"THE FORGERIES OF JEALOUSY": SHAKESPEARE'S CUCKOLDRY

RONALD LEO ST. PIERRE

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Abstract
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A chapter apiece is devoted to Shakespeare's four major cuckold plays--The Merry Wives of Windsor, Othello, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale--and his two minor cuckold plays in which cuckoldry has a significant role in the sub-plot or background of the play--Much Ado About Nothing and Troilus and Cressida. Also slight references to cuckoldry can be found in several other plays. In general, Shakespeare utilizes the language of cuckoldry to debunk the stereotypes and lore of cuckoldry as he received it; especially the saws in cuckoldry which state that all husbands are virtual cuckolds, wives, especially amiable and socially active wives, are naturally wanton and given the chance will horn their husbands, and paramours who know the lore of cuckoldry can utilize it to seduce any wife at will.

For Shakespeare, cuckoldry is chimerical, born of male jealousy and perpetuated by society and slander. Shakespeare's cuckoldry plays do not depict wifely adultery at all; rather, they reveal cuckoldry to be a male delusion. In this way, the plays deny cuckoldry's veracity, portraying the propensity to commit adultery to be foreign to the majority of women. Shakespeare's cuckoldry suggests that if men banish their fears of being horned, they can live fuller and more secure lives, their wives can be more active social partners, and society can be more stable.

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"The Forgeries of Jealousy":
Shakespeare's Cuckoldry

By

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
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Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

"The Forgeries of Jealousy":

Shakespeare's Cuckoldry

by

Ronald St. Pierre

University of New Hampshire, December, 1982

Cuckoldry is a complex of terms, ideas, injunctions and stereotypes attached to the notion that a wife's infidelity transformed her husband into a horned beast called a "cuckold." This complex, or lore of cuckoldry, was not merely a literary tradition but a popular conception which was beneficial to the medieval family structure with its wide kinship bonds and relatively cold husband-wife relationships. During Shakespeare's time, however, the family was changing, placing a greater stress on mutual society and paternal authority in such a way as to be incompatible with traditional cuckoldry. Consequently during the English Renaissance, literary treatments of cuckoldry also changed. Shakespeare, participating in some of these changes, created his own brand of cuckoldry, denying its universal validity.
A chapter apiece is devoted to Shakespeare's four major cuckold plays—The Merry Wives of Windsor, Othello, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale—and his two minor cuckold plays in which cuckoldry has a significant role in the sub-plot or background of the play—Much Ado About Nothing and Troilus and Cressida. Also slight references to cuckoldry can be found in several other plays. In general, Shakespeare utilizes the language of cuckoldry to debunk the stereotypes and lore of cuckoldry as he received it; especially the saws in cuckoldry which state that all husbands are virtual cuckolds, wives, especially amiable and socially active wives, are naturally wanton and given the chance will horn their husbands, and paramours who know the lore of cuckoldry can utilize it to seduce any wife at will.

For Shakespeare, cuckoldry is chimerical, born of male jealousy and perpetuated by society and slander. Shakespeare's cuckoldry plays do not depict wifely adultery at all; rather, they reveal cuckoldry to be a male delusion. In this way, the plays deny cuckoldry's veracity, portraying the propensity to commit adultery to be foreign to the majority of women. Shakespeare's cuckoldry suggests that if men banish their fears of being horned, they can live fuller and more secure lives, their wives can be more active social partners, and society can be more stable.
CHAPTER I

i

The Cuckold Tradition

Well before the English Renaissance, the cuckold was established in England and on the continent as one of the most popular comic figures. Readers and audiences from the first century A.D. up to and beyond Shakespeare's time delighted in cuckold stories. From Apuleius' *Golden Ass* (114 A.D.), which includes perhaps the first anthology of cuckold stories, through innumerable fabliaux, medieval comic tales, early Renaissance comic dramas, and other forms of poetry and prose fiction, the cuckold's horns were displayed, and in the process of telling and retelling of the cuckold's tale a complex of ideas, injunctions, stereotypes and ethical notions attached themselves to the cuckold, his wife, and her paramour. This complex, or the lore of cuckoldry, provided Renaissance writers with a vast store of stock characters and situations, prejudices and saws, tolerances and condemnations from which to draw when writing cuckold stories.
Shakespeare, too, drew from the lore of cuckoldry, and seemed at the same time particularly fascinated and distressed by it. Returning to cuckoldry again and again, Shakespeare participates in some of the changes common to English Renaissance cuckoldry in general, but he develops as well his own alternative brand of cuckoldry. It is necessary, therefore, to examine the lore as Shakespeare received it, and the evolving social forces that shaped Renaissance cuckoldry.1

Although its etymology is by no means clear, the word "cuckold" is usually said to derive from the cuckoo bird’s practice of laying its eggs in the nests of other birds, the word coming by some linguistic reversal to apply not to the paramour who enlarged the nest, but to the husband who finds his nest expanded. The word "cuckold" may, however, have been secured on the cuckold along with his horns. The Oxford English Dictionary tells us they grew as a result of "the practice formerly prevalent [in late ancient Greece] of planting or engrafting the spurs of a castrated cock on the root of the excised comb, where they grew and became horns sometimes of several inches long," the word "cuckold" originating from the Greek word meaning "caapon."2 Certainly,

the lately potent and lordly rooster, now a capon strutting castrated, horned and impotent among his newly served chicken harem seemed an obvious butt for laughter and a vivid image of a wronged husband in a society like that of late ancient Greece which held wives to be undisputed possessions of their husbands. Whatever the origin of the word "cuckold" and the cuckold's horns, imaginatively the cuckold by the agency of his wife's infidelity came to be seen as being transformed into a horned beast.

The deprecatory appellation "cuckold" and the chimerical horns became, in the course of time, apt marks of the disgrace husbands came to bear as a result of their wives' transgression and the source of infinite punning, jesting and laughing. The figure of the horned cuckold was so imaginatively vivid a legion of images seasoned him. He bore countless references to his head, forehead, crest, or head-piece being forked, branched, feathered or horned with abundance, plenty, destiny, suretyship, or fidelity. He was surrounded by horn-shavings, horn-makers, headsman and cuckoo birds, cuckoo flowers, or cuckoo-makers. If he knew and countenanced his wife's adultery, he was called a "wittol" (though this word was often loosely applied to any obvious cuckold). He had both St. Cuccou and St. Arnold for patron saints. His pagan deity was Vulcan, the only

3 For the meaning and sources of these and the following terms see Eric Partridge, Shakespeare's Bawdy. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1969) and/or James T. Hinke, Renaissance-Dramatic-Bawdy (Exclusive of Shakespeare): An Annotated Glossary and Critical Checklist. (Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur Englische Sprache und Literature, 1974).
Greco/Roman god whose wife was unfaithful, and he was thought to resemble Actaeon, who was horned though not by his wife but by Diana whom he saw naked. He could, if he needed sanctuary, join the others stricken with the forked plague by retreating to Cuckold's Haven.

Just as the language of cuckoldry proved fertile and prolific in both popular imagination and in literary production, so too did the stereotypes attached to members of the cuckoldry triangle. Chaucer's *Miller's Tale* (ca. 1388-89) will serve as an example of the stereotypes and their fecundity. As soon as the drunken Miller announces he will tell "of a carpenter and of his wyf. / How that a clerk hath set the wrights cappe" (3142-3143), the Reeve objects, "Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye. / It is a synne and eek a qreet folye/ To apeyren any man, or him defame,/ And eek to bryngen wyves in such fame" (3145-48). On the surface, Osewold the Reeve argues the story will defame the carpenter of the story and wives in general by giving them a bad reputation ("fame"). Clearly, Osewold perceives how the story of one woman's transgression reflects on all women. That one woman is capable of horning her husband implies to his mind all women share this propensity. Beneath the surface, however, Osewold defends himself. He is not so

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much concerned the Miller's tale will defame the carpenter of the tale or wives in general as he is concerned the charge of being a cuckold will extend to himself. Witness, here, the wonderful fecundity of the charge of being cuckolded. The single instance of one fictional character branded by his wife charges all women cuckold-makers and all husbands -- here of the same profession -- cuckolds.

The Miller's defence of his tale denies all men are cuckolds. Even though the Miller puts forward the axiom that "Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold," still, he insists, some men with wives may not be cuckolds. In fact, he affirms there are "evere a thousand goode ayayns onn badde" (3152-3155). The Miller's conclusion, however, takes an ironic twist. "I wol bilee va that I am noon," he asserts, continuing:

An housbond shal nat been inquisitif
Of Goddes Pryvetee, nor of his wyf.
So he may fynde Goddes foyson there,
Of the remenant nedeth nat enquire.
(3162-3166)

The Miller's faith in his wife is not based on any personal trust between himself and his wife; rather, he asserts that he "wol" believe what he wishes to believe. He argues the value of ignorance. One should not look into the doings of God, nor of one's wife, and since the sexual wealth a wife can give should satisfy a husband, why worry if there is some left over for others. The Miller argues men should believe themselves uncuckolded, and tolerate their wives' behavior by ignoring it. The tale itself depicts
stereotypical cuckoldry characters. The carpenter is rude, old, jealous and because he "demed hymself ... like a cokewold" (3226), he keeps his wife "Narwe in cage" (3224-3226). His wife Alisoun, besides being lovely, is "young and wylde" (3225), having "a likerous [sexy] eye" (3244), and "Wybsynge [skittish] ... as is a joly colt," so that no man however wise could find "So gay a popelote of swich a wenche" (3253-3254). This combination of a beautiful, gay, merry, free spirit with a sexual spark attracts two potential paramours: a clerk Nicholas, who is renting a rccm from the carpenter, and Absolon, the parish clerk. Nicholas' first approaches to Alisoun are spurned, but soon his fair speech and dispatch weakens her. Absolon also woos Alisoun with gifts and serenades though with no success, proving, according to the narrator, the saw, "'Alwey the nye slye/ Maketh the ferre leeve to looth'" (3392-3393).

The balance of the tale tells of Nicholas' and Alisoun's efforts:

This sely jalous husband to bigyle,
And if so be the game wente aright,
She shoulde slepen in his arm, al nyght,
For this was his desir and hire also.

(3404-3407)

And so it works out though all, save the wife, suffer to some degree. The carpenter is declared "wood" by his own brother, and the whole is summed up by the narrator as follows:
Thus swyved was this carpentaris wyf,
For al his kepynq and his jealouslye,
And Absclon hath kist her nether eye,
And Nicholas is scalded in the towte.

(3850-3853)

Nicholas' and Alisoun's desire for adulterous sexual pleasure is celebrated in this tale, as is the duping of the foolish, jealous old husband. The pains doled out seem in no way retribution for sins, but humourous trifles, part of the fun for the narrator and auditors. The husband's efforts to avoid being horned are useless, and in fact his supposed searchings into "Goddes pryvatee" (see 3454) result in his own cuckoldling. This tale reveals the foolishness of jealousy and of efforts to avoid being cuckolded. It is better to just let be.

In the next tale, the Reeve revenges himself on the Miller by also utilizing the universal applicability of a cuckold tale. In effect, he calls the Miller cuckold by telling a tale involving another Miller cuckolded. So just as the tales tell of men's rivalries in love and revenges for cuckoldry, the tales themselves are told as mutual charges of cuckoldry in a series of rivalries and revenges.

Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" provides an epitome of the cuckold tradition and shows how the stereotypes found in cuckoldry are easily extended to apply to virtually everyone. Medieval comic tales and fabliaux, Boccaccian and other Renaissance tales, and drama such as Machiavelli's La Mandragola (ca. 1513) and John Heywood's A Merry Play (1533-34) all use cuckoldry in similar ways. Almost
exclusively in comic genres, the early cuckold tradition celebrated the mischievous, amorous and bawdy fun involved in cuckoldry. The idea of a horned husband became a universal subject of laughter. Wifely adultery, undertaken to satisfy a wife and her paramour's amorous or sexual desires, was presented as neither sinful nor especially destructive to marriage. The cuckold tradition tolerated these desires in wives and young men, encouraged their fulfillment, warned husbands not to interfere nor to be jealous, while laughing at the vain efforts of husbands who try to avoid being cuckolded. As a result, the tales of cuckoldry focused on the wife and/or her paramour and upon their plots against the foolish, old husband.

During Shakespeare's time, stories of cuckoldry could be found in prose, poetry and drama, each tale relying more or less on the conventional plots and lore of cuckoldry. Stories themselves varied enormously though scores of plots, plot devices and character traits recur again and again. The plot conventions always revolve around the real or suspected infidelity of a wife, along with a number of other commonplaces which may or may not be utilized. These may include the actual involvement of the cuckold in uniting the paramours (what I will term the "wittol theme"), the efforts of a pandar to arrange a meeting, and either an initial refusal by the wife or an exchange of flirtatious looks between the wife and the paramour engendering love in them both. After the wife and her paramour consummate their
affair, the husband's suspicion or discovery of it usually follows, causing him to attempt to uncover proofs of wrongdoing or catch them in *flagrante delicto*. Despite the husband's efforts, however, the paramour usually escapes. The conclusion can involve the paramour's discovery of the identity of the cuckold, often followed by his repentance and exit, or the husband can be fooled into believing against proof that any wrongdoing has occurred. In such a case, he may lose his jealousy and the adultery can continue indefinitely or with impunity for the one time. Alternatively, something tragic may occur in the end, usually caused by the cuckold's jealousy and desire for revenge. The tragedy involves in many cases the death of the adulterous wife.

This survey certainly does not exhaust the conventions of plot. Space limitations do not allow for a complete discussion of the cuckold tradition's plot conventions here. Rather, I will discuss plot conventions that bear directly on Shakespeare when I discuss his works. In what follows, I will sketch the main character types found in the cuckold tradition. A selective list of cuckold tales can be found in the primary source bibliography.

The most outstanding feature of the cuckold is his jealousy, the psychology of which is outlined in fullest detail in Varchi's *Blazon of Jealousy* (1560) translated with notes by Robert Tofte in 1615, though the Italian tract was known in England by Shakespeare's time.6 Varchi sees
jealousy arising from love, the strongest passion from which all other passions proceed. Some of these passions "exceed (beyond all comparison,) all other Torments, and Tortures whatsoever," the worst of these being "passing pleasing and sweet, in regard of that one damned Feare, or Hellish Suspect, or rather uncurable Plague, and deadly poysone, cleped Jealousie." In general, jealousy is defined as "a certaine eager and earnest Desire to enjoy a Beauty of one alone by himself onely," or more fully, "a certain Feare or Doubt, least any one whom we would not, should enjoy a Beauty that wee make account of; and, this, for two Reasons, eyther because wee our selves would enjoy the same alone, or else, that such a one as we like and desire, might have the sole fruistion and possession thereof." There are four ways, Varchi suggests that jealousy arises: "By reason (1) Of Pleasure, (2) Of Passion, (3) Or Property or Right, (4) Or Honor." By reason of pleasure, Varchi means, the individual wishes "all the Pleasure of one"; by reason of passion, he wants what he most loves; by property or right, he wants to possess someone "wholly" and in this case when it seems as if other "merchants" have enjoyed the woman, he wishes to give her up entirely and quench the jealousy and

6 Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1930), p. 150.
8 Varchi, p. 5.
9 Varchi, p. 12.
10 Varchi, p. 16.
the love that was there before.11 Finally by reason of honor, the jealous man is tender of his honor according to his station of life and national custom. In this regard, southern nations especially the Persians and Italians are singled out as especially prone to jealousy.12

The results of jealousy, Varchi suggests, are offered by Ariosto in Canto 13, Stanza 5 of Orlande Furioso:

"suspcion, fear, martyring [according to Tofte, inner torture of mind and body], frenzy, ["distemperature of the braime"]13, and madness ["a furious passion, that taketh away right Senses and Wits for euer"]14. In 1621, Robert Burton fills in the list of symptoms by quoting Galen: an unrelieved jealousy individual will "proceed from suspicion to hatred, from hatred to frenzy, madness, injury, murder, and despair."16 The physical signs of jealousy are also enumerated by Burton:

'Tis proper to jealousy so to do,
Pale Haq, infernal fury, pleasure's smart,
Envy's observer, prying in every part
Besides those strange gestures of staring,
frowning, grinning, rolling of eyes, menacing,
ghastly eyes, broken pace, interrupt [sic], precipitate half-turns. He will sometimes sigh,
weep, sob for anger, .. swear and belie,
slander any man, curse, threaten, brawl, scold,
fight; and sometimes again flatter and speak fair,
ask forgiveness, kiss and coll, condemn

11 Varchi, p. 20.
12 Varchi, pp. 22-23.
13 Varchi, p. 11.
14 Varchi, p. 11.
15 Varchi, pp. 10-11.
his rashness and folly, vow, protest, and swear he will never do so again; and then eftssoons, impatient as he is, rave, roar, and lay about him like a madman, thump her sides, drag her about perchance, drive her out of doors, send her home, he will be divorced forthwith, she is a whore, etc .... 17

Varchi writes more briefly that if wisdom, patience or discretion fail, jealousy burns into a hatred, to a frenzy, to madness and is finally directed against the wife, her paramour or any who foster the jealousy. The result is often murder.

Varchi also analyzes how the persons involved in a triangle increase or decrease jealousy. According to Varchi, a number of factors within the jealous person contribute to his jealousy. First of all, those who are most prone to jealousy are those who are either unfaithful themselves, excessively idle, given to choler, or distemper, and are "over-heady." 18 Once jealous, they will take everything in its worst sense. The more they suspect, the more they are jealous and the more they search out evidence to convince themselves of their worst fears. The disease, as it is often called, becomes desperate. "They will despite of their owne selues," Varchi writes, "imagine and conceit that which doth so much afflict, gaule, and torment them incessantly, and without rest, as if they were not (properly) in loue." 19 All in all, jealousy is not

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17 Burton, Pt. 3, pp. 280-81.
18 Varchi, p. 33.
19 Varchi, p. 33.
determined by the "rule of Truth"20, that is, by the actual faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the wife, but by the jealous man's psychology, the place he was born, the times, or whether or not he is idle.

At the end of his tract, Varchi affirms that some "spice" of jealousy accompanies all love, that if a man wants a child like himself, "he should not obtaine his purpose, having his she-Friend common to another."21 Thus it "is as naturall a thing for a man to be Iealousie, as to desire to engender, and beget that which is like to himselfe, which is the most naturall thing ... that a living creature can doe."22 Peter de la Primavdaie's French Academy- (1577), translated into English in 1598 by T. B., concurs: "No greater happiness can come to man & wife than to leave issue as a testimony to posteritie, that once they were in the world & and have left behind them a token of their life."23 Primavdaie goes on to define "Marriage of Loue" as "that which is between an honest man an a vertuous [sic] woman, linked togethier by God for the perservation of the lineage of man."24 Thus it is that once a woman is married, her allegiance belongs more to her husband than to her parents.25 For both Varchi and Primavdaie, conjugal

20 Varchi, p. 33.
21 Varchi, pp. 54-55.
22 Varchi, p. 57.
24 Primavdaie, p. 493.
fidelity is a pre-eminent value. Primavdaye concludes that it is instituted by God as the greatest injunction for society; and for Varchi conjugal replication is the best way to "participate and come neere vnto diuine Nature."26

Because some spice of jealousy was thought to belong in all marriages, moderate jealousy was not condemned. Condemnation was directed toward the extremes of excessive jealousy or foolish lack of suspicion when it should exist. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Page argues moderation when he warns the once excessively jealous now repentant Ford, "Be not as extreme in submission as in offense."27 Cuckolds, therefore, tend to the extremes, being either overly jealous, acting like jailors to their wives (like the carpenter in "The Miller's Tale"), making them lonely, restless and anxious for a paramour; or they tend to be fooled into thrusting their wives into the arms of willing cuckolders as is the foolish Messer Francesco who allows the "fine and foppish" Zima to woo his wife in his sight.28 At times, cuckolds can combine both the above characteristics. Messer Nicia in La Mandragola and Corvino in Volpone are both husbands who lack their wives in and who, duped by clever cuckold-makers, consent to be horned -- Nicia that he

25 Primavdaye, p. 485.
26 Varchi, p. 57.
27 All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blackmore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Hereafter line numbers will be indicated in the text.
may become a father, Corvino that he may become rich, neither of which happens. Emilia in *Othello* (IV.iii.84-103) enumerates other ways husbands cause their wives' infidelity: by neglect, infidelity on the husband's part, and beatings.

In all these ways, the cuckold tradition depicts husbands as participating in one way or other and to some degree or other in their cuckolding. Thus the word "wittol," though in its strictest sense only applicable to willing cuckolds like Nicia and Corvino, became almost synonymous with "cuckold" as horned husbands came to be universally considered instrumental in their transformation into beasts. Even the imaginary cuckold seemed responsible for his imagined dishonor, for it is his overactive mind and suspicious imagination combined with an obsessive seeking for wrongdoing that convinces him of his own disgrace. Robert Tofte, Varchi's translator, admonishes all jealous husbands:

> That always, seek's, what thou fearst most to find.
> That runst before thy FAIRE ONE in the street,
> So, with FOULMCUTHS, that thy sly ears may meet,
> Such as dare black the name of Goodnesse, such
> As n'ere speake true but when they say, 'ts TOO MUCH
> THOU SHOULDST ENJOY WHAT FORTUNE, NOT THY WORTH
> HATH GIU'N THEE IN HER.29

Husbands feared being cuckolded mostly because they suffered a loss of honor as a result of their wives' transgressions. Frankfort in Thomas Heywood's *Woman Killed*

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29 Varchi, p. xi.
With Kindness tells his wife when he considers her infidelity, "Now, I protest, I think 'tis I am tainted, / For I am most ashamed." The calumny attached to being the husband of an unfaithful wife was so acute, Milton wrote in 1643, "The generosity of our Nation is so, as to account no reproach more abominable, than to be nicknāmed the husband of an adulteress." In Shakespeare, Ford says the devil's names are better than the cuckold's (The Merry Wives of Windsor-II.ii.299-300), and Thersites goes so far as to say he would rather be "the louse of a lazar" than to be the cuckold Menelaus (Troilus and Cressida-V.i.64-69).

A husband was disgraced by his wife's infidelity because, according to Frederick Bryson, honor in the Renaissance was something "external" depending "more upon those who render it than upon those to whom it is rendered." "A man of honor," Bryson continues, "was generally held to be one who ... has not lost the good opinion of the world." Since a wife honored her husband by being faithful and obedient to him, her infidelity would indicate she had lost her good opinion of her husband, and

as cuckolds were usually assumed to participate in their
cuckolding, the dishonor would be considered to be deserved.
If a wife's transgression was discovered, it would also take
from her husband the good opinion of society because, as
Bryson reports, "in the opinion of the public ... his wife
was in his care." 34 Her lack of obedience would suggest her
husband could not control her. As Count Romei puts it, "the
loss of a woman's honor equally affects that of her husband
since the world would judge him ignorant, of small worth,
and worthy of that contempt his wife and the adulterer
procure him." 35 For these reasons during the
sixteenth-century the husband frequently had to share his
wife's disgrace at a "skimmington," or public shame
punishment. 36

Finally, in this highly patriarchal society with its
wide kinship bonds and economic status dependent on lineage,
personal identity and honor were strongly connected to
ancestry. Dishonor incurred by parents was shared by their
children, and children's shame reflected back on their
parents. A wife's infidelity would stamp her husband's
progeny with the taint of illegitimacy, a taint that the
husband would share. Thus in a world where men derived much

34 Bryson, p. 27.
35 Quoted in Curtis Brown Watson, Shakespeare and the
Renaissance Concept of Honor (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton
36 Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England
1500-1800 (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), abridged
of their identity through lineage, it is no wonder that by 
the violation of legitimacy both child and father were 
transformed, the child to a bastard and the husband into a 
horned beast.

Just as being dubbed "cuckold" was the greatest calumny 
for a husband, so being called "whore" was the greatest 
calumny to befall a Renaissance wife. The word is so 
repulsive to Desdemona, she can barely speak it (Othello 
IV.ii.117). And the slandered Imogen tells Pisanio, "I have 
heard I am a strumpet, and mine ear,\12 Therein false strook, 
can take no greater wound" (Cymbeline- III.iv.113-114). 
Curtis Watson writes that "honor" and "honesty" in women 
consisted almost exclusively "of virginity as long as she 
was unmarried and in her faithfulness to her husband after 
marrige."37 This honesty seems to have been the single most 
important possession a woman had. In defending herself 
against the seductive arguments of Bertram, Diana says:

Mine honor's such a ring,
My chastity's the jewel of our house,
Bequeathed down from many ancestors,
Which were the greatest obloquy i' th' world
In me to lose.

(All's Well That Ends Well-IV.ii.45-49)

The image of chastity and honor as a family jewel is apt. 
The image suggests not only that it is a precious 
inheritance connected to legitimacy like one's name or 
wealth, but also that it is not fully the woman's 
possesion. It is a family possession that she must guard. 
As an inheritance from her ancestors, her honor was the

37 Watson, p. 159.
possessio of her father before marriage and of her husband after marriage. This is almost humorously evident in "The Rape of Lucrece" when after the raped wife takes her life Collatine and Lucretius, her husband and father, argue in their grief over who has lost her:

"O," gouth Lucretius, "I did give that life Which she too early and too late hath spill'd." "Woe, woe," quoth Collatine, "she was my wife, I owed her, and 'tis mine that she hath kill'd." "My daughter!" and "My wife!" with clamors fill'd

The dispers'd air, who holding Lucrece's life, Answer'd their cries, "My daughter!" and "My wife!"

(1800-1807)

And as Hector points out, "Nature craves/ All dues be rend'red to their owners; now/ What nearer debt in all humanity/ Than wife is to husband?" (Troilus and Cressida II.ii.173-176).

Women did not possess honor in themselves, Bryson points out: they were thought to be "by nature imperfect" as compared to men. They had no intrinsic honor but were only repositories for their husband's honor. Thus when a woman loses her honor, that loss reflects more on her father before marriage and on her husband after marriage than on herself. The woman's calumny derives from losing what she held in trusteeship, not from losing what she herself possessed.

38 Bryson, p. 24.
As the prime quality defining a woman's honor, loss of chastity was to a self-respecting woman tantamount to the loss of life. Some Elizabethans went so far as to favor capital punishment for adultery. Mrs. Frankfort feels that the most welcome punishment for her delinquency is death (Woman Killed With Kindness IV. v. 96), and Frankfort's "kindness" is to let her live. Often in Shakespeare, suspicion of adultery, whether true or not, left only death as an alternative. Lucrece commits suicide and Lavinia allows herself to be killed. Hero and Hermione feign death till their names are cleared, and their accusers are caught and/or make reparation. Desdemona and Imogen are marked for death by their husbands when their faiths are suspected. It is of utmost importance, then, for a woman to be careful of her honor, for it can be damaged by the slightest suspicion. Imogen, for instance, must undergo severe trial before her name is cleared and she is reunited with her husband. Primavdaye quotes Caesar's warning "that a woman must not only be free from that fault, but also from all suspicion thereof," and Primavdaye concludes that "the greatest vertue of a woman ... is not to be known but of hir husband." 

40 Watson states that the murder of a wife for adultery was acceptable in Renaissance codes of honor, pp. 159-160.
41 Primavdaye, pp. 515-516.
The importance of faithfulness in a wife is explainable, of course, in a patriarchal society as a way of insuring legitimacy, and thus the smooth transferal of a father's possessions to his eldest legitimate son. This is, perhaps, the reason Diana in *All's Well That Ends Well* sees chastity as the "jewel" of her "house," and why it was seen in some contexts to be the exclusive possession of the husband. Keith Thomas' article, "The Double Standard," suggests that the insurance of legitimacy first created the injunctions for female chastity, an idea by no means new as Thomas finds it expressed in Dr. Johnson. From this injunction by a process of extension, a whole complex of restrictions arose as a result of

the desire of men for absolute property in women, a desire which cannot be satisfied if the man has reason to believe that the woman has once been possessed by another man, no matter how momentarily and involuntarily and no matter how slight the consequences.

This concept matches Varchi's category of jealousy by reason of Property or Right.

The process of extension is important in regard to stories of cuckoldry, for it applies in several ways both to cuckolds and their wives. Two of the most frequent ideas expressed in the literature of cuckoldry are the cuckoldom of all husbands and the sexual licence of all women. The most common anti-feminist stereotypes in the English

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43 Thomas, p. 216.
Renaissance insisted on the changeableness of all women. "The woman is a weak creature and not endued with ... strength and constancy of mind," says the Hymn on Marriage. Harbage affirms that coterie drama usually depicts women as not only changeable but sexually insatiable. These stereotypes can be found in popular drama as well as in coterie drama. For instance, it lies behind Demetrius' statement in *Titus Andronicus*, "She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd/ She is a woman, therefore may be won" (II.i.82-83). And so it is that all married men are cuckolded. Benedick vows to stay single, for only in this way can he be sure to wear his cap without suspicion (*Much Ado About Nothing* I.i.497-499), and thus it is that charges of unfaith in one woman are again and again followed by charges of infidelity in all women. As soon as Othello is convinced Desdemona has been unfaithful, he affirms "Even then this forked plague is fated to us/ When we do quicken" (*Othello* III.iii.276-277), and in similar circumstances, Posthumus says "We are all bastards,/ And that most venerable man which I/ Did call my father, was I know not where/ When I was stamp'd" (*Cymbeline* II.v.2-5). Because of the process of extension, the apparent lawlessness of one woman suggests that men have no control or possession over women in general. After Othello, I will call this idea the theme of the forked plaque, and many of the stories of

44 Quoted in Stone, p. 138.
cuckoldry written before and during Shakespeare's time affirm it as a theme. Even in Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour*—though Dame Kitely, wife of the jealous Kitely, proves faithful, the end of the drama includes a vision of all London's population cuckolded:

> See what a drove of horns fly in the air
> Winged with my cleansed and my credulous breath!
> Watch 'em, suspicious eyes, watch where they fall.
> See, see! on heads that think they've none at all!
> O, what a plenteous world of this will come!
> When air rains horns, all may be sure of some.

