A soldier's a man: A study of the soldiers in Shakespeare's Much ado about nothing, All's well that ends well, Othello, and Coriolanus

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TITLE:
"A Soldier's A Man": A Study of the Soldiers in Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothin, All's Well That Ends Well, Othello, and Coriolanus

DATE: May 31, 1992

by

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A Thesis
Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in
English

Lehigh University
May 1992
This thesis is accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

May 6, 1972
(date)

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ABSTRACT

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Othello*, and *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare creates portraits of a soldier. In each case, the soldier, or soldiers, move from a military setting into a non-military or domestic setting. In some cases, the soldier approaches marriage or 'married life; in others, he enters politics.

I study the limitations that preclude or hinder a soldier’s successful entry into domestic life, including his inability to use language effectively and the inappropriateness of the alliances he forms. Specifically, I discuss the soldier’s excessive trust in other soldiers, his difficulty in forming and sustaining healthy marital relationships, and his inability to compromise his "honor" or "reputation" in order to adapt to changing circumstances.

The soldier as an "ideal" is an archaic and anachronistic notion. Though Shakespeare shows some soldiers who have fairly successfully adapted to domestic life, the "heroic" or "idealized" soldier’s inability to translate action into words frequently dooms him.
Chapter I: The Soldier Defined

The classical, even mythical, hero is first and foremost a soldier. The mythical hero takes the form of a demigod with Hercules as the prototype (Waith 39). Greek and Roman culture idealized the warrior/hero, assigning signifying nouns to qualities that are not readily translatable in this century. The Greek word "areté" and the Roman word "virtus" carry connotations for which there are no twentieth-century equivalents:

Courage in battle is the basis of this ancient ideal and remains central to it even when it is later broadened to include nobility of the mind. (Waith 16)

Though Hercules was the mythical hero on which the ideal of the warrior was based, the ideal broadened to include Samson, David, even Christ (Waith 39). The attributes of gentle tolerance and the ability to moderate passion were added with the incorporation of Christ-like qualities into the originally more barbaric concept of the mythical warrior/hero.

The humanists of the Renaissance were fascinated both with the classical notion of the hero, and with its application to the identification of an ideal man in their own time. The apparent inconsistency of imbuing a Herculean warrior with Christ-like virtue did not
"an example of an active life" (Waith 38) was only increased by the association with Christ which added "abstract general virtue" and "turns Hercules into a model of reasonable control and moderation" (Waith 39, 40).

Elizabethan England saw a change in the social system which, although it did not negate the manly ideal of the warrior, called into question the potential for achieving that ideal. England was not at war under Elizabeth, yet the ideal man was still, at least in part, a soldier. Kirby Farrell suggests that the inconsistency of role-playing in Elizabeth's court created an identity crisis for the courtiers:

Reared in a fantasy of heroism that combined the superhuman gentleness of Christ with the triumphal violence associated with the warrior and hunter, the Elizabethan courtier-hero embraced an identity founded on apocalyptic stress. (Farrell 125)

Farrell suggests that Elizabeth encouraged a process of mutual idealization. The courtiers attempted to fulfill the requirements of the ideal (with the military as a major element) and Elizabeth encouraged her courtiers to idealize her in a similar fashion: "the
queen and her people fashioned her into a mythic creature, a goddess who combined the roles of maiden, wife and mother" (Farrell 126). Elizabeth's use of sexual politics to control her courtiers somewhat undercuts the notion of the manly ideal. In a historical context in which a military bent seems less important than a political one, the edges of the courtly soldier begin to blur. Farrell agrees, identifying this as "a time when in spite of its warrior ethos the English aristocracy was becoming an elite administrative corps" (125).

Shakespeare, writing within this confusing political context, treats the soldier in many of his plays. As Farrell says, "Clearly, it would have been lèse majesté for Shakespeare to depict the queen as a predatory oppressor or to mock the martial pretensions of the aristocracy" (127). However, the issue of the unemployed soldier is one that clearly interested him. The problem of the movement of the soldier from military to domestic life and his need to grapple with the concomitant changes in his own identity, his associations and alliances, and his place in a changing society was obviously one which had real impact in
Elizabethan society. The need to alter the concept of "ideal" or abandon it altogether becomes increasingly clear. Shakespeare holds the soldier up to the light in *Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, All's Well That Ends Well,* and *Coriolanus* and illuminates not only the soldier but the society which contains and has created him.

In these four plays, Shakespeare explores the notion of the soldier as an ideal, in the same way he considers virginity as an ideal. In some ways these two states are presented as equals, though of course distinguished by gender. Both are difficult, if not impossible, to sustain. Both a soldier and a virgin have many other characteristics which generally serve to qualify if not negate their idealization. In this section, I will focus on the soldier—though in three of the four plays the soldiers are juxtaposed to virgins (or a virtuous woman in *Othello*)—and the ways in which he is described. The descriptions of the soldier come from many characters and express both the ideal and the real man. At times, the behavior of the soldier directly contradicts the ideal, at times it is consistent with it. Claudio, in *Much Ado About Nothing,*
is described in the early lines of the play as "doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion" for which Don Pedro "hath bestow'd much honor...." (1.1.14-15, 10).

The attribute of honor is key throughout the four plays, and is the defining attribute of the soldier in *Much Ado*. In Claudio's case, honor is equated with reputation. A.G.H Bachrach suggests that military "Service" is "forged and kept intact by associated concepts of honour and reputation, and by the special social position this entailed" (14). His soldier's honor is translated into a lover's reputation. He protects his reputation at the expense of Hero's honor. One might argue that he loses his own honor in his zeal to protect his reputation. He formally rejects Hero based on the words of a known and self-confessed villain:

The word is too good to paint out her wickedness. I could say she were worse; think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant. Go but with me tonight, you shall see her chamber-window ent'red, even the night before her wedding-day. If you love her then, tomorrow wed her; but it would better fit your honor to change your mind. (3.2.103-10)
Claudio's readiness to sacrifice another's honor for his own reputation calls into question the concept of honor for the soldier.

*Othello* is full of comments which define the characteristics of the soldier. A soldier is unable to speak "the soft phrase of peace," even in order to save himself. Othello regrets his inability to defend himself with words when attacked by Desdemona's father. His seven years in battle have left Othello uncomfortable with the words of peace: "And little of this great world can I speak/ More than pertains to feats of broil and battle..." (1.3.88-9).

Othello's view of himself as a soldier is reinforced by the views of others. Montano says "the man commands like a full soldier" as they wait for Othello's ship to arrive. A soldier commands. Montano offers another definition of a soldier; a soldier drinks: "Good faith, a little one; not past a pint, as I am a soldier" (2.3.62-3). Drinking both shows who are the soldiers and who is not: Cassio. Cassio's inability to hold his liquor puts him outside the definition of soldier. Iago engineers Cassio's fall
from Othello's favor, of course, but he does it by proving Cassio an unworthy soldier. Randall Nakayama, in his dissertation on gender identity and marriage in several of the plays, suggests that Cassio is well inside the definition of soldier because of his "drinking and whoring," which are "'manly' activities" that are part of the "soldier's ethos" (Nakayama 259-60). He suggests that Othello, outside of Venetian culture, does not understand the cultural rules that apply to insiders.

Montano, again the spokesman, enjoins Iago to tell the truth about his altercation with Cassio: "If partially affin'd, or leagu'd in office,/ Thou dost deliver more or less than truth,/ Thou art no soldier" (2.3.212-14). Later the clown says, when speaking of Cassio, "He's a soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies,/ 'tis stabbing"(3.4.5-6). A soldier doesn't lie. Of course, all the soldiers lie in Othello, even Othello himself. He denies responsibility for murdering Desdemona, though one line later he admits his guilt. Iago lies. Cassio doesn't lie, but there is a question as to whether or not he is a true soldier.

Finally, Othello himself characterizes a soldier,
"'Tis the soldiers' life/ To have their balmy slumbers wak'd with strife" (2.3.251-2). Othello's own sense of the soldier as one who cannot rest (or sleep with his wife) certainly holds true for him. He trades his battles on the field for battles off the field. Othello the soldier cannot slumber.

Alls Well That Ends Well typifies the soldier as well. The countess, sending her son to court, defines a soldier:

Be thou blest, Bertram, and succeed thy father In manners, as in shape! Thy blood and virtue Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few, Rather in power than use, and keep thy friend Under thy own life's key. Be check'd for silence But never tax'd for speech. What heaven more will, That thee may furnish, and my prayers plucked down, Fall on thy head!...(1.1.61-70)

She gives her son advice for life as well. Bertram, of course, follows little of his mother's advice; he trusts the wrong people, he makes promises he shouldn't, and he depends more upon his birthright than his goodness.

