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Rebecca Parsons '23
DePauw University

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The Bard's Precursors to Psychology: Exposing Dark Sides of Human Nature

Rebecca Parsons

Honor Scholar Thesis

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Introduction

Jealousy as a “Green-Eyed Monster”:

Beyond the Humors to Evolutionary and Social Psychology

William Shakespeare expressed an understanding of psychology far ahead of his time, as he revealed through his complex portrayals of human nature. Even more than 400 years after his death, his work remains as relevant as ever because, as Ben Jonson astutely noted, “He was not of an age, but for all time” (Greenblatt, *Norton* A31). Although Shakespeare could not have known the proper terms to articulate the concepts of modern psychology, he certainly conveys them through depictions of jealousy in three plays: *Much Ado About Nothing*, an early comedy; *Othello*, a tragedy; and *The Winter’s Tale*, a romance from near the end of his career as a playwright.¹ In his illustrations of jealousy, he blends two different branches of psychology, drawing upon evolutionary adaptations and cultural influences. Many of Shakespeare’s characters portray this blurred line between biological theories and societal norms and thus, hint at the age-old argument of nature versus nurture. Each of these different understandings of human behavior stems from distinctive areas of psychology that are often seen as unrelated inverses of each other. Shakespeare, however, seems to have a profound notion that culture and biology mutually influence patterns of behavior. If Shakespeare stands correct, our natural propensities may be left up to interpretation by culture.

In Shakespeare’s explorations of human nature, jealousy emerges often as a theme and plot device. Jealousy’s ability to protect and show appreciation for a relationship sharply juxtaposes its other darker sides; many experience the emotion out of paranoia, which leads to a number of delusionary reactions. Shakespeare delves into the duplicity of jealousy by coining it

¹ *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter’s Tale* were respectively first performed in 1599, 1604, and 1610 (“Timeline of Shakespeare’s Plays”).

the “green-eyed monster” in *Othello* (3.3.179). This embodiment of jealousy symbolizes its uncontrollable nature as it separates itself from the person who experiences it and adopts a mind entirely of its own. It takes shape in many different forms, but in all cases, it has the ability to taint and darken reality. The monster has an ability to build upon itself and create something out of nothing. As Claudio, Othello, and Leontes all become victims of jealousy, they each demonstrate the dangers in this evolutionary passion with their societal pressures to protect their masculinity and defend their investments.

Today, evolutionary psychologists argue adamantly that behaviors result solely from intrinsic adaptations, but Shakespeare’s rationale may have some truth as these innate behaviors influence certain social stereotypes, expectations, and gender roles. A social environment can cause the evolution of behaviors into a new order just as the physical surroundings can. Issues that seem entirely rooted in culture—patriarchy, marriage, gender normalities—can actually be traced back to evolutionary adaptations as an unconscious means of fulfilling these inherent biological needs. Shakespeare highlights this relationship through a number of plays as he connects social injustices to a larger theoretical framework of instinct in men and women alike. Shakespeare’s thoughtful analysis urges us to think more deeply about the influences that shape our behaviors.

Gender role theory largely acknowledges the influence that one’s upbringing has on behaviors as society ingrains gender through norms. Literature often sustains culture by enforcing certain expectations. However, Shakespeare’s rebellious characters often break free of these stereotypes, contrasting starkly with those who perpetuate stigmas. By pushing back against social norms, these rebels force us to ask whether the innate evolutionary patterns in society are really necessary, or even helpful. Most importantly, Shakespeare presents an

argument that remains not only relevant today but is even more urgent now than in his lifetime: are sociobiological factors that perpetuate cultural structures harmful because they disadvantage certain demographics? If so, should we not abandon dangerous and harmful adaptations from the past?

Psychological understandings through an evolutionary or sociological lens have not always been in place. In fact, during Shakespeare's life, intellectuals took a very different approach to the brain. Psychology during the Elizabethan period intertwined very closely with physiology, as the mind and body were viewed in conjunction with each other. The connection primarily developed from the humoral theory, which served as the basis and foundation of human psychology, physical health, and personality. The four humors—blood, bile, choler, and phlegm—came from Hippocrates, who created the humoral tradition in the 4th century, and Galen, who later expanded upon its ideas (Jouanna and Allies 335). Hippocrates implemented a basis for the ideas by associating the humors with natural elements, but Galen reached further by connecting each humor to temperament in relation to a lack or excess of the fluid (Flaskerud 631). In addition to the natural elements' associations with the humors, connections with organs, temperature, and planets existed as well. Each of these ties hinted at a very holistic approach to the body and the outer world around it (Jouanna and Allies 336).

Galen connected the four humors to a temperament—blood to sanguine, black bile to melancholic, choler to choleric, and phlegm to phlegmatic (Flaskerud 631). According to the theory and its advancements, these fluids moved through the body via the bloodstream and had a significant effect on an individual's personality (Jouanna and Allies 335). Despite the theory's limitations, it sparked an interest in new conversations of psychology. The Elizabethan intellectuals largely associated these emotions with passions, as the four humors resulted

respectively in anger, grief, hope, and fear (Jouanna and Allies 339-40). However, the temperaments proved less fickle than quick-changing emotions and suggested a stronger consistency in personality. A sanguine temperament shows “impulsivity, excitability, and quick reactivity”; an excess of melancholy leads to dourness and gloom; cholera leads to irritability and anger, and phlegm to “detachment and impassivity” (Flaskerud 631). Each of the temperaments has distinct qualities, and the greater the excess, the more obvious the stereotypes become.

Shakespeare’s characters are often dramatic, clearly exemplifying an excess of certain humors. Hamlet, for example, proves a very well-known illustration of melancholy. Typically associated with wisdom, melancholy could more positively create an analytical attitude, but when the black bile grows too much, indecisiveness can take over (Babb 251). The melancholic temperament holds a poor reputation, often labeled as “the most unfortunate” humor because it breeds isolation, lethargy, and coldness (Babb 249). Hamlet exemplifies this darker side through his mourning for his father and his brooding over his mother. However, despite the negative connotations of melancholy, a level of romanticism follows it as well. Melancholy’s association with deep thoughtfulness became akin to genius. Aristotle even claimed that, under the right circumstances, melancholy could lead to higher intellect (Babb 253). The paradoxes inherent in melancholy appear in melancholic characters’ behavior.

Although Shakespeare definitely played into the influences of his period, he seemed to tap into a far more lasting and universal understanding of the human mind. The feelings and thought processes that he examines stretch beyond the limitations of humor theories; they connect to universal emotions and empathy. Shakespeare’s insight ensured that his plays remained relevant far beyond the time of their composition. His ability to explore modern concepts of psychology aligns him with such well-known geniuses as Sigmund Freud.

Shakespeare's use of the humors in his work should not limit observations of his characters to the oversimplified Renaissance formulas. He views the mind with a multi-faceted approach that draws from a deeper system than the Elizabethan humoral theories. His ability to portray the paradoxical array of emotions especially encapsulates the breadth of his depictions of human nature. Shakespeare launches himself into contemporary psychology with his ability to predate many of its complex concepts as portrayed through his characters.

A look at the modern field of psychology allows for a far deeper understanding of Shakespeare's intricate illustrations of human nature. Although the discipline of psychology was not created until the late 1870s, and evolutionary psychology, specifically, even later, toward the end of the 20th century (Oatley 12), Shakespeare anticipated many of the crucial themes of the discipline as a whole. Evolutionary psychology largely stems from the foundational principle that organisms, including humans, evolve and adapt behaviors that are most likely to aid in producing successful offspring. Dr. David Buss—a renowned evolutionary psychologist—explains why humans pass these tendencies on: “Adaptations are coping devices passed down over millennia because they worked—not perfectly, of course, but they helped ancestral humans to struggle through the evolutionary bottlenecks of survival and reproduction” (5). A range of habits contribute to the overarching goal of DNA survival and genetic replication; by sharing a similar rationale of helping in the past, they get passed on to the future.

In response to evolutionary psychology's key principles, an individual may think, ‘my intentions are certainly not all rooted in the successful production of offspring. I do not consciously think about risks to my DNA when in relationships’ (Buss 6). In fact, it is even quite common in our modern world for individuals and couples not to want children at all. Similar critiques may appear, questioning the purpose of birth control and abortion in society if all

relationships truly serve the primary purpose of reproduction. Further, evolutionary psychology's premises also endure criticism for their ties to a heteronormative approach, appealing firmly to biological sex differences as part of an oversimplified binary. In response to these oppositions, evolutionary psychologists push back with the emphasis that "we are typically not conscious of these reproductive quandaries" (Buss 6). Just as individuals may crave a certain food or desire companionship without questioning their deeper intentions, so may they exemplify subconscious evolutionary adaptations—even if they combat our conscious desires. Buss resolves contradictory arguments further by defining adaptation in his field of evolutionary psychology as "an evolved solution to a recurrent problem of survival or reproduction" (5). Our evolved instincts also get so ingrained in society that the culture subconsciously perpetuates them through its structures and expectations. Although every modern adult human being certainly does not live with the primary goal of producing successful children, these hard-wired instincts for survival remain pressing influences on sexual and romantic relationships.

Evolutionary psychology presents patterns of innate human behaviors; some traits may come as a direct result of our biological makeup. These tactics of self-preservation cause people to evolve and change, adopting behaviors that increase their chances of sustaining their DNA. However, society interacts with these factors as biology can be interpreted through culture as in the scientifically studied hypothesis that women are less aggressive than men (Eliot 566). While this fact may be true, individual differences do apply and do not entirely remove aggression from the female genetic makeup. However, society may stigmatize women's violence to try and ensure that women are kept from stepping outside of male rules. Evolutionary psychology suggests that human nature can be linked back to biological influences based on a common individual goal of sustaining one's DNA. Social psychology, on the other hand, looks at human behaviors through a

wider lens, tying them to conventional expectations. Yet the two may not be as incompatible as they appear. Social psychology's understanding of gender expectations and stereotypes could serve as attempts to sustain certain instinctual behaviors that evolutionary psychologists propose exist. Perhaps society implements norms as a means of defending these biological propensities.

Men and women experience sexual differences in evolutionary adaptations thanks to their ancestors' desires to achieve reproductive certainty. Because of the deviation in the positions that men and women respectively hold with regard to sexual reproduction, they differ in the methods used to achieve their objective of producing fruitful heirs. These subconscious tendencies remain prevalent in "the hazardous region of human sexuality" (Buss 3) in modern times because they "helped our ancestors and most likely continue to help us today, to cope with a host of real reproductive threats" (Buss 5). An element of competition outlines these desires as organisms compete for the survival of the fittest. This principle serves a foundational role in psychological behaviors as individuals both cooperate and compete in pursuit of self-preservation, inside and outside of their sex. Marriage can be seen as a mutually beneficial contract that works to fulfill the needs of men and women and ease each group's anxieties in an act of cooperation. The contract acts as a sort of guarantee that eradicates the competitive aspect of relationships and provides an assurance of commitment. Balancing cooperation and competition, the firm binary structures of gender role theory show how culture may mingle with biology to maintain these expectations and practice adopted patterns of behavior.

The role that females play in sexual reproduction places them at a somewhat obvious disadvantage in terms of mobility in society. Their literal connection to the child—as they physically carry the offspring—renders them in a position of constraint, which males can exploit to their own advantage in terms of maintaining power over women. Their lack of liberation

during pregnancy leaves them to rely on men for resources for themselves and even for their offspring after birth, as well. Lactation presents another multifaceted range of positive and negative consequences as an evolutionary adaptation. The female's abundant supply of milk offers necessary provisions for life-sustaining immunity and health without dependency on other resources. However, the ability to nurse does not come without a cost, as Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, a sociobiologist, points out: "Each offspring that survives past weaning would have extracted enormous somatic investment from the mother, not to mention opportunity costs—time out of her life spent nursing offspring she already has instead of making more" (127). Women experience many other constraints thanks to the limits of age on fertility as well as the physical toll and temporal restraints of pregnancy and childbirth on their bodies. Men, however, are far less confined, with no age restrictions and the ability to conceive without time limits as often as they have the opportunity to do so. Because of these differences, women pursue emotional connections as a signal for a long-term commitment from men; abiding relationships indicate a sense of security for future resources, which women crave in order to have successful offspring. These biological distinctions pair with societal structures—often upheld through patriarchy—to exploit areas of vulnerability in women and allow men to maintain power and privilege.

