inflamed man who has the unfortunate accident of meeting an Iago.”¹⁵ The seeds of disaster are sown in the very characters of Othello and Desdemona themselves: as Heraclitus once noted, “Man’s character is his fate [*daimōn*],”¹⁶ meaning that one’s own character, not the stars above, determines one’s fortune or misfortune, *eudaimonia* or *dusdaimonia*.

In consecrating her “soul and fortunes” to Othello’s “honors and his valiant parts” (1.3.252-53), Desdemona enacts in heart what the couple’s mutual consent performs by law, the subsuming of her person in the legal person of her husband. For better or for worse, Desdemona joins her honor and casts her lot (Gr. *daimōn*) irretrievably with Othello. When he begins to abuse his male prerogative, following popular traditions of the patient wife/cruel husband tales, Desdemona proves unable to disassociate from her vicious husband when she should, according to Protestant marriage treatises, “place her allegiance to God’s law as discerned by her conscience above her obligation to her husband.”¹⁷ Inflexibly, the orb of reality that she inhabits cannot admit the thought of an ignoble Othello. Desdemona, whose “heart’s subdued/ Even to the very quality of [her] lord” (1.3.249-50), clings fiercely to her idealized projection of a valiant and gentle Othello for the practical reason that after her filial disobedience, she cannot return to her

¹⁵ Allan Bloom and Harry V. Jaffa, *Shakespeare’s Politics*, (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., 1964), 38; see also A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 278, on Othello’s victimization by Iago based on the textual clue in Othello’s final speech: “but being wrought/ Perplexed in the extreme” (5.2.354-55).

¹⁶ Heraclitus, Fragment 119, *The Complete Fragments: Translation and Commentary and the Greek Text*, trans. William Harris, 31-32, <http://www.community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf> (4 April 2006).

¹⁷ Sara Munson Deats, *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Kolin (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 236.

father's house. Relinquishing that ideal would be as much metaphorical death to her as clinging to it would inexorably lead to physical death by his hands. Instead of perceiving a more closed and jealous attitude in Othello, Desdemona persists in pleading Cassio's suit, further widening the conjugal breach leading ultimately to her murder. Fulfilling his ungrounded fears "begriming" her name and visage "black/ As [his] own face" (3.3.392-93), Othello snuffs out her life in the blackest of deeds. Ciphering her honor in his devouring dishonor, he enacts *dusdaimonia*, wedding deed to name, doling death to Desdemona—because only in silent chrysolite is there assurance of her fidelity and, the chaos in his soul thus subdued, may he love her. If inexperienced love drives Desdemona to fixate on Othello as the ideal man to her doom, a fuller love of complete acceptance of an imperfect other, without forgetting one's sense of self, would not have required her abject acceptance of fault at death and might possibly have prevented her tragic murder.

Both Desdemona and Emilia die at the hands of their husbands. Comparing Desdemona's "complicity" in her own death with Emilia's underscores the latter's closer achievement of virtuous moderation, which her mistress and master fail to attain within their marriage. By generic imperative, *Othello* depicts the tragic hero and heroine's shortcomings in virtue as the harmonizing of reason and passion into effective action. As the site of self-expression, character entails, according to Bert States, "an infinitely delicate self-adjustment"¹⁸ to stimuli posed by the world. Ethical action by a character (*ethos*), especially in the dramatic context, implies interaction with other characters. As Bruce Smith suggests, "character happens in response to other people."¹⁹ Accordingly,

¹⁸ Bert States, *Hamlet and the Concept of Character* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 6-7.

¹⁹ Smith, 103.

virtue in theater unfolds within the web of characteral interaction. My use of the word, “complicity,” signals my indebtedness to Harry Berger’s principle of “redistributed complicities”²⁰ in examining ethical action in Shakespearean tragedy. While this interpretive lens has produced startling insights into character through incisive reading of discursive relationships, my interpretation is essentially grounded on the conception of virtue as disciplined passion, thereby avoiding the potential drawback of Berger’s method: the ethical whitewashing of victim and villain, “good” and “bad” characters.

I. Othello: Self-Castration and the Demonizing of Desdemona

Bolstered by military and romantic success, Othello presents himself as judiciously calm and self-assured in the first half of the play. In conversation with Iago, Othello reveals a liberal nature that approves the sensual side of virtue and promotes the flourishing of beauty and love through pleasure:

’Tis not to make me jealous
To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company,
Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances;
Where virtue is, these are more virtuous. (3.3.183-86)

Desdemona’s accompanying Othello to Cyprus as his “fair warrior” (2.1.179) seems to signal a happy union of Mars and Venus: Othello partakes in the social and domestic joys while Desdemona lives closer to the masculine, military life than what early modern women were generally allowed. As David Bevington explains,

Othello and Desdemona are, for a time, happily married. They genuinely admire each other. They both take huge risks and make sacrifices in order to share a life together. The great difference that they sense in their heretofore separate lives is

²⁰ Harry Berger, Jr., “Acts of Silence, Acts of Speech: How to Do Things with Othello and Desdemona,” *Renaissance Drama* 33 (2004), 10; *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Erickson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

one that they embrace in its complementarity. They cherish each other for offering such new worlds that they can occupy jointly.²¹

Desdemona's love enables Othello to be his virtuously moderate self. As Othello explains, he has no need to be jealous: "Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw/ The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt,/ For she had eyes, and chose me" (3.3.187-89). What presents itself here in the first line as modesty will later rebel against the self-confidence in the last line as soon as Iago begins working on Othello's male anxiety, compounded by racial inferiority. As long as he believes that Desdemona loves him, Othello behaves as the reputed "noble Moor." But the moment that the foundation of female love is shaken, he joins the rank of other basely jealous males in the Shakespearean canon—Claudio, Mister Ford, Leontes—though he surpasses all of them in self-delusion by elevating the murder of his wife to the level of a religious sacrifice and noble deed.

Shakespeare's particular representation of male anxiety illuminates the psychodynamics of otherness and its poignant impact on male efforts at self-integrity vis-à-vis the female other. Specifically, Othello's racial inferiority entails certain compulsions of ethnic difference. Because of his outsider status, he must prove himself as more valiant and more honorable than white men because all things being equal, a white man of virtue will be preferred to him. That is why Othello expresses himself before the Venetian Senate as unfailingly constant in his duty to the state: "when light-winged toys/ Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness/ My speculative and officed instrument,/ That my disports corrupt and taint my business,/ Let housewives make a skillet of my helm..."(1.3.263-267). His husbandly duty in the rites of marriage must defer to his martial and civic honor, which represents who he is as a man. Already compelled to

²¹ Bevington, 223.

exercise moderation to protect his “perfect soul” (1.2.31) by the dictates of racial prejudice, Othello is perforce less equipped to temporize wisely when assailed with another attack on his manhood, the possibility of Desdemona’s infidelity.

Troubled in both the racial and sexual aspects of his being, Othello acts consistently to defend his manhood over his marriage, his personal interests over those of the joint being. Despite his cry of despair at the loss of love, he is more consumed by the loss of his mental peace. His anguish is so great that he buys this peace at the cost of bewhoring Desdemona. Sexual and racial insecurity assailing the core of his self-worth, Othello is not capable of love defined as emotional and psychic unity such that selfless devotion towards the beloved’s well-being is equivalent with one’s own well-being. For Othello, Desdemona remains an object to be enjoyed, appreciated, and used for male profit, not a subject in her own right, whose feelings and actions he respects and bewonders as those of a distinct individual.

That is why Othello makes professions of justice regarding her alleged adultery but shortly thereafter denies her the due process entitled to the accused. The judicious deliberation of “I’ll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove” (3.3.194) is followed a mere 170 lines later by the violent exhortation, “Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore.... Give me the ocular proof” (3.3.364-65). “[O]nce in doubt” (183) through Iago’s persuasion that Desdemona’s aberrant fancy for a match of “foul disproportions” will be overruled by “natural” affection based on “like like” “matches/ Of her own clime, complexion, and degree” (234-35), Othello must “be once resolved” (3.3.183-84). As Iago well knew, it would take only a seed of doubt to fire up in Othello an immediate need for resolution. In act 3, scene 4, Othello, interpreting her moist hand not

auspiciously but suspiciously as a sign of sexual promiscuity, “fruitfulness and liberal heart” (3.4.36), counsels her in self-denial: “fasting, . . . prayer,/ Much castigation, exercise devout” (38-39). In this, his first encounter with Desdemona after Iago’s pernicious impact, Othello already demonizes her in a riddling manner: “For here’s a young and sweating devil here/ That commonly rebels. ’Tis a good,/ A frank one” (3.4.40-42). Choosing to speak to Desdemona in a mystifying manner, Othello, even as he prematurely decides her guilt, prevents open communication with her, further shutting down her opportunities to defend herself. In this manner of rejection, he subconsciously yet insidiously sends the “frank” Desdemona to Cassio, to “intermingle” ardently in his suit—not in lewdness but out of boredom, for the “young and sweating devil here/ That commonly rebels” is the woman idling away in domestic inconsequence, suddenly impassioned by an opportunity for meaningful action.

Othello shortcircuits the investigation of Desdemona’s alleged adultery because subconsciously he wants her to be guilty so that he may renounce her for his former “unhousèd . . . condition” (1.2.26), “free” of the turbulence she arouses. He cleverly maneuvers between the “perdition” of loving—the threat against his self-integrity—and the “chaos” of not loving—the void it leaves—towards a falsely just mean: the self-justified peace of not loving Desdemona by virtue of her “proven” guilt. Though demanding ocular proof, Othello settles, conveniently for Iago and himself, for the more easily obtainable but less direct evidence. Iago offers Othello a combination of indirect and unreliable evidence—the circumstantial evidence of the handkerchief, pseudo-auditory proof, and various accounts of hearsay—the totality of which successfully presents Othello an illusion of sufficient proof. Far from being ocular proof, the

handkerchief, a tangible object supposedly transferred from Desdemona's hand to Cassio's, provides tangential evidence of "intermingling" which acts indirectly to incriminate Desdemona. Though Thomas Rymer in his *Short View of Tragedy* (1693) may be right about the ignobility of the tragic hero being undone by a household trifle,²² what he overlooks is that it is Othello himself, who exploits the superstitions surrounding *his* handkerchief in order to "quit the house." The handkerchief reveals Othello in a prosecutorial rather than an impartially judicial role, exposing his desire to find her guilty. Asking Desdemona of the handkerchief's whereabouts after relating its amorous portent, Othello begins to suspect wrongdoing prejudicially the minute she cannot bring it forth for display. Considered racially inferior by white Europeans, the Moor, in turn, demonizes his sexual inferior by incriminating Desdemona prematurely. Moreover, he implements the expeditious military procedures of the traditionally male realm of action rather than the due process of the equity courts presiding over domestic issues. Ultimately, the proof is as spectral as the accusation. Love, by its very grounding on faith, demands imaginative assent; it cannot be tested, proven by the methods of forensic science.

By preying on his racial and sexual insecurity combined, Othello's autogenetic jealousy, not Desdemona's actual infidelity, brings about his metaphorical castration, as reflected in his defunct virtue. With a nudge from Iago, Othello fatally deviates "from a proper sense of self-worth, conceived as a mean between a self-abnegation that idolizes

²² Thomas Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy* (1693), in *The Critical Works of Thomas Rymer*, ed. Curt Zimansky (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 160. See also Harry Berger, Jr., "Impertinent Trifling: Desdemona's Handkerchief," *SQ* 47.3 (1996), 235-50, for an extremely insightful close reading of the handkerchief.

the other and a self-regard that renders the other superfluous.”²³ The physical and deliberative excellence that enabled him to surpass others in the male pursuit of honor proves flaccid and impotent in the shadows of his insecurity and his imagined castration. By the compensatory instinct of insecurity, he dons an extra shell of masculine hardness against Desdemona: his initiation of military process in a domestic action. Not martial hardness, but rather an emotional and mental suppleness, is the sign of real manhood in the civic sphere of complex human interactions—the sort Othello does not command. When he modestly apologizes before the Senate for his “rude” speech, lacking “the soft phrase of peace” (1.3.82), it is rather, as we later see, the sensibility and just understanding beneath the rhetoric which Othello gravely lacks. In murdering Desdemona, Othello has successfully retreated into male self-sufficiency, self-deludedly justified in having severed his tainted wifely half.

Shakespeare’s tragedy can be read as illustrating the competing models of early modern marital conduct. Modern (and even early modern)²⁴ sensibilities would readily allow us to see the play through this devolving trajectory from the companionate to the male dominance model. In this respect, Othello’s murder of Desdemona can be seen as a literalization of the male headship in marriage:

$$1+1=L+0,$$

where L is the legal personhood, which obtains solely in the man, and the woman becomes ciphered. At the same time, however, the greatness of Shakespeare lies in that he allows us experience the moral struggle and the genuine terror of Othello’s dilemma.

²³ Scodel, 255-56.

²⁴ Performance history tends to show that *Taming* was not well received. Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005), 52: “there are only three recorded references to it before 1647.”

Othello's murder of Desdemona is the literalization of dreams on the part of early moderns of the death of their spouses because in those days there was no option of divorce, no annulment of marriage except by death. The only way that Othello can get his identity, his "pure soul" back is to cut her off; so real is his sense of contamination, so visceral is his experience as indicated by his speech p. 132

If, as Othello claims, he "loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.353), he also "loved ... too well" so as to not to love at all—a "hyperlove" that vitiates itself.

II. Desdemona's Angelizing of Othello

The flipside to Othello's demonization of Desdemona is her angelizing of her husband, her refusal to see and assist him as an honorable but flawed being rather than an objectified projection of her fancy: the "gloriously active"²⁵ man that "heaven had made her" (1.3.162). Of unmitigated virtue "too noble for the world" (*Coriolanus*, 3.1.255), Desdemona, like Coriolanus, is ill-equipped to deal effectively with the foul actions stirring around her. Justified in respect of the greatness of her merit, Desdemona's excessive pride, nonetheless, hinders proper action vis-à-vis her husband, who, apparently, is not living up to her moral standards. By the virtue of their permeable joint being, flaws in Othello would become flaws within her own being. Thus, by the compulsions of her exacting virtue, Desdemona must maintain the illusions of a virtuous Othello and a happy marriage in order to defend the bulwark of her "perfect soul" (1.2.31). This very effort, however, induces her demise and the ruin of her marriage.

In act 1, we can sympathize with Desdemona's insistence on accompanying her husband to Cyprus and her complementary reluctance to stay behind in the vicinity of her

²⁵ Bevington, 224.

disapproving father when her new devotion by marriage is to Othello. At first Desdemona's presence at Othello's side in Cyprus promises the harmonious mythical union of Mars and Venus, but the events of the play reveal, instead, that military and domestic actions do not mix auspiciously as Othello's martial adjudication of his domestic trouble clearly reveals. Given her open, solicitous nature ("liberal heart" [3.4.36]) and the murky boundaries between the martial and the social realms, it is hard to condemn the sympathetic motives behind her incursions into the military sphere. At the same time, Desdemona might have acted more moderately in light of Othello's compulsions toward manhood as he defines it—public duty over personal fulfillment.

What motivates her unwise interference in Othello's governing decisions? In this "conspicuously masculine realm," Desdemona is "as isolated and potentially vulnerable as Othello in the subtle world of Venice."²⁶ A bride feeling neglected in this isolation, Desdemona might desire more attention from Othello than he offers her: "we must think men are not gods,/ Nor of them look for such observancy,/ As fits the bridal" (3.4.148-50). On this joint enterprise with her husband, not merely listening to his stories in between her household chores, Desdemona might be longing to take part in Othello's active life. In Desdemona's mind, taking up Cassio's suit for reinstatement might seem the perfect opportunity for her to participate in a meaningful way with her venereal powers in the masculine world, thereby bridging the two spheres. In her first occasion to exercise female agency in the male sphere of action, she does it ardently—perhaps too ardently. Assuming that she and her husband enjoy a marital companionship based on liberal understanding beyond the overbearing masculine rule prescribed in early modern

²⁶ Michael Neill, "Changing Places in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Survey* 37 (1984): 118.

manuals on marital conduct, Desdemona, in her liberal kindness, begins to mirror Cassio's feelings rather than her husband's, thereby unwittingly contaminating marital intimacy.²⁷

Like Coriolanus, Desdemona comes to tragedy by mistakenly pursuing virtue as an unqualified extreme, instead of modulating it according to the political imperatives bearing upon all human action. In act 3, scene 4, just after the temptation scene, Othello, examining Desdemona's moist hand, speaks mournfully of hearts and hands—how joining hands no longer necessarily means joining hearts. Desdemona, unaware how gravely Iago has pricked his insecurity, dismisses Othello's dour fortune-telling in a gesture of chiding affection for, in her view, more "serious" business—the mending of the breach between Othello and his lieutenant, Cassio. Like Othello, who, in his single-mindedness to find his wife guilty for his own peace, does not give her a chance to defend herself, Desdemona, likewise, in her fixed purpose, is not attentive to his effort to communicate his insecurity: "The hearts of old gave hands,/ But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts" (3.4.44-45). Desdemona's own impeccable honor, bound with her unassailable idealization of Othello, "keeps her from acknowledging his jealousy while pursuing a course of rhetorical action that aggravates it."²⁸ Desdemona engages "frankly" with Cassio, wholly out of touch with the emotional reality of her husband's jealousy. Desdemona's perception of his insecurity should alert her to mitigate her ardent suit in Cassio's behalf. Nonetheless, she does not make allowances for moral weakness and instead expects Othello to conduct himself as magnanimously as she does.

Given Cassio's misconduct in the drunken brawl (at Iago's insidious instigation),

²⁷ Berger, "Three's a Company," 254.

²⁸ Berger, "Three's a Company," 257, pun intended.

Othello's suspension of the lieutenant was a reasonable decision, which Desdemona the very next day tries to override with no regard in this instance for the rehabilitative effect of disciplinary action. In her conversation with Cassio, who is afraid of losing his position permanently, Desdemona rightly reassures him that Othello "shall in strangeness stand no farther off/ Than in a politic distance" (3.3.12-13). Upon the entrance of Othello and Iago, Cassio himself enacts a "politic distance" and dismisses himself, "Madam, not now," in deference for penitential time. On the contrary, Desdemona contradicts her own words and solicits an immediate reinstatement of Cassio with no regard for "politic distance." In her excess of pity, (from which Othello himself previously benefited), she implores with pathos:

Othello: Went he hence now?

Desdemona: Yes, faith, so humbled
That he hath left part of his grief with me
To suffer with him. Good love, call him back. (3.3.52-55)

Not surprisingly, Othello repeats Cassio's very words: "Not now, sweet Desdemon. Some other time" (56). This verbal accord suggests two points: first, the two men will sort their difference out in due time and in good measure, and, second, Desdemona's affect-based meddling is not only unnecessary but harmful to the natural course of repairing the martial, homosocial relationship. Yet Desdemona, veritably in the role of the "young and sweating devil .../ That *commonly* rebels" (3.4.40-41, my italics), perversely forces the issue:

Desdemona: But shall't be shortly?

Othello: The sooner, sweet, for you.

Desdemona: Shall't be tonight at supper?

Othello: No, not tonight.

Desdemona: Tomorrow dinner, then?

Othello: I shall not dine at home.
I meet the captains at the citadel. (57-60)

Blinkered, Desdemona does not infer from this last remark that the resolution regarding Cassio's dereliction of duty resides in a tougher, masculine form of interaction of the martial realm rather than the more affective, feminine form of interaction of the domestic realm. For a woman of reputed virtue, Desdemona displays an uncommon immoderation and a most common impatience. Still unrelenting, she then *demand*s that Othello and Cassio reconcile within three days, giving as arguments the harshness of the punishment and Othello's personal debt to Cassio, who served as the loyal intercessor during their courtship. Her reasons, however, are not militarily sound. First, Cassio's participation in a drunken brawl resulting in the wounding of a man greatly exceeds what erroneously she undercuts "in our common reason [as] not almost a fault/ T'incur a private check" (65-68). Second, as Cassio would well understand, Othello, in his duty as governor, must set aside all personal claims in the disciplining of his lieutenant. Desdemona's reasoning is common in two ways: she applies (common) civic procedure when military procedure is in order, and, furthermore, exhibits mediocre instead of sound judgment—with the final implication that her reputed virtue refers more to traditional female chastity and fidelity than the practical wisdom required by virtuous moderation, or disciplined passion.

Yet Desdemona continues to flex her "grace or power" (3.3.46), even to the point of threatening consequences if Othello does not comply: "By'r Lady, I could do much" (75). She is the one guilty of having "so much to-do/ With bringing [Cassio] in" (74-75), not Othello whom she accuses. Deeply attached to her, Othello indulgently grants her wish: "Prithee, no more. Let him come when he will./ I will deny thee nothing" (76-77).

By any reasonable measure, Desdemona should be satisfied with Othello's answer, yet she is not, exclaiming, "Why, this is not a boon" (77), and rants about this denouement. To Desdemona, who has turned this event into a big issue involving her female agency, Othello's granting her a general blessing has the effect of belittling what, from her perspective of limited female agency, is weighty matter, "full of poise" into a domestic trifle such as entreating "you [to] wear your gloves,/ ... Or sue to you to do a peculiar profit/ To your own person" (77-81). Ironically, Desdemona's speech has the curious effect of betraying her own psychic process as she, lacking "poise," uses Cassio's suit to gain "a peculiar profit/ To [her] own person." Subsumed by marriage in Othello's gloriously active life, Desdemona is not content merely to listen vicariously about his adventures in the drawing room but rather to engage actively in them herself.

This last ranting causes Othello to repeat his intention to please her—with a note of finality and plea for peace:

Othello: I will deny thee nothing!
Whereon I do beseech thee grant me this,
To leave me but a little to myself.

Desdemona: Shall I deny you? No. Farewell, my lord. (3.3.83-85)

Desdemona's acquiescence sounds a bit impertinent. Like Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Desdemona is not the ideal of feminine virtue, "the maiden never bold" (1.3.94) and "Truly, an obedient lady" (4.1.252), that she is reputed to be. Such forward conduct by Desdemona not only lends grounds for Iago's antifeminist remarks about her as the general's general (2.3.292) but also lays the foundation for Iago's inciting of jealousy in Othello in the immediately succeeding lines. Through Iago's pernicious counsel, Othello,

solely focused on assaults to his integrity, comes to match Desdemona in her single-minded focus on Cassio's suit.

Othello's confronting of Desdemona on this trifle-turned-terror is predictably toxic. While Othello asks after the handkerchief, fishing for signs of guilt and using "magic" now to trap her if he hadn't during their courtship, Desdemona, on her side, consumed by reinstating Cassio, trivializes the handkerchief and repeatedly returns through her answers to the "weighty" topic of Cassio, ending with an immoderate accusation: "I'faith, you are to blame" (3.4.94). Given the confusion of subjects from Othello's speech to Desdemona's speech, this final outburst is ambivalent in meaning. Though Desdemona seems to be saying that Othello is the one preventing the reconciliation between the two men, Othello, in his jealous frame of mind, might take the line, instead, in reference to Desdemona's suspected infidelity. The barbs thrown against his insecurity by her previous, again ambivalent line, "Come, come, you'll never meet a more sufficient man" (88), strengthen this second reading. In her self-division, Desdemona gains gratification from exerting greater female agency to repair Cassio's agency. In asserting her own self in association with Cassio, she, however, risks a fatal breach with her husband, who misconstrues her desire for self-expansion as an appetite for lust.

At Iago's provocation, Cassio, to his better judgment, frantically solicits the aid of Desdemona, exploiting her goodness and desire for self-assertion towards a disaster beyond her prevention. Even if Cassio was not aware of Othello's jealous state, newly "wrought" by Iago again, he should keep a "politic distance," not only from Othello but also from his wife. His leaning on a woman instead of simply enduring the disciplinary action smacks of "effeminacy" by early modern gender expectations. Hence, the

undisciplined passion on the parts of both Cassio and Desdemona leads her to the edge,²⁹
as she confesses to him:

I have ... stood within the blank of his displeasure
For my free speech! You must a while be patient.
What I can do I will, and more I will
Than for myself I dare. (3.4.124-27)

Despite her words, Desdemona's action is not as selfless as it appears. As a virago in early modern society, Desdemona veils her participation in (masculine) weighty matter in the display of feminine sympathy towards another. Her aims for expanded female agency become subsumed within the actions of the intersubjective being created by friendship or marriage.

Despite Emilia's remark, "Is this man not jealous?" (3.4.96), representing the commentary of the rational (wo)man, Desdemona, willfully involving herself in martial affairs as Othello's "fair warrior" (2.1.179), believes that "state matters" (3.4.151) of Venice are the cause of Othello's distemper.³⁰ Desdemona herself admits, however, that she has gone too far in promoting the interests of friendship over the interests of marital harmony. Instead of trying to temporize with shortcomings of other morally flawed beings, Desdemona focuses self-absorbedly on her penitence:

Beshrew me much, Emilia,
I was—unhandsome warrior as I am—
Arraigning his unkindness with my soul;
But now I find I had suborned the witness,
And he's indicted falsely. (3.4.146-49)

²⁹ For similar arguments, see Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 174-75.

³⁰ See Paster, 60-64, for an excellent psycho-physiological explanation of Othello's "puddle" spirit.

If only for a moment, Desdemona regrets this recent rebellion of her soul, which she had joined eternally with Othello's. In her contrition, however, she is more focused on upholding her integrity than examining how her "frank" behavior might be aggravating his sense of insecurity and how she might change her course of conduct. Even her statement, "Nay, we must think men are not gods,/ Nor of them look for such observancy/ As fits the bridal" (3.4.144-46), is more a generalized observation about the gap between martial and marital spheres than an empathetic understanding of what her exceeding kindness has wrought in her sexually insecure husband. Desdemona's assurance of love, "'twas that [frank] hand that gave away my heart" (3.4.43), would have satisfied the former Othello, appeased by the thought that "she had eyes and she chose me" (3.3.193) but not the jealous Othello, whom she ignores through her narrow, solipsistic lens of hypervirtue. Moreover, simply exculpating herself as the cause of Othello's jealousy ("Alas the day, I never gave him cause" [3.4.153]) does nothing to confront the problem in real terms, which, as Emilia well understands, is a condition *independent* of cause, a disease within Othello's mind. An image of high expectation of conduct and achievement often becomes the impetus for a person to fulfill that image. But such is not the right strategy to deal with Othello in his pathological state. Desdemona's blinkered focus on her personal integrity prevents any practical handling of Othello's problem.

Thus, despite her confession to wrongdoing, Desdemona again, instead of following her own good counsel, continues to badger Othello about Cassio, this time in public. In her single-minded pursuit of reconciliation between Othello and Cassio, Desdemona shows an odd combination of cleverness and obtuseness. Not the "subtle

whore” Othello thinks her to be, she resorts to cunning tactics of social pressure to mend bonds in the broadest sense of the venereal enterprise. Yet she does not modulate her virtuous project with the realities of interacting with fallible human beings. Thus her explanation to Lodovico about the “unkind breach” (4.1.218), trying to enlist him to her cause, is most “Unpleasing to a married ear” (*Love’s Labour Lost*, 5.2.877): “I would do much/ T’atone them, for the love I bear to Cassio” (4.1.224-25). When Othello, astounded—“Fire and brimstone!” (226)—by her temerity, cautions Desdemona, “Are you wise?” (225), she obtusely continues to press the issue further. When “state matters” call him back to Venice, “Deputing Cassio in his government” (229), in Othello’s heated brain, Fortune and Desdemona, the “subtle whore,” might just as well be conspiring to bring him down. Desdemona, seeing his anger, only spurs him further, “By my troth, I am glad on’t” (230), committing in Othello’s mind, the ultimate act of madness justifying his slapping her face in public. Desdemona’s utter disregard of Othello’s jealousy seriously undermines her protestations of virtue: “sweet Othello... I have not deserved this” (234-35). Technically, no, she does not deserve the public reprimand because she is innocent on the count of infidelity, but on account of angering her husband by refusing to perceive the jealousy roused within him, only the blind, hypervirtuous Desdemona would insist after this scene of provocation that she “never gave him cause” (3.4.153).