Varchi states beauty is the main quality in a wife that sparks suspicion. Indeed, jealousy is defined as the desire to possess or enjoy the "Beauty of one." A woman's beauty attracts paramours whose wooing defrauds a woman of her chastity. For this reason Hamlet warns Ophelia "that if you be honest and fair, [your honesty] should admit no discourse to your beauty", for "the power of beauty will ... transform honesty from what it is to a bawd" (*Hamlet*, III. i.406-7, 110-11). Primavdaye warns, "If thou marriest a faire woman, thou putttest thy selfe in great danger, lest thy round head become forked."

Certain personality traits were also thought to give men cause for suspicion. By cataloguing the qualities found in a woman which lessen jealousy, Varchi reveals what qualities men thought marked a faithful wife. Men are less

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46 In *The English Drama*, V.v.74-79.
47 Varchi, p. 20.
48 Primavdaye, p. 483.
jealous, writes Varchi, of a woman who "is well bred, is pittiful of Nature, proper of Personage, constant, witte, discreet, modest, of few words, [and] tender of her owne Reputation and Honour."49 A woman who is not well brought up, who is bold, inconstant, dull, indiscreet, immodest, talkative and unncerned with her honor tends to create jealousy in her husband. Primavdaye finds the true ornament of a woman is to be "honest, wise, humble & Chaste," whereas "a discovered dug, a naked brest. frisled locks, paintings, perfumes, & especially a rouling eie, & a lasciuous & unchaste lock are the fore-runners of adultery."50

The ideal wife was thought to be quiet, retiring, submissive, and modest, usually staying in the home away from company.51 Tendencies towards boldness, love of company, gregariousness, talkativeness were all marks of unfaithful wives. As Marilyn French emphasizes, Renaissance women were locked at in two major ways, what she calls "inlaw" and "outlaw" principles.52 The inlaw principle was characterized by loyalty, modesty, mildness, submission and chaste constancy; the outlaw principle characterized by disloyalty, lasciviousness, boldness, ambition and sexual

49 Varchi, pp. 27-28.
50 Primavdaye, p. 50.
51 Stone, p. 138.
infidelity. These stereotypes were epitomized by Mary and Eve respectively. A failing in any way would through extension stereotype a woman among the potentially unchaste and attract paramours.

The paramour in the cuckold tradition is usually young, lusty, fun loving, and clever. In the early cuckold tradition, he is most often a positive figure whose enterprise is encouraged. Often more interested at first in the science of love as a kind of intellectual exercise, he becomes obsessed with the beauty of a wife and feels helpless among his sighs and depression. But his anguish is usually relieved when alone or with the help of a pandar he approaches the wife and receives a favorable response, usually after his first declaration of love. A tryst is then arranged at which the paramour hopes to find relief, and he usually does but often not until he suffers some difficulties, most often incurred when trying to avoid the jealous husband. These trials and indignities are found throughout the cuckold tradition as far back as Horace who warns would-be paramours as follows:

It is not worth your while, ye who would have disaster wait on adulterers, to hear how on every side they fare ill, and how for them pleasure is marred by much pain, and, rare as it is, comes oft amid cruel perils. One man has thrown himself headlong from the roof; another has been flogged to death; a third, in his flight, has fallen into a savage gang of robbers.53

Sometimes the paramour has a rival in another admirer, who

bears equally humiliating trials as in "The Miller's Tale."
In many cases, the preferred paramour is comforted and/or
aided by a mischievous friend, a wily servant, the wife's
lusty maid, or the wife's sympathetic mother or wittolly
husband himself. Just as marriages were usually negotiated
by intermediaries,54 paramours engaged pandars to approach
their beloveds. The pandar is usually older, bawdy, and
clever, motivated either by a faith in love and romance, a
pleasure in mischief, or by a kind of voyeuristic impulse.
This sketch of the cuckold-triangle illustrates the kind of
stereotypes Renaissance authors relied upon. In what
follows, I will discuss the social forces that contribute to
the popularity and form of cuckold tales in Renaissance
England.

54 Margaret Loftus Ranald, "As Marriage Binds, and Blood
Breaks": English Marriage and Shakespeare," Shakespeare
Quarterly 30 (1979), p. 74.
Society and the Cuckold

The popularity of cuckoldry stories and of the lore and language of cuckoldry can be better understood by examining the social conditions out of which they grew. C. S. Lewis, in explaining the popularity of another genre that celebrates adultery, the courtly love tradition, begins to shed light on popularity of the cuckold tradition. Lewis explains that because marriages in early England were "purely utilitarian ... marriages of interest" having "nothing to do with love," "any idealization of sexual love ... must begin by being an idealization of adultery." In addition, because passionate love in general was viewed as essentially wicked, all love in or out of marriage seemed adulterous. In short, medieval attitudes towards sex—the idealization of chastity and condemning of all sex for pleasure—made all passionate love seem tantamount to adultery.

In terms of courtly love in its most extreme form, the affection a man had for his wife, if any, was not viewed as love. In Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love*, the man of higher nobility objects to the woman of the simple nobility's use of the term "love." "I am greatly surprised

55 Lewis p. 13.
56 Lewis, pp. 13-18.
that you wish to misapply the term 'love' to that marital affection which husband and wife are expected to feel for each other after marriage, since everybody knows that love can have no place between husband and wife. 57 As defined (however ironically) by Capellanus, love is "an inordinate desire to receive passionately a furtive and hidden embrace." 58 Love cannot exist in marriage, therefore, because a man's wife was thought to belong to him, and one cannot take furtively his own possession.

This seeming coldness between spouses was the result of social conditions that existed throughout medieval Europe up to and through the first half of the sixteenth century. Lawrence Stone describes the existing conditions:

Relations between spouses in rich families were often fairly remote. Living in big houses, each with his or her own bedroom and servants, husband and wife were primarily members of a functioning universe of a large household and were rarely private together, ... their marriage was usually arranged rather than consensual, in essence the outcome of an economic deal or a political alliance between two families. The transaction was sealed by the wedding and the physical union of two individuals, while the emotional ties were left to develop at a later date. If they did not take place, and the husband could not find sexual alternatives through casual liaisons, the emotional outlet through marriage was largely non-existent for either husband or wife. 59

It should be noted, however, that this was particularly true

58 Cappelanus, p. 100.
59 Stone, p. 81.
among the propertied classes only, for the households of the prince and the great nobles were sufficiently separate from parental supervision that considerable freedom was enjoyed there, and the lower classes were sufficiently poor that they too were freed from such stringent economic considerations.60 Also in many cases, love would develop after the marriage had taken place. But still, affection could not be counted on to grow, so expectations of love in marriage had to be severely tentative, if they existed at all. In such a situation, love was reserved for extra-marital affairs. It is not surprising, then, that the cuckold tradition came to tolerate wifely adultery. Extra marital exploits seemed laughable, not tragic, not undertaken in order to disrupt unhappy marriages, but at times seemingly good for an unsatisfying marriage. Often stories of cuckoldry end as does the third story on the third day of the Decameron:

Nor did they omit so to arrange matters that they [the lovers] were able to dispense with master friar [the cuckold], and yet pass many another night together with no less satisfaction.61

This continued cuckoldry is so purely desirable that Filomena, the teller of this tale, wishes "all other Christian souls that are so minded, may be speedily guided of God in His holy mercy."62 Machiavelli's La Mandragola

60 Stone, pp. 81-82.
ends with the wittoingly Nicia giving the lover Callimace the key to the ground floor room where the audience knows the adulterous affair will continue, and it is suggested that the arrangement will hold the marriage together by providing, as Nicia tells his wife Lucrezia, "a staff to support our old age." 63

Because the loss of honor was the most feared consequence of cuckoldry, the dangers in cuckoldry could be mitigated in the early cuckold tradition, if it could be arranged that the husband's honor remained intact. It became common in the cuckold tradition for either the husband to be ignorant of his being cuckolded, or for him to be one of the few people outside of his wife and her lover to be aware of the adultery. In the second novel of the third day in the Decameron, for example, King Agilulf is praised for avoiding a "bruit" by not avenging himself on a servant who once without the queen's knowledge, took the king's place in bed. Pampinea, the narrator of the tale, praises Agilulf for not revealing the adultery which he should be "sedulous to cloke" for revealing it would have "augmented his disgrace, and sullied the fair fame of his lady." 64

It is not surprising that in Europe and in England till about Shakespeare's time, the cuckold tradition tolerated a wife's desire for sexual gratification outside

marriage, as long as it was enjoyed discreetly. In such cases, stories of cuckoldry were comic, showing the desire for sex and love to be humorous human foibles, harmless to marriage and society.

Although cuckoldry can be seen, therefore, to be compatible with upper class medieval society and consequently of special interest to the majority of writers and readers of medieval literary art, the popularity of stories of cuckoldry spanned class distinctions. Rural audiences for medieval balladeers as well as lords attending plays at court found delight in tales of cuckoldry. The language of cuckoldry could be heard in the city and the country, in the university and in the court. So whereas the preceding may have explained, in part, the rise of cuckoldry as a literary tradition, cuckoldry's hold on medieval imagination cannot be fully explained. Even origin of the word "cuckold" is a matter of speculation, not certainty. Suffice it to say that cuckoldry as a literary topos arose in a society which in certain strata were compatible with it, and which in time was influenced by it. The language, stereotypes and lore traditional in cuckoldry came to affect all levels of medieval society, perpetuating and creating attitudes and affecting behavior throughout Europe. prominent way of understanding wifely adultery.

Starting about fifteen hundred, changes began to take place very slowly in English family life which affected the way stories of cuckoldry presented adultery. Though
marriages throughout Shakespeare's time were still mostly marriages of convenience, according to Stone, large households and kinship groups were breaking down, placing a greater emphasis on smaller nuclear families, which in turn enhanced the need for love in marriage both for social stability and personal satisfaction. The Renaissance in England became a time when the roles of love and sex in marriage began changing, when medieval idealization of chastity and toleration of extra-marital sex were in conflict with a growing ideal of marital affection.65 As a result, stories treating cuckoldry in traditional ways—showing foolish, jealous husbands being duped by clever wives and lovers—gave way more and more to depictions of imaginary cuckolds, and to portrayals of the tragic effect of marital infidelity on individuals and society.

Harbage quotes an epigram of Sir John Harington which illustrates that changes were taking place. Marriages were undertaken, Harington writes,

As, namely, first for procreation,
Next, to avoid dishonest fornication,
And that late writers, men of passing piety,
Have found, a third cause, mutual society.66

Harrington's epigram suggests that only recently has "mutual society" been added to the reasons for marriage and most prominently by "writers." Stone agrees. He finds the "ideal of romantic love" promulgated by poets and playwrights, such

65 Stone, p. 16.
66 Quoted in Harbage, p. 222.
as Shakespeare, to be in stark contrast to the "pragmatic calculation of family interest [that] was the accepted viewpoint of the sixteenth century, and the only one upon which the approach to marriage in real life was normally based."67

Still, writers' interest in the importance of mutual society in marriage reflected a real concern found in English men and women. As early as 1569 "mutual society, help and comfort" were added to Archbishop Cranmer's prayer book as reasons for marriage, and other writers later in the century wrote in their family handbooks of "spiritual intimacy."68 Richard L. Greaves points out that Heinrich Bullinger's tracts, the Edwardian Books of Common Prayer, Bishop Cooper's popular biblical expositions, and Thomas Coogan's medical handbook all list mutual comfort among the three reasons for marriage, also that George Sandys, William Perkins, and later Puritans gave "primacy of place to mutual society, assistance, and comfort, which helped lay the foundation for the idea of the companionate marriage."69

This new emphasis on personal attachment in marriage was necessitated by the lessening of large kinship ties in favor of the nuclear core. As large kinship groups broke down, the smaller families exhibited more equality between husband and wife, and stronger emotional ties between all

67 Stone, p. 128.
69 Greaves, p. 118.
family members.70 This smaller family unit came to be seen as essential for social stability. The French Academy indicates an awareness of the importance of the bonds of marriage to social stability when it speaks of the "society of wedlocke" as the "seminarie and perseruation [sic] of all societies."71

Individual family stability was achieved by an increased emphasis on patriarchal power. The family resembled in the minds of Renaissance writers a mirror of the monarchy with the father representing the king and the other family members owing obedience to him. This comparison became so strong that King James in 1609 argued the supremacy of kingship by remarking that "Kings are compared to fathers in families: for a King is truly parens patriae, the politic father of his people."72 Infidelity seemed a more serious matter, often being compared to treason against the bonds of wedlock, bonds which were recognized to be necessary for society and an image of the bonds of loyalty in the state itself.

Thus there was a tension in Elizabethan marriages between the actual and the ideal. Among landed classes marriages were still determined by mercenary factors; yet the idea that marriages should provide men and women with compassionate, affectionate and loving partners was an ideal

70 Stone, p. 149.
71 Primavdaye, p. 480.
72 Quoted in Stone, p. 110.
that many were cognizant of, if but few were able to adopt it as a way of life. 73 Elizabethan writers, on the other hand, were able to present marriages which fulfill the ideal without questioning the status quo. Shakespeare, for instance, depicts marriages, such as those in The Taming of the Shrew, that combine promise of mutual society with economic advantage. When Othello analyses the agony he feels by being cuckolded, it is not so much the loss of honor that tortures him, as it is being banished from where he had "garner'd up" his heart (IV.iii.53-58). The loss of love usurps the loss of honor as the prime evil involved in cuckoldry.

The Taming of the Shrew also illustrates how economic and affective considerations competed in premarital negotiations. In the main plot, Baptista and Petruchio bargain a contract for the match between Petruchio and Katherina before Kate even knows there is a suitor for her. In Katherina's case, the bargain is not sealed until "the special thing is well obtain'd, / That is, her love; for that is all in all" (The Taming of the Shrew II.i. 128-129). Here, the contract is made, but the veto power is given, in effect, to Kate for she must come to love Petruchio or else the contract is void. By Shakespeare's time, granting a child veto power (though probably only once and only after a single interview with the prospective suitor) was common in order to insure that violent antipathy

73 Stone, p. 128.
will not preclude the possibility of mutual compatibility. Still Baptista plays "a merchant's part" by handling Bianca in a more conservative and pecuniary manner. She is auctioned off: "he of both/ That can assure my daughter greatest dower/ Shall have my Bianca's love" (The Taming of the Shrew. II.i.342-344). Here the daughter's love accompanies the dower. No one is required to obtain her love. Rather, as Margaret Ranald puts it, "Bianca is simply informed by messenger of her father's decision, she is expected to agree to the marriage he has arranged."75

Because of the alterations in the nature of marriage in Elizabethan England, cuckoldry in the later tradition became more serious. It was no longer something that could be tolerated. As Stone has pointed out, adultery dishonored the husband, called into question his authority in the family, his potency and his progeny. It violated "holy matrimony" which came to be seen especially in Anglican circles as more and more sacred.76 By raising the issue of illegitimacy and by striking at paternal authority, adultery came to be seen as a kind of treason against the nuclear family which was increasingly important in the landed class for social and economic stability.

74 Stone, p. 134.
75 Ranald, p. 69.
76 Stone, p. 101.
By Shakespeare's time, stories of cuckoldry were less funny, and less tolerant of wifely adultery. Stories of cuckoldry that depicted adultery as compatible with marriage, even advantageous to it, gave way to stories like those in *Pandosto* (1588) and *A Woman Killed With Kindness* which depict adultery as destroying marriage and damaging to society. Shakespeare never laughs at actual instances of wifely infidelity, only at husbands' erroneous suspicions. Further, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* explore the tragic elements in cuckoldry, as do such dark comedies as John Marston's *The Malcontent* (ca. 1604) and James Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635). Also, cuckoldry is handled as a source of tragedy in plays like *Othello*, Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607) and Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* (1603). Certainly, cuckoldry was still used in the Stuart period with comic intent, for example in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1606), but the humor is often of a darker stamp than previously, and this darkening cannot be dismissed as being only a part of the general darkening of outlook in Jacobean England; rather, the alteration of the tone of cuckoldry from farcical comedy to high tragedy and dark comedy was the result of the radical changes that took place in English society starting about fifteen hundred.

Like his contemporaries, Shakespeare found cuckoldry fascinating and artistically useful. He utilized cuckold-triangles, or imagined cuckold-triangles in a number of his plots, the most important being the main plots of *The-
Merry-Wives-of-Windsor, Othello, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale. The language of cuckoldry seasons many of Shakespeare's other plays whether a cuckold-triangle appears or not. Both As You Like It (at III.iii.52 ff) and All's Well-That-Ends-Well (at I.iii.428 ff) contain speeches in praise of the cuckold and songs about the forked plague (As You Like It IV.ii.10 ff., All's Well-That-Ends-Well I.iii.60 ff.) though neither of these plays contains cuckolds, real or imagined. As in the works of other Renaissance writers, cuckold-triangles are compatible in Shakespeare with comedy and tragedy. Most importantly, though Shakespeare may seem at first consideration to use cuckoldry off-handedly, he took cuckoldry as seriously as his contemporaries do, indeed, more seriously because he takes great exception to certain features of it.

Though he seemed fond of using the language of cuckoldry and plots involving men who think themselves cuckolded, Shakespeare was at the same time particularly sensitive to the lore and stereotypes of cuckoldry. Coppelia Kahn is correct in saying Shakespeare was "concerned to understand the psychology and social workings of cuckoldry as a powerful male fantasy."77 Cuckoldry is indeed consistently presented in Shakespeare to be a male fantasy (though I will use the word "chimera" because it conjures more vividly the vision of a monster), and Shakespeare's plays do explore the psychological and social

77 Kahn, note 1, p. 120.
ramifications of cuckoldry. Yet Shakespeare rejects the main tenets of the cuckold tradition: namely, that wives, especially amiable wives, are prone to horn their husbands, that husbands' jealousies are partly justified because they are continually in danger of being dishonored, and that handsome young men can easily seduce wives with gifts and romantic banter. Although Shakespeare depicts men who feel this way—Falstaff, Ford, Benedick, Iago, Jachimo and Leontes—he does not depict society operating according to the lore of cuckoldry. Instead, the plays of Shakespeare focus on cuckoldry as a figment of the male psyche, and as a result, whereas most cuckold tales focus on the machinations of wives and paramours, Shakespeare's plays focus more on the husbands' corner of the triangle. (The Merry Wives of Windsor is an exception.)

For the most part, Shakespeare avoided the language and lore of cuckoldry when women were actually unfaithful. The Merry Wives of Windsor, Othello, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale, the four plays in which the lore and language of cuckoldry play prominent roles in the main plots, all depict trustworthy wives. The language of cuckoldry in these plays is misapplied, and the lore of cuckoldry is revealed to be slanderous. Ford, Othello, Posthumus, and Leontes all imagine themselves dishonored and transformed into cuckolds, imagine the world laughs at them as horned beasts, imagine all men wronged and all women unfaithful. But they are wrong. Because he presents cuckoldry as usually a figment
of the husbands's imagination, Shakespeare's cuckold plays focus more upon the imaginary cuckold than upon his wife and her supposed lover. (The Merry Wives of Windsor is an exception.) and social workings of cuckoldry. In these plays, he reveals the lore of cuckoldry to be chimerical, and examines the personal and social consequences of the belief in the lore of cuckoldry.

Besides Shakespeare's four major cuckold plays mentioned above, two plays, Much Ado About Nothing and Troilus and Cressida, utilize cuckoldry as a major theme in the sub-plots or background of the play. Several other plays contain jokes, quibbles, jibes or references to cuckoldry, and some plays depict the act of wifely adultery without reference to the lore of cuckoldry. Still in many ways, Shakespeare's handling of cuckoldry is all of a piece. Consistently, Shakespeare presents, particularly in the major cuckold plays, a single vision of cuckoldry, a personal lore that varies greatly from his contemporaries. Shakespeare conveys a sense that all applications of the language, lore and stereotypes of cuckoldry are unjustified, that the lore of cuckoldry itself is slanderous. To adapt the words of Titania, cuckoldry, its language and stereotypes, are "the forgeries of jealousy" (A Midsummer Night's Dream II.i.81), chimeras in the minds of men created and fostered by their capacity for jealousy and perpetuated by the anti-feminist stereotypes embodied in cuckoldry.
Shakespeare accomplishes his revision of cuckoldry by following, in his major cuckold plays, a consistent scenario which is in contrast to the cuckold tradition's usual plot outlines. They begin usually with a husband who is not particularly pre-disposed to jealousy, or at least he does not think so (with the exception of Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), married to a clever, sociable and amiable woman. The husband is usually approached by a would-be cuckold-maker, like Falstaff, or by a slanderer, like Iago, who utilizes the wife's amiability to convince the husband his wife will be or is unfaithful. Falstaff tells the disguised Ford that his wife has planned to meet him for a romantic tryst. Iago convinces Othello that Cassio has enjoyed Desdemona. Iachimo "proves" to Posthumus he has topped Imogen. Leontes, an exception to this rule, is in a sense his own tempter, treacherous against himself. All of the husbands are easily convinced, in Ford's case because he is already pre-disposed towards jealousy, but also, as is the case with most of the other imaginary cuckolds in Shakespeare, because he is easily infected with horn-madness, a disorder that involves for Shakespeare searching out proofs of marital infidelity, accepting them, developing a distrust of all women, and being especially prone to a kind of self-confirming jealousy. Eventually each of the husbands discovers that his suspicions and jealousies are unfounded: usually he does not do so until after his revenge succeeds or comes near to succeeding in
killing his wife and, in the case of the *Winter's Tale*, his children too. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is the exception. In all these plays, jealousy is unjustified, the language of cuckoldry seems misapplied, wives are faithful, and would-be paramours are either foolish or they are liars, faults for which they are usually punished. Progressively in the cuckold plays, Shakespeare creates his own treatment of cuckoldry, developing new stereotypes, relying on them in subsequent plays and building upon them as he proceeds.
"Who's a Cuckold Now?"

The Merry Wives of Windsor

The Merry Wives of Windsor is Shakespeare's only major cuckold play in which cuckoldry is treated in a fully comic way. All the other major treatments of cuckoldry in Shakespeare mix tragic and comic modes. As such, The Merry Wives defies the warning implicit in the Second Lord's song in As You Like It:

Take thou no scorn to wear the horn,  
It was a crest ere thou wast born;  
Thy father wore it,  
And thy father's father wore it;  
And thy father bore it,  
The horn, the horn, the lusty horn  
Is not a thing to laugh to scorn.  
(IV.ii.13-18)

The Merry Wives of Windsor laughs to scorn the lusty horn and affirms that the lore, stereotypes and terminology of cuckoldry are not universally valid, thus beginning a long process of undermining the cuckold tradition. Mrs. Page, speaking of the final trick played on Falstaff, says "The truth being known,/ We'll all present ourselves; dishorn the spirit,/ And mock him home to Windsor" (IV.iv.63-65).
The play will dishorn the spectre of cuckoldry by revealing wives to be faithful, husbands uncuckolded, and lusty paramours foolish, horned and worthy of chastisement. Near the end of the play, Page announces that "No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns" (V.ii.42-14). The only evil intended in the play is Falstaff's, and this evil is scundly punished.

The *Merry Wives of Windsor* takes for its scurce the second story from the first day of Ser Giovanni's *Il Pecorone*, a typical cuckold tale which depicts an old, wittolly, jealous husband cuckolded by his beautiful, clever but easily wced young wife and a young university student. But Shakespeare transforms this plot in such a way as to frustrate audience expectations that the lore of cuckoldry will be fulfilled. In short, the lore of cuckoldry works in *Il Pecorone*, but it does not work in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In Shakespeare's play, the husband and the would-be paramour both believe in the lore of cuckoldry; namely, that wives are easily wooed by romantic banter, or in this case cant, and that husbands' jealousies are justified because they are continually in danger of being dishonored. But the merry wives of the title are not receptive to wooing, nor inclined to extra-marital affairs even though outwardly they do resemble wives found in the cuckold tradition, especially in their social amiability, or in terms of the play, their merriness.

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1 Bullough, Vol. II. Line numbers from this edition will be given in the text.
The main similarities that have linked *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to *Il Fecorone* are aspects of plot. In both *Il Fecorone* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the husband is privy to the paramour's actions through a plot apparatus allaying them without allowing the paramour to realize it is the husband to whom he is confiding. In both the paramour must elude the husband in humiliating or uncomfortable ways, one of which involves a mass of dirty or damp laundry which conceals the paramour on one occasion and is stabbed by the husband later when the house is searched. In both the husband is seized by horn madness witnessed by many, and in both the paramour seems to be going through the motions of a smitten lover without really feeling love.

Despite these plot similarities, the portrayals of love, marriage and cuckoldry are vastly different. In *Il Fecorone* love is portrayed as a superficial art or "discipline" divorced from marriage. Bucciolc looks at love as a liberal science which can be taught, and the Professor's willingness to teach the art of love suggests he too sees it as such. The several steps taught are as follows: (1) find a suitable woman, (2) make it clear to her by means of looks how smitten you are, (3) give the loved one gifts through a pandar who broaches the subject of a tryst, (4) answer repulses with continued attention and advances. If these steps are followed, success ensues. The art of love here has nothing to do with marriage. Marriage is neither an end of nor an obstacle to making love. Love
is simply the art of seduction. Bucciuolo follows the steps, Giovanna reacts predictably. Like the carpenter's wife, she feigns moral indignation at first, but yields easily soon after. When first confronted by the pedlar woman who serves as Bucciuolo's pandar, Giovanna pretends to resent the old woman's presumptuous suggestions calling God's judgment upon her and chasing her from the house (21), but this indignation is soon revealed to be feigned; for Giovanna is quick to send her maid to Bucciuolo offering him an evening of delight. Later, when the Professor enters seeking Bucciuolo, Giovanna again appeals to God in such a way as to reveal the deep contradiction between her inner life and her outward profession. "Cross yourself my husband," she says, "for surely the Enemy of God has tempted you and caused you to see what could never really be" (23).

Significantly, it is Giovanna who has been tempted and is about to do what she claims "could never really be." The lengths to which Giovanna would go to protect her reputation while retaining her paramour include allowing her husband to be chained up "like a madman" (25), and pleading with Bucciuolo to stay in Rome rather than follow his tutor's last wish to leave "in God's name" (26). But in the end Bucciuolo leaves Rome so as not to further wrong the tutor he owes so much to. In short, Giovanna's hypocrisy involves a keen contrast between her profession of godliness and faith, and her actual self-indulgence and lack of faith. She is clever, but she uses her wit to fool her husband. In
stark contrast to Mrs. Ford, her eager sexuality moves her to wrong her husband and makes her predictable.

The Professor too acts predictably. He becomes jealous, seeks revenge, is thwarted and goes mad. He exhibits the double standard at the beginning, being willing without qualms to instruct a young man in the art of love, essentially the art of cuckoldry, but outraged when he finds it is himself who is being wronged. The situation is a fine twist of the wittol theme according to which the husband is instrumental in aiding adulterers to his wife. The only real twist in the story is its ending. Sympathy is elicited for the maddened husband, the wife is portrayed as desperately needing the paramour, and the paramour realizing he has wronged his own tutor retreats repentantly. The story that precedes this one in *Il·Pecorene* has a similar theme in which a young man refuses to cuckold a husband to whom he owes a personal debt. Adultery in these stories is depicted as wrong only when it involves horning a man who had helped the paramour in some valuable and personal way. Cuckoldry alone seems a harmless pastime, a practice which has rules which if followed produce appropriate and predictable results.

In *Il·Pecorene* the central conflict involves the tension that arises between the harmless fun, and perhaps the justice, in dishonoring a wittol and the moral gravity and clear injustice involved in dishonoring a revered professor. Shakespeare's play omits this conflict. There
is no reason Falstaff should not cuckold Ford more than any other man. The desire to commit adultery itself is sufficiently reprehensible to justify Falstaff's shame ceremony. Bucchiolo is abashed not because he has committed adultery, but because he has wronged a man to whom he owes particular reverence. Even in his private embarrassment and regret, Bucchiolo is not particularly blamable, and certainly not blamable for the act of adultery per se. On the other hand, Falstaff's evil intent and his presumptions themselves are blamable, deserving public ridicule and censure. Il Pecorone depicts cuckoldry as a harmless and diverting study, and women as clever, faithless and easily wooed. Shakespeare adjusts the thrust of Il Pecorone's plot to redefine cuckoldry, showing the fear of being cuckolded to be foolish, wives faithful, and would-be paramours morally reprehensible.

The Merry Wives of Windsor redefines cuckoldry by setting up what would in other contexts forecast the wives being unfaithful and husbands being horned, while assuring us that these expectations will not be fulfilled, keeping the play free from all suggestions that cuckoldry is something to be feared. Shakespeare shows us the stereotypes being applied, but unjustly. Ford may be jealous, but he has no reason to be. His jealousy is a part of his character not a reaction to his wife's character. Ford's jealous temperament is first indicated when Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page pledge to be revenged on Falstaff:
Although Mrs. Ford is anxious to be revenged on Falstaff for presuming her dishonest, she is still chary of her honor. She will do nothing to call her "honesty" in question. She combines a keen sense of personal integrity, respect for her reputation and a merry, almost mischievous, willingness to discipline the presumptions of the would-be cuckold-maker. Both Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page declare their trustworthiness in this exchange, a trustworthiness that survives despite Ford's and Page's resemblances to the jailor and complaisant wittols, men whose personal faults often thrust their wives into the arms of other men. The contrast between Ford's jealousy and Page's confidence is developed in the play when Pistol and Nym reveal to the husbands Falstaff's illicit resolve; their reactions, set back to back, expose their wittoly dispositions:

Ford: I will seek out Falstaff.
Page: I never heard such a drawling, affecting rogue [Nym, that is]....