The lack of temporal constraints on men to reproduce leaves them able to conceive as many times as they are able, so they often hope to find fertile females who will help in effectively achieving this goal. Over time, men and women alike have pursued their goals by associating certain physical and behavioral traits with their contrasting objectives to aid their hunt. For example, the stereotypical assumption that women seek men with resources and wealth to provide for their offspring leads to the label of women as "gold-diggers" (Buss 11). Similarly, men hold a reputation for pursuing more attractive and younger women in part because these

physical attributes indicate fertility as age correlates to a decrease in a woman's chances of reproducing (Buss 16). Age for men, however, holds a more positive connotation as it suggests a stronger sense of establishment, and therefore, greater access to resources (Buss 11). Women seek men who display dominance, masculinity, and even basic physical features such as height and thick beards, as these qualities are associated with an ability to attain resources (Dixson et al. 2312). Men also seek specific physical attributes and personality traits in women as indications of fidelity. While desiring attractive women, males also seek meek, quiet women, as they believe that meekness and silence are indications of faithfulness. Men often believe that these women will be less likely to step outside of their confined roles. These heuristics in attributes act as signals for stereotypes that are perpetuated through society, which upholds strict gender expectations and structures.

One disadvantage that men experience, on the other hand, is a lack of paternal assurance. Women need never question the authenticity of their DNA in the child thanks to internal fertilization, but men are left to trust the women, constantly craving a deeper sense of certainty. David Buss acknowledges this phenomenon with a reference to a saying from African culture: "Mama's baby, papa's maybe" (qtd. in Buss 4). Men have developed and adapted a number of methods to protect themselves from this weakness. To counteract their insecurities, men attempt to possess their female partners in a number of ways, as they display extreme anxiety to lose them. Developing as a sort of alarm bell for threats to one's relationship, jealousy comes into play with reproductive goals to ease anxieties. Unlike women, who desire an emotional attachment, men seek monogamous sexual connections to signify high fertility chances and sexual fidelity.

Jealousy serves as a key element in the conversation of evolutionary psychology and acts as a crucial tactic for both male and female anxieties against threats to reproductive security. This passionate emotion serves an imperative purpose in maintaining love and cooperation, acting as a warning signal and tactic of mate retention. Jealousy comes with pejorative associations and often with a label of immaturity. As Buss argues, however, evolutionary psychology calls us to recognize the importance and even necessity of jealousy: “Nonjealous men and women . . . are not our ancestors, having been left in the evolutionary dust by rivals with different passionate sensibilities. We all come from a long lineage of ancestors who possessed the dangerous passion” (5). Although jealousy can prove to be a less than pleasant emotion, humans universally experience the feeling because it is an important tactic for biological survival. Jealousy serves as a powerful motivating force, encouraging its experiencer to show affection, commitment, and protection over a threatened or wavering partner. However, jealousy’s darker sides hint at the reason Buss describes the success of adaptations with the qualifier “not perfectly, of course” (5). Despite jealousy’s clear purpose, a number of negative consequences present themselves as dangers to both parties in a relationship. Jealousy can evoke both reactive and cognitive/suspicious responses, and the two types present themselves through entirely opposite tactics.

Jealousy’s reactive side normally receives a positive label because it results in positive responses. The motivational aspects of jealousy can encourage a productive relationship. When a person fears a partner’s imminent departure, the competition provides an incentive to rise to the challenge and uphold behaviors that encourage the partner to stay. Jealousy also has the ability to monitor the level of interest and care an individual holds for a partner. If a significant other does not feel threatened by the possibility of a partner’s interacting with a possible “mate poacher,” it

may signal a lack of appreciation for or commitment to a relationship. A study performed by Puente and Cohen reveals that a healthy level of jealousy stands as an assurance that individuals treasure their partners and fear the possibility of losing them. This research measured each man's level of jealousy and considered women's interpretations of said jealousy to determine how much each woman believed that the man cared. The results conclude "that jealousy can be seen as a sign of love" (Puente and Cohen 452) because the two concepts were closely correlated in responses. St. Augustine hinted at this same deduction when he reasoned, "he that is not jealous is not in love" (qtd. in Puente and Cohen 451). Studies have even shown that women sometimes attempt to elicit jealousy from men intentionally to measure their level of regard for them.

The harm caused by "the green-eyed monster," which is so destructive in *Othello*, emerges in less healthy and productive patterns. This type of cognitive/suspicious response often leads to violence through an explosive temper. Interestingly, this form of passionate and violent jealousy in the heat of the moment appears far more often in men than in women as in the common trend of homicide in romantic relationships, a phenomenon often labeled "morbid jealousy" or the "Othello syndrome" (Buss 6). In fact, 13% of all homicides are attributed to spousal murders, with jealousy as their leading cause (Buss 8). This condition received its name from Shakespeare's titular character, who struggles with cognitive jealousy through the play in which he appears. Despite Othello's wife's protests as she is killed—"That death's unnatural that kills for loving" (*Othello* 4.5.2.51)—Othello's impetuous act reveals the irrationality of this cognitive form of violent jealousy.

Jealousy does not always emerge in the midst of an intense moment, however; hence, the suspicious side of the cognitive type appears. Jealousy can be a sort of preemptive measure as well, acting to "combat a real threat" (Buss 9). Yet this evolutionary behavior may, and often

does, prove harmful and destructive when in excess. Anger in this form often elicits manipulative tactics toward one's partner, such as isolation, control, and criticism to try and curtail personal anxieties. Buss also illustrates these darker parts: "jealousy can be an emotional acid that corrodes marriages, undermines self-esteem, triggers battering, and leads to the ultimate crime of murder" (7). Shakespeare explores such extremes in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

Unfortunately, jealousy's paradoxical nature blurs the lines between its positive and negative sides, making them difficult to identify. Society struggles to determine the difference between jealousy's duplicitous parts as so many of these evolutionary adaptations occur subconsciously. This struggle to distinguish reality from facades evokes sympathy for the angry, jealous male partner who fails to analyze his own intentions. Men who commit domestic murder "are often declared unfit to stand trial" for reasons of insanity as they suffer from this condition of "morbid jealousy" (Aldrige and Brown 270). Society perpetuates these bad behaviors through its complacency and leniency toward them. Although we have unintentional responses thanks to evolution, it certainly does not excuse them as acceptable. The acknowledgment of these dangerous passions serves a key role in breaking down the darker parts. Shakespeare's analysis of violent jealousy seems to be an attempt at this consciousness-raising; he urges his society to examine behaviors rather than passively allow them to hide under the guise of uncontrollable human nature.

Just as men and women have unique sex differences in their reproductive roles and the goals for their offspring, they similarly hold clear variations in their forms of jealousy and possessiveness. Sexual and emotional jealousy, while not mutually exclusive, develop from very different triggers based primarily on the distinctive goals they each work to achieve. Buss et al.

examined these differences through their psychological study, measuring whether men and women would each get more jealous about an instance of either emotional or sexual infidelity. The results aligned very closely with their hypothesis that women would be more distressed by the former and men by the latter. Men are typically more likely to show signs of sexual jealousy in connection with their desire for paternal assurance: they feel averse to their spouse's sexual infidelity because it creates risks of genetic incompatibility with their offspring. Women, on the other hand, show signs of emotional jealousy because they see emotional attachment as an indication of long-term commitment, which results in the provision of resources for themselves and their offspring.

Jealousy—hard to describe—can be labeled as an emotion, a feeling, or a warning alarm, but regardless, every human can understand and relate to exactly how the green-eyed monster feels. Shakespeare's work shows no shortage of this evolutionary adaptation, as Elizabethan men seem almost obsessed with the fear of cuckoldry. Paternal assurance influences the adaptive nature of male anxiety toward infidelity as men crave constant certainty about their wives' faithfulness to guarantee their connection to their offspring's genetic makeup. The need for paternal assurance, shown through male anxieties, led to Elizabethan fixations on cuckoldry. A cuckold is a man who foolishly takes care of offspring who are not his own because he remains with an adulterous wife. This common fear explains men's obsession with finding a chaste wife who will not stray from her husband's desires. This insult also has implications about a loss of masculinity, suggesting that a man loses some of his credibility through this life-altering mistake of staying committed to an unfaithful woman. Cuckoldry found roots in society with its damning reputation, but its origins closely tie to a biological desire for paternal assurance as men fight for a sexual commitment from partners.

By contrast with sociobiology, which interprets behavior as a consequence of nature, social psychology interprets behavior as the result of culture. However, its roots may still remain in evolutionary psychology as society implements certain expectations to uphold instinctual patterns. The study of social psychology argues that gender can be performative as a means of fulfilling expected roles or stereotypes that society impresses upon men or women. Perhaps each group's vulnerability—according to the evolutionary perspective: men in need of paternal assurance and women limited by their role in offspring production—leads to these societal norms. The performance of gender roles could result from pressure from the opposite sex to maintain expectations and restrict mobility—especially for women. Attributes culturally associated with men and women may be the byproduct of these areas of insecurity; by imposing these roles, they act as a sort of defense mechanism and help to keep the other group in the area in which their counterparts want them to remain.

Forced to rely on women for the actual labor of producing fruit, men need to uphold their sense of power in society as a means of protecting their paternal assurance and ability to reproduce abundantly. Culture mingles with biology to create these seemingly natural roles that view women as maternal, virtuous, and sensitive and men as dominant, strong, and assertive. These purported roles come as a byproduct of biological and evolutionary influences but are maintained through cultural structures. This contrast leads to well-known patriarchal structures that have survived in contemporary society, as seen in literature, film, politics, and everyday life. *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale* examine these conforming attitudes closely; Shakespeare seems to point out the unfairness in these common gender stereotypes by exposing the devastating consequences of jealousy. Alongside the conventional characters, he includes many women who defy the expected gender binaries of the period. Beatrice, Emilia, and

Paulina—each a rebel in her own way—serve an important purpose in pushing back against the tactics meant to oppress women.

Social psychology pairs with biological instincts in order to uphold certain behaviors through societal structures. In the same manner that humans evolve biologically, so does society as specific groups attempt to hegemonize and preserve themselves from outside threats. Men clearly experience a number of insecurities relating to their reproductive roles, so they often exploit the disadvantages of women by developing a variety of tactics to protect themselves. More specifically, men as a demographic attempt to perpetuate the patriarchy in order to keep control of the power dynamics. While evolutionary psychology acknowledges individual change as a means of self-preservation, social psychology approaches human nature on a much broader scale, as it attempts to acknowledge how individuals collectively adopt a group mindset. Social psychology looks at a community of mutual interdependence where our individual instincts impact the culture around us.

Although we often behave in sociobiological ways without even recognizing them, we develop subconscious patterns and normalities that get ingrained in society and maintained through expectations. Defining culture as “a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained” as well as “a repertoire of models to which individuals must conform,” Stephen Greenblatt notes that society punishes individuals who do not adhere to this “system of constraints” and rewards those who do (“Culture” 225, 227, 225-26). Culture forces individuals to find a sense of order and normalcy, in the hope of belonging with the people around them. So although society may not have developed the evolutionary adaptation that we should walk upright rather than on all fours, culture can certainly uphold and encourage its practice. Most would probably look at individuals walking around on all fours with a sense of confusion and

concern—i.e. the figurative punishment. Society uses these rewards and punishments to encourage conformity and expect normalities, which often spark from biological influences and find roots in culture. Greenblatt acknowledges art's purpose in passing expectations on, as it "is one of the ways in which roles by which men and women are expected to pattern their lives are communicated and passed from generation to generation" ("Culture" 228). Individuals look to art and literature as indications of how to construct their lives. Art has the unique power to transmit this culture, so Shakespeare's attempts to illuminate cultural issues prove a strong method for exposing the dark sides of adaptations that become social norms.

Gender roles serve as an example of how society uses adaptations to normalize certain behaviors. Patriarchy's emergence in society produces no shortage of these expectations for women, who face a number of instructions on how best to fulfill their roles. Mothers' maternal expectations to care for and pour resources into their offspring reduce women's social mobility, as they trust men to provide resources for them and their children. Perhaps the greater sense of responsibility attributed to women also arises as a byproduct of their larger investment in offspring production. This biological sex difference interacts with society to uphold structures that aid men. Women's vulnerability due to their lack of freedom gives men the ability to gain assurance through patriarchal structures.

Women's biological position, with the constraints of pregnancy, labor, and lactation, calls them to rely on men for resources. Despite the diminishing importance of successful offspring or the necessity of lactation, subconscious tendencies remain in women to seek long-term commitment from men. Society also perpetuates the assumption that men, labeled as "breadwinners," provide resources. Female limitations within the home, moreover, decrease the possibility of their infidelity and help to ease male anxiety about paternal assurance. Although

society has eased its restrictions for women—especially within the last century—a certain level of societal pressure still weighs heavily on them. Even today, they face the the expectation to care for their children most of the time whether or not they work outside the home just as much as their partners do. Responsibilities within the home to care for the family remain within a woman’s purview, whether as wife or as mother.

