



The Anxiety of Procreation: Evolutionary Theory in Effect in Shakespeare's Richard III and Othello

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The Anxiety of Procreation:
Evolutionary Theory in Effect in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Othello*

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's protagonists, Richard III and Othello, notably find themselves in conflict with their respective environments for their "otherness." Richard III is ubiquitously known as the "villain, great deformed," while Othello is cast as "The Moor." Both characters are objectified and marginalized within the respective environments of the plays they traverse, as a result both have been analyzed through the lens of gender, race, politics, religion and post-modern literary criticism. However, few scholars have engaged in exploring the plays through the lens of changing ideas around families and components which created "successful" families in Early Modern England (est. 1486-1625). With the shifting demographics of the era, the familial structure evolved taking into account such factors as high mortality, especially infant mortality, an unstable political climate, and a rigid patriarchal family structure. These factors contribute to illuminate procreative anxieties possessed by the populous at large and dramatized by these Shakespearean characters. My thesis draws on current discussions around evolutionary theory in literature, specifically Christopher Perricone's "Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets: a Darwinian View" and Joseph Carroll's *Literary Darwinism*, this paper explores aspects of both plays through the lens of evolutionary theory, recasting aspects of these plays as acts of ultimate causation vs. proximate causation. I argue that when reframed as acts of ultimate causation, the procreative anxiety is elucidated.

Dedication

For Walter.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter I.

Introduction

William Shakespeare's protagonists, Richard III and Othello, notably find themselves in conflict with their respective environments for their "otherness." Richard III is ubiquitously known as the "villain, great deformed," while Othello is cast as "The Moor." Both characters are objectified and marginalized within the respective environments of the plays they traverse, as a result both have been analyzed through the lens of gender, race, politics, religion and post-modern literary criticism. However, few scholars have engaged in exploring the plays through the lens of changing ideas around families and components which created "successful" families in Early Modern England (est. 1486-1625). During this era, England was evolving from the medieval nucleated parish structure to a more cosmopolitan social structure as people migrated from the countryside seeking greater opportunities in the expanding cities. With the shifting demographics, the familial structure evolved taking into account such factors as high mortality, especially infant mortality, an unstable political climate, and a rigid patriarchal family structure. These factors contribute to illuminate procreative anxieties possessed by the populous at large and dramatized by these Shakespearean characters.

One way of delving into this theme of family is through evolutionary theory where perpetuation of the human species is reliant on behavioral systems: mate selection, familial and kin selection, and reciprocal altruism (Carroll 194). The purpose of this

thesis is to examine these “othered” protagonists by studying how anxieties around procreation and creating successful families are imbedded in both texts, moving beyond metaphor and considering the body, physicality, otherness, and how these elements relate to tensions around procreation and ideas of “successful” families that were being explored as England transitioned through the Early Modern Era. Shakespeare’s time was a time of precarious political climates, disease, and high infant mortality rates, and much thought was given to mate selection, necessity to create progeny and form successful family units working within established social systems to maximize survival. However, there is little scholarly literature that examines the plays from this biological standpoint. Scholars, such as Joseph Carroll, aim to introduce evolutionary theory into literary criticism, to root literary analysis in evolutionary theory “to situate literary figurations in relation to the personal and social conditions in which they are produced” (Carroll 15). Carroll argues that there exists universal, species-typical characteristics that form a common framework for understanding which can provide a foundation to link human nature with literary meaning (Carroll 233).

Richard III begins *The Tragedy of Richard III* justifying his villainy with, “And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, / To entertain these fair well-spoken days, / I am determined to prove a villain” (*Richard III*, 1.1.28-30). Who has claimed he cannot prove a lover? Has he made this declaration for himself or has this label been foisted upon him? A popular position is that Richard reduces this label to his own sterility, but even in this position, the anxiety of procreation reveals itself (Moulton 265). From the outset, Richard is not viewed as a favorable mate with, “I, that am rudely stamped, and want love’s majesty / To strut before a wanton ambling nymph” (*Richard III*, 1.1.16-17).

In *Othello*, through Othello's elopement with Desdemona, he has usurped a highly desirable woman in Venetian society, stoking the jealousy of Iago and the censure of the governing patriarchy which includes Desdemona's father, Brabantio. From the outset of the play, Othello must defend the plausibility of their mutual attraction, "She loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them. / This is the only witchcraft I have used / Here comes the lady: let her witness it" (*Othello*, 1.3.181-184). Scholars have viewed this as a reference to witchcraft as an attempt to link Othello to the feminine (as a practitioner of witchcraft), placing him outside of the masculine gender norm. Rather than view this passage through an engendered feminine-masculine dichotomy as an exploration of normative gender studies, consider the passage in the light of evolutionary theory's reciprocal altruism and kin selection, as these are cornerstones to legacy building and survival and relevant subject matter to the audiences of Early Modern England.

This paper will explore the idea that an anxiety around procreation, creating "successful families," informs both plays and mirrors a pervasive anxiety of the time. Both the characters of Richard III and Othello embody a paradox of what constitutes an optimal mate according to evolutionary theory. On the one hand, Richard III inhabits a position of procreative primacy though his character and physicality does not justify his position. On the other hand, Othello arguably possesses all the physicality and characteristics of what constitutes an optimal mate, yet according to the social construction of the era, he should not possess access to optimal mate selection. The characters of Othello and Richard III work outside of an established, socially acceptable framework to assimilate and create progeny within their societies, as people understood

in that historical moment. Their “otherness” created considerable anxiety in terms of how people understood mate selection as well as the immediate family unit as both characters challenge the prevailing heteronormative construct. This tension was very much in the minds of current audiences of the era, who lived at the time when the idea of what constituted “successful” families, both in terms of viable children and successful family units, was very much in a state of transformation. Othello and Richard III were characters who seemed to negotiate and test the biological frameworks their contemporaries adhered to as normative societal practice. This influences their confrontations and interactions with other characters.