Page: If he should intend this voyage toward my wife, I would turn her loose to him; and what he gets more of her than sharp words let it lie on my head.
Ford: I do not misdoubt my wife; but I would be loath to turn them together. A man may be too confident. I would nothing lie on my head. I cannot be thus satisfied.

(II.i.140-142, 181-88)
These speeches echo the sentiments of countless wittoly husbands. Shakespeare could count, at this point, on his audience to anticipate the jailor Ford driving his wife to wrongdoing by tormenting her with suspicions and provoking her to find relief from his vexations in the arms of a paramour. Also the audience would anticipate Page wittoly thrusting his wife into the arms of a paramour, confident that she would not wrong him. Both these expectations, of course, will be frustrated by Shakespeare. The thrust of the play will be to convert Ford's belief in the lore of cuckoldry to Page's faith in the lore of trust. In this play cuckoldry exists only in the minds of its men, never in the acts or desires of its women. For these wives, truly cuckoldry is, in Giovanna's words, something that "could never really be." Rather, cuckoldry is a series of terms and metaphors that haunt, tease and torment, but never materialize.

Ford's jealousy is characterized by such a haunting. In his soliloquy that follows his interview disguised as Brook with Falstaff, Ford reveals how much the idea of being called "cuckold" and "wittol" agonizes him:

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2 Such is the case with Tofano whose jealousy causes his wife to become so resentful she devises a stratagem by which she might give her husband "cause enough to die of that evil which without cause he so much dreaded." Decameron Day 7, Novel 4.
3 As Messer Francesco Vergellisi who is so confident of his wife's obedience he gives the fine and foppish Zima a free conference with her resulting, unknowingly to the wittoly Vergellisi, in "seasons not a few" through which cuckoldry thrives. Decameron Day 3, Novel 6.
My heart is ready to crack with impatience. Who says this is improvident jealousy? My wife hath sent to him, the hour is fix'd, the match is made. Would any man have this? See the hell of having a false woman! My bed shall be abus'd, my coffer's ransack'd, my reputation gnawn at, and I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. Terms! names! Amiamon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason, well; yet they are devils' additions, the names of fiends; but Cuckold! Witto!—Cuckold! the devil himself hath not such a name.

(II.ii.287-300)

Though Ford agonizes over having his bed abused, his coffer's robbed and his reputation damaged, he lingers on the idea that Falstaff who will do him these wrongs will call him "cuckold" and "witto." The hell of having a false wife may take from his chaste bed, his wealth, and his good reputation, but Falstaff's language will provide Ford with an appellation more shameful than the devil's. As Ford's speech continues, his belief in stereotypes in general becomes evident:

Page is an ass, a secure ass; he will trust his wife, he will not be jealous. I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself. Then she plots, then she ruminates, then she devises; and what they think in their hearts they may effect, they will break their hearts but they will effect. God be praised for my jealousy! Eleven o'clock the hour. I will prevent this, detect my wife, be reveng'd of Falstaff, and laugh at Page. I will about it; better three hours too soon than a minute too late. Fie, fie, fie! cuckold, cuckold, cuckold!

(II.ii.300-314)

The lore of cuckoldry, particularly its language, is more offensive to Ford than robbery, adultery or familial
treason. Ford suffers as he imagines Mrs. Ford living the part of a wife like Giovanna, plotting behind his back and fulfilling her sexual desire. Ford's imagination has taken control of him. He imagines his wife's actions and is so moved by the images he conjures that he becomes convinced they are occurring. Ford's reaction is of course predictable. He vows to prevent his wife from cuckolding him.

Ironically, Ford's efforts to prevent being called "cuckold" place him in the position to hear himself called just that. When he confronts the knight, Ford places himself in his most embarrassing posture, unable to reply when the fat soldier abuses him:

Falstaff: Hang him, poor cuckoldy knave ... jealous wittol ... Hang him, mechanical salt-butter roque! I will stare him out of his wits; I will awe him with my cudgel, it shall hang like a meteor o'er the cuckold's horns.... Ford's a knave, and I will aggravate his style; thou, Master Brook, shall know him for a knave and cuckold.

[II.ii.270,277,278-81,283-285]

During these encounters in which he squirms under the abominable terms Falstaff conjures up, Ford endures the terms he so abhors. In a sense Falstaff is right, though not in the usual sense of "cuckold": for Shakespeare in the process of redefining cuckoldry redefines "wittol" and "horn-madness," using Ford as his example. Ford is a wittol not because he makes his wife unfaithful, but because he, more than anyone else, is instrumental in dishonoring himself by placing himself in the position to suffer being
called "wittcl" and "cuckold" and jealous. It is Ford who goes to Falstaff to hear himself abused. Also, when Ford seeks to discover Falstaff and Mrs. Ford together, he gathers an army of witnesses, friends and servants to accompany him, assuring, in this way, his shame would be proclaimed about town had he been successful. "You shall have sport," he promises as he rallies his friends, "I will show you a monster" (III.ii.80-81). But at home the monster he reveals is himself, a jealous monster. Page, the representative of trusting husbands, pledges to mock Ford for his improvident jealousy (III.ii.228-229). So Ford's shame derives not from being cuckolded, but from fearing to be cuckolded, from being jealous and from seeking public exposure of his adversary. It is his belief in cuckoldry which is reprehensible and foolish.

To Ford's credit, his jealousy is not of an obsessive stamp. After finding no Falstaff at home, he relents at least provisionally. "I cannot find him," he says, "May be the knave braqq'd of that he could not compass" (III.iii.195-200). "Heaven make you better than your thoughts," Mrs. Page chides him. "Amen," Ford replies (III.iii.204-206). It must also be granted Ford he has strong evidence to spark suspicion—Pistol's warning and Falstaff's own allegations, both confirmed by Ford's own observations. So later we are not surprised when Ford's jealousy returns augmented. Mrs. Page describes him:

Why waman, your husband is in his old lines again. He so takes on yonder with my husband; so rails against all married mankind; so curses
all Eve's daughters, of what complexion so ever; and sobuffets himself of the forehead, crying "Peer out, peer out!", that any madness I ever yet beheld seem'd but tameness, civility, and patience to this his distemper he is in now. (IV.ii.19-28)

Ford's wittoly character is in its apogee. In this frenzy, Ford beats his own brows bidding non-existent horns to appear. Ford's jealousy has extended to doubt all marital faith and to condemn all women. This is, for Shakespeare, horn-madness, and it is part of his morality to depict this universal distrust, unwarranted misogyny and frantic desire to reveal adulterous sin as self-indulgent madness.

In Il Pecorone- horn-madness consists of a frantic loss of wit and control ensuing when the Professor fails to prove the actual adultery of his wife. It results from the frustration of not being able to reveal the truth. Ford's horn-madness is an obsessive desire to discover his own disgrace:

Well, I will proclaim myself what I am .... I will search impossible places. Though what I am I cannot avoid, yet to be what I would not shall not make me tame. If I have horns to make one mad, let the proverb go with me: I'll be horn-mad. (III.v.143-44)

In his horn-madness, Ford becomes the most active agent in shaming himself. He vows to proclaim himself "cuckold". He invites horn-madness and consciously bids it to appear, as he ordered horns to appear on his forehead. Ford's horn-madness consists not of regret and sorrow for being wronged, but belief in cuckoldry itself. Later, in an ironic speech, he refuses to admit the possibility of error:
Help to search my house this one time. If I find not what I seek, show no color for my extremity, let me for ever be your table-sport. Let them say of me, "As jealous as Ford, that search'd a hollow walnut for his wife's leman."

(IV.ii.160-164)

Of course, once he realizes he has been wrong, Ford repents but is not, at least not on stage, mocked with the severity he seems to anticipate. Rather, the only real mocking that occurs on stage is the final baiting of Falstaff.

Shakespeare does not depict fully the scene in which Ford loses his jealousy. Presumably, he confronts Mrs. Ford and, she reveals how she and Mrs. Page have fooled Falstaff. Shakespeare's reluctance to depict Ford's challenge of his wife is perhaps an indication of the playwright's sensitivity towards the questioning of wifely faith. Act IV, Scene iv begins just after Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford have explained how they have treated Falstaff. The scene, opening with Ford's apology, assumes him to have believed immediately the facts of the matter and repented:

Pardon me, wife hence forth do what thou wilt,
I rather will suspect the sun with cold
Than thee with wantonness. Now doth thy honcr stand,
In him that was of late an heretic,
As firm as faith.

(IV.iv.6-40)

Whereas in his first scilloquy Ford's comparisons addressed popular prejudices and stereotypes—a Welshman's appetite a Irishman's thirst for whiskey, a wife's lust—here, Ford's comparisons address the natural order represented by the sun, indicating his conversion involves a new insight into
the nature of things. Ford has been converted to Page's faith in wives, a faith that trusts and frees. Ford has learned that faith is as uncharacteristic of the merry wives as cold is foreign to the sun. Faithfulness in marriage becomes for Ford a religious matter, his former distrust seems heretical to him, and his present belief is "as firm as faith." Page's reply to Ford is significant: "'Tis well, 'tis well, no more/ Be not extreme in submission as in offence" (IV.iv.10-11). Here The Merry Wives of Windsor does argue for a particular ideal of marriage, an ideal based on the assumption that wives will be faithful and can be trusted. Page commends Ford's new faith, but urges him to subdue his enthusiasm, still to be master and not to offer submission to his spouse. Page argues for moderation in the paternal authority in the nuclear family. Page is now in a position of authority sufficient to offer such advice. Earlier, in Ford's view, and perhaps in the audience's view also, Page seemed a foolish wittely ass whose cuckoldling was inevitable, but now Page's faith in his wife has been shown to be well founded. His faith and advice command respect for they fit the wives depicted in The Merry Wives of Windsor.

The example of Mrs. Page and Mrs. Ford allows Page's faith to be affirmed. In a way, they resemble the amiable, fun loving and witty wives found so often in cuckold stories who teach their jealous husbands to have faith and teach unacceptable paramours the folly of their advances. Unlike
the wives in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, however, most often these wives do cuckold their husbands though they manage to convince them otherwise, as in *II: Pecorone*, and they usually turn away the unacceptable paramour only to favor others more attractive. But Shakespeare's merry wives are all faith. Wifely fidelity in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is assumed to be as much a part of a wife's identity as infidelity is assumed part of a wife's identity in the cuckold tradition. Mrs. Page's reaction to Falstaff's advances indicates how she finds the impulse to cuckold her husband uncharacteristic of her:

> It makes me almost ready to wrangle with mine own honesty. I'll entertain myself like one that I am not acquainted withal; for sure unless he know some strain in me that I know not myself, he would never have boarded me in this fury.  

*(II.i.84-89)*

Mrs. Page cannot conceive how she could spark such an advance as Falstaff's. She sees no strain in her that would suggest she would be unfaithful.

Ford and Falstaff, however, do see such a strain. They question the wives' faithfulness because they misread amiability or merriness for licentiousness. They stereotype her as a cuckold-maker because she is "merry." Ford remarks that his wife "enlargeth her mirth so far that there is shrewd construction made of her" *(II.ii.222-23)*, and Falstaff is just such a one to translate Mrs. Ford's mirth into language so rich in connotation as to make a shrewd

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4 As in Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale".
construction powerful enough to ccuzen even himself:

I do mean to make love to Ford's wife. I spy entertainment in her. She discourses, she carves, she gives the leer of invitation. I can construe the action of her familiar style, and the hardest voice of her behavior (to be English'd rightly) is, "I am Sir John Falstaff's."

(I.iii.43-48)

Falstaff fools himself by translating Mrs. Ford's social entertainment, her amiable invitations, her familiar style, her merriness into conscious allure. Pistol's aside, at this moment in the play, assures the audience that Falstaff's use of language is a mistranslation, "He hath studied her [well] and translated her will, out of honesty into English" (I.iii.43-50), "English" here being a language of falsity. Just as the fat would-be cuckold-maker is able to conceive of Ford as a cuckold, so language allows him to conceive of Mrs. Ford as an unfaithful wife. Cuckoldry has become a matter of language, a language that deceives instead of describes, a language of stereotype and of falsity, a language that creates cuckolds and calls women's faith into question.

Falstaff's wooing also follows stereotypical patterns, indicating how he concludes like the Professor and Bucciuolo that one needs only to go through the motions that characterize a typical young paramour--be discreet in company, use sonnet conventions, approach the beloved through a pandar -- and the wives will fall. Falstaff's letter to the wives opens with a conventional sonnet sequence topic, the relationship between love and reason:
"Ask me no reason why I love, for though love use Reason for his precisiar, he admits him not for his counsellor" (II.i.4-6). Like Sidney's Astrophil, Falstaff approaches his Stella (also a married woman) by sending notes that attempt to anatomize the psychology of love (compare *Astrophil and Stella*, #10). Falstaff's attempt, as the remainder of his letter confirms, is clearly weak, foolish, insincere and insulting. When he enters Mrs. Ford's chambers, Falstaff follows up his poetizing by quoting Sidney directly, choosing the song which tells how Astrophil first stole a kiss from Stella, "Have I caught thee, my heavenly jewel?" Falstaff's lack of any real attempt to simulate sincerity shows how he underestimates both the faithfulness and the intelligence of Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page. He sees them not as real women, but as characters in the cuckold tradition.

Falstaff sees himself as the typical paramour. With humorous effect he struts his bulk about the stage, while with mock humility he denies the attraction of his "good parts" (II.ii.106-7). Only in one respect does Falstaff fulfill the plot conventions as applied to cuckoldry's paramours: he endures humiliating discomfort in the pursuit of the wives' favor. In *Il Pecorone* Bucciuolo needs to hide, for a short time, beneath "a heap of newly washed clothes," but is recompensed with "a fat capon, with wine of several kinds" followed by "great joy" when the wife and he

5 *Astrophil And Stella*, #2, line 1.
give "each other delight and peace" (23). But peace is one
delight. Falstaff is never to enjoy. Unlike the paramour in
Il Pecorone, all Falstaff gains at the hands of Mrs. Ford
and Mrs. Page is indignity. Falstaff is forced to bear
with the cramped quarters and stale odors of a buckbasket,
is treated to an uncleansing dip into the freezing mud of
the Thames, and later suffers the indignity of dressing as
the old witch of Brentford and receiving a sound cudgeling.

In most senses, Falstaff is quite unlike the paramours
of the cuckold tradition. He is not a young, clever, potent
and romantic man competing with an old, foolish, jealous,
greedy and possessive husband. Rather, he is the old,
easily fooled, gouty and greedy man, more of a mismatch for
Mrs. Ford than for her husband. Though Falstaff believes he
has the wives' confidence, he does not. His romanticizings
are patently absurd. Most importantly, the play concludes
not with Ford, but with Falstaff transformed into a horned
beast, and mocked in a public shame ceremony. In this
scene, Falstaff, disguised as the local Windsor figure Herne
the Hunter, resembles the cuckold more than the husband. In
the end it is Falstaff who wears horns, resembling Actaeon,
a Renaissance representative of the cuckold.

That Shakespeare chose to recall Actaeon is
significant. Earlier Pistol warned Ford against the fate of
Actaeon, "Prevent, or go thou/ Like Sir Actaeon he, with
Ringworm at thy heels" (II.i.148). Later Ford himself
adopts the terminology applying it to Page, "Well, I will
... divulge Page himself for a secure and willful Actaeon" (III.ii.40-43). It is apt in this play for Shakespeare to choose Actaeon as a symbol of the cuckold, and for Ford who is so sensitive to the dishonor imparted by the language of cuckoldry to adopt it. In the Renaissance, Actaeon had, through the agency of his horns, become a symbol of the cuckold despite the fact that the myth concerning him contains no reference to cuckoldry. Acteon's case is an example of adultery charged where it never occurred. Actaeon does, therefore, resemble one character in The Merry Wives of Windsor more exactly than Ford or Page; it is Falstaff because he locks upon the beauty (and wealth) of the chaste Dianas of this play, is transformed in the woods into a horned beast and is tormented there, baited by at least one of his former hounds, Pistol.6

The paramour in this play has not only endured the torments and indignities traditionally given to them, but he also bears the shame, dishonor and the horns of the traditional cuckold. The horns, in short, have been reassigned. Falstaff, in the end, endures the indignities, the mockings and the public shame ceremony meted out by the Windsor society. Finally, Ford applies the language of cuckoldry to the would-be paramour:

Now, sir, who's a cuckold now? Master Brook, Falstaff's a knave, a cuckoldly knave; here are his horns, Master Brook; and, Master Brook, he hath enjoy'd nothing of Ford's but his buck-basket, his cudgel, and twenty pounds of money which must be paid to Master Brook... .

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Fal: I dc begin tc perceive that I am made an ass.
Ford; Ay, and an ox too: both proofs are extant.
(V.v.109-115,149-120)

When Ford asks the horned Falstaff, "Who's a cuckold now?" the answer in one sense is, "No one." Neither husband has been wronged in this play. But in another sense, the answer is, "Falstaff." He sports a fine pair of horns, partly as a result of being betrayed by the wives, partly as the victim of poetic justice that gives him the horns he wished to give Ford and Page. But most importantly, Falstaff's shame and transformation into a horned beast are due him for his personal corruption. He is mocked for his "sinful fantasy," his "lust and luxury," his "unchaste desire," and for the "flesh of a corrupted heart" (V.v.93-94-96-87).

Kahn rightly places great significance on Falstaff's being called a "cuckold." She implies, however, the exchange of horns between Ford and Falstaff represents the universality of cuckoldry, how the forked plaque is shared by all men:

As the horned cuckold, he embodies the plight of all men, which is a corollary to the double standard and the sexual property in women allotted to them by patriarchal marriage. The double standard grants free sexual activity of men only, but marriage, by making their honor and virility depend on their wife's chastity, turns that sexual freedom into a threat. It makes every husband a potential cuckold, and gives every man, married or not, the opportunity to "plume his will" by cuckoldling his friend. . . . 8

Kahn is correct in saying this about cuckoldry in general.

7 Kahn, p. 150.
8 Kahn, pp. 149-150.
But in *The Merry Wives of Ford*, Falstaff's belief that he can "plume his will" by cuckoldining Ford is as much a male fantasy as is Ford's belief that he is a cuckold. Again and again in Shakespeare's plays (with the exception of *Troilus and Cressida*), the male belief that he can cuckold husbands at will is as much a foolish fantasy in the potential cuckold, as being a horned beast is a chimera to husbands.

Falstaff wears the cuckold's horns and bears the shame, the taunts and the name of a cuckold because Mrs. Ford rightly betrays his confidences and reveals his sexual advances. As a result, he has been transformed into a beast in accordance with the motto of the Knights of the Garter whose home was in Windsor, "Honi soit qui mal y pense" (Evil to him who evil thinks). John M. Steadman has shown how all three of Falstaff's trials in the play (being placed in a buck basked of dirty laundry, dressed as the witch of Brentford and leaten, and transformed into Herne the Hunter) are all symbolically linked to emblems of libido punished.9 The final indignity of becoming a Windsor stag combines by suggesting the figure of Actaeon both a Renaissance symbol of the cuckold and "an emblematic expression of lust and its chastisement."10

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9 "Falstaff as Actaeon: A Dramatic Emblem," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 24 (1963), 230-244.
10 Steadman, p. 234.
Falstaff cannot be, as Kahn states, "an emblem of Everyman as both cuckold and cuckolder" because no one in The Merry Wives of Windsor is either a cuckold or a cuckold-maker. In fact, Falstaff's horning denies rather than affirms a double standard; for it represents the calumny due to the would-be paramour who attempts to engage in adultercous acts. The revenge in this play is not directed, as it often is, towards the wife but towards the presumptuous paramour. Shakespeare's presentation of wives as morally upright, unembued with the desire to cuckold their husbands, exorcizes the play from the threat of cuckoldry as it will in Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale. These plays affirm that wives may be amiable, fully free in company, and active members of a social community without being cuckold-makers. In the perspective of the Renaissance, it is clear that Shakespeare is not affirming a stereotype, but is attempting to expunge it, freeing women to live more active, fulfilling and free social lives.

Comedy obtains in The Merry Wives of Windsor because the dangers inherent in cuckoldry are mitigated by the incompetence of the would-be cuckold-maker Falstaff's threat to the marriage and by the competence of the wives' defenses. Falstaff's resolve to approach the merry wives and Ford's belief that his imaginary rival could succeed are presented as absurd. Only Falstaff, Pistol, Nym and Ford

11 Kahn, p. 150.
believe Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page are capable of being unfaithful, all others believe in the lore of trust. Also, Ford's suspicions never have physical confirmations -- like the handkerchief in Othello or the bracelet in Cymbeline. Rather, cuckoldry exists only in the minds and conversation of those who have faith in the lore of cuckoldry. The Merry Wives of Windsor fits into the cuckold-tradition by instructing an unacceptable, presumptuous paramour and a suspicious husband to trust. The play is unique in the cuckold-tradition by having this instruction delivered by faithful wives.

In this way, Shakespeare's play affirms the Renaissance ideal of the companionate marriage. Rather than depicting clever wives duping foolish husbands, it shows a wife chary of her honor, attempting at first to spare her husband the agonies of jealousy and eventually confiding in him and joining with him to punish the foolish paramour. And by depicting a wife as amiable, socially active and faithful, Shakespeare presents a marriage in which suspicion can be banished, mutual attachments flourish, and community social activity can grow, helping to cement marital and societal coherence. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Shakespeare ridicules and defeats his most beloved and, in other plays, his most inventive cozeners, belying the stereotypes of cuckoldry.
CHAPTER III

"God Will Send You No Horns"

Much-Ado-About-Nothing

Much-Ado-About-Nothing continues The Merry Wives of Windsor's examination of the role cuckoldry plays in society. It is set in a world one step up the social scale from The Merry Wives of Windsor, peopled by princes, lords and up and coming military men, rather than by members of the gentry of Windsor's rural England. As such, it is a world much more lettered, closer to the court, and thus its characters are more sophisticated in terms of worldly attitude and verbal pyrotechnics. Still, Much-Ado-About-Nothing, like The Merry Wives of Windsor, depicts a world in which people are couzened by the fecundity of cuckoldry that slanders all wives, calls all marriages into question, and affirms the existence of the forked plague. The language of cuckoldry, here, endows some speakers with a cynical mask of quips, jests and superficial banterings that belie their inner feelings.
In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, men are truly fooled by cuckoldry. Ford and Falstaff believe wives are apt to commit adultery, and both these characters act on this belief. In *Much-Ado-About-Nothing*, men are not fooled inwardly by cuckoldry but are motivated to act as if they did believe its lore. Benedick professes belief in the lore of cuckoldry, especially in the universality of the forked plague, and to avoid ridicule, acts upon his profession though eventually his real faith in the lore of trust is revealed privately and publically, spurring actions that refute his statements. Benedick's initial proclamations of faith in the reality of the forked plague are insincere, motivated, perhaps, by a desire to disguise his inner fear that Beatrice does not return his love. The contradiction between his professions and his real feelings is made evident when his love for Beatrice is revealed publicly by his friends' trickery and privately by Benedick himself after forged letters have removed the fear that Beatrice will spurn him and when the serious consequences of the charges against Hero create an atmosphere too serious to maintain a jesting humor. When he allies himself among those who maintain faith in the lore of trust, Benedick belies his professed faith in female changeableness. But when Benedick defends Hero, he reveals how insincere professed faith in female weakness can be. In sum, *Much-Ado-About-Nothing* reveals cuckoldry to be a conventional pattern of jesting, unconnected to human feeling or impulse.
Traditional cuckold stories pit husbands and lovers against one another in sexual rivalries. Cuckoldry in Much Ado About Nothing sparks two kinds of rivalries: rivalries of wit between characters, and inner rivalries between profession and feeling. Both of these rivalries reveal the difficulties and dangers involved in using the easy humor inherent in cuckoldry. The opening of the play speaks of the "merry war betwixt Signior Benedick" and Mistress Beatrice and depicts several of the "skirmish[es] of wit" that take place between them and other members of the cast (I.i.61-63). The most important of these skirmishes involve cuckoldry: bantering with the terminology, charging one another cuckold or cuckold-maker, and mocking all married men as horned. This war of wit is of course all meant in jest, but the jest gets out of hand for Benedick. The verbal assent he jokingly gives to the lore of cuckoldry makes it impossible for him, under normal circumstances, to reveal his love publicly and comes close to suppressing it forever. Language in this play seasoned as it is with the terminology and stereotypes of cuckoldry belies real inner feelings, and as a result professions, especially Benedick's, are called into question. Language no longer can be trusted; only actions reveal men's true feelings.

The first scene begins the banterings and reveals the professed attitudes that need to be denied by action:
Don Pedro: I think this your daughter.
Leonato: Her mother hath many times told me so.
Benedick: Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

[I.i.104-106]

Here Benedick's curt comment humorously calls into question
Leonato's sense of security, and obliquely, Beatrice's legitimacy. Leonato defends himself with a counterattack
that suggests Benedick is a cuckold-maker:

Leonato: Signior Benedick, no, for then were you a child.
Don Pedro: You have it full, Benedick. We may guess by this what you are, being a man.

[I.i.107-109]

This exchange shows how jokes utilize cuckoldry's stereotypes to jestingly slander others by assuming the existence of the forked plaque. Leonato is called a cuckold, Benedick, a cuckold-maker. Second, the exchange affirms the cuckold-maker is a more repugnant thing than a cuckold, for Leonatus' reply to Benedick works only if the chance of being a cuckold-maker is more degrading than being called cuckold. This exchange has turned the joke from the cuckold to the cuckold-maker, just as The Merry Wives of Windsor transferred the horns from the cuckold to the cuckold-maker. Shakespeare's sensitivity to charges of illegitimacy is indicated here as the jests change focus and speak of Beatrice. As the battle of wits continues, Don Pedro dispells, at least for the audience if not for Benedick, the suggestion of Beatrice's illegitimacy:

Don Pedro: Truly, the lady fathers herself. Be happy, lady, for you are like an honorable father.

[I.i.110-112]
The meanings of "fathers", here, are many, but for our purposes now, suffice it to say that one meaning is that her resemblance to Leonato proves he is her father. This is how Benedick sees Pedro's meaning, and unwilling to give up his quipping, Benedick replies with a confused, almost meaningless suggestion:

Benedick: If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.
(I. i. 113-114)

Benedick is implying that Leonato's head may be horned whether Beatrice is legitimate or not—the reference to head alone suggests cuckoldry, and thus Beatrice would not wish to resemble her horned father. Benedick's joke is weak, as Beatrice notes: "I wonder that you will still be talking ... nobody marks you" (I. i. 116-117). The jokes trail off, in this scene, losing their humor and appearing more a kind of conventional form of joking than spontaneous wit.

Even in a short insignificant exchange as the above, we can see Shakespeare's morality operating to deny cuckoldry and turn moral blame away from the cuckold onto the lover. Benedick, the chief advocate for the lore of cuckoldry gets the worse of this skirmish by being charged a cuckold-maker and by losing the attention of his on-stage audience. Leonato and Beatrice are affirmed legitimately linked by their manifest resemblance. Thus Benedick's insistence on the universality of cuckoldry is set in clear contrast to the rule of truth. His experience in the play will force him, eventually, to abandon the lore of cuckoldry and
replace it with words and actions based on faith in women.

Later in the first scene Benedick jestingly rails against marriage. When Claudio airs his desire to take Hero as his wife Benedick replies, "In faith, hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion?" (I.i.197-199), and goes on to vow publicly to stay a bachelor in order to avoid being horned:

That a woman conceiv'd me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks; but that I will have a rechate winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldric, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor. (I.i.238-246)

Benedick's public profession here backs him into a corner and forces him not only to vow single life but to invite the calumny given a cuckold if he proves false to his vow. When Don Pedro repeats the saw, "'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,'" Benedick replies:

The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's hcrnrs, and set them in my forehead, and let me be wildly painted, and in such great letters as they write "Here is good horse to hire," let them signify under my sign, "Here you may see Benedick the married man." (I.i.261-267)

Benedick has come to insist that marriage and cuckoldry are universally linked, to be married is to be a cuckold. His professed "faith" (226) early in the play is in the lore of the forked plague.
Beatrice too gives jesting assent to the assumption of universal cuckoldry. By sending her no husband, she says, she too will avoid gaining horns, in this case, on her husband's forehead:

Leonato: So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.
Beatrice: Just, if he send me no husband.

(II.i.25-27)

But both Beatrice's and Benedick's "outward behaviors" (II.i.97), their professed attitudes are shown to mask more faithful and loving interiors, their affirmations of the forked plague appearing only in their public statements, not in private soliloquies.

The Heron/Claudic plot of Much Ado About Nothing concerns chastity and fidelity, and follows Shakespeare's usual scenario of cuckoldry but in a pre-marital context. A trusting lover is convinced by a lying slanderer that his beloved has been unfaithful. Easily convinced, the lover accuses the beloved of being a whore. She goes through a symbolic death, and is later reborn cleansed once the lover realizes his error, repents, and makes reparation. So although the main plot of Much Ado About Nothing is not a cuckold tale, the play does resemble Shakespeare's cuckold tales in several ways. Also, the jokes of cuckoldry that assume again and again that the forked plague is rife create the atmosphere that allows Hero to be so easily slandered. For it is, in a way, the language itself that accuses her. This is true not only of the content of the play, but of the way the play is constructed. Shakespeare does not, for
instance, depict on stage the balcony scene despite the importance of this scene, and despite its dramatic potential; rather, it is reported for the audience by Borachio to Conrade. Thus in terms of the presentation of the play, the slander itself remains in the realm of language alone, not in action. Also, Don John, the malcontent bastard whose birth allies him with the forces that deny legitimacy says "There is not chastity enough in language,/ Without offence to utter them [Hero's alleged actions] (IV.i.97-98). Don John is declining here to delineate his slanderous accusations, relying on the other characters' common experience with the licentiousness of language to discredit Hero. And the gambit works (IV.i.71).