Female internal fertilization breeds a connection to the child that society has translated into a sense of responsibility heavily placed on the shoulders of women. “Self-sacrificing motherhood,” Sarah Blaffer Hrdy points out, “was what women were for, and women in many societies have believed this was their destiny. Overlooked was the huge stake that everyone has in motherhood” (4). Hrdy’s bold claims break down centuries of expectations that women face, as she reasons that women’s maternal nature merely developed as an arbitrary and illusory byproduct of society. Many women in Shakespeare’s plays work to dissolve the phenomenon famously conveyed in Lady Macbeth’s shocking admission, “I have given suck, and know / How tender ‘tis to love the babe that milks me; / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out” (1.7.55-59). Lady Macbeth defies every stereotype of motherhood as protective, nurturing, and loving as she aligns with Hrdy’s claims that these societal impositions forced upon women are unnatural myths of biology.

Although sex differences often hint at contrasting roles for women and men in their reproductive patterns, no part of evolutionary psychology suggests that women are somehow inferior to men. Yet society has often adopted this narrative that women are too emotional and not strong enough to handle serious situations. However, “life on this planet isn’t threatened by woman’s tears; nor does the brimming salty fluid cause poverty, drain public coffers, ruin

reputations, impose forced intimacies, slay children, torture helpless people, or reduce cities to rubble” (Konner 6). The complex Elizabethan women who appear in Shakespeare’s untraditional plays certainly prove themselves equal to men in humor, wit, and strength. Shakespeare consistently resists the typical stereotypes of women by portraying full and authentic female characters who anachronistically confront societal structures that oppress them.

Whether dictated by biology or culture, the psychological consequence of patriarchy results in a specific type of prejudice: sexism. This discrimination, most commonly targeted toward women by men, develops out of the belief that one sex is inherently superior to the other. Women face a disadvantage as a consequence of this ideology: “Simply put, men typically rule, dominating the highest status roles in government and business across the globe” (Glick and Fiske 110). Women are unfairly portrayed as underachieving in every area; an excess of one quality means scarcity in another. Virginia Woolf cleverly hinted at this hopeless conundrum for women in *A Room of One’s Own*: “If a woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person . . . very various; heroic and mean, splendid and sordid, beautiful and hideous in the extreme” (qtd. in Glick and Fiske 109). Women in high authority positions cannot escape criticism; they are either seen as too strong and manipulative or too weak and fragile (Valentino et al. 219). Caught in a lose-lose dilemma of polarizing expectations, women face relentless criticism, no matter their choices. Men work to belittle and chastise women, portraying them as too emotional, weak, and scatter-brained and therefore incapable of handling serious situations. Men often adopt this same critical attitude, harshly deeming women unable to fill the same roles as men.

Ambivalent sexism theory takes a deeper dive into the specific forms of sexism that women endure. Its two types—benevolent and hostile—have entirely different signals, but may

not be as separate as they first appear. The two types can prove complementary based on a woman's response to societal structures. Hostile sexism exemplifies the more common type of prejudice toward women, with harsh attempts to keep them in a specific position and prevent them from rebelling. Benevolent sexism may appear at first, but hostile sexism can follow swiftly: the former takes a far softer and nicer approach to oppressing women, as it uses positive reinforcement to keep them in their positions without pushback. However, its less volatile nature seems only to increase the danger that accompanies hidden duplicity. Both sexist types, individually and collectively, contribute to the maintenance of patriarchy and perform specific roles within society to protect evolutionarily adapted goals for men.

Women are expected to uphold specific ideals to appease male anxiety about cuckoldry and male craving for parental assurance. These expectations—often imposed through a very subtle and implicit method of reasoning called benevolent sexism—develops a narrative for women to follow, instructing them on their duties. This concept comes from a constructed role for women in gender theory and “rewards” them for remaining in their subordinate position. This form of sexism proves especially peculiar because it simultaneously appreciates yet depreciates women. Psychologists Peter Glick and Susan Fiske acknowledge the oddity of benevolent sexism, raising the question, “How can a group be almost universally disadvantaged, yet loved?” (110). Benevolent sexism has a misleadingly pleasant name, as it expresses a male bias and expects women to uphold the traits that will fulfill their roles as dutiful wives and maternal mothers. The rewards that the women receive for their agreeability come in the form of supposed compliments that, in reality, have an underhanded side to them. Women are described as dainty, pure, in need of protection, maternal, sweet, and virtuous—all as part of benevolent sexism—to reinforce these softer behaviors. The more gentle form of sexism largely contributes to the

idealistic biological role that women are afforded as society designates them as the natural caregivers of the offspring.

The complementary traits ascribed to women, although seemingly positive, camouflage a darker underside as they “reinforce women’s lower status” (Glick and Fiske 110); after all, subordination and endearment often go hand in hand. By declaring women as precious and in need of defense, men ensure that they serve a distinctive purpose in society and that women rely on them as protectors and providers. This side of sexism frequently connects back to chivalry, which typically gets seen in a positive light. Yet underneath these courteous mindsets, chivalry encourages the theory that women are docile and fragile, and thus perpetuates problematic structures that patronize women and justify systems of sexism. Society reinforces these standards through seemingly polite practices that hide their deeper implications—for example, the norm for a man to pay for a date certainly seems kind in nature, but can be implicitly problematic by maintaining the power dynamic that women rely on men for resources and sustenance. Patriarchy intentionally uses these seemingly harmless divisions in order to keep men in a position of power, rewarding women for agreeing graciously and punishing them for any form of non-compliance. Society connects back to evolutionary adaptations in this way: when women remain confined within their designated position, couples are more likely to have successful offspring, whereas men are less likely to face the consequence of parental insecurity with a wife who freely roams.

Benevolent sexism operates on the hope that women will remain in their positions amicably without protest or resistance as a result of its “disarming” effect (Glick and Fiske 111). Hostile sexism, however, surfaces when this hope fails and women begin to mobilize themselves, moving out of their limited roles. The positive attributes that men once bestowed upon women

shift into dark and angry traits: manipulative, deceptive, lying, emotional. Hostile sexism acts as an attempt to protect security for men and to discourage women from seeking equal positioning to their male counterparts. This more blatant form of sexism works to discredit and discourage women, often seen through criticism toward women in public spheres. For example, women who run for political office often experience far crueler headlines and comments against them than those directed at their male counterparts. Donald Trump showed this hostility toward Hilary Clinton in the 2016 presidential race, accusing her of “playing the woman card” (qtd. in Cassese and Holman 55). Women face different standards: loudness and confidence have positive connotations for men but not for women. Under the scope of hostile sexism, assertiveness in women gets scrutinized and punished, but in men, gets rewarded as leadership. These oppressive attacks undercut women with intimidation, pushing them to retreat anxiously from open speech into quiet, submissive positions.

As so many patriarchal behaviors do, these restricting tactics can stem from a desire to protect paternal assurance. Women’s gain of power often correlates somehow with the concept of sexual freedom and independence from male provision. Men commonly exemplify a discomfort toward unconstrained female sexuality. Placing cruel judgments of women into conversations of supposed licentiousness, men attack female sexuality in a way that women could never reciprocate. Phrases or slang meaning “whore” appear a total of 1,497 times throughout all of Shakespeare’s plays (Stanton 102) as women are criticized for any hint of promiscuity. Women seemingly hold a responsibility to appease male fears of cuckoldry and evade any behavior that could suggest sexual disloyalty, as “masculine privilege is contingent on the legibility of women” (Cook 187). Hostile sexism kicks in when women refrain from this duty, as seen with Claudio’s

change of heart toward Hero, in Othello's metamorphosis with Desdemona, and Leontes's sudden antagonism toward both Hermione, his wife, and Polixenes, his childhood friend.

Jealousy's Corrosion: From "Jewel" to "Rotten Orange"

Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*'s roots in comedy lend it a unique relationship with the conflict that it portrays. Unlike Shakespeare's tragedies and romances in which the consequences of jealousy linger, the comedy concludes with a joyful source of escape from lasting repercussions. Yet underneath its artificially idyllic ending, jealousy's consequences still prove evident. Shakespeare pairs two couples side by side; one unconventional couple—Beatrice and Benedick—and one conventional couple—Hero and Claudio. The two relationships become foils for each other due to their stark differences and they demonstrate jealousy's role within romance. Although Hero quietly complies with societal expectations and adopts the role of the ideal Elizabethan woman, Beatrice shows her unruliness as she stands up boldly against Benedick, fighting for her autonomy. Beatrice and Benedick share their stubborn, free-willed spirits, as they interact in a "skirmish of wits" (1.1.59), but Hero remains virtually silent around Claudio, idealized into his "silent goddess" (Dreher 85). Hero's obedience proves in vain, however, as she faces false accusations of infidelity despite her unwavering loyalty to Claudio. Ultimately, Claudio's rejection of Hero stems from his distrust and insecurities. Through its depictions of Claudio's unfounded jealousy, *Much Ado About Nothing* explores mate-retention tactics and their roots in societal structures.

Claudio's repudiation of Hero reflects the sliding scale from benevolent to hostile sexism. Likening her to a "jewel" alongside his descriptions of her as "modest" and as a "sweetest lady" (1.1.174, 158, 180), Claudio begins with celebrations of Hero's chastity and meekness. His descriptions show his superficial love as they all align her with the oppressive Elizabethan expectations for women. Claudio's union with Hero happens distinctly "according to the

principle of a *caveat emptor*” that predisposes him to doubt her fidelity (Henze 192), so he uses both benevolent and hostile forms of sexism to enforce Elizabethan expectations. Claudio’s seemingly sweet remarks about Hero give an ostensible appearance of affection; he puts her on a pedestal and cherishes her. Hero reaps the rewards of her compliance as Claudio credits her with these complementary labels and frees her from criticism. In reality, however, his remarks are examples of benevolent sexism, intended only to avert rebellion, as he implicitly encourages her to stay within her confined role. However, Hero experiences the limits of this affection when Claudio unfairly suspects her of breaking out of her obedience and begins to display clear hostile sexism. His affection turns to resentment as Hero’s interests allegedly threaten the patriarchy through supposed infidelity. Losing his admiration of Hero, he becomes her harshest critic, as he replaces his loving descriptions with the label of a “rotten orange” (4.1.31). He dotes on Hero when he believes he can possess her, but when he doubts his ability to control her, he reacts in a jealous outrage.

Hero’s tragic downfall shows that even perfect obedience does not shield a woman from cruel treatment. Hero, unlike Beatrice, fulfills her role as a daughter by adhering to Elizabethan values.² Her father, Leonato, exerts his power over his daughter as he reminds her, “Daughter, remember what I told you. / If the prince do solicit you in that kind, / You know your answer” (2.1.61-63). Leonato reinforces his control of Hero’s future and reminds her that she must comply with his orders and submit her free will in order to fulfill her role. Despite Hero’s deference to his every desire, he continues to rule over her and gives her no choice in her own

² Although women still have certain expectations in contemporary society, these structures were even more pressing during the Elizabethan era. Women held very specific roles in the home and had little mobility to disobey them. Several instruction manuals specified the ways in which a woman could best fit her role as daughter, wife, and mother: “it becometh not a maide to talke, where hir father and mother be in comunicacion about hir mariage” (qtd. in Cook 72). These instruction booklets also go on to direct men on qualities to avoid in a spouse, again emphasizing the importance of shyness by degrading a woman with a chattering tongue through the label of a shrew. These expectations stigmatize women unfairly, quieting their voices as if their thoughts and desires are somehow unimportant.

marriage to Claudio. In response to Leonato's harsh orders, Beatrice refuses to accept her powerlessness quietly, so she encourages Hero, "Yes, faith; it is my cousin's duty to make cur'sy and say 'Father, as it please you'. But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy and say 'Father, as it please me'" (2.1.49-52). Beatrice questions gender roles by calling attention to the inequalities that Elizabethan women experience.

Despite the unfairness of Elizabethan expectations for women, Hero takes on this role without hesitation. Her love interest, Claudio, also fits into his gender role as a domineering man who confines female freedom within a certain standard for the woman who will become his wife. However, despite Hero's utter faithfulness, Claudio accuses her of infidelity. After Don John reports that Don Pedro intends to steal Hero's affections, Claudio dismisses her abruptly: "Farewell therefore Hero!" (2.1.176) without allowing Hero the chance to defend herself. Infuriated by his believed cuckoldry, he suggests that he will destroy her publicly, "If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her" (3.2.116-18). Ultimately, Claudio's male anxieties instigate the entire conflict of the play, leading to Hero's downfall: "The distrust casts a dark shadow upon possibilities for love and commitment" (Dreher 128). The natural competition of self-preservation prohibits Claudio from trusting Hero as he instinctively protects his own interests. Hero's very own father declares, "Death is the fairest cover for her shame" (4.1.116). Innocent Hero's submissive efforts to be a good daughter and wife truly prove in vain when her father shows little appreciation for her obedience by prioritizing patriarchy and defending other men above her.