Christopher Perricone’s “Procreation Sonnets,” provides a new lens to explore *The Tragedy of Richard III* and *Othello*. In the essay, Perricone makes the compelling argument that Shakespeare exhibited a sense of Darwinism in his repeated exploration of procreation in his sonnets. In this same light, Richard III and Othello exhibit characteristics, both physical and character-wise, that would make them less than ideal mates given the understanding during Shakespeare’s time. These same physical differences and character differences, or “otherness,” have been explored extensively through the lens of religion, politics, gender, racial and post-structural arguments, yet this “otherness” also stoked anxiety in terms of what was deemed successful in raising progeny and creating stable families.

Political Facets of Early Modern England: Evolution of Propaganda and Theater

In order to begin to understand what created viable families during the Early Modern Era, one should recall the political and social reality of the population as these inform within the family how to negotiate survival during this era. The population functioned in a highly social system that heavily relied on others, often in small parish communities. Shakespeare was born in a small community, and lived most of his life under the Tudor reign.

The Tudor reign and propaganda devices employed by the monarchs had a marked influence on the social order of Early Modern England. In Richard III's defeat, the War of the Roses ended as did over 400 years of the Plantagenet reign which ushered in the Tudor Era, simultaneously marking the end of the medieval era and giving way to the Early Modern Era in England. William Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* 100 years after Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, defeated Richard III in the Battle at Bosworth in August 1485 near Leicestershire, England. This battle was the last time a monarch in England won the throne through war, and for English subjects, the battle was just beyond living memory (Schwyzer 297). In this time frame, the Tudors put into place a robust propaganda program meant to legitimize the Tudor claim to the English throne as well as consolidate power throughout the country. As the Tudors worked to assert and build their credibility in the eyes of the populous and political power brokers within the country (e.g. clergy and landed gentry), the English population at large was evolving in tandem from provinciality and parish-centricism to re-orientating towards accepting governance and regulation from farther afield (i.e. London). The monarchy began to increasingly

monopolize powers of justice and punishment, military protection, welfare and regulation of property (Stone 133). Simultaneously with this consolidation and expansion of influence and power, the throne embarked on an unprecedented propaganda campaign for loyalty amongst the populous, “inculcating the view that the first duty of every citizen is obedience to the sovereign, that man’s obligation is to his country, involving the subordination of all other considerations and loyalties, even life itself” (Stone 133). This evolution introduced a level of anxiety into the dynamics of family formation and legacy building as families negotiated the changing dynamics within their homes and parish communities.

During Henry VII’s reign from 1485 to 1509, appeal to the masses was necessary to legitimize the Tudor claim to the throne that was tenuous at best, and dubious at worst, due to technicalities around the legitimacy of the hereditary lineage of his mother, Margaret Beaufort. This created a need to consolidate popular opinion and shore up support to counter detractors, so Henry VII began a charm campaign in earnest with the aid of a judicious marriage to Elizabeth of York which unified the warring Yorks and Lancasters, ceremonial pomp and circumstance to show strength, directives aimed to gain papal support, and propaganda to disseminate ideology aided by the recent invention of the Gutenberg press, which allowed for mass printing of pamphlets and leaflets for distribution (Taylor 102). The magnificent courtly displays and printed texts widely distributed throughout the country acted to obscure the extent the Tudors were dependent on the consent of the subjects, and largely succeeded.

With this foundation, Henry VIII, reigning from 1509-1547, and subsequent Tudors, established a “new style of monarchy” by courting their subjects love and

adoration (Doty 7). The Tudors lacked the features of a modern state to ensure and enforce mass obedience; therefore they created the illusion of one then began to build it (Cooper 211). Within the shires outside of London and other major commerce centers, law and order relied on the goodwill of the local political community, but “quiet government was also determined by the voluntary obedience” of the masses, which Henry VII laid the groundwork to ensure and Henry VIII continued (Cooper 212). In pursuit of a male heir, Henry VIII used propaganda to facilitate aligning the sovereign with holiness in order to validate the break from the Catholic Church, thus paving the way to annul his marriage to Mary I (Mary Aragon) and then proceed to marry Anne Boleyn. The premise was that the “king became an ecclesiastical emperor, on earth second only to Christ by virtue of his supremacy over the Church of England” which casts light on the oaths of allegiance to the king as supreme head that were demanded of priests and office-holders in the 1530s (Cooper 214-215). This Henrican Reformation co-opted the parish church and clergy where “the physical edifice of the church had long been the centre of local society, in both spiritual and secular terms, and attending divine service said as much about membership of the community as it did about personal religiosity” now said as much about one’s citizenship and allegiance to the sovereign (Cooper 216). The Henrican version of Caesaropapism allowed no distinction between principled objection to royal policy and outright heresy, therefore sedition and treason laws passed in the 1530s meant to control the ebb and flow of information (Cooper 215). Henry VIII’s aides, Edward Foxe and Richard Sampson, championed the Henrican cause in academic and theological circles, arguing to amend and rewrite texts, as Thomas Cromwell produced material to be distributed to the masses to steer ideology to the favor

of the sovereign. This created a culture which suppressed the populace so that “though they forbear to speak at large, for fear of punishment, yet they mutter together secretly” (Taylor 105-6). Rebellion against the divinely ordained sovereign was viewed as impious and immoral. Notably, often failed conspirators in Tudor England invariably confessed the sinfulness of their actions just before their executions (Stone 267).