The gap between Desdemona’s and Othello’s views can further be explained by the fact that the wifely prerogative of free speech in their initially consensual, companionate marriage has by the effect of male insecurity regressed to the patriarchal injunctions of feminine silence, obedience, and chastity. According to this restrictive standard,

Desdemona's open speech is in and of itself an expression of promiscuity.³¹ Despite Lodovico's defense of her as "Truly, an obedient lady" (4.1.243), there is room for doubt even within the context of a consensual, companionate marriage. An obedient wife in such a marriage would not act in bad faith by pursuing a double-faced strategy of calling him "sweet Othello" even as she intentionally provokes him to anger. Her gladness in Othello's return to Venice is, moreover, inconsistent with her initial insistence on accompanying her husband to Cyprus.

The challenge that presents itself for the early modern virago, a woman aspiring for greater agency, is the difficulty of balancing feminine obedience and masculine self-assertion towards best effects, something that as we shall see in the next chapter, Helena of *All's Well* does supremely. Sympathizing with her passion for greater agency, we also witness how Desdemona botches her attempts at just action, unsuccessfully intermingling masculine and feminine modes of conduct in the intermediate space of Cyprus between the martial and the venereal. Ineffectively pleading Cassio's suit in a feminine, affective mode of action with masculine self-assertion, Desdemona fails to bridge the gap between the two spheres, reflective of her fractured being, and ultimately yields to female subsumption within the male being, a negation physically enacted by her death at Othello's hands.

Desdemona, who wields words deftly to her purposes, ironically "understand[s] a fury in [Othello's] words,/ But not [his] words" (4.2.33-35) damning her as a whore.

³¹ See Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 118, quoting Juan Luis Vives, *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1540) trans. Richard Hyrde: "for [a woman] to be 'eloquent of speche' is tantamount to babbling and 'a token of a light mynde and shrowde conditions.'" See also Dana Aspinall, *The Taming of the Shrew: Critical Essays*, (New York and London: Routledge: 2002), 10.

Ignoring Emilia's admonishment that jealousy "is a monster,/ Begot upon itself, born on itself" (3.4.156-57), Desdemona takes his accusation as a personal injury. Specifics as to "To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false?" (4.2.42) are irrelevant because they have nothing to do with "the cause," the preservation of male integrity for Othello as with Cassio and Brabantio, who also have causes to promote.³² Othello refrains from answering not so much because he does not want to give Desdemona a chance to defend herself but because in his ideology of insecure manhood, her guilt, by the very fact of her womanhood, is a foregone conclusion. Once sucked into the maelstrom of misogynistic ideology, Othello takes the label as proof: as Desdemona later confirms, simply naming or spelling a whore has the incantatory power or "charm" (OED from *L. carmen*, meaning song, charm; derived from *canere*, to sing, chant) of "abhorring" (4.2.166) and "bewhor[ing]" (4.2.118) turning the referent literally and effectively into a whore. As abundantly confirmed by the experience of accused witches, Desdemona, once "beshrewed," has no way to save herself, either by honestly refuting or falsely confessing, her "wretched fortune" (132) to which she maladroitly contributes. Othello's cause, in sum, is male insecurity placated only by restituting "the free, unhoused condition" through the elimination of the female.

³² See other references to "cause" (my italics):

Othello: And therefore little shall I grace my *cause*
In speaking for myself. (1.3.88-89)

Brabantio: Mine's not an idle *cause*. . . . (1.2.96)

Desdemona: To the last article: my lord shall never rest;
I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift;
I'll intermingle every thing he does
With Cassio's suit: therefore be merry, Cassio;
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy *cause* away. (3.3.21-28)

In this last example Desdemona thus engrafts her aspiring female agency onto Cassio's injured male agency.

Desdemona's bifurcated position in Shakespeare's version of the patient wife/cruel husband tale dramatizes the conflict within early modern marriage between "the doctrine of obedience and the doctrine of conscience."³³ According to manuals of female conduct by the humanists Juan Luis Vives and Erasmus, if the husband "beats her, she is to think that this is God's punishment of her; if her grows 'wytles,' she 'wyll handle wisely inough and neither provoke [him] to anger nor take from [him] the honour belonging to the man, but bring hym in good hope that all thing shal be done after his wyll' (b2^v-3)."³⁴ Ostensibly, Desdemona displays such wifely submission:

'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
 How have I been behaved, that he might stick
 The small'st opinion on my least misuse?
 I am a child to chiding. (4.2.110-112, 117)

The repetition of the word "meet" underscores a countercurrent of "injured merit," to use Berger's expression,³⁵ beneath Desdemona's obedience. Her question acknowledges the paranoid behavior of jealousy—far too late for practical action; instead, her "super-subtle" (1.3.347)³⁶ focus is injured merit, hinted by the peculiarly formulated verbal phrase, "have ... been behaved," floating between the active and passive modes. This grammatical ambiguity reflects the shared complicity that I have thus far argued, extending Berger's view short of the reciprocity that he seems to argue, claiming, for instance, that Iago "is undone ... by the efficiency with which his victims have used him to undo themselves."³⁷ Nonetheless, Desdemona's sense of injury increases through the

³³ Deats, 233.

³⁴ Vives, *Instruction of a Christen Woman*, quoted in Jordan, 118.

³⁵ Berger, "Three's a Company," 257.

³⁶ My use of this term is certainly not as derogatory as how Iago uses it: "an erring Moor and his super-subtle Venetian" (1.3.347).

³⁷ Berger, "Acts of Silence," 32.

having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right" (4.3.78-80). In her "radical" commonsense, infidelity is "wrong" only because there is something wrong with the way the world is, and this "wrong" can be made right by those who can navigate adroitly in this flawed world toward what they deem as the good by their own inner sense transcending the defective worldly view. Emilia does not shy from deliberating morally flexible means and transgressing against socially prohibited actions to attain what is essentially good beyond society's judgment: "Ud's pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch? I venture purgatory for't. (4.3.74-75). Here, she contemplates morally expansive virtuosity to elevate her husband and herself to sovereign power with which they can also retribute their "wrong" by imposing the higher morality of their "own world" onto the larger world.

The final scene of *Othello* demonstrates the conflict between the doctrine of obedience and the doctrine of conscience through the final actions of Desdemona and Emilia, both murdered by their husbands. Desdemona's brief, unexpected cries after her supposed death again evoke the expressions of a split soul. On the one hand, her irreproachable virtue makes her exclaim, "A guiltless death I die" (5.2.132). She wants to assert her moral agency from a subject position even as her absolute virtue compels her to shield her husband from a "filthy deed" (156): [O, who hath done this deed?]/ Nobody—I myself. Farewell./ Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!" (5.2.116,121,123-24). Asserting herself as a moral subject while negating herself as object-victim, Desdemona becomes the wifely abject of early modern marriage. Only by subjecting herself to be killed by Othello without incriminating him can she obey the dictates of her personal

virtue and their intersubjective marital being. True to her vows in 1.3.243-49, Desdemona consecrates herself wholly to Othello's "soul and [mis]fortunes" (249), holding the spirit of marriage intact while sacrificing her physical person. Othello received his imagined sin from the imagined white superiors of society and, in a deadly combination of self-contemptuous black inferiority mixed with self-protective male superiority, bestows his sin on a white woman, who is as good as she is fair. In their marital *dusdaimonia*, Desdemona absorbed and became his sick part: his black hole absorbing all his fears, his insecurities, his chaos to make him "whole." In this regard, she is not the female abject of male oppression, but rather genuinely endorsing the two-in-one marital ideal, her life consigned to Othello's "honors and his valiant parts" (1.3.252-53). That is why she ambivalently maintains the justice of her own actions in the same breath as Othello's virtue. Whatever happened to turn Othello against her—some vague, external evil force or perverse concatenation of events³⁸—does not vitiate his honor in her eyes. She enacts the double duty of Vives's ideal woman, who "is to live in two ways, presenting herself as one who is choosing and willing her destiny, and at the same time observing those immutable proprieties that attend her state of life."³⁹ The difference, however, is that Desdemona is not a figure of female submission but rather a hero—transcending sexual distinction—who in the unavoidable failure to save herself dies magnanimously, her noble spirit hovering over the needless waste of her life.

At the same time, one could accurately describe Desdemona—rather than Othello—as "one that loved not wisely but too well" (5.2.353). Desdemona's

³⁸ She is the last to admit the possibility of the cause being an actual malevolent human agent, a person whom she would, moreover, forgive rather than blame: "If any such there be, heaven pardon him" (4.2.139).

³⁹ Jordan, 118.

unconditional love, unable to temporize, failed to marshal itself effectively against the base influences of the human world. As the staunchest of friends, she pursued Cassio's suit somewhat too "fondly," to the debacle of her own marriage. According to Emilia, she was also "too fond of her most filthy bargain" (5.2.164), refusing to assert her conscience over wifely fidelity and obedience and, instead, reconciling them only at the cost of her death. Desdemona will not impugn Othello even as she futilely invokes the Heavenly Lord while assailed by her earthly lord. What distinguishes Desdemona perhaps from the classic victims of domestic violence is a fatal element of otherworldly virtue tied with misguided action, which simultaneously alienates her from Othello through her ardent pursuit of friendship and compels her to love her husband despite the murder.

Both Othello and Desdemona prove unable to temper their respective virtue by temporizing with the earthbound realities of the gender and race disparities and the evil ends to which Iago exploits these cultural dissonances. Paired with *Taming, Othello* emphasizes, however, not so much the gender question of who's on top in the marital hierarchy or whether the woman wields great/greater power despite male headship but rather the richly human, phenomenological experience of early modern subjects/spouses successfully (in comedy) and less successfully (in tragedy) trying to achieve a working love in marriage. *Othello* seems to suggest that the lofty-mindedness of heroic figures such as Othello and Desdemona tragically handicaps them in the practical, day-to-day striving towards a thriving conjugal partnership.

Lingering in the mundane a bit longer, i.e., in the trenches of the gender battle, one might ponder further and tease out one possible implication of violent demise of the heterosexual union in *Othello*. To this end, it behooves us to continue our comparison of

Desdemona and Emilia with regard to virtuous moderation as well as scrutinize their same-sex relationship at the wake of the failure of marital union. Emilia, unhindered by the compulsions of hypervirtue, properly discerns the dangers of Othello's jealousy, which Desdemona does not heed. Unlike Desdemona, who, for better or worse, is true to an idealized conception of her husband, Emilia is not unconditionally loyal to her husband: upon her discovery that he is a treacherous villain, she unhesitatingly disobeys Iago's command of silence to expose his machinations, thereby asserting conscience over wifely obedience in her own spousal conflict. When Iago charges her to go home, Emilia asserts divine authority over husbandly authority, "'Tis proper I obey him, but not now./ Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (5.2.204). Many Protestant domestic tracts of the period argued on the side of conscience: "The wife indeed should cast her eye only upon the lawfulness or unlawfulness of the thing, asking none other questions but whether it offend God, yea or no."⁴⁰ Discovering that her husband was the very villain who incited Othello to murderous jealousy, Emilia disobeys Iago's injunction and speaks out the truth in defense of goodness and justice:

'Twill out, 'twill out. I peace?
No, I will speak as liberal as the north.
Let heaven, and men, and devils, let 'em all,
All, all cry shame against me, yet I'll speak. (225-28)

Compelled by the need to detain a murderer and his accomplice, Emilia's vehement disclosure provokes Iago to kill her—uxorial punishment for her open speech.⁴¹

⁴⁰ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush or A Wedding Sermon (1616)* (Amsterdam: Johnson, 1975), 23.

⁴¹ Additionally, Emilia's actions might well be spurred by her own complicity of secreting away the fatal handkerchief to Iago. Reasons why she withheld knowledge about handkerchief despite Desdemona's evident worry might be, first, Emilia's embarrassment and, second, her somewhat cynical attitude towards men in general as appetitive creatures with strange whims and wild jealousies (through her experience with Iago) and Othello, in particular, as Desdemona's "most filthy bargain" (5.2.164). Emilia finds herself in a conflicted situation, devoted to Desdemona but preferring that she had married someone like Lodovico, a

Ultimately, Emilia dies for ideals like Desdemona, her mistress, who dies for idealizations—both ejected by the brute forces of the sublunary world to more congenial higher spheres. In this tragedy of conjugal love, Desdemona’s idealized conception of joint being cannot thrive in the noxious air of lingering patriarchal prejudices. Instead, Emilia’s ultimate loyalty to her mistress over her own husband indicates that “a woman’s real identity,” as Constance Jordan suggests, is furthered through the homosocial “mirroring *between women*”⁴² rather than uxorial mirroring of heterosexual marriage, the female-female bonding undergirding and countervailing the all-not-quite-well within the conjugal bond in the following chapter.

“very handsome man,” whom an unnamed “lady in Venice would have walked barefoot to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip” (4.3.34-37).

⁴² Jordan, 127.

Chapter 4

Living Well: Virtue, Means, and Ends in *All's Well That Ends Well*

To find more congenial male-female alongside constructive female-female relations, we must turn from the tragedies to the comedies, for instance, *The Taming of the Shrew*, where Kate, as we saw in Chapter 2, gestures in her speech towards a reconciliation between homosocial and heterosexual collaboration, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, where Helena adroitly enlists female cooperation to achieve virtuous marriage. In this latter comedy, Helena demonstrates more fully and expansively what Kate begins to model at the end of *Taming*: the virtuous life in marriage as compatible with erotic life. *All's Well*, as its title suggests, ruminates on ends, means, and happiness—the moral philosophy which Lucentio in *Taming* (and the Duke of Navarre and his companions in *Love's Labour's Lost*) aimed to study before love's diversion: “Virtue and that part of philosophy/ ... that treats of happiness/ By virtue specially to be achieved” (1.1.18-20). As Lodowick Bryskett claims, “civil felicity ... is achieved by the temper of reason, ruling the disordinate affects stirred up in us by the unreasonable parts of the mind, ... and guiding us by the mean of virtue to happy life.”¹ The following discussion of *All's Well* examines the effective enactment of virtuous moderation through both dramatic action and its underlying philosophical grounding.

In act 2, scene 4, of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well*, Helena's solicitations after the Countess's health launch Lavatch into a jocular rumination on existential wellness:

¹ Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 32.

Helen: My mother greets me kindly. Is she well?
Lavatch: She is not well, but yet she has her health. She's very merry, but yet she is not well. But thanks be given she's very well and wants nothing i'th' world. But yet she is not well.
Helen: If she be very well, what does she ail
That she's not very well?
Lavatch: Truly, she's very well indeed, but for two things.
Helen: What two things?
Lavatch: One, that she's not in heaven, whither God send her quickly. The other, that she's in earth, from whence God send her quickly. (2.4.1-11)

As this exchanges reveals, the Countess is physically healthy, emotionally “merry,” and materially well off, “yet she is not well”—because she lives on earth instead of in heaven. Aside from the irony of this reductive conclusion by the play's most earthbound and bawdy character, Lavatch's remark raises an ontological inquiry into the nature of existential wellness, as blandly yet pointedly suggested by the play's title: short of the heavenly state of eternal happiness as envisioned by doctrinal religion, how does one go about to live well in the temporal, mutable state of earthly life? Or in early modern terms, how does one attain virtue, the complete life gained through self-knowledge and disciplined passion? The French lords' choral commentary on Bertram's perfidious conduct in act 4, scene 3, offers further ethical musing on the difficulty of achieving virtuous moderation: even as Bertram “contrives against his own nobility, in his proper stream o'erflows himself,” so “we are ourselves .../ Merely our own traitors” (4.3.20-25) in our efforts to harmonize the duality within our own nature. My study examines both the practical enactment of virtuous moderation through dramatic action and ethical ideas embedded in this action.

The character enacting this virtue in *All's Well* is once again a virago: young Helena, who marshals erotic desire to the best of personal and civic ends. This practical

wisdom entails “calculat[ing] well with a view to some good end” by choosing the right emotional response and action at the right time and towards the right objects and people.² In referring to the practical action of virtue, I will henceforth use the term “virtuosity” rather than the more clunky, Aristotelian term, “practical wisdom”; adapting its conventional meaning, “virtuosity,” in this study, will mean “great technical skill” applied to some good end, thereby reinforcing its linguistic affinity to virtue. As the play’s main conflict, Helena adroitly wins a trophy husband yet cannot have him. In pursuing her disdainful husband Bertram, she gains him through “calculating” means, first by curing the King’s disease and, second, by recourse to the bedtrick, luring a reluctant husband to consummate their marriage. The passional aspect of her virtue is complemented and practically implemented by her situational virtuosity in such a way as to reconcile generically the tensions of unbounded romance and grounded realism.³

In the light of the play’s abundant scheming, scholars have come to regard the comedy as a problem play for a number of difficult issues involving eros and virtue, love and honor—among them, the heroine’s sexual assertiveness, the hero as an unworthy object of love, the controversial bed-trick, and the hero’s unconvincing redemption at the play’s end. An in-depth discussion of motives, means, and ends, prompted by both the play’s title and plot, greatly helps to reduce the “problem” aspect of the play. Unlike the romantic heroines, Rosalind and Viola, who in their male garb enjoy “the expressive

² Aristotle, *NE*, VI.4.1140a28-32, II.6.1106b20-23.

³ *All’s Well* is a richly hybrid work exploiting literary traditions as diverse as courtly love, magical folktale, and miracle play. For a helpful discussion of the diverse sources from which Shakespeare draws, see Gary Waller, ed., *All’s Well That Ends Well: New Critical Essays* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 4-9.

liberties of the saucy ... youth,"⁴ Helena, constrained by social codes enjoining female modesty and restraint, must necessarily apply covert means to achieve her virtuous ends. Through extraordinary female invention, she adroitly circumvents feminine meekness and exhibits a power of agency exceeding her cross-dressed sisters of romantic comedy, let alone that of almost any other character of the Shakespeare canon. As a virtuous virago, Helena advances "feminine" action with "masculine" assertiveness in her salutary aims of marriage and moral guidance, graciously mediating through the bawdiness and the dissemblance inherent in the carnal, mutable world.

Helena's need to resort to deceptive and indirect methods has laid her open to moral criticism. Rather than the opportunistic, Machiavellian tones by which unsympathetic readers have viewed Helena's enterprising energy, my study advances a view of human action along the lines of Lorna Hutson's "prudential activity," richly evidenced in sixteenth-century prose romances, "that is, the constant and unceasing emplotment of present circumstances to prevent future disaster and ensure good fortune—a habit of mind"⁵ precisely derived from Aristotelian virtue.⁶ Helena's prudential activity, however, is more than worldly foresight into the future: it is also her virtuosity, which enables the successful enactment of virtue in the contingent world.⁷ In this regard, Helena, as an aspirant to love and virtue, is not immune from the experience of failure or suffering. The achievement of her goal is, indeed, delayed by the absence of

⁴ Heather James, "Shakespeare's Learned Heroines in Ovid's Schoolroom," *Shakespeare and the Classics*, ed. Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 78.

⁵ Lorna Hutson, "Fortunate Travelers: Reading for the Plot in Sixteenth Century England," *Representations* 41 (Winter 93), 91. My thanks to Heather James for bringing my attention to this connection.

⁶ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.

⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.5; Francis Goyet, "Prudence et 'panurgie': Le machiavélisme est-il aristotélicien?" *Au-delà de la Poétique: Aristote et la littérature de la Renaissance*, [*Beyond the Poetics: Aristotle and Early Modern Literature*], ed. Ullrich Langer, Genève: Droz, 2002, 30.

amorous consent in act 2 and the departure of the King at the end of act 4. Her *hamartia* (originally meaning “missing the mark”), here in the comic as opposed to the tragic world, is a signal to aim better, which she subsequently does by deftly responding to life’s contingencies.

In the play’s critical history, however, Helena’s apparent use of the same tactics of dissimulation used by the morally deficient characters has made scholars oriented towards social realism rather than romance often regard Helena as “no less distasteful than Bertram—an unscrupulous hard-eyed huntress with her sights on the quarry and her mind on the make.”⁸ In this manner, they gravely neglect the moral basis of virtue that guides her actions. Helena’s knowledge of virtue, i.e., the good for which to aim, validates her unconventional actions. Despite rhetorical and performative similarities, Helena’s furtive flight as an amatory “thief ... stealing away” (3.2.129), fueled by virtue, becomes a foil to the perfidious flights of Parolles and Bertram, induced by vice. Indeed, Helena’s “cunning” calculation, which her detractors have taken in the more familiar negative sense of “scheming” is precisely the calculation that Aristotle extols in practical wisdom as the enactment of virtue in human affairs: “Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of thing conduce to health or to strength, but about what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general.”⁹ Knowledge, thus, crucially informs both the performance of virtue on the part of the agent and the discernment of virtue on the part of the observer.

⁸ James L. Calderwood, “Styles of Knowing in *All’s Well*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 25 (1964): 274.

⁹ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.5.1140a25-28.

The rich presence of indirect motives in the play's action invites not only a fruitful discussion of means and ends in specific instances but also instrumental means in relation to an ultimate end, according to Aristotle, the "chief good"¹⁰ towards which all things aim. Writing within the milieu of rich humanist culture, Shakespeare—technically, a playwright, not a scholar of philosophy—nonetheless, dramatizes the perplexities that engage philosophical inquiry. Extending beyond the rationales for political power embedded in such notions as "reason of state" and "the end justifies the mean,"¹¹ this play, particularly in its genre of tragi-comedy, invites contemplation of existential wellness within the ancient and Renaissance discourse of virtue in relation to knowledge and action. Knowledge not only grounds Helena's virtuous action throughout the play but also plays the key role in the most viable interpretation of the play's troublesome ending. In her tutelary role in guiding Bertram towards virtue, Helena ambitiously combines in her multi-facetedness the Petrarchan suitor, the heroic lover, the prudent captain, and the physical and moral physician. Bertram, the "unseasoned courtier" (1.1.63), exemplifies, like *Taming's* Lucentio, the "young man [who] is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science [ethics on the large scale of the body politic]."¹² His transformation at the end, as we shall see, will hinge simultaneously on the power of wonder from the romance tradition and the foundational role of knowledge in the acquisition of virtue in the real world. In this regard, even the play's pointedly unsettled ending reinforces Shakespeare's conception of happiness: the aspiration to virtue defies the order of ends and endings to the fusion of becoming and being, action and ecstasy. Virtuous

¹⁰ Aristotle, *NE*, I.2.1094a22.

¹¹ Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric, From the Counter-Reformation to Milton*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 60.

¹² Aristotle, *NE*, I.3.1095a2.

moderation in *All's Well* through female ingenuity becomes the “elusive source of power and satisfaction”¹³ to address both the ontological end of living well and the play’s famously unsatisfying ending.

I. Helena as Virtuous Lover

Act 1, scene 1, immediately situates Helena in love, her passion for the callow Bertram overtaking her grief for her recently deceased father. When the virtuous Helena equivocates a show of piety, “I do affect a sorrow indeed, but I have it too” (1.1.57), she complicates Katharine Maus’s assumption of a disparity between an unexpressed interior and a theatricalized exterior.”¹⁴ By both affecting and genuinely feeling sorrow, Helena situates herself in a curious ethical middle ground between Hamlet’s distinguishing markers of deep affective life (“that within which passeth show” [1.2.85]) and the decorous show of bereavement. While Maus, on Hamlet’s authority, validates interior emotionality over outward social obsequy and thereby maintains their separation, Shakespeare, through Helena’s commingled response to the simultaneous event of her father’s passing and her beloved’s departure, closes the perceived gaps between the self and the body, the inward and the outward, reason and passion. Although she feels and displays grief, the problem here is that the object of her grief has been displaced and replaced by a more urgent sorrow of the imminent departure of her beloved. Though readers judging her by traditional values might find her lacking in filial piety, one could understand at this jointure of double sorrow how the youthful Helena, caught in “love’s strong passion” (1.3.117), would feel more acutely and occupy herself with her claims to

¹³ From a helpful discussion with Heather James.

¹⁴ Katharine Eisman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 1995, 2.

life instead of reflecting upon the irretrievable status of the dead. We can appreciate in her candid confession not a willful attempt to deceive others but rather a powerful expression of being in Love's thrall:

I think not on my father,
And these great tears grace his remembrance more
Than those I shed for him. My imagination
Carries no favour in't but Bertram's.
I am undone. There is no living, none,
If Bertram be away. (1.1.74-80)

As the Countess later rightly suspects, "Her eye is sick on't" (1.3.118), Helena's doting lament situates her in the tradition of lovesickness, or its euphemistic Renaissance commonplace, *amor heroycus* (heroic love)¹⁵:

The *ambition* in my love thus plagues itself:
The hind that would be mated by the lion
Must die for love. 'Twas pretty, though a plague,
To see him every hour, to sit and draw
His archèd brows, his hawking eye, his curls,
In our heart's table; heart too *capable*
Of every line and trick of his sweet favor.
But now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy
Must sanctify his relics. (1.1.85-93, my italics)

Even while playfully satirizing the conventional expressions of the Petrarchan lover, Shakespeare, however, emphatically distinguishes Helena from the debilitated state of both the melancholic lovers such as Chaucer's Arcite or Shakespeare's Romeo and the maidens suffering greensickness. In her "virtuoso ability" (suggested by the words, "ambition" and "capable"), as we shall soon see, "to emplot the circumstances of the present and of the immediate and the remote past within a providential narrative,

¹⁵ This occurred through some etymological confusion of eros with *herus* (master) and *heros* (hero) by Latin translators of early Greek medical texts. See Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 124.

promising imminent good fortune,”¹⁶ Helena, in one sense, embodies in potent female agency, Lorna Hutson’s figure of the prudent captain in the Elizabethan emplotment of narrative fiction. Yet, Helena is more than a “clever wench,” a cunning plotter of the romance tradition (moreover, with skills of calculation moralistically judged against her).

Indeed, there is a serious side to her amorous folly to the extent that Helena comes to resemble the heroic lover in its original sense of the lover of virtue¹⁷—with the difference that whereas love motivates the lover of the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition to virtue, Helena, *qua* lover, will promote virtue as psychic and physical well-being for herself and others within the play. At the same time, Helena’s bold musing a hundred lines later rings with Neoplatonic resonances:

What power is it which mounts my love so high,
That makes me see, and cannot feed mine eye?
The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things.
Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense, and do suppose
What hath been cannot be. (1.1.203-09)

Unlike the timorous sublunary lover, Helena, as the Neoplatonic lover, is unfazed by constraints of gender, class, and common sense in her striving for an Aristophanic love of “like likes” (1.1.206).¹⁸ In her love, the beauty of Bertram’s face embodies the visible and erotic symbol of her strivings for ideality. Her proverbial “falling in love” operates through the sensory phenomenon, “seeing is believing,” by which the eye is the Neoplatonic entry to the transcendent.¹⁹ Helena’s amatory “blindness,” or (Platonic)

¹⁶ Hutson, 91.

¹⁷ See Plato, *Symposium* 206a10: “love is wanting to possess the good forever.”

¹⁸ See Plato, *Symposium* 191c-e, on Aristophanes’s account of love as a search for one’s “matching half.”

¹⁹ See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino*, trans. Virginia Conant, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 268.

divine madness,²⁰ towards Bertram's moral shortcomings, which seems like amorous folly to the rational eye, becomes supra-rational insight into his individual potential and foresight into the noble man that he could become. Helena's amorous aim is to realize the ideal, to attain that "bright particular star,/ ... so above me" (1.1.81-82), thereby serving both her and her beloved's interests. Fueled by the triply virtuous goals of fulfilling her love, turning Bertram into a better man, and thereby contributing to the social good, Helena enthusiastically embarks on her venture.