Shakespeare uses the church scene, when true chastity has been fouled by slanderous language, to reveal that below the veneer of the slanderous jesting lie faith and love in Beatrice and Benedick. Staying behind with the women rather than accompanying his male friends, Benedick in effect indicates he does not side with the masculine allegations of unchastity but allies himself with the women. Benedick is pre-disposed to have faith in Hero's chastity. He is the first to seek evidence to defend Hero. "Were you her bedfellow last night?" (IV.i.147) he asks Beatrice, and though she cannot provide Hero with a defence and though he has faith in the "honor" of Don Pedro and Claudio, Benedick still suspects Hero is honest, intuiting that the blame rightly belongs to Don John (IV.i.188). The public assent
he gives in jest to the lore of cuckoldry, to the unchastity of all women, is clearly shown to be insincere, contradicted by his intuitive trust and soon by his actions. "Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wrong'd," he tells Beatrice (IV.i.259-160).

When left alone together, Benedick and Beatrice are allowed by the seriousness of the situation to reveal their loves to each other, showing each other how their inner feelings contradict their professions. What is more, Beatrice who has come to believe that "Men are only turn'd into tongue," (IV.i.320) orders Benedick to prove the truth of his love profession by taking action. "Kill Claudio," she insists (IV.i.289). Benedick must act because words, corrupted by the language of cuckoldry, have proven to be slanderous, unchaste and unconnected to true feeling. "By this hand, I love thee," (IV.i.324-325) Benedick declares, but it is not by oaths on his hand, but by acts of his hand that he can prove to Beatrice his profession true.

When Benedick encounters Don Pedro and Claudius, at first they take his challenges as banter:

Claudic: Wilt thou use thy wit?
Benedick: It is in my scabbard, shall I draw it?
Don Pedro: Dost thou wear thy wit by thy side?

(V.i.124-126)

This very awkward moment for these characters shows the language of honest feeling battling the language of wit and cynical banter. Benedick is forced to break off witty challenges and use harsher, straight-forward language:

You are a villain. I jest not; I will make it good how you dare. Do me right, or I will
protest your cowardice. You have kill'd a sweet lady, and her death shall fall heavy on you. Let me hear from you.

[V.i. 145-150]

Only now does Claudio take Benedick seriously, though he and Don Pedro both attempt to joke him out of his earnestness with continued banter referring to Beatrice. Benedick, speechless, endures the talk until the language of cuckoldry appears:

Don Pedro: But when shall we set the savage bull's horns on the sensible Benedick's head?  
Claudio: Yea, and text underneath, "Here dwells Benedick the married man"?  
Benedick: Fare you well, boy, you know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor.  
[V.i. 181-185]

Benedick has found the "gossip-like humor" that jests with cuckoldry unsatisfying and false, so he discontinues the company of these friends and their unattractive humor. Benedick, whose delight earlier was in the jests of cuckoldry, now turns from them.

In the final scene, Claudio, after completing his repentance rite (as Leontes will do his later), is blessed with a new Hero whose new identity has been purified from slander by her symbolic death and rebirth and by Claudio's public penance that contrasts with his public denunciation. In the church scene the slandering of Hero destroys her very identity. "Is this face Hero's?" Claudio asks (IV.i. 71), as if chastity was such an obvious part of Hero's character that the charge of unchastity must belong to another woman. The later church scene, resurrects Hero, purged of the calumny due an unfaithful woman by her symbolic death:
Claudio: Another Hero!
Hero: Nothing certain:
One Hero died defil'd, but I do live,
And surely as I live, I am a maid.
[V.iv.62-64]

It remains only for Beatrice and Benedick to compact their loves in marriage. But the tension gone, easily both of them fall back into their habits of denying their love and faith in a public arena. Their private feelings retreat again behind public profession. They need the miracle of the act of their "hands"—written documents—to belie the expressed claims of their "hearts" (V.iv.91-92).

Finally, as in the conclusion of The Merry Wives of Windsor, there is a transformation made in the connotations attached to cuckoldry. At the end of the earlier play, the horns have been transferred to the forehead of the lover. At the end of Much-Ado-About-Nothing, horns are gilded with precious metals. Don Pedro, anticipating crowning Benedick with horns after his upcoming marriage, promises to mitigate his punishment by tipping his horns with gold:

Tush, fear not, man, we'll tip thy horns with gold,
And all Europe shall rejoice at thee,
As once Europa did at lusty Jove,
When he would play the noble beast in love.
[V.iv.43-46]

Here, the horns are associated with gold, rejoicing, and nobility. This transformation in the connotations attached to horns is continued before Don John is reported captured, when Benedick accepts his horns telling Leonato, "There is no staff more reverent than one tipp'd with horn" (V.iv.12).
Much Ado About Nothing shows the slanderous, unchaste language of cuckoldry battling honesty and good feeling. Its easy, conventional, fecund humor belies men's true opinions, influences them to act in ways they would rather not, and creates an atmosphere in which women can be easily slandered or even destroyed. The language of cuckoldry slanders those to whom it is applied and those who use it, because it does not reflect true feeling. By masking men's real attitudes and by creating suspicion, it eventually may convince, confirming itself without reference to the rule of truth. Because of the serious charges of unfaith in Hero, Much Ado About Nothing comes severely close to tragedy. In all of Shakespeare's remaining major cuckold plays when charges of unfaith occur in marital arenas, tragedy obtains, at least for a time. The lore of cuckoldry has become in Shakespeare intrinsically linked to tragedy, the lore of trust linked to comedy.
CHAPTER IV

"The Forked One"

Troilus-and-Cressida.

The cuckoldry which lurks solidly in the background of Troilus-and-Cressida infects the entire world of the play, plunging it into political, social and interpersonal chaos. Unlike any other play in Shakespeare, the forked plague is potentially rife in Troilus-and-Cressida, and for this reason, the play seems to stand apart in Shakespeare's treatment of cuckoldry. Here Shakespeare faces female infidelity uncompromisingly in both marital and pre-marital arenas. The play seems to be written from the perspective of belief in the lore of cuckoldry, not in the lore of faith. The play depicts Helen, the archetypal unfaithful wife, enjoying the sensual pleasure of her adulterous affair and shows both Greeks and Trojans striving to gain possession of her in an endless war against their own self-interest and against some of their better judgments. Political order is thus destroyed by the war. Social order, especially among the Greeks, is also disrupted by rivalries that arise as a result of the war: Achilles rebels against
his nation and is disobedient to his military superiors by refusing to fight, which, in turn, results in Ajax being preferred when he should not be. The call of logical order in this play is defied too, especially by Hector. Despite his cogent arguments to the contrary, he votes that the Trojans continue to fight for Helen for honor's sake. The laws of honor are defied when Achilles destroys Hector against the rules of fair play. And finally, personal struggles for love are frustrated by the war which separates Troilus and Cressida and creates exigencies that foster pre-marital infidelity. All this disruption, virtual chaos, follows from Helen cuckolding Menelaus.

It was not necessary for Shakespeare to utilize the lore and language of cuckoldry in Troilus and Cressida. It does not play a part in his most immediate source, Chapman's Homer. In fact, the cuckold-triangle in Homer's Iliad is handled much like the cuckold-triangle in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In Chapman's Homer, Helen does not take Paris willingly, but is forced into Paris' arms by the goddess Venus. In Book III, Helen feels longing for her "first espoused, her native tow'rs and friends" (146) and tells Priam "I wish I] had never lost/ The sight of these my ancient friends of him that lov'd me most./ Of my sole daughter, brithers both, with all those kindly mates/ Of one soyle, one age, borne with me, though under different

1 All quotations from The Iliad are taken from Chapman's Homer, ed. Allardyce Nicoll, Vol. I, Pantheon Books, 1956. Line numbers will be inserted in the text.
fates!" (189-191). Helen regrets being away from her husband Menelaus and from his kin and community. Unlike Shakespeare's Helen, Chapman's (and Homer's) longs to be returned to her home, family and friends. She despises also the part Venus makes her play with Paris. After Venus spirits Paris away from his battle with Menelaus and in the form of Graea urges Helen to go to his bed, Helen objects. "What shame were it for me to feed/ This lust in him?" she says. "All honour'd Dames would hate me for the deed" (433-444). But Venus, enraged, terrifies Helen with threats, forcing her to go to Paris. Venus, for mirth's sake, sits Helen on a footstool before Paris, so much to Helen's shame that she exclaims to him, "O would to God thy life/ Had perish'd by his worthy hand to whom I first was wife!" (449-450). In Chapman's Homer, Helen is not a willing adulteress; rather, it is the supernatural power of the goddess Venus which makes her submit to the lust of Paris' bed.

A similar situation occurs in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Titania's adulterous affair with the transformed Bottom is not undertaken willfully. Rather, Titania acts under the supernatural influence of the flower, love-in-idleness applied by the jealous Oberon. Perhaps because of the unwilling nature of Titania's affair with Bottom, no calumny is due her as an adulteress, nor to Oberon as a cuckold. The language and lore of cuckoldry appears only once in the play when Bottom sings the song
that wakes Titania (III.i.125-136). The song, however, applies only obliquely to the cuckold-triangle. Cuckoldry's lore and language is never applied directly to anyone in the play. Shakespeare, then, did not need to emphasize the cuckoldry in Troilus and Cressida. He could have presented an unwilling Helen, and an unhorned Menelaus. His choosing not to do so seems all the more remarkable considering his usual habit of avoiding the language of cuckoldry when women are actually unfaithful.

The only husband of an unfaithful wife in Shakespeare who is called "cuckold" is Menelaus. He is called "cuckold" by Thersites, Achilles, and Diomed. Of the war, Thersites says, "All the argument is a whore and a cuckold" (II.iii.72-73), and when the Greek heroes ignore Achilles, he is especially insulted by Menelaus' snub. "What, does the cuckold scorn me?" (III.iii.64), he exclaims. Diomed calls Menelaus "a puling cuckold" who "would drink up/ The lees and dregs of a flat tamed piece," thinking both Menelaus and Paris "the heavier for a whore" (IV.ii.62-63;67). And Thersites in a speech that echoes Ford's on being a cuckold states that no calumny on earth is so debasing as to be a cuckold:

... to be a dog, a moile, a cat, a fitchook, a toad, a lezard, an owl, a puttock, or a herring without a doe, I would not care; but to be Menelaus, I would conspire against destiny ... I care not to be the louse of a lazar, so I were not Menelaus.

(V.i.54-55,60-64,65-66)

Whereas Ford felt the devils' names were preferable to the
cuckold’s. Thersites prefers to be any sort of low beast, even a parasite on the body of a leper, than to be a cuckold like Menelaus.

In Troilus and Cressida, the images that season cuckolds are applied to characters in addition to Menelaus. In trying to impress Cressida with Troilus’ sense of humor, Pandarus tells his niece of the fuss made over a white hair Helen found on his chin. Helen noticed Troilus sports but "two and fifty hairs" (I.i.157) on his chin, and Pandarus continues:

"Two and fifty hairs," quoth he, "and one white. That white hair is my father, and all the rest are his sons." "Jupiter," quoth she [Helen], "which of these hairs is Paris my husband?" "The forked one," quoth he, "pluck’t out and give it him." But there was such laughing! and Helen so blush’d, and Paris so chaf’d and all the rest laughed, that it pass’d.

(I.i.160-167)

When Troilus identifies the forked hair with Paris, he is attributing a characteristic usually reserved for the cuckold, being forked, to the cuckold-maker, and the image of Helen giving Paris the forked hair forecasts her future infidelity to him. As in The Merry Wives of Windsor, Shakespeare has placed both horns and shame on the forehead of the lover. In the scene described by Pandarus, it is the lover who chafes. Later, Diomed identifies Paris and Menelaus, stating that both are "the heavier for a whore."

In this way, Paris’ and Menelaus’ common desire for Helen seems to suggest their resemblance to one another and their common disgrace. Her manifest infidelity charges both the
men interested in possessing her to be cuckolds.

In several ways, the Troylus-Cressida-Diomed triangle in the play mirrors the Menelaus-Helen-Paris triangle in such a way as to make it seem like a cuckold triangle even though no marriage has taken place. In the first scene, Pandarus compares Cressida's beauty to Helen's (I.i.41ff). In the second scene, Cressida and Pandarus compare Paris' and Troilus' complexions (I.ii.91ff), and the forked hair that grows on Troilus and represents Paris connects these characters, for Troilus too is described as forked because of his cloven chin (I.ii.119-120). The two triangles are further confounded and linked by the way Shakespeare toys with the idea that they could overlap. Pandarus swears to Cressida that Helen loves Troilus "better than Paris" (I.ii.107-108). And later Pandarus makes this revelation to Helen, "My niece is horribly in love with a thing you have, sweet queen" (III.i.97-98). These hints that loves cross the triangles link them more closely, and the latter persiflage lends these links a particularly sexual flavor with its reference to Paris' "thing."

The two triangles are linked most firmly, however, by Paris' and Troilus' common desire for women who prove faithless. And as Paris, Helen's lover, bears being called "forked", so too Diomed, Cressida's lover, wears horns, at least in Troilus' imagination. Overhearing Diomed's vow to Cressida to wear the sleeve she had as a token from Troilus, he vows to challenge it in battle even if Diomed was the
devil and wore the sleeve on his horn (IV.ii.95-96), the horn here referring to the devil's and hinting at the cuckold's. These resemblances are finally reinforced because in all cases the desire to possess unfaithful women is based as much upon the attractions of beauty and sex as on love, the attachments are violated or in violation of other attachments, and breaches of faith in them lead to the battlefield.

So in Troilus and Cressida, Menelaus is called "cuckold", Paris and Troilus "forked", and Diomed "horned." Everyone sexually involved with the unfaithful women is treated as a cuckold whether they are husbands or lovers, married or single. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Falstaff was called "cuckold" and was subjected to a public shame ceremony partly because he was sexually betrayed by Mrs. Ford and partly because of his "unchaste desire" (V.v.96). In Troilus and Cressida, men's desire to possess unfaithful women, especially as we shall see for the pleasure of having a beautiful woman sexually, charges them "cuckold." In both plays, seeking women more for the gain sex can afford than for love tends to lead to shame.

The respectability of the desire for Helen and Cressida is condemned in the play. She is "not ours" (II.ii.22), Hector says of Helen, and Troilus, who argues for keeping Helen, admits she was "stol'n" (II.ii.93). Hector, Troy's chief warrior, argues most cogently against keeping Helen:

Nature craves
All dues be ren'd to their owners; now,
What nearer debt in all humanity
Than wife is to the husband?

(II.ii. 173-76)

Hector argues that laws both of human nature and of state insist that a wife belongs to her husband and should not be taken from him:

If Helen then be wife to Sparta's king,
As it is known she is, these moral laws
Of nature and of nations speak aloud
To have her back returned.

(II.ii. 183-186)

On the Greek side, when Diomed is chided by Paris for being critical of Helen, Diomed replies,

For every false drop in her bawdy veins,
A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight,
A Trojan hath been slain.

(IV.i. 69)

This catalogue of insults is completed by both Diomed and Thersites with the word "whore." For Trojans, keeping Helen is against laws both moral and social; for Greeks, continuing to fight to regain Helen will destroy more Greeks needlessly. For both Trojans and Greeks, having Helen is little more than having a contaminated whore.

In a similar, but less extreme way, Ulysses sums up his impression of Cressida:

Fie, fie upon her!
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Ay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits lock out
At every joint and motive of her body.
O, these encounters, so qlib of tongue,
That give a coating welcome ere it comes,
And wide unclasp the tables of their thoughts
To every ticklish reader! set them down
For sluttish spirits of opportunity,
And daughters of the game.

(IV.v. 54-63)

Unlike Falstaff's original reading of Mrs. Ford, Ulysses is
not translating Cressida's actions out of "honesty"; he reads their language rightly. He sees Cressida as worldly-wise and able to use her sexuality for opportunity; hers is not an honest amiability, but an invitation to dishonesty, motivated by the circumstances of war that forced her to seek alliance in the Greek camp. And though Cressida herself sees the weakness in her nature, and though she feels the immorality of giving in to her weakness, she does. Leaving with Diomed, she says,

Troilus, farewell! one eye yet looks on thee,
But with my heart the other eye doth see.
Ah,rection our sex! this fault in us I find
The error of our eye directs our mind.
What error leads must err; O then conclude,
Minds sway'd by eyes are full of turpitude.

(V.ii.107-112)

Her self-awareness, her sense of guilt, and her regret do not allow us to consent to Thersites' comment on this speech, though many of Shakespeare's audience no doubt would: "A proof of strength she could not publish more,/ Unless she said, 'My mind is now turn'd whore'" (113-114).

Men strive for Helen and Cressida for all Varchi's categories--pleasure, passion (love), property or right, and honor--though the least of these seems to be love. Menelaus has nothing to say about Helen except that she is a "deadly theme" about which to speak (IV.v.181). The arguments in her favor are delivered for the most part by Paris, who during the Trojan assembly, argues for keeping Helen because of the "pleasures such a beauty brings with it," and because of the "shame" that would come to the Trojans were she given
up "on terms of base compulsion" (II.i.146-153). Paris
never speaks of love in the assembly. For Paris it is the
pleasure involved in the possession of beauty and avoiding
the dishonor that would come from surrendering her that
motivates his desire for Helen; all Varchi's categories
except love. And although the one scene which depicts Paris
with Helen speaks of love, it is clear that pleasure and sex
are the subjects. "Is this the generation of love—hot
blood, hot thoughts, and hot deeds?" Pandarus asks. "Hot
deeds is love," he says (III.i.31-32,20). The talk in this
scene is of "desires" [2], "beauty" [48], "pleasure" [48],
"performance" [52] and "a thing" Helen has that Cressida
desires, while armies fight outside the walls of Troy.

Troilus' desire for Cressida is of a similar nature.
It is her beauty that torments him (I.i.27ff), and the
eating imagery that dominates Troilus' language (see esp.
III.ii.17ff) suggests the sensual quality of his desire for
Cressida, as does the imagery and innuendo that seasons of
Troilus and Cressida's talk together. Cressida talks of
"performance" (III.ii.84), while Troilus speaks of taste
(90) and feeding (160). Another major component of their
desire for one another is possession. That Troilus employs
Pandarus at all indicates his desire is of a detached
nature, his attraction to Cressida is not based upon the
joys of mutual society, but upon appetites whetted by his
eyes. Cressida too seeks to gain possession of Troilus.
Her soliloquy reveals how she puts on a coyness so as to
inspire deeper desire and attachment in Troilus:

Words, vows, gifts, tears, and love's full sacrifice,
He offers in another's enterprise,
But more in Troilus thousandfold I see
Than in the glass of Pandar's praise may be;
Yet I hold off. Women are angels, wooing:
Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing.
That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this:
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.
That she was never yet that ever knew
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue.
Therefore this maxim out of love I teach:
Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech;
Then though my heart's content firm love doth bear,
Nothing of that shall from mine eyes appear.

(I.ii.282-295)

Certainly Cressida sees much in Troilus, much more than Pandar reveals, enough to inspire her "firm love." The weakness in her love derives from her vision of it as a thing to be "won" through cunning based upon stereotyping male love as something more valued before gaining than after gaining. Her relationship with Troilus is not natural and spontaneous, but studied and contrived in an attempt to fix firmness in love by using policy. All the talk of constancy and truth that concludes Act III, Scene ii emphasizes the desire both of them have for secure possession of one another. Finally, Troilus' view of Cressida as a possession is revealed when he consoles himself over the loss of Cressida to Diomed by saying: "This she? no, this is Diomed's Cressida" (V.ii.137), as if Cressida's identity is determined by which man possesses her.
Love in *Troilus and Cressida* is limited by the stress it places on possession, sex and policy. Though Troilus and Cressida are able to imagine and vow eternal faith, they are in fact limited. As Troilus says, "This [is] the monstruousity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confin'd, that the desire is boundless and the act slave to limit" (III.ii.81-83). Though horned monsters abound in the play, Troilus sees only the gap between the infinite will and desire in love and its execution as monstrous in the pageant of Cupid (III.ii.74-75). Indeed, after their love has been consummated, Troilus' desire seems to have waned as Troilus seems to be too easily able to hasten away though Cressida would have him tarry (IV.ii.3-18). And when circumstances of war separate them, their loves prove weak. Cressida turns to Diomed, and Troilus' vow to challenge Diomed in battle is bathetic [see below]. In the match between Troilus and Cressida, though of course there is no marriage and thus no cuckoldry, there is depicted a matching that inevitably will result in a breach of lover's fidelity.

Although Troilus is not married to Cressida and is not technically a cuckold, in a way he is. His cloven chin, his forked hairs, his similarities to Menelaus and Paris in desiring a "flat tamed piece," all proclaim his cuckold. Perhaps the imagery of cuckoldry applies to Troilus because the "bargain made," witnessed, sealed (III.ii.197) and consummated by Troilus and Cressida may have sufficiently
fulfilled Renaissance requirements for a legal marriage. Or perhaps because Shakespeare saw cuckoldry as a matter of language and imagination that is applied so arbitrarily and so unjustly that Menelaus, Paris, Troilus and even Diomed may in some ways participate in the calumny due a cuckold because they all are able to use sex and/or professions of love for personal pleasure, acquisition, or honor. In Troilus and Cressida, this ability leads to false valuation of women turning social order to a chaos that perpetuates war and social disruption of all kinds. "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery, nothing else holds fashion" in this world, says Thersites (V.ii.194-5).

The end of Troilus and Cressida is, perhaps, the most bathetic in Shakespeare. Troilus handles his grief by convincing himself that there are two Cressids. "If there be rule in unity itself/ This was not she," he argues convincing himself that "This is, and is not Cressid" (V.ii.141-42,146). And Troilus vows he hates Diomed as much as he is "half attached" to Cressida. (Troilus does not argue with Ulysses' suggestion that he is 50% in love with

Cressida [V.ii.464-62]. What would Othello say if a Lord suggested he loved Desdemona with only half his heart?) But as the fight scenes progress, Troilus seems to seek Diomed in battle more to revenge the loss of his horse than for Cressida. "0 traitor Diomed! turn thy false face, thou traitor," he says, "And pay thy life thou owest me for my horse" (V.vi.6-7). Troilus' love thus wanes. Hector's death shows honor to be as false as the love of Helen and Cressida, and the last lines of the play are given to Pandarus, who sees the play's tragedy as his own. His final lines are addressed to those in the trade of prostitution. Pandarus bequeathes them the sweats that result from the Renaissance cures of venereal disease (V.x.35ff). These highly ironic, crest fallen, concluding scenes underline how wifely infidelity cripples all aspects of society. The very genre of Troilus and Cressida seems to suffer, combining satire, comedy, and tragedy so unsuccessfully as to create one of the most chaotic plays in Shakespeare's canon.

In Troilus and Cressida, Shakespeare abandoned the cuckold scenario he used in The Merry Wives of Windsor and will resume in Othello and continue using in Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale. Shakespeare for only the second and last time depicts a willingly unfaithful wife and calls her husband "cuckold", weighing his brows with horns. (The other example is Titus Andronicus, in which Tamora continues an affair with Aaron after her marriage has taken place.) But still, cuckoldry in Troilus and Cressida is quite
different from Renaissance cuckoldry in general. Helen did not originally give in to Paris because she is a woman married and thus a woman easily seduced. Rather, she was raped. Paris, himself, calls it so, admitting it was wrong, "I would have the soil of her fair rape/Wip'd off, in honorable keeping her" (II.i.148-149). As in "The Rape of Lucrece" and A Midsummer Night's Dream, the only other plays besides Titus Andronicus which mix the language of cuckoldry, however slightly, with instances of actual wifely adultery, the wives are either raped, as is the case with Lucrece, Lavinia, and Helen, or mated unwillingly (indeed unwittingly) as is the case with the entranced Titania. In short, in none of these plays is the saw that a married woman is a woman easily seduced fulfilled. In fact, though Demetrius and Charon affirm this adage in Titus Andronicus (II.i.82-83, quoted on page 22 of Chapter 4), it proves untrue, forcing them to rape Lavinia in order to satisfy their lust.

Further, the language of cuckoldry that is so rife in Troilus and Cressida applies because very specialized circumstances exist. Because it attaches itself in both marital and pre-marital contexts to both husbands and paramours, the language of cuckoldry seems less dependent upon the actions of the women than upon the character of men's desires for women. Both the nature of the men's desires for Helen and Cressida, and the worth of the women themselves are far from positive. The women are unfaithful,
a fault that would rank them in the Renaissance among whores. Paris' and Troilus' desires for these women, aptly, are based more upon possession and sex than love. Further, Helen's attraction for the Trojans and Greeks is based for the most part on the honor that accrues to those who possess a beautiful woman. In Troilus and Cressida, it is the pursuit of women for pleasure, possession and honor not for love that opens men to the calumny due a cuckold, and plunges the world that places a great weight upon the value of order into personal, social and political chaos.

In a larger sense, false valuation of women is the disrupting factor in Troilus and Cressida, as it is in All's Well That Ends Well, King Lear and The Winter's Tale. In this context, Shakespeare's next comedy, All's Well That Ends Well, can be seen as a kind of antidote to Troilus and Cressida. The heroine of the play, by reason of her name, Helena, and by reason of Lafew's comment when he leaves her with the king -- "I am Cressid's uncle, / That dare leave two together" (II.i.97-98) -- is identified with the unfaithful women of Troilus and Cressida. And the scene in which Helena chooses Bertram, rejecting several lords of Paris, is reminiscent of Cressida's scene with the Greeks, except in Cressida's scene she kisses all but one of the Greeks, while Helena tactfully passes over all the Parisian lords. But unlike Helen and Cressida, Helena is not valued by the man she loves. Instead, she is spurned by Bertram after his forced wedding to her. He promises never to allow her to
call him "husband" until, as he writes "[you] show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to" (III.ii.57-60). In a bed trick which substitutes a wife for a mistress and avoids adultery, Helena fulfills Bertram's conditions and presents him with a legitimate son. All's Well-That-Ends-Well is, therefore, a kind of anti-cuckold play, in which a worthy wife proves herself the mother of a legitimate child. Bertram's acquiescence at the end of the play, therefore, is more accountable because he has been taught true valuation which prompts him to accept Helena, and leads him to happiness and order.
CHAPTER V

"Cuckold Me!"

Othello

Othello returns to the line of treatment given cuckoldry in The Merry Wives of Windsor and Much Ado About Nothing. Like these earlier plays, the belief in cuckoldry is unfounded, wives amiable and faithful, horns chimerical. The Merry Wives of Windsor and Much Ado About Nothing depict jealousy as unfounded, unconnected to the rule of truth and the lore of cuckoldry to be false and slanderous. But just as Troilus and Cressida attempts to face up to feminine infidelity, Othello attempts to face up to the widespread existence of jealousy in a world where it is unfounded. Lily B. Campbell states that Othello is "clearly a study of jealousy and in jealousy as it affects those of different races".1 But more than this, Othello goes further to show how cuckoldry once engrained in the male imagination can overwhelm and lead to tragedy. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Falstaff seeks the advantages, both sexual and

financial, promted by the lore of cuckoldry while Ford seeks proofs to demonstrate that the lore is or has been fulfilled. But never does the lore become anything more than a male chimera. In *Much-Ado-About-Nothing*, the lore of cuckoldry surfaces as a conventional form of humor utilized in conversations for good natured, friendly contests of wit. In the Beatrice/Benedick plot, the jesting does get out of hand and does affect behavior, but the dangers and difficulties are easily overcome. Again, belief in cuckoldry is harmless, something to laugh to scorn. In the Hero/Claudio plot, however, accusations of unchastity in a pre-marital context have tragic potential for they nearly kill Hero. *Othello* fulfills this tragic potential by showing how the belief in the lore of cuckoldry can subject men to jealousy, horn-madness, and faith in the forked plaque, all of which lead to death. Chimeras lead to real palpable tragedy. The imagined rivalries between men become real based upon misunderstanding and jealousy. Shakespeare utilized what had been a stock comic plot and created a tragedy. The figure of the foolish imaginary cuckold appeared in many Renaissance comic dramas before and after *Othello*.2 Shakespeare makes the cuckold story a matter of tragic awe. Shakespeare accomplishes this transformation not by depicting the horror of female unchastity and human lust in general, as Cyril Tourneur did three years later in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, but by utilizing his scenario to

2 McDonald deals fully with the problem of the foolish hero in *Othello*. 
focus on the growth, development and results of unfounded jealousy.

Othello, like The Merry-Wives of Windsor, points to several plot devices and character traits typical of Renaissance cuckoldry all of which either fail to result in adultery or prove patently false. Desdemona is charged stereotypically by Iago of being changeable, her eye following, as did Cressida's, the present object:

Her eye must be fed; ... When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be, [again] to inflame it and to give a fresh appetite, loveliness in favor, sympathy in years, manners, and beauties.

(II.i.225-230)

What could be more typical of Renaissance explanations of why a husband is cuckolded? Women are fickle, needing constant change to whet their lusty appetite. They need a young man, lovely, and well-mannered. Cassio, moreover, fulfills these criteria, as Iago points out:

He is too familiar with his [Othello's] wife ... He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected—fram'd to make women false.

