"My Life Upon Her Faith": Love Relationships and Cuckoldry in *Othello* and *Much Ado*

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genre, which I think bear stating (or repeating, at least). First, whenever a someone becomes involved in an incestuous relationship, that person is doomed. I would assert that the presence of incest in at least these two Gothic novels displays the ultimate power of the Christian (or Catholic) Church. Beatrice cannot "rest" until she has come back to God, in the symbolic gesture of the Christian burial in her family's tomb. She also requires that "thirty mases be said for the repose of my Spirit, and I trouble the world no more" (Lewis 172). Manfred, in the end, "took on ... the habit of religion in the neighboring convents" (Walpole 115). And Ambrosio, having in the end utterly renounced God by selling his soul to Satan in return for his escape, is thrown from a mountain-top by the same Satan, left alive where he falls so that the birds, animals and bugs may pick his body apart while he still breathes.

With this final image of horror, it is obvious that the convention of incest within the Gothic genre was used for the most part to invoke disgust and abhorrence, and to signal the downfall of any who become involved in it. While only early Gothic novels were examined herein, this sentiment holds true in later Gothic works as well: Darl ends up in an asylum only after noticing that his sister's "wet dress ... those mammalian ludicrosities which are the horizons and the valleys of the earth" (Faulkner 150), i.e. that Dewey Dell has a nice rack.

Works Cited


"MY LIFE UPON HER FAITH": LOVE RELATIONSHIPS AND CUCKOLDRY IN OTHELLO AND MUCH ADO

by Elizabeth Falconer '00

Love relationships and marriage during the Renaissance boasted very specific social roles for both males and females. Ideal Renaissance men and women were required to obey distinct codes of conduct; these codes, once translated into marriage treaties, pervaded marriages of the day (Vaughan 76). Females were expected to be silent, chaste, and obedient figures of society. This image carried over into female marriage roles, as wives were trusted to faithfully obey their husbands. Males were chiefly concerned with their honor and reputation in society; that is, a husband was expected to retain control of his wife. If he could not, and she was unfaithful to him, then he was deemed a cuckold. Renaissance men feared cuckoldry, for it labeled women as whores, men as victims, and was viewed as a mockery of male virility (Kahn 122). Shakespeare commented on this pervasive Renaissance male fear and its impact on marriage in several plays. The relationship between Othello and Desdemona in Othello and that between Claudio and Hero in Much Ado About Nothing each illustrate male vulnerability to such a fear through Renaissance notions of female sexuality, as well as the ironic partnership of cuckoldry and the dependence of women's lives on the faith of their husbands.

According to Coppelia Kahn, cuckoldry was thought to be derived from three central attitudes toward Renaissance love relationships (121). Misogyny, the first of the beliefs, presumed that all women were licentious and wayward. The second belief was termed "double standard:" that is, infidelity was acceptable for men, but inexcusable for women. The final belief was called "patriarchal marriage." This basically involved male domination of marriage and female status as property. When a woman was unfaithful to her husband, the value of his property rapidly deteriorated. In such a situation, a role reversal took place, converting the man to victim and the woman to the center of the action. This woman would be the first to be blamed, not her lover. She would suffer condemnation, while her lover would simply endure mere disapproval from the community. Strangely enough, cuckold, the true victims of the events, were brought more humiliation than were either of the adulterers. This is due in part to Renaissance masculine ideals, which implied that a woman's fidelity is a symbol of her husband's virility (Kahn 121). Cuckoldry was represented in literature through symbolic horns. These horns were both a phallic symbol and a representation of male virility. A woman leading her husband by the horns was symbolic of the man allowing his virility to be manipulated by his wife. Of course, according to Renaissance masculine ideology, this idea was completely unacceptable, for it shifted the dominance from husband to wife. Men had three defenses against cuckoldry. The Renaissance man would either deny the existence of cuckoldry by objectifying women, expect female infidelity due to misogyny, or change the commonly outcast cuckold into a phallic symbol through horn imagery (Neely 141). These defenses allowed men to experience cuckoldry as a male bond, and to view marriage as a community of potential cuckolds.

In Othello, the plot revolves around the marriage of Othello and Desdemona. However, this marriage is one lacking in trust, as well as even personal intimacy, for Othello and Desdemona really know very little about each other. The relationship between the two is based solely on the tales Othello has shared with Desdemona: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (I.iii.167-8). The foundation of their marriage is composed totally of Othello's own life, which exhibits the self-centered qualities of Othello's own life, leading her husband by the horns was symbolic of the man allowing his virility to be manipulated by his wife. Of course, according to Renaissance masculine ideology, this idea was completely unacceptable, for it shifted the dominance from husband to wife. Men had three defenses against cuckoldry. The Renaissance man would either deny the existence of cuckoldry by objectifying women, expect female infidelity due to misogyny, or change the commonly outcast cuckold into a phallic symbol through horn imagery (Neely 141). These defenses allowed men to experience cuckoldry as a male bond, and to view marriage as a community of potential cuckolds.