Elizabeth I, reigning from 1558-1603, continued to reign in this vein to consolidate her power in moves meant to outmaneuver her detractors and rival claimants to the throne by openly courting an audience and engaging with the masses, maintaining strict censors and expanding religious indoctrination including the reintroduction of the revised 1552 *Book of Common Prayer*. Voluntary attendance of mass typical of the pre-Reformation period was replaced by growing governmental pressure to attend prayer book services, culminating in injunctions and legislation to enforce participation upon the reluctant. Religious reformation gave the crown a prime opportunity to indoctrinate its subjects with the necessity of obedience (Cooper 216). Furthermore, through state sanctioned homilies and sermons, the parishes instilled the necessity of obedience amongst the masses through making survival conditional with the acceptance of the hierarchy. The general belief being that disobedience to lawful political authority would disrupt the other hierarchies by which society was governed: the respect of children for their parents, the loyalty of wives to husbands, and even the existence of private property (Cooper 222-23). For example, here is a common sermon on obedience:

Take away kynges, princes, rulers, magistrates, judges an such states of Gods ordre, no man shal ride or go by the high waie unrobbed, no man shall slepe in his awne house or bed unkilled, no man shall kepe his wife, children and possessions in quietness: all thynges shal be common, and

there must nedes follow all mischief and utter destruction, both of soules, bodies, goodes and common wealthes (Bond, *Certain Sermons*, 161-22).

Concurrently to the consolidation and evolution of Tudor propaganda and influence, the theater became of rose as the venue to express political thought, and gain collective perspective outside the influence of the church and throne. Shakespeare treated his public like they were part of the public sphere in contrast to the other public meeting space, church services, in which political indoctrination was state sanctioned and enforced (Doty 18). Shakespeare grew up aware of the political and economic ramifications of religious defiance as his parents were Catholics and accused recusants. As a young and ambitious playwright, Shakespeare was exposed to the royal censors tasked with maintaining the royal image as he wrote and courted the nobility for sponsorship. Queen Elizabeth and King James each likened monarchy to being “upon of publike stage.”¹ To be on the “publike stage” meant to be surrounded by people poised to praise, criticize, or judge. Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Richard III* is par exemplar of Tudor Propaganda, yet also a shrewd study of survival in the Early Modern Era. In the titular Richard III, Shakespeare created the ultimate villain in contrast to Elizabeth I (“Gloriana”) and her familial predecessors. From the stage, Shakespeare honed his political thought: the latent power of the people; the effects of emotion in public rhetoric; the techniques of image-management used by shrewd leaders; and the way that political communication itself, like a performative speech act, could evolve into new collective and individual consciousness. Just as Tudor propaganda was pushing the collective to accept new facets of survival, Shakespeare used the stage to elucidate these facets.

¹ James I, *Basilicon Doron*, reprinted in *King James I and VI: Political Writings*, ed. Johann Sommerville Cambridge University Press, 1994, pg. 4.

Chapter II.

The Literary Perspective from Evolutionary Theory

In both Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Richard III* and *Othello*, conflict created by otherness is pervasive. As noted above, scholars have analyzed *Othello* and *Richard III* through many lenses including, but not limited to: religion, politics, gender, race, and disability studies. This paper aims to discuss these plays through the biological lens of evolutionary theory, a perspective scarcely explored. Before turning to that lens, however, I will first begin with a survey the existing literary criticism of both plays to provide one with a landscape of the lenses these plays have been viewed as contrast to the proposed framework from the perspective of evolutionary theory which follows. The goal is to return the literary lens one rooted in a biological perspective. Indeed, in "Intentional meaning in Hamlet: An Evolutionary Perspective", Joseph Carroll writes, "Shakespeare holds mirror up to nature". Using evolutionary theory helps to "develop analytic concepts congruent with the common idiom but encompassing the common understanding within a more systematic and integrated body of causal explanations" (Carroll 231).

Historiography of *Richard III* and *Othello* in Literary Criticism

From the outset of *Richard III*'s defeat on Bosworth Field, critics coupled *Richard*

III's deformity² with his moral character, and used it as a metaphor for the political strife that engulfed England during the War of the Roses (1455-1487). Beginning in 1557, Sir Thomas More characterized Richard III as "little of stature, ill featured of limes, croke backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard favoured of visage," and argued that Richard III was the personification of Vice. This characterization, along with Holinshed (1577) and Hall (1548), informed the manifestation of the titular protagonist of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Richard III*, written about 1592 which appeared in the first folio in 1597. The theme of a misguided moral compass linked to his deformed body persisted into the early 20th century as, notably, E.M.W. Tillyard placed Richard within the dichotomy of a Christian conception of good versus evil, where Richard serves as the metaphorical Evil that England, as a nation, defeats through God's instrument of Good, manifested in Richmond (Tillyard 207).