(II.i.396-398)

In short, Cassio is apt to be suspected because he fulfills the stereotype of a paramour. Like a suitor in stories of cuckoldry or in courtly love narratives, Cassio seeks Desdemona's maid, Emilia, to sue for him (III.i.44-55), and later in the play Othello sees Emilia in this role charging her with being a bawd for Desdemona. "She's a simple bawd,/ A closet lock and key of villainous secrets," he says (IV.ii.20-22). Other stock cuckold-story devices in the
play include two examples of gifts and money being given, though only allegedly, to a beloved in an attempt to woo her (V.i.14-17 and IV.ii.186-190).

Further in Act IV, Emilia catalogs behaviors of husbands which are thought to cause wives to cuckold their husbands, some of which apply to Othello. Emilia argues:

I do think it is the husband's faults
If wives do fall. Say that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps;
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us; or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having despite:
Why, we have galls; and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. 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 ....

... let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.
(IV.iii.84-96,120-103)

It is the husband's actions, Emilia believes that causes women to stray, their neglect, their jealousies, their beating, their adulteries. Supporting this catalogue, Desdemona's song tells of a man whose adulteries cause his wife to be false (IV.iii.57). Finally, it is affirmed, by Iago again, that the forked plague is rife, thus it is better to be aware than ignorant. "Think," Iago tells Othello:

... every bearded fellow that is but yok'd
May draw with you. There's millions now alive
That nightly lie in those improper beds
Which they dare swear particular; your case is better.
O, 'tis the spite of hell, the fiend's
arch-mock,
To lift a wanton in a secure couch,
And to suppose her chaste! No, let me know,
And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be.

(IV.i.66-73)

"Knowing myself a cuckold," Iago is saying, "I know my wife a whore." And apparently, Iago believes in the forked plague for he too feels that both Cassio and Othello have taken his place in bed (I.iii.386-388, II.i.295, IV.ii.146).

Still, despite these and the other uses of cuckoldry's stereotypes and lore, no wifely adultery occurs Othello. Though Othello suspects him, not only does Cassio not cuckold Othello, but Shakespeare altered the plot from his source so as to make it impossible for him to have done so. In Cinthio, the Moor, the wicked Ensign and the corporal all travel to Cyprus on one ship.3 Shakespeare, by placing Desdemona and Cassio on different ships, makes it impossible for them to have had an affair because they all departed on Othello and Desdemona's wedding night, and Othello and his wife were reunited immediately upon arriving in Cyprus. Though Roderigo wishes to cuckold Othello, the idea is unthinkable. Though Iago suspects Othello, Emilia, the pandar for the truth at the end of the play despite her belief that many wives do cuckold their husbands, feels that it was a knave such as the "insinuating rogue" (IV.ii.131) who slandered Desdemona, that turned her husband's mind "seamy side without" (IV.iii.146-147), making him suspect her with Othello. And finally, though Iago suspects Cassio

3 Bullough, Vcl. VIII, p. 243.
with his "night-cap too" (II.i.307), this suspicion is so off-hand it seems very like his own suspicion of Othello. He knows "not if't be true," but "for mere suspicion in that kind. / Will do it as if for surety" (I.iii.388-390).

The great master of the lore of cuckoldry in Othello is Iago. He affirms the stereotypes, stage manages affairs so as to resemble cuckoldry situations, and his unreasonable suspicions of both Othello and Cassio make him more susceptible to horn-madness than even Othello who at the end judges himself "one not easily jealous [sic], but being wrought, / Perplexed in the extreme" (V.ii.345-346). And, significantly, it is to Iago that the question of honesty is most often applied. His suspicions, his command of the workings of jealousy, his expertise in the lore of cuckoldry all make him dishonest, and the revelation of the truth at the end makes Iago dumb (V.ii.304), stripping him of the language of doubt, suspicion and cuckoldry.

In contrast to Iago's expertise in the lore of cuckoldry, Desdemona is absolutely ignorant of wifely infidelity. In Act IV, Scene iii, when Emilia instructs her in the lore of cuckoldry, Desdemona exhibits how foreign it is to her nature by rejecting it. Though Othello behaves as do the husbands who, as Emilia suggests, drive their wives to adultery, Desdemona entertains no thought of dishonoring Othello. Othello has become jealous. He has struck Desdemona (IV.i.240). He as restrained her by confining her to her chamber. Still Desdemona finds no fault with her
husband; rather, she says, "My love doth so approve him,/
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns — / . . .
have grace and favor [in them]. (IV.iii.19-21). She goes
so far as to revise the "Willow Song" to say the same
(IV.iii.52-53), though the song seems to have the opposite
import for it causes Desdemona to ask Emilia whether in fact
there are women who "abuse their husbands/ In such gross
kind" (IV.iii.63). Emilia's reply includes the catalogue of
vices in men that result in wifely infidelity (quoted on
page 97) to which Desdemona replies, "[God] me such uses
send,/ Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend"
(IV.iii.104-105). Clearly, Desdemona is not the
stereotypical wife found in stories of Renaissance
cuckoldry. She cannot conceive women abusing their
husbands. Her questions to Emilia and her inability to
pronounce the word "whore" earlier show how alien infidelity
is to her nature.

The fact of Desdemona's inherent chastity is as obvious
to us as it is to several members of the dramatis personae
who often speak of her using terms that suggest grace or
heaven. When Iago tries to convince Roderigo that Desdemona
is in love with Cassio and "hath found him already," the
gull replies in disbelief, "I cannot believe that in her,
she's full of most bless'd condition" (II.i.248-250). And
later when attempting to get Cassio to woo Desdemona in
earnest, Iago suggests to the young lieutenant that
Desdemona is "full of game" and has an eye that "sounds a
parley to provocation," Cassic affirms that her eye is "inviting" yet "right modest," causing Iago to drop his intent and try a different gambit. Iago too believes Desdemona unapproachable for out of two choices of revenge—getting even "wife for wife" (II.i.299) or inciting jealousy "so strong/ That judgment cannot cure" : (301-2) —Iago chooses the latter knowing full well an attempt on Desdemona is doomed to failure. Finally, Othello's better mind tells him Desdemona is chaste. Initially, his faith in her is indeed strong. Unlike Ford before him and Leontes later, Othello is not jealous of Desdemona's honest amiability with other men:

'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.

(III.iii.483-186)

Othello does not succumb on his own to the saw in cuckoldry that states a merry wife is a false wife, nor does he measure his own lack of merit as a cause of cuckoldry, thus giving the lie to cuckoldry's lore:

Nor from mine own weak merits will I draw
The smallest fear of doubt of her revolt,
For she had eyes, and chose me.

(III.iii.484-186)

And even after Iago instructs Othello in the lore of cuckoldry so that the Moor can state that "the forked plague is fated to us/ When we do quicker" (III.iii.276-277), still the sight of Desdemona causes him to deny her falsity. "If she be false, [O then] heaven [mocks] itself!/ I'll not
believe'\text{'t}' (III.iii.278-279). Roderigo calls her "bless'd", Othello thinks her heavenly, and Cassio calls her the "grace of heaven" (II.i.85). The lore of cuckoldry conjured up by Iago makes Desdemona's honesty seem all the more divine. Initially, it is obvious to Othello, Cassio, Roderigo, even Iago that Desdemona is by nature chaste. In contrast, Ford immediately gives credence to Pistol's suggestion that his wife could fall prey to Falstaff's wooing (\textit{The Merry Wives of Windsor}; II.i.109ff). Until instructed in the lore of cuckoldry, Othello's faith is in the lore of trust; Ford's, in the lore of cuckoldry.

This denial of cuckoldry's lore is, of course, nothing new in Shakespeare. What is new is the analytical portrayal of the existence of jealousy in the face of manifest fidelity. Emilia sees jealousy as causeless. When Desdemona laments she never gave Othello cause for jealousy, Emilia replies:

\begin{verbatim}
But jealous souls will not be answer'd so;  
They are never jealous for the cause,  
But jealous for they're jealous. It is a monster  
Begot upon itself, born on itself.  
(III.iv.159-162)
\end{verbatim}

And so it seems especially for Iago whose capacity for jealousy and envy is unbounded. In soliloquy, he discusses his hate for Othello:

\begin{verbatim}
I hate the Moor,  
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets  
[H'as] done my office. I know not if't be true,  
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,  
Will do as if for surety.  
(I.iii.386-390)
\end{verbatim}

Apparently, there is some talk that Iago has been cuckolded
by Othello. Emilia's comment at IV.ii.146 confirms this. Though Iago has no proof himself, through a willful act of imagination he chooses to believe. In his next soliloquy, Iago seems convinced:

I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap’d into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth (like a poisonous mineral) gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even’d with him, wife for wife:
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure.

[II.i.295-302]

I suspect the reason critics have found Iago's impulse to revenge insufficient motivation for his acts is because today we do not feel as strongly about infidelity as did the Renaissance husbands. Also since Shakespeare was showing how the emotion of jealousy was "self-born", causeless, to us Iago's jealousy seems too intellectual. And as a result, he has been portrayed as too heady and unemotional. The above speech read calmly and analytically masks its deep emotional content. Though perhaps the speech should be read this way, for Iago's "vision of society as a network of cuckoldries" makes him immune to the more violent effects of jealousy, but not from jealousy itself. In fact, Varchi affirms that being overheary is a typical characteristic of the cuckold. (See above p. 12.) Iago is the prime example of Othello's wisdom, "to be once in doubt/Is [once] to be resolv'd" (III.iii.175-180). As Iago himself says, "Trifles light as air/ Are to the jealous confirmations strong/ As

4 Kahn, p. 142.
proofs of holy writ" (III.iii.322-324). And this is more true of Iago than of Othello (a fact that may have sparked Shakespeare to write *The Winter's Tale* in which he portrays a man in whom jealousy is most surely begot and born upon itself). Iago easily believes in his own cuckoldom, because he believes in the forked plague.

Whereas Iago embraces jealousy in a conscious act of imagination, Othello attempts to reject jealousy through an act of will. "Think'st thou I'll make a life of jealousy," he asks Iago, "To follow still the changes of the moon?" (III.iii.77-78). "I'll not believe't," he tells himself later (III.iii.278). Initially, Othello is remarkably lacking in jealousy. Desdemona recognizing this denies Varchi's point that southern nations tend to be more jealous than northern nations. (See p. 11.) "I think the sun where he was born/ Drew all such [jealous] humors from him," she tells Emilia (III.iv.29-30). This is confirmed by Othello's actions through the opening of Act III, Scene ii. He is unconcerned, at first, over Cassio's being with Desdemona, nor is there a hint of suspicion in him while Desdemona first sues for Cassio's return. On the contrary, her suing makes Othello all the more fond of her:

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again.

(III.iii.90-92)

And though Iago hints that something is amiss about Cassio's leaving Desdemona as "guilty like" (III.iii.39), and about his going between Othello and Desdemona wocing for his
superior, and though Iago questions Cassio's honesty, still Othello doesn't add them up to suggest cuckoldry. "[Zounds,] what dost thou mean?" (III.iii.454) Othello asks Iago. A Renaissance audience would clearly see how Othello, were he a worldly Venetian, would easily be jealous without Iago's direct mentioning of jealousy or cuckoldry. In fact, Othello's naivety contrasts with the play's source in which the Moor quickly guesses the intent of his Ensign's innuendo.5 But Iago is forced, finally, to instruct Othello in the lore of cuckoldry:

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wringer;
But O, what damned minutes tell he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet [strongly] loves!

(III.iii.165-170)

Once wrought upon, Othello proves fertile ground for the growth of jealousy.

Othello's jealousy is not "self-born" as is Iago's. Russ McDonald is correct in stressing the role of the imagination in the imaginary cuckold.6 In Othello, Iago's imagination gives birth to the jealousy which convinces men that cuckoldry is so rife. "I have't," he says. "It is engend'red. Hell and night/ Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (I.iii.403-404). In Troilus and Cressida, the gap between love's desire and the limits of

5 Bullough, Vol. VII, p. 245.
6 McDonald, pp. 51-67.
human performance was termed "monstrous." In Othello, the rivalries between men engendered by cuckoldry is monstrous. Iago's consciously adopted belief in cuckoldry born out of frustrated desire to cuckold hatches a birth which transferred to Othello through instruction in cuckoldry grows to monstrous proportions. Othello, himself, recognizes Iago's imagination as monstrous before it is revealed. "Thou echo'st me," Othello complains, "As if there were some monster in thy thought/ Too hideous to be shown" (III.iii.106-107).

Othello, an outsider, a Moor uninstructed in the stereotypes of Renaissance cuckoldry, unable to resist the onslaught of the monster Iago shows him, is transformed utterly by Iago's instruction. From the noble Moor who was "all in all sufficient," (IV.i.265) who "passion could not shake ... whose solid virtue/ The shot of accident nor dart of chance/ Cculd neither graze nor pierce" (IV.i.265-268), he becomes a passionate, frenzied jealous man as described by Varchi and Burton. Othello is obsessed with his cuckolding. Charging Iago to prove his dishonor and becoming obsessed with discovering proofs of her dishonesty, Othello participates in the wittol theme. "Villain," he warns Iago, "be sure to prove my love a whore" (III.iii.359), and later he says, "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not/ ... I'll have some proof" (III.iii.384-396). Othello is tortured in his own mind by terms. "Cuckold me!" he cries (IV.i.200). He feels his
temples weighed down, "I have a pain upon my forehead, here," he complained to Desdemona (III.iii.283). "A horned man's a monster and a beast," he tells Iago (IV.i.62). He is horrified at the shame due a cuckold, to be made "a fixed figure for the time of scorn/ To point his slow [unmoving] finger at" (IV.ii.54-55). His previous joy in Desdemona's qualities has become terrors:

Othello: Hang her, I do say what she is. So delicate with her needle! an admirable musician! O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear. Of so high and plenteous wit and invention.

Iago: She's the worse for this.

Othello: O, a thousand, a thousand times. (IV.i.187-192)

He goes horn-mad falling into an "epilepsy" (IV.i.50). And finally he seeks revenge. "I will withdraw/ To furnish me with some swift means of death/ For the fair devil" (III.iii.477-479). Through all this, he has lost his identity. "My lord is not my lord," Desdemona observes (III.iv.224). "Othello's occupation gone," he becomes a slave to his humors.7

The violence of his jealousy arises, ironically, out of his love for Desdemona. Born from an enjoyment of mutual society, his love for Desdemona based on what Varchi terms "passion", what we term "love". Their love grew out of enjoying each other's company. "She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd," Othello says, "And I lov'd her that she did pity them" (I.iii.67-68). Othello is fully engaged in his attachment to Desdemona. His identity seems

7. Campbell traces the growth of Othello's jealousy fully.
determined by her love for him. When this is gone, "Chaos is come again," Othello says (III.iii.92). There is no talk here of great beauty, of sex, nor of possession. Rather, the personal qualities enjoyed in conversation enamour them. "My heart's subdu'd/ Even to the very quality of my lord," Desdemona affirms (I.iii.250-251). And her desire to follow Othello to Cyprus argues that it is his life she wishes to share, and it is "to be free and bounteous to her mind" that Othello wishes her to accompany him, not "to comply with heat," for as he says "the young affects [of appetite are] in me defunct" (I.iii.261-265). When Othello analyzes the horror he feels imagining himself cuckolded, it is not, he insists, so much the shame of "the scorn of time," but to be "discarded" from where he had "garner'd up" his heart (IV.ii.53-58). Whereas Ford was most concerned with the loss of honor marked by being called "cuckold" and Paris with the loss of the possession of the most beautiful woman, Othello is most affected by the loss of love, and perhaps, for this reason his passion is most violent and leads to tragedy.

Ironically, the greatest proof for Othello of Desdemona's lack of faith is the very strength of his jealousy and the passion that accompany it. "Nature would not invest herself in such a shadowing passion without some instruction." he tells Iago. "It is not words that shake me thus" (IV.i.39-42). The very strength of Othello's passion convinces him that cuckoldry is not just a matter of
language, but cf fact. Nature would not shake him, Othello feels, with such a strong passion were it not justified. Thus he is convinced it is the "cause" (V.i.1-4) that moves him to be a revenger, a justice, and an executioner who must kill her "else she'll betray more men" (V.i.6). Jealousy itself convinces both Othello and Iago. Iago acts and believes just because he suspects. Othello tells Desdemona to confess "For to deny each article with oath/ Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception/ That I do groan withall" (V.i.54-56). His strong conception is jealousy itself. In the frenzy of jealousy, Othello kills her.

As Campbell points out, Othello, being from a southern climate, is especially susceptible to jealousy. Significantly, jealousy is not prone to spring out of him spontaneously, as it will in Leontes. Iago must teach him the lore of cuckoldry. As an outsider, uninstructed in the subtleties of Venetian society, Othello is ignorant of the stereotypes that brand amiable women potential adulterers. As a result, he does not suspect or distrust Desdemona on his own. He is a kind of tabula rasa for Iago to experiment on, and for Shakespeare to demonstrate how rich a ground man's imagination is for the growth of jealousy. Once it takes root in Othello, jealousy engulfs him. He is unable to suppress it, rather he acts solely on its dictates plunging himself and his wife into tragedy. Othello, then, accounts for the existence of jealousy and cuckoldry by

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8 Campbell. p. 154.
showing how apt a ground for jealousy man is and how self-confirming an emotion it is, and how society, here in the shape of the worldly Iago, perpetuates through instruction the lore of cuckoldry.

Shakespeare's Othello by atomizing jealousy accounts for male belief in the lore of cuckoldry when wives are faithful. Othello also reveals how doubt in general can quickly become jealousy which, in turn, can usurp a man's imagination and dominate his every thought and action. Thus, Othello realizes for the first time in Shakespeare the tragic potential latent in the belief of cuckoldry, transforming his cuckoldry scenario into a tragic form. In his remaining cuckold plays, Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare focuses on how the tragic belief in cuckoldry affects a wider social group than just a husband and his wife, and how the potentially tragic dangers and evils that result from the belief in cuckoldry can be effaced and slandered marriages redeemed.
CHAPTER VI

"Thou's Made Me Cuckold!"

Cymbeline.

Shakespeare's last two major treatments of cuckoldry—
Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale—incorporate new conclusions into his cuckoldry scenario that depict how the tragic inertia involved in the slander of cuckoldry can be arrested by a divinely sparked reparation followed by repentance, penance, and pardon. These plays seem less concerned with the personalities of those involved than with the process by which breaches between men and women can be healed. Othello-focused on two characters, Othello and Iago, in whom the lore of cuckoldry became fully ingrained; these later plays sketch similar characters tersely and integrate them into more extended plots that free them from the tragedy encountered in the earlier plays. Cymbeline shows tragedy averted for an Othello-like character, one who was convinced of his wife's infidelity by another; The Winter's Tale for an Iago-like character, one in whom jealousy was self-born. In both these plays, the consequences of cuckoldry extend beyond husband and wife: they affect a larger family unit,
and because these families are royal families, the nation too is affected.

The process of redemption from the evil consequences resulting from cuckoldry in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*—seem dependent on similar circumstances. For both Posthumus and Leontes, a realignment with the family line and with the divine precedes reunion with their spouses. Posthumus enjoys an intercession by his parents and brothers to Jupiter in a dream-vision before he regains Imogen, while Leontes recognizes divine intervention in the death of his son and is reunited with his daughter before regaining Hermione. And in both of these romances, though the wives' honest amiability leads to slander and near death, they remain faithful to their husbands, patiently awaiting the time when they will be reunited, willing to pardon their husbands. The tragic power inherent in the male chimera of cuckoldry and the jealousy accompanying it are defeated and purged through men's ability granted through divine grace to recognize their error and make reparation, and women's long suffering willingness to pardon. These qualities in men and women defeat cuckoldry, allowing estranged husbands and wives to reunite under a new lore based on trust. In short, the thrust of these romances, to quote *Cymbeline* 's source in Boccaccio, is "to punish the deceiver and pardon the deceived." ¹

In *Cymbeline* the process by which divisions caused by the belief in cuckoldry are healed is entangled with a mesh of rents within families all of which are one way or another repaired. Posthumus has been separated from his mother, his father and his brothers because of their untimely deaths. Cymbeline has been separated from his children: his sons because they have been stolen, and his daughter because she hies from court in order to follow Posthumus, who has been banished for marrying above his station. But in the course of the play all these characters cooperate in the process that reunites the marriage and realigns legitimate heirs to the British throne. Redemption from the breaches caused by cuckoldry is linked in *Cymbeline* with the renewal of past family ties in the belief that secure lines of ancestral legitimacy help keep married faith alive.

Shakespeare's interest in the plot he found for *Cymbeline* most probably derives from its potential to question again the veracity of cuckoldry. In the story which Shakespeare could have derived from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (in its original Italian or in a French translation) or from the English *Frederick of Jennen*, a slanderous Iago-like villain attempts to spread and profit from cuckoldry's stereotypes. Boccaccio's story begins with a conversation among Italian merchants in a Parisian hostelry in which "all seemed to concur in the opinion that the ladies they had left behind them were not likely to

2 *Riverside Shakespeare*, p. 4518.
neglect their opportunities. "3 All those present agree: all but one that is, for Bernabo Lomellin "dissociated himself from the rest, affirming that by especial grace of God he was blessed with a wife who was, perhaps, the most perfect paragon to be found in Italy of all the virtues proper to a lady . . . . she was fair, still quite young, handy, and clever beyond all other women in embroidery ... well-mannered, discreet, and sensible ... [but most of all] 'twas not possible to find a woman more honest, more chaste than she."4 Ambrogiuolo da Piacenza, thinking Bernabo "a careless observer of the nature of things," tries to convince him of "what common sense dictates" that "however honest she be, she will do as others do."5 To prove his accusation, Ambrogiuolo offers to test Bernabo's wife. Bernabo consents, betting five thousand florins of gold that his wife is chaste. This tale goes on to portray how misogynist bias and slander spread the lore of cuckoldry despite the natural chastity of wives, and it shows how the slanderer deserves punishment. Interestingly, Shakespeare changes the locale of part of his play, testing the veracity of the lore of cuckoldry on an English woman.

Unlike his sources, Shakespeare begins his tale by portraying the relationship that exists between the husband and wife. When the play opens all of Cymbeline's court are

wearing frowns though at heart they are "Glad at the thing they scowl at" (I. i. 14); that is, Posthumus and Imogen's marriage. One gentleman explains:

He that hath miss'd the Princess is a thing Too bad for bad report; and he that hath her (I mean that married her, alack, good man! And therefore banish'd) is a creature such As, to seek through the regions of the earth For one his like, there would be something failing In him that should compare. I do not think So fair an outward and such stuff within Endows a man but he.  
(I. i. 16-24)

Like Othello, Posthumus is thoroughly admired. All the courtiers view Imogen's choice of Posthumus as "true election" (I. ii. 27). Imogen calls him "a man worth any woman" (I. ii. 146). But the ease with which the courtiers mask true feeling with outward show suggests that appearances are not always the best indicators of inner reality. And perhaps there is something too easy about Posthumus' first valediction to Imogen. Certainly, she thinks so. "Were you but riding forth to air yourself," she chides him, "Such parting were too petty" (I. i. 110-111). Posthumus is so easily parted from Imogen not only because he has great faith in her, but because he sees her as his undisputed possession. He calls the ring he gives her "a manacle of love," and Imogen herself his "fairest prisoner" (I. i. 122-123). "Manacle" and "prisoner" are apt in one way because Imogen has been made prisoner to the queen by her father Cymbeline who opposes the marriage of his daughter, but more meaningfully, Posthumus' choice of words reveals
how he looks at Imogen as his possession, a prisoner
manacled to him by love. It must be granted Posthumus that
he sees her as his "queen" as well as his "mistress"
(I.i.92), and himself as "the loyall'ist husband that e'er
plight[ed] troth" (I.i.96). He appreciates Imogen, praising
her as "more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant,
qualified, and less attemptable than any the rarest of our
ladies in France" (I.iv.59-61). Still it is notable that
out of seven praiseworthy qualities Posthumus finds in
English women, four (or five if we include "virtuosus") have
to do with fidelity, suggesting Posthumus' great interest in
possession. In general, the idea of possession, albeit he
sees it as intermutual, is of great importance to Posthumus,
perhaps of greatest importance, for he can say that if
Imogen can be seduced, "she is not worth our debate"
(I.iv.85). Posthumus' faith in Imogen is laudable in so far
as it denies the misogynist tenets of cuckoldry, but is
tainted in so far as he views Imogen as a mere possession,
as chattel. In this way, Posthumus resembles Collatine in
"The Rape of Lucrece" (a poem which resembles the cuckoldry
plot of Cymbeline in several ways). Like Collatine,
Posthumus extols "the incomparable chastity of his wife"
(I.iv.12-13), and feels great pride in the "possession of
his beauteous mate" (I.iv.18). As in "The Rape of Lucrece"
the husband's boastsings of his wife's qualities lead a
would-be cuckold-maker to attempt to seduce her.
That Posthumus' undertaking the wager with Jachimo is based more upon his confidence in possessing Imogen than upon faith in the constancy of her nature is revealed, in part, by his identification of her and the ring she gave him. When Jachimo claims that Posthumus is exaggerating his praise of Imogen, the Briton replies, "I prais'd her as I rated her; so do I my stone" (I.iv.77). Soon Posthumus qualifies this comparison: "the one may be sold or given, of if there were wealth enough for the [purchase], or merit for the gift; the other not a thing for sale, and only the gift of the gods" (I.iv.82-85). Posthumus sees both the ring and Imogen as his possessions; the only difference is that, were there wealth enough to purchase it or merit enough to deserve gaining it as a gift, he could sell or make a gift of the stone, whereas Imogen is not a commodity to be transferred but an endowment bequeathed by the gods, an endowment Posthumus asserts, by the grace of the gods, he will keep (I.iv.87). Posthumus' confidence in Imogen seems dependent less upon his sure knowledge of her character than upon his faith in the strength of his claim upon her. Jachimo's skepticism is based upon his belief in cuckoldry's tenet that all women are changeable:

You may wear her in title yours; but you know strange fowl light upon neighboring ponds. Your ring may be stol'n too: so your brace of unprizable estimations, the one is but frail and the other casual. A cunning thief, or (that way) accomplish'd courtier, would hazard the winning both of first and last. (I.iv.88-93)

Jachimo recognizes how much faith Posthumus places upon
'"title" and belittles it by declaring that Posthumus' title to his ring is "casual" or subject to accident, and his title to Imogen, "frail," for all women are weak in matters of constancy.

Whereas Posthumus' confidence is based upon his faith in title, Jachimo's is based upon faith in cuckoldry. He sees Posthumus' confidence unfounded because all women, he feels, are attemptable. "I make my wager rather against your confidence than her reputation," he tells Posthumus, "and to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world" (I.iv.110-130). Jachimo asserts his wager is not undertaken because he has any sure knowledge of Imogen in particular, but because he believes any woman can fall. The conflict between Jachimo and Posthumus is not, then, a conflict between a man who trusts his wife and a man who does not, but between a man who believes he possesses his woman and one who has faith in cuckoldry.

The question as to how Posthumus should react to Jachimo's wager is important. Jachimo's argument and wager call Imogen's honesty in question and assert that Posthumus, if he is not already a cuckold, is at least a potential one. Further, Jachimo's offer to test Imogen is a threat, or even a promise, to cuckold Posthumus. According to Renaissance codes of honor, Jachimo has overstepped the bounds of honorable behavior. The question of how Posthumus should act depends upon the severity of Jachimo's insult. A slight
insult can be ignored, but this is no slight accusation for it is not crly of a grave nature, but it also finds assent among those with Posthumus and Jachimo.6 Posthumus should, therefore, give Jachimo the lie or the mentita, a challenge to a duel.7 We know Posthumus acted this way the previous evening in response to the same argument. The Frenchman reports that a similar argument moved Posthumus to put the question to the "arbiterment of swords" (I.iv.49-50) because, as Posthumus claims, his "quarrel was not altogether slight" (I.iv.46-47). In a similar situation later, when Jachimo accuses Posthumus of infidelity and suggests to Imogen that she revenge herself by sleeping with him, she gives Jachimo the lie, "Thou wrong'fst a gentleman, who is as far/ From thy report as thou from honor" (I.vi.145-146); and she condemns Jachimo for acting dishonorably: "If thou wert honorable,/ Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not/ For such an end thou seek'st--as base as strange" (I.vi.142-144). And Jachimo, himself, sees he is acting dishonorably when he offers the wager to Posthumus, for he successfully avoids Posthumus' anger when he says "and to bar your offence herein too, I durst attempt it against any lady in the world" (I.iv.112-113).

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6 Bryson points out that an offence can be ignored only if it makes no impression on third parties, p. 92.
7 Bryson, p. 5.
That Posthumus does not challenge Jachimo but undertakes the bet, wagering the stone to which he compared Imogen earlier, indicates a shallowness in his honor, for it is honorable to give the lie when it is deserved. Also a weakness in his understanding and faith in Imogen is revealed, for not only does it insult her but it also opens the door to doubt, a feeling which has led before in Shakespeare to raging jealousy.

Despite his host Philario's remonstrations, Posthumus easily undertakes the wager. "This is but a custom in your tongue," he answers Jachimo, revealing his belief that Jachimo's insistence on the universality of cuckoldry is but a verbal convention unattached to the truth. Confident, Posthumus urges Jachimo to follow through on the bet, "You bear a graver purpose, I hope," he says (I.iv.138-139). "I dare you to this match .... I embrace these conditions" (I.iv.145-146,156). In this way, and by providing Jachimo with a letter to Imogen, Posthumus contributes to his imaginary cuckoldring. But he is most active in the process when Jachimo returns to Rome with his false proofs of Imogen's infidelity.