The king adds to the definition of the soldier,
asking his young courtiers to "see that you come/ Not to woo honor, but to wed it, when/ The bravest questant shrinks. Find what you seek,/ That fame may cry you loud..." (2.1.14-17). The soldier behaves honorably allowing fame to find him. Bertram, though honorable on the field, behaves less than honorably in all his non-military activities; he runs from his new wife, and he attempts to seduce Diana with false promises and lies. Bertram explains this apparent contradiction based on his own definition of soldier:

This very day,  
Great Mars, I put myself into thy file.  
Make me but like my thoughts, and I shall prove  
A lover of thy drum, hater of love.  
(3.3.8-11)

Bertram conceives of honor and goodness as only applying to the battlefield. In fact, for him, war and love cannot coexist.

When Parolles is captured by his fellow soldiers and asked to betray his officers, they ask him to judge the worth of a soldier. In doing so, a definition of a good (or ideal soldier) emerges. The First Soldier asks Parolles,

You shall demand of him, whether one Captain Dumain be i'
A soldier is brave, honest, expert in war, and incorruptible. The humorous and ironic juxtaposition of these characteristics with Parolles, a lying, cowardly "retrograde" soldier who is corrupted even without benefit of gold undercuts the description itself.

As in the other three plays, a soldier is defined in Coriolanus by soldiers themselves, as well as by the characters who surround them. For Coriolanus's mother Volumnia, a man must prove himself by going to battle:

When yet
He was but tender-bodied and the only son
of my womb,
When youth with comeliness pluck'd all
gaze
His way, when for a day of kings'
entreaties a mother
Should not sell him an hour from her
beholding. I
Considering how honor would become such a person,
That it was no better than picture-like
to hang by th'
Wall, if renown made it not stir, was
pleas'd to let him
Seek danger where he was like to find
fame. To a cruel
War, I sent him, from whence he return'd,
his brows
Bound with oak. I tell thee, daughter, I
sprang not
More in joy at first hearing he was a
man-child than
Now in first seeing he had prov'd himself
a man. (1.3.5-17)

Volumnia defines the soldier further when she learns
that her son will return from battle with Aufidius. She
hopes for a wound, "O, he is wounded, I thank the gods
for't" (2.1.120). A soldier, at least a Roman soldier,
returning from battle unwounded, returns without honor.

Coriolanus's fellow soldiers, using him as an ideal
model, also define the soldier. Lartius says:

Thou wast a soldier
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and
terrible
Only in strokes, but, with thy grim looks
and
The thunder-like percussion of thy
sounds,
Thou mads't thine enemies shake, as if
the world
Were feverous and did tremble.
(1.4.57)

Cominius describes Coriolanus, the soldier, as having
"valor," proving himself "best men i' th'field," having
"ready sense," (2.2.84,97,116) and untiring strength and
spirit.

The descriptions of Coriolanus as an ideal warrior
make all the more ironic the surprise of his followers
when he proves less than ideal as a political leader. Evidently the attributes that make a great soldier do not necessarily make a great leader in peacetime.

Chapter II: The Soldier Out of War

A soldier out of battle often enters the domestic sphere. In Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, All's Well That Ends Well, and Coriolanus, soldiers attempt to move into domesticity with mixed results. Much Ado About Nothing presents three soldiers. Two are young lords, Claudio and Benedick, serving in war under Don Pedro, prince of Arragon. When the three return from war, they focus on marriage as the next battle to be won. They maintain their positions of rank within the domestic sphere, with Don Pedro planning the campaign and drawing the battle lines.

The image of love and marriage as war is presented early in the play. Beatrice, niece to the governor of Messina, expresses an interest in the well-being of Benedick. Her uncle defines her interest as "a kind of merry war" that uses words as weapons in a "skirmish of wit" (1.1.58-9). Benedick and Beatrice engage in a battle of words from the outset. Benedick chooses a
medium in which he is comfortable. As a soldier, he is at ease in battle. He simply exchanges his sword for sharp words with which he and Beatrice at first battle and then ultimately form a truce. By remaining within the parameters of battle and recognizing that he does so, Benedick has a chance for a successful marriage. He views Beatrice as another soldier, rather than a spoil of war, which also promises some success. Frank Warnke discusses their skirmishes as "The love-combat, or amorous agon, in which a man and a woman who are sexually attracted to each other engage in expressions of mutual hostility" (Warnke 99) particularly in "festive comedy." He describes this type of battle as a "phenomenon of play" (99) which is employed partly to protect the warriors from threatening commitment and also because it is fun (100). Most important, Beatrice herself engages with Benedick on the same terms. She is ready and willing to fight, "man to man." Benedick doesn’t try to be a lover; in fact, he resists love and marriage. Beatrice effectively uses the weapon at a woman’s disposal: words. Her language is compared to a "knife’s point" (2.3.246). Benedick describes Beatrice’s attack on him in military terms:
She [Beatrice] told me, not thinking I had/ been myself, that I was the Prince's jester, that I was/ duller than a great thaw; huddling jest upon jest with/ such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like/ a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me./ She speaks poniards, and every word stabs....(2.1.232-7)

Benedick is comfortable with weapons and battles. By adapting love to his familiar military frame of reference, he may emerge, if not victorious, at least in a marital stand-off. Nakayama takes an opposing view, suggesting that Benedick feels even more strongly than the other men that marriage entails a transformation of the man, substituting a new identity for the existing one—in this case an effeminized lover, or worse, a cuckold, for a soldier (Nakayama 68). Though Benedick does have a general fear of being deceived by an unspecified woman, he is able to overcome his generalized fear with a specific woman, Beatrice. Their nonconformity sets them both outside the realm of generalization. Benedick and Beatrice are successful in their campaign of love. Warnke suggests that their success is due to the fact "that they are perfect matches for each other...perfect partners in a couple, and perfect opponents, and one reason that they have
loved each other from first sight—unadmittedly but unmistakably—is that each of them recognizes in the other a worthy and irresistible opponent" (Warnke 106). Benedick stays within his military persona, accepting Beatrice as a worthy adversary and finally as an ally.

What sets the Beatrice/Benedick battle apart from Claudio’s campaign for Hero is Benedick’s acceptance of Beatrice as an opponent rather than a spoil of war. Claudio attempts to move from his soldier persona into the realm of the lover (or as Nakayama says is transformed into a lover). Although his language is lover-like in his early speeches about Hero, it is tinged with the language of the despoiler: "Can the world buy such a jewel?" he asks. Claudio recognizes his own shift from soldier to lover:

O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I look’d upon her with a soldiers eye,
That lik’d, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.
But now I am return’d and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying, I lik’d her ere I went to wars.
(1.1.284-293)
Nakayama explains Claudio's shift:

Seeing the identities of being a soldier and a lover in this dichotomized way means that the assumption of one identity is always at the expense of the other, so that if one sees the "war thoughts" as victorious in the pre-war Claudio, then one can also see the vacating of Claudio's brain by the "war-thoughts" as less a voluntary act than a rout. (Nakayama 66)

Despite Claudio's professions of love for Hero, he is unable to proceed in his wooing without both the approbation and assistance of his fellow officers. It is unclear whether Claudio is unsure of his ability to shift from soldier to lover when he asks Benedick, "I pray thee tell me truly how thou liks't her?" or whether, as a soldier, his battles must be fought only with the help of his comrades. Benedick's refusal to approve wholeheartedly of Claudio's choice may contribute to the chain of events that follows.

Don Pedro, possibly the soldier most at a loss following his military victories, does not seek a wife of his own. However, he most of all attempts to control the domestic sphere as a general moves armies. His pleasure in planning the coupling of his men, Claudio and Benedick, with their respective sweethearts not only
highlights the image of matchmaking as a battle but also injects a jarring sense of the frivolity of a man who a short while before had control of lives in a real war. Don Pedro's change of profession from general to go-between is a comment on war and ultimately reflective of the man himself. He makes an easy transition from guiding his young soldiers through battle to garnering mates for them. He "tries to negotiate seamlessly between being a soldier and being a lover" (Nakayama 72). Don Pedro's temporary adoption of the persona of Claudio highlights his ability to dabble in the lives of his officers while keeping himself safely apart. Though Claudio has (at least intellectually) rejected his soldier-self in favor of his lover-self, and Benedick stays firmly a soldier, Don Pedro marries the soldier and the lover in his procurement of Hero for Claudio:

I will assume thy part in some disguise And tell fair Hero I am Claudio, And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart And take her hearing prisoner with the force And strong encounter of my amorous tale. Then after to her father will I break, And the conclusion is, she shall be thine. In practice let us put it presently. (1.1.309-16)

Don Pedro's decision to combine his skills as a soldier
and a lover lead him to deceive Hero. Coming to her in disguise again highlights one picture of the military which depends upon tricks and subterfuge for success. It also "reveals an implicit assumption that relations between men and women are hostile--struggles for power involving force and coercion" (Nakayama 73). His deception of Hero and her father also establishes the pattern of deception that continues throughout the play.