Tillyard views the symbolism of Richard through a religious lens, as does Michael Neill's work regarding *Othello*. In Neill's article "'Mulatto,' 'Blacks,' and 'Indian Moors': Othello and early constructions of human difference," he argues that in Early Modern Europe (15th century to late 18th century) skin color was a benign category of otherness, and religion was held in higher regard when assessing differences. People were not wary of Othello for a racial difference, but rather for a religious one. During the Early Modern Era, it was accepted that if one was not born Christian, one could convert, and acceptance of a Christian belief system was sufficient once one converted unless some event gave others a cause to doubt one's Christianity. This was the case in Venetian society. Othello claims he is a converted Christian, and looks more Christian

² Since Richard III's remains were found in the remains of the Greyfriars Abbey in Leicester in 2014, there has been debate about the extent of his disability based on now existing physical evidence.

and less a Moor, until he spirals into paranoid fury at Desdemona, as stoked by Iago. Therefore, Othello conceals an aggressive Otherness within the body of the Same, but the Otherness he is assigned is based on is a religious proclivity rather than racial difference (Neill 365-366). As Neill frames his argument, Othello's assailable Otherness serves as a warning against threats to Christianity, not as sexual competition and the anxiety this potentially provokes. Given the challenges and expectations in Early Modern England, consider the biological and extended familial anxieties of Othello and Desdemona's relationship as it exists outside of the Venetian ethnocentric, patriarchal, heteronormative construct. Both Othello and Desdemona possess an Otherness that threatens the creation of stable families as construed in the Venetian city-state and Early Modern Europe broadly.

Whereas Tillyard and Neill focus on bodily Otherness through a moral and religious lens, other scholars have examined these characters through the lens of gender studies. Critics have looked at the masculinity possessed by both Richard III and Othello metaphorically rather than biologically. Frank Moulton argues that Richard III's body serves as a metaphor for unruly masculinity where masculinity is contextualized by societal politics, not familial. Moulton argues that given Richard's deformity and inability to raise himself physically, he must instead raise himself socially. In Early Modern England the birth of a deformed child was viewed as portentous, and Moulton frames the danger that Richard III poses through his body as one of masculinity that is both perverse and dangerous for the nation (Moulton 262). For Moulton, the danger is political rather than biological. Moulton argues that despite Richard's concern to buttress his rule with dynastic marriages, he gives no thought to progeny. Moulton points to

Richard as a phallic “monster great deformed,” perpetually engaged in erecting himself, but not creating (i.e. procreating). In this argument, Richard’s ineffectiveness with women reflects a perversion of power and manifestation of the impotence in the body politic (Moulton 265). In contrast, rather than take the view of Richard’s masculinity metaphorically, consider it through a biological lens as well. Anne expresses revulsion at the prospect of marrying Richard. Instead of viewing the scene politically, when viewed through a lens of evolutionary theory, what does the interchange reveal when considering mate selection and family formation from the perspective of a culture consumed by ideas of family viability and successful procreation?

If Moulton examines the masculine body gone awry as a symbol of a threat to a nation, Richard Grinnell sees Othello losing his masculinity through a process of feminization through the arc of the play. Grinnell explores how Othello’s masculine otherness is often conflated with the idea of the “Barbarian” as a way to understand the racial and geographical Other from this era (Grinnell 72). Grinnell argues that Othello’s barbarism is understood in terms of witchcraft, which is understood in feminine terms. Iago speaks about Othello racially at the beginning of the play, thus equating him with the powerful masculine, then Brabantio describes Desdemona’s seduction in terms of witchcraft, effectively effeminizing Othello and making him symbolically impotent (Grinnell 74). Rather than emasculate Othello metaphorically with the assertion of witchcraft, consider the purview of Othello when viewing him as a viable male capable of successfully procreating with Venetian society’s female ideal, as embodied by Desdemona.

Witchcraft and its connection to the feminine is also discussed in *Richard III*. Phyllis Rackin argues the play should be viewed through an effeminate lens, thus adding heft to the female characters of the play. Rackin argues that the otherness of other Shakespearean female characters lent an agency to act and speak out of normative societal constructs, empowering them with demonic attributes (i.e. witchcraft). In *Richard III*, any subversive power of agency and transgression associated with the female characters has been appropriated by the male protagonist. Rackin argues that though the women are forceful and eloquent when arguing with Richard, they are deemed irrelevant to the outcome as the witchcraft they possess has been appropriated by Richard. For example, in his seduction of Anne, Richard monopolizes both female and male sexual energy thus in overwhelming Anne he has usurped the female role in seduction; therefore he has claimed the effeminized role of witchcraft as well (Rackin 54). Again, the feminist view of undermined agency during this seduction does not view the seduction scene as a causal act, a means of utility in achieving the hand of Anne in marriage. A marriage between Richard and Anne creates a family unit, and Anne's reaction could be viewed as biological resistance to procreating with Richard who possesses the material resources for progeny, but perhaps not the physical ability.

While Rackin reads the body through notions of dominating both feminine and masculine power, Greta Olson links the Richard's body to a notion of criminality. Olson delineates between human and animal in terms of their crime where human beings are perforce that species that does not partake in "bestly" criminal acts. She argues that this conflation is not an invention of current crime news, but a historically persisting motif that was rampant during Shakespeare's era, therefore befitting (Olson 302). She traces

Richard III by examining the characterization of Richard and examines the associations of the character's criminal behavior and his physical abnormalities with animal motifs which appear in the play. She does not seek to focus on Richard's deformity as an indication of his monstrosity, rather to show how his physicality is connected both with his crimes and specific animal imagery. Rather, Rackin views Richard's physicality and the way it translates to ideas around mate selection, intercourse, and progeny rather than as a metaphor for criminality.