II. Amatory Calculation

The famously bawdy question that Helena poses in act 1, scene 1, "how might one do ... to lose it [virginity] to her liking?" (1.1.140), is, in one sense, the erotic turn of *All's Well's* larger ontological question: how does one do to live well in the temporal, embodied world? Agent of a rational, erotic, and embodied self, she loses no time, like the prudent captain, to reconnoiter the landscape and deploy strategies towards her amatory goal. Turning to blustering Parolles, Bertram's foppish friend, for comfort in Bertram's absence, Helena suavely exploits the expressive liberties of bawdy talk to assert female agency and launch her virtuous designs. Unabashed to hear Parolles's bawdy talk, chaste Helena counters his male stance of aggressive sexuality with a bold query, "Is there no military policy how virgins might blow up men?" (115-16), revealing her erotic designs aimed ultimately at marriage. Against the backdrop of Parolles's empty talk, Helena is more rapt in her own amatory musings as she launches into a rhapsody of her multi-faceted love for Bertram:

²⁰ See Plato, *Phaedrus* 249d-e.

Parolles: ... Will you anything with it?
 Helena: Not my virginity yet!
There shall your master have a thousand loves,
A mother, and a mistress, and a friend,
A phoenix, captain, and an enemy,
A guide, a goddess, and a sovereign,
A counselor, a traitress, and a dear;
His humble ambition, proud humility;
His jarring, concord, and his discord, dulcet;
His faith, his sweet disaster; with a world
Of pretty, fond, adoptious christendoms
That blinking Cupid gossips. Now shall he—
I know not what he shall. God send him well!
 The court's a learning place.... (150-64, my italics)

Beyond the expression of conventional poetics, here, the Petrarchan ambivalences intimate Helena's incipient plan to pursue the disdainful beloved against his will. Thus, she cites prospectively each of the roles she will play later vis-à-vis Bertram: a friend (to whom he has entrusted the care of his mother); an enemy (a hateful wife); a mistress (as Diana) turned mother (as his lawful wife) through the bed-trick—which makes her also a traitress, “his sweet disaster,” a captain of love who deploys marital schemes to “blow up” her martial captain; lastly, in the trial scene, a phoenix reborn and allegedly a dear—through all this, “[h]is faith,” that is, her belief in him and her amatory enterprise.²¹ The word “Now” lurches her back to the present where a void left by her absent beloved reveals both the urgency of her amorous lack and, with a more worldly focus, her “anxious contemplation of courtly rivals whose enchantments may well stir Bertram's desire.”²² Helena, as lover and amatory mentor, wishes to steer him away from corruptive influences towards virtuous love and wisdom. As Bryskett explains, “young men, ...

²¹ See etymological explanation for OED entry, “leave, n.1”: “The etymological sense is prob. ‘pleasure, approval’; the root is identical with that of *love, lief, believe*....”

²² David McCandless, *Gender and Performance in Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 41.

wanting experience in themselves, have great need of the good instructions and admonitions of others.”²³

Her “wish” speech, replete with sexual undertones, subversively gestures bold action to come, beneath a shield of passive modesty:

That wishing well had not a body in't,
Which might be felt, that we, the poorer born,
Whose baser stars do shut us up in wishes,
Might with effects of them follow our friends,
And show what we alone must think, which never
Returns us thanks. (1.1.168-73)

Helena’s wishful “might,” in truth, expresses absolute resolve to turn airy wish into effective, embodied action of virtuous moderation. Thus, Parolles’s departing advice, “Get thee a good husband, and use him as he uses thee” (1.1.197-98) will transmute through Helena’s rare mettle into “the true coin to be made of her virgin ‘metal,’” by investing “the talent of her virginity, thereby transforming Bertram’s use of her into the fullest erotic promise of marriage.”²⁴

III. “Sweet Practicer” of Physic

To gain her beloved, Helena must resort to the indirect means of curing the King of France in exchange for a husband of her choice. As she frankly explains to the Countess in obtaining her blessing, “My lord your son made me to think of this;/ Else Paris, and the medicine, and the King,/ Had from the conversation of my thoughts/ Haply been absent then” (1.3.218-221). Critics unsympathetic to Helena, such as Bertrand

²³ Bryskett, 166.

²⁴ Arthur Kirsch, *Shakespeare and the Experience of Love*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 136. Because her means to achieve virtuous love involve the medical recipes of her magus-father, the transmutation derives from a Hermetic tradition, the details of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Evans, have taken this speech as reflective of her “selfishness and guile.”²⁵ These scholars, in their myopic focus on “ulterior motives, fail to see that Helena’s cure of the King as a secondary goal does not in any way diminish its benevolence. James Calderwood correctly points out “surely the point is that Helena’s love for Bertram generates *good effects*; that without the thorn of passion that drives her to seek fruition of her love she would not have remembered her father's medical receipt, and the King would have died.”²⁶

In the light of the Platonic notion of the philosopher-king as the head of the body politic and the psychosomatic tradition in ancient and early modern medicine, the King’s fistula with its purulent connotation is a direct physical manifestation of psychic stagnation of the royal head, reflecting the moral decadence of the entire society. Examining Shakespeare’s use of contemporary debates over medical knowledge, Julie Solomon reveals that the controversy of how to cure the King was eminently political, interlinking medical knowledge with issues of social class.²⁷ In this essay, I explain precisely *how* Helena navigates adeptly through the medical/epistemological/political issues to achieve virtuous ends at the personal and civic levels.

As with Bertram, Helena’s method to cure the King of flawed virtue must begin with knowledge. Faced with his mental rigidity, Helena must first rouse him from psychic before physical death: the unwillingness to disturb a foreclosed judgment or expectation of death. The King rejects her help on two grounds. First, he states that one should not fight against nature’s will. Yet it is not out of piety that he submits to disease,

²⁵ Calderwood, “Styles,” 282.

²⁶ Calderwood, “Styles,” 283.

²⁷ Julie Robin Solomon, “Mortality as Matter of Mind: Toward a Politics of Problems in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *ELR* 23.1 (2006): 134–69.

but rather out of pride: “I say we must not/ So stain our judgment or corrupt our hope,/ To prostitute our past-cure malady/ To empirics, or to dissever so/ Our great self and our credit, to esteem/ A senseless help, when help past sense we deem” (2.1.117-22). The King exemplifies Aristotle’s depiction of obstinacy:

the people who are strong-headed are the opinionated, the ignorant, and the boorish—the opinionated being influenced by pleasure and pain; for they delight in the victory they gain if they are not persuaded to change, and are pained if their decisions become null and void as decrees sometimes do; so that they resemble the incontinent rather than the continent man [who also abides by his choices].²⁸

Apparently, the King enjoys more pleasure out of sustaining his reputation than his own life and suffers more pain at the possible chance at being proved wrong than from his fistula! Unlike Helena, whose “constancy and wisdom” (2.1.82) are driven by the noble ends of virtue, the King is constant merely to misguided pleasures and pains in conjunction with the false opinion of his medical experts. When he rejects a hopeful cure because it could “corrupt our hope” (118), the King’s mental inflexibility is tantamount to arbitrary governance at both the personal and the civic level.

Knowledge, impelled by supra-rational means, is the first step in the King’s apprehension of Helena as a secular Beatrice who guides the less wise towards virtue. Knowing, on Helena’s active side, grounds her virtuosity and lends her self-assurance (because the virtuous man need fear no harm)²⁹; reciprocally, knowing, on the King’s reactive side, becomes the first step towards attaining virtue. In guiding the skeptical King towards wisdom, Helena pragmatically buttresses her less credible powers of the “meek maid” with the more awesome power of providential narrative, relying both on Neoplatonic and Christian traditions of accessing the miraculous. Helena thus displays

²⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, VII.9.1151b11-16.

²⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 41c-d.

rhetorical “power ... [and] transcendence” (2.3.33) to reverse the King’s presumptive knowledge: “what at full I know, thou know’st no part,/ I knowing all my peril, thou no art” (2.1.130-31). In Ficino’s account of the Neoplatonic ascent towards the love of God, one first learned to approach the transcendent through various faculties of perception: “the intellect, the will, and hearing, and thus through prophecy, the hieratic art, and poetry.”³⁰ Helena seems to follow this sequence in leading the King toward virtue. Because she is not able to pierce his irrational obstinacy through reason, she proceeds further through the medium of hearing, infusing her argument with an incantatory rhythm and prophetic power. Relying on this Neoplatonic dispensation, Helena, at the same time, cleverly draws upon the Christian trope of the virgin as the agent of providential virtue, exploiting one of the few roles by which early modern women enjoyed considerable agency *qua* women.

Thus, the virago Helena “artfully” exploits her apparent “artlessness,” advancing her amatory power: “He that of greatest works is finisher,/ Oft does them by the weakest minister” (2.1.134-35) like herself, a patently powerless maiden. Here, she presents her virtue, in the sense of healing efficacy, as supernatural agency against the King’s “seeming knowledge” (2.3.4) based on the false opinions of his medical experts. Because the King is past hope in a secular world where “our philosophical persons ... make modern and familiar ... things supernatural and causeless” (2.3.1-3), Helena must rouse in him a faith in miracles transcending human comprehension, or, precisely, in actions powered by supra-rational means: “great seas have dried/ When miracles have by the great’st been denied./ Oft expectation fails, and most oft there/ Where most it promises,

³⁰ J. B. Allen, 56, *The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of his Phaedrus Commentary, its Sources and Genesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

and oft it hits/ Where hope is coldest and despair most sits” (2.1.138–43). Because the King refuses to respond to the rationalism of “empirics,” Helena prudently advances her amatory aims under the shield of providential virtue: “Dear sir, to my endeavors give consent;/ Of heaven, not me, make an experiment” (155–56). To deny merit “Inspired” (147) by Providence and perfective human passion, Helena boldly argues, would amount to *hubris*: “It is not so with Him that all things knows,/ As ’tis with us that square our guess by shows;/ But most it is presumption in us when/ The help of heaven we count the act of men” (148–51). Helena implies here that, however great, the King’s knowledge is still incomplete, subject to false opinions, as compared with God’s omniscience, which knows all truth and is not deceived by illusions. Without claiming divine knowledge and cognition, Helena argues an invincible confidence in her power, deftly subsumed in providential agency and human virtue. Her rhyming couplets accelerate with an incantatory power to outmatch the King’s, effectively inverting the skepticism of his ending couplet: “But know I think, and think I know most sure,/ My art is not past power, nor you past cure” (2.1.156–57).

Elevated to these high registers of Christian piety and Neoplatonic love, Helena, nonetheless, propels her argument with the earthbound virtuosity of practical bargaining. When the King demands what she will stake for a chance to prove herself and to save his life against the King’s pride and his death, she “proclaim[s]/ [Her]self against the level of [her] aim” (1.2.157–58). Helena offers a glimpse of herself in self-assured maturity through her resemblance here to Paulina in *The Winter’s Tale*, another Doctor She, who defends “the sacred honour of [the king] himself, his queen’s / His hopeful son’s, his babe’s” (2.3.85–86) against Leontes’s own “slander.” Helena stakes her own life—both

maiden reputation and her bodily existence—on her curative venture, showing not only her dead earnestness but also how perverse evil can demand total sacrifice. Hence, the King’s willingness to try Helena’s extraordinary physic is ultimately seized not through spontaneous faith but through embodied reason. Young, wise Helena will “minister [her] own death” (2.1.188) if she fails to save his already declining life. One look at the King’s decrepit body and Helena’s blooming one suggests the unevenness of the exchange. By any standard of reason, such gratuitous sacrifice inspires wonder.

Helena presents her curative skill as “merit/ Inspirèd” (2.1.147): “There’s something in’t/ More than my father’s skill, which was the great’s/ Of his profession, that his good receipt/ Shall for my legacy be sanctified/ By th’ luckiest stars in heaven...” (1.3.244–248). Her virtue as the power to heal both physically and morally is grounded on an uncanny “inner property with the potency in producing vital effects characteristic” of herself outside herself (OED, “virtue,” II.9.b). Beneath a veil of divine provenance, Helena’s healing powers lie in medical knowledge with the virtuosity to use this knowledge both effectively and towards good ends. This innate skill, the judgment and motivation to perform medically potent cures, could possibly have passed down genetically from her father, along with his patrimony of medical recipes. In any case, the rare knowledge combined with the equally rare skill to judge and enact medical cures virtuously enables Helena to succeed in curing the King. Helena’s virtuosity blending technical with moral knowledge lends her the self-assurance to offer her life as collateral for the King’s life. The King finds her impassioned offer irresistible: “Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak/ His powerful sound within an organ weak;/ ... Thou this to hazard needs must intimate/ Skill infinite or monstrous desperate” (2.1.177–78, 185–

86). Though not comprehending the breadth of her knowledge, the King emotively understands the grave intensity of this ardent healer willing to stake her life on her skill. Successfully persuaded through Helena's virtue of reasoned passion, the King's statement at the same time reveals the important role of hearing in his conversion. Ficino's Christianized theory of Neoplatonic love explains how the ear is the intuitive, first sense to access the divine.³¹ Through the incantatory power of Helena's rhetoric, the King opens into emergent *belief*, which leads to granting Helena *leave* to try her cure, and ultimately to *loving* Helena (the italicized words are unsurprisingly cognates) as the embodiment of virtue.

Wendy Wall, in her recent book, *Staging Domesticity*, provides detailed historical evidence for "Doctor Shes" like Helena, practicing physic within the realm of domestic stewardship. Wall invokes, for instance, Torquato Tasso's *The Householders Philosophie*, which "suggests that good housekeeping is governed by the codes of stewardship and hospitality.... More specifically, he imagines stewardship as transmitted through the father's catechism of his son,"³² in the case of *All's Well*, of his daughter. Helena practices physic as did many "Ladies such as Margaret Hoby, Anne Clifford, Anne Howard, Brilliana Harley, and Elizabeth Grey [who] dressed wounds, prepared drugs, distilled cordials, and attended to internal diseases,"³³ as part of their caregiving practices which extended beyond the household into the neighborhood.

³¹ Allen, 56.

³² Wendy Wall, 35, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³³ Sheldon Zitner, *Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare: All's Well That Ends Well*, (New York and London: Harvester Wheatheaf, 1989), 164.

IV. Virtuous Shifts: Penitent Pilgrim/ Illicit Lover/ Legal Wife

Bertram's rejection of her as wife induces Helena's descent into death, gesturing a corrective to her somewhat hubristic act of trying to buy love. As do the figures of tragedy, Helena, in amorous humility, learns by suffering: "Ambitious love hath so in me offended/ That barefoot plod I the cold ground upon,/ With sainted vow my faults to have amended" (3.4.5–7). Yet, unlike tragedy where the heroes of tragedy who must suffer the fatal consequences of their *hamartia*, comedy allows Helena to redress matters by way of strategic rather than moral correction. Here, in *All's Well*, *hamartia* refers not so much to a character flaw in Helena, who, upon Bertram's reluctance, withdrew her claim on him—futilely however, because the yet-to-be-wise King, indignant at having his authority challenged, forced his will upon his ward.³⁴ Hence, *hamartia*, reverting back to its original meaning of "missing the mark," only urges Helena to aim better in bringing the wayward Bertram to virtue. It is through the errors of experience that Helena learns, in Milton's words, "To measure life ... and know/ Toward solid good what leads the nearest way" (9-10).³⁵

Indeed the mood of contrition plays out quite differently in comedy: by donning the robes of penitence on her pilgrimage to Saint Jaques, Helena literalizes the Renaissance commonplace of the (here, abject) lover as pilgrim, only to switch into the furtive lover/wife when opportunity avails itself in Florence to bait Bertram into consummating his marriage under the shield of an erotic assignation. Blaming herself for

³⁴ For a discussion of contemporary social and legal conventions underlying the play, see Marilyn L. Williamson, "The Problem Plays: Social Regulation of Desire," *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies*, (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1986), 55-110.

³⁵ Milton, "Cyriak, whose grandsire on the royal bench," *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957), 169.

Bertram's flight from Paris to the battlefield, Helena accordingly makes his physical safety her primary concern, which she addresses through two actions, alluded to in double-entendre in her letter to the Countess. First, she leaves Paris so that he can return "safely" on account of her absence. Relatively speaking, Helena would rather deal with the competitive dangers of Bertram as target of "fair eyes" at "the sportive court" than "the mark/ Of smoky muskets" (3.2.106-08). However, the abject lover as pilgrim does not go St. James's shrine as stated in her letter: instead, she follows Bertram to Florence to watch over him and to bring him home. In Helena's virtuous but worldly love, *contemptus mundi* becomes the very means to deploy earthbound virtue: to retrieve Bertram untainted and to reconstitute him to his native nobility. Helena's overt submission, in fact, shields a covert operation of virtue, which must deceive vice into good.

In response to this deception, skeptical readers have leveled charges of opportunism and moral hypocrisy at Helena.³⁶ Indeed, her tactics on the surface are no different from the Machiavellian strategies of "force and fraud" of the *homo politicus*. As Victoria Kahn clarifies, in Machiavellian political theory, "it is good to seem virtuous, good even to be virtuous," but most important, "one should know how to respond differently when appropriate."³⁷ Helena's virtuosity and Machiavellian political expediency resemble each other in this morally flexible attitude toward action in the contingent world. Just as war and covert operations might be appropriate strategies for a state in given situations, deception and domination might be appropriate tactics for a moral custodian in particular circumstances. In order to further her virtuous aim, Helena must sometimes resort to the methods of the vicious. As Bacon notes, "an honest man can

³⁶ See Calderwood, "Styles," 274, on an illuminating assessment of critical stances in correlation to genre.

³⁷ Kahn, 118.

do no good upon those that are wicked to reclaim them,” without recourse to the same tactics used by the wicked.³⁸ The recurring motive of “thief” might ostensibly liken Helena to two other characters, Bertram and Parolles, who steal away from their marital and martial duty respectively. Nonetheless, Helena is a “timorous thief” only in the poetic trope of a suppliant lover. Contrary to her humble speech to Bertram, she is “worthy of the wealth [she] owe[s]” (2.5.75) to any reasonable man except Bertram rebelling with “capriccio” (2.3.277). In guiding Bertram towards virtue, Helena seeks to claim what is rightfully hers by her virtuous beauty and by “What law does vouch [her] own” (2.5.78). While their tactics appear similar, Helena, the “sweet practicer” (2.1.184), is not the scheming maiden on the make. Her calculation, or Aristotelian practical wisdom, is grounded in virtue, enabling her to secure the honorable ends of human life. As Cicero tries to demonstrate in Book III of *Of Duties*, a widespread vehicle of Aristotelian ethics, “honestie” and “profit” are compatible in true virtue.³⁹ Bryskett also defines the practice of moderation, or practical wisdom, as

when a man doth what he ought to do, when time serveth, in manner as he should, for such as becometh him to do, and for causes *honest and convenient*. And whosoever setteth this rule to himself in all his actions, which being so conditioned, shall be far off from the extremes, and near unto virtue.⁴⁰ (my italics)

This is precisely the description of Helena’s ethical action, harmonizing virtue with eros in her pursuit of Bertram.

In reclaiming Bertram as consenting husband, Helena’s virtuosity consists of practical sense and a clever ruse. Having painfully learned that one cannot force love,

³⁸ Kahn, 117.

³⁹ Cicero, Marcus Tullius, *Ciceroes thre bokes of duties (1553)*, trans. Nicholas Grimalde, ed. Gerald O’Gorman (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1990), 112.

⁴⁰ Bryskett, 150.

Helena gives him leave to seek male adventure through military enterprise and the thrill of a sexual encounter—unbeknownst to him—with his previously spurned wife. As an initiatory act of manhood, Bertram wants to bed a Florentine beauty, using her to assert his male autonomy. Even as Helena allows Bertram to follow the urgent call of manhood, she manages a ruse which boomerangs his dalliance right back to her bed, his virtue untainted and their marriage consummated in a kind of bawdy “immaculate conception.”⁴¹ In the comedic tradition of hopeful regeneration, Helena banks on this extraordinary transmutation of lust into virtuous union to spur Bertram’s inevitable transformation into his better self, a true successor to his noble father. Bertram can as successfully try to evade his comedic destiny as Oedipus his tragic one.

When Bertram, however, succumbs to lust, Helena, as his amatory mentor, converts his vice into virtue. Helena transmutes Bertram’s “unchaste composition” (4.3.19) into his destined nobility by fulfilling precisely the impossible condition of “immaculate conception,” which Bertram voiced in careless contempt. Helena, adeptly through the alchemical bed-trick, “uses” Diana⁴² as a cover for Bertram to “use” his own wife to his liking: a “salubrious contriving”⁴³ to bed Bertram without his knowing, thereby transmuting his alloyed lust into the golden rite of conjugal love. Helena’s commentary reveals the seeming moral ambiguity of “this deceit so lawful” (3.7.38):

⁴¹ Beneath the lusty rhythms of comedy, Shakespeare, with mock-heroic undertones, makes Helena miraculously transmute a bawdy scene into an epic one, re-writing arguably the two foundational stories of the classical and the Christian traditions respectively: the fall of Troy through Helen and the fall of Adam through Eve.

⁴² The name, Diana Capilet, especially in conjunction with Helena’s name in the original Boccaccio version, Giletta, subtly recalls *Romeo and Juliet*, as though Shakespeare is consciously or subconsciously re-writing the tragedy of idealized young love with a more ironic eye, comedy’s peculiar effects of problematizing love and marriage while preserving a “happy” ending.

⁴³ Dorothy Cook, “Helena: The Will and the Way.” *Upstart Crow* 10 (1990): 21.

Why then tonight
Let us assay our plot, which, if it speed,
Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed,
And lawful meaning in a lawful act,
Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact. (3.7.43–47)

Helena, the “sweet practicer” (2.1.184), commingles with Bertram, turning his lust into marital consummation,⁴⁴ a “wicked mean[s]” issuing in a “lawful deed.” A mingling of good and evil in the indiscriminate “mean” threatens to whitewash Helena’s virtuous dexterity with Bertram’s lascivious conniving, her ruse with his sublimation. In this instance, it behooves us to parse the passage, applying a term Francis Goyet suggests to distinguish the (purely instrumental) means from the means specifically promoting the noble end: the *modus*.⁴⁵ Hence, “wicked meaning” superficially comprehends while ethically distinguishing Bertram’s ploy of lewd intent and Helena’s sinful seeming *modus* to redress him to virtue. Ironically recalling Parolles’s unwittingly prophetic advice, Helena virtuously “use[s] him as he uses thee” (1.1.197-98) viciously, yet “wondrous kind[ly]” (5.3.307). With the bed-trick as her full-fledged *modus*, Helena proves herself a foil to numerous other Shakespearean characters—namely, Angelo, Isabella, Claudio, Orsino, and Olivia—who fail to exert virtuous moderation with regard to love and sexuality. The reference to an “hour” (4.2.59) of sensual pleasure, which David McCandless glosses as evidence of female *jouissance*,⁴⁶ could also be read in the context of the Horatian topos of “relishing the single happy hour” in “moderate delight,”⁴⁷ thereby underscoring Helena’s virtuous moderation.

⁴⁴ See Frances M. Pearce, “In Quest of Unity: A Study of Failure and Redemption in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *SQ* 25.1 (1974): 71–88, for an insightful Christian account of Bertram’s redemption.

⁴⁵ Goyet, 19.

⁴⁶ McCandless, 63-64, 74.

⁴⁷ Scodel, 244-45.

Contrary to the unseemly anonymity of sexual union,⁴⁸ making the maneuver problematic for modern sensibilities, the bed-trick has a respectable precedent in the Judeo-Christian tradition of which the early modern audience was probably aware.⁴⁹ These spectators, also steeped in a richer folktale heritage than their modern counterparts, likely saw *All's Well* within a tradition of prodigal plays, which incidentally enjoyed great popularity and appeared in surprising numbers during the years 1602–04.⁵⁰ Shakespeare ingeniously makes the Griselda figure no longer merely passive but endows her with the dexterity of the clever wench, a maneuver admittedly more susceptible to ironic interpretation. Arthur Kirsch notes that this underlayer of irony could induce the sense

that Helena is being abused not only by Bertram but by Shakespeare as well. She seems, at times, a creature from another kind of play, too richly endowed both for her husband and for the plot in which she is called upon to act; so that the part she does in fact perform, and her consciousness of it, come uncomfortably close to making her seem either a fool or a knave, though clearly she is neither.⁵¹

The persistently ambivalent aspect of Helena's virtuosity culminating in the bed-trick can be better understood in the context of Neoplatonic love converging with the folktale motif of lost love regained through the fulfilling of impossible tasks. Consequently, for Helena, the virtuous lover who "cannot choose/But lend and give" (1.3.198-99), the bed-trick entails an act of love in the giving of herself to Bertram rather than an act of humiliation in losing a prized possession of virginity.⁵² She yields her pure body to

⁴⁸ This particular offensiveness could be partially reduced by casting Helena and Diana to resemble each other.

⁴⁹ See Peggy Munoz Simonds, 55, "Sacred and Sexual Motifs in *All's Well That Ends Well*," *RQ* 42.1 (1989): 55.

⁵⁰ Pearce, 78.

⁵¹ Kirsch, 109.

⁵² See Werner Berthoff, 343, "'Our Means Will Make Us Means': Character as Virtue in *Hamlet* and *All's Well*," *New Literary History* 5.2, Changing Views of Character (Winter 1974): 319–51.

Bertram, who, on his side, intends to flesh “his will in the spoil of her honor” (4.3.16). As both mentor and lover/wife, Helena, one step ahead of Bertram, effectively defuses the harmful potential of his “wicked meaning” (3.7.45) by converting “sick desires” (4.2.36) into lawful erotic union. The consummation of their marriage in this “wondrous kind” (5.3.307) way creates and preserves the potential for love.⁵³ As Helena’s hope for their marital future indicates, “But with the word the time will bring on summer/ When briars shall have leaves as well as thorns/ And be as sweet as sharp” (4.4.31-33).

Although in his supposed bedding of Diana, Bertram deems himself the superior “gamester,” Helena is the real virtuoso, to be revealed in the concluding trial scene. When honor is bargained for honor—female virginity for male status—the two rings symbolically exchanged together signify Bertram’s double binding to Helena. First, Bertram prodigally gives away his family ring, grave emblem of Roussillon honor, in exchange for Diana’s maiden honor—to put it more bluntly, to despoil a virgin. This “unchaste composition” (4.3.19) emphasizes two considerable losses in exchange for questionable gains for either party. Through this bargain, however, Bertram, in fact, unknowingly sells his patrimony to Helena, the more worthy guardian of Roussillon honor. Moreover, the second ring is not the token of love from Diana that Bertram thinks it is but rather, as a gift from the King, a symbol of Helena’s virtuosity as shown by her successful cure of the King and winning of Bertram. Ostensibly reifying Bertram’s taking of Diana, the second ring subversively emblemizes Helena’s reining of Bertram into virtuous marriage. Instead of boastfully “made in the unchaste composition” (4.3.19),

⁵³ See Carol Thomas Neely, “Power and Virginity in the Problem Comedies.” *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare’s Plays* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 69-79, for an illuminating gender account of the bed-trick.

Bertram is the one successfully taken, fulfilling his own mock-impossible conditions to becoming Helena's husband: he unknowingly beds his wife, thereby consummating his virtuous marriage, and implants in her the seed of his child. Helena's deceit proves to be the virtuous means by which Bertram is ultimately enlightened, and his final consent in act 5, scene 3 is the epistemological act unfolding a promise of conjugal love.