The three male characters of Much Ado offer three alternative approaches to a reentry of the soldier into domestic life. Claudio moves wholeheartedly (though unsuccessfully) from his role as soldier to that of lover. However, he retains his dependence on his fellow officers and fails to break his alliance to the military. Benedick hangs on to his soldier-self, using his military expertise to do battle with Beatrice. His battles are direct and face-to-face, and he emerges, with Beatrice, mutually victorious. Don Pedro both stays within his military pose and dabbles in a role as lover. He (like many generals) remains outside the confrontational part of the battle. He sets the battle in motion, then watches from behind the lines. He tries to find a way to be a soldier in the domestic sphere.
He wins the war, but at an enormous cost to his own men as well as to the "spoils" of the battle.

The tragedy Othello also highlights three soldiers--Othello, Iago and Cassio--who move from military to domestic life. In peacetime Cyprus, they find chaos that did not exist for them in battle.

Iago's concurrent plots are based on his ambitions as a soldier. His desire to be appointed Othello's lieutenant rather than his ancient is especially ironic considering Cyprus is at peace. Iago is unable to move into the domestic sphere without rank. He makes the mistake of considering Cassio's appointment a military one, based on Cassio's merits (or lack thereof) as a soldier, rather than the political choice it is:

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine,
A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife,
That never set a squadron in the field,
Nor the division of a battle knows
More than a spinster-unless the bookish theoretic,
Wherein the toged consuls can propose
As masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice
Is all his soldiership. (1.1.21-8)

Iago does not consider Cassio a soldier since Cassio's knowledge is theoretical. In peacetime, however, Cassio seems a logical choice. Iago considers himself the more worthy soldier, so the more deserving of the position of
general’s lieutenant. Since that position will not be his, he makes war on Cassio, who has received the appointment, and on Othello, who has done the appointing.

Though military rank should be less of an issue in Cyprus than on the fields of battle, Iago defines himself as well as his enemies on the basis of rank. Iago proves himself a ruthless and effective soldier. He maintains the self-control necessary for success in battle, the control for which Othello is known. He maintains his soldier persona throughout. He doesn’t allow himself to be distracted from his campaign against Cassio and Othello by domestic matters. He makes no separation of military and domestic. In fact, his only mistake is attempting to kill too many birds with one stone. Only when planning the murders of Roderigo and Cassio does Iago’s plan get away from him. The soldier is trying to fight too many enemies.

Cassio, on the other hand, enters enthusiastically into the domestic sphere. He completely relaxes his military discipline, like a sailor on shore-leave. He engages in activities that stereotypically define an off-duty soldier. He is lacking in self-control; he
drinks, dines and whores. He recognizes his inability to control himself in such situations, yet allows himself to be led into the temptations he knows he should resist. Iago urges him to drink, but Cassio says, "Not tonight, good Iago. I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking" (2.3.30-1). Cassio allows himself to be convinced by the more controlled and controlling Iago. Cassio’s descent into the battle of his peacetime existence begins. Iago points to Cassio’s drunkenness as unbefitting a soldier:

You see this fellow that is gone before. He’s a soldier fit to stand by Caesar And give direction; and do but see his vice. ’Tis to his virtue a just equinox, The one as long as th’other.’Tis pity of him. I fear the trust Othello puts him in, On some odd time of his infirmity, Will shake this island. (2.3.115-22)

Iago now titles Cassio a soldier in the context of Cassio’s weakness in order to highlight the error of Othello’s choice.

Othello enters Cyprus a conquering hero and retains his general’s persona throughout. Othello’s uneasy transition to governor of Cyprus is marked by his inability to shake off the rules and expectations of war
It is apparent both in his relationships with his men and in his relationship with his wife that he is unable to adjust to his new position. Kay Stockholder, in her article "Form as Metaphor: Othello and Love-Death Romance," suggests that Othello must maintain his soldier persona in order to keep both his self-esteem and the esteem of the Venetians. She says "His self-esteem...rests on seeing himself and being seen by others as an indispensable warrior-hero...His esteem as Venice’s manly warrior, then depends on his denial of his sexual identity" (Stockholder 738). Stockholder suggests that Othello’s sexual identity is all that remains after his military identity is stripped away. She ignores his relationship with Iago and the other officers in her article. I think there are more than two sides to Othello. I agree, however, that Othello must suppress his sexual side since it is seen as so threatening by Brabantio and the other Venetians.

Othello expects unqualified allegiance from his men. Iago, his trusted "ancient," is able to trick and deceive Othello because of Othello’s blind assumption of Iago’s loyalty. Iago himself makes it clear that any
Othello trusts Iago implicitly, as a fellow soldier duty-bound by his command. Iago, though a soldier by trade, is capable of moving into the politics of peacetime. He recognizes the need to change the rules to fit the new conditions.

Nor does Othello recognize his appointed lieutenant, Michael Cassio, in a non-military setting.
Cassio's domestic excesses shock Othello, distant as they are from Othello's perception of a proper soldier. Nakayama suggests that Othello as an "outsider" doesn't understand the social conventions of the Venetians. Even within the realm of "soldier" there are societal variations: "Cassio, like Othello, believes in abstract values like honor and reputation, but Cassio's behavior deviates from the ideal and is nonetheless acceptable and even expected" (Nakayama 258). Othello considers Cyprus "a town of war" in which "private and domestic quarrel" is "monstrous" (2.3.207,209,211). His extreme punishment of Cassio ["Cassio, I love thee;/But never more be officer of mine"(2.3.242-3)] shows his military decisiveness. A crime is immediately and brutally punished. However, the inappropriateness of his unilateral punishment of Cassio points both to his ineffectiveness as a political (rather than military) leader and also portends his failure in his second peacetime role, husband.

Othello believes he leaves his military persona behind in his role as husband. However, his greeting to Desdemona, "O my fair warrior!" (2.1. 179) upon his arrival in Cyprus signals his role confusion which
James Lake interprets as a mirroring of Othello's father as warrior and his mother as nurturer (Lake 329).

Desdemona is Othello's greatest admirer. What she admires about Othello is his soldier's life. In fact, she wishes she could be a soldier as well: "...she wish'd / That heaven had made her such a man" (1.3.163-4). She asks to accompany him in his battle with the Turk:

That I did love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world. My heart's subdu'd
Even to the quality of my lord.
I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honors and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate.
So that, dear lords, if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
The rites for why I love him bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.
(1.3.251-62)

The crux of the problem between Othello and Desdemona is expressed here and in Othello's responding speech:

Let her have your voice.
Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat--the young affects
In me defunct--and proper satisfaction,
But to be free and bounteous to her mind.
And heaven defend your good souls, that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
When she is with me. No, when light-wing'd toys
Of feather'd Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and offic'd instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let huswives make a skillet of my helm,
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation!
(1.3.263-77)

Desdemona expresses her impression of the soldier;
Othello expresses his impression of the lover.