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As Renaissance ideals, Othello and Desdemona both accept and reject established codes of conduct.

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Othello has been described as "ideally calm, reasonable, and rooted in a sense of legitimacy" (French 204). However, he rejects masculine ideals by wed- ding a much younger bride of a different social class (Vaughan 75). Renaissance men were supposed to be at most four to five years older than their wives. Othello is an alien in Venice, both racially and so- cially. Shakespeare depicts him as an outsider in Desdemona's world, and is highly vulnerable to Iago's deceit for that very reason. Othello can easily see the prejudice of Venice, but is blind to Desdemona's re- jection of this prejudice. However unlike today, Renaissance society would not have sympathized with Othello's position in a racist society. Michael D. Bristol concludes that Othello and Desdemona's marriage would have been seen as "an absurdly mut- ual attraction between a beautiful woman and a funny monster" (4). However, Iago is successful in his attempt to disclaim his weapon outside of military situations is limited ("Othello" 1990). This lack of societal familiarity pervades his consciousness, allowing Iago to manipulate Othello's jealousy.

Desdemona rejects ideal feminine identity in her outspokenness. Betraying her father, Desdemona demonstrates her reluctance to submit to male au- thority (Vaughan 75). However once married, Desdemona surrenders to the typical submissive char- acteristics of the Renaissance wife. She is obedient as a wife and exhibits a transgressive love for her husband. This unconditional love is evident in her dying words: "Nobody; I myself...Commend me to your kind lord" (V.ii.125-6). In that statement, Othello does not even know Desdemona. She is at unfamiliar to him as a wife. Strangely, however, Othello seems naive in his mistrust of his wife. Just as Othello knows Iago as an old friend, he should also know that Iago has a vul- gar mind, and that he should not necessarily believe the hasty charges he brings against Desdemona. Fur- ther, Othello had previously staked his own life on his wife's fidelity, when presented with Iago's idea, he cannot even defend her from the obscene accusa- tions (Gerard 13). Because of his rash nature, the Moor tends to act suddenly and powerfully in most situations, which may be due to his military back- ground. When Othello trusts, that trust is unfailing. Othello's imagination plays a great role in his actions. However, his instantaneous actions are based on Iago's unchaste wife. While Desdemona can hardly believe that such women exist, her husband is convinced of her guilt points back to the pervasive male notion of misogyny. The existence of this idea in Othello's con- sciousness causes his actions to be rather impulsive. He is in a sense expecting Desdemona to be false, and when presented with the possibility, immediately accepts this idea as a truth.

Othello's fear of cuckoldry is unleashed as Iago's accusations continue. Iago, perhaps helping to bring this fear to the surface, calls cuckold the green-eyed monster, which doth mock women. He has to have Don Pedro woo Hero for him instead of winning her for himself. Claudio's basic image of women stems from medieval notions of female excellence; namely that a chaste woman is a virtuous woman ("Much Ado About Nothing: Comment" 1966a). Also similar to Othello, Claudio is extremely vulnerable to warnings of cuckoldry from Benedict and Don John (Friedman 237). These warnings later increase Claudio's capability for believing Hero's infidelity.

Claudio is the conventional Renaissance man, and has been described along with Don Pedro as "standing[ing] on ceremony, rule, and right" (French 127). Claudio exhibits his masculine identity by in-quiring about Hero's dowry. He asks whether or not Hero has a brother (Bennett 275). This procedure to investigate such subjects (Bennett 275). In addition to this, Claudio shows his ideal masculine identity in his rejection of Hero in the church scene. He refuses her because of the nature of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, and Renaissance male fear of cuckoldry. The displaced trust from the relationship is missing due to the lack of intimacy between Othello and Desdemona. Othello's threatened feelings stem from his fear of misogyny, as well as from his own lack- ing self-esteem in doubting Desdemona's love for him. Even then this forked plague is fated to us (III.iii.166-168)

From here, Othello begins to doubt that Desdemona could ever love him: "And yet, how na- ture erring from itself" (III.iii.227). Othello later speaks of cuckoldry as if it is an unavoidable fate: "Tis destiny unshunnable, like death. Even then this forked plaque is fated to us When we do quicken. (III.iii.275-7)