Jachimo describes Imogen's apartment to Posthumus, shows him the bracelet he stole, and describes Imogen's mole, but unlike Boccaccio's character, Posthumus is convinced after seeing the bracelet. "O no, no, no, 'tis true," he cries giving Jachimo the ring Imogen gave as a

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8 Bryson, p. 45.
love token. "Here take this too" (II.iv.106). Posthumus follows through in typical cuckoldry fashion quickly being convinced and quickly charging all women with spreading the forked plaque:

Let there be no honor
Where there is beauty, truth, where semblance,
love,
Where there is another man. The vows of women
Of no more bondage be to where they are made
Than they are to their virtue, which is nothing.
0 above measure false!

(II.iv.108-113)

Shakespeare has altered his sources here so as to emphasize Posthumus' wittolly nature, for whereas in Boccaccio, Ambroginiolc still is skeptical and asks for more proof, Posthumus is easily convinced. It is necessary for Philario to suggest that the bracelet could have been stolen and that more proof is necessary. So Posthumus asks for his ring back. "Render to me some corporal sign about her,/ More evident than this; for this was stol'n," he challenges comically. Jachimo replies weakly as if he had no other proofs, "Ey Jupiter, I had it from her" (II.iv.119-121). Though weak, this reply convinces Posthumus:

Mark you, he swears; by Jupiter he swears,
'Tis true—nay, keep the ring—'tis true. I am sure
She would not lose it. Her attendants are
All sworn and honorable. They induc'd to steal it?
And by a stranger? No, he hath enjoy'd her.
The cognizance of her inconstancy
Is this. She hath bought the name of whore thus dearly.

(II.iv.122-128)

Ironically, Posthumus chooses to trust his wife's maids over Imogen. As a result, it is superfluous for Jachimo to tell
Posthumus about Imogen's mole, Posthumus convinces himself. The merest suggestion that Imogen has been untrue sparks an impulse in Posthumus that seeks to prove her false. Like Othello he is fertile ground for the planting of doubt and the growth of jealousy. Othello orders Iago to "prove my love a whore" (III.iii.359). Posthumus takes Jachimo in his hands and says, "I will kill thee if thou dost deny/ Thou's made me cuckold" (II.iv.145-146).

Posthumus' soliloquy that begins the next scene reveals a man fully in the grips of the forked plaque, charging all women with adultery, even his mother; in fact charging women with all evil, dissassociating male from female nature:

Is there no way for men to be, but women Must be half-workers? We are all bastards, And that most venerable man which I Did call my father, was I know not where When I was stamp'd. Some cinder with his tools Made me counterfeit; yet my mother seem'd The Dian of that time. So doth my wife The nonpareil of this, ... Could I find out The woman's part in me--for there's no motion That tends to vice in man, but I affirm It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it, The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers; Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers,; revenges. hers; Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain, Nice longing, slanders, mutability, All faults that name, nay, that hell knows, Why, hers, in part or all; but rather, all; For even to vice They are not constant, but are changing still: One vice but of a minute cld, for one Not half so old as that. I'll write against them, Detest them, curse them; yet 'tis greater skill In true hate, to pray they have their will: The very devils cannot plague them better (II.v.18,19-35)

Shakespeare depicts here the process of over-extension.
Posthumus' self-convincing jealousy attributes a fault to Imogen and then goes on to add a myriad of faults, indeed all faults to her and to all womankind. Men's faults, he argues, are products of female nature in men. Posthumus almost resolves to write misogynist tracts, but he decides it is better to let women condemn themselves; for only devils could torment women sufficiently.

In the central portion of the soliloquy, Posthumus torments himself, much as Iago torments Othello with voyeuristic imagery of seduction comparing the imaginary vision of adultery to the chaste behavior he remembers:

\begin{quote}
O vengeance, vengeance!
Me of my lawful pleasure she restrain'd,
And pray'd me oft for forbearance; did it with
A prudence so rosy the sweet view on't
Might well have warm'd old Saturn; that I
thought her
As chaste as unsunn'd snow. O, all the devils!
This yellow Jachimo, in an hour—was't not?—
Or less—at first? Perchance he spoke not, but
Like a full accres'd boar, a German [one],
Cried "O!" and mounted; found no opposition
But what he lock'd for should oppose and she
Should from encounter guard.
\end{quote}

[II.v.8-18]

Posthumus outdoes Iago in tormenting himself, imagining Imogen freely bestowing the sexual favors she denied her husband, thus wronging him in two senses. Posthumus begins to take on the slanderer's role fulfilling to a degree Emilia's definition of jealousy as self-born, and self-conceived. And in accordance with Varchi's definition of jealousy based on property or right, Posthumus wishes to be rid of Imogen and his love for her. He orders her killed.
In contrast to Jachimo's belief and Posthumus' jealousy, Shakespeare places Imogen's faithfulness. In the sources, Imogen's counterparts fulfill Varchi's catalogue of characteristics found in chaste wives, importantly they are asocial and solitary. In *Frederyke of Jennen*, Jachimo's counterpart never gets an interview with Imogen's counterpart, because she is too discreet, putting the slanderer off by her "womanly behavior."10 Sc too, in Boccaccio, *Amorciuolo* never has an interview with Zinerva but learns "in the course of a few days enough about her habits of life and character to know .... that his enterprise was hopeless".11 Jachimo, this play's expert in the lore of cuckoldry, believes amiable and sociable women are unchaste. When Jachimo undertakes his bet with Posthumus, he sets as a condition that she give him "admittance and opportunity to friend" (I.iv.105-106). If she give him the "opportunity of a second conference" (I.iv.129-130), Jachimo is convinced she cannot be chaste. Unlike her counterparts in Boccaccio and *Frederyke of Jennen*, Imogen is amiable to Jachimo, albeit he has a letter from Posthumus bidding her to be hospitable to him. Shakespeare has altered his sources, revising them so as to reassert his scenario, and again depict an amiable wife who is chaste.

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10 Bullough, Vcl. VIII, P. 66.
Despite his usual distrust of appearances and his habitual distrust of woman, Jachimo even, before he attempts to seduce Imoqen, seems assured of her faith:

All of her that is out of door most rich!
If she be furnish'd with a mind so rare,
She is alone th' Arabian bird, and I
Have lost my wager.

(I.vi.15-18)

The "Willow Song" and Emilia in Othello speak of how a man's adulteries drive wives to cuckold their husbands. Jachimo, aware of this stereotype, attempts to convince Imoqen that Posthumus has been unfaithful to her and that her logical course is to follow suit. As Iago attempted to move Othello to revenge by convincing him his spouse was unchaste, so too Jachimo tries, though unsuccessfully, to move Imoqen to revenge because of her spouse's supposed adulteries:

Should he make me
Live, like Diana's priest, betwixt cold sheets,
While he is vaulting variable ramps,
In your despite, upon your purse—revenge it.
I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure,
More noble than that runagate to your bed,
And will continue fast to your affection,
Still close as sure.

(I.vi.132-139)

Emilia too spake of how women should seek revenge when their husbands "pour our treasures into foreign laps... in despite" (Othello.IV.iii.88 & 91). But Imoqen belies the saw, seeing through Jachimo's scheme, rejecting him and his tale:

Away, I do condemn mine ears that have
So long attended thee. If thou wert honorable,
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
For such an end thou seek'st—as base as strange.
You wrong'rest a gentleman, who is as far
From thy report as thou from honor, and
Solicits here a lady that disdains
Thee and the devil alike.

(I.vi.141-148)

Imogen, unlike Posthumus, reacts according to Renaissance concepts of honor; she gives Jachimo the lie and refuses to listen to him further. Like Desdemona, Imogen would have Jachimo pluck good from bad, not bad from good (Othello IV.iii.104-105). She sees the slanderer as a matter of "report" only, of language, due a "Rominish stew" and a "beastly mind" (I.vi.152 & 153). Here, again the lover-slanderer is the beast of cuckoldry.

The closet scene in Cymbeline is reminiscent of "The Rape of Lucrece": in fact, Jachimo sees the resemblance himself, "Our Tarquin thus/ Did softly press the rushes ere he waken'd/ The chastity he wounded" (II.ii.12-14). Not only does he see Tarquin as part of his own party—"our Tarquin" he calls him—but he sees himself as a Tarquin-like thief who has "pick'd the lock and ta'en/ The treasure of her [the wife's] honor" (II.ii.41-42). Jachimo sees himself as a thief, taking what Posthumus thinks is his own. And like Iago, Jachimo takes joy in how his treachery will result in the "madding of her lord" (II.ii.37).

Pisano, who receives the order, sees immediately that it is "slander" (III.iv.33), that some "monsters" accuse her (III.ii.2). "She's punish'd for her truth, and undergoes,/ More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults/ As would take some virtue," Pisano insists (III.ii.7-9). Unlike
Boaccaccio, murder is unthinkable for the imaginary cuckold's servant, emphasizing in Shakespeare how true chastity is evident to those not blinded by jealousy, not taken in by cuckoldry. Pisano rails against the horrors of slander. "It is slander," he says,

> Whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue
> Out venoms all the worms of Nile, whose breath
> Rides on the posting winds and doth belie
> All corners of the world. Kings, queens, and states,
> Maids, matrons, nay the secrets of the grave
> This viperous slander enters.

(III.iv.33-38)

Imogen's first reaction when she learns Posthumus believes her unfaithful and has ordered her killed is to affirm that she rejects him and will distrust all shows of goodness in men:

> Men's vows are women's traitors. All good seeming,
> By thy revolt, O husband, shall be thought
> Put on for villainy; not born where't grows,
> But worn a bait for ladies.

(III.iv.54-57)

Her honor betrayed by Posthumus' revolt, Imogen bids Pisano to kill her. She assures him her heart is "empty of all things but grief," because Posthumus "who was indeed/ The riches of it" is no longer there (III.iv.69-74). But this insistence that Posthumus no longer resides in her heart seems put on only to convince Pisano to obey his master's order to kill her, for when Pisano suggests a way by which Imogen may be near Posthumus she relents (III.iv.140-154). Her disguise and pilgrimage to Posthumus is an indication of her great love for him and shows how her love transcends the
desire for possession. Since Imogen sees herself as dead to him (III.iv.130), in no sense can she see him as her possession. Still she feels being close enough to hear of Posthumus is sufficient justification for living. Her adopted name "Fidele" is apt, therefore, because her pilgrimage is an indication of her continued faithfulness. Imogen's faith is later confirmed by Lucius who tells her, "Thy name well fits thy faith; thy faith thy name," (IV.ii.361) when he sees her devotion to the supposed Richard de Champ who Imogen thinks is the beheaded Posthumus. Although Imogen's faith needs no testing for the audience, and though these confirmations are never evident to Posthumus, they provide a ritualistic purging of the slander Imogen has borne. The charges of adultery, whether justified or not, necessitate severe hardships for the slandered wife in Cymbeline (as well as in The Winter's Tale). Like Hero, she must feign a death, and absent herself from court. But for Imogen the trials go further, involving a pilgrimage to Posthumus in the guise of a man, a rediscovery and adoption by her brothers, an apparent death by poison, a resurrection accompanied by a proof of her continued devotion to the supposedly dead husband and a final trial of chastity.

Part of the ritualistic process which reunites Imogen and Posthumus is her readoption by her brothers, and her adopting them. In one way, her sejourn with them resembles a wife returning home when she abandons a false husband.
"Pardon me qods!" she says, "I'd change my sex to be companions with them,/ Since Leonatus's false" (III.i.i.86-88). In another way, because Guiderius and Arviragus are lost brothers, her adoption by them and the manifest affection spontaneously arising between them is a reestablishment of family ties, a reassertion of sound legitimacy. They adopt Imogen and aver they would love her as much as they love their supposed father. Guiderius says, "I love thee; I have spoke it;/ How much the quantity, the weight as much,/ As I do love my father" (IV.i.i.16-18). And Arviragus agrees. Their honorable behavior marks them as noble by birth, in contrast to Posthumus whose courtly experience came by adoption. "These are kind creatures," Imogen says, "Our courtiers say all's savage but in court./ Experience, O, thou disprov'st report" (IV.i.i.32-34). And just as her brother's nobility is evident despite their lack of court experience, Imogen's noble birth is evident despite her disguise. "This youth, how e'er distress'd, appears he hath had/ Good ancestors," Belarius observes (IV.i.i.47-48).

When Posthumus re-enters in the last act, he is regretful though not because he has been converted, like Ford, to faith in the lore of trust. He still believes Imogen to have "wryed" (V.i.i.5), but he sees it was not his place to be god's scourge. "Gods," he prays, "if you/ Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never/ Had liv'd to put on this; so had you saved/ The noble Imogen to repent, and strook/ Me, wretch, more worth your vengeance"
(V.i.7-11). Like Othello, he wishes his wife the time to repent; unlike the Moor, Posthumus sees he had no right to wreak vengeance even though he believes he had cause. In modern terms, Posthumus is arguing against the double standard. Like Troilus, Posthumus dedicates himself to the "face of peril" (V.i.28), fighting for Britain which he hurt enough by killing Imogen.

Unlike his counterpart in Boccaccio who continues to brag about his supposed adultery, Jachimo is repentant by the end of the play:

The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood, I have belied a lady
The Princess of this country; and the air can't
Revegingly enfeebles me, or could this carl,
A very drudge of nature's, have subdu'd me
In my profession.

(V.ii.1-6)

Unknowingly, the carl who subdued Jachimo for a time is Posthumus disguised, fighting for Imogen's sake. Indirectly, then, Posthumus, through his repentance and regret, helps vanquish the Italians, which will lead to the eventual revelation of the slander and his reconciliation with Imogen.

But before the revelation and reconciliation scene, Posthumus has a dream in which he sees his parents and Jupiter. The dream comes almost in answer to Posthumus' desire to repent. The dream depicts Posthumus' parents and brothers, pleading for Posthumus' happiness and asking of the god why he has been tormented. Aptly, Jupiter is addressed, the god whose adulteries give him no right to
punish man for them. Jupiter replies saying he delays his
gifts to make them more delighted (V.vi.99-102), giving
Posthumus a tablet cryptically foretelling his fortune. In
a way, this dream reasserts legitimacy itself, showing true
parentage interceding for its offspring as Imogen will
intercede for Posthumus.

Hazlitt praised the last scene of Cymbeline by saying
"the fate of almost every person in the drama is made to
depend on the solution of a single circumstance—the answer
of Jachimo to the question of Imogen respecting the
obtaining of the ring of Posthumus."12 This answer is of
such importance because upon it rests the question of
Imogen's chastity. Once Jachimo reveals his villainy and
Imogen's honesty, the several threads of action are unwound,
identities are revealed and relationships reestablished.
All relies on the question of a wife's chastity and on
teaching a confirmed believer in cuckoldry, in Jachimo's
words, "the wide difference/ 'Twixt amorous and villainous"
(V.v.94-95). In Boccaccio, Jachimo's counterpart,
Ambrogioolo, does not reveal his own villainy out of regret
and repentance; rather he is cozened into telling the truth
by the conning of the slandered Zinerva and by a threat of
torture, the climax of the trial scene coming when Zinerva
reveals her identity by "baring her breast".13 Boccaccio's
tale ends with Amgurogiuolc tied to a stake covered with

12 Riverside Shakespeare, p. 1512.
honey where he is attacked by "swarms of flies, wasps and gadflies ... [so] that not only was his life sucked from him but his very bones were completely denuded of flesh."\textsuperscript{14} But in \textit{Cymbeline} the deceiver Jachimo has been taught the lore of honesty, and he reveals the truth voluntarily, initiating the revelations so that in the end "Pardon's the word to all" (V.v. 422).

After Jachimo confesses, Posthumus also confesses and takes the guilt for Imogen's death upon himself. "It is I," he affirms, "That all th' abhorred things o' th' earth amend/ By being worse than they" (V.v. 215-217). Whereas earlier Posthumus attributed all evil to women, he now takes all evil onto himself, "every villain/ Be call'd Posthumus Leonatus, and/ Be villainy less than 'twas!" (V.v. 223-225). Posthumus' unwitting striking of Imogen symbolically represents his earlier resolve to harm his wife, and Imogen's recovery from the blow repeats for the last time the death-resurrection theme, for once she has arisen, she and her husband are once again united. In her embrace, Posthumus reveals how he sees himself and Imogen not a possessor and possessed, but as an organic unit. "Hang there like fruit, my soul,/ Till the tree die!" (V.v. 263-164). He sees Imogen not only as part of him as a fruit is part of a tree, but as his very soul.

\textsuperscript{14} Boccaccio, Vol. I, p. 140.
When Cymbeline realizes Fidele is his daughter, he says "If this be so, the gods do mean to strike me/ To death with mortal joy" (V.v. 234-235). The play ends with the Soothsayer's reading of Posthumus' tablet, revealing the purpose of the gods to render their gifts more delightful because they have been delayed. When the play opened, appearances were so confounded all seemed "that way past grace" (I.i.137), but in the end all true relationships, feelings and identities have been revealed through the divine imparting of grace to men and women. What Cornelius tells the audience in an aside applies to Imogen and the love she and Posthumus have for one another: "There is/ No danger in what show of death it makes,/ More than the locking up the spirit a time,/ To be more fresh, reviving" (I.v.39-42). As Cornelius is to his drug, so Jupiter is to the action of the play. In the end, it is right for Cymbeline to say "Laud we the gods" (V.v.476), because through their gifts grace and happiness return to England and are more appreciated because of the show of death they have made.

Cuckoldry in Cymbeline, though not effecting the initial breaches in the play, nevertheless, threatens the entire fabric of English society by threatening the life of Imogen, who proves of utmost importance in maintaining the stability of the royal family. When her chastity is confirmed and the threat of cuckoldry is expelled, both the deceiver and the deceived are instructed in the lore of
trust. They repent and order is restored. *Cymbeline* depicts the lure of cuckoldry defeated by chastity, patience and willingness to pardon accompanied by manifest legitimacy. Cuckoldry is revealed to be not only chimerical but able to be defeated by women's faith and honor and by men's ability to recognize their error, take on the guilt for their distrust, and renew their faith in their wives.
CHAPTER VII

"Hard'ning of my Brows"

The Winter's Tale

The Winter's Tale culminates Shakespeare's treatment of cuckoldry in two ways. It reverses some of his earlier applications of cuckoldry that, perhaps, he saw to be inappropriate and fulfills the later trends he found more suitable. The Winter's Tale reverses the plot of Henry the Sixth, Part Two, which depicts a king who has been wronged, but who is not jealous. In The Winter's Tale, a king has not been wronged, but is jealous. Similarly, The Winter's Tale reverses the imagery found in the song that ends Love's Labours Lost, which connects spring with a husband's fear of being cuckolded. Spring sings,

When daisies pied, and violets blue,
And land-smocks all silver-white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue
Do paint the meadows with delight,
The cuckoo then on every tree
Mocks married men; for thus sings he,
"Cuckoo;
Cuckoo, cuckoo"—0 word of fear,
Unpleasant to a married ear!
(V.ii.894-904)

The Winter's Tale connects winter with a husband's fear of being cuckolded; spring and summer with his release from
that fear.

More importantly, *The Winter's Tale* fulfills more than any other play Shakespeare's major cuckoldry themes. For instance, Emilia's description of jealousy as "a monster/ Begot upon itself, born on itself" *(Othello* III.iv.161-162) describes Leontes' jealousy more precisely than Othello's. And Othello's remark that "to be once in doubt/ Is [once] to be resolved" *(Othello* III.iii.179-180) describes Leontes as much as it describes Othello. Perdita and Florizel fulfill Imogen's wish in *Cymbeline* to be "A neat-heard's daughter, and my Leonatus/ Our neighbor shepherd's son!" *(I.i.148-150)*, while Leontes fulfills Posthumus' promise to "abide the change of time,/ Quake in the present winter's state, and wish/ That warmer days would come" *(Cymbeline* III.iv.6-7). *The Winter's Tale* mixes tragic and comic modes, follows the scenario that depicts an amiable wife slandered who endures a symbolic death, and in the person of Leontes, Shakespeare combines the husband, the pardar, and the slanderer in a final portrayal of how faithful women are betrayed by unjustified jealousy. Finally, *The Winter's Tale*, like *Cymbeline*, extends Shakespeare's exploration of the possible consequences of the belief in cuckoldry by showing Leontes' unreasonable jealousy obsessing him, nearly killing his wife and daughter, actually killing his son and a trusted advisor, severing his attachment to his best friend and political ally, and shaking the stability of his state.
Shakespeare's ultimate cuckold Leontes lies at the center of the tragic portion of *The Winter's Tale*. Of all Shakespeare's imaginary cuckolds, Leontes develops the most unreasonable jealousy. Ford has Pistol's and Falstaff's evidence to confirm his suspicion. Othello and Posthumus have the slander of Iago and Jachimo to convince them of their wives' infidelity. Though all these imaginary cuckolds do participate in the wittol theme by partially convincing themselves they have been wronged, none of them are the sole authors of their suspicions as is Leontes. He is husband and king, cuckold and cuckold-maker, slandered and slanderer. Also in *The Winter's Tale*, the effects of jealousy are more widespread than in any other major cuckold play in Shakespeare. Jealousy affects not only the husband and his wife, but also their children and their friends. Furthermore, because the imaginary cuckold is king and Polixenes his political ally, Leontes' suspicion threatens to destroy his political alliance with Bohemia and cut off the rightful heir to the throne of Sicilia. Finally, *The Winter's Tale* fulfills Shakespeare's cuckoldry scenario, because, unlike Posthumus, who repents only of having taken revenge Leontes repents for having doubted, is fully converted to the lcre of faith and endures the most prolonged period of penance of all Shakespeare's imaginary cuckolds.
The Winter's Tale emphasizes more than any other cuckold play in Shakespeare how unfounded jealousy can be. The play's opening is constructed so as to emphasize the irrationality of Leontes' jealousy. When the play starts, Polixenoses and Leontes are being discussed. They "were train'd together in their childhoods: and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot but choose but branch now" (I.i.22-24), says Camillo who means "branch" in the sense of "flourish", not in the sense of "break apart." The ironic sense, however, is fulfilled. A breach does occur even though Archidamus is sure "there is not anything in the world either malice or matter to alter" the kings' friendship (I.ii.33-34). Jealousy will arise despite the lack of "matter" to do so. The friendship Shakespeare assures us exists between these two kings who are at the start like brothers makes the jealousy Leontes develops seem all the more unreasonable and destructive.

The way jealousy is sparked by Hermione's amiability also emphasizes how unjustified Leontes' jealousy is. In The Winter's Tale, Leontes needs no one to suggest Hermione's sociability indicates a propensity towards illicit love. This idea arises in Leontes spontaneously. Not only is Leontes' jealousy, therefore, "self-born," but Hermione's amiability is urged on by the king himself, making the jealousy all the more ironic and Leontes all the more an instigator of his horn-madness. "Speak you," he commands Hermione (I.i.27). Her success in convincing
Polixenes to stay in Sicilia, difficult though it may be, causes Leontes to doubt, and leads him to compare his queen's "purpose" (I.i.89) with Polixenes to her vow to be his wife and queen. He identifies her obedience with this command to her free resolve to give herself to him. In the spirit of courtly hospitality and honest sociability, Hermione too identifies the taking of a husband with the hospitality given to a friend:

'Tis grace indeed.  
Why, lo you now! I have spoke to th' purpose twice:  
The one for ever earn'd a royal husband;  
Th' other for some while a friend.  
(I.ii.105-108)

Leontes' jealousy arises in this scene spontaneously, sparked by a temperament that identifies doubt with assurance, and fuelled by the innocent courtly hospitality of his wife. Jealousy arises simultaneously with Hermione's speech with Polixenes, grows when he asks why Polixenes stayed at her request but not at his own (I.iii.87-89), and has fully taken root when she compares "husband" to "friend" taking Polixenes by the hand. To Leontes, Hermione's honest amiability seems to push friendship too far. For Leontes, unlike Othello, to see that his wife "loves company" (Othello III.iii.169) is cause for him to feel jealousy. "Too hot, tcc hot!" Leontes exclaims. "To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods" (I.ii.108-109).

It is significant that it is the mingling of bloods that torments Leontes because the adulteration of blood suggests the threat to legitimate progeny, a theme developed
in *The Winter's Tale* more than in any other cuckold play in Shakespeare. Leontes' jealousy is unique in Shakespeare because it concerns itself as much with children as with a wife. His horn-madness turns from the consideration of his passion to questioning the paternity of his son:

> I have tremor cordis —on me; my heart dances, but not for joy, not joy. This entertainment may a free face put on, derive a liberty from heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom, and well become the agent; 't may—I grant. But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers, as now they are, and making practic'd smiles, as in a looking glass; and then to sigh, as 'twere The mcrt c' th' deer—O, that is entertainment My bosom likes not nor my brows! Mamillius Art thcu my boy?

(I.ii. 110-120)

In the course of this speech, Leontes transforms the sense of "entertainment" from meaning liberal, warm, bounteous, fertile, well-becoming grace to practiced deceit covering illicit love. His passion causes him to dismiss the former alternative and adopt the latter.

Leontes' horn-madness leads him to question Mamillius' legitimacy, and grows as his speeches become disjointed and his mind becomes obsessed with horned animals, his wife's supposed flirtations, and his son's possible illegitimacy:

> Why, that's my bawcock. What? [hast] smuck'd thy nose? They say it is a copy out of mine. Come, captain, we must be neat; not neat, but cleanly, captain; and yet the steer, the heckfer, and the calf are all call'd neat.—Still virginalling upon his palm?—how now, you wanton calf, art thou my calf?

(I.ii. 121-127)

The *Riverside Shakespeare* note mentions how "Leontes' mind
leaps from the sense of 'tidy' for 'neat' to the sense of 'cattle,' and rejects the term because cattle have horns."1

As Leontes continues considering his son he questions his boy's legitimacy despite the general opinion that he and Mamillius are "as like as eggs":

Thou want's a rough pash and the shoots that I have,  
To be full like me: yet they say we are  
Almost as like as eggs: women say so --  
That will say any thing. But were they false  
As o'er-dy'd blacks, as wind, as waters, false  
As dice are to be wish'd by one that fixes  
No bourn 'twixt his and mine, yet were it true  
To say this boy were like me. Come, sir page,  
Look on me with your wekin eye. Sweet villain!  
Most dear'st! my collop! can thy dam?--may't be?  
(I.ii.128-137)

Leontes' suspicions quickly overextend. Though he sees his "collop" as a "piece of [his] own flesh"2, Leontes is sure the women who affirm his resemblance to Mamillius are lying. Because he suspects one woman, all women cannot be trusted. Because all women cannot be trusted, Hermione is false. Leontes sees, moreover, that it is emotion itself that is convincing him his wife is unfaithful:

Affection! thy intention stabs the centre,  
Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
Communicat'st with dreams (How can this be?),  
With what is unreal thou co-active art,  
And fellow'st nothing.  
(I.ii.138-142)

Leontes here defines jealousy ("affection") as making possible the impossible, communicating with the unreal, distinct from the truth. But still Leontes becomes

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1 p. 1571.
2 p. 1574.
convinced of the reality of adultery because he feels it so strongly. As was the case with Othello, the very strength of jealousy convinces:

Then 'tis very credent
Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost
(And that beyond commission), and I find it
(And that to the infection of my brains
And hard'ning of my brows).
(I. ii. 142-146)

Leontes argues that if jealousy can become co-active with what's unreal, then it can also co-join with something real though not generally believed (that which is "beyond commission"). Because it may co-join with something, jealousy is sure it does. Leontes insists that because doubt may have a foundation, it must. To be in doubt, for Leontes, is to be assured.

In a long aside, Leontes comforts himself with arguments like Iago's to Othello, contemplating the forked plague:

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a fork'd one!
Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I
Play too, but so disgrac'd a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamor
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been
(Or I am much deceiv'd) cuckolds ere now,
And many a man there is (even at this present,
Now, while I speak this) holds his wife by th' arm,
That little thinks she has been sluic'd in 's absence,
And his pond fish'd by his neighbor—by
Sir Smile his neighbor. Nay, there's comfort in't,
While other men have gates, and those gates open'd
As mine, against their will. Should all despair
That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind
Would hang themselves. Physic for't there's none.
It is a bawdy planet, that will strike
Where 'tis predominant; and 'tis powerful--think
it--
No barricado for a belly. Know't.
It will let in and out the enemy,
With bag and baggage. Many thousand on 's
Have the disease, and feel't not.
(I.ii. 186-207)

Leontes argues as Iago does in Othello: one who knows
oneself to be a cuckold is better than one who does not, for
"millions ... lie in those unproper beds" (Othello
IV.i.67-68). Iago argues not to comfort Othello, but to
linger on the subject of cuckoldry, so as to torment
Othello. Leontes, in his efforts to comfort himself,
torments himself in a similar way. He compares his wife to
a damned pond, the sluice or gate of which is her chastity.
But Leontes imagines her chastity is no protection
("barricado") for her womb ("belly") for it is easily opened
by Sir Smile, the grinning neighbor, and is tainted by his
"bag and baggage." The imagery of adultery here delivers, in
Leontes' mind, illegitimate progeny into Hermione's womb,
tormenting him and turning him against his legitimate heirs.

This speech, which seems at the end to be a direct
instruction to the audience to believe in the reality of the
forked plaque, is spoken by a man the audience knows is
wrong. Shakespeare here is reversing a comic device found,
for instance, at the end of Every-Man-in-His-Humour, which
charges the audience with the plaque. Jonson's play ends by
portraying Kity cleverly unkuckolded but assuring those
around him that the horns he imagined are falling on the heads of all London's husbands. Shakespeare shows a man who is wrong about his own horn's, trying to convince others that they too are horned. The speeches have opposite effects, Jonson's calls the audience to be wary, Shakespeare's shows the foolishness and danger of being wary.