Desdemona's sense of Othello as her general in an idealized adventure of war contrasts starkly with Othello's sense of love as "light-wing'd toys," "wanton," and "corrupt." Desdemona assumes that Othello sees her as she sees herself: a fellow soldier, albeit a subordinate one. In fact, Othello sees her as primarily a sexual object. Lake suggests that Othello does see Desdemona as a warrior, but as his suspicion of her grows, the image of himself which he sees in her becomes a negative rather than a positive one: "Without the vision of Desdemona as 'fair warrior,' Othello diminishes his own 'warrior' identity, when he comes to feel...that she no longer is his alone to command" (Lake
Othello’s protestations of immunity to lust, and his emphasis on the sexual dangers of a female companion (that can, in fact, compromise a soldier’s professionalism) indicates a singular obsession with sexuality as Desdemona’s primary attribute. His denial of a young man’s sexuality clouds his recognition of the potential of an older man’s alternative to lust; sexual jealousy. Both partners are guilty of miscommunication and lose the key to the puzzle of their eventual doom. Stockholder suggests that Desdemona’s obsession with the soldier in Othello indicates a collusion with him in their violent end. Desdemona’s rejection of other suitors suggests that she waited for "something other than ordinary love" (Stockholder 743) and that Othello filled that need. Certainly Desdemona’s attraction to the soldier in Othello ties her to him in his final violence towards her. Whether this is intentional collusion or not is a moot point. Desdemona wants to be a soldier like Othello; Othello wants to be a lover like Cassio. Desdemona is incapable of sexual infidelity to Othello, so strong is her military fealty to him. Othello, his vision clouded by sexual jealousy, cannot see that Desdemona’s soldier’s honor matches his
Although Othello realizes that he is now in a domestic situation, he is unable to shift gears. He hangs on to his military persona in his relationship with Desdemona, though he knows he is out of the military:

I had been happy if the general camp,
Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body,
So I had nothing known. O, now, forever
Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars
That makes ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th'ear-percing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th'immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone.
(3.3.350-62)

Othello recognizes two things: his inability to trust his wife's sexual virtue and his own inability to operate outside of a military context. Stockholder says that Othello does indeed abandon his "occupation" with this speech in preparation for his final scene with Desdemona: "...Othello's profession was to restrain
barbarian passions, both his own, and those of the Turks. Since for him restraint of others and self-restraint are identical, his farewell to his occupation also expresses his final abandonment of self-restraint" (Stockholder 742). Rather than abandoning his profession, I think Othello relies more heavily upon it (with dire results) as his suspicions about Desdemona grow. He makes war on Desdemona with Iago as his ally, "...Now art thou my lieutenant" (3.3.482). Iago plans the execution of the campaign against Desdemona and Cassio, in which Othello will move relentlessly against his unwitting enemy, Desdemona. Ironically, Desdemona would have gladly adopted a soldier persona, though as Othello's ally rather than his enemy. Othello's brutality toward an innocent victim speaks not only to the soldier's inability to bridge the gap from military to domestic but also to the issue of war itself.

Tom McBride takes a new historicist approach in "Othello's Orotond Occupation." He suggests that the play is about jealousy of occupation, or social space. This jealousy applies to Othello, Iago, Brabantio, and Roderigo. Iago, he proposes, expresses his motivation for destroying Othello as jealousy over his failed
For McBride, trusting Iago's motivations offers the key to the play. He suggests that Othello is robbed of his military, sexual and social occupations in a complicated Renaissance world:

Power-political, military, and cultural-plays on a complex battlefield in Venice which will hire its Beowulf rather than memorialize him or make him absolutely sovereign; yet allows him to marry a Venetian aristocrat (further domesticating him) in the middle of a perilous Turkish advance... (McBride 418)

McBride makes a strong argument initially for jealousy as the "obsession" (421) of the play. He discusses the Renaissance "ideal" man as a combination soldier, scholar, and courtier. His argument weakens in his discussion of Othello's interaction with Desdemona, though I agree with his assessment that the play "is about war by other means" (McBride 2).

Once Othello has made a decision, conscious or unconscious, to remain a soldier in his marriage, he remains so even to the final defeat. Unlike Iago, who tries to wriggle out of his responsibility for the tragic series of events, Othello accepts responsibility for his errors. He makes a soldier's end, facing
execution stoically. The fact that he is his own executioner makes his decision heroic. It also highlights his shift in attitude. In making his decision to kill Desdemona, Othello considered Desdemona a traitor: "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6). He kills himself, as though he is the traitor:

Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
I took by th'throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus. (5.2.362-5)

He asks that in remembering him, they "speak of me as I am" (5.2.351), though he goes on to describe how he is. He asks, at first, to be remembered as a lover rather than for the service he has done the state (5.2.348). Finally, though, his final words are those of a soldier. The man unable to speak any language but that of a soldier, moves the listeners from focusing on Othello the lover to the more attractive picture of Othello the soldier.

The soldiers in All's Well That Ends Well move backward and forward from war to domesticity. The play differs slightly from the others since there is ongoing war coexisting with the domestic subplots. The soldier's failure to adjust to domesticity as separate
from battle is all the clearer. Love is a battle; even a military-type plot. The method of trickery that Helena (aided by Diana and Diana's mother) employs puts Bertram's faults to her advantage. This domestic plot is mirrored by the noblemen's plot against Parolles.

Bertram, a young nobleman (and an eligible bachelor), is a courtier of the King of France. Helena, his mother's ward, cures the King of a disease using skills and prescriptions left to her by her dead father, a physician. As a reward for curing the King, he grants her a wish. Her wish is to have Bertram as her husband. The King gives Bertram to her without consulting the young man or obtaining his consent. Bertram, though loyal to the King and protective of his position in the court, flees to escape consummating the marriage with Helena. He goes as part of an allied force to the Duke of Florence. Though a soldier going to battle in order to escape the domestic situation into which he has been forced, the only warnings he receives are warnings about women. The French King first calls upon his young courtiers to seek honor in the battle. Even this exhortation comes in domestic terms, as the Kings tells them "Not to woo honor, but to wed it" (2.1.15). He
The King seems to equate domestic life with war in his use of interchangeable metaphors for love and battle. He recommends, in the same breath, honor in battle, and dishonor in love. The ambiguity of the King's message is reflected in Bertram's behavior in Florence, where he attempts to follow the King's advice. Susan Bassnett-McGuire suggests that foreign war was a place of "entertainment and self-trial for bored young aristocrats" (98), which may explain the apparent frivolity with which Bertram and the others approach the domestic side of war.

Bertram feels that he can escape domesticity with Helena: "I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her" (2.3.272). War for Bertram is preferable to marriage. He says, "War is no strife/ To the dark house and the detested wife" (2.3.290-1). Peggy Munoz Simonds, in her article "Sacred and Sexual Motifs in All's Well That
"Ends Well," discusses the apparent dichotomy of sexual and sacred themes in this play. She points out that in the Renaissance, men felt that they were weakened by sexual intercourse; the semen came from the bone marrow and was not replenished. This belief brings up several interesting questions. First, a loss of virility and strength would be especially hazardous for a soldier. Second, the spending of male strength during intercourse gives credence to the notion of love as war. Bertram's finding equal danger in war and marriage (perhaps slightly less in war) makes more sense in light of Munoz's argument. She points to the Clown's statement as an indication that "marriage is more dangerous than war, which is why as man enters into such a union only for the most serious reasons" (Munoz 53). Helena blames herself for Bertram being in danger of death without expressing the irony of his flight from her:

Poor lord, is't I
That chase thee from thy country, and expose
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
Of the none-sparing war? And is it I
That drive thee from the sportive court,
where thou
Wast shot at with fair eyes, to be the mark
Of smoky muskets? (3.2.101-7)

Bertram rushes into another domestic situation
in Florence. His behavior in this situation shows similarities to that of soldiers already discussed. He, like Claudio in Much Ado and Roderigo in Othello, uses a male go-between to arrange his romance. Parolles, one of Bertram's followers, makes the initial overtures to Diana, a young woman of Florence, on Bertram's behalf. Although Diana's virtue, virginity, and noble birth are important to Bertram, he later dismisses her as "a common gamester to the camp" (5.3.187) when she attempts to get him to marry her.

The women in All's Well succeed in their domestic battles by using military strategy, but Bertram is not nearly so successful in his attempts to conquer domesticity. Helena hatches a plan to capture Bertram, engaging Diana and Diana's mother as her allies. The female alliance is juxtaposed to the male alliance between Parolles and the other officers which is readily broken. Nakayama discusses these "polarized communities of men and women" (121) noting the strength of the female alliance and the weakness of the male alliance. He draws only the conclusion that the women are able to deceive thus confirming, "male fears about male-female sexuality and female duplicity" (121). He ignores the
deception of men by men which seems to undercut the
notion of female duplicity in this case. Rather, the
issue of broken oaths calls into question the honor of
all of the characters. Bertram, supposedly an
accomplished and honorable soldier, assumes his prowess
in the domestic sphere as well. He woos Diana with
courtly phrases, calling her a "Titled goddess" and
telling her "I love thee/ By love's own sweet
constraint, and will for ever/ Do thee all rights of
service" (5.2.2,15-17). Diana has been doubly warned
against him; once by Mariana who knows Parolles:

I know that knave, hang him! One
Parolles,
a filthy officer he is in those
suggestions for the young
earl. Beware of them, Diana; their
promises, entice-
ments, oaths, tokens, and all these
engines of lust, are
not the things they go under. Many a
maid hath been
seduc'd by them; and the misery is,
example, that so
terrible shows in the wrack of
maidenhood, cannot for
all that dissuade succession, but that
they are lim'd
with the twigs that threatens them. I
hope I need not
to advise you further, but I hope your
own grace will
keep you where you are, though there were
no further
danger known but the modesty which is so
Diana has also been warned by Helena herself, who has come to Florence to find Bertram. In fact, the women's plot against him is already hatched, and Diana "is arm'd for him, and keeps her guard in honestest defense" (3.5.72-3). Bertram, who believes he has escaped marriage and domesticity, enters the female battleground unwittingly. He sees Diana as "a fortress to be stormed and a campaign to be won" (Nakayama 143). His mistaken impression that he is invulnerable to domesticity within the parameters of war because he is a soldier, allows the women to entrap him easily.