In considering Richard's physicality through the lens of disability studies, Katherine Schaap Williams states that in *Richard III* critics conflate "disability" with the language of "deformity," and assume the pre-modern notion of disability which construes bodily deformity as the visible sign of moral evil (Williams 757). What modern scientific characterization would call "disability," readings of Richard emphasize the relation between his moral depravity and his body as indicative of the era's attitudes towards bodies (Williams 758). Decouple this link between moral evil and deformity, and consider the deformity exhibited by Richard III in a procreative framework that explores the implications of Richard's deformed body to a biological imperative.

Williams further expands the conflation of disability and deformity linked to morality beyond Richard's body to encapsulate early modern era subjectivity on the multiply ways bodily difference is negotiated throughout the play, and the degree to which all the bodies in the play are unstable (Williams 760). This reinforces her argument that subjectivity of bodily difference possessed during this era is socially embedded. Williams compounds the argument with Richard's anxiety about time (Williams 762). In the temporal register, Richard in his deformity is attuned to the ebbs and flows of societal

norms and how his deformity sets him outside of this norm, but Williams does not explore the heteronormative medieval biological imperative. Rather than view the bodies in the play as unstable mapped against the body politic in an unstable social era, consider this instability as suitability in creating family units, and the temporal register to be viewed as a biological register (i.e. the biological clock).

In the case of Othello, sexual mating with Desdemona is conflated with racial mythology within the racial politics of dominance and submission as defined by Western industrialized attitudes. The coupling of Othello and Desdemona hits upon the racial sexual taboo of miscegenation as defined by 20th century Western society (Cohen 325). If taken through the lens of Perricone and the perpetuation of the family unit through procreation, would Othello be viewed as a desirable mate? One could take the view that he could be perceived as an ideal mate, given his bravery and military reputation, but if one considers the importance of building family legacies in early modern Europe (Stone 180), Othello and Desdemona's marriage would not be ideal as the union did not take into consideration the influence and importance of the extended family and the societal influence of the medieval patriarchy (Stone 152). Beyond the family unit, the enforcement of the patriarchy was assisted by the church in "encouraging holy matrimony and in stressing the moral and religious responsibilities of the household" (Stone 154). Othello threatens the familial structure with his potential to revert back to Moorishness thus forsaking the patriarchal social structure built upon Christian doctrine (Neill 365). If viewed through the lens of ultimate causation, where each action/decision is made with the intention of continuing the heteronormative structure, the implications

of this threat on the patriarchy (i.e. Brabantio and the Venetian state) throws the patriarchy into question.

Building A Literary Perspective Which Moves Towards Evolutionary Theory

With more than 400 years between the first performances of both *Richard III* and *Othello*, modern literary surveys of these works run the risk of overt textualism. Though Shakespeare is performed frequently, with high literacy and historic distance, modern interactions and experiences with the works are more literary rather than performative, and with the ability to interact with the text, one can find many points of entry into distilling a text. In *Literary Darwinism*, Joseph Carroll argues that textualism in postmodern literary studies argues that “the text which exists linguistically is sufficient to deduce anything from it.” The danger this presents is that by affirming that texts do not refer to objects but rather constitute them, textualism eliminates correspondence, and “by eliminating truth, poststructuralism yields epistemological and ontological primacy to rhetoric or ‘discourse,’ and it simultaneously delegitimizes all traditional norms” (Carroll 16).

If literature, and by extension literary criticism, provides avenues to illustrate and explore culture as humans explore understanding of themselves and survival, then a representation of culture rooted in biological rationale provides a consilient³ view

³ From E.O. Wilson’s *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (1998) is the belief that the humanities are the last frontier of science, that “the greatest enterprise of the mind has always been and always will be the attempted linkage of the sciences and humanities” (pg. 8). Because the physical sciences and the humanities constitute polar points in the field of knowledge, and because the products of human genius

avoiding human exceptionalism. In this context, human exceptionalism is the view that “the human mind, spirit, or human culture, somehow stands apart from the causal hierarchy that prevails in the rest of the natural order” (Carroll 21). Namely, the argument asserts that in historic treatment and handling “culture” is treated as an autonomous human order detached from evolved and genetically transmitted dispositions⁴ (Carroll 22). Carroll argues, if the purpose of literature is to represent the human experience, and if the fundamental elements of biological existence are organisms, environments, and actions then “the figurative elements that correlate with these biological elements would naturally assume a predominant position within most figurative structures.” For example, in the case of the amount of attention paid to Richard III’s body, instead of taking Moulton’s position that his body is the metaphorical embodiment of the English body politic and waning masculinity, rather, take the view that the meaning thrust upon Richard’s deformed body is rooted in a biological debate determining fitness for function (i.e. survival) and procreating in the natural world.