V. Knowledge Is Virtue: An Epistemological Approach to the "Problem" Ending

All's well that ends well, so claims the play's title—or does it? Given his tendency to ironize and probe the complexities of human action, Shakespeare's bare assertion of a happy ending prompts its contrary. The ending of *All's Well*, as one of its most problematic aspects, has received much scholarly attention with critics divided as to whether the play, indeed, ends well. Some argue for a heavy-handed treatment in terms of a rushed, premature ending or one that defies the conventional comedic resolution closing with a festive dance. Others, like Calderwood, question more fundamentally "what, if anything, does end in the play?"⁵⁴ Ian Donaldson and Thomas Cartelli argue for a metadramatic consciousness on Shakespeare's part regarding the unconventional, rather abrupt and less sociable ending. In accord with these scholars, I believe that surely Shakespeare must be acting deliberately in reducing the ethically and logistically complex actions of a most uncommon heroine to a formulaic commonplace. I argue that insofar as plays as dramatic creations must end, endings are artificial. Insofar as dramatic endings are thus arbitrary, the reductive cliché, "All's well that ends well," works well, in short, to end the play while at the same to hint soberly but promisingly at the prospective effort of constructing *happiness*—not merely the momentary joy at the curtain's close but

⁵⁴ Calderwood, "Mingled Yarn of *All's Well*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 57.1 (Jan 1963): 62.

a more well-grounded “happily ever after” in the ancient ethical sense of virtue as genuinely flourishing and living well. *All’s Well* alludes to the dynamics of endings in real life—as opposed to theater—as ever coupled with beginnings, especially in the organic construction of companionate life.

Nonetheless, most critics like Barbara Hodgdon and E. A. J. Honigman are understandably skeptical, taking cue from the King’s qualifying closing words, “All yet *seems* well” (5.3.329, my italics), and “All is well ended *if* this suit be won” (Epilogue 2, my italics). Given “the problematic ‘ifs’ of Bertram, Helena and the King, which acknowledge the conditional nature of human sexual behavior in marriage and of fictions about marriage,” this close, argues Hodgdon, “celebrates compromise, the text’s final real-izing of romance.”⁵⁵ E. A. J. Honigman gestures an even gloomier forecast: “We are left wondering whether the most impossible task of all, the winning of a husband’s love after so public a disgrace, is not beyond Helena, and beyond human nature.”⁵⁶ With sparse text to confirm Bertram’s reformation, criticism on *All’s Well* is understandably saturated with pessimism about its ending.

As with the late romances where conflicts, disorders, and injustices are marvelously resolved through supernatural powers of restoration, *All’s Well* also demands that we replace the attitude of skeptical reason for one of benevolent acceptance. The essence of a hopeful ending, I believe, lies in Bertram’s attainment of moral and amatory knowledge. I would like to present here something more firmly hopeful than Werner Berthoff’s view that “Bertram’s coming to virtue is mostly a

⁵⁵ Barbara Hodgdon, “The Making of Virgins and Mothers: Sexual Signs, Substitute Scenes, and Doubled Presences in *All’s Well That Ends Well*,” *Philological Quarterly* 66 (1987): 68.

⁵⁶ E. A. J. Honigman, “*All’s Well That Ends Well*: A ‘Feminist’ Play?” *Myriad-minded Shakespeare: Essays, Chiefly on the Tragedies and Problem Comedies*, (New York: Macmillan Press, 1989), 144.

promise as the play ends.”⁵⁷ Virtue presiding ubiquitously through Helena’s invisible hand nullifies the possibility of Bertram as incorrigible within the solid moral structure of *All’s Well*. Toying with Bertram as a bad boy and even granting him a ward’s legitimate grievance against a guardian’s tyrannical authority, Shakespeare must inevitably draw him into the reasonable and amatory persuasion of preeminent Helena. Knowledge is power, as the saying goes. Knowledge is the means by which Helena gains moral and amorous success: her wondrous revelation that she has fulfilled his impossible condition of “immaculate conception” possesses the power of transforming him morally.

In the context of a society which simultaneously disproves and promotes the aristocratic equivalence between noble birth and noble character, Shakespeare advances the hope that Bertram—unlike Parolles, his vain, dishonorable surrogate, who knows himself without the capacity for change (4.1.39-40)—will come into his native nobility, bringing to fruition his “well-derived nature” (3.2.88). The argument for Bertram’s transformation relies on the notion that true knowledge entails virtue. The young Lords, in the manner of Greek chorus, speak self-reflexively of Bertram’s vicious conduct as representative of the entire male gentility:

As we are ourselves, what things we are!... Merely our own traitors. And as in the common course of all treasons we still see them reveal themselves till they attain to their abhorred ends, so he that in this action contrives against his own nobility, in his proper stream o’erflows himself. (4.3.19–25)

Accordingly, virtue in Bertram begins as genuine moral insight, “the vital power of seeing, behind the merely receptive ‘sense,’”⁵⁸ with which he desired and thought he had seduced Diana. Informed by both the Neoplatonic ascent towards the Good and early

⁵⁷ Berthoff, 336.

⁵⁸ Berthoff, 332.

modern theories of acquiring moderation, Bertram's insight signals his knowledge of and potential for real manhood instead of the martial and sexual prowess for which he mistook it. This newly gained knowledge will lead him in rational deliberation rather than perverse rebellion to displace his previous aversion to Helena with "wondrous kindness," a feeling, because intelligible, more deeply engaging than the short-lived lust he felt for Diana. In his previous sensual "knowing," sex and marriage were clearly dissociated in his mind. Now in his amatory "knowing," Bertram, through Helena's teaching, learns that the objects of desire and marriage converge—in his own virtuous wife. Is it precisely this self-knowledge—that he could be erotically kind to kin, "join[ing] like likes, and kiss[ing] like native things" (1.1.206)—illuminating Bertram even *as* he speaks such that his "If" implies not so much grudging cynicism but rather cautious wonder in the face of an incipient transmutation?

Granted, the challenge for the Bertram actor is tremendous to render his reformation credible in the few lines given and in the absence of cinematic techniques of capturing facial expressions. Making the fullest use of tonality and bodily gesture, the actor must skillfully convey a genuine reaction of ineffable wonder, uttering the resonant \bar{o} in "Both, both. O, pardon!" (5.3.305), as though "submit[ting] ... to an unknown fear" (2.3.5) no longer to be trifled with: that awe-ful beauty, Helena—his incomparable wife.⁵⁹ The "[n]atural rebellion ... i' th' blade of youth" (5.3.6) subsiding with his martial and sexual achievements, Bertram, under the doubled effect of Helena's amatory healing of the moribund King and her caddish husband, is precisely acquiring "the sense to know/ Her estimation home" (5.3.3-4). Bertram's illumination reveals his ignorance, like the

⁵⁹ See Waller, 43-48 for further thoughts on effectively performing the "wondrous" effect upon Bertram and making the most of the dramatic silence.

King's, "to have been willful, complicitous, a refusal to see."⁶⁰ And further like the King, who learned to trust Helena's absolute wisdom—"know I think, and think I know" (2.1.156)—intimating that her knowledge transcends mere opinion, so, too, Bertram begs "to know this clearly" (5.3.314), precursor to "lov[ing] her dearly, ever, ever dearly" (5.3.313)—with the respect and desire that the double-entendre of "knowing" entails. Calderwood richly elaborates upon different styles of knowing in his insightful essay of that title. Purposefully indistinct, the pronoun *this* of Bertram's statement seems pointedly to refer to the wondrous nature of Helena's amatory virtue in healing both the King and Bertram, the older and younger representatives of a physically and morally ailing male gentility.

Intellectually receiving the knowledge conducive to virtue, Bertram can truly understand the sublime rightness of his union with Helena only through the affective and sexual sides of amatory knowing. What would clear Bertram's confusion and better assure his love, I suppose, is a re-play of the couple's consummation without the cloak of night. But we shall leave that to Bertram and Helena to come about in good time. (For those skeptical critics who are persuadable only upon sight and seek the reassurance that, according to Stanley Cavell, is the skeptic's true desire, I invoke the Apuleian moral: "Believing is seeing"). Having already proven to himself his ability for "wondrous kind[ness]" (5.3.307) "to cherish her flesh as his own,"⁶¹ Bertram must bridge lust to honor through transcendent love (a salubrious conduit contrasting the King's purulent fistula) to infuse his marriage with "holy reasons" (1.3.27). Such would be the true

⁶⁰ Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 85.

⁶¹ Kirsch, 142.

humanizing of Bertram as one, who in loving his own wife, loves himself.⁶² Parallel to the physical quickening in Helena's belly is Bertram's figurative conception, his amatory and moral transformation. This hopeful promise of amatory union, moreover, is mutually bolstered by rational compulsions. To regain personal and family honor carelessly squandered, Bertram, in a gender reversal of traditional hymenal *topos*, must rationally and amorously re-attach himself like a vine unto Helena, who has engrafted herself onto the Rousillon elm, symbolized by her possession of Bertram's family ring.⁶³

This possibility of marital love is precisely what Helena plaintively implores: "'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see,/ The name and not the thing" (5.3.303–04). She has Rousillon honor without Bertram's love: in amatory striving, "the fine's the crown" (4.4.35)—all is naught without the chief ends of love and beauty. This transcendent well-being, the teleological aim of virtue, is subtly and offhandedly gestured elsewhere in the play, for instance, in Lavatch's quip on the Countess's state of being (2.4.2–11): how she is physically well but not completely well until her "entry into life everlasting."⁶⁴ As Susan Snyder insightfully notes, "[r]eal fulfillment of desire, like the Countess's true well-being, is deferred to somewhere beyond the life we know." Similarly, the fulfillment of Helena's and Bertram's love is deferred judiciously to somewhere beyond the play's end. "Bertram's deed of dishonor" alchemically "becomes the word and act of honor,"⁶⁵ yet only time will tell how he makes good the deed not just for public reckoning but enduringly within private marriage.

⁶² Kirsch, 140.

⁶³ See Simonds, 40, quoting Peter Demetz. The *topos* originates from Catallus's "Greek Epithalamium," *Carmen* LXII, of which an almost literal translation is the epithalamium in Ben Jonson's 1606 *Hymenai*.

⁶⁴ Susan Snyder, "'The King's not here': Displacement and Deferral in *All's Well that Ends Well*," *SQ* 43.1 (1992): 32.

⁶⁵ Kirsch, 111.

Gesturing towards this sweet summer from the yet thorny briars of spring, Helena, unassuming yet grave in her entreaty, shows how Bertram's disaffection imposes a lingering metaphorical death upon her, as she invokes the Countess, emphatically living: "If it appear not plain and prove untrue,/ Deadly divorce step between me and you [Bertram]!/ O, my dear mother, do I see you living?" (5.3.314–16). Helena's passion-fueled virtue may achieve its formal success in the two hours' traffic on stage, but sustaining a true "fine" of transcendent love and beauty depends on the elusive, continuing interaction of dynamic agents in the marital economy of desire. To this sovereignty of supra-personal agency must Helena bow humbly like the beggarly King in the Epilogue, ultimately yielding to the audience's will. Just as the players and the audience are dependent on each other for mutual joy in the success of the entertainment, "Bertram and Helena are each seen at the close to be comically and pathetically dependent for life on the grace of the other—comically because there is inherent joy in the dependence."⁶⁶ As Frances Pearce notes, the "darkest, most tragic strains in the play stem from the recognition of potential disaster in the rejection of grace."⁶⁷ If Bertram learns much later than sooner, "Make[s] trivial price of serious things" (5.3.62), as the King forewarns, the young Count might live out the fate of Leontes of *The Winter's Tale*, whose repentance cost him sixteen years' separation from his wife. Upon finally setting eyes on his long lost Hermione, the penitent Leontes exclaims, awe-struck, at Paulina's virtuoso feat of pseudo-resurrection: "If this be magic, let it be an art/ Lawful as eating" (5.3.110–11). This statement underscores the formulaic aspect of these ubiquitous *if's*

⁶⁶ Pearce, 79.

⁶⁷ Pearce, 87–88.

used in riddles and social games of artful, courteous speech. The conjunctive rather than conditional “if” here, could well argue for a similarly permissive tone in Bertram’s famous “If” statement, his leave an eventual promise of love. Shakespeare’s deliberate withholding of the comic “happily ever after” in *All’s Well* reflects his dramatic exploration of virtue as essential to living well, or *eudaimonia*, the ancient Greek notion of well-grounded happiness.

Chapter 5

The Elusive “Heavenly Mingle” in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

Virtuosity at the Nexus of Sex and Imperial Politics

Whereas in *All's Well*, happiness is complicated by the apparent unworthiness of the amorous object and by the nature of teleology, the pursuit of “the chief end” (4.13.27) in *Antony and Cleopatra* is obstructed by the noble lovers’ inability to achieve virtuous moderation, or virtuosity, within the highly charged arena of imperial rule and erotic politics. The previous chapters have explored the Aristotelian convergence of virtue and calculated action in the domestic, mercantile, and courtly spheres of *Taming*, *Othello*, and *All's Well*; the present chapter will examine how prudent statecraft operates as an integral part of virtuous moderation in *Antony and Cleopatra*’s realm of imperial politics. Moderation in this play is the “heavenly mingle” (2.1.58) of virtue and prudence, passion and power, the good and the useful, which the imperial lovers Antony and Cleopatra regard as the complete life. Scholars have come to view the imperial lovers’ doom as rooted in an assumed divergence between the noble and the expedient: the virtuous, “heavenly things” of life and the more ignoble “earthly cares,” as epitomized by the political contestation for worldly power.¹ Indeed, the ending tragedy, following historical fact, seems to indicate that virtue and strategy, aesthetics/ethics and politics, are mutually exclusive spheres of a zero-sum game: as the play inexorably reveals, Antony and Cleopatra are no match for Octavius, the ultimate strategist in the imperial contest. Generically, tragedy predicates the sheer difficulty of such integration, moreover, within the play’s representation of opposing values: a perceived ideological clash between Rome

¹ Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 32.

and Egypt, containment and fluidity, *gravitas* and mirth, impedes Antony from achieving a “midway/ Twixt these extremes” (3.4.18-19). Virtuous moderation, however, operates by harmonizing such conflicting values through well calculated action within *Antony and Cleopatra*’s larger realm of politics proper as within the narrower realms of its action in the three plays already examined.

Both external and internal forces contribute to Antony and Cleopatra’s failure. Externally, the lovers are beset by political and social forces inimical to a sustained attainment of the “heavenly mingle” (2.1.58) of virtue and prudence. Even more than Othello and Bertram, Antony finds himself confined by a male-inflected conception of virtue epitomized by Roman *virtus*, manly excellence (by its root *vir* meaning man) marked by qualities of strength, valor, and constancy. The “woman question”—whether women are beneficial or detrimental to masculine selfhood—bears directly on whether love is a component of virtue in its expansive sense of human flourishing. The Romans in *Antony and Cleopatra* exhibit the traditional misogynist view of women as a threat to manhood, and, thus, *virtus* effectively excludes love. Antony, the martial courtier, who strives for honor *and* love in his zest for life, finds himself in conflict with the narrow values of Roman *virtus*. Indeed, the ethos of Roman *gravitas*, as exploited by the power-mongering Octavius distorts Antony and Cleopatra’s heroic eros, or (h)eroics, their twinned pursuit of honor and love, into lust, an appetite fraught with gender implications, one that turns women into sirens of sexual desire driving men to dishonorable dereliction of duty.² Antony’s allegiance to Roman *virtus* effectively continues to stir discord

² Honor and love converge in the twinned pursuit of Platonic *erōs*, the love of the beautiful and the noble, *Symposium* 203c. All citations of Plato are from *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997).

between the couple. Aside from the brief scenes of “heavenly mingle” in act 4, Antony consistently fails to merge the demands of love and honor and instead oscillates between them with every new turn of events. Contrary to the view of the Romans including Antony, the triumvir himself is accountable for his dishonor, not Cleopatra, whom he blames. Like Carol Thomas Neely, I argue that Cleopatra is a beneficial rather than deleterious influence upon Antony, as his vital center embodying the synthesis of honor and love, not an impediment to his integrity. Extending the feminist scholarship of Neely and others, my interpretation of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the nexus of sex and politics demonstrates how virtuous moderation is central to the examination of erotic action.³

At a further level of examination, Antony and Cleopatra are unable to harmonize their tenuously allied honor and love with their desire for imperial power. The interpretive lens of moderation shows that, unlike their successful counterparts in comedy, Antony and Cleopatra come to tragedy by failing to marshal an effective strategy against Caesar, thereby fatally preventing their access to the complete life. Such an ethical reading presents a hitherto more nuanced account of Antony’s and Cleopatra’s tragic action than offered by both traditional close reading and new historicist accounts working within binary structures.

Antony and Cleopatra achieve great love while Octavius achieves absolute rule. None of these three principal characters, however, attain virtue as the complete life integrating passion and reason, (h)eroics and politics through moderation—at least in a sustained manner. Through her “infinite variety” (2.2.241) of gestures and expressions

³ Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Linda Fitz (a.k.a. Woodbridge), “Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra* Criticism,” *SQ* 28 (1977): 297-316.

climaxing in her simultaneously sensual and heroic suicide, Cleopatra, among the three potentates, best approaches the “heavenly mingle.” Critics commonly misperceive Cleopatra’s mobile expressions and vital energy as signs of inconstancy, when, instead, they can be viewed as the dynamic manifestations of her erotic power subsumed in her (h)eroic constancy to the complete life. In this manner, Cleopatra recuperates for female conduct the traditionally male ideal of Roman constancy and thereby turns it into human excellence, achievable by both sexes. Counteracting her imprudent action at the battle of Actium, Cleopatra demonstrates heroic moderation in act 5, “tak[ing] her way” (5.2.327) against Caesar’s political will. In so doing, Cleopatra attains tragic grandeur by achieving the figure of Venus *armata*, thereby the integrating love with honor, and virtue with prudence, within herself and within her joint being with Antony. Her virtuoso deception of Caesar reveals at a metadramatic level the consummate art of the actor, requiring performative moderation.

I. Antony: Bipolar Oscillation Rather than Virtuous Moderation

Numerous scholars in traditional close readings have insightfully observed Antony’s action as characteral oscillation. “With Antony,” Ernest Schanzer explains, the oscillation of feelings ... is linked to, and partly expressive of, his veering between East and West, which exert their rival pull upon him. The remarkable absence of any inner conflict in Ant when faced, at several points in the play, with the necessity to choose between Rome and Egypt is an expression of this emotional polarity, this pendulum swing of the feelings.⁴

Insisting upon having both worlds, Rome and Egypt, Julian Markels explains, “Antony keeps moving back and forth, even ... in Egypt, trying to encompass both; and this

⁴ Ernest Schanzer, *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare: A Study of Julius Caesar, Measure for Measure, Antony and Cleopatra*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 143-44.

oscillating action becomes the locus of his final suffering and glory.”⁵ T. McAlindon observes, moreover, that

The conflict in Antony between Roman and Egyptian values is a conflict between responsiveness to the ever-changing demands of time and the desire to lose himself in the pleasurable ‘stretched’ moment that has no end. In this Egyptian mood, he mocks the chimes of midnight and finds eternity in the lips and eyes of Cleopatra. In his Roman mood, he repudiates what these ‘poison’d hours’ have done and seeks to ‘despatch’ his neglected business with ‘haste’ (II.ii.94, 168-70).⁶

Despite their keenness, these observations seem to describe Antony’s oscillation as simply an inherent aspect of his nature rather than analyze further how and why Antony behaves that way in the intermixed context of imperial rivalry and personal love. Ruth Nevo explains “the dramaturgy of oscillation” through Antony’s “conflict of divided inclination, and passing, contrapuntally, through the ... phases of dilemma, fateful decision, betrayal, and remorseful recognition.”⁷ Not merely indicating emotional instability, Antony’s oscillation is the clearest manifestation of his immoderation, his inconstancy to the complete life. The true man of moderation, without suppressing passion, would marshal it towards virtuous ends by judiciously responding to changing political realities. The two-tiered action of moderation involves *temporizing*, that is, achieving “specific, instrumental ends (*skopos*)” through politically prudent means in order to attain the “final, noble end (*telos*)” in a mutable, contingent world.⁸

⁵ Julian Markels, *The Pillar of the World: Antony and Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s Development*, (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1968), 132.

⁶ T. McAlindon, *Shakespeare’s Tragic Cosmos*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 237.

⁷ Ruth Nevo, *Tragic Form in Shakespeare*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), 332-33.

⁸ See Francis Goyet for this helpful distinction, “Prudence et ‘panurgie’: Le machiavélisme est-il aristotélicien?” *Au-delà de la Poétique: Aristote et la littérature de la Renaissance*, [*Beyond the Poetics: Aristotle and Early Modern Literature*]. Ed. Ullrich Langer, Genève: Droz, 2002, 15-20. For an example of a politically expedient policy in statecraft, see Aristotle, *Politics*, V.8.1308a25-34, where the ruler, in order to govern effectively is encouraged to “invent terrors” to keep citizens from becoming lax.

Moderation, as a situational ethics, involves choosing the just response to actions and passions in a given situation. Choice, according to Aristotle, is “deliberative desire, [whereby] both the reasoning must be true and the desire right, if the choice is to be good, and the latter must pursue just what the former asserts.”⁹ With Antony, reasoning or desire, or both, more often than not, are lacking. The Emperor, straddling both the Roman world of *gravitas* and the Egyptian world of sensuality, “registers a familiar and enduring modern ambivalence regarding the relationship between passion, the central value of a personal sphere of intimacy and self-fulfillment, and self-interest, the driving force of [a political] sphere defined by the prudential calculations of instrumental reason.”¹⁰ Rarely as in the opening scene of the play, Antony, like the speaker of Thomas Carew’s poem, “A Rapture,” escapes “the servile rout/ Of baser subjects” (4-5) bound by conventional constraints of sexual honor, and immerses himself in the pleasures of love, where “All things are lawful ... that may delight/ Nature, or unrestrained appetite” (111-12).¹¹ Lacking this speaker’s sense of personal autonomy, Antony, for the most part, however, wavers inconstantly between what he sees as two incompatible goods of love and erotics, on the one hand, and social honor and heroics, on the other hand, and becomes embroiled in the gender inflections of this opposition. The “narrow values of assertive manhood”¹² and male bonding drive Antony to repulse the Egyptian queen repeatedly when, without the perceived conflict in gender conceptions, he might have apprehended earlier and more constantly that Cleopatra, his “grave charm” (4.13.25), as

⁹ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.2.1139a23-26.

¹⁰ Joshua Scodel, *Excess and the Mean in Early Modern English Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 196.

¹¹ Thomas Carew, “A Rapture,” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 5th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 1: 1645-49.

¹² Neely, 151.

the oxymoron suggests, sounds the way towards rather than impedes the integration of *gravitas* and charm in his life. Thus, his departure back to Rome, where Antony gets defensively cornered into a political marriage with Octavia, the predictable rupture of which Caesar exploits to be at a moral advantage in the routing of his enemy. Only through significant errors does Antony belatedly discern Octavius as his true enemy. Hence, Antony's choice to return to Rome turns out to be unsound in reason and desire—his “chief end” (4.13.27) would have been better served to fortify his military and amatory alliance with Cleopatra against power-mongering Octavius instead of later regretting his slackness against Caesar's uncanny martial “celerity” (3.7.23). Instead of seeing love and statecraft as jointly working toward a shared goal, Antony, like Othello, unable to achieve virtuosity, wavers between “a self-abnegation that idolizes the other and a self-regard that renders the other superfluous.”¹³

The lens of integrative moderation allows a further nuanced and probing analysis just at the point where McAlindon concludes that the “Roman moods, however, are too fitful to enable [Antony] to deal with a rival who lives vigilantly in time and moves with astonishing speed when opportunity favours him (I.iv.72-6; III.vii.56, 75).”¹⁴ Against Caesar's supreme expediency subordinating all else to the sole aim of power, Antony's dual desire demands a considerably more intricate, two-tiered virtuosity: a vigorous military strategy must be marshaled against Octavius in order to achieve the transcendent end of honor and love commingled. Antony's invariable strategy of impulsive reaction followed by contrite overcompensation reveals how he consistently fails to harmonize passion and reason towards effective action. Antony, for whom passion is the selfsame

¹³ Scodel, 255-56.

¹⁴ McAlindon, 237.

source of glory and ruin, lacks the “slow step ... thought proper to the [supremely virtuous] man, a deep voice, and a level utterance,”¹⁵ Aristotle’s metonymic attributes of virtuous moderation.

The Roman general feels challenged on both sides by Caesar and Cleopatra. On the one side, Antony decides to fight Caesar by sea, granting his opponent the advantage. From a practical perspective, this is an action which Octavius, the supreme strategist for whom winning is all, would never undertake. As Jonathan Dollimore suggests in his analysis of imperial Realpolitik, this willingness to fight on Caesar’s terms—just because “he dares us to’t” (3.7.29)—is not “largess of soul” but “reckless overcompensation.”¹⁶ Antony’s injured pride gets in the way of prudence: his consciousness of the youthful Octavius as Fortune’s favorite galls the seasoned martial hero to the point that the older, experienced warrior decides to fight Caesar (who in 3.13 refuses a one-on-one duel) at a handicap to reassert his ascendancy vis-a-vis this stripling. In this conflict between generations, Antony shows himself as the *senex puer*, mature man with adolescent swagger, to Octavius’s *puer senex*. Instead, the justly proud man, Aristotle claims, “does not run into trifling dangers, nor is he fond of danger, because he honours [the] few things”¹⁷ worthy of pursuit. Although Antony may have rightly merited his past deeds of valor (which cunning Caesar lauds—merely to disparage Antony’s present debaucheries), he should not jeopardize an important battle by fighting it at *sea*, where he, as an experienced general on *land*, has no claim to success. As the sound-minded Enobarbus remarks in an aside, “Caesar, thou has subdued/

¹⁵ Aristotle, IV.3.1125a13-14.

¹⁶ Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology, and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 210.

¹⁷ Aristotle, IV.3.1124b6-7.

His judgement, too” (3.13.35-36). Incontinent with regard to honor, Antony gravely jeopardizes his military situation.

On the other side, Antony’s previous overswing toward Roman honor and simultaneous neglect of Cleopatra pressures him to overcompensate in the sphere of love. Thus, Antony yields to martial disadvantage against his very “soldiership” (3.7.42) to accommodate Egypt, or Cleopatra, whose martial strength lies in the sea, the terrain of love as associated with the sea-born Venus. Though this amatory action might bring the two closer in the short run, strict soldiership that prudence recommends, appearing to weaken love, would ultimately promote the conditions by which their powerful love may prosper in the longer run by addressing its most formidable threat—Octavius. Including Cleopatra in Roman theater of politics, Antony should, nonetheless, assert his greater martial expertise when she forecloses other arenas of battle, “By sea—what else?” (3.7.28)—either because of her lesser experience or her eagerness to participate in the martial scene. In their eagerness to integrate martial and venereal passion, Antony and Cleopatra imprudently push their forces into battle against the better prepared fleets of Caesar, whose “strange” (20, 57) celerity in taking Toryne hints at the almost providential assurance with which Caesar pursues his will. According to “*festina lente* (‘make haste slowly’) ... the most widely cherished Renaissance maxim,” ripeness, in other words, virtuous moderation, “is achieved by a growth of strength in which quickness and steadiness are equally developed.”¹⁸ In their short-sightedness, they slough over strength and allow honor and love to get the better of military prudence.

¹⁸ Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 90.