In Coriolanus, as in the other plays, the soldier is asked to move from war to peace; battle to domesticity. Like the others, Coriolanus offers more than one view of the soldier. Coriolanus is juxtaposed to Aufidius, his arch-rival in battle, who also must make a transition to a domestic existence. Here, unlike the other plays, the peacetime world is more chaotic than the world of war. Rather than the domestic world being a world of love and marriage, it is a world of politics. As in the other plays, however, there is a woman whose relationship with the hero is pivotal in his
success or failure outside of the military.

Coriolanus, like Othello, recognizes his ineptness as a politician. The traits that made him a successful warrior and military leader doom him as a consul. John Velz considers Coriolanus's inability to adjust to the politics of Rome a metaphor for the ripening of Roman society analogous to the maturing Britain under the Tudors. He suggests (reading the play in Vergilian rather than Plutarchan terms) that Coriolanus "is living in the unrecoverable past as if it were the present" (Velz 61). Coriolanus, he says, "is a play set at the shadowy moment between the first and second ages of Rome...this moment comes between the heroic age of personal achievement and the age of the city-state in which an organic society will be the moral standard" (62). Velz suggests that in clinging to "the military arts" (63) Coriolanus becomes "an anachronism in his own time...to be crushed, bewildered, by the ineluctable momentum of history" (66). Obviously, a personal reading of the play is not inconsistent with Velz's historical approach. His argument suggests a broader explanation for Coriolanus's ultimate doom, both as an individual and as a "type."

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Coriolanus’s disdain for the common man and inability to embellish his language with political flattery make him an ineffective political leader. Coriolanus’s hesitation to discuss his battle wounds with the public is at once an expression of modesty and also a desire to keep his achievements in the war unsullied by contact with the mob.

May these same instruments, which you profane,
Never sound more! When drums and trumpets shall
I’ th’field prove flatterers, let courts and cities be
Made all of false-fac’ed soothing! When steel grows
Soft as parasite’s silk, let him be made An overture for th’wars. No more, I say!
For that I have not wash’d my nose that bled,
Or foil’d some debile wretch—which without note
Here’s many else have done—you shout me forth
In acclamations hyperbolical, As if I lov’d my little should be dieted
In praises sauc’ed with lies. (1.9.41-51)

Like Othello, his ability to act decisively in battle and make quick, unemotional decisions, leave him helpless in the political situation of Rome. Unlike Benedick, Coriolanus cannot trade his weapons of war for the weapons of love, words. Coriolanus cannot make love to the populace of Rome without compromising his
soldier’s ethics. He equates politics with self-prostitution and self-castration. When Volumnia, Menenius and Cominius ask Coriolanus to soothe the ruffled feathers of the angry crowd, he says: "Well, I must do’t./ Away, my disposition, and possess me/ Some harlot’s spirit! My throat of war be turn’d,/ Which quired with my drum, into a pipe/ Small as a eunuch, or the virgin voice/That babies lull asleep!" (3.2. 112-7).

Coriolanus, like Othello, is already married when the play begins. Othello’s relationship with his wife is focal; the marriage of Coriolanus and Virgilia is not of the same significance, though it highlights Coriolanus in his role as absent soldier. Coriolanus’s relationship with his mother is far more important. However, Volumnia’s ability to push her son from soldier to politician is less important in terms of a woman’s power over a man than reflective of the contrast between Volumnia’s extreme ease in the role she wishes on her reluctant son and her son’s failure in the same role. Jane Carducci, in her article "Shakespeare’s Coriolanus: ‘Could I find out/ The woman’s part in me,’" suggests that Shakespeare rejects the "Roman code of manliness"
(Carducci 11) in Coriolanus. She describes Coriolanus as an "unfinished character" (17) arrested in adolescence and encouraged by his mother to "suppress his feminine side" (13). Carducci characterizes Coriolanus as a "machine" (12), who by denying the "woman's part" in him (the ability to use language to express feelings) remains isolated and unable to achieve an integrated personality. Carducci's psychological reading of Coriolanus fits neatly within Velz's broader interpretation of the play. Both view Coriolanus in isolation or only within the context of the other "Roman" plays. Looking at Coriolanus within the context of the "soldier" plays sheds a slightly different, though perhaps consistent, light.

Volumnia and Aufidius (whom I will discuss later) both achieve what Coriolanus can (and will) not. They move freely from one role to another, accommodating to the necessary changes of peacetime. Coriolanus is strictly a soldier; his vision is of war and battle only. Menenius says, "His heart's his mouth" (3.1.256). Menenius recognizes that domesticity is unnatural for Coriolanus:

Consider this: he has been bred i' th'wars
Since 'a could draw a sword, and is ill
school's
In bolted language; meal and bran
together
He throws without distinction.
(3.1.321-3)

Volumnia, who until now has limited her education of
Coriolanus to soldiering, attempts to teach her son the
tricks of seduction. Though Coriolanus is asked to
seduce a populace and not a woman, he sees no way to
achieve a seduction without a compromise of his
soldier/manhood persona. Volumnia, who until now has
asked nothing of Coriolanus except that he be a noble
and heroic soldier, asks him to step onto the shifting
ground of politics:

Or say to them
Thou art their soldier, and, being bred
in broils,
Hast not the soft way, which, thou dost
confess,
Were fit for thee to use as they to
claim,
In asking their good loves, but thou wilt
frame
Thyself, forsooth, hereafter theirs, so
far
As thou hast power and person.(3.2.82-7)

Volumnia's lesson is self-revealing. She, at ease with
both seduction and politics, convinces her son to try to
soothe the people he mistrusts and disdains. However,
Coriolanus is unable to sustain the facade his mother
tries to impose upon him.

Coriolanus's entrance into domesticity is a disaster. He is most comfortable in battle and most uncomfortable with the domestic life. His love for his mother is apparent, yet he lacks the facility to defend himself against her vision of him, since it requires the language of seduction. Coriolanus runs from the domestic situation to a comfortable military one. He allies himself with Aufidius, whom he considers a military "soul-mate." In truth, Coriolanus finds himself in another political, if not obviously domestic situation, with a fellow-soldier who has made an better transition than he has.

Chapter III: The Male Alliances of the Soldier

In each of the four plays, the heroic soldiers; Claudio, Othello, Bertram, and Coriolanus, cling to the male associations of their military life. They are blindly loyal to male military counterparts, to the exclusion of common sense. These soldiers, trained to command and expect perfect loyalty, anticipate the same sentiments from their peers. Their idealism limits them in all their relationships, both with men and women.
The folly of their limitation is revealed most clearly by the success of their duplicitous male military counterparts in deluding them. They cannot be faulted for their trust in their fellow officers. In fact, under the rules of war, they should be commended for it:

Having regularly been under fire together, having in combat achieved impossible-seeming objectives together, having committed together actions which in their ugliness would probably been unthinkable under peace-time conditions, having, in addition been prisoners of war together, tortured and humiliated and physically as well as spiritually all but destroyed...in every one of such circumstances an officer and his adjutant learn to depend on each other in a way infinitely more basic than the majority of civilian relationships of an ordinary hierarchic nature will ever afford. (Bachrach 18)

The horror of all four plays is the ease with which companions of the "ideal" soldiers turn this laudable loyalty against them.

The domestic wars upon which these soldiers embark are only to a degree "gender" wars. Though females are distrusted by the soldiers, it is more significant that the soldier heroes so completely trust their fellow-soldiers. In battle, this type of trust is necessary. One's life might depend upon the action of a fellow soldier. This type of loyalty is more than a gender
issue. Society sends males to war—therefore military associations are male. Twentieth-century warfare has included women in combat, a phenomenon which initially must have been confusing to male soldiers. Indications are that as long as females "soldiered" appropriately, "soldier" became her identity. A female who proves herself a soldier [like Beatrice and perhaps Helena] moves onto equal footing with her male counterparts.