A further argument for a view of this works through the lens of evolutionary theory is that explanations rooted in biological meaning take into account causal interactions among emergent phenomena, but valid conceptions of emergent phenomena depend on correctly identifying elements that make up the emergent phenomena (Pinker 2005). In this instance, emergent phenomena is the result of a causal act between an organism (e.g. human) and another organism and/or the environment. To further argue for a literary perspective rooted in biological meaning, Carroll writes:

constitute the most complex objects in nature, Wilson considers this linkage as the ultimate test of “consilience” his term for the unification of all knowledge. (Carroll, *Literary Darwinism*, 69)

⁴ This was a dominant view from about 1911-1970. (Carroll, *Darwin’s Bridge*, 22)

Ignoring principles of natural selection, for instance, produces false conceptions of the way populations interact with each other and with the individual organism (Carroll 2001, Easterlin 2004). Dismissing ideas of an evolved and adapted human nature produces false conceptions of the way institutions and cultural practices interact with each other and individual people.

Proximate Causation vs. Ultimate Causation

Incorporating the causal hierarchy⁵ and taking into consideration complex social systems, mate selection causally produces variation within the human genotype. When two sets of genes merge during reproduction, a new variation of human emerges.

Christopher Perricone discusses the need to think of causation (i.e. each action) in ultimate terms, not proximate terms where “every phenomenon or process in living organisms is the result of two separate causations, either proximate or ultimate”

⁵ The foundation of evolutionary theory is laid with the causal hierarchy, which explains and corresponds to levels of organization in the physical world. As the foundational point of departure for how all known systems and physical beings are constructed, the causal hierarchy begins with physics and astronomy which deal with the fundamental forces in the physical world, such as gravity, electromagnetism, and strong and weak nuclear forces. From there, chemistry enters the hierarchy, to deal with the organization of subatomic particles into specific kinds of atoms which compose the various chemical elements. Next, geology explains how these chemical elements have organized during the history of the planet. Biology follows to show how the organization of chemical elements creates organic molecules, which then explains the plausibility of the development of life through natural selection (Darwin’s Bridge 21). This hierarchy works both backwards and forwards, from the simple subatomic level to more complicated phenomena and vice versa.

Expounding on these features, biology creates the conduit linking the physical sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. In the causal hierarchy, basic concepts in evolutionary biology inform virtually all evolutionary research in the social sciences and the humanities therefore can provide a lens to view literature. Furthermore, complex biological systems emerge at points of “major transition” where life began with the formation of self-replicating molecules and worked up through ever-more complex levels of organization, from nucleated to non-nucleated single-celled organisms, multicellular organisms, organisms with organ systems, social animals, and human cultures. (Darwin’s Bridge 21; Shubin 2013) The causal hierarchy has been used to explain such complex social phenomena as adaptation by means of natural and mate selection (Darwin 1859, 1871), inclusive fitness (Hamilton 1964a, 1964b), differential parental investment (Trivers 1972), and reciprocal altruism (Trivers 1971) (Darwin’s Bridge 23).

(Perricone 12). The difference between the two types of causations is: proximate causations are causations encompassing physiological, developmental, and behavioral processes that are controlled by genetic programs and somatic programs; and, ultimate causations, or evolutionary causations, are those that lead to the origin of new genetic programs (e.g. human biological composition) or to the modification of existing ones. For example, in the case of sexual selection, sex should not be viewed in proximate terms vis-à-vis the pleasure of the moment, but rather ultimate terms, selection characteristics enhancing reproductive success, such as the ability to compete with members of the same sex and the qualities required to attract the opposite sex (Perricone 12-13).

Perricone acknowledges the biological imperative of procreation arguing that in Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets (Sonnets 1-17), the characters are reacting to the biological when confronting protagonists. Perricone argues that Shakespeare is encouraging the reader to treat each encounter and consideration as an assessment of mating suitability. He calls these instances "yum, yum" or identifying an attractive and optimal mate. The crux is that attractiveness is not proximate; it should be viewed in ultimate terms, in that sexual pleasure is not of the moment, but that Shakespeare is arguing this should be viewed with a long historical perspective in mind. For example, when considering the following lines from Sonnet 1, "From fairest creatures we desire increase, / That thereby beauty's rose might never die," Perricone argues that Shakespeare is imploring the reader to have intercourse with the goal of procreation with a mate one has identified as possessing attractiveness and fitness (ultimate causation), not just the pleasure of the intercourse itself (proximate causation). As biological creatures, time will ultimately destroy us, and passing genes through natural selection is how our

genes show up in the next generation (Perricone 12-13). The goal is to procreate through sexual selection, then ensure ultimate survival through familial, extended kin, and social structures.

Survival: Family Units and Social Composition in Early Modern England

An overview surveying evolving attitudes around the structure of family and extended social networks in England, and by extension Europe, during the Early Modern Era can provide anthropological credence to the biological perspective when reading *Richard III* and *Othello* through the lens of evolutionary theory. Shifts in world views and value systems can be shown by focusing on the evolving family unit. For example, Lawrence Stone tracks the change in belief systems and child-rearing from a “bird’s nest” style of child upbringing to the “nuclear family” model as well as the evolution from a rigid patriarchy to a more liberal distribution of power. He also tracks these attitudes over different social classes, genders, and discusses economic and religious influence on the evolving family structure. Stone emphasizes that in the 16th century, there existed the pragmatic calculation of family interest in choosing a spouse, such as social class, religious conviction, and personal affiliations as well as property and assets as a means to ensure resources for survival. Stone discusses how families dealt with courting and marriages based on affection as opposed to marriages based on pragmatic considerations as property and sharing resources. Romantic love was often viewed as a passing illness, and the parental influence on mate selection took precedence, particularly in the wealthier

classes. These attitudes are the same attitudes that would have informed Shakespeare's world view and provided a context in which he shaped his characters.