Finally, Othello makes a reference to the sym- bolic horns of cuckoldry. "I have a pain upon my forehead, here" (III.iii.284). Othello's rage at the thought of being cuckolded builds until he reaches a kind of murdered hatred. He exclaims, "I will chop her head off!" (IV.i.196). Desdemona, however, holds onto her idealistic image of Othello. She states: "God me such usage send, / Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend" (IV.iii.103-4). Desdemona feels that within a mar- riage, to hurt the other person in retaliation for what they have done to you is immoral, but to overlook this "right" to revenge is a form of charity, benefiting both yourself and your spouse (Adamson 239). A sharp contrast is visible between Othello's extreme rage and jealousy and Desdemona's meek nature. She asks Emilia for confirmation "that there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?" (IV.iii.60-1). While Desdemona can hardly believe that such women exist, her husband is convinced of her guilt points back to the pervasive male notion of misogyny. The murder of Desdemona is a direct result of the nature of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, and Renaissance male fear of cuckoldry. The displaced trust from the relationship is missing due to the lack of intimacy between Othello and Desdemona. Othello's threatened feelings stem from his fear of misogyny, as well as from his own lack- ing self-esteem in doubting Desdemona's love for him. Even then this forked plague is fated to us (III.iii.166-168)

Love Relationships and Cuckoldry

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Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger.

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Finaly, Othello makes a reference to the sym- bolic horns of cuckoldry. "I have a pain upon my forehead, here" (III.iii.284). Othello's rage at the thought of being cuckolded builds until he reaches a kind of murdered hatred. He exclaims, "I will chop her head off!" (IV.i.196). Desdemona, however, holds onto her idealistic image of Othello. She states: "God me such usage send, / Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend" (IV.iii.103-4). Desdemona feels that within a mar- riage, to hurt the other person in retaliation for what they have done to you is immoral, but to overlook this "right" to revenge is a form of charity, benefiting both yourself and your spouse (Adamson 239). A sharp contrast is visible between Othello's extreme rage and jealousy and Desdemona's meek nature. She asks Emilia for confirmation "that there be women do abuse their husbands / In such gross kind?" (IV.iii.60-1). While Desdemona can hardly believe that such women exist, her husband is convinced of her guilt points back to the pervasive male notion of misogyny. The murder of Desdemona is a direct result of the nature of Othello and Desdemona's marriage, and Renaissance male fear of cuckoldry. The displaced trust from the relationship is missing due to the lack of intimacy between Othello and Desdemona. Othello's threatened feelings stem from his fear of misogyny, as well as from his own lack- ing self-esteem in doubting Desdemona's love for him. Even then this forked plague is fated to us (III.iii.166-168)

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quick agreement to blindly marry Hero's cousin even "were she an Ethiopie" bolsters this impulsiveness ("Much Ado About Nothing: Comment 1966a). Just as Claudio is the ideal Renaissance man, Hero is the conventional Renaissance woman, yielding and submissive. "[Hero] is mostly a docile participant in an arranged marriage" ("Much Ado About Nothing" 1990). Hero is described by Carol Cook as "meek, self-effacing, vulnerable, obedient, seen and not heard, she is a face without a voice" (91). These qualities are apparent in Hero's silence. She never fully expresses her love for Claudio, and the one time she speaks of him endearingly is in a compliment to Benedick: "He is the only man of Italy / Always excepted my dear Claudio" (III.ii.92-3). Her silence, obedience, and modesty make Hero the ideal Renaissance wife (Neely 144). However, Hero's silence restricts her as a "non character." Carol Hansen comments that: "Indeed, the character of Hero is seen as puppet-like, popping up at the end like a doll who had been temporarily dismissed" (55).

Claudio possesses two images of Hero. The first is a nonsexual, not threatening, fraternal love. The second is a lustful beauty that deceives men. These two images may be associated with Othello's images of the "superhuman" and "subhuman" Desdemona. Like those of Othello, Claudia's perceptions of Hero change from nonsexual to lustful at the altar, and then back to nonsexual after her alleged death. Claudio's anxiety, influenced by Benedick and Don John's warnings, is released at the altar scene. As Renaissance male code required male dominance, cuckoldry reverses this to make men the victims and women the active participants. Thus, cuckoldry was a direct violation of Renaissance male honor. Additionally, Hero was to be Claudio's property after the marriage, so he felt as though Hero had committed the ultimate betrayal (Hayes 87). Therefore, his great show of emotion at the church scene is due to his male fear of cuckoldry.

Further, Claudio's belief of Don John's and Borachio's lies is much like Othello's acceptance of Iago's accusations. Both men were harboring notions of misogyny in their minds prior to the allegations brought against the women, and therefore both men reject the women. This rejection is never questioned by Claudio, even after Hero's death. He insists that he "sinned not but in mistaking" (V.i.261-2). Thus, male influence persists despite Hero's death. Claudio's words at the tomb symbolize this male dominance and female silence (Cook 197).