Claudio, in Much Ado About Nothing, never fully detaches himself from his military unit composed of Benedick and Don Pedro. He fully trusts his fellow soldiers, to approve and woo his choice of a mate and also accepts their word as truth when Hero is called unfaithful. Claudio's willingness to seek Benedick's approval of his choice of a mate, as well as his willingness to allow Don Pedro to woo Hero on his behalf, is significant. Claudio's tendency to dismiss an alliance is evident when he believes that Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself. He attributes Don Pedro's action as well as his own response to it as indigenous to the "affairs of love." He expresses a fear, greater than Benedick's, of the danger of love to the male alliance:
The Prince woos for himself.
Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love;
Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues.
Let every eye negotiate for itself
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.
This is an accident of hourly proof,
Which I mistrusted not. Farewell therefore Hero! (2.1.168-76)

Claudio doesn’t see the danger of his trust in Don Pedro, the man. He only recognizes that in matters of love, comrades cannot control their own behavior.

However, his trust in his comrades in these instances merely portends the more significant events that follow. Don John is able to capitalize on Claudio’s trust of Don Pedro in portraying Hero as unfaithful. "Don Pedro is himself the target of Don John’s plotting and is as easily duped as Claudio" (Nakayama 82). Notice how Don John appeals to Don Pedro first, rather than to Claudio:

For my brother, I think he holds you well,
and in dearness of heart hath holp to effect your ensuing marriage-surely suit ill-spent and labor ill bestow’d. (3.2.91-4)

Don John realizes that Claudio’s first loyalty is to his
military officer rather than to his fiance. However, if this were purely a gender issue, Don John wouldn’t need Don Pedro’s affirmation of Hero’s unfaithfulness in order to convince Claudio. He could simply appeal directly to Claudio. It is true that both men (Claudio and Don Pedro) readily believe that Hero may be untrue. There is no question that the military system is a patriarchal one. Some of the distrust of the women can be excused, however, on the basis of ignorance and lack of knowledge about the nuances of lovemaking except "by the book."

Don Pedro becomes embroiled in the domestic situations of his men. Not content to leave the men to their own devices, he involves himself intimately with the details of their courtships. Not only does he meddle in the love affairs of his men, he employs foot soldiers to do some of his dirty work. For example, he engages Hero and Margaret to deceive Beatrice into accepting Benedick as a suitor. Don Pedro establishes Benedick’s worthiness of Beatrice in terms of his noble traits as a soldier, then describes the campaign:

Thus far can I praise him: he is of a noble strain, of approv’d valor, and confirm’d honesty.
I will teach you how to humor your
cousin, that she
shall fall in love with Benedick; and I,
with your two
helps, will so practice on Benedick that,
in despite of
his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he
shall fall in
love with Beatrice. (2.1.360-6)

Don Pedro's light-hearted attempts at matchmaking
between Benedick and Beatrice contrast sharply with his
part in Hero's ruin. As quickly as he took Claudio's
part in wooing Hero, he takes his part in dishonoring
her. At the "wedding" scene, Claudio asks Leonato, "And
what have I to give you back, whose worth/ May
counterpoise this rich and precious gift?" Don Pedro
answers, suggesting that Claudio return Hero to her
father, regretting linking his "dear friend to a common
stale" (4.1. 26-7, 28, 63-4). Mark Taylor, in his
article discussing the significance of the absence of
the chamber-window scene from the staging of the play,
attributes Don Pedro's violent attack on Hero to concern
for his own honor. He says, "Perhaps one whose honor's
at the stake is never the more reliable and objective
witness" (Taylor 8). He suggests that Don Pedro "in
most respects, a good man and a reasonable man" (8),
reads Hero "conditioned by his sense of self" (9).
Though I question Taylor's estimation of Don Pedro, I agree that honor, more specifically a soldier's honor, is operative here. More significant than Don Pedro's radical about-face on the subject of Hero's virtue, is Claudio's implicit trust in the Prince's judgment and his readiness to allow Don Pedro to speak on his behalf. Shirley Nelson Garner suggests that the male characters "bond" out of fear of alliances with females:

Hero's supposed betrayal would make it unnecessary for him [Claudio] to disrupt his bonds with men in the slightest way. In fact, her 'betrayal' draws him closer to them as they conspire to catch Hero in the act of betrayal and to punish her for it. (Garner 140)

Garner suggests that the male characters welcome the notion of an unfaithful woman which allows them "to break their bonds with those women and return either imaginatively or actually to an exclusively male community" (138). Claudio, Don Pedro, and even Leonato do readily believe Hero's dishonor. When the soldiers encounter unforeseen enemies, Don Pedro leads his troops in a hasty (albeit somewhat undignified) retreat.

Benedick, slightly older and wiser than Claudio, extends his distrust of women and his distaste for marriage to a certain wariness of Don Pedro as well. He
may be the exception that proves Garner’s rule. Bene

Benedick is more fearful of a marital alliance than Claudio, yet he is able to move away from the male alliance. Benedick’s relative success in assimilating into domesticity allows him a certain freedom from the male/soldier ties of the military. His independence from Don Pedro and ultimately from Claudio both allows him to form alliances outside the military (with the Friar and Beatrice on Hero’s behalf) and allows him to make the transition from the male world of the soldier into the female world of marriage.

The dysfunction of the male alliance is nowhere more visible than when Benedick challenges Claudio. Claudio and Don Pedro attempt to maintain the brotherhood of the soldier, ribbing Benedick about marriage. Claudio and Don Pedro have fallen victim to the soldier’s inability to use wit, a necessary weapon in the domestic world. Benedick tries to express the seriousness of the situation, though for Don Pedro and Claudio, talk of love and marriage is the subject of jokes:

Fare you well, boy. You know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor. You break jests as braggarts do blades,
which, God
be thank’d, hurt not. My lord, for your
many courte-
sies I thank you. I must discontinue
your company. (5.1.182-6)

The male alliance breaks down here, but re-forms at the end of the play. Claudio and Benedick renew their friendship as "kinsmen" rather than soldiers and Benedick re-allies with Don Pedro in order to devise a punishment for the villain, Don John.

The willingness to engage in self-destructive behavior based on a male alliance is even more marked in Othello. "In Othello’s world men are even more exclusively and intensely bonded together as warriors" (Garner 140). Iago’s ability to manipulate his male companions is less remarkable than the blind faith they put in him. Iago’s success depends upon his ability to say what the men expect to hear. He preys on their basest instincts, capitalizes on their weaknesses, and anticipates their selfish responses. Othello, Cassio, and Roderigo believe that Iago puts the association of soldiers above his own goals, though he tells Roderigo outright that he serves no master but himself (1.1.59-60).

Iago’s double-cross of Roderigo is perhaps the most
significant example of the unreliability of the male
bond within the context of the shift from military to
domestic. Othello expects a loyalty from his men which
mirrors his own; Iago has an ax to grind with Cassio
that precludes mutual loyalty and trust. Iago should
have no hatred for Roderigo. Iago, depending upon
Roderigo's sense of the male alliance, speaks to
Roderigo (as he does to Cassio and Othello) in a loving
way, calling him, "noble heart," saying, "I have
professed me thy friend," and assuring Roderigo, "Thou
art sure of me" (1.3.305, 339, 366). Roderigo makes the
mistake Claudio makes when trusting Don Pedro to be his
agent in his pursuit of Hero. In fact, it is dangerous
to rely on the male alliance in domestic matters.
Nevertheless, Roderigo depends upon Iago to "be fast to
my hopes" (1.3.364), to pursue Desdemona in his behalf.
Roderigo doesn't recognize that the military bond of
loyalty has already been broken. Iago hates Othello and
will do anything to destroy him. His reversal of
loyalty to his general proves that Iago applies
different rules in the non-military situation. His
battle with Othello is a political, not military, one.
Roderigo hears Iago's thoughts on loyalty, yet trusts
him to keep his interests at heart. Iago uses Roderigo as a pawn in his double plot against Othello and Cassio.