Patriarchy soothes male insecurities by assuring mutually beneficial defense. These same-sex friendships even surpass familial bonds, and exemplify the strength of evolutionary

impulses to protect a sex's own interests. By keeping women in tightly held constraints, men maintain their power no matter how a woman chooses to respond to societal structures. Wilson acknowledges this inevitably hopeless conflict: whether a woman should choose to “adhere to the feminine ideals constructed by men or resist them—they are rendered voiceless by an unjust system of unquestioned male authority” (65). Male desires to ensure their power within society stems directly from a need for paternal assurance and the guarantee that women will continue to rely upon men. Leonato instantly believes the accusations about Hero's fidelity, and, like Claudio, shows hostile sexism through his critiques of her: “Oh, she is fallen into a pit of ink, that the wide sea hath drops too few to wash her clean again” (4.1.139-41). Leonato implies that, through infidelity, Hero has permanently stained herself and will never regain her purity. He condemns Hero, siding with Claudio against his own daughter. Men defend each other with a wholehearted allegiance that no woman could withstand, even a daughter who has fulfilled all her filial and wifely duties.

By siding with Claudio, Leontes perpetuates Hero's voicelessness in a patriarchal system that upholds men's authority. Elizabethan parents played a major role in their daughters' marriage, orchestrating it almost entirely. A woman's filial duty was a sign of her direct obedience to her father, later to be transferred to her husband through the marriage blessing. When Hero prepares to leave her father's home in marriage, Leonato tells Claudio, “Count, take of me my daughter and with her / My fortunes” (2.1.288-90), implying a sort of freedom from a burden with his loss of her. The concept of “fortunes” in his remark reminds Claudio that the marriage acts as a sort of financial transaction as well. Deprived of independence, the Elizabethan woman lived her entire life constantly under a man's order.

Dreher suggests that the absence of a father gives Beatrice an unusual flexibility and freedom that her cousin lacks (115). Don Pedro—a single nobleman whom Beatrice rejects in the play—even admits, “Truly, the lady fathers herself” (1.1.105-06). The lack of a father to control her in her adolescent years may carry into her refusal to be oppressed as an adult. Some psychologists argue that a daughter who matures through childhood without a father may become defensive and assertive as a result (Dreher 128). Beatrice has the luxury of not having to experience a father who works to control or possess her. Her unique freedom from a male figure in her life excuses her from cooperating with another sex, so she sticks primarily to competition. Beatrice does not suffer the conundrum of how to appease the men around her as she need care only for herself.

Beatrice seems almost exempt from the harsh expectations placed upon women as she exercises the same right as men to be cautious and protective of her own authority and power. She prioritizes her independence all while demonstrating cleverness, humor, and strength, not “to show how worthy she is of a mate” but instead, “to show how thoroughly she deserves to remain herself” (Gardner 7). Although the audience is not privy to the details, hints of a past relationship between Beatrice and Benedick reveal a lingering fear of cuckoldry. However, Beatrice does not allow male anxiety about infidelity to overtake her own needs. She questions men’s chastity as frankly as men discuss women’s sexuality. By giving Benedick the nickname “Mountanto,” when she asks the messenger, “I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars, or no?” she refers to the fencing motion of an upward thrust as a phallic representation to hint at his sexual promiscuity (1.1.29-30). Her crude comments about Benedick resemble the attitude of hostile sexism that men often take toward women. Women, often forced to ignore deceptions of men, could not really acknowledge male infidelity. Female jealousy and anxiety over

unfaithfulness from partners are often dismissed, but Beatrice refuses to keep quiet and adopts the same doubt and distrust toward Benedick that men often show women.

By refusing to accept hypocritical expectations, Beatrice makes a powerful statement as she flips the standard onto men. When her uncle asks why she does not want a husband, she promptly retorts, “What should I do with him—dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting gentlewoman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth, and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him” (2.1.31-36). Just as Benedick criticizes women harshly, Beatrice wittily reciprocates this attitude toward men. By casting the same judgment and criticism that women often face silently, she again defies the double standard enforced upon women. Beatrice’s frequent reassessments of power remind Benedick, and all men around her, that women are of equal ability and status.

Much of cuckoldry in the Elizabethan period centers upon pride and the desire to maintain a certain image; a man will appear as a fool if he allows a woman to deceive him. So by showing a refusal to accept infidelity, Beatrice seems to suggest that women have the same level of reputation and pride to protect as their suitors. Further, when prompted by her uncle, Beatrice separates herself from a typical woman by emphasizing her opposition to marriage: “Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I’ll none. Adam’s sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kinred” (2.1.55-60). Beatrice humorously likens herself to men by proclaiming that everyone is a part of mankind and will each leave the Earth in the same manner, regardless of gender. She further claims that to marry would be incestuous because everyone descends from Adam. In her clever response, she

puts men and women on the same level as she develops indistinguishable parallels between the genders with no sense of remorse. Beatrice's desire to be equal and independent supersedes any biological instincts, so she resists and refuses to submit to male expectations of women. Her early declarations about gender equality look ahead to the play's recurring double standards as men consistently ascribe infidelity to women.

Dreher hints at this competitiveness of evolutionary psychology in relationships when she recognizes that, within the play, men and women each remain "afraid to trust a member of the opposite sex" (128). Anxieties over cuckoldry polarize the two genders as they remain unwilling to be open and vulnerable with each other. Claudio shows a clear distrust of Hero when he accuses her of infidelity and immediately demands her death. Similarly, Beatrice and Benedick exemplify a sense of competition and distrust through their playful banter, hesitating to admit any true feelings that would make them vulnerable to each other. As the self-preservational competition eventually subsides for Benedick and Beatrice, however, they slowly develop mutual trust. Benedick dotingly tells Beatrice, "Come, bid me do anything for thee" (4.1.287). To test the strength of this loyalty, Beatrice urges Benedick to betray his biological instincts of self-preservation and take a risk in defending Hero's honor, commanding him to "Kill Claudio" (4.1.288). Initially he refuses, angry at her request, but eventually he reconsiders. He defies his masculine numbness when he relents to her desires and responds just as she wishes, "I will challenge him" (4.1.330). Dreher acknowledges how women are often responsible for "educating and redeeming their men from the folly of limited-vision and self-absorption" (115). Beatrice adopts this role when she calls Benedick to make Claudio acknowledge his wrongdoings. Beatrice and Benedick work together to disprove these unwarranted lies and confirm Hero's innocence, further acknowledging the unfairness of the patriarchy. The couple joins together to

combat unfair social standards, and in doing so, suppresses biological impulses of distrust and insecurity.

The dynamics of distrust extend not only to couples, as Hero and her father show this deep lack of faith, as well. Even Leonato sides with the man against his daughter, condoning the perpetuation of Hero's voicelessness in the unjust patriarchal system. Beatrice and Benedick, unlike Leonato, work together to disprove these unwarranted lies and confirm Hero's innocence, further acknowledging the unfairness of the patriarchy. Benedick breaks down the patriarchal structures around him when he combats jealousy and refuses to protect Claudio. He breaks the complicit silence toward Claudio, insisting, "You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you" (5.1.148-49). Just as Beatrice combats her biologically and socially imposed role by refusing to submit to or rely on a man, she incites Benedick to fight back against his habitual male assumptions. The couple aids innocent Hero in her struggle against a jealous man and, in doing so, pushes back against convention through their equal independence and cooperative loyalty.

Beatrice resists the societal structures of the time, refusing to submit to men's expectations. Longing to humiliate Claudio in the same manner that he has attacked her cousin, she laments, "Oh, that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands, and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor—Oh God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace" (4.1.302-06). Feeling trapped by the gender expectations, Beatrice wants to break out of her role as a woman to defend her innocent cousin. In defending Hero, Benedick and Beatrice demonstrate their freedom from the social pressures around them. They do not adhere to expected gender roles, as they come to love each other through mutual feelings of respect. Claudio's jealousy is conveyed through his possession of

Hero, which contrasts starkly with the opposing unconventional couple. Claudio's internal jealousy drives his cruel treatment of Hero as he fears the possibility of cuckoldry. His jealousy is heightened by the patriarchal structures around him, which enforce a male need for control and power. Claudio's male peers—including Hero's own father—side with him consistently until Benedick defies patriarchal structures, and like Beatrice, pushes back against dark sides of human nature. Benedick and Beatrice acknowledge the danger of mistaken jealousy as they work to stop its corrosion in defense of innocent Hero.

“Nature’s Plague”: Othello Succumbs to Societal Pressures

Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello* presents an untraditional couple, Othello and Desdemona, who push back on negative biological and social influences, modeling defiance against Elizabethan expectations. While the other men around Desdemona belittle and objectify her, Othello values and respects her. The two resist many of their society’s norms; he treats her like an equal—not lesser for her womanhood, and she values him despite the racial prejudices that others direct toward him. Othello originally shows little anxiety about his wife’s liberties as he clearly represses the masculine evolutionary adaptations that would be expected of him. The couple’s unconventionality shines especially at the very start of their relationship with their elopement, as Othello does not seek the blessing of Desdemona’s father, Brabantio. When asked if Othello is jealous, Desdemona, confident in her husband’s trust, even tells Iago’s wife, Emilia, “I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humors from him” (3.4.29-30). The couple portrays freedom from the unhealthy impulses of human nature by rising above the typical biological and social influences even as Iago, the play’s antagonist, constantly shows manipulation and misogyny. Once Iago forces Othello into a state of jealousy, he succumbs to Iago’s insinuations about Desdemona’s supposed infidelity and exemplifies jealousy’s dangerous ability to mold its victim.

Shakespeare’s first scene focuses on men who do not hold the same progressive nature as Othello. Iago reduces Desdemona to property to be obtained when he warns Brabantio, “Look to your house, your daughter and your bags! / Thieves! Thieves!” (1.1.82-83). Desdemona’s grouping with bags couples her in a list of stolen objects and compares her to a piece of her father’s property. Women often adopt the role of sitting ducks, objects of male desire to be

chased and acquired as possessions. The descriptions of Desdemona as property to be possessed or stolen illustrates how men objectify and attempt to control women. The men never consider the possibility that Desdemona's own autonomy led her to a relationship with Othello; Brabantio assumes that Othello must have used "foul charms" or "drugs or minerals" (1.2.74, 75) to steal her attention. Just like an object, Desdemona faces the humiliation of serving as a possession to be fought for, rather than a person with rights. Iago exaggerates the scenario when he tells Brabantio, "An old black ram / Is tugging your white ewe" (1.1.90-91). This metaphor makes Desdemona akin to sheep; a symbol of quiet compliance, and likens her to prey; to be hunted or chased³ without the ability to pursue others. Iago's use of sexually charged anthropomorphism insinuates that men hold animalistic domination over women. Overt sexualization leaves women at the hands of male decisions by keeping them as the objects of pursuit rather than active participants in the relationship. The use of color as a symbol further adds to the complexity of the analogy—Iago implies that Othello's blackness enables him to rob Desdemona of her whiteness, which represents her purity.

Society's enforcement of expectations often works to aid evolutionary adaptations and ensure long-lasting survival. Jealousy as a tactic specifically often pushes men to use patriarchy to maintain their masculine privilege and keep a role of power; male anxieties about female sexuality lead them to exert ownership over women. Brabantio and Iago show frustration as Othello and Desdemona's relationship hinders the typical patriarchal norm, so they work to restrain free-willed Desdemona by questioning the marriage. Desdemona's relationship, at first,

³ Shakespeare commonly employed animalistic metaphors to describe women being 'hunted' in their relationships. Helena, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, also uses an animal-based analogy when she speaks out against this practice of male domination. Confidently, she further emphasizes the role reversal and tells the man whom she courts—Demetrius—to, "Run when you will, the story shall be changed" (*Midsummer*, 2.1.230). Helena goes on to reveal the shift in gender expectations when she flips the norms and acknowledges the flaws of this rigid structure: "further Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase. / The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind / Makes speed to catch the tiger—bootless speed, / When cowardice pursues and valor flies" (2.1.231-34). By giving the meek creatures the powerful action verbs, she reverses the gender roles.

allows her to defy these expectations of her gender. Othello even describes his wife's androgynous attitude: "she wished / That heaven had made her such a man" (1.3.163-64) and explains how Desdemona encouraged him to "woo her" (1.3.168), rather than waiting to be courted. Her marriage came not of someone else's choosing, but of her own, as Othello's adventurousness appealed to her. Desdemona's father, on the other hand, possessively exerts his power over her, as if one of his belongings has been threatened. Othello takes a far different approach, treating Desdemona as an equal who can make her own decisions. He trusts her to speak for herself, so when Iago and Brabantio discuss her role in the relationship, Othello boldly encourages the men to "Send for the lady to the Sagittary, / And let her speak of me before her father" (1.3.117-18). Rather than continue to speak on her behalf, Othello shows respect for his wife by giving her the license to use her own voice.