Cleopatra's misjudgment undoubtedly contributes to the naval debacle at Actium. With her sudden accession to power, Cleopatra steps up to join the imperial contenders of Roman politics with misguided assurance. Despite her eagerness to assume leadership after long idling, Cleopatra's fearful retreat during the battle of Actium reveals retroactively that a high-risk military situation was not the optimal one in which to resume her sovereign leadership. Her aloof reply to Antony, "Celerity is never more admired/ Than by the negligent" (3.7.23–24) is coldly ironic rather than helpful even as her peremptory stance to fight Caesar by sea proves to be premature and without adequate calculation. Moreover, her habituated stance of female submissiveness, despite her strong will, dignity, and intelligence, does not readily convert to the bold and vigorous action required in a high-stakes battle. As though sensing Octavius's self-assurance in the wind, Cleopatra bows to Fortune's favored son and flees, "The breese upon her, like a cow in June" (3.10.13), thereby handing Caesar a psychological rather than a martial victory, consistent with the Soothsayer's prophecy. When Antony later feebly scolds her that she should have known, "My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings ..." (3.12.57), Cleopatra retorts that she scarcely thought the valiant Antony would follow suit in her unmanly flight (3.11.55–56). This misunderstanding reveals the lack of deliberation constitutive of virtuous moderation, thereby also the lack of psychic and emotional accord essential to their counteraction of Octavius and the imperialist manhood he represents.

Without condoning her error and subsequent cope-out response, Cleopatra is, nonetheless, essentially right on what Antony should have done. A clear-thinking general would have held his "ground" and fought out the battle with Octavius—knowing that a

defeat to Caesar would threaten the couple's pursuit of the complete life—integrating love, honor, and power. Instead, Antony and Cleopatra's first joint military effort turns into a botched affair as Antony flees after her instead of fighting on in pursuit of the supreme life. Cleopatra is cowed by Caesar's confidence and Antony is tied to Cleopatra's retreat by love, but the net result of their actions fulfills the Soothsayer's admonition that near Caesar's spirit, Antony's "angel/ Becomes afeard, as being o'erpowered" (2.3.19–20). While in marriage, a couple has many trials to perfect the joint venture, in war such a misfiring as at this battle of Actium entails irreparable loss.

The syntactical equation of his "heart," or his courage, the seat of honor, to his "lady" (3.13.175) reveals how Antony, like Othello, loves not wisely nor well, failing to harmonize passion and reason in his love. This psychic integration suffers proportionately with Antony's changing fortune. Whenever he experiences adversity in fortune, when the crushing blow of his sinking worldly status hits home, Antony all too readily equates Cleopatra, to whom he has consecrated his "soul and fortunes" (*Othello*, 1.3.253), with fickle Fortuna who betrays men. This conflation is reinforced by Renaissance iconography which depicts Fortuna skimming over the sea, itself associated with chance and hazard, "on a boat, a wheel, a sphere, or a dolphin."¹⁹ Instead of taking charge of his fortune, Antony displaces his own failure onto his "ladyluck," claiming that his heart was tied to Cleopatra's rudder, one of Fortuna's emblems. Yet the resemblance stops there because Cleopatra herself is Fortuna's victim, retreating with "fearful sails" (3.11.55). Fortuna's rudder, in fact, turns to the resolute will of Octavius. When Antony returns to

¹⁹ Peggy Munoz Simonds, "'To the Very Heart of Loss': Renaissance Iconography in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Studies* 22 (1994): 226.

his nobler self, he again valorizes their extraordinary love, telling Cleopatra: “Fall not a tear, I say. One of them rates/ All that is won and lost” (69–70). It is again love which fortifies him to rise above human fortunes: “Fortune knows/ We scorn her most when most she offers blows” (75).

Nonetheless, Antony fails to dislodge his fatal mistrust of Cleopatra which poisons his love and their joint imperial enterprise. His imperial rivalry with Octavius continues to be vexed by the political and erotic tension from within Love: desire aroused by Cleopatra’s “infinite variety” versus fear that he is a mere victim of Egypt’s political opportunism as a client ruler. In 3.13, Antony, despite their recent reunion, fails to discern “Cleopatra’s magnificently noncommittal diplomacy” in receiving Thidias, Caesar’s lackey, graciously as “excellent dissemblance.”²⁰ Thidias becomes the whipping boy for Antony’s own failure to harmonize love and prudence, passion and reason through moderation. Joseph Roach offers a compelling account about the early modern actor’s art as consummate self-control over bodily motions often expressed through excessive emotion. The skillful actor keeps

the *force of Imagination* on a tight rein, to keep it “down,” to hold it “under.” Emotion, passion, transport, ecstasy—these he can take for granted—like mercy, they rain down from heaven; but to attain restraint, control over these copious and powerful energies, represents both artistic challenge and preventive medicine.²¹

Unlike the skillful player, capable of tailoring a passion to his internal motions, Antony, through his tirade, illustrates the failure to modulate anger to the needs of the external circumstance. Antony expresses Senecan fury against an insufferable indignity: “Moon and stars,/Whip him. Were’t twenty of the greatest tributaries/ That do

²⁰ Nevo, 332.

²¹ Joseph Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Scenes in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 52.

acknowledge Caesar, should I find them/ So saucy with the hand of she here...” (3.13.95–98). Contrary to an oversimplified opposition of passion and reason, anger, according to the ancient ethics of both Plato and Aristotle, is “a passion auxiliary to wisdom.”²² According to Aristotle, justified anger is virtuous: “The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.”²³ Of the two types of incontinent man that Aristotle identifies, “the one does not abide by the conclusions of his deliberation, while the excitable man does not deliberate at all.”²⁴ Antony’s outburst of fury is an act of incontinence of the latter type caused by impetuosity, not by weakness of the former type. Once his anger has subsided, Antony expresses his awareness of his vicious conduct towards Caesar’s lackey:

But when we in our viciousness grow hard—
 O misery on’t!—the wise gods seel our eyes,
 In our own filth drop our clear judgements, make us
 Adore our errors, laugh at’s while we strut
 To our confusion. (112–16)

Yet this consciousness does not prevent him from vilifying Cleopatra as a lascivious whore passed along as the imperial leftover from Julius Caesar to Pompey to himself and now to Octavius. Antony is overly angry at the wrong thing against the wrong people at the wrong time. Brilliantly ironic is his accusation that though Cleopatra “can guess what temperance should be,” she “know[s] not what it is” (122–23). Further on the theme of knowing, the first words of Cleopatra’s defense, “Not know me yet?” ironically recalls

²² John Bligh, “The Mind of Coriolanus,” *Shakespearean Criticism* 36 (1997): 127. See Plato, *Republic* IV.440b-d; Aristotle, *NE* II.8.1116b24-1117a5 and IV. 5. 1125b34-35. See also Introduction, note 26, Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise on the Passions and Faculties of the Soul*, vols. 1–6 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1826, 1996), 46.

²³ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.4.1125b32-33.

²⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, VII.10.1152a19-20.

Antony's former recrimination, "thou knew'st too well/ My heart was to thy rudder tied by th' strings ..." (3.12.56–57). His male presumption is that his love is so strong to the point of uxoriousness while hers, continuously doubted and reduced to sexual knowing, must be proven over and over again. Antony and Cleopatra's inevitable reconciliation leads to act 4, scene 4, the arming of Antony, a brief remarkable scene of love and honor "heavenly mingle[d]" (2.1.58), where both Antony and Cleopatra, attain "infinite virtue" (4.9.18) by embodying in each separately and jointly the integrated Venus *armata*. Carol Neely's claim that here at the midpoint of the play, "Passion becomes heroism for Antony and heroism becomes passion for Cleopatra,"²⁵ cannot dispense with an account of the character Eros, who, as an intermediary between his master and mistress, embodies the twinned pursuit of love and masculine honor, which converges in the Platonic sense of *erōs*, the infinite desire for "beautiful things and the power to acquire them."²⁶ Holistic *erōs*, expanding beyond and above the mere sexual sense of our word, *eros*, evades the social condemnation that sometimes accompanies sexuality.

In this magnificent instance of *discordia concors*, the martial warrior and the goddess of love are the complementary, not opposing faces of the selfsame *erōs*, a "creative tension"²⁷ producing noble achievement. As Cleopatra "accepts her complementary role as woman and queen, providing inspiration, encouragement and reward, and in this way becomes an intrinsic part of a heroic achievement," Antony "is

²⁵ Neely, 146.

²⁶ See Plato, *Meno*, 77b–78b. In Plato's *Symposium*, *Erōs* is rendered incarnate as a demigod, who, as the offspring of penury and resource, instantiates ceaseless striving for the beautiful and noble (203c).

²⁷ Robert Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 157.

utterly at one with her, with his men, and with himself.”²⁸ When Cleopatra lovingly helps Antony into his armor, replacing Eros, his “squire,” she also embodies *erōs*, reinforced by Antony’s addressing Cleopatra, “O love” (4.4.15). In the tradition of pagan mythologies, venereal amiability and martial fierceness “infolde” as lover and warrior attain their perfection in transcendent unity.²⁹ In contrast to her detrimental participation in the naval debacle at Actium, Cleopatra becomes at last the Venus *armata*, modulated through Eros/*erōs*, her surrogate, an embodiment of her venereal spirit on the battlefield. In so doing, Cleopatra inspires him, through “the strength that comes from love,”³⁰

to recover his lost honour as a soldier, his soldiers awaken in him the magnificently generous friend, and the love of war, friends, and mistress are all part of one spiritual continuum. The scene shows the totality of Antony’s greatness held in dynamic equilibrium, harmoniously interrelated without confusion or imbalance.³¹

Antony’s love is finally in perfect harmony with his manly honor, or *virtus*: “O thou day o’th’ world,/ Chain mine armed neck; leap thou, attire and all,/ Through proof of harness to my heart, and there/ Ride on the pants triumphing” (4.9.13–16). As Julian Markels keenly notes, “In the morning he had called her the armorer of his heart; now he invites her to achieve by her love what no man could do with a sword, to penetrate his armor and reach his heart, and yet not to displace the armor but to merge with it...”³² As in the cross-dressing episode, Antony is too much the man to be unmanned by the joint enterprise that is Love: here again, the female riding upon the male is not a reversal of gender roles but a harmonious union of the sexes in a joyous embrace of triumph.

²⁸ T. McAlindon, 246.

²⁹ Wind, 87.

³⁰ Wind, 85–86.

³¹ McAlindon, 246.

³² Markels, 139.

In contrast to the scene of the naval defeat at Actium, Antony, in this scene, is a rightly proud man. Hence, Cleopatra deservedly addresses Antony, “O Lord of lords! O infinite virtue” (4.9.17–18) at this, his acme of nobility. In the previous scene a soldier executing Antony’s magnanimity, takes to the defector Enobarbus his “treasure, with/ His bounty overplus” (4.6.20–21) with the remark, “Your Emperor/ Continues still a Jove” (4.8.28–29), which elicits Enobarbus’s remorseful cry, “O Antony,/ Thou mine of bounty” (4.8.31–32). Antony, like Aristotle’s supremely virtuous man, is not “mindful of wrongs”³³ and towards his former follower is more “apt to confer benefits”³⁴ and apologies than pity his increasing loss of authority: “I wish he never find more cause/ To change a master. O, my fortunes have/ Corrupted honest men!” (4.5.15).

Such is Antony’s sincere rapport with his men, “unassuming towards those of the middle class [commoners]” like Aristotle’s virtuous man, who knows “among humble people that [a lofty bearing] is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak.”³⁵ In an instance of great-souled gratitude towards his men, Antony exclaims: “I wish I could be made so many men,/ And all of you clapped up together in/ An Antony, that I might do you service/ So good as you have done” (4.2.16–19). Such an incorporation into Antony’s body and a communing in his personal flourishing, indeed, occurs several short scenes later when *bellum* and *bella* are superbly united after the victorious battle of 4.8. Noble Antony praises his heroic men: “You have shown all Hectors./ Enter the city, clip your wives, your friends,/ Tell them your feats whilst they with joyful tears/ Wash the congealment from your wounds, and kiss/ The honoured gashes whole” (4.9.8–11) in a

³³ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1125a4.

³⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b9.

³⁵ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b19-23.

splendid civic concord of love and honor. The integrated soul or polity uses armor toward the end of personal and civic flourishing. Contrasting Caesar, who successfully achieves absolute power through a reifying alienation of the people, Antony is the magnanimous leader, who in the “great classical metaphor of the body politic, ... endows collective humanity with the virtues of an individual man.”³⁶ This high point, however, is not sustained as Antony predictably repulses Cleopatra in the light of the martial defeats in the ensuing scenes. In his waning struggle against Caesar, Antony continues gynophobic to associate the treacherous reversals of Fortuna with what he regards as Cleopatra’s fatal eroticism.

While Octavius unswervingly advances by expedient strategy toward his single-focused goal of exclusive power, Antony’s defense against Caesar’s steady encroachment is jeopardized by his double allegiance to the traditionally opposed love and honor, which obscures his direction in the political contest. In the sublunary world, the infolded perfection of 4.4 must perforce unfold back to its opposing forces of love and honor.³⁷ When Antony’s honor is clipped through the loss of a battle, he does not stay constant to the vision of the complete life. In 4.4, that rare scene of self-mastery, his complete synthesis with self and with Cleopatra allowed him to transcend adversity: “If fortune be not ours today, it is/ Because we brave her” (4.4.4). Yet in 4.13, upon hearing that the Egyptian fleet has lost another sea battle near Alexandria, Antony, more inconstant than Cleopatra against whom he rails, displaces his own blame onto her.

“Fortune and Antony part here” (4.13.19-20), as he states, yet his gynophobic

³⁶ Barbara Vincent, 70, “Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Rise of Comedy,” *English Literary Renaissance* 12 (1982): 70.

³⁷ Wind, 87.

spurning of Cleopatra aligns precisely with his own inability to master Fortuna, better ridden by Caesar. Once more his martial defeat is attributed to Cleopatra, as lady luck whose efficacy fails him. As long as his fortune rides high, Cleopatra is loved, but as soon as it plummets, she is railed as a treacherous witch (47) and a “Triple-turned whore,” who leads him into the perilous straits, no longer his “great fairy” (4.9.12) Queen, her love inspiring him to honorable “gests” (4.9.2). Rather than acknowledge his deficient virtuosity, Antony finds it less painful to declaim love four times, “Eros, Eros! ... Eros, ho! ... Eros, ho!” (4.13.29, 42, 49) and to scapegoat Cleopatra. Returning her oath of love, “Not know me yet?” with “All come to this?”, Antony finds it easier to view the defeat as confirming her self-serving rapprochement with Caesar, consequent to her interview with Thidias. On the contrary, Cleopatra’s soliciting question, “Why is my lord enraged against his love?” (31) seems ingenuously spoken as though she is not aware of the defeat and implicitly not accountable for it. Losing half of the world, Antony experiences an accompanying melting of authority (3.13.90) as he discovers that his Roman identity is dependent on power irreparably lost.³⁸ Hence, it is Antony, rather, who has “Beguiled [himself] to the very heart of loss” (29) by being inconstant to the complete life and Cleopatra, his “grave charm” (4.13.25). As “effective power slips away” and Antony “becomes obsessed with reasserting his sense of self,”³⁹ he ignobly displaces his frustration and failure onto Cleopatra, his political and sexual inferior. Instead of keeping steady with Cleopatra, Antony falls right into the psychological trap of the politically expedient Caesar, who wants to finish off the noble pair in the imperial contest by driving a fatal wedge between them.

³⁸ Dollimore, 210–11.

³⁹ Dollimore, 210.

In the light of Antony's consistent inability to modulate a further escalating rage, Cleopatra applies the logic of literalization by appearing to fulfill his wish, "She dies for't" (4.13.49). She retrieves Antony, who consistently wavers between the extremities of love and hatred, through the dynamics of *erōs*: a dissemblance of lack, which revives desire. Patently effective, this strategy reveals further unforeseen, ironic consequences. Having accused her of robbing him of his "sword" (4.15.23), Antony, twelve lines later, cannot strip off his armor quickly enough. Just as after his triumph of act 4, scene 9 he told Cleopatra to "leap thou ... to my heart" (4.9.14–15), his heart now wants to leap out of his armor to join her in haste:

Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done,
And we must sleep....
The seven-fold shield of Ajax cannot keep
The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
Heart, once be stronger than thy continent;
Crack thy frail case. Apace, Eros, apace. (4.15.35–36, 38–41)

With the cleaving of his body, Antony will cleave in transcendent union with Cleopatra, finally, "apace," at peace. "No more a soldier" (42), Antony longs to "o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and/ Weep for my pardon" (44–45). "Since the torch is out," "All length is torture" (46). Living in dishonor every minute he survives Cleopatra and is apart from her, Antony aches for the complete life that he could not sustain in mortality and that death will bring by "sealing" his desire. Eternally joined with Cleopatra, he will no longer be vulnerable to the mutability of the sublunary world.

Even as he calls after the physically absent Cleopatra, with *erōtic* urgency, Antony calls back his faithful attendant, whose momentary absence allowed Eros to be taken figuratively in line 50, "Come, Eros, Eros!" (4.15.54). The servant Eros, alter ego

of both Antony and Cleopatra, is the incarnation of their souls and “fortunes mingled” (4.15.23). Like the Fool in *King Lear* serving as a dramatic extension of Cordelia, Eros’s existence depends upon his master and mistress. His last appearance is to show the way of honor and love in perfect integration. Following the putative example of her mistress, by whose “death our Caesar tells ‘I am conqueror of myself’” (4.15.61–62), Eros valiantly takes his own life rather than kill or survive Antony. In so doing, he also enacts the heroic love after which he is named. Antony, who tries to follow suit in his queen’s and servant’s noble suicide, botches his ultimate act of stoic self-mastery by merely wounding himself.

This aborted self-destruction, emphasizing Antony’s characteristic in-betweenness, presents itself both as a final commentary on his deficient virtuosity and a historical event by which Shakespeare climactically amplifies the double-sidedness and “earthly mingle” of Antony’s heroic action. On the one hand, his bungled suicide caps his failure to integrate love and honor in the temporal world. Instead of actively pursuing this fixed aim, Antony habitually “ben[t] with the remover to remove” (Sonnet 116, 4), impulsively embracing love or honor, as circumstances pushed him. Ultimately a Roman, hardwired to keeping decorum, Antony was unable to sustain the “heavenly mingle” of 4.9. His suicide attempt reinforces his inability to master the two-tiered moderation required of the complete life. At the instant he hears of Cleopatra dying with his name on her last breath, Antony yields himself completely to love, abandoning his martial strength, “No more a soldier” (4.15.42). It is not Cleopatra, who has robbed him of his sword (4.15.23), but he himself as “all [his] labour/ Mars what it does; yea, very force entangles/ Itself with strength” (4.15.47–48). Though all pursuits of worldly honor and

martial glory now seem to him fruitless, Antony must muster up his force for one consummate act before “The long day’s task is done” (4.15.35). He must reserve fierceness for his ultimate heroic act, as a *Venus armata*, fusing hard and soft. To his last day, Antony lacks the reasoned strength that Aristotle advised through the “slow step.” Antony, at the end of his life, reveals that he has not yet acquired the virtuosity exemplified by *festina lente*. In response to Cleopatra’s supposed death, he impulsively abandons his *virtus* when he should marshal his masculine strength to join Cleopatra in (h)erotic union.

On the other hand, the aborted suicide opens into the ultimate carnivalesque vision of life rising into death with all the heaviness of a man dying, clinging to clay—because Cleopatra, contrary to his belief, is still part of earth. It lies not in whether or not Antony actually achieves virtuous moderation that he moves us as a tragic hero, but rather the very humanness in his aspiration for the divine. We sympathize with his heroic yearning because “we feel in it the infinity there is in man.”⁴⁰ Even in this scene in which he demonstrates his absolute love for Cleopatra transcending earthly cares, Antony clings to a chance to lay a last kiss upon her lips. Doubled human error allows for one last earthly sublimity, an ensouled kiss, we recall, embodying “All that is won and lost” (3.12.70).

Thus, the lofty transcendence of love, mingled with material weight, is depicted as a strenuous, literal elevation. Showing mirth in gravity, Cleopatra comments on the heaviness of Antony: “here’s sport indeed! How heavy weighs my lord!” (4.15.32). As a prime agent of the carnivalesque, she assists in the representation of “the socially and

⁴⁰ A. C. Bradley, “Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*,” *The Quarterly Review* 204:407 (1906): 341.

spiritually exalted on the material bodily level”⁴¹ by bravely making the most of carnality within the limits of temporality:

Had I great Juno’s power
The strong-winded Mercury should fetch thee up
And set thee by Jove’s side. Yet come a little.
Wishers were ever fools. O come, come, come!
They heave ANTONY aloft to CLEOPATRA
And welcome, welcome! Die when thou hast lived,
Quicken with kissing. Had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out. (4.16.35–41)

The mechanical emphasis of heaving the heavy Antony aloft with rope and pulley parodies transcendent love, reminiscent of the mechanicals’ overly literalized performance of the tragic “Thisbe and Pyramus” in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. At the same time the scene demonstrates Cleopatra’s virtuosity of “heavenly mingle” (2.1.58), her uncanny ability to converge opposites, arcing linear progress into circular eternity⁴²: matter and air, mirth and gravity, life and death, comedy and tragedy. Only after “The crown o’th’ earth doth melt” (4.16.65) does Cleopatra allow herself to melt momentarily.

II. Cleopatra’s Two-Tiered Moderation: Calculated Means, Virtuous End

As scholars have well noted, Antony dies while the play still has an act to run, leaving act 5 to be devoted solely to the action of Cleopatra. Throughout the play, it is Cleopatra, steadily focused on the complete life, despite her lapses in virtuosity, as opposed to Antony, who falls short in both heroic constancy and virtuosity. Act 5, I argue, demonstrates how Cleopatra finally masters virtuous moderation through her supremely achieved suicide, integrating love and honor. Critics, if granting Cleopatra tragic stature at all, tend to do so by seeing her as an extension of her male counterpart.

⁴¹ Michael Bristol quoted in Lindley, *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse: Studies in Carnavalesque Subversion*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 146.

⁴² McAlindon, 238.

As Linda Fitz, a.k.a Woodbridge, has argued, “Cleopatra is repeatedly criticized for thinking of anything but Antony: this would seem to follow from the sexist precept that nothing but love is appropriate to a woman’s thoughts.”⁴³ Here, I argue that Cleopatra, as the protagonist superior or at least equal to Antony,⁴⁴ ultimately achieves tragic grandeur first in her own right and, second, jointly with Antony, by redressing Antony’s failed attempt at (h)eroic integration. Just as Cleopatra redresses his botched suicide and thereby elevates both of them to heroic stature, the integrative lens of disciplined passion reinforces feminist correctives to androcentric readings.

Cleopatra’s refusal to descend from her monument to the dying Antony demonstrates self-assertion aligned with their mutual well-being—not “at the expense of her love for Antony,”⁴⁵ as though honor and love are wholly incompatible, as so many critics have supposed. Cleopatra achieves, in fact, the virtuoso balance between individual and joint being, which Antony fails to achieve throughout the play. Assailed on one side by Antony and Caesar on the other, Cleopatra retreats “To th’ monument,” the tomb she had built foreseeing her death,⁴⁶ the play’s unifying conceit, its literal event preceded by numerous instances of her erotic dying and fainting and Eros’s death. Contrary to the bawdy insinuations of “monument,”⁴⁷ suggesting that she might use sexual charms on Caesar to gain favor, Cleopatra’s action signals a dignified assertion of autonomy within the bounds of her tragic circumstance: “My resolution and my hands I’ll trust,/ None about Caesar” (4.16.51). Cleopatra’s immurement in her monument serves

⁴³ Linda Fitz (a.k.a. Woodbridge), “Egyptian Queens and Male Reviewers: Sexist Attitudes in *Antony and Cleopatra* Criticism,” *SQ* 28 (1977): 304.

⁴⁴ See Fitz, 307–10, for a thorough overview of this issue.

⁴⁵ Fitz, 304.

⁴⁶ *Norton Shakespeare*, 2689, n. 4.

⁴⁷ A bawdy term for the vagina, see Richard Levin, “That I Might Hear Thee Call Great Caesar ‘Ass Unpolicied,’” *Papers on Language and Literature* 33.3 (1997): 250.

dually to bring the wrathful Antony around, psychically and physically, and, thereafter, to prepare for her suicide, an act of individual dignity intermingled with absolute fidelity.

When the dying Antony requests that she come down, Cleopatra reveals, despite her love, a clear-headed decision to remain in the monument:

I dare not, dear,
Dear, my lord, pardon. I dare not,
Lest I be taken: not the imperious show
Of the full-fortune'd Caesar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me, if knife, drugs, serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation. I am safe:
Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes,
And still conclusion, shall acquire no honour
Demuring upon me. (4.16.22–30)

If the lady doth protest too much, Cleopatra has been well instructed by admonitions of her master, during one of his fits:

Let [Caesar] take thee
And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians;
Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
Of all thy sex; most monster-like be shown
For poor'st diminutives, for dolts, and let
Patient Octavia plough thy visage up
With her prepared nails. (4.13.33–39)

The irony of Antony victimized by his own destructive passion aside, Cleopatra's capture would not advance their mutual interest because Caesar would use her to adorn his triumph over the famous pair: the humiliation of Cleopatra would be equally the degradation of Antony in their interlocked fate.

Cleopatra faints with Antony's final passing, mourning: "The odds is gone,/ And there is nothing left remarkable/ Beneath the visiting moon" (4.16.68–70). Yet her momentary weakness, "such poor passion as [of] the maid that milks/ And does the meanest chores" (76–77), has the opposite effect of mustering manly strength and

resolution to embrace Stoic death:

It were for me
To throw my scepter at the injurious gods,
To tell them that this world did equal theirs
Till they had stol'n our jewel. All's but naught.
Patience is sottish, and impatience does
Become a dog that's mad. Then is it sin
To rush into the secret house of death
Ere death dare come to us? (77–84)

Rebuking herself for fainting at Antony's death instead of governing her grief stoically, Cleopatra, by the end of this speech rallying her girls to noble suicide, addresses them as manly soldiers:

What, what, good cheer! Why, how now, Charmian?
My noble girls! Ah, women, women! Look,
Our lamp is spent, it's out. Good *sirs*, take heart;
We'll bury him, and then what's brave, what's noble,
Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,
And make death proud to take us. Come, away,
This case of that huge spirit now is cold.
Ah, women, women! Come. We have no friend
But resolution, and the briefest end. (85–93, my italics)

Despite this noble address, many critics view Cleopatra with skepticism, censuring every word or action in act 5 that betrays her devotion to Antony as though only love is an appropriate pursuit for a woman. Her women gravitate toward her, like Antony's men toward him in 4.9, in a final magnanimous gesture of collaborative suicide. They do not fear death, like Aristotle's virtuous man, "knowing that there are conditions on which life is not worth having."⁴⁸

A number of scholars explain act 5 in terms of vindication. Several assert that "the entire fifth act, particularly Cleopatra's magnificent suicide, vindicates the queen's

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b8-9.

transcendent love for Antony, her demi-Atlas, her paragon of men.”⁴⁹ As Peter Alexander also states: “Cleopatra has to vindicate her right to his devotion.”⁵⁰ Ruth Nevo claims: “What she has realized ... is that it lies within her power to vindicate the passion that has ruined the triple pillar of the world: that it rests with her either heroically to affirm the rare quality of their love, its possession of heroic stature and value, of a supreme excellence among human things, or to leave it upon the pages of history as a royal strumpet’s lust for an infatuated libertine.”⁵¹ All three quotations reveal the extent to which critics are complicit in the Roman condemnation of “fatal Cleopatra,” an Eve figure responsible for Antony’s fall. From this misogynist view, Cleopatra redeems herself only as love’s martyr through an act of *sati*.⁵² Even Carol Neely, despite her keen insights into the integration of power and desire, reads Cleopatra’s conduct as opaque and open to misogynistic insinuations of being a political schemer: “We cannot be sure whether she genuinely seeks the ‘briefest end’ (IV.xv.99), as she claims at the end of act 4, or whether she stalls to bargain for acceptable terms. We cannot tell whether her suicide attempt as the monument is seized is faked or authentic.”⁵³ Despite Shakespeare’s penchant for creating complex and ambivalent representations of human action, I argue that a nuanced reading of Cleopatra relies indispensably on the Aristotelian distinction between means and ends: “virtue makes us aim at the right mark, and practical wisdom [or virtuosity] makes us take the right means.”⁵⁴ Virtuosity entails “calculat[ing] well with a view to some good end” by choosing the right emotional response and action at the

⁴⁹ Horace Howard Furness quoted in Deats, 17.