Cassio trusts Iago as well. His trust is truly the loyalty of fellow-soldiers in arms. Cassio, in relying on this fellowship, totally underestimates Iago. He allows Iago to get him drunk when Iago suggests a night out with "our friends" (2.1.34). Iago stresses the military bond in his choice of a drinking song:

"And let me the canakin clink, clink;  
And let me the canakin clink.  
A soldier's a man.  
O, man's life's but a span;  
Why, then, let a soldier drink."
(2.3.65-69)

Although Iago is responsible for pushing Cassio to drunkenness, Cassio reaffirms his trust in Iago after Othello has punished him. Iago encourages this renewed confidence by swearing his love for Cassio (2.3.305) while advising him to use Desdemona as a go-between in his conflict with Othello. Cassio agrees, saying, "You advise me well," eliciting a confidence-inspiring reply from Iago, "I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness" (2.3. 320-1).

Derek Cohen suggests that sexual jealousy becomes the overwhelming passion for Othello, turning him from a soldier to a murderer. His plot with Iago, who provides
Othello with the visual images necessary to incite his rage, provides justification for his actions within the military/male context. Allying with Iago against the common enemy (to men), Desdemona, Othello is able to rationalize his transformation from soldier to murderer:

The sinister delight Othello takes in the poetic beauty and rightness of this exaction savors of sexual excitement. The thoughts the image arouses center on Desdemona’s sexuality, the contaminated bed and the lying throat being encircled by his strong hands, the surrender of that body to the greater power of his own. (Cohen 216)

Further, "To the human being pressed or conditioned to live for death, the human being physically and emotionally conditioned to live for life and giving birth becomes the great antagonist..." (Bachrach 21).

Cassio, Roderigo and Othello all trust Iago implicitly as though domestic situations required the same soldier to soldier loyalty required in war. Iago, though still obsessed with what he considers military injustices, applies different rules once the wars are over. He shifts into a mode of politics, which requires flattery of everyone. He has moved successfully into the domestic phase. However, Iago’s ambitions, clearly
marked at the beginning of the play, finally get the better of him. In his zeal to win all his domestic battles, he engages too many players. He has become so entirely political that he has no one to trust. His plan is too unwieldy to execute without allies, so it (partially) fails.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram, like Claudio and Roderigo, uses a male go-between in his sexual pursuit of Diana. Bertram's alliance with Parolles is based on Bertram's perception of Parolles as an honorable and worthy soldier:

Lafew: But I hope your lordship thinks not him a sol-
dier.
Bertram: Yes, my lord, and of very valiant approof.
Lafew: You have it from his own deliverance.
Bertram: And by other warranted testimony.
Lafew: Then my dial goes not true. I took this lark for a bun-
ing.
Bertram: I do assure you, my lord, he is very great in knowledge and accordingly valiant.
(2.5.1-9)

Because Bertram sees Parolles as a worthy soldier, he trusts him as an agent in love as well as battle.

The folly of Bertram's trust is established by revealing Parolles's "retrograde" (1.2.197) form of honor as a
Parolles establishes himself as Bertram's ally in the battle against women's virginity. He and Helena describe virginity as a treasure that needs a "barricade," a "warlike resistance," and a "military policy" to protect it (1.1.115, 119, 123). Helena also establishes herself as a soldier, one who defends her own honor; the honor of chastity: "I will stand for't a little, though therefore I die a virgin" (1.1.135-6). Helena's self-definition in military terms may explain her eventual success in achieving her goal (Bertram), though ironically simultaneously losing her honor (chastity).

Helena recognizes Parolles' cowardice in his role as soldier though her love of Bertram prevents her from recognizing his equal cowardice in his role of husband. Bertram hides behind Parolles in domestic matters (sending him to tell Helena he wouldn't consummate their marriage) just as Parolles hides behind Bertram in battle. Their relationship is mutually self-serving. This may explain Bertram's relative leniency when he finds out that Parolles has betrayed him.

Parolles helps to convince Bertram to leave Helena
and return to war. He addresses Bertram in lover’s terms, calling him "sweetheart" (2.3.268). Parolles, the cowardly soldier, appeals to Bertram, the cowardly lover, in military/sexual terms:

Ay, that would be known. To th’ wars, my boy, to th’wars!
He wears his honor in a box unseen,
That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,
Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
Of Mar’s fiery steed. To other regions!
France is a stable, we that dwell in t’jadi.
Therefore, to th’war! (2.3.277-84)

Parolles’s insinuation that "real men" don’t get married reinforces Bertram’s fear of domesticity. Bertram flees his marriage to the more comfortable companionship of soldiers. Bertram is convinced that love and war are irreconcilable; he chooses war:

This very day, Great Mars, I put myself into thy file. Make me like my thoughts, and I shall prove A lover of thy drum, hater of love. (3.3.8-11)

Parolles continues his alliance with Bertram in Bertram’s courtship of Diana. Diana is "solicited" (3.5.15) by Parolles on Bertram’s behalf. The word itself suggests an interest less than honorable. Diana is warned against Parolles, who is described as a
"knave," and a "filthy officer" (3.5.16,17). Bertram's reputation is sullied by his association with Parolles in the world of love as well as in the world of war.

Bertram finally recognizes that Parolles is not worthy of his trust. The revelation is in a military rather than a domestic context, which makes it all the more shocking to Bertram. His question, "Do you think I am so far deceiv'd in him?" (3.6.6) is doubly ironic. First, in asking this question, he again depends on the opinion of fellow soldiers. Second, Bertram's inability to recognize Parolles's cowardice and dishonesty has stained Bertram's own reputation. Parolles's opinion on virginity/honor as something to be assaulted and broken down-- "It is not politic in the commonwealth of nature to preserve virginity" (1.1.128-9)-- coincides with his perception of honor in his male associations as well. Parolles takes his male relationships as lightly as those between males and females. As with Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing, it is necessary for the bond between the men to be broken in order to clear the way for the male/female bond.

When Parolles is taken "prisoner" by his fellow-soldiers, he betrays any vestige of military honor. Not
only does he divulge military intelligence in order to save himself, he also freely criticizes Bertram and the other officers. Nakayama suggests that the Lords "desire to hear what Parolles says about them personally...[because] these men fear the harm Parolles could do to their reputations" (150). He suggests that Parolles is the scapegoat (similar to Don John) who "is blamed so that a young aristocrat may have his name cleared and be re-admitted to his society to be married" (Nakayama 149-50). Parolles will say anything that is necessary to avoid punishment. Parolles's willingness to divulge "all the secrets of our camp" (4.1.87) and to betray "that lascivious young boy the Count" (4.3.303) opens Bertram's eyes. One must also question, however, the honor of the soldiers who tricked and plotted against Parolles. For who, indeed, "cannot be crush'd with a plot?" (4.3.328).

Coriolanus, in Coriolanus, has both a male and a female association in Rome. His mother, Volumnia, and his surrogate father, Menenius, together are responsible for attempting to guide (or push) Coriolanus into a new role in peacetime. However, it is Coriolanus's relationship with Aufidius, a soldier, that is most
significant for the purposes of this paper. Aufidius is an enemy to Coriolanus; they fight against one another in the battle which gives Coriolanus his name. Their respect for one another is great. In fact, we first learn of a pact the men have from Aufidius, "If we and Caius Marcius chance to meet, 'Tis sworn between us we shall ever strike/ Till one can do no more" (1.3.35-6). The soldiers' pledge of honor appears to be two-sided and indeed it is within the military context. Aufidius and Coriolanus are soldiers worthy of mutual respect. Coriolanus makes two mistakes in his relationship with Aufidius, however; first, he assumes Aufidius adheres to exactly the same code of honor to which he subscribes; second, he assumes the rules apply in a domestic situation as well as in war. Aufidius, however, tired of being beaten, has changed the rules:

Five times, Marcius,
I have fought with thee, so often hast
thou beat me,
And would'st do so, I think, should we encounter
As often as we eat. By th'elements,
If e'er again I meet him beard to beard,
He's mine or I am his. Mine emulation
Hath not that honor in't it had; for where
I thought to crush him in equal force,
True sword to sword. I'll potch at him some way
Aufidius admits that he will break the rules and compromise his soldier's honor in order to win. His personal ambition has superseded the code to which Coriolanus still subscribes. He hates Coriolanus so much that he will attempt to crush him "Where I find him, were it/ At home, upon my brother's guard, even there,/ Against the hospitable canon..." (1.10.24-6) Coriolanus still considers Aufidius a worthy enemy, one who is as much of a soldier as he is. Carducci suggests that Coriolanus and Aufidius view their relationship similarly. She says they are in the "'manipulative' phase of male friendship. Each man has a skill the other can use; they have a shared goal (to defeat Rome), and when there are no longer mutual benefits, the relationship is over" (Carducci 12). She considers their mutual manipulation as further proof of Coriolanus's inability to have an intimate relationship. I think Carducci overreads Coriolanus and underreads Aufidius. Though they do indeed have a mutually held goal, Coriolanus proceeds knowing his own honor and assuming that of Aufidius. Aufidius admits his own honor is blemished by opportunism.
Aufidius, like Iago, has the characteristics, to succeed, at least temporarily, in both the military and domestic worlds. Aufidius, unlike Coriolanus, is able to play the politician. He can flatter and hate at the same time. Coriolanus's trust in Aufidius is based on his knowledge, not of Aufidius, but of himself:

They have a leader,
Tullus Aufidius, that will put you to't.
I sin in envying his nobility;
And, were I anything but what I am,
I would wish me only he. (1.1.228-31)

He ascribes the characteristics to Aufidius that exist in himself. Coriolanus can only take the narrow view. This other warrior, "a lion/ That I am proud to hunt" (1.1.235-6), must be as pure as Coriolanus. Coriolanus's blindness concerning Aufidius (along with his inability to deny anything to his mother) leads to his final defeat.