The act of a wedding and the bride's father's foundational role within it help to maintain the concept of marriage as a contract to be negotiated between two men: the groom and the father of the bride. In this practice, a woman appears like an article of traffic, traded for a dowry. Othello fails to ask for Desdemona's father's blessing, and thus, disrupts the male process of handing down the women. This overstep of marriage without Brabantio's permission prompts questions of obedience as the proper transfer of ownership never occurred. Once Desdemona appears to speak about her marriage, her father questions her allegiance, asking, "Do you perceive in all this noble company / Where most you owe obedience?" (1.3.181-82). Because Desdemona did not endure the typical marriage transfer, she faces the difficult question of whether to lend her obedience to her husband or to her father. Desdemona answers that she holds a "divided duty" (1.3.183). Her response symbolizes the dissonance many women feel as they struggle to honor all men in their lives. A woman's obedience seemed a necessary part of life to

keep women from dismantling their constraints. Expected to protect both her father's and husband's reputations, Desdemona reasons that—just as her mother had with her own relationship—she must prefer the Moor “before her father” (1.3.189). Her inevitable need to displease one of the men renders her the victim of cruel distrust by her father, as he even sends the new couple away with a warning to Othello: “Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see. / She has deceived her father, and may thee” (1.3.295-96). Brabantio's statements hint that, through the male bonds of a patriarchal society, men form a natural alliance to protect paternal assurance when a woman has failed to fulfill the needs of all the men around her.

Desdemona continues to defy the marital expectations of her time by fleeing out of her father's safety to follow her husband to the battlefield. Cassio acknowledges their unique relationship by calling Desdemona “our great captain's captain” (2.1.76). Cassio openly admits to Desdemona's hold over her husband, as Othello continues to show admiration for Desdemona during their reunion, bestowing sweet compliments upon her and even empowering her by calling her “my fair warrior” (2.1.182). Othello grants an unusual position of power to his wife. Later Iago notices the same rarity when he notes, “The general's wife is now the general” (2.3.308-09) as he hopes to plant the seed of jealousy in Cassio. As Othello welcomes his wife, he foreshadows the dark undertones that Iago's plan later sets up: “If it were now to die, / 'Twere now 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” (2.1.187-91). Othello rejoices in Desdemona's presence, yet his speech also reveals the dark undertones of an unknown future. He acknowledges the beauty of having something so amazing but betrays his underlying paradoxical fear of losing this treasure.

Othello clearly values Desdemona and fears losing her, so his attachment lays the foundation for his catastrophic worry as Iago begins to meddle in the relationship. Although Shakespeare may not have directly known the psychological term “catastrophizing,” it certainly does not invalidate his apt understanding of the universal human feeling. Othello’s consistent signs of anxiety suggest that he worsens situations into delusions—he assumes the worst when nothing is wrong in reality. A huge part of this concept comes from psychologists’ general agreement that “anxiety and worry are important factors in paranoid experience” (Startup et al. 523). Othello’s appreciation for Desdemona instigates his worry and anxiety about losing her loyalty. Iago further enforces the pressures that can pollute a healthy level of jealousy as he perpetuates many of Othello’s anxiety-induced delusions. His affection for his wife is precisely what allows Iago’s influences to be successful; Othello could only catastrophize situations for which he cared deeply.

Unlike reformer Othello, Iago exemplifies societal pressures with deep roots in harsh stereotypes and biases as he elicits Othello’s paternal anxiety. His misogyny reinforces his distrust of women, which he expresses to his wife when he cruelly mocks, “Come on, come on. You are pictures out of doors, / Bells in your parlors, wild-cats in your kitchens, / Saints in your injuries, devils being offended, / Players in your housewifery, and housewives in your beds” (2.1.111-14). He criticizes women for their hypocrisy, yet he ironically fails to acknowledge his own duplicity as he constantly deceives people. He bears the sobriquet “honest Iago” (1.3.297) yet lies constantly. Iago’s ability to mislead all around him emulates the double-sidedness of human nature with his constant ironic hypocrisy. Exuding bitterness about Othello’s choice of Cassio for lieutenant, Iago’s trek for revenge stems from his very own jealousy. His suspicions of

his wife's infidelity with Othello only add fuel to the fire, as he allows his insecurities to drive his evil plot.

Iago fails initially to plant suspicions because Othello laughs at them: "'Tis not to make me jealous / To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company, / Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances well. / Where virtue is, these are more virtuous" (3.3.197-200). He reminds himself that he has faith in his wife and will not doubt her loyalty—after all, he fell in love with her because of her warm, bubbly spirit. He continues, "Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw / The smallest fear or doubt of her revolt, / For she had eyes, and chose me" (3.3.201-03).

Othello's descriptions of his wife show trust, respect, and appreciation; he feels no worries about her outgoing nature as he feels secure with the fact that she consciously chose to be with him of her own free will. The emphasis on her sight reinforces Othello's belief that his wife fully saw him—including his insecurities, especially related to his race—and still consciously made the decision to marry him, so he refuses to allow jealousy to torment his mind, remaining "not much moved" (3.3.240). He adamantly refuses to adopt Iago's unhealthy mindset, which is driven by jealousy.

Beneath Othello's seemingly unshakeable attitude, his hasty repetition reveals that Iago's rumors bother him despite his claims otherwise. Eventually Iago's prods gain momentum, so Othello's tone changes when he contradicts his prior sentiments and begins to desire proof: "I'll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove, / And on the proof there is no more but this: / Away at once with love or jealousy" (3.3.204-06). He shows clear signs of dissonance as he struggles with what to believe, and becomes solely obsessed with attaining a sense of certainty. In his conflict, he grows angrier and more defensive toward Iago, demanding, "Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore, / Be sure of it. Give me the ocular proof" (3.3.375-76). Such a request

seems his only option to escape the indecision that torments him; sight appears as a consistent theme throughout the play as he longs for tangible evidence of Desdemona's supposed infidelity. He shows a new anger toward Iago in response to his skepticism, but in reality, the anger really buds from the jealous monster that Iago has placed inside of his mind.

Othello's jealousy aptly demonstrates the irrationality that the cruel emotion can create; jealousy warps reality and builds upon delusion. Iago uses jealousy's irrationality to his benefit as he attempts to evoke Othello's erratic responses. When Iago first refers to jealousy, drawing Othello's attention, he facetiously remarks, "Ha, I like not that" (3.3.35) in response to their sighting of Cassio and Desdemona's interaction. The vagueness of the loose demonstrative "that" lays the groundwork for an empty implication that seemingly holds something deeper underneath its simplicity; Iago's underhanded statements plant a seed to fester in Othello. Iago continues the trend of mysteriously omitting details to concern and confuse Othello even more, building upon his theory of jealousy's ability to rise out of nothing.

Hinting at its volatility, Iago frequently recognizes jealousy's ability to feed upon the unknown. He duplicitously acknowledges the dangers of jealousy, lamenting, "As I confess it is my nature's plague / To spy into abuses and oft my jealousy / Shapes faults that are not" (3.3.159-61). Iago recognizes the deception of jealousy, but in reality, he does so only to make himself appear more credible. Emilia heightens the insidiousness of jealousy in the next scene by describing it as "a monster begot upon itself, born on itself" (3.4.162-63). Iago works to break down Othello's rational mindset and corrode his sense of reason. The mere implication that something could be the truth proves enough to make Othello question reality and undermine his own beliefs. Exploiting Othello's position as an outsider against him, Iago asserts his own position to make Othello trust him: "Look to't / I know our country disposition well" (3.3.214).

Iago manipulatively works to make Othello believe that he possesses a knowledge that Othello lacks. He then furthers his sexist stereotypes toward Venetian women: “In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks / They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience / Is not to leave’t undone but kept unknown” (3.3.216-18). Iago makes Othello’s strong faith in his wife seem like a weakness; he tries to brew feelings of naïvety in order to mold Othello’s beliefs about Desdemona.

Much like Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Othello faces a difficult choice: whether to adhere to male bonds or to side with his love interest. Othello ignorantly calls Iago “honest” on twelve occasions, naïvely believing that his antagonist has good intentions. However, Iago’s claims create confusion for Othello, who uses the label “villain” to lash out against Iago’s persistence (3.3.375). Othello’s sudden outburst of anger contradicts his prior praises of Iago and his new attempt to dismiss the accusations toward Desdemona. His internal conflict illustrates his struggle to choose between loyalty to his friend or trust in his wife. The gap between appearances and reality hints at human deceptiveness and connects to the fears that cause jealousy and make Othello stress about the emasculation implicit in cuckoldry: “But, oh, what damnèd minutes tells he o’er / Who dotes, yet doubts—suspects, yet soundly loves!” (3.3.182-83). Lamenting the possibility of appearing as a fool, he allows this anxiety to drive his actions; fear of the unknown leads Othello to believe in a delusion simply as a means of self-preservation. Iago plants fictitious images in Othello’s head to fill the place of the proof he craves, questioning, “But how? How satisfied, my lord? / Would you the supervisor, grossly gape on? / Behold her topped?” (3.3.410-12). Although Othello never witnesses his wife with another man, the images that Iago conjures are enough for him to imagine them ceaselessly. These cruel attempts lead Othello to the darker side of jealousy, displaying a cognitive and suspicious

reaction. Iago's cruel lies create a foundation of suspicion so that the discovery of Desdemona's strawberry handkerchief only cements Othello's pre-existing doubts.

Frequent metaphors in the temptation scene (3.3) add to its drama, as tormented Othello experiences extreme dissonance over how to handle his relationship. As he loses faith in Desdemona, he retreats to the racial slurs and animalistic images from the first act: "Haply for I am black, / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have; or for I am declined / Into the vale of years—yet that's not much— / She's gone. I am abused, and my relief / Must be to loathe her" (3.3.279-84). Othello views Desdemona as "gone" because she has supposedly stepped outside of her role in their relationship (3.3.283). Othello believes now that he has no choice other than to cut the ties of their contractual agreement because this investment has brought no benefits: "Oh, curse of marriage, / That we can call these delicate creatures ours / And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad / And live upon the vapor of a dungeon / Than keep a corner in the thing I love / For others' uses" (3.3.284-89). His descriptions of marriage reveal his disillusionment with his wife whose ostensible appetite suggests that she has some sort of uncontrollable impulse, which led her to these choices. He even goes as far as suggesting that he would rather be a toad in a dungeon than to live his life as a cuckold. He concludes his hopeless statement, lamenting, "Yet 'tis the plague of great ones; / Prerogated are they less than the base. / 'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death" (3.3.289-91). Othello's speech reveals how quickly his attitude has changed as he moves from devotion to betrayal almost instantly. Although he claims, at first, not to believe Iago's accusations, this monologue reveals his underlying sense of doubt, which he pursues in attempting to find physical evidence. Iago exploits the strawberry handkerchief as a means of fulfilling this search.

The strawberry handkerchief, in itself, represents so much more than just a token of love between the couple. A symbol for a common practice of Shakespeare's time, the handkerchief represents the bloody bedsheets of the wedding night, which were often retained as evidence of a wife's virginity before the marriage (Boose 363). Although Othello originally shows an egalitarian spirit, the handkerchief brings out his instinctive propensity toward jealousy and self-preservation when Desdemona fails to tell him where she left it. Despite Desdemona's naïvety in failing to see her husband's newfound jealousy, the couple's conversation about the handkerchief certainly exposes his new side as he simply yells, "The handkerchief!" (3.4.94, 95, 98) angrily three times in a row. The encounter brings up new realizations for Othello, as well, as his jealousy reaches new heights. His once kind tone toward Desdemona changes drastically, as he declares to Iago, "I will chop her into messes! Cuckold me?" (4.1.201). His threats of violence reveal his inner fear and aversion toward cuckoldry as he works to protect his masculinity and pride through assertions of dominance.

In his attempts to prevent his own humiliation, Othello begins to validate his fears. Confirmation bias is an important psychological concept that arises in a conflict. Othello serves as a perfect example of this theory of bias when he seeks evidence that Iago has led him to believe. Confirmation bias within the field of psychology is a natural propensity technically defined as "the tendency to search for evidence that supports a preconceived or favoured theory," and the phenomenon also has an association with illusory correlations where individuals create a misconceived relationship between two things that, in reality, have no connection (Whitesmith 184). Although Iago plants the idea in Othello's head, Othello is the one who refuses to let the subject go without investigating it even further. As Brents Stirling astutely observes, "It is Othello who demands demonstrations of Desdemona's guilt" (137). He craves proof as the

powerful force of jealousy in his mind convinces him that there is no possibility of its nonexistence. Othello's psychological struggle even leads him to the point of an emotional collapse. Othello both wants to disprove his fears and craves answers from the unknown, so this internal discord leads him to seek proof, validating the false images inside of his head.