⁵⁰ Peter Alexander quoted in Fitz, 309.

⁵¹ Nevo, 351.

⁵² Dorothea Kehler, “Cleopatra’s *Sati*: Old Ideologies and Modern Stagings,” in *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 137-52.

⁵³ Neely, 158.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.12.1144a7-9.

right time and towards the right objects and people.⁵⁵ Though her means might appear as female submission and ingratiating vis-à-vis Caesar, Cleopatra has always been and remains constant to the complete life, integrating honor and love. Despite her animated, variable action, her resolution to this underlying virtuous goal throughout the play is unshakable, hence her commitment to join Antony by suicide.

Thus, in the Seleucus episode of act 5, scene 2, when Cleopatra appears to ingratiate herself with Caesar, critics scrutinize her motivation and try to pinpoint the actual “firming” of her resolution, leading them to conclude that her tragic grandeur of her suicide is undercut by her “vacillation” and her final decision coming after her unfavorable interview with Caesar. Shakespeare, however, pointedly emphasizes Cleopatra’s resolution by ending with it in act 4, scene 16 and beginning with it in act 5, scene 2, interrupted only by a “Roman” scene of Caesar, receiving news of Antony’s death. Nonetheless, in response to Cleopatra’s opening lines, “My desolation does begin to make/ A better life” (4.16.1–2), Richard Levin, for instance, quibbles that “she asserts only that her ‘desolation does begin’ to make her ready. Since she is not yet fully resolved on death, it may be inferred that she is still trying to decide whether to be or not to be.”⁵⁶ The deduction that her suicide is a mere fallback following the aborted Seleucus episode is grounded on a *post hoc* fallacy. What appears to be Cleopatra’s vacillation to these skeptical critics, I argue, is the theatrical representation of her biding time through the interviews she must undergo, waiting for a chance to enact her suicide. This virtuosity is demonstrated at two levels: Cleopatra acting before the Romans and the boy actor playing the Egyptian queen. Virtuosity, as the situation demands, can entail deceptive

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *NE*, VI.4.1140a28-32, II.6.1106b20-23.

⁵⁶ Levin, 252.

action to achieve best ends at both the dramatic and metadramatic level. While Neely remarks that Cleopatra's "vacillation is redeemed when she *grows* 'marble-constant' (V.ii.240)" (my italics),⁵⁷ I contend that such redemption is superfluous because she always been heroically constant. Constancy, from one instance to another, may *appear* inconstant, as in Cleopatra's "infinite variety." Complex, multi-faceted characters such as Cleopatra and Antony, with heroic aspirations and exquisite needs in a world of intricate politics, can hardly express themselves or work expansively towards noble ends without appearing inconsistent at times.

Critics who have from the beginning viewed the play more or less through Roman eyes naturally see in this episode Cleopatra's final attempt at saving her hide through her erotic charms. When she speaks of Caesar's men hoisting her up and showing her "to the shouting varletry/ Of censuring Rome" (5.2.55–56), the harsh audience includes literary critics as well. Their Roman bias, viewing Cleopatra as a scheming strumpet, disables them from catching the irony of her words and, instead, makes them fall victim to her virtuous subterfuge. Through dissemblance, Cleopatra exploits her feminine weakness and transforms it into a strength, combining soft and hard, feigned "feminine" frailty and "masculine" firmness, passion and reason, in the Seleucus scene as well as the ensuing suicide. In Cleopatra's moderation, concupiscence and reason are harmonized in heroic passion, aiming for the "chief end" (4.13.27) of joining with Antony, the "great spirit" (1.2.111). What Levin and others overlook is that what Cleopatra enacts in the Seleucus episode is a virtuoso performance of "feminine" lust, so convincing through her consummate acting *as though* she becomes what she merely acts. At the theatrical level,

⁵⁷ Neely, 160.

the adept boy actor must act *as though* he becomes what he merely acts to make credible a statement like “I shall see/ Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness/ I’th’ posture of a whore” (5.2.216-17). Unlike Antony, who so easily succumbs to his momentary passions, Cleopatra, as the skillful actor, not only “tailor[s] the ... passion to adhere to h[er] own [feminine] body with a smooth fit,”⁵⁸ but also adjusts her actions deftly to the demands of the immediate situation.

Nonetheless, there are telltale signs that Cleopatra’s conduct is mere performance, specifically, through a rare blend of sardonic scorn and ready obedience. In trying to achieve her purpose—to deceive Caesar into thinking that she wants to live⁵⁹—Cleopatra ostensibly takes the advice of Proculeius: “Pray you, tell [Caesar]/ I am his fortune’s vassal, and I send him/ The greatness he has got. I hourly learn/ A doctrine of obedience, and would gladly/ Look him i’th’ face” (5.2.28–33). Cleopatra’s wording, however, suggests her “sense of superiority in conferring greatness upon Caesar.”⁶⁰ If we are to accept Cleopatra’s resolution on heroic death, as we should, her reply to Caesar is fully ironic, implying that she is a “slave’s slave,” since Caesar is “but Fortune’s knave” (3). Notably, Cleopatra does not subordinate herself to Caesar, only to his fortunes, and that even Caesar, “Not being Fortune” (3), is ultimately no greater than she, reduced to a beggar. This sardonic scorn permeates Cleopatra’s speech, blended with her feigned obedience, “hourly learn[ed].” The alacrity with which she dons her role shows the extent of her virtuosity. Once resolved on the virtuous end, Cleopatra skillfully adjusts her demeanor to achieve that end—quickness and steadiness combined.

⁵⁸ Roach, 52.

⁵⁹ The view of Adolf and Stahr (1864) and others, see Deats, 19.

⁶⁰ Norton, 2697, n. 4.

When Caesar appears on scene, Cleopatra immediately “kneels,” following Proculeius’s advice of kneeling to him for grace (5.2.28), an action that seems to embarrass Caesar enough to tell her three times to rise (110). Despite this obsequious gesture, Cleopatra’s words reveal dignity: “Sir, the gods/ Will have it thus. My master and my lord/ I must obey” (111–13). Here, she indicates, consistent with her previous message to Caesar, that she is “fram[ing] herself/ To th’ way she’s forced to” (5.1.55–56), obeying “injurious gods,” whom she scorns in 4.16, upon Antony’s death: “this world did equal theirs/ Till they had stol’n our jewel” (4.16.79–80). Caesar, playing the princely overlord, indulges Cleopatra’s view of human powerlessness in her favor: “The record of what injuries you did us,/ Though written in our flesh, we shall remember/ As things but done by chance” (5.2.114–16). But undeceived Cleopatra, half-mockingly addressing him as “Sole sir o’th’ world,” makes a reply which beneath the decorous humility reflects the dignified self-reflection of a ruler who rues how her feminine frailty contributed to the defeat at Actium:

I cannot project mine own cause so well
 To make it clear, but do confess I have
 Been laden with like frailties which before
 Have often shamed our sex. (5.2.116–19)

The feminine frailties here are less an allusion to Cleopatra’s use of erotic charms, as many critics think,⁶¹ but her previous weakness in heroic action, which the defeated queen now reprehends, especially in her resolution to take Antony’s course. Accordingly, this speech specifically recalls her “fearful sails” at Actium and her fainting in 4.16 as counterexamples to the resolution she “hourly” (5.2.30) revives.

⁶¹ See, for instance, Levin, 257, who interprets these lines as “Cleopatra’s flirtation,” arguing an unwarranted shift of “attention from her military improprieties to her improprieties as a sexual being and a female, ‘confess[ing]’ that she has been ‘laden with like frailties....’”

This resolution is redoubled by Caesar's threat of killing her children if she "lay on me a cruelty by taking Antony's course" (5.2.125–26). Her alternative to suicide, to live "pinioned at [Caesar's] court" (52), is insufferable. Against this hard fate, Cleopatra can assert herself only through her sovereign wit and, later, body. Cleopatra ironically dilates on Caesar's good-bye, "I'll take my leave" (129): "And may through all the world! 'Tis yours, and we,/ Your scutcheons and your signs of conquest, shall/ Hang in what place you please" (130–32). Delaying his departure with her subversive submission, she shows masterfully that he will leave, rather upon her leave—when she has attained her desired end: Caesar's belief that she clings to life, contrary to the truth. Thrusting "a brief" of her possessions into his hand, Cleopatra dissimulates how eagerly she "appl[ies her]self to [his] intents" (122). She quickly calls for Seleucus, her treasurer, to confirm that she reserves "nothing" (140), a fact conveniently denied by Seleucus, launching her into a lively tirade—virtuously harmonizing feigned hot passion and cool reason. Lie against lie regarding Cleopatra's actual possessions—what Caesar believes in this regard is insignificant compared to his inference from Cleopatra's hoarding possessions that she clings to life. Self-degradation as a "lady trifle" (161) and humiliation at the hands of her subordinate—these are a small price to pay for what Cleopatra gained: Caesar's belief of her "sweet dependency" (26). In this marvelous confrontation between the two greats, both characters masterfully dissemble what they are not: Caesar, an "honourable and ... kindly" overlord and Cleopatra, an imperial courtesan. Caesar is easily "hooked" (2.5.12), however, by Cleopatra's superior "cunning" because she suavely reflects back the projections of his orderly, objectified world: "Women are not/ In their best fortunes strong, but want will perjure/ The ne'er-touched vestal" (3.12.29–31). Through this

subversive mirroring, Cleopatra commands the scene and “unpolicies” Caesar through her sublime suicide “that is simultaneously an allusive, carefully staged, theatrical dying; an orgiastic sexual dying, ‘as sweet as air, as soft as balm” (5.2.311); ... a literal dying,” and lastly, a lyrical dying, by which Cleopatra and Antony’s love transcends their temporal failure.⁶² As heroic integration, Cleopatra’s suicide consummately blends Egyptian beauty, carnality, and oneness with nature with Roman firmness of purpose in a heavenward mingle. Only through death do both Antony and Cleopatra escape the debasement of passion—martial heroism and venereal sexuality—in Caesar’s hands.

Caesar, to his credit or as a mouthpiece for Shakespeare, gives the following apt tribute to Cleopatra: “Bravest at the last,/ She leveled at our purposes, and, being royal,/ Took her own way” (5.2.325–27). Echoing Antony’s praise of Fulvia at her death, “At the last, best” (1.3.61), the Roman eulogy indicates that Cleopatra has finally incorporated Fulvia and has become *Venus armata*. In so doing, she also redresses Antony’s botched suicide and seizes in death the integrated life that they only briefly knew on earth. Last but not least, in taking “her own way,” Cleopatra “realizes her inalienable possessions, that she is above Fortune”⁶³ and above the men who try to confine her divine combination of “infinite variety” and heroic constancy. Cleopatra

⁶² Lindley, 146.

⁶³ S. L. Bethell, *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, (Westminster: King and Staples, 1944), 130.

“buried by her Antony” (348) presents the final image of heroic constancy, the famous pair lying together *beyond*, if not “standing with” one another *in* the temporal world.

Chapter 6

Civic Immoderation in *Coriolanus*

*For wisdom is the property of the dead,
A something incompatible with life; and power,
Like everything that has the stain of blood,
A property of the living....*

—William Butler Yeats, “Blood and Moon”

While *Antony and Cleopatra*, focusing on the titular characters, demonstrated how insufficient moderation kept them from attaining the complete life, two other Roman plays involving the contest for rule explore the consequences of immoderation, the lack of proper self-government, as an endemic disorder affecting the entire body politic. In *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare exposes the abuses of Roman honor from within and from without. It is Titus’s excessive piety—both in yielding his elected title of Emperor to Saturnius and rigidly demanding the death of Tamora’s eldest son as payment for Rome’s losses—which stirs the clash between the Andronici and the Queen of the Goths, subsequently empowered by the self-absorbed, megalomaniac Saturnius, elder son of the late Emperor. Though by the play’s end, Titus has successfully wreaked vengeance upon Tamora’s clan, responsible for killing two of his sons and raping and mutilating his daughter, the immoderation within Rome’s civic constitution remains, and, without it, the lack of a peaceful transfer of power to a virtuous ruler.

In comparing Shakespeare’s first Roman play with his last, we see that the immoderation that wreaks havoc in *Titus Andronicus* (1592) through virtually all its characters resurges in *Coriolanus* (1608), pointedly in the troubled interaction between its eponymous hero and the Roman state with its comparably immoderate constitution. Two elements link the plots of *Titus* and *Coriolanus*: both title characters, warriors granted

political leadership, ultimately become victims of ingratitude from the Roman emperor, Saturnius, and from the entire state of Rome, respectively; both plays end without the political procedures and structures in place to ensure a stable transfer of power, whether monarchical or republican. The question of moderation, virtuous self-government, both at the level of the individual and interconnectedly at the level of the polity—apparently intrigued Shakespeare enough to take a second look at it in *Coriolanus*. Though we arrive at a perhaps no more satisfying conclusion at its end as with *Titus*, the exploration of the good citizen in *Coriolanus* sheds further light on the inherent paradox of Roman civic virtue: the imperative to be both uncommon and common, to rise above the herd and to be cooperative within it. This challenging feat entails modulating passion with reason in the moderate government of the self, which, manifold, contributes to a properly constituted, well-functioning polity.

Roman *virtus*, derived from its root *vir* meaning man, literally means manly excellence. As Geoffrey Miles explains, *virtus* is best exemplified through the Stoic notion of constancy, understood as fortitude, endurance, and consistency of action.¹ Like Aristotelian moderation, *virtus* is, in value, an extreme but, in praxis, involves exercising the just mean of affect and action as part of one's proper role within the polity (civic decorum)² and within the larger natural order. An ideal applicable to civic participation in times of war and peace, *virtus* was best exhibited by the aristocratic warrior and the Stoic *sapiens*, the two types of people within the polity for whom self-sufficiency involving the utmost physical and mental toughness became a special devotion. As

¹ Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 29.

² Miles, 13.

Cicero well knew, however, such “aspirations to individual self-advancement and self-perfection [... were not] easy to reconcile with the common good of the state.”³ In other words, can the good man be a good citizen?⁴ Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* dramatizes Aristotle’s classic query about the supremely virtuous man in a polity and the tensions between individual distinction and the common good. How does the exceptional man who strives for distinction above the herd conduct himself decorously, i.e., play his proper civic role⁵ as a member of the body politic? The maneuver demands a political dexterity involving disciplined passion which, we shall see, the virtue-loving Coriolanus woefully lacks. In this Roman tragedy, a heroic warrior is promoted to consulship only to be banished as a traitor. The peripeteic course of Coriolanus’s career in Rome from “th’ casque to’ th’ cushion” (5.1.43) to a sudden descent suggests flaws in the hero’s character inherent in the conception of Roman virtue. The source of Coriolanus’s downfall is what I call his hypervirtue, akin to Titus’s hyper-piety, an ethical extremism, which perverts into a genocidal mission, or in Othello’s mind, the “cause” that justified the murder of his innocent wife. As in these other cases, Coriolanus’s hypervirtue consists of a genuine love of virtue, paired with a fatal imprudence, the insistence upon the absolute good rather than what is actually attainable in the human world of conflicting interests. With his extraordinary strength, the passion that fuels his hypervirtue finds its most auspicious results on the battlefield (though even there subject to critique) and worse results in the civic forum, where he finds moderation most incompatible with his heroic ideal.

³ Miles, 29.

⁴ See Aristotle, *Politics*, III.4.

⁵ Miles, 29.

The question of whether Coriolanus, the exceptional man, is a good citizen furthermore depends, as Aristotle explains, on the type of government in force at the time. In an aristocracy, the role of a virtuous man is to rule, “and the virtue of the citizen to include ruling and obeying”⁶; in a constitutional rule of “freemen and equals by birth,”⁷ the role of the good man and the citizen converge more closely. Although their political roles are inherently different, both need to know how to govern and obey; both need to exercise temperance and justice in their respective roles as leader and citizen.⁸ Coriolanus’s virtue, as Aufidius elucidates, “Lie[s] in th’interpretation of the time” (4.7.49-50). Yet if Rome’s emergent republic is in a temporal state of flux, the other characters’ judgment of Coriolanus as god or beast, hero or traitor, as we shall soon see, is as labile as the Roman government wavering between aristocracy and republic. Coriolanus instantiates the paradox embedded in Roman *virtus*, unfolding within a transitional republican state: on the one hand, an ethos of personal honor and, on the other hand, civic duty, requiring compliance with the common goals of the state.

When differences in ethical and political vision irreparably alienate Coriolanus from the less virtuous but more democratic republic, his pursuit of perfection rises to monstrosity: Coriolanus resolves to annihilate mediocrity *en masse* by burning Rome with cleansing fire. Pushed into this dire stance by the compulsions of his hypervirtue, Coriolanus ironically sets in motion the course of his own inexorable extinction ultimately in the name of the Roman republic. Coriolanus’s downfall results from his defiant pursuit of individual virtue at the neglect of civic prudence and justice. An

⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.4.1277a27.

⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.4.1277b10.

⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.4.1277a14–20.

unwavering virtue which makes Coriolanus a martial hero, then precipitously a political exile, ultimately enables his self-affirmation in death, briefly reconciling personal honor and civic sacrifice, the passionate extreme and the rational mean. The hybridity of both Coriolanus, wavering between exceptional and anti-social, god and beast, and Rome, between aristocracy and republic, is reinforced generically through the play's tricky mediation between Senecan tragedy's exalting of fury and Aristotelian tragedy's extolling of moderation as disciplined passion.

Longstanding criticism of the play, largely grounded on Aristotelian *hamartia* and a misconceived standard of moderation *qua* passionless mean, has tended to view the title character as a pre-eminent example of a flawed and incomplete hero, lacking virtue. Critics have invariably focused on his numerous flaws of pride, irascibility, unsociability, and emotional privation, impugning his very patriotism.⁹ Referring to Coriolanus's speech, Carol Sicherman, moreover, speaks of a "disjunction between the heart and the brain."¹⁰ The divergent critique of Coriolanus's character from coldness to overheatedness implies, as Menenius's and Volumnia's schooling of him suggests, his lack of moderation. Coriolanus is painted as the very picture of immoderation. Past and current character criticism on Coriolanus is polarized between his detractors and his admirers among scholars, who seem to take cue from the opinions of the play's characters split along class lines between the plebeians against Coriolanus and the patricians supporting him. What is largely missing in the scholarship, however, is a

⁹ John Bligh, "The Mind of Coriolanus," *Shakespearean Criticism* 36 (1997): 126. See also Cynthia Marshall, "Wound-man: *Coriolanus*, Gender, and the Theatrical Construction of Interiority," *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, Dymphna Callaghan, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94, for a summary of a "criticism of lack."

¹⁰ Carol Sicherman, "*Coriolanus*: The Failure of Words," *ELH* 39 (1972): 197.

squaring of Coriolanus's flaws with his love of virtue.¹¹ It is one thing to say that Coriolanus, exhibiting humoral and emotional imbalance, is too cold in one scene or too angry in another; it is considerably more challenging to explain his failures in relation to his attributes of virtue. The most insightful account of this kind, I find, is offered by Carson Holloway. While Holloway situates his analysis on an incisive comparison of Coriolanus to Aristotle's magnanimous, or great-souled, man, my examination squares Coriolanus's attributes with his shortcomings through the integrative lens of virtuous moderation as the adept harmonizing of reason and passion as the situation demands. Situational ethics of this sort addresses the real issue of the play, the massive difficulty of attaining moderation, or self-government, at the personal and, interrelatedly, the civic level.

The rational and passionate analysis of Coriolanus as a microcosm of Rome is the key to understanding the constitutional imbalance within the emergent republic. It is in this light that we can both understand Coriolanus's failings and appreciate his strengths. If we are to see Coriolanus as flawed—as we rightly should—we see simultaneously that he serves as foil to political opportunism and self-interest on the part of the tribunes and the patricians, which also hinder the well-being of the state. If Coriolanus is Rome's best citizen as its greatest warrior, he is the play's archetype of immoderation, highlighting Rome's endemic problem: the lack of self-control in its various citizens constitutes the collective immoderation of the polity, its inability to bring its various parts into salutary corporate balance. A parody of Plato's tripartite polity in the *Republic*, the belly parable of act 1, scene 1, through the symptoms of physiological imbalance within the body

¹¹ Carson Holloway, "Shakespeare's Coriolanus and Aristotle's Great-Souled Man," *The Review of Politics* 69 (Summer 2007): 353-74.

politic, highlights Rome's civic injustices, which the plebeians try to redress by amputating its most virtuous member: through his uncompromising virtue, Coriolanus is the politically expendable yet the least venal of the play's cast of characters. His inability to implement public good in the political sphere does not vitiate his virtue, still greater than those of the play's other morally flawed characters. If Coriolanus is the necessary sacrifice for the formation of the republic, Rome has also lost the virtuous core upon which to build a government directed at the public good. Equally troubling, the headlessness of Rome's body politic signifies not only the lack of proper leadership but also the insufficient exercise of reason within the overall civic participation, threatening to immobilize the inchoate republican state.

I. To Be Uncommon within the Commonwealth

Coriolanus is the exceptional man who "hath been used/ ever to conquer and to have his worth/ [by] contradiction" (3.3.26-27), by difference. By the very core of his *ethos*, Coriolanus repels commonness, and what he perceives as common abilities of the plebeians as opposed to what he regards as the inherent *aretē* of his own aristocratic class of patricians. What critics often overlook, distracted by Coriolanus's extravagant displays of pride and anger, is the intellectual grounding of his political stance.¹² As a patrician, he firmly subscribes to the dominant political conception of antiquity, the Platonic tripartite state hierarchically composed of rulers, soldiers, and workers/commoners corresponding respectively to the reason, passions, and appetites of the tripartite soul. He holds the traditional low opinion of the third class of plebeians as "the mutable rank-

¹² Bligh, 126.

scented meinie” (3.1.70), ever fickle, subject to appetites.¹³ Valuing moral strength and integrity especially in times of foreign threats, he spurns moral weakness and vacillation on the part of both the plebeians and the patricians. Coriolanus opposes political change upon the valid “reasons” (3.1.122) that the transitional state of republican rule is one of confusion and vulnerability, dangerously diluting patrician power with the authority of a politically naive citizenry schooled by the more savvy tribunes. Especially because the play, by its end, comes to confirm his political prognosis, Coriolanus’s view of Rome in the short-run would be tenable were it not for its deterministic aspect. Coriolanus is right in his assessment of the plebeians as presently lacking in the political skills necessary to fulfill their civic duties. The problem is, however, that Coriolanus’s opinion regarding the plebeians is that their condition is static, with no view towards their perfectibility. Such a naturalized view of the hierarchical classes is clearly antithetical to the very definition and existence of a republic, grounded on the validity of every citizen’s voice, or vote. Despite his genuine commitment to excellence, Coriolanus presents himself as an obstacle to the long-term goal toward an effective communal form of government designated as the republic.

Coriolanus’s martial prowess fuelled by passion enables Rome’s defeat of aggressive neighboring states, thereby bringing the civic peace requisite for her slow evolution from an oligarchy to the more equitable/egalitarian republic. Rome’s act of gratitude to her best citizen/ protector of the state in wartime, the bestowing of consulship to Coriolanus, becomes the seed ironically for its near disintegration in peacetime.

¹³ Plato, *Republic* IV.440-41. See Barbara L. Parker, *Plato’s Republic and Shakespeare’s Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works*, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 27, on the centrality in Tudor thought of Plato’s *Republic* with its tripartite body politic corresponding microcosmically to reason, passion, and appetites in man.

Moderation, requisite for the rational discussion and often collective decision-making in civic society, is antithetical to the heroic ideal of exceeding the crowd. The assets and defects of this pursuit of self-perfection manifest themselves first in Coriolanus's actions as soldier. As a warrior who single-handedly won Corioles for Rome, Coriolanus is the constant Roman *par excellence*, exhibiting supreme courage and physical self-mastery. His conduct invariably displays an unremitting virtue, charged with passion *during* the heroic action but with dismissiveness towards his worthy deeds once done. When praised for his superhuman feats of valor, in his view, mere "nothings monstered" (2.2.74), Coriolanus refuses to be distinguished from his fellow soldiers who fought with equally virtuous spirit—if not ability—for their country: "He that has but effected his good will/ Hath overta'en mine act" (1.10.20-21). Hence, Coriolanus "stand[s] upon [his] common part with those/ That have upheld the doing" (1.10.39-40), nobly declining a larger share of the war booty. This is, indeed, the action of Aristotle's just man who "does not assign to himself more of what is good in itself, unless such a share is proportional to his merits,"—or noble-spirited virtue in Coriolanus's view—"so that it is for *others* that he labours, and it is for this reason that men ... say that justice is '*another's* good'" (my italics).¹⁴

There are, nonetheless, cracks in Coriolanus's magnanimity and modesty, qualities proper to the virtuous man. For one, his inclusive attitude of elevating all to the same level of excellence apparently does not extend to plebeians since Coriolanus later contemptuously remarks that "our gentlemen [sarcastically],/ The common file" (1.7.43), briskly fled from the battle. The plebeian Have-nots of Rome apparently seem to be less

¹⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, V.6.1134a3-5.

inspired than their patrician counterparts to defend a corporate machine designed to maintain and protect the politico-economic interests of the Haves. Even if there were a few plebeians within the ranks of this martial *aristoi*, Coriolanus's acknowledgment of their exceptional virtue seems to be as "good-willed *without* effect"—applying his standard—as his unaccomplished gesture of kindness towards the nameless Volscian man who "used me kindly" (1.10.82). As Aristotle well notes, virtue arises not by moral will alone, acting in accordance with or in resistance to nature:

None of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot be habituated to move upwards, even if one tries to train it by throwing it up ten thousand times.... Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.¹⁵

Vis-à-vis both the brave plebeian soldiers and the nameless Volscian host, Coriolanus, with an acculturated view that plebeians and aliens merit less consideration, lacks the active will to carry through his good intention.

Contrary to first glance, Coriolanus's virtuous modesty also presents itself as flawed pride, an imperfection inherent within the relentless pursuit of perfection. Cominius's report of his taxing virtue reveals Coriolanus's excessive rejection of honor: "Our spoils he kicked at,/ And looked upon things precious as they were/ The common muck of the world. He covets less/ Than misery itself would give, rewards/ His deeds with doing them, and is content/ To spend the time to end it" (2.2.120-124). Personal excellence so rules his life that Coriolanus is unable to accept gifts graciously, a refusal that conveys a sometimes justified and sometimes overplayed disregard for the values

¹⁵ Aristotle, *NE*, II.1.1103a19-25. I am relying on the helpful suggestions of Jeffrey Gauthier's commentary for my paper, "Virtue, Passion, and Moderation in Shakespeare," Northwest Philosophy Conference, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR, 2007.

others treasure. According to Aristotle, pride, in regard to the supremely virtuous man, is the proper mean between humility and vanity, for the “proud man . . . is an extreme in respect of the greatness of his claims, but a mean in respect of the rightness of them; for he claims what is in accordance with his merits, while the others go to excess or fall short.”¹⁶ Hence, while “His nature is too noble for the world” (3.1.255), Coriolanus invariably acts with “a merit/ To choke it in the utt’rance” (5.1.50), the paradox of perfection. While noble in the boundlessness of intrapersonal striving, Coriolanus’s humility becomes an improper pride within civic intercourse.