When Coriolanus is banished from Rome, he flees to Aufidius, hoping to ally himself with Aufidius against what has become a common enemy. Though it is in Aufidius's interest to accept Coriolanus's partnership in a campaign against his enemy, Aufidius's admiration of Coriolanus has a dark side. He shares the almost sexual fraternalism that Coriolanus has expressed:

63
Know thou first, I lov’d the maid I married; never man 
Sigh’d truer breath. But that I see thee here, 
Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart 
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw Bestride my threshold. (4.5.118-23)

Velz compares Aufidius’s "shocking imagery" (67) with similar sexual imagery used by Coriolanus in a speech to Cominius (1.6.29-32). He suggests that the men’s’ inability to separate "sexuality and violence" proves that by "...Shakespeare’s standards they are true primitives" (Velz 67). Aufidius and Coriolanus are certainly connected by a strong bond of some kind. But it is a mistake to ignore the essential difference between them. Even within the context of Velz’s argument, Aufidius, though not a Roman, has adopted the "modern" ways. He has become a political animal as well as a primitive one. Coriolanus is fooled by Aufidius’s loving reception. He fails to see that Aufidius admires "all-noble Marcius," yet hates him at the same time. The "root of ancient envy" (4.5.108) in Aufidius’s heart is his motivation in welcoming Coriolanus. Coriolanus may believe the two are equals, but Aufidius does not:

Resemblances or fancied resemblances between the two warriors establishes the supremacy of the heroic ideal in
Coriolanus' Scale of values, but we cannot doubt which of them more nearly encompasses the ideal. As we watch the progress of their alliance, we see Aufidius becoming increasingly jealous and finally working for the destruction of his rival. (Waith 132)

He knows that Coriolanus is his superior, and the servants know, too:

Second Servant: ...He [Coriolanus] is simply the rarest man i' th'world.
First Servant: I think he is. But a greater soldier than/ he, you wot one.

Aufidius recognizes Coriolanus's nobility, but he also recognizes his great military ability. Aufidius wants revenge, not only on Rome but on the soldier who led Rome to defeat him. Though Coriolanus seems, at first, to recognize Aufidius’s thirst for revenge against him, he is lulled by Aufidius’s readiness to ally with him in battle against Rome.

Aufidius puts his personal hatred of Coriolanus on hold in order to achieve his military goals. In fact, Aufidius knows he can’t win without Coriolanus, nor could he win if Coriolanus were fighting for Rome. Aufidius’s choices are limited, though his willingness to employ one enemy to do battle on another should have
been ample warning to Coriolanus. Their soldiers’ pact
had been broken; their next meeting did not lead to
battle to the death. Aufidius has transformed from a
soldier to a politician. He resorts to double-dealing
in order to win at any cost.

Aufidius misreads Coriolanus as well. His
estimation of Coriolanus’s unfailing honor does not take
into account Coriolanus’s loyalty and submission to the
will of Volumnia. Coriolanus’s decision to return to
Rome is an unexpected twist which complicates Aufidius’s
plans. His anger at Coriolanus becomes self-righteous
and self-serving:

That I would have spoke of,
Being banish’d for’t, he came unto my
hearth,
Presented to my knife his throat. I took
him;
Made him joint-servant with me; gave him
way
In all his own desires; nay, let him
choose
Out of my files, his projects to
accomplish,
My best and freshest men; serv’d his
designments
In mine own person; holp to reap the fame
Which he did end all his; and took some
pride
To do myself this wrong—till at the last
I seem’d his follower, not partner, and
He wag’d me with his countenance, as if
I had been mercenary. (5.4.28-40)

Aufidius attempts to turn a political victory into a
military and personal honor. As usual, though, he can only be second best. Aufidius' final chance for the victories he seeks is in killing Coriolanus:

[Excerpt from coriolanus]

Aufidius sounds more like a jilted lover than a noble general. His politicizing of the military worked no better than Coriolanus's militarizing of politics. Both men chose this alliance unwisely; neither's expectations were met.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

Several critics advance a feminist theory that Shakespeare's plays present an unshakeable patriarchy, perpetuated and upheld by the author himself. Based on what these critics see as a distrust of women, they argue that Shakespeare both represents the patriarchal reality and, in creating the text, perpetuates the system. Though in these four plays, a patriarchal
military society is portrayed, Shakespeare presents an equivocal view of a male society. Though certainly in the characters of Othello and Coriolanus one may read a nostalgia for the "warrior" and a certain regret for the passing of an anachronistic ideal, the patriarchal machine runs none too smoothly in any of the four plays. "As with beautiful notions such as Kingship or Courtly Love," Bachrach states, "he [Shakespeare] knew that the notion of Service and the ideals it embodied were not really of this world" (23).

The patriarchy of the military, based on male alliance, breaks down in each of the plays. The refusal of Claudio and Bertram to alter their outlook makes their marriages anything but joyful. Though there is some doubt as to Benedick's participation in the reforming of the male alliance at the end of Much Ado, his movement away from the military/patriarchy toward a new alliance with a woman based on mutual independence and a healthy limitation of trust on both sides, makes Benedick a survivor in a new world.

The entry of the man into the world of the female is seen as a form of rape, or invasion of private female space where "the woman's chamber has represented her
'self': both her physical body and mental/spiritual nature" (Ziegler 87), which again connotes a perpetuation of the patriarchy. In fact, in a discussion of language in *Much Ado*, Carol Cook suggests "a complex chain of association among the word, the sword and the phallus, marking off language as the domain of masculine privilege and masculine aggression" (Cook 186). She explains Beatrice’s facility with words as allowed since she is "gendered as masculine" (Cook 190). I see language as very much within the domain of the female. Benedick rather than Beatrice has made a change. In trading words with Beatrice, he has entered the woman’s space in a positive rather than negative way. His decision to form an alliance based on affinity of nature rather than on artificial rules of male conduct bodes well for the future of these two characters. It also suggests some hope for man’s potential for change. Shakespeare is well aware of the dangers of language within the context of the four plays. Iago’s and Volumnia’s ability to use language to deceive and manipulate demonstrates the malleability of language to suit the user. In fact, "Elizabethans believed that the ears were entrances to the soul and
that the soul therefore could be endangered by long exposure to lies" (Lake 333). In one way, the soldier’s inability to manipulate language makes him more attractive. Finally, though, it also dooms him, or at least his "type." The rigidity of the soldier’s code, which requires action rather than words, limits the soldier’s ability to adapt to a changing society.

In these four plays, Shakespeare considers marriage and politics metaphors for a more cosmic change. Velz suggests that "heroic societies are immature," and that in order to achieve maturity what is needed is "rational discourse, as opposed to impulsive violence." Velz represents the ideal not as a warrior, lover, or politician, but as a "mature man in a mature society" (Velz 64).

"Maturity" then, and now, is a slippery term. Claudio and Bertram are young men offered the opportunity to grow and change, though ultimately there is little likelihood of their "maturing." Othello and Coriolanus, as active soldiers, cannot adapt to change in their world. Finally, if adaptability is one measure of maturity and the ability to use language effectively is a dangerous tool with which adaptation is possible,
neither man nor woman will "mature" in an idealized state. Adaptability requires crossing of all boundaries, vocational as well as gender. Only acceptance of changing rules and the need to forge individual alliances allow the creation of a human being able to survive. A soldier, in order to assimilate into a non-military world, must shed his distrust of women, modify his trust of men, and integrate language into his transformation. Since, as Iago's song suggests, "A soldier's a man," there is hope for change.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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