Despite Othello's every attempt to trust his wife and defy society's harsh treatment of women, he eventually succumbs to societal pressures and betrays his faith in her. Iago's constant coercion of Othello to adhere to a typical misogynistic view could serve as a symbol for the patriarchy's use of societal structures to appease certain biological instincts. Othello's treatment of his wife at the start of the play threatens the patriarchy by affording a woman too much power, so Iago's influences attempt to protect male authority. Othello's eventual fear of cuckoldry leads him to kill his wife—the harshest form of dominance and oppression he could possibly exercise over her. Othello clearly shows signs of morbid jealousy, or Othello syndrome,⁴ with his unfounded distrust and extreme possessiveness of Desdemona. His erratic jealousy ultimately leads to his violence: losing self-control, he murders her brutally, subconsciously allowing his impulses to go against his values. His trajectory proves that the strength of biological and cultural influences can become so powerful that even the kind and genial Othello can reverse himself.

As Othello steps into his more socially accepted role, he begins to adopt Iago's misogynistic attitudes. His transformation shows the development of hostile sexism, which often takes shape when men believe that women have stepped out of their traditional roles. Othello originally shows faith and trust in Desdemona, free from even signs of benevolent sexism. Yet his fear of her infidelity proves enough to kickstart his signs of hostile sexism as he criticizes her

⁴ Male violence in response to spousal infidelity remains a very frequent trend today (Aldrige and Brown 266). This trend hints at the level of passion that comes from the unwavering instincts by which humans are influenced.

hatefully with no regard for her well-being. He damns her before he kills her: “Ay, let her rot and perish and be damned tonight, for she shall not live. No, my heart is turned to stone. I strike it and it hurts my hand. Oh, the world hath not a sweeter creature, she might lie by an emperor’s side and command him tasks” (4.1.183-87). In his anger at Desdemona’s alleged sexual promiscuity, he explicitly acknowledges his change of heart. The societal pressure pushes him toward jealousy and permanently hardens him toward his wife to whom he once showed tenderness.

Surprisingly, despite Iago’s clear misogyny, Emilia defies her husband to support Desdemona. She reminds her friend, “Let husbands know / Their wives have sense like them: they see and smell / And have their palates both for sweet and sour, / As husbands have” (4.3.96-99). Desdemona, however, lacks Emilia’s confidence; as her husband displays more toxic masculinity, she retreats into the cultural wifely expectations. As Othello’s brutality increases, Desdemona submits and frees him from blame, singing, “his scorn I approve” (4.3.54). Othello’s cruel sexism causes her to become “helplessly passive” (Neely 133), unlike her prior free-willed spirit. Othello’s insecurities drive his dominance over Desdemona as he tries to protect himself, justifying his actions by claiming that otherwise, “she’ll betray more men” (5.2.6). Just as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, an innocent woman gets confronted with the cruel punishment of death merely because of a man’s insecurity. Othello’s susceptibility to Iago’s pressures leads to their relationship’s eventual metamorphosis as they adopt stereotypical gender roles that they had originally evaded.

Although Othello and Desdemona begin their love story by opposing all societal conventions forced upon them, Iago pressures Othello to share his sexist view of women. Desdemona initially believes that Othello lacks the jealous impulse, but she is eventually proven

wrong as he becomes controlling and violent. When Othello's insecurities and fears drive his confirmation bias, his biological propensity materializes. At the heart of his jealousy and anguish, however, is Othello's passion. While Desdemona remains true to him until the end, believing in their authentic love, his care for her becomes his downfall, ultimately driving his insecurities as he fears losing her. While their relationship starts with expressions of equality and value, fear and insecurity quickly shift Othello toward needs for possession and control. As Othello succumbs to Iago's pressures, he reveals how biological impulses can be molded or exploited by society.

“Partake no Venom”: Dangerous Knowledge

The most blatant example of a longing for paternal assurance comes through *The Winter's Tale* as Leontes, the King of Sicily and protagonist of the play, undergoes a fit of jealousy in his struggle with his wife's supposed infidelity. His jealousy proves the catalyst for his sudden fury against his wife, Hermione, and his childhood friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia. Leontes's unsubstantiated accusations turn the former friends into enemies. Leontes's paranoid behavior stems from his fear of cuckoldry as he questions his paternal assurance. The lack of justification behind his fears, however, creates irony in his poor choices and exposes the dark sides of jealousy. Just as in *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Winter's Tale* shows how jealousy can result in delusion. However, unlike Othello's jealousy, which develops from pressures of the villainous Iago, Leontes's madness is “self-born” (Schwartz 250); all of his worries and anxieties stem entirely from an internal, pathological conflict. Jealousy's onslaught means that it strikes unnecessarily in the absence of any threat. Leontes's tragic trajectory suggests that evolutionary adaptations, meant to be defense mechanisms against threats, can become unruly and uncontrollable when employed at inappropriate times. Leontes's delusion ultimately leads to self-sabotage and a loss of happiness as he falsely believes himself a victim of an imagined affair between Hermione and Polixenes.

The Winter's Tale quickly exposes the paradox ingrained in the two Kings' friendship when Archimadus, a member of the Bohemian court, summarizes the friendship that links the two kings: “They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.1.22-24). The double-entendre of the verb “branch” creates ambiguity as the two men have the ability either to grow together from the

same root or to branch away in separate paths (1.1.24). Their childhood memories explain the changes in their relationships; they met as innocent boys, as “twinned lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun” (1.2.67), but they have become more worldly in adulthood. Polixenes equates his loss of innocence with his introduction to the world of women: “And our weak spirits ne’er been higher reared / With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven / Boldly “not guilty,” the imposition cleared / Hereditary ours” (1.2.71-75). Polixenes suggests that their natural propensity for sin arises with their association with “stronger blood,” which also means sexual passion (1.2.72). The use of the adjective “hereditary” suggests that men inherit the sinfulness of lust. Hermione acknowledges this idea when she responds, “Th’ offenses we have made you do we’ll answer, / If you first sinned with us, and that with us / You did continue fault, and that you slipped not / With any but with us” (1.2.83-86). Hermione becomes an Eve-like figure as she shoulders the responsibility of her husband’s corruption. Just like Desdemona when she sings “his scorn I approve” (*Othello* 4.3.54) about her husband’s faults, Hermione acknowledges the enforced responsibility for women to act as a moral compass in their relationships and take the blame. Through the playful conversation, misogynistic men often attribute the root of male sin and competition to women, who they believe control male desires to achieve successful offspring through a committed and faithful mate. Rivalry exists between men and women as women can fulfill male goals but can simultaneously be the source of their anxieties, an example of how closely competition and cooperation align.

Although Leontes begs his wife to persuade Polixenes to stay, he grows jealous of her ability to succeed when he himself has failed. While Leontes attempts to persuade Polixenes to prolong his stay, the King of Bohemia expresses his appreciation of their friendship by responding, “There is no tongue that moves, none, none i’ th’ world, / So soon as yours could

win me” (1.2.20-21). Yet only when Hermione speaks up to plead does he actually make the commitment. Leontes urges his wife to aid him, questioning, “Tongue-tied, our queen? / Speak you” (1.2.27), but he quickly changes his tune when Hermione reports that Polixenes will, in fact, stay. Leontes curtly responds, “At my request he would not” (1.2.87). As Hermione extends her hand to Polixenes with an expression of friendship, Leontes immediately grows enraged and begins to suspect her of infidelity. Despite his request that Hermione speak to Polixenes, Leontes does not believe that Polixenes has agreed to stay in the spirit of friendship.

Leontes’s jealous outburst reveals that he has lost the eloquence of a king as he launches into an erratic tirade. Exclaiming, “Too hot, too hot!” Leontes declares, “My heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy” (1.2.108, 110-11). His jealousy, spurred because Polixenes touches Hermione’s hand, portrays his mental instability as the repetition and caesuras in his moment of panic produce choppy undertones. The shift happens so suddenly that it seems totally unjustified. A connection to paternal assurance promptly arises when he finishes his speech by questioning, “Mamillius, / Art thou my boy?” (1.2.119-20). Leontes quickly reacts to his newfound jealousy by seeking paternal assurance from his son—a key offshoot of evolutionary psychology. Whereas Hero, Claudio, Desdemona, and Othello are only beginning their relationships at the start of their respective plays, Leontes and Hermione are already parents, so jealousy offers a more intense look at its role as an evolutionary adaptation through the male struggle for certainty about genetic lineage. The Sicilian couple’s established relationship builds tension as Leontes questions the authenticity of his young son and expected daughter.

Competition often exists between men when the threat of an affair arises with one's mate. The concept of mate poaching largely stems from a belief that individuals in a committed relationship may be more attractive than those who are single, so “it might be adaptive to obtain

an already attached mate in order to have a better chance of reproducing” (Kohler 2). In order to exercise mate retention and protect partners from being poached, mate-guarding tactics develop, which Leontes often exhibits. The higher propensity for sexual jealousy from men sparks their possessiveness toward their partner’s physical being. Leontes quickly employs mate-guarding behaviors when Hermione’s hand is touched. These methods of safeguarding can be simple, such as the maintenance of close proximity to one’s mate, but can also be more meticulous practices as when a mate threatens rivals or asks a partner to wear a wedding ring—a visual symbol of possession. Although meant to serve a positive and protective role, these measures can create problems.

Leontes watches his wife and friend’s interaction carefully, remaining physically close to Hermione throughout her dialogue with Polixenes. He later attempts to ward off his rival by threatening his life and displaying possessive behavior toward Hermione. Although Leontes certainly employs mate-guarding techniques, he believes that his wife has already been unfaithful, and therefore, that the mate poaching has already occurred. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione’s pregnancy at the time of the conflict opens the door for Leontes to believe that his expected child already does not share his DNA. His doubt sparks his strong yearning for a sense of paternal certainty. He quickly dismisses his previous mate-guarding techniques and moves toward protection from cuckoldry.

Although Leontes’s thought process clearly proves inconsistent, he never allows himself to abandon his distrust of his wife. Believing that all women make cuckolds of their husbands, he finds comfort in the ubiquitousness of jealousy, accepting its role as a common and useful emotion: “Physic for’t there’s none. It is a bawdy planet, that will strike. / Where ‘tis predominant; and ‘tis powerful, think it, / From east, west, north, and south. Be it concluded, /

No barricado for a belly” (1.2.200-04). Despite Leontes’s overwhelming sense of ignorance throughout the play, he displays a profound understanding in this moment as he describes the universal experience of jealousy as a vehicle for men to protect their own interests. He explicitly ties together a connection between possessiveness in romantic relationships and the womb’s openness without a barricade against “the enemy” (1.2.205). Shakespeare recognizes the use of mate-guarding—an evolutionary adaptation—as protection for offspring via romantic jealousy as a defense mechanism. The incompatibility in his thought process also creates confusion in his relationship with his son. The womb becomes a home for the interests of men, and when intruded upon, it can become the downfall of their investments.

Children serve a complex role in terms of paternal assurance; although unable to control their own genetic lineage, they immediately become the direct holder of their parents’ interests once born—especially for their fathers. In another of Shakespeare’s tragedies, Hamlet’s attempts to guarantee his mother’s fidelity past his father’s death resembles this role for children as his actions suggest the need for filial duty to seek paternal assurance. The complex relationship between competition and cooperation also occurs for children with their paradoxical role as they fulfill their father’s need for assurance but lack control on the matter. Polixenes describes his paradoxical relationship with his son, Florizel: “He’s all my exercise, my mirth, my matter, / Now my sworn friend and then mine enemy, / My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all” (1.2.166-68). The mock rivalry with which Polixenes describes Florizel shows how quickly this relationship forms between fathers and children. As men compete for paternal assurance but simultaneously bond over mutual interests, they form uniquely volatile yet affectionate relationships with those around them. Leontes similarly later calls his son, Mamillius, “Sweet villain! / Most dear’st!” (1.2.136-37) while debating the legitimacy of his paternity. His

contradictory epithet serves as an expression of how children can symbolize men's downfall into cuckoldry or the vehicle for their genetics to continue successfully.

Just as Othello searches for ocular proof against cuckoldry, Leontes attempts to do the same, hoping to find visual evidence to give him clarity. This metaphorical need for tangible confirmation hints at the perpetual evolutionary struggle for men to feel assured in their relationships without a hardwired protection. Men eagerly search for a guarantee only to find nothing. Ironically, the nothing that men gather mirrors the woman's "nothing"—slang for female genitalia—which frequently appears in conversations of sex-linked differences (Wilbern 375). Leontes eloquently describes this eternal search for truth: "There may be in the cup / A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart, / And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge / Is not infected" (2.1.39-42). Leontes hints that a man who does not know of his wife's infidelity will never experience the venomous knowledge; he can be surrounded by a dangerous situation but remain blissfully ignorant when unaware. Yet, "if one present / Th' abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known / How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides, / With violent hefts" (2.1.42-45). Once the beholder does see the spider, he can no longer unsee the evidence and will lose control of his actions. The venom will take control and violently remove his free will. Leontes admits that he, himself, has become victim to the venom when he asserts, "I have drunk, and seen the spider" (2.1.45). The spider, even if fictional, cannot be removed from his eye.