Aristotle claims that a “truly proud [great-souled] man must be good.”¹⁷

Coriolanus’s flawed pride points to cracks in his hypervirtue. Like those well-born or those enjoying power or wealth who, lacking perfect virtue, become disdainful and insolent, Coriolanus cannot “bear gracefully the goods of fortune; and, being unable to bear them, and thinking [himself] superior to others, [he] despise others and [himself] do[es] what [he] please[s].”¹⁸ The paradox of perfection unfolds most vividly in Coriolanus’s difficult interaction with the common lot. Vis-à-vis the plebeians, ambivalently presented as mediocre in courage and intelligence, Coriolanus “love[s] them as they weigh” (2.2.69), pushing the virtue-challenged to prove their worth. He stresses in this regard that the state dispensation of corn was *not* a reward for the plebeians’ cowardly martial effort at Corioles. This situation counterposes two divergent perspectives on civic duties and benefits: social entitlement vs. merit. In Coriolanus’s

¹⁶ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.2.1123b12-14.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b30. H. Rackham, tr., *Nicomachean Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999), translates this notion of *megalopsuchos* as “great-souledness.”

¹⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124a29-31. This point constitutes my principal counterargument to Rodney Poisson’s claim that Coriolanus is the Aristotelian magnanimous man. See Poisson, “Coriolanus as Aristotle’s Magnanimous Man.” *Pacific Coast Studies in Shakespeare* (1966), 210–24.

hard-line view, the plebeians must rightly earn civic entitlements and through their cowardice “Did not deserve corn gratis” (3.1.128). His rigorous martial standards exact an equal effort as his from those with less moral luck, i.e., without the mental and physical capacities and socio-economic privileges conducive to the virtue he himself has attained.¹⁹ Unlike Antony towards his followers in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Coriolanus holds “a lofty bearing ... among humble people [which] is as vulgar as a display of strength against the weak.”²⁰

The question of the fair distribution of corn is directly linked to the concerns of social equity framed in the Aristotelian notion of distributive justice. The just distribution of wealth in society, Aristotle claims, should proceed according to merit—though there is disagreement over the interpretation of merit: as in the situation of *Coriolanus*, “democrats identify it with the status of freeman, supporters of oligarchy with wealth (or noble birth), and supporters of aristocracy with excellence.”²¹ In Act 1, the plebeians’ violent demands for food, are, instead, appeased by the appointment of two tribunes to represent their concerns at civic debates. Indeed, Sicinius and Brutus, as it turns out, successfully galvanize the veto power of the plebeians to obstruct the installation of imperious Coriolanus as consul. The danger of Coriolanus as leader of an emergent republic is that in theory, he is a supporter of aristocracy, promoting excellence, but in practice, he acts more as a supporter of oligarchy, promoting wealth and noble birth. Potentially valuable, his devotion to excellence, inherently biased—or in Sicinius’s

¹⁹ See Paul Cantor, *Shakespeare’s Rome: Republic and Empire*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), 68: “[T]he distribution of wealth and privilege in Rome favors the growth of spiritedness among the patricians and works against it among the plebeians.”

²⁰ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b22-23.

²¹ Aristotle, *NE*, V.3.1131a26-29.

words, “poison[ed]” (3.1.90-91)—to exclude the common crowd, could well be harmful to the nascent republic.

While Rodney Poisson makes an admirable case for Coriolanus as Aristotle’s magnanimous man, noting *just* disdain as one of the latter’s characteristics,²² most critics, including myself, see that in Coriolanus’s case, his contempt towards the plebeians is far from just. I argue further that in his lack of imagination, it does not dawn on Coriolanus that with more food in their bellies (more kindness in the martial regime), the plebeian soldiers might have shown more heart to fight. Indeed, the rabble-rousing First Citizen complains about the constant state—in war and peace alike—of being eaten though themselves starved: “If the wars eat us not up, [the patrician rapacious belly] will; and there’s all the love they bear us” (1.1.75). Though Coriolanus’s aim is to embody the constancy of the warrior and the *sapiens*, he has not imbibed the spirit of Stoic teachings, for Cicero, in advocating the pursuit of excellence, expounds ethical individuation allowing for diverse potentials to be attained by dissimilar persons:

that kind of men is seldom found, who after they be either of excellent profoundness of wit, or of famous learning, and knowledge, or with both these adorned, have got a time to take advisement [on] what race of life they would [most rather] run; in the which advice, all a man’s counsel is to be applied to each man’s proper nature. For since in all things, [it] be done, out of that nature wherewith every man is born ... we seek what becometh, then, in pointing out the whole life, much more regard thereof must be had that in the continuing of our life we may agree with ourselves, and never halt in any duty.²³

²² Aristotle, *NE*, IV.3.1124b5.

²³ Cicero, *Marcus Ciceroes thre bokes of duties to Marcus his sonne (1556)*, trans. Nicolas Grimalde, ed. Gerald O’ Gorman (Washington, D. C.: Associated University Press, 1990), Book I, sig. F7; slightly modified for clarification.

Cicero, following Aristotle's lead, allows for the virtuous ideal to vary according to the relative circumstances of the agent.²⁴ The best man, explains Aristotle in his chapter on justice in *Nicomachean Ethics*, "is not he who exercises his virtue towards *himself* but he who exercises it towards *another*; for this is a difficult task"²⁵ (my italics). In measuring others against his rigorous personal standard, however, Coriolanus subjects the promptings of his own self improperly onto others, thereby disrupting the civic order. It is Coriolanus's very compulsion to be "author of himself" (5.3.36), which, the tribunes fear, will translate into excessive civic authority, were he to be consul. This ethical intolerance later comes to a head in his genocidal negation of the city which banishes him.

With regard to his unrelenting pursuit of *virtus*, Coriolanus's leadership on the battlefield—precisely where his martial prowess is eminently displayed—opens itself to query. Though fellow officer Lartius commends the noble soldiery of Coriolanus as he "sensibly outdares his senseless sword" (1.5.24), the ironic sense of *sensibly* as *irrationally* shows that Coriolanus channels martial fury into singular feats of strength. Granted that this supra-rational ability to will the mind and heart toward particular ends is a special power of discipline and focus, its virtue largely obtains upon successful outcome, which is never guaranteed. Within a rational analysis of virtue, Coriolanus's heroic passion is further problematic as generally recommendable martial ethos because it acts with complete disregard for death, upholding virtue over life itself. By "refusing to calculate possible harm to himself or to others, and by preferring action to words," Coriolanus's military prowess, Katharine Maus argues, following Paul Jorgensen's lead, "is not merely irrelevant to peacetime employment but indeed renders him politically

²⁴ Aristotle, *NE*, II.6.1106b36-1107a2.

²⁵ Aristotle, *NE*, V.1130a8-9.

incompetent or even dangerous.”²⁶ Although Coriolanus happened to be successful in the siege of Corioles, the outcome might well have been that of Hotspur, who “with great imagination/ Proper to madmen, led his powers to death,/ And winking leapt into destruction” (2 *Henry IV*, 1.3.31-33). Thus, plebeian cowardice in Coriolanus’s eyes may be for the ill-fed soldiers a wiser decision of not engaging in “Foolhardiness!” (1.5.17). According to the passional standard, however, the same compulsion that drives the fury-driven hero to “banish every vestige of sense”²⁷ later makes him banish the plebeians, who, as the Platonic analogue of the appetites, are more responsive to the senses.

Amidst this tension between Coriolanus and the plebeians, both sides are decorously framed by the civic custom of promoting the war hero to consulship. Both sides are narrowly scripted into partaking in a socio-political ritual of a hero’s display of wounds, communing heroic deeds with his people and incorporating all into a body politic through this national ethos. This ritual demonstrates precisely Rome’s hybrid political state respecting both the aristocratic heroic ethic and a nascent democratic principle of popular voice in the governing of the state. On their side, the plebeians are compelled by civic duty to endorse a martial hero-turned-civic leader who has time and again voiced himself as their foe. On his side, Coriolanus would almost rather forego the consulship rather than submit to a ritual both humiliating and superfluous from his perspective of proven merit. Within Rome’s distribution of political power, Coriolanus’s

²⁶ Katharine Eisaman Maus, introduction to *Coriolanus*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2787; Paul Jorgensen, “Shakespeare’s Coriolanus: Elizabethan Soldier.” *PMLA* 64 (1949): 221-35.

²⁷ In this sense Coriolanus’s passional energy resembles amatory fury in Neoplatonic accounts such as that of Giordano Bruno, who regarded love as a means of mystical ascent. See John Charles Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno’s Eroici furori* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1958), 178.

desire to return to an aristocratic state is pitted against the plebeian desire to expand their voices beyond a mere role of approving or denying the consul.

The well-meaning plebeians try to enact their civic duties responsibly, regarding their voices as valid opinions in a democratic as opposed to an absolute form of government enforcing one truth and one will. They are conscientious to avoid committing monstrous ingratitude: as the third citizen explains, “We have power in ourselves to [deny Coriolanus our voices], but it is a power that we have no power to do...; so if he tell us his noble deeds we must also tell him our noble acceptance of them” (2.3.4-8). The plebeians fulfil their social duty graciously, reciprocating the deference shown them. If it were not for the accusation of ingratitude, or worse, unpatriotism in this time of fragile peace, they might well have preferred another candidate more inclined to sympathize with plebeian interests and concerns.

On his side, however, Coriolanus becomes a squeamish virgin—the *vir* acting as *virgo*, reversing the *virago*—refusing to display his wounds to the plebeians, to let them put their “tongues into those wounds and speak for them” (2.3.6-7). This extraordinary phrase with its doubly political and sexual registers helps to explain Coriolanus’s uncivil response: in his aversion of the commonplace, Coriolanus inappropriately rejects civil participation by regarding the event as personal and private intercourse when he should more properly see it as civic intercourse essential to the republic. Coriolanus is Rome’s first citizen and servant, who by displaying his wounds publicly, would reaffirm his personal devotion to public service through this civic communion linking the protector to those he is protecting: the transubstantiation of his martial wounds into plebeian tongues into political voices ratifying his consulship. Coriolanus, however, misreads himself as

forced into the role of a public prostitute and thereby refuses to sell himself for votes, “crav[ing] the hire which first we do deserve” (2.3.104). Through this aloofness, Coriolanus expresses a disdainful lack of civility and civic respect towards them,²⁸ as Cathy Shrank argues, antipathetic to civilized, civil, and civic society (418), corresponding to Aristotle’s virtues of social intercourse.²⁹ His prudishness converging with pride (both from French *preux*), Coriolanus yet lacks the prudence (also from *preux* by way of Latin *prode*, meaning “profitable, advantageous, useful”) requisite in civil interactions.³⁰ He finds the ritual an insufferable imposition, but it is rather his claim on consulship that is, in fact, presumptuous. In Carson Holloway’s right assessment, “Coriolanus is a man who ... deserve[s] great honors, but claims honors even greater than those he deserves.”³¹ His martial leadership and his love of virtue, though admirable, do not automatically qualify him to lead a Rome that seems to be shifting from an oligarchic towards a more republican form of government. Indeed, his inability to act with civility, respect, and prudence within the procedures and organs of civic governance runs precisely counter to the republican process.

Virtue without affection is like a rose without perfume. Coriolanus’s sense of justice is circumscribed by his exclusive patrician outlook, not extending magnanimously to the feelings and beliefs of the plebeians. The coldness of Coriolanus’s hypervirtue effectively induces a reciprocal coldness in its recipients. As his mother chides him, “You might have been enough the man you are/ With striving less to be so” (3.2.18-19). A

²⁸ Cathy Shrank, “Civility and the City in *Coriolanus*,” *SQ* 54.4 (2004): 418. See also 407-08, where she notes the topical relevance of republican politics to England, despite her monarchical rule, by highlighting the importance of civic culture as disseminated by humanist education and practiced within her 204 corporate towns and cities (407-08).

²⁹ Aristotle, *NE*, Chapters 6-8.

³⁰ See the etymological explanation for the OED entry for “proud.”

³¹ Holloway, 374.

victorious hero's return home might invoke the excitement of civic glory from a distance, but Coriolanus's aloofness in person alienates rather than endears him to the common mass. In refusing the praise of his heroic deeds as "nothings monstered" (2.2.74), Coriolanus fails to see the monstrosity, nonetheless, of his perfection: his utter lack of compassion and understanding for human imperfection such that he has broken bond with humankind long before he decides to side with the Volscians against his Roman kin. Consequently, just when he thinks he has successfully discharged an onerous duty and won the plebeians' approval, they, at the tribunes' instigation, easily retract it because he did not "enquire [his] way,/ ... with a gentler spirit" (3.1.57-58).

Sicinius and Brutus's obstruction of Coriolanus's power apparently results from a need to protect their newly invested authority and the emergent republican state they represent.³² Yet, the tribunes, themselves creatures of passion unopposed to stooping to "dirty politics," deliberately provoke his anger to prove him a tyrant—in classical and Renaissance understanding, a ruler subject to inordinate passions³³—thereby, a hazard to Rome which she must eliminate. Scholarship has well considered the play's republican politics in the light of Jacobean monarchy. Bringing topical references to bear upon the play however imperfectly, "[c]ommonplace wisdom," according to Joshua Scodel, "held that both monarch and subject should use moderation to preserve the constitutional balance of the royal prerogative and subjects' liberty, a relation conceived of as a vague

³² See also Cantor, 89 and John Plotz, "Coriolanus and the Failure of Performatives" *ELH* 63.4 (1996): 809-32, that Coriolanus's quick responses to the tribunes' intentional needling are shows of "authentic interiority[...], a viable alternative to shallow public life" or "opportunistic mendacity" (809). Plotz's point is well taken but inclines towards an analysis of false dichotomies.

³³ Scodel, 156.

but normative mean between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy.”³⁴ Yet in *Coriolanus*, the showdown in the forum is a play of inordinate passions. In the ensuing verbal battle, the tribunes’ accusations against Coriolanus hang on his exceptional nature. Brutus charges, “You speak o’th’ people as if you were a god/ To punish, not a man of their infirmity” (3.1.85-86), to which Sicinius adds: “It is a mind/ That shall remain a poison where it is,/ Not poison any further” (3.1.89-91). Along with pride, other metaphors shift 180 degrees: Coriolanus, the war hero, protector, and patriot, suddenly becomes re-cast in terms of poison, disease, and treason against the polity, the people who constitute the *polis*. His sovereignty as exceptional man threateningly opposes the sovereignty of the republic.

To be sure, Coriolanus’s absolute commitment to virtue over pressures to compromise is more commendable than Volumnia’s superior diplomacy grounded in personal ambition. Praising or vilifying Volumnia as an incredibly strong-willed woman who “framed” her son into a warrior-hero, critics often argue her dominating influence, keeping Coriolanus her “boy” to the end. I, however, see her influence in a much more qualified way: Coriolanus comes under her sway only to the extent she promotes personal glory as *subordinate* to virtue—as she does salubriously in act 5, representing mother nature and the mother-state—not vice versa, as she does in this scene. Molded into the exemplar of Roman *virtus* by his mother, he autonomously rejects the social honor that motivates Volumnia for his own pursuit of absolute virtue. Despite her superior self-governance in politics, she lacks the noble qualities that mitigate his incontinent pursuit of honor. Hers, by contrast, is pure ambition, pervertedly blood-thirsty in martial affairs

³⁴ Scodel, 6.

(1.3.42-44) and strategically prudent in civic affairs, inspired by interest, not virtue. More admirable, then, is Coriolanus's constancy, confirming each time his identity (from Gr. *idem*, same), sealing again and again his *ethos*, the integrity of his character.

Shakespeare highlights Coriolanus's intelligent virtue by proving all his admonitions right about the chaos provoked by "double worship" (3.1.145) and unbound plebeian veto power—at least in the short-term and, moreover, by the hero's own retaliation against Rome. Coriolanus's anger, John Bligh argues rightly, is "too logical and proper an argument to be taken as mere spleen."³⁵ Contrary to an oversimplified opposition of passion and reason, anger, according to the classical ethics of both Plato and Aristotle, is "a passion auxiliary to wisdom."³⁶ According to Aristotle, justified anger is virtuous: "The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised."³⁷ Coriolanus's yielding to fury is not an act of incontinence, neither by impetuosity (*propeteia*) nor by weakness (*astheneia*), the two types that Aristotle distinguishes: "Of incontinence one kind is impetuosity, another weakness. For some men after deliberating fail, owing to their emotion, to stand by the conclusions of their deliberation, others because they have not deliberated are led by their passion."³⁸ Coriolanus is neither weak nor impetuous since he goes through the three-step process of practical wisdom from deliberation to decision to action, as clarified by Thomas Aquinas, the famous medieval commentator of

³⁵ Poisson, 223.

³⁶ Bligh, 127. See Chapter 5, note 22.

³⁷ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.5.1125b32-33; see also Bryskett, 178: "This virtue then of mansuetude, is she that holdeth the reins in her hand, to bridle the vehemency of anger, showing when, where, with whom, for what cause, how far forth, and how long it is fit and convenient to be angry; and likewise to let them loose, and to spur forward the mind that is restive or slow in apprehending the just causes of wrath, with regard of like circumstances: directing the particular actions of the virtuous man in such cases according to reason; to whom she, as all [the other] virtues, is to have a continual eye and regard in everything."

³⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, VII.7.1150b18-22.

Aristotle.³⁹ Deliberately, he compares his fury provoked by the tribunes' political maneuverings against him as consistent with the continent man's forbearance, as is manifested at his departure from Rome, consoling his loved ones: "Choler? Were I as patient as the midnight sleep,/ By Jove, 'twould be my mind" (3.1.88-89). Coriolanus is angry at the right things and against the right people but, contrary to Bligh's unqualified moral endorsement, at the wrong time and in the wrong manner. Despite their partial validity, Coriolanus's political objections aim more at protecting the patrician order through his leadership rather than pursuing the well-being of the entire polity.

Coriolanus inflexibly sees the class conflict in biased opposition of patrician "wisdom" and "general ignorance" (3.1.147,149): "[O]ne part [patrician] does disdain with cause, the other [plebeian]/ Insult without all reason" (3.1.146-47). The play, however, proves that the moral and intellectual distinction between patricians and the plebeians is not an intrinsic one and that his own superior abilities *qua* patrician lie along the same continuum of human competence as the plebeians. Coriolanus's deficient understanding closes him to the possibility that his aristocratic convictions may be misgrounded and misconceived. Between his desire and the actual attainment of virtue lies a considerable deficiency of understanding and will. Menenius's last prompt before facing the tribunes, "Calmly, I do beseech you" (3.3.31) induces Coriolanus to sound a most "noble wish" (3.3.40): "Th'honoured gods/ Keep Rome in safety and the chairs of justice/ Supplied with worthy men, plant love among's,/ Throng our large temples with the shows of peace,/ And not our streets with war!" (3.3.35-39). Yet all of Menenius and

³⁹ Francis Goyet, "Prudence et 'panurgie': Le machiavélisme est-il aristotélicien?" *Au-delà de la Poétique: Aristote et la littérature de la Renaissance*, [*Beyond the Poetics: Aristotle and Early Modern Literature*], ed. Ullrich Langer, Genève: Droz, 2002, 20.

Volumnia's supplicating schooling of Coriolanus to act "mildly" come to naught because of Coriolanus's truculent conviction of aristocratic virtue and of aristocratic rule as superior to republican or what he views as mob rule. Despite all his best intentions to conform to the republican process, Coriolanus cannot and will not because he fundamentally adheres to a class-based rule of aristocracy, which equates "wisdom" with "gentry [and] title" (3.1.147). Were Coriolanus truly concerned about the public good—about the people of Rome—he would do well, given his troubled relations with the plebeians, to withdraw his candidacy for consul. Virtuous moderation of this sort would encourage rather than scorn others in perfective endeavors as does Coriolanus's exclusive, patrician virtue.

Ironically, the tribunes gain the upper hand precisely because, as lesser men than Coriolanus, they have no qualms about resorting to less than honest means towards what they believe to be personal and republican well-being. In deliberately exploiting to their advantage the aspiration for "republican liberty as a mean between tyranny and anarchic license,"⁴⁰ the tribunes lead Rome, in fact, towards anarchy. Conversely, the nobler Coriolanus falls prey to their stratagems because his mind, constant to what he regards as an invariable aristocratic ideal, cannot bend to accommodate prudence, with which to achieve civic integrity and harmony. A man exercising prudence in Coriolanus's situation would have abandoned his protest after act 3, scene 1 when his effort to rally the patricians to retract the tribunate and go back to aristocratic rule proved fruitless. In Machiavellian terms, Coriolanus, living by an increasingly obsolete heroic ideal, is a lion, unable to assume the ways of the fox needed to maneuver one's way in a world "less-

⁴⁰ Scodel, 7.

than-heroic,”⁴¹ slouching towards a more equitable political system than the old order of privileged aristocracy. Undoubtedly, the transformation into a republican state is fraught with challenges ahead as voices (of mere veto power at this juncture) are granted to those deserving representation but not yet sufficiently trained for active political participation. Coriolanus, however, believing in an essential inability instead of the perfectibility of common citizens, obstructs the republican process, himself creating civic disintegration through his inflexible, autarchic integrity. Ironically, his passion-fueled honor serving a rational political ideal sidesteps the judicious good of the commonwealth.

In his farewell, Coriolanus rightly explains to his mother his fate to “exceed the common ... be caught/ With cautelous baits and practise” (4.1.33-34) by the “unmeriting, proud, violent, testy tribunes” (2.1.39-40), who make him “exceed the common[wealth],” literally beyond its borders. But this outcome is not foreordained. The tragedy for the Roman state lies in that agents on neither side conduct themselves with virtuosity—prudence towards a good end—as do the characters such as Petruccio, Kate, Helena, and Cleopatra, marshaling their superb acting towards salubrious ends. While Coriolanus “play[s]/ The man I am” (3.2.14-15), true to his own nature but against civil decorum, Sicinius and Brutus play at dirty politics, exploiting republican aspirations for self-interest. In the name of self-interest instead of the public good, Sicinius and Brutus use dishonorable methods to aggravate instead of propitiate the conflict when Coriolanus confronts them in a conciliatory stance. In Aristotle’s words, “instead of looking to the good of their own constitution, they have used ostracism for factious purposes.”⁴² Unable

⁴¹ Maurice Evans, “Virtues,” *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press and Routledge, 1990), 361.

⁴² Aristotle, *Politics*, III.13.1284b21-22.

to act alone like Coriolanus, the tribunes act cowardly behind the support of the gullible masses whom they exploit to secure their power with an attitude of mistrust instead of an open, magnanimous spirit required to work cooperatively beyond class differences towards a viable republic. This act of monstrous ingratitude towards Rome's pre-eminent hero proves, at the least, short-sighted.

II. The Higher Claims of *Universa Natura*

Even as Aristotle discusses the civil procedure of ostracism, he hints at its danger: "Any one would be ridiculous who attempted to make laws for them: they would probably retort what, in the fable of Antisthenes, the lions said to the hares ["where are your claws and teeth?"]], when in the council of the beasts the latter began haranguing and claiming equality for all."⁴³ Violent retribution, like the scourge of God,⁴⁴ is exactly what is visited upon the hares of Rome: the ill-treated warrior-hero, while displaying stoic forbearance in leaving his loved ones, acts single-mindedly to tender his imprecatory speech-act upon the plebeians. Coriolanus's inflexibility leads to the bravura of throwing his sentence back onto the people: "I banish you" (3.3.127). His virtuous autarchy and the republican polity are completely incompatible: as Aristotle in the *Politics* explains, "for men of pre-eminent virtue there is no law—they are themselves a law."⁴⁵ Coriolanus "cannot rule/ Nor ever will be ruled" (3.1.42-43) within the Roman republic, the very reproof he hurls at the plebeians. By the very reason of his "exceptional" virtue, or more precisely, commitment to the absolute rather than the attainable good, Coriolanus is excepted: the republic implements what Aristotle refers to as the civic procedure of

⁴³ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.13.1284a14-19.

⁴⁴ See Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2.1253a27; III.13.1284a10, 1284b31 for comparisons of the pre-eminently virtuous man to a god or Zeus.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.13.1284a12-13.

ostracism—“to cut the principal men in the state” in the professed aims of political justice.⁴⁶

Thus, when he is banished as unfit for the republic, Coriolanus, with the conviction that he alone stands for Roman virtue, launches a jihad-like holy war against his own tribe, who, in his eyes, lacking virtue, are no longer Romans. Here, Coriolanus is unable to achieve mansuetude, according to Bryskett, the “mean between wrathfulness with desire of revenge, stirred up in the irascible appetite in respect of some injury done or supposed to be done, and coldness or lack of feeling of wrongs when they are offered.”⁴⁷ Indeed, the good-tempered man, according to Aristotle, “tends to be unperturbed and not to be led by passion, but to be angry in the manner, at the things, and for the length of time, that the rule dictates; but he is thought to err rather in the direction of deficiency; for the good-tempered man is not revengeful, but rather tends to make allowances.”⁴⁸ The great-souled man of virtue, as a foil,

would see that the city’s unjust treatment of him stems more from error than deliberate evil. He would not conclude, like Coriolanus, that his banishers deserve death, but instead, like Socrates, that they deserve to be instructed. He might insult them with truth to disabuse them of their presumed superiority, but he would not declare war on them.⁴⁹

In the dilemma of how to be a Roman and an exile, Cicero would support Coriolanus’s assessment “that Rome was not a state when it banished the true citizen.”⁵⁰ But when Coriolanus intends genocide instead of passive resistance, he himself falls short of Roman virtue, grounded in the public good. A soldier, who instinctively turns to war to

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, III.13.1284a35, 1284b17.

⁴⁷ Bryskett, 177-78.

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *NE*, IV.5.1125b34-1126a2.

⁴⁹ Holloway, 371.

⁵⁰ Jane Kingsley-Smith, 148, *Shakespeare’s Drama of Exile*, (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

resolve conflict, Coriolanus's retaliation perverts Cicero's classical preference for the active, civil life over the retired, contemplative life, thereby violating Roman decorum based on Stoic wisdom: one may follow one's own individual nature as long as it does not conflict with nature and, accordingly, with right reason,"⁵¹ which governs the universe. "It is the part of justice," Cicero affirms, "to offer men no violence: of shamefastness, to offend nobody: wherein the nature of comeliness [Latin *decorum*] is most thoroughly seen."⁵²

As much as he tries to act as though "truth to oneself overrides all other moral or social obligations,"⁵³ Coriolanus cannot, however, resist the stronger claims of *universa natura* over his *propria natura*.⁵⁴ Coriolanus's aim to burn and cleanse Rome in the name of virtue, despite his valiant deeds in service of the public, can only absurdly claim to be for the Good. Even in Coriolanus's situation of righteous anger, public service demands a more charitable approach of helping those inferior to one instead of killing them off as the least fit in a process of "natural selection." Moreover, in annihilating Rome, Coriolanus would destroy what in better times serves as the mirror of public opinion, not so much to hang on but to acknowledge his rightful worth.⁵⁵ Name and lineage bestowed identity in ancient times; without kin, tribeless, one was "Nobody," the name Odysseus used to fool Polyphemus. Aristotle in *Politics* states: "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god:

⁵¹ Miles, 33.

⁵² Cicero, Book I, sig. E7^v.

⁵³ Miles, 36.

⁵⁴ Miles, 37, 167.

⁵⁵ For reference to mirror in this sense, see *Julius Caesar*, (1.2.70-72); see also A. D. Nuttall, 175-76 for further discussion.

he is no part of a state.”⁵⁶ Unlike Socrates, who inclines more towards god by submitting graciously to his unjust death sentence for the alleged charge of corrupting the youth of Athens,⁵⁷ the virtuous Coriolanus, through his holocaustic aims towards Rome, inclines here more towards beast.