In *The Winter's Tale*, doubt and jealousy are especially dangerous because their ill effects spread so easily. When Camillo speaks of the paradoxes of jealousy, he tells Polixenes that it is "a sickness/ Which puts some of us in distemper,/ ... And it is caught of you that yet are well" (I.ii.384,387). In Shakespeare's other major cuckold plays, jealousy is not caught so much from the well, but from those whose minds are diseased by the lore of cuckoldry--Falstaff, Iago and Jachimo. In *The Winter's Tale*, the innocent and healthy minds of those from whom jealousy is caught--Hermione and Polixenes--are emphasized. But though jealousy is caught from those who are well, it affects the ill and the well. Polixenes discourses on how the charge of being an adulterous lover affects him:

O then, my best blood turn
To an infected jelly, and my name
Be yok'd with his that did betray the Best!
Turn then my freshest reputation to
A savor that may strike the dullest nostril
Where I arrive, and my approach be shunn'd,
Nay, hated too, worse than the great'st infection
That e'er was heard or read!
(I.ii.416-423)

3 See quotation on p. 23 of Chapter One.
For Polixenes, the charge of being called an adulterer ranks him with Judas, the man who "did betray the Best." It smells worse than the "greatest infection," the imagery of infection revealing how the real disease is not the forked plague but the taint spread by unjustified jealousy. For this reason Camillo affirms that it is a worse sin to reiterate the sin of adultery than to commit it. When Leontes tells Camillo of his suspicions, the faithful servant replies:

I would not be a stand-by to hear
My mistress clouded so, without
My present vengeance taken. 'Shrew my heart.
You never spoke what did become you less
Than this; which to reiterate were sin
As deep as that, though true.
(I.ii. 279-284)

Camillo sees that speaking the language of cuckoldry, spreading its infectious calumny, is as worthy of vengeance as adultery itself. It is unbecoming of Leontes, since it is slanderous of others.

Despite cuckoldry's ability to destroy men's and women's reputations, for those unaffected by the lore of cuckoldry no taint can color true chastity. In The Winter's Tale, Leontes' ability to distrust Hermione is placed in stark contrast to other men's faith in her. Though Leontes believes Hermione unfaithful, those around him know her to be faithful. He alone believes in her ability to commit adultery. Artigonus, for instance, puts full faith in Hermione, willing to try all women--his wife and daughters included--on Hermione's example:
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 futh'er trust her;
For every inch of woman in the world,
Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false,
If she be.

(II.i.133-139)

Hermione's faith is so evident to Antigonus, he is willing to charge all women false if she is. He vows to treat his wife as a jailor would by locking her up like a horse in a stable and never letting her out of sight, if Hermione prove false. He vows to "geld" his three daughters, "co-heirs" to his estate, that they might not bring forth "false generations," if Hermione prove false (II.i.140-150).

As in Cymbeline, on the faith of a single woman depends the reputation of all women. If the lore of cuckoldry proves true for one, it is true for all. As Antigonus says, if Hermione is false, "we need no grave to bury honesty,
There's not a grain of it the face to sweeten/ Of the whole dungy earth" (II.i.155-157). Because the others believe in Hermione's chastity, as Leontes tries to convince others his suspicions are justified his belief isolates him from his subjects, and though by remaining loyal to the lore of trust they remain truly loyal to Leontes (II.i.140), he remains as blind to loyalty as he is to Hermione's faith.

The ill effects of cuckoldry are fecund in The Winter's Tale- not because belief in cuckoldry is rife, but because the man who believes in cuckoldry is so powerful. Leontes embodies the metaphor that compares husband to king, and the
play develops the metaphor by having the king identify adultery and complicity with adultery to political treason. "The king hath on him such a countenance," Polixenes notes, "As he hath lost some province and a region/ Lov'd as he loves himself" (I.ii.386-370). Polixenes sees Leontes grief to be sparked by the loss of a province. Leontes identifies the act of adultery with treason when he charges Hermione, Polixenes and Camillo with attempting to usurp the throne. Polixenes' and Camillo's hasty departure convinces Leontes that his friend and advisor are traitors. He goes on to conclude that Camillo was Polixenes' pandar to Hermione. Charges of adultery lead to charges of treason, charges of treason lead to charges of complicity with adultery.

Surely for Leontes, "All's true that is mistrusted" (II.i.480), for he comes to believe that all who defend Hermione's honor are also treasonous. When Paulina defends the queen, Leontes imagines all have conspired against him. "A nest of traitors!" he exclaims (II.iii.82). And later, after he accuses Antigonus of setting Paulina on him, and the Lords reply that this accusation is untrue, Leontes says "You're liars all" (II.iii.131-146). Paulina, however, sees Leontes to be both the traitor and the lying slanderer. When her husband Antigonus insists he is not a traitor, Paulina adds, "Nor I, nor any one that's here--and that's himself; for he/ The sacred honor of himself, his queen's,/ His hopeful scree, his babe's, betrays to slander,/ Whose sting is sharper than the sword's" (II.iii.83-87). Paulina
sees Leontes transformed into a new being. He is no longer himself but a jealous monster, a slanderer and a traitor. After the fecundity of Leontes' charges reaches a climax, he undertakes the trial to "be clear'd/ Of being [called] tyrannous" (III.ii.4-5), though the trial ends up showing how jealousy tyrannizes over the king.

Hermione, despite indications to the contrary, maintains faith that she will be delivered:

But thus, if pow'rs divine
Behold our human actions (as they do)
I doubt not then innocence shall make
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience.
(III.ii.28-32)

But her faith in divine justice is placed in opposition to her husband's faith in stereotypes. Leontes' reply to Hermione's defence shows stereotypes determining his opinions:

I ne'er heard yet
That any of these bolder vices wanted
Less impudence to gainsay what they did
Than to perform it first.
(III.ii.54-57)

Leontes speaks here of what he has heard, not of what he knows to be true of Hermione. He abandons what he knows of his wife and puts his faith in stereotypes. Hermione too has heard such statements. "That's true enough," she says, "Though 'tis a saying, sir, not due to me" (III.ii.57-58).

Finally, Hermione in frustration asserts that Leontes' speech itself is a "language" she does not understand (III.ii.80). From his first cuckold play, Shakespeare has emphasized the role of language in perpetuating cuckoldry's
slander. Here, too, it is a language adopted by men but unknown to women. Male jealousy has given birth to it, and confirms it, while women suffer under the calumny it spreads.

At the critical moment when the oracle is revealed, Shakespeare alters his source to emphasize once more the irrationality and obsessive quality of Leontes' belief in Hermione's wrongdoing. In Robert Greene's Pandosto, the king immediately believes the oracle, responding with regret and repentance. In Shakespeare, Leontes claims the oracle false. "There is no truth at all i' th' oracle," he exclaims. "The session shall proceed; this is mere falsehood" (III.ii.140-141). Leontes' doubts have extended to include the divine. His suspicions are so fecund, he believes them above the oracle. Though Leontes is not convinced by the words of the powers divine, he is convinced eventually by the god's deeds. They deny Leontes his legitimate progeny. Leontes' dismissal of the oracle is followed by the news that his first born has died. Leontes quickly sees the loss of his son to be a punishment for his injustice. "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves/ Do strike at my injustice ... I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion" (III.i.146-147,151). Previously, he thought of revenge; now he seeks pardon and reconciliation:

Apollo, pardon
My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle!
I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,

New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo,
Whom I proclaim a man of truth and mercy.

(III.ii.153-157)

Just as the chimera of cuckoldry was able to appear quickly and powerfully, so too it disappears quickly, though its effects remain to be expunged. Unfortunately, it is too late for Leontes to clear himself easily. He has been proven a tyrant by dismissing the oracle and must undergo the longest most gruelling repentance in all of Shakespeare in order to regain his queen and his legitimate heir. Like Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Leontes must proclaim his guilt in church, but unlike Claudio, he must wait many years before he regains his losses.

*The Winter's Tale* completes Shakespeare's treatment of cuckoldry by considering at length its relationship to legitimacy. Leontes is as concerned with the legitimacy of his children as he is with adultery and treason. His first soliloquy ends when he questions whether or not Mamillius is his son. Leontes' first act is to separate Mamillius, whom he believes to be legitimate, from Hermione, whom he believes to represent illegitimacy. The impulse to disassociate legitimacy and illegitimacy in this way is present in several earlier Shakespearean characters. Leonato, for instance, wishes to deny having begot Hero when he believes she has been unchaste:

Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?
Why had I not with charitable hand
Took up a beggar's issue at my gates,
Who smirched thus and mir'd with infamy,
I might have said, "No part of it is mine;
This shame derives itself from unknown loins"?

(*Much Ado About Nothing* IV.i.130-135)
Later in Shakespeare, Posthumus laments, "Is there no way for men to be, but women/ Must be half-workers? We are all bastards,/ And that most venerable man which I/ Did call my father, was I know not where/ When I was stamp'd" (Cymbeline II.v.1-5). Both Leonato and Posthumus feel tainted because they believe they are connected through lineage to unfaithful women. Leontes is the only imaginary cuckold in the major cuckold plays who acts radically on this feeling of disgust. He takes Mamillius from his wife in an attempt to divorce her influence over him. "Give me the boy," he commands Hermione. "I am glad you did not nurse him./ Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you/ Have too much blood in him" (II.i.55-58). Leontes hopes to break the chain of illegitimacy in this way, but succeeds only in destroying his son.

Leontes, conceiving his wife's honor gone, wishes to keep her dishonor from infecting his first born. Later, Leontes imagines that he sees Hermione's shame actually infecting Mamillius:

To see his nobleness,
Conceiving the dishonor of his mother!
He straight declin'd, dropt'd, took it deeply,
Fasten'd and fix'd the shame on't in himself,
Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,
And downright languish'd.
(II.iii.12-17)

Leontes imagines Mamillius sensing the taint of his mother's supposed dishonor and fixing the shame upon himself. Leontes is disturbed by Mamillius' languishment, but the king's desire for revenge overcomes his concern for his
child. "Fie, fie, no thought of him:" he tells himself, "The very thought of my revenges that way/ Recoil upon me." Leontes sees that his sympathy for Mamillius could cause him to be lenient towards Hermione, reducing his revenge. So Leontes puts thoughts of Mamillius cut of his mind. "Let him be,/ Until a time may serve" (II.iii.21-22). Leontes' obsession with cuckoldry and revenge overcomes his finer sensibilities concerning his legitimate son, and results in a carelessness with time that takes his son from him and forces him to undergo sixteen years of penance before he can regain his wife and gain a legitimate heir.

Recognizing Leontes' concern with legitimacy, Paulina hopes to convert him by confronting him with his daughter, whose visage, she trusts, will prove the child a legitimate offspring:

Behold, my lords,
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 cheeks, his smiles,
The very mould and frame of hand, nail, finger.
(II.iii.98-103)

But Leontes' jealousy blinds him to his daughter's legitimacy. He rejects her, ordering her left as a changeling at the mercy of nature's climate. The importance of legitimacy is further underlined because it is the death of Mamillius, whom Leontes believes to be legitimate, that shocks Leontes into repentance. He sees this loss of a legitimate heir as a clear and direct sign that the gods are
punishing him for slandering Hermione unjustly. In a way, this action of the gods is a blessing for Lentes, because it sets into motion the repentance that eventually results in his reconciliation with Hermione, Perdita, Camillo and Polixenes, returning legitimate heirs to the throne.

In The Winter's Tale, the imaginary cuckold atones more fully for his jealousy and for the actions he has taken because of his jealousy than does any other of Shakespeare's imaginary cuckolds. Ford hardly repents at all. His conversion to faith in his wife and his appeal for pardon exonerates him from blame for suspecting Mrs. Ford and frees him from the need to make reparation. Othello makes no reparation either. Though in committing suicide he takes upon himself the guilt of his actions, his speech tends to make excuses for himself. He explains how he was "one not easily jealous, but being wrought./ Perplexed in the extreme" (V.ii.345-346). By pointing to Iago's share of the blame, Othello lessens his own. Also, Othello's description of himself as "one that lov'd not wisely but too well" (V.i.344) implies, perhaps, he ought not to have married a Venetian at all, though certainly he is now assured of Desdemona's "honesty" and "chastity" (V.ii.245 and 276). In Cymbeline, though Posthumus recommits himself to the supposedly deceased Imogen by undertaking to fight for Britain in her honor, he does not do so because he now believes she was faithful. Rather, Posthumus repents of having taken vengeance himself. The other imaginary
cuckolds, ther, do not make reparation for lack of faith. Leontes, on the other hand, pledges and lives sixteen years a solitary life, though others in Sicilia would have him remarry. His enforced chastity is a faithfulness to his supposedly dead wife, a protracted penance apt for his suspicion of her chastity. Unlike Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing, who agrees to marry a substitute, Leontes vows never to marry until Paulina chooses a wife, and she vows to marry him only when Hermione is again "in breath" (V.i.84).

Leontes' penance is so long extended because his jealousy is more self-generated, with less exterior justification than any other imaginary cuckold in Shakespeare, and because the ill effects of his jealousy extend further than they do in the other cuckold plays. Specifically, the gods order that Leontes "shall not have an heir/ Till his lost child be found" (V.i.35-40). Leontes does not find a partner to his throne besides his lost wife, and cannot find an heir besides his lost child. It seems, also, that the regaining of the lost child must precede the regaining of his wife. As is the case with all the other major cuckold plays (with the exception of Othello), those wronged by the imaginary cuckold participate in the renewal of the family. The latter portion of The Winter's Tale, tells the story of Perdita's and Hermione's reconciliation to Leontes and the restoration of their rightful place in Sicilian political order.
The transition between the courtly atmosphere of the cuckoldry tainted courtly world of the first and the pastoral innocence of the latter portion of the play is marked by, among other things, a comparison between the literary tradition that perpetuates cuckoldry's stereotypes. When Perdita is found by the Shepherd, he thinks, like Leontes, that she is the product of a woman's sexual escapades. "Though I am not bookish," he says, "Yet I can read waiting-gentlewoman in the scape. This has been some stair-work, some trunk-work, some behind-door-work" (III.iii.72-75). The simple Shepherd realizes that "stair-work," "trunk-work", and "behind-door-work" are subjects of literature as read by the "bookish" audiences of court. Thus onto the court-country contrast in this play, Shakespeare grafts the assumptions of illicit progeny to the courtly portion.

The process by which Perdita is cleared of the charge of bastardy begins in the flower scene. Because of her "unusual weeds" (IV.iv.1), donned for the sheep-shearing festival, Perdita is pied, resembling the "streak'd gillyvors/ (Which some call Nature's bastard's)" (IV.iv.82-83). This appellation causes Perdita to banish these flowers from her garden. Gillyvors gained their dishonorable nickname because they were created by grafting, or as Polixenes terms it, by marrying "a gentler scion to the wildest stock," a process which "conceive[s] a bark of baser kind/ By bud of nobler race" (IV.iv.92-95). But,
Polixenes argues, Nature's participation in this process redeems the flowers, so they should be included in the garden. Polixenes is affirming here that not only does the art of grafting mend nature by changing it, but that "the art itself is Nature" (IV.iv.95-97). Ironically, Polixenes argues, here, against his later stated motivations in refusing his son to marry Perdita.

Ironic too is Perdita's rejection of Polixenes' argument, for by doing so she argues against her own apparent actions. Perdita's reasons are as follows:

I'll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them;
No more than were I painted I would wish
This youth should say 'twere well, and only
therefore
Desire to breed by me.
(IV.iv.99-103)

Perdita compares the variegated color of the gillyvors to a woman's paintings and rejects them both because they attract more through show than through true valuation of inner worth. For Perdita and Florizel, natural attraction based on this kind of valuation proves, despite its initial appearance, to be a marriage of equally noble strains. Shakespeare is not affirming the value of misalliances, but showing natural selection creating true alliances. In the comic portion of the play, therefore, nature conspires to realign legitimate ties though human action seems to do otherwise.
Legitimate ties are also important in the latter half of the *The Winter's Tale*, playing a central role in the breach that occurs between Florizel and his father. Polixenes' disowning of Florizel seems motivated as much by Florizel's refusal to allow his father a place in nuptial festivities as upon the apparent mismatch. Polixenes has already argued that the marriage of noble and base can mend nature, and he does not take exception to the Shepherd's insistence that Florizel's father "shall not need to grieve/A knowing" of his son's choice (IV.iv.415-416). Polixenes' plea to be informed of the match seems a plea to be allowed to attend the marriage, not to disrupt it. But Florizel's refusal to consult his father angers the King, causing him to object to the apparent mismatch though he admits but for his son's noble status Perdita is worthy of Florizel. She is, he says, "Worthy enough a herdsman, yea, him too,/ That makes himself (but for our honor therein)/ Unworthy thee" (IV.iv.435-437). Polixenes has already noticed Perdita "smacks of something greater than herself,/ Too noble" for the countryside (IV.iv.158-159). Instinctively he sees she is worthy of Florizel, but his anger at Florizel's breaking the proper chain of legitimacy by not allowing him to attend the wedding feast blinds him to her intrinsic nobility, just as Leontes' false suspicions of Hermione blinded him to Perdita's legitimacy. Eventually, however, the strong love of Perdita and Florizel, based as it is on instinctive recognition of nobility which leads to a well-matched
alliance, will bring them to Leontes' court where the lines of legitimacy will be renewed and the breaches caused by cuckoldry will be healed.

By the last scene, all the circumstances necessary for Leontes' reunion with Hermione are fulfilled. He has found his lost daughter and has undergone his penance as directed by Paulina. "All my services/ You have paid home" (V.iii.3-4), she tells the king. Leontes is prepared finally to regain the blessing of Hermione's companionship. The language that accompanies their reunion reveals a strong religious component in it. "She was as tender/ As infancy and grace" (V.iii.25-26), he says, and seeing the lifelikeness of her statue, he feels her beneficence piercing his "soul" (V.iii.95). Further, Hermione's reanimation requires that Leontes reawaken his "faith" (V.iii.95). This reawakening of Leontes' faith allows life to "redeem" (V.iii.102-103) Hermione, whose first words call upon the gods to bless her daughter. "You gods, look down/ And from your sacred vials pour your graces,/ Upon my daughter's head!" (V.iii.121-123). The word "faith" used in connection with "soul," "grace," "redeemed," and "sacred," suggests both its marital and spiritual meanings. Just as Ford's conversion to faith in Mrs. Ford seemed both a marital and a spiritual conversion, the reconciliation of Leontes and Hermione has strong religious overtones. Her return in the play seems more like a resurrection than the return of the slandered woman in the other cuckold plays.
In both Hero's and Imogen's cases, the supposed deaths were brief and revealed to the audience to be only apparent. Hermione's death is not revealed to be feigned till the end. Her resurrection is thus endowed with a more miraculous quality than are Hero's and Imogen's.

The religious tone concluding Shakespeare's treatment of cuckoldry is accompanied by a peaceful, almost spiritual silence. The First Gentleman reports the quietude of Leontes' reconciliation with Perdita. "There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture, they look'd as they had heard of a world ransom'd or one destroy'd" (V.ii.13-15). The awe inspired in Perdita and Leontes by contemplating the world of slander and death destroyed and the world of legitimacy and life ransomed inspires in them a speech of loving gesture freed from the calumny and unchastity cuckoldry has given to language. When Paulina reveals Hermione standing "like a staute" (V.iii.21 sd), she tells Leontes "I like your silence, it the more shows off/ Your wonder" (V.iii.21-02). This silence accompanies Hermione's reanimation also, for she has but eight lines to speak in the last scene and none to Leontes.

Unlike some of Shakespeare's earlier comic treatments of cuckoldry, The Merry-Wives of Windsor and Much Ado About Nothing, for instance, The Winter's Tale does not conclude by reversing the connotations attached to the language of cuckoldry: rather it expunges language altogether. The silence at the end of the play replaces the language of
cuckoldry that perpetuated the fears of the imaginary cuckolds and slandered the faithful wives. Falstaff translated Mrs. Ford's amiable gestures out of "honesty" into English, and he imagined unfaithfulness there. Also in that play, Mr. Ford tormented himself, contemplating being abused by the terminology of cuckoldry. Don John sees "there is not chastity enough in language" to speak of honest Hero "Without offence" (Much Ado About Nothing IV.i.97-98). Desdemona finds the word used to describe false women too unchaste to utter. And Hermione finds Leontes description of her adultery "a language that I understand not" (III.ii.80). The English language of cuckolds, horrors and the forked plague is replaced by a language of gestures and actions that speak of love and faith. The lore of faith is a lore of silent accord that needs no vows like those of Troilus and Cressida, but thrives on a spiritual mutuality, unaffected by the lore, stereotypes and language of cuckoldry.

In the conclusion of Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale there is still something disturbing. In these plays which reunite suspicious husbands and slandered wives, the reconciliations are not engineered by a repentant husband asking for forgiveness. Rather, the reunions seem corollary to the realignment of other individuals. In Cymbeline, a net of relationships are renewed as a result of Imogen's efforts to clear herself of being charged unfaithful, but little passes between herself and Posthumus. In fact,
Posthumus, albeit unwittingly, strikes her down. Posthumus' oracle speaks as much of Britain's good fortune as it does of Posthumus. In this regard, the reunion of Cymbeline and his children seems more significant than Posthumus' reunion with Imogen. After all the play is named for the king not Posthumus. Similarly, in The Winter's Tale parent-child reunion seems more important than husband-wife reconciliation. Leontes' and Hermione's lack of verbal communication seems apt in effacing the language of cuckoldry, but at the same time de-emphasizes their reunion in favor of the mother-daughter reunion. In fact, Hermione says it was the possibility of this reunion which motivated her to await this time. "Knowing by Paulina that the oracle/Gave hope thou wast in being," Hermione tells Perdita, "[I] have preserv'd/ Myself to see the issue" (V.iii.125-128). In both plays, husband and wife are not so much reconciled as simply rejoined, just a part of a process that regrafts children into legitimate lines. As I shall discuss in the conclusion, this new emphasis on legitimacy and the importance of its bonds over husband-wife bonds may indicate a frustration in Shakespeare concerning the possibility of male conversion to the lore of faith.

In terms of these romances, marital breaches caused by cuckoldry are healed not so much to reward the repentant husband, as to repair the name and fortunes of the slandered wife, to return disenfranchized children to their rightful places and, because the children involved are members of the
royal family, to insure national stability. In this way, the necessity of faith and concord in marriage for social stability is stressed in these plays, as is the role of women in maintaining this stability. Just as female infidelity disrupted all society in Troilus and Cressida, female fidelity reknits society in these romances. Upon Imogen's ability to prove herself chaste depends the fate of nearly all the characters at the end of Cymbeline. Upon the return of Perdita to the Sicilian court and her reunion with Hermione depends the establishment of legitimate heirs to the throne of Sicilia.

Shakespeare's final two cuckold plays again show how slanderous cuckoldry is dangerous to marriage and to society. They go on, however, to show how for the sake of the innocent and society the ill spread by cuckoldry is redeemable, by male ability to recognize errors and repent, by female patience and willingness to pardon, all combined with fate and divine intervention. After The Merry Wives of Windsor and Much Ado About Nothing, cuckoldry is nothing that can be laughed to scorn. Instead, cuckoldry's tragic potential remains fully imminent, though not necessarily final. Because so much depends on a woman's chastity, the effects of cuckoldry can be severe. Still, the romances show the lore of cuckoldry defeated by men and women with the aid of divine grace.
Chapter VIII

Conclusion

Shakespeare's Cuckoldry

Shakespeare's treatment of cuckoldry in the major cuckold plays discussed in this dissertation indicates he recognized the changes taking place in the nature of the Renaissance family, felt positively about the new family, and saw traditional concepts embodied in cuckoldry as a threat to this new social development. Therefore, Shakespeare utilized a series of artistic gambits tending to debunk the lore of cuckoldry. As I have tried to show in Chapter One, there was developing in the English Renaissance a new ideal of the family. This ideal grew out of social changes characterized by the breakdown of wide kinship bonds, leaving a smaller nuclear family upon which the stability of society came to depend. Coherence within the small nuclear family, which consisted of a husband, wife and offspring, was achieved by an increased emphasis on patriarchal power, by a growth in the affective bonds within the family and by more equality developing between husband and wife. During this time, the husband was often
compared to the king and the wife to the queen, a tendency which suggest both a greater equality between spouses, the greater stress placed on the wife's role in marriage and a sense of the importance of secure marriage to society.

The language, stereotypes and lore of cuckoldry received by Shakespeare and his contemporaries arose in an earlier society and were compatible with that society. During a time when husbands and wives were united more by economic and political factors than by emotional ties and when individuals found stability by being members of large kinship groups, casual extra-marital affairs both of husband and wife could be tolerated and could be seen, at times, to be beneficial to the maintenance of social stability, especially, in the case of wifely adultery, if the affair or affairs were undertaken discreetly, placing no doubts on the legitimacy of the children. Cuckold stories before Shakespeare, therefore, often tolerated even celebrated a wife's adultery, encouraging the wife and her paramour in their efforts to dupe the wittolly, jealous, old and foolish cuckold.

Shakespeare saw traditional cuckoldry to be destructive to the new family as it arose in Renaissance England. The stereotype in cuckoldry stating that sociable, amiable wives will, if given the chance, cuckold their husbands could inhibit the free growth of social commitment between husband and wife and social bonds between families. Those women whose social skills were the greatest and, therefore,
most beneficial for establishing amicable bonds within and between families would be most suspected. As a result, they could most easily be slandered or suppressed by suspicious husbands. The wives of all Shakespeare's imaginary cuckolds—Mrs. Ford, Desdemona, Imogen and Hermione—are suspected because they are socially active. Also, the foolishness which traditional stories of cuckoldry attribute to husbands could tend to undermine the strength of a husband's authority within his family. Perhaps, for this reason, Shakespeare does not ridicule his real or imaginary cuckolds as his contemporaries did but treats them with understanding and gentleness, elevating one, Othello, to tragic eminence.

Shakespeare's cuckold plays do affirm an ideal of marriage. They reveal that wives may be both faithful and socially active partners. Mr. Page in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* provides an example of trust, being, as his wife affirms, "as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause" (II.i.103-104). His trust extends to making her hostess at his festive dinners. "Wife," he exhorts, "bid these gentlemen welcome" (I.i.194). Unlike Leontes, Page derives no jealousy from Mrs. Page's social skills. The lore of faith to which Page subscribes is seconded by Orlando in *As You Like It* when he woos the disguised Rosalind. After Rosalind tells Orlando a snail carries his destiny with him, Orlando asks to what she refers. Rosalind replies:
Why, horns! which such as you are fain to be beholding to your wives for. But he [the snail] comes arm'd in his fortune, and prevents the slander of his wife.

(IV.59-62)

Significantly, Rosalind uses the word "slander" as a synonym for the calumny a husband receives from an unfaithful wife. For Shakespeare usually depicts cuckoldry as a kind of slander. Rosalind's use of this word reveals her own feeling about cuckoldry contradicts her statement affirming the forked plague theme. Orlando's reply reveals his implicit trust in Rosalind's honesty. "Virtue is no horn-maker, and my Rosalind is virtuous" (IV.i.63-64). The most eloquent expression of the lore of trust is, ironically, Othello's:

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.

(III.iii.183-186)

In contrast to Elizabethan stereotypes that insist women are lustful, changeable and untrustworthy, these speeches affirm virtue and trust in bold, active women who, like Mrs. Page, are able to participate as social partners of their husbands without giving cause for fear.

In the major cuckold plays, the Pages provide the most significant foil to the married couples whose lives are disrupted by jealousy. Page's instinctive trust of his wife is just one example of how men can recognize with certainty a trustworthy woman. Benedick in Much Ado About Nothing...
gives no credence to the charges against Hero even though Beatrice cannot provide evidence to contradict Hero's detractors. In Othello, Roderigo, Cassio and even the great expert in cuckoldry Iago all see the adament virtue in Desdemona. Pisanio in Cymbeline, when he reads the letter from Posthumus accusing Imogen and ordering her death, immediately perceives that some "false Italian" must have prevailed upon his master's "too ready hearing" (III.i.1-6). In the same play, Jachimo, the great proselytiser of cuckoldry upon first view believes in Imogen's virtue and feels he has lost his wager. Finally, in The Winter's Tale, all the courtiers have faith in Hermione's honor. Most of all, Camillo and Antigonus affirm the lore of faith in this play. When Leontes confides in him, Camillo immediately defends his queen, as does Antigonus who is willing to test all women on Hermione's example. To these men who apprehend wifely virtue spontaneously, several husbands are, like Page, as far from jealousy as their wives are from giving them cause. Despite all their bawdy banter, Petruchio never intimates the possibility of cuckoldry involving his Katherina, and takes Hortensio's quip in this matter as mere jesting (The Taming of the Shrew V.ii.35-37). Other secure marriages, untainted by the lore of cuckoldry, are anticipated in many of the romantic comedies. The possibility, therefore, of both husbandly faith in a women's chastity and secure companionate marriages are ultimately revealed both in
In general, Shakespeare's major cuckold plays show that husbandly lack of trust not wifely lack of faith is a serious threat to secure marriages and, consequently, to a stable society. Belief in the lore of cuckoldry threatens the mental well-being of husbands, and at times, endangers the lives of their wives and jeopardizes the survival of their legitimate children. By subjecting his falsely suspected wives to the threat or reality of death, Shakespeare links the belief in cuckoldry to domestic tragedy. And by linking, in Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale, the return of legitimate heirs to their rightful place in the royal family to the process which affirms wifely honor, Shakespeare emphasizes the importance of the lore of trust in creating legitimate lines of heredity. In both cases, it is necessary for men to replace the lore of cuckoldry with the lore of trust. The song of the cuckoo must no longer be a sound of fear for husbands. During the English Renaissance, secure marriages and the propagation of legitimate issue were both recognized as essential to social stability. The lore of cuckoldry, in Shakespeare's formulation, can be seen, therefore, to be a direct threat to society.