With his final marriage at the play's conclusion, Claudio finally "enters the brotherhood of cuckoldks" (Friedman 243). Old order is restored in new terms as Hero is unveiled to Claudio, finally purged of her unchaste accusations. These new terms consist of Claudio's recognition of Hero as a truly chaste, silent, and obedient woman.

The fear of cuckoldry was pervasive in Renaissance marriage, and was represented by Shakespeare in various manners. Othello illustrates this fear tragically through the death of the honest Desdemona, while Much Ado About Nothing portrays this fear in a comical manner. The fact that Hero does not actually die allows the cuckoldry theme to be communicated in a lighter way than that of Othello. These plays depicted cuckoldry in two different lights, but the consequences of even the threat of cuckoldry were equally severe in both cases. Perhaps the extremity of the male response in these situations could be attributed to the common notions of feminine ideology, misogyny, double standard, and patriarchal marriage. Males, aware that many women were lustful and deceitful, were apprehensive in their marriages. As wives were seen as property, these men would grow concerned about keeping their property under control. Consequently, male sensitivity was greatly heightened. Increased feelings of threat followed closely hereafter. The fear felt by these men is clearly illustrated in Othello's and Claudio's impulsive reactions to even slight implications of feminine infidelity.

This common Renaissance male fear was also easily derived from the nature of marriage at the time. Many marriages were based on money or were arranged, which allowed for a lack of trust and personal intimacy within relationships. When husband and wife hardly knew each other, there could be no solid foundation of trust in the relationship. This lacking trust between Othello and Desdemona ended tragically, while that between Claudio and Hero ended happily. However, putting Hero's alleged death into consideration, the lives of both these women were contingent on the faith of their husbands. An irony persists between cuckoldry and men's faith, for as cuckoldry hinged on a wife's sexual faithfulness to her husband, wives depended on their husbands re-
The politics of academic tenure is an issue which, in the 1990s, is working its way into the consciousness of the academic mind. Its significance stems from the fact that the tenure process, and the resulting decisions, affects not only educators, but also students, university communities, and society at large. According to one junior professor, "tenure, at its inception, was meant to protect the academic freedom of university teachers" (Epstein 43). We must ask today, however, in the midst of many tenure-related disputes and discussions in the popular and scholarly media, just how valid tenure is in today's educational system and, more importantly, what positions institutions of higher learning should take on related issues in the future.

Those in favor of the practice claim that Academic tenure has been justified historically by the ostensible necessity of protecting "academic freedom." In particular, it was argued to be necessary, purportedly in the interest of the unfettered search for knowledge and truth, to protect the faculty member and, perhaps more importantly, the employing institution from attack by partisan or parochial political, social and religious interests. (Dresch 68)

This goal, in and of itself, is an understandably noble pursuit. Tenure is important because it "safeguards academic freedom and freedom of speech at the PC university of the '90s," says Richard Berthold, an associate professor at the University of New Mexico, "I say things in class that would get me fired without tenure" (Blair 2). Clearly, there is a need for such protection in academia, a world based on ideas and knowledge. If the tenure process dealt solely with these issues, it would unquestioningly remain a beneficial practice. The tenure process is an intricate and complicated one, however, and one which does much more than merely protect the rights of educators as a whole.

On the other hand, those in opposition claim that tenure practices served to concentrate power within institutions, thus limiting innovation and freedom of inquiry. Critics argue that "fundamentally ... tenure practices served to concentrate power within institutions in the hands of the [already] tenured faculty, which collectively and virtually independently controlled the award of tenure, not infrequently to ends contradictory to the ostensibly claimed protection of academic freedom in the search for truth" (Dresch 68). This concentration of power allows those select few with tenure to control who has, and does not have, a voice within academic institutions. Such a state would not even present a major problem if the group of tenured individuals were representative of the teaching faculty as a whole—with proportional numbers of women and minority groups—or of the student population. This, however, is not the case, as the majority of those holding tenure are older white males—a group which many refer to as the "old boy network." As Journalism Scholar Larissa Grunig states, "With more women faculty members now than ever before, this situation of women encountering special difficulties in shattering the glass ceiling of academia has major implications" (93). Also of concern is the "lack of women who are tenured or who have attained the rank of full professor" and the "imbalance between female faculty and female students" (Grunig 94).

Thus, a main problem with the current tenure system is its ineffectiveness on the careers of female educators. According to the New York Times Magazine, "In the male-run world of American colleges and universities ... 88 percent of presidents, provosts and chancellors ... 87 percent of full professors, [and] 77 percent of trustees are men" (Matthews 47). While such statistics may not cause alarm in some, they are simply not consistent with the number of women in the work force or in academic institutions. According to Psychology Today's "unemployment rates for women with Ph.D.s are two to five times high for men ... [and] Even if women do get an academic ...

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