Coriolanus’s exchange with his wife and his mother, however, reveals how the claims of human affect are vehemently resurging from martial repression. Coriolanus’s inner reaction to Virgilia, “those dove’s eyes/ Which can make gods forsworn? I melt, and am not/ Of stronger earth than others” (5.3.27-29) reveal that our hero does not lack emotion or inner depth but rather how rigorously they have been hidden from us by the compulsions of Roman *virtus*—as a blend of martial zeal and Stoic constancy—to protect what he believes is the solitary bastion of *Romanitas*—his own self.⁵⁸ Coriolanus’s protest anticipating Virgilia’s plea underscores, nonetheless, the strength of her venerateal against his martial power: “Best of my flesh,/ Forgive my tyranny, but do not say/ For that ‘Forgive our Romans’. O, kiss/ Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!/ Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss/ I carried from thee, dear, and my true lip/ Hath virgined it e’er since” (5.3.42-48). When Coriolanus protests against arguments of unnaturalness, “Desire not t’ally/ My rages and revenges with your colder reasons” (5.3.85-86), Volumnia, by maternal prerogative, subtly chides him towards a more rational, temperate, pacific, and humane course of action “to show a noble grace to both parts [Volscian and Roman]/ Than seek the end of one” (5.3.122-23): “Think’st thou it honourable for a noble man/ Still to remember wrongs?” (5.3.155-56). She bids him to

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, I.2.1253a28-29.

⁵⁷ See Plato’s *Apology*, 24c.

⁵⁸ Bligh, 126.

see his intended action “in th’interpretation of [broader] time” (4.7.50), that if he burned Rome, he will indeed reap a name, an undesired, infamous one, dogging him with endless curses: “The man was noble,/ But with his last attempt he wiped it out,/ Destroyed his country, and his name remains/ To th’ensuing age abhorred” (5.3.146-49). With a last chiding, “There’s no man in the world/ More bound to’s mother, yet here he lets me prate/ Like one i’th’ stocks” (5.3.159-161), Volumnia and her train kneel before him. This final image of noble abjection both enacts a speech-act and proclaims a solemn prophecy: “thou shalt no sooner/ March to assault thy country than to tread—/ Trust to’t, thou shalt not—on thy mother’s womb/ That brought thee to this world” (5.3.123-26). This humble gesture of supplication puts Coriolanus in the ultimate position of disgrace, thereby disarming him completely. Here again, his narrow sense of personal justice must bow to the larger compulsions of social justice within the *universa natura*.

Volumnia’s invocation of the mother-child bond underscores the irony that Coriolanus’s immoderation, his monstrous constancy, is the modified offspring and tragic issue of his mother’s hypermasculinity, her way to overcompensate for the passive roles women play in civic and martial action, the means to attaining social honor. More consistently than any of Shakespeare’s characters, Coriolanus enacts the distinction between masculine and feminine roles that Othello—to assure the Venetian Senate of his military commitment—so colorfully invokes in his vow not to “Let housewives make a skillet of my helm” (*Othello*, 1.3.271). Accordingly, Coriolanus is paired with Virgilia, a figure of feminine modesty like Octavia of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Soft-spoken Virgilia is often interpreted in criticism as the cipher character of the silent, submissive wife. I argue, however, that her insistent femininity and protection of the domestic sphere is

Shakespeare's particular critique against Rome's hypermasculine ideology. In her protection of the home and its values, "No less than seven times in about forty lines does she refuse to accompany Volumnia and Valeria out of doors,"⁵⁹ steadfastly remaining by the hearth. She is the voice of human sentience and nurturing in an environment where the norm, even among women with their traditionally readier access to feeling, is to regard cruel violence as a sign of nobility. Thus, Valeria, a gentlewoman, calls Coriolanus's son, "a noble child," upon hearing how he viciously "mammocked" (1.3.61) a butterfly in his play. Virgilia's refusal to venture outdoors, marking her repugnance to bloody news in contrast to Valeria and Volumnia's blood-thirstiness, uxorially mirrors her husband's squeamishness regarding the public disclosure of his wounds. In this closed and reticent manner, Virgilia ardently protects private space and the feelings that inhabit that space. Though Coriolanus calls Virgilia, "My gracious silence" (2.1.161), it is less to signify wifely subjection than the feminine complement to his martial austerity. In this manner, she is the play's model of virtuous moderation, passionately defending the hearth while supporting her husband's martial and civic endeavors bravely and passively. Scholarship has virtually ignored the extent of Virgilia's courageous forbearance in resisting hegemonic masculinity and enduring Coriolanus's times away at battle.

More than any of the other plays discussed thus far, *Coriolanus* presents in Rome a world of gender polarity, and in Coriolanus and Virgilia, a conspicuous lack of the gender parity intermittently present in *Antony and Cleopatra* and effected towards personal and social good in *The Taming of the Shrew*. The "heavenly mingle" of reason

⁵⁹ Miola, 172.

and passion, the masculine and the feminine principle, emphatically though fleetingly achieved in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is unimaginable in the hypermasculine world of *Coriolanus*. The hard but graceful figure of the *Venus armata* in the earlier tragedy is replaced in the later one by the voluminous paradox of the blood-thirsty mother, Volumnia, who, in taking the right action of pleading for Rome, becomes its savior by sacrificing her son.

Feminists generally praise Volumnia's rhetorical command in her lengthy, moving entreaty to Coriolanus over Virgilia's demureness as sign of less agency and persuasive power. Yet his first words to Virgilia after his exile reveals his gentleness, respect, and passion towards her, rarely disclosed publicly—all testifying to the power of her physical presence: "Best of my flesh,/ Forgive my tyranny, but do not say/ For that 'Forgive our Romans'. O, kiss/ Long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!/ Now, by the jealous queen of heaven, that kiss/ I carried from thee, dear, and my true lip/ Hath virgined it e'er since" (5.3.42-48). It is, in fact, Virgilia's brief interjection, "Ay, and mine,/ That brought you forth this boy to keep your name/ Living to time" (126-28), with the effective presence of herself and her son, which again signals the crumbling of his hardness: "Not of a woman's tenderness to be/ Requires nor child nor woman's face to see" (130-32). Arguably it is by their virtue that he yields grudgingly to his mother, (representing the mother-state of Rome), for whom "[His] hazards still have been [her] solace" (4.1.29). In this sense, Volumnia is granted verbal space to fulfill her bloodthirstiness, which implicitly demands the death of her son whether in the course of battle or here as a civic sacrifice. The understated personal and civic tragedy of

Coriolanus lies in that despite Coriolanus's expressions of love, Virgilia, like her epic forbear, Dido, is ultimately powerless against the imperatives of his hypervirtue.

Like his submission to the Roman mother-state foreordained by inalienable affective bonds, Coriolanus's contention and ensuing death by the Volscians is equally predetermined by his unvarying character, or *ethos*, allegorizing integrity. When Aufidius calls him a "boy of tears" (5.6.103) in a move to gain ascendancy, Coriolanus's Senecan fury seems to fulfill this charge as the hero, lacking from the Aristotelian standard the manly wisdom to ignore little slights for acts of greater justice, the promotion of peace. Egging the Volscian conspirators on, Coriolanus welcomes death: "Cut me to pieces, Volsces. Men and lads,/ Stain all your edges on me.... I [who]/ Fluttered your Volscians in Corioles./ Alone I did it. 'Boy'!" (5.6.112-17). The ambivalent heroism here lies in his bravura of facing fearlessly a sure death but one that might perhaps have been avoided through more prudent political navigation. Against the common view of Coriolanus's reaction as a knee-jerk response to a narrowly programmed pride, I propose, however, that Coriolanus acts with more astuteness at both the personal and political level than critics normally attribute to him. Here, Coriolanus decorously achieves the consummate act of personal honor in the service of the Roman state. His *modus operandi*, "I play the man I am" (3.2.14-15), takes on a new layer of conciliatory significance. Even with this overt regression to unrestrained aggression, Coriolanus, knowing that the realities of suing for peace effectively demand that he be its sacrificial tender ("O mother, mother!/ What have you done? .../ Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,/ If not most mortal to him." [5.4.183-90]), seals the peace treaty more firmly by making more wounds to those he refused to show in the communal ritual of Act 2, scene 3: as in the storming of

Corioles in Act I, “He is himself alone,/ To answer all the city” (1.5.22-23). That is why Coriolanus, “eagle in a dove-cote” (5.6.115), belying his aggressive words, passively receives wounds in a final act of “stoic individualism turning death to self-assertion,” a scene that the actor of Coriolanus should play graciously not “bother[ing] to draw his sword.”⁶⁰ At the personal level, as R. B. Parker insightfully notes, his “death is a last act of aggression, his final humiliation of Aufidius.”⁶¹ Despite his outburst of umbrage, Coriolanus, done with the mortal “rhythm of winning and losing,”⁶² has no further need to prove himself against rivals of lesser martial and moral virtue. Surely Aufidius cannot deny that his insult to his ever superior rival, “unholy braggart” (5.6.119), boomerangs right back at him as the envious Volscian defeats him, not in a solo dual combat but dishonestly with others’ assistance. Despite words still devoted to personal integrity, Coriolanus’s actions faithfully serve his city. Thus come to a close what Kenneth Burke calls “the delights of faction,”⁶³ which offered both the less educated spectators and more sophisticated auditors—to use Gurr’s distinction⁶⁴—of the early modern audience with lively stage spectacle and intellectual stimulation. In this manner, *Coriolanus* demonstrates Shakespeare’s characteristic aim to appeal to a broad audience of all tastes and social classes, as reflected in the diverse Roman polity. His complex and ambivalent presentation of both the hero and the Roman state allows both a nuanced understanding of Coriolanus and a cautious promotion of the citizens’ cause against monarchic rule, a critical political issue in the time of Jacobean absolutism.

⁶⁰ R. B. Parker, Introduction to *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, in *Shakespearean Criticism* 36 (1997): 102.

⁶¹ R. B. Parker, 102.

⁶² Christopher Givan, “Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*: The Premature Epitaph and the Butterfly.” *Shakespearean Criticism* 36 (1997): 124.

⁶³ Kenneth Burke, “*Coriolanus*—and the Delights of Faction,” *Hudson Review* 19.1 (Spring 1966):185.

⁶⁴ Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2-3.

Ironically in his highest act of serving Rome, Coriolanus signals his release from honor measured by public opinion and exhibits the supreme instance of self-sufficiency achieved only at death. In this paradoxically passive, almost Zen-like self-assertion, Coriolanus is “getting somewhere,” to use Burke’s words, even as he is “totally immobilized, a quite unusual state for so outgoing a character.”⁶⁵ If his death appears to critics as a deflated, ignominious end for a hero, Coriolanus is also released from their opinions as well. In this final action consummating his heroism, Coriolanus achieves his prized self-sufficiency through a delicately balanced participation and exclusion from the *polis*, which defines his honor. “Longer to live most weary” (4.5.94), Coriolanus welcomes death, fully aware that his *ethos* does not allow him to sustain this finely achieved balance further in civic life. Complying with Stoic virtue, he chooses death because living well means more to him than merely living. Such a defiant action, unattended by Romans, of achieving honor by deed alone, inner victory by external defeat, invokes our admiration and sympathy. With the self-awareness that his premonition of death implies, his mother’s victory “most mortal to him” (5.4.190), the Herculean grandeur of the exceptional man lies in this noble acceptance of self-immolation: “let it come” (5.4.190).⁶⁶ In this manner, Coriolanus, like the Sophoclean hero, achieves moderation at last: “the self-knowledge that enables man to face reality, renounce delusion, and understand his part in the cosmic pattern.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Burke, 199.

⁶⁶ In Coriolanus, as in Hercules, “areté is pushed to the ultimate degree; yet, in defiance of justice, he is rewarded with extraordinary suffering. His ability to endure it is the final proof of his heroism.” See Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 38.

⁶⁷ North, 4.368.

III. Back to the Belly Parable

As scholarship has well noted, Menenius's belly parable of Act 1, scene 1, is a distortion of the Platonic tripartite body politic, by which the ruling class designating its head, overextends its physiological functions and boundaries and, contrary to its characterizing rational faculty, rapaciously occupies the belly, home of the lower appetites. According to Menenius, the condescending answer of the "good belly" (1.1.137), representing the "fat and prosperous" senators of Rome, is that through "Their counsels and their cares, ... Touching the weal o'th' common, .../ No public benefit which you receive/ But it proceeds or comes from them to you,/ And no way from yourselves" (139-43)—similar was the ideology of the feudal aristocratic system by which lords collected tithes from their vassals and serfs. By virtue of their famished condition, the plebeians' view of the "cormorant belly... the sink o'th'body" (110-11) as "idle and unactive,/ Still cupboarding the viand, never bearing/ Like labour with the rest" (88-90) seems more accurate. Although it would seem that Coriolanus, by his inherent sense of justice, would balk at the greed of his fellow patricians, Shakespeare, for his purposes, keeps class allegiances virtually intact and does not explore possibilities of inter-class alliances. Such is the root of the constitutional troubles as depicted in *Coriolanus*. By the middle of the play, the tribunes have successfully installed themselves as power players, alongside the Senate, with no indication that they will advance public benefit any better than the selfish patricians. Coriolanus's sacrifice signals the urgent need of patricians and plebeians to subordinate partisan politics and self-interest in the higher goal of the public good—concerns of the present day. Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* underscores the continuing challenges of the republican endeavor: not only of

establishing an educated citizenry but also effective leaders with the right balance of ethics and politics, character and political prudence, to guide policies toward the human good.

Afterword

This study has examined virtuous moderation in the complexity and breadth of its operations from the domestic, mercantile, and courtly spheres to the imperial and civic arenas. Through a number of Shakespearean plays, this study has examined virtuous moderation as passion rationally attuned to each situation. We have examined throughout the chapters how Shakespearean characters have tried to regulate a range of passions—love, anger, jealousy, shame, joy, etc.—in the pursuit of virtue, or living well. Among these various representations of ethical action weaves a concern intrinsic to the discourse of virtue, deriving from the Delphic injunction to know oneself. Prudence in life, as Lodowick Bryskett reminds us, “shows [a subject] himself, making him to know what he is, and to what end created.” Furthermore, “he knoweth that he is not born to himself alone, but to civil society and conversation, and to the good of others as well as of himself....”¹ Virtue, as ethical life grounded in dialogue and interaction with others, involves at core one’s sense of self in relation to others and the need to find the just mean between one’s self-opinion and one’s reputation and social status. The pre-Socratic philosopher Democritus once said, “One must not respect the opinion of other men more than one’s own.”²

Virtuous moderation, as demonstrated by the chapters, entails at heart a salubrious balance of one’s self-regard with the regard by others. Coriolanus demonstrates, of course, the tragedy of regarding oneself to the exclusion of others. Antony portrays an inability to modulate apparently competing cultural views, heeding Roman opinion more

¹ Lodowick Bryskett, *A Discourse of Civill Life*, ed. Thomas E. Wright (Northridge: San Fernando Valley State College, 1970), 154.

² Kathleen Freeman, trans., *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), 115.

than his inner voice or genius, as externalized through the Soothsayer. He and Othello also suffer particular difficulty in achieving the right balance in erotic passion between self-abnegation in the female other or a relentless self-regard that nullifies her. As the foreigner less familiar with Venetian mores, Othello also tragically defers to the misogynistic, fraternal counsel of Iago over his own visceral feelings towards Desdemona. Desdemona's focus on advancing herself, in turn, blinds her from Othello's alienation; when she does react, she swings to the other extreme in a self-abnegation, which, largely futile, becomes literalized in her death. As a change, Petruccio shows a healthy disregard for public opinion while Kate displays a truculent, unwholesome defiance toward others' opinions. Of all the characters, Helena displays the virtuous mean between self-respect and respect for others. Only with regard to love might the audience question her choice of lover, and here, the play's integrity as restorative comedy requires that we see Bertram through Helena's amatory eyes of faith as an aspirant to virtue.

Besides the fundamental interplay between virtue, self-knowledge, and moderation, this study has also argued that in revising a male-inflected virtue, strong women characters whom I call viragos—by virtue of their physiology and socio-political subordination—are more congenial to the project of harmonizing passion and reason. Both their access to emotions and their subordinate position in society contribute to the flexibility and upward aspiration crucial to integrative virtue; hence, in the Shakespearean plays it is the female characters who exhibit virtuosity by ordering the passions to best ends, thereby modeling moderation. The flipside to this thesis is that the imbalance of sexual power presents itself as the principle cause of the tragic or tragicomic issue of *Othello*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*, lurking as a

potential threat even in the comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*. In *Othello*, the movement in Act 3 from comedy to tragedy is grounded on Othello's pivotal switch from companionate spouse to jealous husband. The doubts over *All's Well's* troubling end would be much alleviated by more persuasive evidence of desiderative and deliberative consent throughout the play on the part of Bertram instead of artful "coercion" into marriage and virtue on the part of Helena. The marvelous moments in *Antony and Cleopatra* are undoubtedly the scenes of gender parity, whether in playful cross-dressing or in earnest arming for battle. The harmony presiding over these scenes constitute the essence of virtuous moderation. Unlike Cleopatra, who enjoys more gender parity through her status as queen, Virgilia, however, in *Coriolanus*, is so thoroughly overpowered by the masculine ideology that the only way she can exercise her virtuous moderation is to promote the values of compassion and life-giving nurture by boycotting the martial world while fulfilling her wifely devotion. She does this admirably with her limited means by emphatically confining herself to the domestic sphere as if to guard the sacred hearth from further incursion. While martial Romans and misconceiving critics might censure her for seeming weak-heartedness, Virgilia embodies the moderation not achieved by both Coriolanus and his forebear, Aeneas, whose sacrifice of love for civic honor might have been enacted with more sensitivity to their respective loved ones. A foil to Volumnia's false moderation serving excessive ambition, Virgilia presents herself as its true model, the lone voice of sane humanity in a brutally politicized world feeding on contention and violence.

The failed gender parity continues to present itself into the romances as a key obstacle to a ruler's just governance, an interest which began much earlier in *Measure for*

Measure's exploration of the civic control of sexuality. In the comic world of *All's Well*, the extraordinary Helena not only saves the King of France's life but also breathes moral life into the court, picking up the ruler's shortfall. The theme of just governance in the romances, however, centers on jealous and irascible male rulers, with the agency of female characters markedly limited by the constraints of feminine virtue. If female characters more consistently embody virtue in the comedies and into the romances, the reasserted androcentrism in Shakespeare's later works can partly be explained by the nature of narrative compulsion since stories about morally flawed rather than impeccable characters have more dramatic potential and appeal to the audience.

Bold female action is also curtailed in the romances by what I call the ethics of mystically wrought events, Shakespeare's particular interest in the romances. Displaying faith in power beyond human agency, Shakespeare focuses in his latest works on the transformative resolution through quasi-mystical means of conflicts, disorders, and injustices, which implicitly cannot be redressed by the virtuous action of individual human beings alone. At the same time Shakespeare continues to provide ethical commentary on human frailty against the standard of the reasonably possible. In this context of overpowering external forces and events, female action in the romances, evidently much subdued from the charismatic and dynamic action of comic heroines, nonetheless, reveals, in subtle ways, the traces of their characteristic strength.

In *The Winter's Tale*, both the queen, Hermione, and her faithful companion and physic/healer, Paulina, exhibit virtue—though not flawlessly—through more passive or marginalized permutations of bold female action in the comedies. Hermione, more innocently than Desdemona, plays into Leontes's jealousy solely through the wantonness

of language rather than persisting, like Desdemona, in action which misleadingly flags the color of infidelity. In this tragicomedy, Shakespeare, through the “resurrection” of Hermione, recuperates Desdemona from death, the permanent state of chrysolite passivity, though at the cost of much life—Hermione’s and Leontes’s best years and their estrangement from Perdita, their daughter. Although as victims of Leontes’s jealous rage, Hermione and Paulina enjoy the moral upper hand, their action, nonetheless, of withholding life and love (by feigning Hermione’s death, followed by her lengthy seclusion), which in its quiescent excess is as devoid of moderation as Leontes’s vehement retaliation. The living Hermione is apparently kept away from Leontes for the purposes of his redemption. One wonders, however, why Hermione and Paulina must wait sixteen years to effectuate the reunion of the royal pair, especially when Leontes clearly expressed remorse for his atrocious actions immediately after his son’s death and Hermione’s swooning. Specifically, I am referring, humorally speaking, to a sanguine version of redemption in which the reconciliation of the royal pair charitably takes place a year later, after which all three *actively* join forces to dispatch an investigatory search for Perdita and Antigonus.

Like Pericles’s delay in reclaiming his daughter, Hermione and Paulina’s waiting, however, is callously overextended. One might suspect that the delay has something to do with the fulfillment of the oracle, the return of Perdita, “that which is lost [is] found” (3.2.34). Contrary to this literal reading of the oracle, Hermione and Paulina seem deliberately or obstinately to take a broader reading, one which further includes the queen as the figuratively lost, thereby synchronizing the reunion of the royal pair with the return of their daughter. In humoral terms, their reaction to Leontes’s choler is a phlegmatic

withdrawal from life, which hints of quiet vengeance in spite or because of Hermione's earlier, desperate invocation of her father "with eyes/ Of pity, not revenge" (3.2.120-21). Her first words upon her "resurrection," addressed significantly to her daughter instead of her husband, also reinforce a lingering breach between the royal pair. Paulina and Hermione's phlegmatic instead of sanguine guidance of Leontes towards redemption leads him unwholesomely from a short-lived choleric to a sixteen-year slough of melancholy, even considering that the "use of long expanses of time to achieve a healing end is consistent with the education of nature and instinct ... required for the Aristotelian development of virtuous character."³ The two women's inability to gather up their inner forces towards a more timely restoration is a direct result of the rupture of the conjugal pair as a complete and powerful hermaphroditic unity. It takes ultimately the therapeutic witnessing of such a pair in the virtuously loving Florizel and Perdita to restore the humoral balance in their elders to healthy sanguinity. Shakespeare seems to suggest that even Leontes's genuine moral growth cannot recover the losses inflicted by his jealousy and thereby cannot restore the pre-jealousy marital bliss he enjoyed with Hermione. Such conjugal harmony must be achieved vicariously in the promises of love and virtuous rule in the next generation.

In *The Tempest*, which epitomizes the virtuous patriarchal rule, Shakespeare does not simply present Prospero as an idealized philosopher-king, but rather as a misanthropic egoist. Despite his virtuous core, he is tainted by a "hardening of consciousness" that produces egocentricity, rigidity, irascibility, cold judgmentalism."⁴

³ I am indebted to Jeffrey Gauthier's commentary for my paper, "Virtue, Passion, and Moderation in Shakespeare," Northwest Philosophy Conference, Lewis and Clark College, Portland, OR, 2007.

⁴ Elizabeth Bieman, *William Shakespeare: The Romances* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1990), 79.

Prospero, according to Elizabeth Bieman, “wields his redemptive magic with a harshness that brings us, through Miranda and Ariel, to question seriously his motives, if not his actions.”⁵ Joseph H. Summers presents an illuminating understanding of Prospero’s anger in his seminal essay by that name. Acknowledging that if Prospero, “with the possible exception of Lear, shows the shortest temper of any admirable character in Shakespeare,” Summers accounts for part of the irascibility “the anxieties of a human being who is nervously attempting a providential role for a few, decisive hours.”⁶ In this regard, stage comedy, by its very nature of exploiting human foibles, plays on the “distance between the human imitator and the divine model.”⁷ Despite instances of his “testiness” towards various characters—Miranda, Ariel, Ferdinand, and, most of all, Caliban and the villains, Antonio and Sebastian—Prospero ultimately governs his anger by humanely releasing the villains:

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,
Yet with my nobler reason ’gainst my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. Go release them, Ariel:
My charms I’ll break, their senses I’ll restore,
And they shall be themselves. (5.1. 25-32)⁸

Prospero, “who had had so little patience in the time of immediate crisis,” Summers argues, “possesses it fully and playfully when the crucial moral action is completed and the end of the voyage in sight.”⁹ Here, Summers refers, in particular, to the magi’s showing Alonso, grieving his son’s death, a wondrous vision of Ferdinand and Miranda

⁵ Bieman, 3.

⁶ Joseph H. Summers, “The Anger of Prospero,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 12.2, (1973): 121.

⁷ Summers, 121.

⁸ Summers, 130.

⁹ Summers, 133.

playing chess. It is a scene of “heavenly mingle” in which “playing false” and “wrangling” become “fair play” through the transformative power of love—the diction recalling the rare moments of integration amidst scenes of impassioned contention in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

As in *The Winter's Tale*, the hope of virtuous rule lies in the hands of the next generation, Ferdinand guided by Miranda. In young Miranda lies the best of human qualities—compassion with an intuitive political sense evidenced in the chess game¹⁰—signaling, despite her youth, valuable qualities for her future role as a queen, ruling alongside her noble husband. Iconographically, the game of chess here represents prudence as it does in the medieval representations of the cardinal virtues in the church of San Savino in Piacenza.¹¹ Miranda's affirmative view of humanity, “O, wonder!/ How many goodly creatures are there here!/ How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world/ That has such people in't! (184-187), is balanced with the accommodation to practical politics required by the contingencies of the real world: hence, her response to Ferdinand, “Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,/ And I would call it fair play” (176-77), readily shifting from the context of amorous game to a more serious one of international politics. Antigonus's reply to Leontes's command that he silence his outspoken wife, “Hang all the husbands/ That cannot do that feat, you'll leave yourself/ Hardly one subject” (*The Winter's Tale*, 2.3.110-12) reflects a widespread resistance to the model of male superiority in preference for a more equitable model of partnership in love and in civic governing, which the young royal pairs, Florizel and Perdita and

¹⁰ I am indebted to Bruce Smith for drawing my attention to this scene.

¹¹ Helen F. North, “Temperance,” *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 4:368, 15 June 2007, <<http://etext.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHI/ot2www-dhi?specfile=/texts/english/dhi/dhi.o2w>>.

Ferdinand and Miranda, come to represent. Such are the aspirants of virtuous moderation, passion attuned with reason in the varying circumstances of private and civic governance.

From his earliest comedies to his late romances, Shakespeare evinces an extraordinary insight into human actions and aspirations. Deploying the “creative opportunism” that reflects his dramaturgical virtuosity, he mined as raw materials the commonplace ideas of humanist culture—i.e., moderation and the pursuit of self-knowledge—and “refashioned [them] in the making of immortal plays”¹² treating fundamental human concerns beyond the bounds of specific times and places. Relying largely on his innate insight into human character and action, Shakespeare dramatized complex, potent visions of integrative moderation and, despite his lack of scholarly training, lighted upon a more accurate understanding of the Aristotelian mean than many of his contemporaries who construed it from a divergent rather than convergent model of passion and reason. On a metadramatic level, skilled actors, in the execution of their art, enact “prudent mediocritie”¹³; on a dramatic level, Shakespeare’s plays, as edifying art at its best (meeting Sir Philip Sidney’s requirement of the “right use of comedy”¹⁴ and tragedy), model the virtue of moderation that judicious spectators could take away from the stage and practice in their own lives. In this manner, Shakespeare’s visions of integrative moderation, resonating far beyond the stage, vitally inform present-day endeavors for excellence in our personal and civic lives.

¹² Charles and Michelle Martindale, *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 167.

¹³ Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall (1604)*, ed. Thomas O. Sloane (University of Illinois Press, 1971), 179; quoted in Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Scenes in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 52.

¹⁴ Sir Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney’s An Apology for Poetry and Astrophil and Stella: Text and Contexts* (Glen Allen, VA: College Publishing, 2001), 89-90.

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