Early Modern London was one of the largest and most densely populated cities in Europe, and continued to grow exponentially as people migrated from their parish communities to seek opportunities in the city. In this era, diseases could have devastating effects on the population with lack of medicine and sanitation in dense communities. Family structures were patriarchal in nature. Inheritance laws, as policy, and primogeniture, specifically, were cornerstones of creating, building and ensuring the continuation of family wealth and legacies of the landed and noble classes, and determining allocation of assets in poorer households. These same laws determined the order of succession to the throne for royalty. As examples of proximate causation, these laws were meant to shore up resources and reaffirm existing social structures, and could often come into direct conflict with ultimate causal acts which beget the improvement and fitness of the population through optimal mate selection. It becomes difficult to determine optimal fitness when the proximate considerations reward attributes that are not aligned with optimal biological fitness.

As Shakespeare posits in *Richard III*, if Richard III "cannot prove a lover" then Richard is at risk of failing to create heirs and create the necessary family unit to ensure the survival and continuation of his hereditary legacy. Upon his death if he fails to even leave a widow, his assets will be divided amongst his surviving family, not necessarily as he bequeaths, and his land will be divvied up amongst his relatives or can be reverted back to the crown (Stone 242-243). Therefore, this early declaration is fraught with procreative anxiety, especially as he is aware he is not viewed as a favorable mate with,

“I, that am rudely stamped, and want love’s majesty / To strut before a wanton ambling nymph” (*Richard III* 1.1.16-17). This anxiety is compounded later when he ascends to become king for if he does not produce a legitimate heir, the Plantagenet reign may end, and furthermore the country could descend into civil war as different factions could emerge as claimants to the throne, thrusting the country into further instability.

This procreative anxiety highlights fundamental aspects and considerations of survival during this era, consider *Richard III* from the perspective of evolutionary theory. Beginning with Charles Darwin in Darwinism, the precursor to evolutionary theory, posited that all species organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. Within individual populations are constraints, namely, availability of resources which influence fitness and highlight characteristics necessary to survive the constraints of the ecosystem with other inhabitants (Darwin Appelbaum 83). In the case of Early Modern England, physical fitness and conformity to the social order for the purposes of cooperation were paramount to survival, so creation and maintenance of family units contained those characteristics integral to ensuring individual and familial survival. For example, welfare systems did not exist in Early Modern England. Families provided resources to each other, and charity was administered by the parish for the destitute, if there were resources available for distribution. Reception of resources was contingent upon the worthiness of the recipient to receiving resources, thus one was dependent on the adherence to societal norms and conventions, in order to show worthiness to receive resources to assist in survival. Availability of resources was

contingent upon the success of the community through fitness and cooperation as community members were interconnected.

Within the patriarchal social order of Early Modern England there existed a deep societal preoccupation with order and obedience. Society was presented as an organism of functionally interdependent, though unequal, parts. This model of society was at once an explanation of social inequality and a system of values. Though it is often understood that this portrayal of society was as “it ought to be,” providing a prescription for ideal social relations there existed many examples of exceptions to the norm (Wrightson 27). The patriarchal and hierarchical nature of matrimony was a microcosm of the prevailing societal construct where the male was master of his home and his wife was the subordinate, and she was often viewed as the property of the estate. Female survival within marriage was contingent upon obedience to the male head of the household. Beyond the home, into the extended family and community, choice of spouse mattered as well, as survival of the individual and kin necessitated placement of social constructs and networks to administer divisions of labor and cooperation.

In the extended community “correct choice of partners was vital in ensuring that communities were not overburdened with paupers, the inevitable result of the setting up of ‘over hastie’ marriages” (O’Hara 1). The ramifications of a marriage union of two individuals united and restructured two kin groups, and often involved the import of a newcomer into a community, therefore causing the restructuring of local social relations. Therefore, there existed extended kin and community involvement in courtship by those directly concerned with a particular marriage, which may best be understood as a way of facilitating harmony and the mutual protection of interests (O’Hara 40). Additionally, to

ensure cooperation, communal sanctions and principles determined and were implicit in social relations, so individual reputation mattered. The reputation and name of an individual were considered important because, as part of a collective, he or she was subject to collective sanctions and public opinion, particularly if individuals interacted in a plurality within the community. The force with which communal sanctions operated may be observed in the repercussions with which they had on personal health and individual psychology, in the sphere of economic, social relations, on marriage prospects, and within domestic and marital life (O'Hara 41-42).

In practice, Lawrence Stone notes, the first part of the 16th century saw marriages arranged by parents and kin for economic and social reasons, with minimal consideration of the desires of the children, but would later morph to an arrangement more closed to the influence of extended kin and emotionally warmer to internal relations (Wrightson 78). Parental and kin influence in matrimony increased as one moved up in socio-economic status. Among the aristocracy, parental domination of matchmaking was perceived to be stronger in the marriages of daughters than was the case with matching of sons, while younger children were generally accorded greater freedom of choice than was the case in the marriages of heirs and heiresses due to the inheritance laws and primogeniture (Stone 594-600). As noted by Stone, initially erotic desire for a mate was not valued, but would begin to evolve to take more precedence where even critics of Stone among social historians agree with him on the eventual dominance of marital companionship. One such critic, Valerie Traub stated that later in the Early Modern Era in England that "erotic desire for a domestic partner, in addition to desire for a reproductive, status-appropriate

mate, became a requirement for (not just a happy byproduct of) the bonds between husband and wife” (Bromley 8).