Men use the likeness of their children as a means of fulfillment in their search for the physical something to eradicate their worries. Leontes shows an obsession with Mamillius's appearance as his only indicator for this paternal assurance, viewing his shared likeness with his son as confirmation for his masculine insecurities. However, his constant inconsistency and sexism follow him into these considerations. While Leontes attempts to work through this

cognitive dissonance, he acknowledges the similarities that women identify between himself and his son. He looks particularly at Mamillius's nose, relenting, "they say it is a copy out of mine" (1.2.122) and again later, "They say we are / Almost as alike as eggs" (1.2.129-30). Yet he dismisses the information, arguing that "women say so, / That will say anything" (1.2.130-31), and further, deeming women "false / As o'erdyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false / As dice that are to be wished by one that fixes / No bourn 'twixt his and mine" (1.2.131-34). As Leontes works through his question of whether he is truly Mamillius's biological father, he echoes the same prior line of questioning by retorting, "Art thou my calf?" (1.2.127). His diction includes animalistic references and hints at the image of a cuckold as he prods Mamillius playfully while watching his wife and friend. Shakespeare's use of anthropomorphism as Leontes considers his relationship with his son hints at the effects of evolutionary behaviors on human nature as they are molded through a biological basis much like nonhuman organisms.

After Leontes's eventual public accusations of Hermione, the conversations of likeness come up once again with his daughter, Perdita. When Paulina insists on Leontes's paternity of his newborn daughter, she brings the baby and implores the King to see past his faulty thinking: "Although the print be little, the whole matter / And copy of the father—eye, nose, lip, / The trick of's frown, his forehead, nay, the valley, / The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles, / The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger" (2.3.99-103). She describes each physical trait that the King shares with his young daughter as she hopes to spark a connection between the two. However, she grows more temperamental with her speech, continuing, "And thou, good goddess Nature, which hast made it / So like to him that got it, if thou hast / The ordering of the mind too, 'mongst all colours / No yellow in't, lest she suspect, as he does, / Her children not her husband's!" (2.3.104-08). She urges Leontes to acknowledge his obvious

similarities with Perdita and then concludes with a dig at him; because they are so alike, Paulina suggests that if the child shares his insane mind, she will one day make the same preposterous accusations of her spouse. Despite Paulina's genuine attempts, the typical comfort of likeness between father and children does not alleviate Leontes' insecurities; he remains uncertain about his wife's fidelity and dismisses all attempts to ease his concerns.

Many others around Leontes also attempt to make him acknowledge the pathology of his thoughts, but he refuses to listen, stuck in a state of confirmation bias. Even when others try to convince him of his faulty rationale, he becomes hardened in his own beliefs. Leontes invalidates all contrasting evidence with his preconceived notions and unwillingness to change. When Camillo first hears about the King's concerns, he quickly comes to Hermione's defense: "I would not be a stander-by to hear / My sovereign mistress clouded so without / My present vengeance taken. 'Shrew my heart, / You never spoke what did become you less / Than this . . .'" (1.2.278-82). However, Leontes's response reveals his unwillingness to listen as he commands Camillo to agree with his forgone conclusion: "say it be, 'tis true" (1.2.297). When Camillo refuses to confirm his unfounded assumptions, Leontes promptly exclaims, "You lie, you lie!" (1.2.298). He even blatantly acknowledges his intention to disregard others' opinions: "Thou dost advise me / Even so as I mine own course have set down" (1.2.338-39). Too stubborn to consider his own ignorance, Leontes fails to see the flaw in his thinking. Unlike Othello, who combats Iago's accusations of Desdemona, Leontes does entirely the opposite by convincing himself of his worries all alone and chastising any who disagree. While talking to Polixenes, Camillo ironically encapsulates Leontes's hasty self-sabotage as he reasons, "But I am sure 'tis safer to / Avoid what's grown than question how 'tis born" (1.2.431-32). The catastrophic

consequences of the play come from this unhealthy response to anxiety in which rash decisions and poor communication result in an avoidance of the unknown.

Others share Camillo's attitude and boldly defend Hermione as when a lord declares, "For her, my lord, I dare my life lay down—and will do't, sir, / Please you accept it—that the queen is spotless / I' th' eyes of heaven, and to you—I mean / In this which you accuse her" (2.1.130-34). Like Antigonus, the other members of the court display their belief in the Queen by pushing back against patriarchal structures. The King's employees portray a willingness to risk their own lives to defend the Queen. Any attempt to defend a woman over a powerful king would serve as a direct attack against patriarchy. The underlying sense of sexism that exists within the play only emphasizes this point further because of the audaciousness with which these acts would have been perceived as the men forfeit their unspoken patriarchal commitment to defend a woman.

Patriarchy depends on a guarantee of power and control over women and their reproduction. Antigonus refuses to believe Leontes's accusations, but states, "If it prove / She's otherwise, I'll keep my stables where / I lodge my wife. I'll go in couples with her; / Than when I feel and see her no farther trust her" (2.1.134-37). He explains the preposterousness of the claims with his belief in the Queen's integrity as if to suggest that if Hermione cannot be trusted, no woman on earth can. Antigonus intentionally makes these outlandish statements that do not align with his more progressive nature to demonstrate the magnitude of his belief in Hermione's innocence. He again makes a bold statement about women by following up, "Be she honor-flawed, / I have three daughters—the eldest is eleven, / The second and third, nine and some five—/ If this prove true, they'll pay for't. By mine honor, / I'll geld 'em all! Fourteen they shall not see / To bring false generations" (2.1.144-49). Once again, he holds Hermione up as the

standard for all women, even his daughters. Antigonus's attitude dramatically shows how extremely men fear cuckoldry and the lengths to which he would be willing to go in order to protect patriarchy against the threat of eradication. Believing in Hermione's integrity, Antigonus defends her even though he does the king's bidding.

Many come to Hermione's aid, but Leontes remains unwilling to listen, lashing out, "You're liars all" (2.3.146). As Leontes dismisses each piece of evidence given to him, angry that those around him would take the defense of a woman over him, he often displays harsh, hostile sexism against women. He grows more sexist and angry with each of these attempts, even questioning Antigonus about his lack of control over his wife: "what, canst not rule her?" (2.3.46). Leontes reveals his own problems of superficiality and prejudice as he mocks the couple's genuine relationship and Paulina's level of power as a woman, unconfined by her husband. By juxtaposing a traditionally patriarchal couple with a more progressive and tolerant couple, Shakespeare shows the effects of social and biological influences on a relationship. Similarly to Benedick and Beatrice, Antigonus and Paulina defy the standards of the time, untouched by outside pressures. Although their marriage faces a tragedy in Antigonus's death, the loss only comes as an effect of Antigonus's adherence to the King's orders. Paulina remains one of the most intelligent and outspoken characters throughout the play. Shakespeare seems to suggest that not all societal structures should remain, and like Paulina—who displays brave rebelliousness, society can subvert these unhealthy behaviors to develop loyal and equal relationships.

Even when Hermione gracefully defends herself at length, Leontes remains unmoved and calls for her to "Look for no less than death" (3.2.91). However, a Lord once again comes to Hermione's aid and supports her request to face judgment only from Apollo. He agrees, "This

your request / Is altogether just. Therefore bring forth, / And in Apollo's name, his oracle" (3.2.116-18). Hermione's willingness to have a deity speak on her behalf shows the truth behind her statements. However, when the Officers return with the seal of the oracle, and to Leontes's surprise, it asserts that "Hermione is chaste" (3.2.132), the infallibility of the deity means little to her husband. Leontes exhibits his clear delusion, merely responding, "There is no truth at all i'th'oracle. / The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood" (3.2.140-41). No matter the amount of evidence that arises, he remains sure of his own interpretation of the facts—even above the opinions of a deity. Leontes's close-mindedness mirrors a conversation between Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello* when, in response to her discovery of her husband's jealousy, Desdemona protests, "Alas the day! I never gave him any cause" (3.4.159). Emilia's response perfectly captures Leontes's stubbornness with his self-made delusions as they have no basis in any true cause. She explains Othello's confusing actions by aptly highlighting the irrationality of jealousy: "But jealous souls will not be answered so. / They are not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous for they're jealous" (3.4.160-63). Like Othello's ignorance, Leontes's inflated sense of confidence conforms to the phenomenon now known as "the Dunning-Kruger effect," which looks at meta-ignorance where individuals fail to recognize their own lack of knowledge and proclaim themselves experts on a specific topic or concept (Motta et al. 2). Although modern psychologists typically apply this bias to conversations of science, politics, and specific skill sets, characters like Leontes certainly spark the broader conversation of failed self-awareness through internal and external incongruities.

Leontes's unwillingness to listen sparks tension with many others much like his disagreements with Camillo. Antigonus, Paulina's husband, shares his wife's disbelief in the accusations. He describes the jealousy as a villain who has instigated this delusion: "You are

abused, and by some putter on / That will be damned for't. Would I knew the villain; / I would damn him" (2.1.142-44), which emulates Emilia's description of Othello when she discovers his jealousy: "The Moor's abused by some most villainous knave" (4.2.146). Unlike the literal villain—Iago—who pressures Othello into his irrational thought process, the so-called villain in Leontes's case, ironically, is himself. Antigonus, who cannot fathom Leontes's level of self-deception, believes that some abuser must create his delusions. Human nature overtakes him and thus, forces him into this position of self-destruction. Through these descriptions, Shakespeare portrays jealousy as an uncontrollable illness that consumes its victim and attacks logical thinking. He urges the audience to think about jealousy's dangerous ability to create a world of delusion.

Immediately after denying the evidence in front of him, however, Leontes confronts reality, and pays the price of his self-deception. Reporting, "The Prince, your son, with mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed, is gone" (3.2.144-45), a servant quickly clarifies his euphemism by adding, "Is dead" (3.2.145). The tragedy intensifies as the queen swoons and Paulina reports, "I sat she's dead. I'll swear't" (3.2.203). Faced with the consequences of his actions, Leontes quickly realizes that he has caused the deaths of both his wife and his son. He laments, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (3.2.146-47). Leontes takes ownership over his mistakes only after the damage has occurred. He loses his family in a matter of moments and dooms himself to sixteen years of loneliness and grief. He remains depressed and alone, unaware that his daughter—who survives in Bohemia thanks to Antigonus's thoughtfulness in his delivery of her as an infant—still lives with a shepherd while in love with Polixenes's son, Florizel. This information arrives in a soliloquy by Time

personified, who begins act 4 by informing the audience of the sixteen-year gap between the Shepherd's discovery of the baby, Perdita, and her budding romance with the Bohemian prince.

When, in the final act, the focus returns to Sicily, Leontes appears more contrite than ever as he mourns, "Killed? / She I killed? I did so" (5.1.15-16). Blaming himself for his loss, he continues to sulk over it, concluding, "heirless it hath made my kingdom" (5.1.9). Ironically, Leontes's earlier concerns about the legitimacy of his children ultimately leave him childless for sixteen years. Humbled by his depression, Leontes no longer appears domineering as he did at the start of the play; instead, he is now regretful. Yet when Florizel greets him, he still draws from innate obsessions with paternal assurance as he recognizes the young Prince's shared appearance with his father, Polixenes. Mirroring his prior acknowledgments of his likeness with his own son, Mamillius, Leontes comments, "Your mother was most true to wedlock, prince, / For she did print your royal father off, / Conceiving you. Were I but twenty-one, / Your father's image is so hit in you" (5.1.124-27). Even as he remains sorrowful over his mistaken jealous obsessions, he still shows his masculine compulsory need to compare appearance as a means of paternal assurance for men. When Florizel responds to his comments by claiming that his father sends greetings, Leontes laments, "O my brother, / Good gentleman, the wrongs I have done thee stir / Afresh within me, and these thy offices, / So rarely kind, are as interpreters / Of my behindhand slackness" (5.1.147-51). Leontes's expressions reveal that the guilt he endures remains just as fresh as when the conflict happened sixteen years earlier. His dramatic statements of remorse show the toll that poor choices have had on the King.

After the report of the two Kings' reunion, Leontes and Polixenes, along with Florizel, Perdita, Paulina and Camillo, gather around a recreation of Hermione in the form of a statue. Leontes's build-up of regret over a long period heightens as Paulina dramatically draws the

curtain, warning, “Prepare / to see the life as lively mocked as ever” (5.3.18-19). Leontes immediately agrees with Paulina’s sentiment, exclaiming, “Her natural posture!” as he sees the life-like resemblance of Hermione (5.3.23). However, Leontes recognizes a slight difference in her appearance, noting, “But yet, Paulina, / Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing, / So aged as this seems” (5.3.27-29). The wrinkles that Hermione has sustained symbolize the irretrievable loss of the last sixteen years. As Leontes looks longingly on the statue, imploring Paulina not to “draw the curtain” (5.3.60), he exudes remorse for his actions. Leontes encapsulates the bittersweet feeling as he acknowledges the paradox of the moment: “For this affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort” (5.3.76-77). Despite his overwhelming guilt about his wife’s death, he appreciates her beauty in the form of the statue.