So far in this dissertation, I have discussed at length four major cuckold plays in Shakespeare and have touched on several minor treatments of cuckoldry in his canon. Before reviewing the major plays, however, a discussion of some
further treatments of cuckoldry and wifely adultery in Shakespeare will show how he sought, from his earliest plays, he sought a unique way to handle cuckoldry and will complete this dissertation's examination of Shakespeare's cuckoldry as a whole.

Shakespeare's first series of history plays about Henry VI hint at an affair between the unfaithful Queen Margaret and the Earl of Suffolk. The affair is kept just less than explicit in the play, being mentioned directly only twice (2-Henry VI-IV.i.75, 142-143). In this play, the cuckolded king never feels jealousy, nor shame, and is never called "cuckold" or "horned." In short, though Henry VI is actually cuckolded by his wife Margaret, he never acts the part of cuckold nor bears the calumny due a cuckold. The play, therefore, deals with adultery and eschews cuckoldry.

Shakespeare's early comedy, perhaps his earliest, The Comedy of Errors, includes jokes about cuckoldry but does not depict wifely adultery. After Antipholus of Syracuse beats Dromio of Ephesus, mistaking him for his own servant, the menial goes to his actual master's wife Adriana and complains, "sure my master is horn-mad" (II.i.57), meaning only that his master's anger is beastly. But Adriana takes the complaint as an accusation of wrongdoing, so Dromio feels compelled to correct himself. "I mean not cuckold-mad" (II.i.58), he explains. Later, Antipholus of Ephesus is strangely kept out of his house while, unknown to him, his wife is entertaining his twin brother in his place.
The real husband who is, about to break in, is restrained by Balthazar who argues breaking in would "draw within the compass of suspect/ Th' unviolated honor of your wife" (III.i.87-88), and cause the "common rout" (III.i.104) to slander his "yet ungalled estimation" (III.i.102). These arguments prevailing, Antipholus of Epheus withdraws, allowing the possibility of his being horned by his own brother. But this eventuality does not occur, because Antipholus of Syracuse refuses the attempt by Luciana, Adriana's maid, to push him into the bedchamber against what he calls his "soul's pure truth" (III.ii.37). So Antipholus of Syracuse's scruples, or his infatuation for Luciana, keep his brother uncuckolded. In a parody of this scene, Drumio of Syracuse avoids the advances of Drumio of Ephesus's wife, because she is too fat though he claims it is because of his scruples. "And I think, if my breast had not been made of faith, and my heart of steel," he says, "She had transform'd me to a curtail dog, and made me turn i' th' wheel" (III.ii.146-147). Like Henry VI, Antipholus is remarkable in his lack of jealousy though suspicion under the circumstances is fully justified for both of them.

These two plays indicate an early tendency in Shakespeare to avoid utilizing the language of cuckoldry in situations where wifely adultery occurs. Moreover, this tendency continues in Shakespeare. The Elder Hamlet (if we take the Ghost's term "adulterate" at Hamlet. I.v.41 literally, and there is no reason not to), the Duke of
Albany in *King Lear*, with, perhaps, the Duke of Cornwall in the same play are like Henry VI, wronged husbands who are spared being called "cuckold" and who do not wear horns in their or anyone's imagination. Further, as I have shown, the language of cuckoldry is slanderously applied in all the major cuckold plays. Cumulatively, this dissassociation of the language of cuckoldry from actual instances of wifely infidelity strips the language of cuckoldry of its meaning and the lore and stereotypes of cuckoldry of their credibility.

In only four instances in Shakespeare, the language of cuckoldry applies when women have had sexual relations with men besides their husbands. *Troilus and Cressida* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have already been discussed (see Chapter IV). In "The Rape of Lucrece" the idea that a wronged husband wears horns is hinted at by Lucrece in her distraction:

"O unseen shame, invisible disgrace!  
O unfelt sore, crest-wounding private scar!  
Reproach is stamp'd in Cclatinus' face,  
And Tarquin's eye may read the mote afar,  
How he in peace is wounded, not in war.  
Alas, how many bear such shameful blows,  
Which not themselves but he that gives them knows!

If, Collatine, thine honor lay in me,  
From me by strong assault it is bereft.  
(827-835)

The invisible disgrace and crest-wounding private scar are, of course, Cclatinus' horns. (See the song quoted on page 42 where "crest" means "horns.") Lucrece imagines that by being raped by Tarquin, she has wronged her husband.
"Tarquin wronged me," she cries, "I Collatine" (819). Still, neither Tarquin nor Collatine sees it this way. Tarquin, in trying to force Lucrece into complying with his lust, threatens to murder her and "some worthless slave" (515), place them in bed together, and claim he slew them as they embraced. This suggests that Tarquin does not see his rape of her as sufficient to dishonor Collatine but feels that framing her as a willing adulteress is necessary. Collatine's sense of shame rests also on the question of Lucrece's willingness to commit adultery. When he learns of the rape, he is filled with woe, sadness and grief but not shame. Finally, when Lucrece voices her sense of shame publicly, "all [there] at once ... say... Her body's stain her mind untainted clears" (1709-1710). Her non-compliance with Tarquin's lust in the eyes of the lookers-on frees her from calumny and, apparently, this "all" includes Collatine. Though applying, in the slightest way, the lore of cuckoldry to Lucrece's rape, the poem shows how repulsive extra-marital sex is to Lucrece and how keen is her sense of honor and how strong is her sense of loyalty to her husband.

Similarly, though Titus Andronicus applies the language and lore of cuckoldry to actual instances of wifely infidelity, the play as a whole contrasts male belief in female sexuality and changeability with actual wifely fidelity. Demetrius and Charon assume all women are attemptable:

She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd,
She is a woman, therefore may be won,
She is Lavinia, therefore must be loved.
What, man, more water glideth by the mill
Than wets the miller of, and easy it is
Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know.
Though Bassianus be the Emperor's brother,
Better than he have worn Vulcan's badge.

(II.i.82-89)

Demetrius thinks in terms of cuckoldry's stereotypes. It is part of a woman's nature to be susceptible to wooing. It is as easy for a man to cuckold a husband, as it is for water to flow by his mill. Once a woman loses her virginity, it is as easy to seduce her with impunity as it is to steal a slice of bread from a cut loaf. And men of all stations, even the brothers of emperors have felt the weight of Vulcan's badge, horns. Aaron, whose desire to "mount aloft" with his "imperial mistress" has already been revealed in this scene (II.i.43), seconds Demetrius' opinion. In an aside, the eavesdropping Aaron remarks that Bassanius, Lavinia's husband, may wear horns "as good as Saturnius [the emperor] may" (II.i.90).

Titus Andronicus, however, distinguishes between women who can be wooed and women who cannot. Lavinia cannot. Like Lucrece, she must be raped in order to serve the lust of her ravishers, and once violated she seeks death. Tamora, however, can be wooed. In fact, she comes predisposed to cuckold her husband and make love to Aaron (See II.ii.10 ff.). She, unlike Lavinia, has the "gift of horning" (II.ii.67). In fact, in all Shakespeare's canon, Tamora is the only willing adulteress to whose husband the language of cuckoldry is applied. Though Collatine and Menelaus both are spoken of as having horns, both Lucrece
and Helen were originally raped, not willingly adulterous. (Granting of course, Helen becomes a willing partner to Paris.) So in Titus Andronicus as in Shakespeare generally, women are not as a rule typically changeable. Rather, as Shakespeare's usual cuckold scenario affirms, wives are often naturally faithful, the lore of cuckoldry notwithstanding.

Shakespeare returned to the subject of cuckoldry in four major cuckold plays, two minor treatments of cuckoldry, several other places sprinkled throughout his canon. In these treatments of cuckoldry Shakespeare continues to discredit the lore of cuckoldry by utilizing a variety of artistic gambits, including the transformation of connotations associated with the cuckold and his horns. As already discussed, the conclusion of The Merry Wives of Windsor places the horns on the would-be paramour instead of on the imaginary cuckold, and Much Ado About Nothing gilds the cuckold's horns with gold and suggests horns bestow reverence. These instances are supplemented by two speeches delivered by fools in Shakespeare that continue to reverse associations attached to the cuckold and his horns: Touchstone's in As You Like It and the Clown's in All's Well that End's Well. Both of these speeches comfort cuckolds, not by assuring them their wives are faithful, but by assuming all men are cuckolds. Touchstone states that though horns are "odious," all men have them, and therefore, they should accept them:
As horns are odious, they are necessary. It is said, "Many a man knows no end of his goods." Right! many a man has good horns, and knows no end of them. Well, that is the dowry of his wife, 'tis none of his own getting. Homs? even so. Poor men alone? No, no, the noblest deer hath them as huge as the rascal. Is the single man therefore bless'd? No, as a wall'd town is more worthier than a village, so is the forehead of a married man more honorable than the bare brow of a bachelor; and by how much defense is better than no skill, by so much is a horn more precious than to want.

(III.iii.31-63)

By comparing horns, protection on the brows of deer, to walls protection to towns, Touchstone transforms the connotation of horns from odious to "precious." Similarly, the Clown through a process of linguistic logic reverses the relationship of cuckold to paramour:

He that ears my lands spares my team, and gives me leave to inn the crop. If I be his cuckold, he's my drudge. He that comforts my wife is the cherisher of my flesh and blood; he that cherishes my flesh and blood loves my flesh and blood; he that loves my flesh and blood is my friend: ergo, he that kisses my wife is my friend. If men could be content to be what they are, there were no fear in marriage for young Charbon the puritan and old Poysam the papist, howsoever their hearts are sever'd in religion, their heads are both one: they may jowl horns together like any deer 'i th' herd.

(I.iii.44-55)

And after the speech the Clown sings:

For I the ballad will repeat,
Which men full true shall find:
Your marriage comes by destiny
Your cuckoo sings by kind.

(I.iii.60-63)

Both these speeches, like the old ballad, affirm the universality of the forked plaque and comfort the cuckold by telling him his lot is shared. These two speeches are more
in line with traditional treatments of cuckoldry than, perhaps, anything else in Shakespeare. They assume a woman's dower is cuckoldry, all men are horned by destiny, and men should, therefore, tolerate it through a conscious effort of mind. It is, perhaps, significant that these speeches are spoken by fools, and should, therefore, be read ironically.

These speeches, with Troilus and Cressida, are the great exceptions in Shakespeare. He uses similar arguments in the major cuckold plays, and in each case they have ironic import, spoken by men who are known to be lying or patently wrong. In Othello, Iago tells the Moor he should be content because millions of men are cuckolded too (IV.i.67-68), and Leontes comforts himself with the same argument (The Winter's Tale. I.ii.186-207). But in both these cases, the audience knows the women these men suspect are chaste.

The conclusions of Much-Ado-About-Nothing, like the speeches of Touchstone and the Clown, gild the image of the cuckold and his horns but, at the same time, affirm no cuckolds exist, for women are chaste; the only reason in Much-Ado-About-Nothing that Benedick must wear horns is because he publicly asserted all married men wear them. Falstaff, at the end of his cuckold play, also wears horns because he had presumed the lore of cuckoldry to be true and acted on that belief. For this reason, Falstaff bears the shame and thus shares with Iago, Jachimo and the untrusting
part of Leontes, the calumny not of being a cuckold, but of believing in cuckoldry.

The minor treatments of cuckoldry and adultery in *2 Henry VI, Comedy of Errors*, "The Rape of Lucrece," and *Titus Andronicus* and the speeches of Touchstone and the Clown all tend in small ways to alter Renaissance cuckoldry. Shakespeare's fascination with and repulsion toward cuckoldry is expressed most fully in the major cuckold plays. A quick review of these plays with *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Troilus and Cressida* will follow, leading to an outline of Shakespeare's scenario and his cuckold triangle before I discuss whether or not Shakespeare felt satisfied, at the end of his career, with his artistic presentation of cuckoldry.

In his major cuckold plays, Shakespeare creates a series of works that combine to undermine traditional cuckoldry and replace it with new stereotypes and lore. I do not mean to say Shakespeare consciously undertook to provide a social service by debunking cuckoldry, but I do mean to say his artistic impulse and social sense combined to create in his cuckold plays a consistent scenario which builds upon itself and expands a vision of cuckoldry which reveals traditional cuckoldry to be chimerical, dangerous to marriage and society, needing to be expunged and replaced by closer family ties cemented by faith and trusting accord.
The Merry Wives of Windsor begins Shakespeare’s refutation of Renaissance cuckoldry. The only fully comic treatment of cuckoldry in the major cuckold plays, The Merry Wives of Windsor defies a warning found in a song in Love’s Labours Lost by laughing to scorn the horned sceptre of cuckoldry, and denying the universal applicability of its lore. The play transforms a typical cuckold story which depicts paramours successful, wives lascivious and husbands forked, and frustrates the expectations that these stereotypes will be fulfilled. Instead, the husbands remain uncuckolded, the wives are chaste and the would-be paramour is unsuccessful, shamed and chastized. In this way, Shakespeare suggests "merry wives", who are clever, amiable and socially active women, are not necessarily cuckold-makers. The thrust of The Merry Wives of Windsor is to "dishorn" the cuckold and mock in his place a unique figure in Shakespeare, the horned paramour. In short, cuckoldry is not to be feared, for it is chimerical; and the real calumny involved in cuckoldry accrues to those who believe in it and its lore.

A lesser cuckold play, Much Ado About Nothing, resembles The Merry Wives of Windsor by placing an emphasis on how cuckoldry, here the humorous fecundity implicit in its language, affects society. Set in a more courtly atmosphere than The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing depicts in the Beatrice-Benedick subplot a world in which the conventions established by a society that delights
in giving jesting verbal assent to the language and lore of
cuckoldry creates rivalries of wit between men that have the
power to cause men to act against their true opinions and
feelings. The fool in Much-Ado-About-Nothing is, therefore,
not a wittolloy husband but Benedick, the witty expert in
cuckoldry who is couzened into hiding his real feelings
behind a cynical mask of insincere jests, quips and
promises.

Further, the worldly mask of banterings that dominate
male conversation in Much-Ado-About-Nothing creates an
atmosphere in which man can easily give credence to
accusations of unchastity in women, here in a pre-marital
context. In the Hero/Claudio plot, Shakespeare utilizes a
story line which resembles his cuckold scenario but in a
pre-marital arena without the language of cuckoldry. In
this way he begins to experiment with plot structures and
themes he will apply and develop later in marital contexts.
In this pre-marital arena, the accusations of unchastity in
a betrothed woman, Hero, lead to her apparent death which
lasts till after her disgrace is effaced. The tragic
potentials inherent in the plot are frustrated by the
slighted woman's patience and willingness to forgive
combined with her accuser's renewed faith in female fidelity
and desire to repent and make reparation. In the end, Much-
Ado-About-Nothing depicts the dangers involved in even the
jesting assent given to the lore and language of cuckoldry.
Troilus and Cressida, like Titus Andronicus, seems in many ways to stand apart from Shakespeare's other cuckold plays, for it faces the possibility of female unfaith uncompromisingly and applies the language of cuckoldry when wives are actually unfaithful. In the play, the principle female characters, Helen and Cressida, a wife and a woman betrothed, are unfaithful, and Cressida goes so far as to claim that all women are changeable. Despite these women's blatant infidelity, they are deeply desired by men. In fact, men are drawn to the battlefield in order to defend or regain these women, all of which leads to social, ethical, and political chaos. Men's desire for the unfaithful women in Troilus and Cressida is of a unique stamp, however, based more on the honor that accrues to men who possess a beautiful woman and on sex than on deeply felt love. As a result, there is something less than honorable in the men who seek Helen and Cressida. Aptly, then, Menelaus, Paris, Troilus and Diomed all bear images reserved for cuckolds, for their great desires for the possession of an unfaithful woman earns them participation in the calumny due a cuckold. Shakespeare shows in Troilus and Cressida how the wrong motivation for seeking a woman, excessive concern with possession of women, false valuing of women combined with female infidelity—all can plunge the world into a chaotic morass. This may account for the difficulties in defining the genre of Troilus and Cressida.
Othello realizes the tragic potential latent in Renaissance cuckoldry, depicting Iago, in whom cuckoldry is fully engrained and Othello, who is at first untouched by it, but who, once fully instructed in cuckoldry, is completely dominated by it. Earlier, most of Shakespeare's treatments showed the belief in cuckoldry to be unjustified by the rule of truth. Othello goes on to account for the existence of the chimera of cuckoldry by anatomizing the emotion of jealousy, showing how it is not native to the heart of man, but implanted there by malice and by the the conventions of cuckoldry itself, and how its violence tends to confirm itself without reference to the rule of truth. Othello is a man uninstructed in the lore of cuckoldry who, once taught its language and lore, proves to be fertile ground for its growth; for it eventually takes control of his imagination, coloring all his perceptions and actions.

In this way, Shakespeare portrays how apt a soil man is for the growth and perpetuation of cuckoldry. While anatomizing jealousy and depicting how it can transform a man into an abusive beast, Othello reemphasizes a wife's capacity for long-suffering patience and faith despite the presence of several stereotypical traits in Othello thought in the Renaissance to cause wives to transgress. The tragic outcome of Othello occurs because in Iago and Othello belief in cuckoldry fully convinces its victims and the resulting internalizations of the lore of cuckoldry spark real rivalries between men and revenges towards women.
Shakespeare's last two treatments of cuckoldry build on the earlier treatments and extend his scenario, expunging calumny that results from slanderous charges of wifely infidelity, including the reconciliation of marriages destroyed by the belief in cuckoldry. In the process of reconciliation, children are re-adopted by their parents and given their rightful place as inheritors of their fathers' name, wealth and honor. Cymbeline depicts an Othello-like character, one who initially is free from suspicion, convinced by an Iago-like character that his wife is unfaithful. Like Othello, Posthumus seeks revenge by ordering his wife's death. But unlike Othello, Posthumus is allowed to be reunited with his wife after repenting for seeking revenge, undertaking a kind of crusade for Imogen by fighting for England, and enjoying an intercession to the divine by his family. Imogen too, despite her guiltlessness, must undergo a ritualistic purging process before being reunited with her spouse. Her trials include a pilgrimage to Posthumus in the guise of a man, a rediscovery and adoption by her brothers, an apparent death by poison, a resurrection accompanied by a proof of her continued devotion to her supposedly dead murderer-husband, a readoption by her estranged father and finally a trial of her chastity. For both husband and wife in Cymbeline, reunion comes only after the completion of a ritualistic process which includes a renewal of nuclear family ties: for Posthumus in a dream vision with his deceased parents.
and brothers; for Imogen in the country with her lost brothers and later in the court with her father. The concept of coherence within the nuclear family becomes in this play important in regaining faith in marriage. Further in *Cymbeline* on the renewal of faith in marriage and wifely fidelity depends not only the lives of many individuals, but also the safe and rightful passage of the regal sceptre.  

*The Winter's Tale* culminates Shakespeare's portrayal of cuckoldry. In it jealousy is most fully self-born and self-confirmed and the effects of the belief in cuckoldry are most widespread, affecting a husband, a wife and their children. For the first time in Shakespeare, questions of wifely fidelity immediately affect legitimate progeny. And because the imaginary cuckold Leontes is both husband and king, charges of adultery affect the royal family, the courtiers, national alliances and national stability. The redemption process in *The Winter's Tale*, therefore, depends on the rediscovery of legitimacy, and the search for proper marital alliances based upon love and dynastic merger. Following the rediscovery and adoption of true legitimacy comes a resurrection of another apparently dead slandered wife, completing a secure nuclear family which, in turn, secures fraternal and national friendship and alliance.  

Shakespeare's scenario depicts male jealousy as the danger to marriage, not wives' propensities to commit adultery. But husbands, themselves, are not solely to blame for their jealousies. Rather, a man's aptness to be jealous
seems to blame for marital disruption. This quality seems innate and uncontrollable in Shakespeare's imaginary cuckold. The blame for marital disruption also belongs, therefore, to the forces that perpetuate the lore of cuckoldry, because these forces, whether they are language itself (as in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Much Ado About Nothing*), worldly revengeful slanders (as in *Othello* and *Cymbeline*), or man's spontaneous emotion (as in *The Winter's Tale*), in a man an emotion which he cannot control and which can be utterly destructive to himself and those around him.

Besides creating his cuckold scenario, Shakespeare consistently peoples his imaginary cuckold plots with similar characters so they combine to create his own stereotypes that contrast with the stereotypes of traditional cuckoldry. Shakespeare's wittily husbands remain uncuckolded. Slanders or would-be cuckold-makers usually convince the husbands they have been wronged, though the imaginary cuckoldsd participate in the wittcl theme by helping to convince themselves. This participation is a kind of horn-madness, which sparks a jealousy so strong it confirms itself and results in a desire to be proved a cuckold. Despite the violence of their horn-madness, however, Shakespeare's imaginary cuckoldsd can be converted to faith in their wives' fidelity. Ford, Othello, and Posthumus all realize their error when the truth is presented to them in public forums, and Leontes is convinced when the gods strike down his legitimate heir. For both
Posthumus and Leontes, conversion seems dependent on both divine intervention and on the realignment with legitimate ties between generations. In all except Othello's tragic case, when the imaginary cuckold realizes he has been wrong, he is pardoned and reconciled to his wife and/or his children.

The gentleness with which Shakespeare treats his cuckolds is striking. For the most part, drama of cuckoldry written during Shakespeare's time exhibits little sympathy for cuckolds, real or imaginary. The Duke in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* is an adulterer himself as well as a murderer. Just before his death, he is forced to witness his bastard son's incestuous copulation with his wife the Duchess, the two of whom couple in order to revenge themselves against the lustful Duke.1 The wittily Corvino in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* is a greedy fool who brings his chaste wife Celia to the feigningly ill Volpone's chamber after having been tricked into believing that by sleeping with Volpone she will be a healthful benefit for him which will result in Volpone making Corvino his sole heir.2 Camillo in John Webster's *The White Devil* is described and presented as "Merely an ass in's foot cloth" (I.ii.54).3 In the first scene in which Camillo appears, he witnesses unwittingly his wife and Flamineo arrange a tryst for

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2 In *Drama of the English Renaissance*.
3 In *Drama of the English Renaissance*.
Flamineo's master, Branchiano, believing he himself is being praised. Examples of this kind in which cuckolds are presented as vapid fools, objects of scornful laughter, or vile lustful villains can be multiplied.

In Shakespeare, on the other hand, Ford, Posthumus and Leontes are all pardoned by their wives, and reunited with them, even after two of them nearly kill their wives. In Othello's case, the strength of his jealousy and horn-madness themselves contribute to elevate him to tragic proportions. (In A. Women-Killed-With-Kindness, it is the regretful wife who dies because she has been separated from her wronged husband, who qualifies for tragic heights not the husband.) Shakespeare, despite his wholesale condemnation of jealousy, understands his imaginary cuckolds, and mitigates their guilt by attributing it, in part, to slanderous adherents to the lore of cuckoldry and, in part, to the uncontrollable force of male jealousy. By dividing guilt in this way, Shakespeare not only frees his jealous husbands from the charge of villainy (Iago is an exception), but emphasizes the dangers implicit in the lore of cuckoldry itself and the calumny due to those who proselytize cuckoldry.

All the slandered wives in Shakespeare's major cuckold plays are suspected wrongly because they are sociable. Fully faithful and trustworthy, they indicate clearly how the desire to cuckold is foreign to their characters. If slandered, suspected and even nearly killed by their jealous
husbands, they still remain long suffering and faithful, either actively pursuing reconciliation or patiently waiting till the time when reunion with their husbands is possible. Finally, they are willing to pardon their suspecting husbands and live reconciled to them without resentment.

The paramours in the scenario resemble, in many ways, the slanderers. Falstaff, Iago and Jachimo all resemble one another by being disciples of the lore of cuckoldry and desiring or attempting to cuckold the imaginary cuckolds. They all convince the husbands of their wives' infidelity even though none of them succeeds. Still, they persist in their belief in the lore of cuckoldry. After several adverse adventures, Falstaff continues his advances. Iago, though he knows he has no chance with Desdemona, continues to affirm her ability to horn Othello. And Jachimo, though repulsed by Imogen, still conspires to convince Posthumus that all women are attemptable. Falstaff, Iago and Leontes' suspicious self are all chastized for their belief in cuckoldry, though Jachimo and Leontes are pardoned because they repent. In the end, these proselytizers of cuckoldry gain shame and must repent more for their belief in cuckoldry and for spreading the taint of cuckoldry's shame, than for believing their wives unfaithful. Leontes, because he combines the role of slanderer and imaginary cuckold, endures the most prolonged period of penance.
The final question I wish to consider in this dissertation is whether or not the artistic, and perhaps social, impulse in Shakespeare that causes him to debunk cuckoldry was purged and satisfied at the end of his career, or whether he finally felt frustrated by some male's propensity to suspect and give credence to cuckoldry. *The Winter's Tale*, I feel, indicates the latter proposition to be true. Leontes's jealousy, as I have shown, is not only the most unreasonable, unfounded and potentially damaging in the major cuckold plays, it is also the most stubborn. Ford's, Othello's and Posthumus' jealousy all disappeared once the truth about their wives was revealed in public forums. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, Leontes' belief persists ever after the god's oracle states in no uncertain terms Hermione is faithful. Also Hermione's comment in the trial scene seems telling in this matter. Hermione addresses Leontes:

You, my lord, best know
[[Who] least will seem to do so] my past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste, as true,
As I am now unhappy; which is more
Than history can pattern, though devis'd
And play'd to take spectators.

(III.ii.32-37)

She affirms that it is Leontes who most should know her chastity which, in fact, least does. Despite his own certain knowledge based upon long experience, Leontes is still blinded by groundless jealousy. The final clause of Hermione's speech is especially important in this regard, for although she states that "history" is inadequate to
depict her chastity and faith, it is clear that she is thinking specifically of dramatic literature, literature that is written ("devised") to be acted ("play'd"). Even though art, according to Sidney, was thought in the Renaissance to be able to present the "perfect pattern" of things, Hermione here affirms that literature is unable to depict her chastity and faith in all its perfection. In Hermione's appeal here, a voice of frustration with literature is evident to me. From his first cuckold play, Shakespeare depicted the language of cuckoldry instrumental in perpetuating the harmful and slanderous lore of cuckoldry and here, in his last cuckold play, his virtuous heroine expresses her opinion that dramatic literature, literature "play'd" for "spectators," is inadequate. Perhaps the unchastity Don John speaks of in language itself (Much Abo
About Nothing, IV.i.97-98) has so tainted dramatic communication that Shakespeare felt unsatisfied with its ability to celebrate true chastity. Hermione feels the reality of her honesty surpasses what dramatic literature can portray. That Shakespeare wrote four plays of cuckoldry, depicting wifely faith indicates he felt the subject worthy of repeated treatment. The consistency of his scenario in these plays suggests he found it an artistically valuable way to treat cuckoldry. But Hermione's insistence in regard to literature's limitations

suggests that Shakespeare may have continued to return to cuckoldry not because it was effective dramatically but because he felt frustrated in his attempt to depict chastity fully and efface the stereotypes and lore of cuckoldry.
Glossary of Shakespeare’s Language of Cuckoldry

Actaeon. n. Mythological type of the cuckold (by nature of his horns, not his wife). The Merry Wives of Windsor II.i.117-121.

Cornuto. n. A cuckold. The Merry Wives of Windsor III.v.76.

Crest. n. The place upon which the cuckold’s horns are placed. By extension, the horns themselves. As You Like It IV.ii.14.

Cuckold. n. A derisive name for the husband of an unfaithful wife. The Merry Wives of Windsor II.ii.313-14.

v. To make into a cuckold. Othello I.iii.368-69.

Cuckoldly. adj. Having the character, or quality of a cuckold. The Merry Wives of Windsor II.ii.270-74.

Cuckold-mad. adj. Driven mad by being made a cuckold. Comedy of Errors II.i.59.

Cuckold-maker. n. One who causes a husband to be a cuckold. Troilus and Cressida V.vii.9.

Cuckoo. n. A bird the imitation of whose call mocks or foretells the arrival of a cuckold. The cuckoo's habit of laying is eggs in the nests of other birds has, by reversal, through the course of time given its name to
the cuckold. *Love’s Labours Lost* V.ii.894-911.

Forehead. n. The place upon which the cuckold's horns are placed. A particularly sensitive spot for the cuckold. *Othello* III.iii.283.


Head. n. The place upon which the cuckold's horns are placed. *Troilus and Cressida* IV.v.45.

Horn. n. Cuckolds were fancifully said to wear horns on their brows. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* II.ii.280-81. [The verb form of "horn" is not used by Shakespeare.]


Jealousy. adj. Distrustful of the faithfulness of wife, husband or lover. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ii.i.301. [Also in the Renaissance, "jealousy" means "doubtful," "suspicious," or "apprehensive of evil." *King Henry the Fifth* IV.i.284.]


Wittol. n. A man who is aware of and complaisant about the infidelity of his wife, a contented cuckold. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ii.ii.299.


Vulcan. n. The only god in the Greek-Roman pantheon who is a cuckold, thus the patron of cuckolds. *Troilus and Cressida* I.iii.168.

Vulcan's Badge. n. The mark of the cuckold. *Titus Andronicus* II.i.89.
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