The group looks longingly upon her statue until Paulina dramatically proclaims, “Music, awake her! Strike!” (5.3.98) and the suspense of the scene peaks. The moment has a clearly magical element as Paulina declares, “Tis time. Descend. Be stone no more” (5.3.99), and Hermione’s supposed statue comes to life. When she descends, fully alive from her pedestal to reunite with her daughter and husband, the group responds in shock. Leontes embraces Hermione, and Perdita kneels before her mother as the play reaches its pinnacle of excitement. Paulina commands Leontes in his shock: “Do not shun her / Until you see her die again, for then / You kill her double” (5.3.105-07). By reminding him of his past errors and demanding that he not kill her with shame once again, Paulina emphasizes the unique circumstances under which the family reunion can take place: Hermione can return to life only once Leontes has fully recognized his full blame. The fictional element that Paulina describes as “Like an old tale” (5.3.118) reminds us that despite the magical excitement, remorse remains, and so beckons the audience to celebrate the moment with caution.

The Winter's Tale does not take on the more polarizing endings of the other two plays—complete tragedy in *Othello* and brazen happiness in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Rather, an underlying feeling of loss, confusion, and a small shred of redemption emerges from the play's conclusion. There appears to be an overarching tone of positivity with the union of Perdita and Florizel, the reunion of Polixenes and Leontes, and an engagement between Camillo and Paulina. *The Winter's Tale*'s genre of romance allows it to adapt a tone of magic in the final moments, so the final act culminates in a moment of excitement and celebration amidst the sadness. Unlike *Othello* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, which adopt polar extremes of emotions, *The Winter's Tale* exudes ambiguity and confusion as the characters all work to reconcile the past years of grief in multiple reunions.

Despite the magical elements in the final scene of the play, irreparable loss has undeniably occurred, and Leontes will never mend much of the damage. Leontes will never revive his son, Mamillius, and Paulina will never see her husband, Antigonus, again. All of those involved have also lost time that they could never regain; a lasting consequence of Leontes's jealousy. He himself acknowledges this tragic damage to his loved ones, calling it “the wide gap of time since first / We were dissevered” (5.3.156-57). This reminder of the sixteen year-gap between acts three and four enforces a key point: time is irreversible. Human nature is inherently wrapped up in the limits of a lifespan, so instincts must be carefully monitored so as not to steal precious moments. Although the reunions of *The Winter's Tale* occur joyfully, the overwhelming sense of loss in time lingers as a reminder that underneath the newfound happiness, the family also endures lasting consequences. The audience bears witness to Leontes's self-destruction and narcissism as yet another caution from Shakespeare that evolutionary and societal pressures on thoughts and actions can create abiding ramifications if the forces of jealousy take over.

Conclusion

“What Jealousies Awake”: The Dark Undersides of Nature and Nurture

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) portrays the human condition with complexity as he employs a profound understanding of human nature within his work as he transcends the changes of society (Greenblatt, *Norton* 4). His plays portray a stronger authenticity in their conception of the human condition than any modern psychologist could fathom. He captures complex emotions and propensities in a distinctly relatable way that allows his viewers to submerge themselves into the play—whether they watch from the Globe Theater, which burned down in 1613, or from the modern stage (Greenblatt 102-03). Harold Bloom acknowledges the truth behind Shakespeare’s depictions of human nature, reasoning, “*The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* could as soon be called *The Book of Reality*” (11). Both evolutionary and social psychology work to explain intentions behind human behaviors, but Shakespeare deepens the conversation as he highlights those behaviors’ effect: jealousy becomes dangerous quickly and can produce lasting consequences. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, and *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare notes how behaviors, originally adapted to achieve a goal, can turn dark through social pressures.

So much of human nature has roots in the form of adapted behaviors. Humans base their techniques for survival on what worked most successfully for their ancestors. After all, failed methods lead to the end of a lineage and thus, the failed offspring do not exist to perpetuate those patterns. Ultimately, in the theory of evolutionary psychology, organisms proceed in the manner that may best aid the continual success of their DNA, which, for humans, comes in the form of offspring. Although humans may not always be totally attuned to these media that hold an influence on their behaviors, so many of these adapted techniques persist nonetheless as subconscious tendencies. Individuals may not consciously think about the protection of their

future heritage in the midst of a jealous outburst, but the feeling likely developed as a means of defending personal investments. Although the goal of genetic lineage certainly does not remain the end-all or be-all in today's world, underlying behaviors remain and pressure individuals internally to act in a certain way.

Social psychologists push back against the concepts of evolutionary psychology and consider its sex-based binaries far too simplistic to account for individual differences. More specifically, many social psychologists argue that gendered expectations are enforced solely through society and that associations with biology do not justify their existence. Many assume that the evolutionary theoretical lens condones the principles that it establishes. However, in reality, evolutionary psychology merely works to deepen, not endorse, the understanding in the roots of human behavior. Shakespeare's depictions of Othello's and Claudio's erratic, jealous outbursts do not encourage their inexcusable behavior, but rather, work to caution against the trajectory of catastrophic thinking. Similarly, Leonato's sixteen years of loneliness and grief warn audiences about the loss that can come with adhering to dark impulses of jealousy. Developing this more informed approach allows psychologists to acknowledge the influences and patterns that we are accustomed to exhibit so that we can move past them when they are harmful.

William Shakespeare's work aptly shows that biology and society are not mutually exclusive agents, but rather that nature and nurture collaborate to dictate behavior. Genetic predispositions in no way suggest that behavior cannot also be informed by culture. In fact, evolutionary psychologist Stewart-Williams asserts that without culture, "we're as naked and vulnerable as a crab without a shell" (13) because societal norms dictate so many decisions and thoughts. Shakespeare addresses the timeless argument between nature and nurture and seems to

suggest that, in reality, the answer to the daunting question is meaningless. Rather, he argues, the true importance of studying behavior comes with individual responses to these influences. Art, as in Shakespeare's work, can play a crucial role in culture, working alongside our natural instincts to identify flaws and address problematic parts. Literature holds a unique ability to pass culture along and to implement changes in society.

Underlying instincts look to culture as a means of direction, which gives society the power to reinforce or to dismantle ingrained practices. Society can perpetuate these instinctual behaviors because culture creates a sense of normalcy in specific structures through metaphorical "rewards" and "punishments" in a "system of constraints" (Greenblatt, "Culture" 225-27). At times, society manipulates the reward system and perpetuates the darker parts of human nature in attempts to protect certain groups' interests. For example, men, who seek paternal assurance, hope to guarantee that their female partners remain faithful, so society encourages the use of fathers to uphold patriarchal structures and maintain the responsibility of passing daughters along to one man. Shakespeare thoughtfully explores how culture works alongside evolutionary adaptations to assuage threats; Leonato and Claudio control Hero through Elizabethan marital structures, and Brabantio struggles with Desdemona's evasion of the practice, as she marries Othello without a filial blessing. Leontes, who has already married his wife, abuses his societal structures and maintains patriarchal power as a man and King, cruelly dictating Hermione's fate. Each of these men has impulses of jealousy and rage that cause them to use their societal positions to protect their own interests.

Much Ado About Nothing, *Othello*, and *The Winter's Tale* all portray how society can also play a positive role of progress as individuals can question the motives behind problematic practices. Shakespeare investigates the system of constraints by implicitly acknowledging the

futility of the rewards and punishments. Hero, who should supposedly be rewarded for her compliance to her sexist society, only experiences shame; Desdemona, who adopts the blame for her husband, receives death in return; Hermione's loyalty gets traded for a loss of time and the death of her child. On the other side, Beatrice, Emilia, and Paulina who should theoretically be "punished" for their defiance, face little backlash in return. Shakespeare dismantles society's adherence to a culture of constraints by encouraging individuals to recognize the unfairness of the system. Hero, Desdemona, and Hermione all fall victim to the punishments undeservingly, as they each experience the consequences of erratic outbursts from their partners' paternal anxieties.

Humans are far too complex to boil down to good-or bad-natured. Rather, we have a vast range of emotions, thought patterns, and behaviors that can be attributed to both genetic and environmental forces. These universally experienced feelings did not develop randomly or out of nowhere; humans adopt them to address a problem or achieve a goal. Therefore, no matter how unpleasant feelings like jealousy may be, they emerged with a specific purpose. Similarly, the sex-based differences, although often unfair, certainly had a purpose in terms of evolutionary success. Yet the function of these behaviors does not always eradicate the problems that they create within society. Shakespeare examines some of the problems that these adaptations can create through bold characters who push back. The human mind often makes mistakes when employing evolutionary adaptations, and individuals may quickly discover the darker sides of human nature.

Much Ado About Nothing centers upon a highly patriarchal society with one woman who adheres to its expectations—Hero, and another woman who refuses to conform to a wifely role—Beatrice. Claudio's unfounded jealousy drives his cruelty toward Hero as he moves from a

chivalric attitude to hostile treatment toward her. He publicly shames her to the point of her supposed death with the support of all the men, including her own father. The bonds of patriarchy prove a crucial point of tension in the play as the men unfairly ruin Hero's reputation, and the women have little say. Beatrice demands that Benedick overlook the constraints of strict gender roles, so his bold defense of Hero symbolizes a rebellion against his social expectations as a man. Beatrice recognizes faults in the impulsive behaviors men display, so she refuses to give into the harsh standards for women. Beatrice and Benedick work together as a couple to defy the societal structures that reinforce dark sides of human nature.

Othello begins his marriage by pushing back against the norms that his society tries to enforce. Much like Benedick, he opposes Claudio's possessive attitudes and values Desdemona for more than the ideals of Elizabethan women. Just as Beatrice does, Desdemona enters into her relationship of her own free will and defies the standard of her father's blessing. Iago, however, acts as a symbol for social pressure within the play, continually pushing to evoke Othello's instincts for jealousy. He manipulatively uses Othello's isolation and naivety about Venice against him to establish an aura of superiority. Othello's defense of Desdemona slowly wanes as Iago's pressures become more intense and find grounding in false evidence with the handkerchief. Despite Othello's attempts to remain calm and trusting, Iago reinforces Othello's biological impulses through societal pressures. Othello suppresses his fears of anxiety, but cannot control his confirmation bias as he starts compulsively to seek evidence. His erratic behavior shows how jealousy adopts a mind of its own, irreversibly taking shape like a "plague" or "monster" (3.3.159, 162). Desdemona's death ultimately depicts the tragic results of a jealous man's rage in a society that lends women little power to defend themselves.

Unlike Othello whose anxieties result from external pressures, Leontes's crazed jealousy develops entirely internally as he convinces himself of his wife's infidelity. While others actively try to convince him of his mistaken accusations, he remains unwilling to listen, and ultimately pays the price for doing so. His jealousy comes as a result of his own mind's delusions and he, unwilling to consider the possibility of being wrong, shows an inflated sense of confidence. Leontes endures the severe consequence of losing his family before he can recognize his errors. When he does experience relief from his depression, it comes bittersweetly as his reunions are riddled with a loss of time. As a romance, the play does not adhere to the same tragic ending as *Othello*, but still lingers with an overwhelming pang of regret. When Hermione dramatically returns to life from the form of a statue, her wrinkles remind everyone of the sixteen-year loss, especially Leontes who quickly notices them. Similar to the perfection with which *Much Ado About Nothing* concludes, *The Winter's Tale's* magic holds an artificiality that reminds the audience of its fictional nature. The play cautions about jealous impulses like Leontes's and the importance of closely monitoring them with an open mind.

Othello, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Winter's Tale* each encapsulate universal human experiences and caution their audiences about moments of jealousy, sexism, and heartbreak. They have different outcomes—thanks to their respective genres of tragedy, comedy, and romance—but regardless, each play serves a key purpose in the conversation of controlling impulses. *Othello* shows how society can reinforce these dangerous natures as seen through Iago's pressure to make Othello return to self-interested propensities. *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Winter's Tale*, on the other hand, show how individuals can combat societal norms to push back against these problematic behaviors. Progressive and rebellious women—Beatrice, Emilia, and Paulina—each defend their blameless friends, and highlight society's responsibility

to push back against the dark moments in human nature. William Shakespeare demonstrates how we can examine our society to ensure that it dissuades negative behaviors and promotes progress. When Hermione acknowledges Leontes's lack of reason—"if I shall be condemned / Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else / But what your jealousies awake, I tell you / 'Tis rigor and not law" (3.2.112-14)—she boldly refuses to accept a law unfairly proclaimed by her jealous husband. Like Hermione, both Hero in *Much Ado* and Desdemona in *Othello* also fall victim to unjustified and unproven accusations of infidelity, but in all three plays Shakespeare invalidates the men's jealousy and exonerates the women. The Bard's acute awareness of human nature encourages his audience to share this mindful approach to life: always acknowledge what "jealousies awake" and actively scrutinize society's endorsement of the dark undersides (3.2.113).

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