Within the couple, the ideal of marriage contained the essential element to recognize the supreme authority of the husband, and perpetuate the patriarchy. In one historic record of the era, William Whately expresses the view that the husband is God’s officer and king in his own house (Wrightson 98). Keith Wrightson describes the situation succinctly, in that the “women’s subordination was axiomatic, and was enshrined in legal disabilities, particularly with regards to property rights. Nevertheless, it was commonly agreed that the husband had duties towards, as well as privileges and authority over, the ‘weaker vessel’” (Wrightson 99). Though this was the ideal to aspire, the reality indicates “the private existence of a strong complementary and companionate ethos, side by side with, theoretical adherence to the doctrine of male authority and public female subordination” (Wrightson 100).

Within the marriage, when considering procreation and lineage, children were valued in themselves, at once as the blessing of God to those influenced by religious teachings, and as guarantees of the perpetuation of the family line to those concerned with lineage (Wrightson 112). Additionally, birth and descent were matters of significance, and were vital where hereditary titles were an issue (Wrightson 55). Particularly in the case of primogeniture, in the Early Modern Era the title and lands went in the entirety to the eldest legitimate male heir. With this expectation, a wife’s main tasks were to maintain the household, childbearing, and childrearing. Childbirth in and of itself was dangerous with high instances of death in childbirth of either mother or child. If the child did survive, there existed high child mortality. The Wrigley and Schofield

study of actual records of eight parishes in the period 1550-1649, about 25% of all children born would fail to live to the age of 10, the heaviest mortality being within the first year (Wrightson 112-113).

Chapter III.

Richard III: The Demise of a Family

From the opening lines *The Tragedy of Richard III* the play is cast as a tragedy of Machiavellian political intrigue when viewed through the lens of proximate causation, but through the lens of evolutionary theory and ultimate causation, the play illustrates the demise of a family dynasty, given Richard's inability to successfully procreate and the extended Plantagenet family's inability to expand and sustain a viable, and successful, family unit. The female characters in the play: The Duchess of York (Richard's mother), Queen Elizabeth, Anne, and Queen Margaret illuminate the perilous social structure women had to negotiate during the Early Modern Era, as they maneuver the Machiavellian landscape to ensure their survival and optimize the opportunities for survival of their kin.

Edward vs. Richard: Optimal Mates

From Richard's opening lines, the play tracks the ultimate demise of a man and a family. Richard's opening soliloquy begins with, "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this sun of York" (1.1.1-2). Naturalistic motifs, such as seasons, were a cornerstone of the English literary tradition during this era. As Christopher Perricone notes in "Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets: a Darwinian view", Shakespeare utilized the seasons to illustrate the seasons of one's life aligned to one's

sexual viability. As a point of departure, if viewed through the lens of evolutionary theory, Richard is the “our” as he juxtaposes his discontent in his procreative capabilities to the “glorious summer” of his brother, King Edward VI, the son of York (i.e. the son of Richard II) who is at the height of his sexual viability, and by extension, Richard should be in this season as well. Richard frames his brother Edward as the epitome of the virile male: successful and physically fit. Edward’s success translates from the battlefield into reproductive currency with, “And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds / To fright the souls of fearful adversaries, / He capers nimbly in a lady’s chamber / To the lascivious pleasing of a lute” (1.1.10-3). On the one hand, this passage illuminates the lightheartedness of the peaceful era, and on the other hand, Richard makes explicit that war time success and gains translate into abundance of access to mates. Juxtaposed to Edward, Richard possesses wealth and status, and has even demonstrated prowess in combat as it is implied he fought with Edward, but Richard does not possess the physical attributes that would make him an optimal, or even attractive, mate. As Perricone states, he does not possess the “yum, yum” factor in ultimate causation, where ultimate causation leads to the origin of new genetic programs (i.e. procreation) (Perricone 12). From 1.1.14-1.1.21, Richard makes explicit his reaction to his physicality, and how this physicality is perceived in the world. Specifically, imbedded in the construction of lines 14-18 Richard has internalized how the world views him, “But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks, / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass; / I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion / To strut before a wanton ambling nymph” (1.1.14-18); whereas, in lines 19-21 Richard articulates his frustration with his physicality and perceived physiological shortcomings. He curses Nature (biology) for his physicality with “I, that am curtailed of

this fair proportion, / Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature, / Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time / Into this breathing works, scarce half made up” (1.1.19-1.1.21). He concludes, “And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover / To entertain these fair well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain⁶” (1.1.28-30). Therefore, his villainy is a reaction to the social accepted belief that he is perceived to be an unattractive a mate.

Female Survival within the Social Construct

The seduction of Anne in Act 1.2 is an intriguing interchange between Richard and Anne, as Richard improbably succeeds in seducing Anne, the wife of the Plantagenet family rivals. Though from the evolutionary perspective, if the scene is viewed from the perspective survival and mate selection, Anne is in a vulnerable position, and must consider Richard’s proposal. In Richard’s success, not only does he gain a feminine ideal, but he becomes a more attractive male as he will be enriched with the land attached to her inheritance.

Upon Anne’s arrival with the corpse of her recently deceased father in law, Anne epitomizes the anxiety women of her era and social stature. The stage is framed to illuminate the challenges that lie ahead for her. She follows the body of the last man available to provide protection and security, and that he is a dethroned Lancaster, the vulnerable state she inhabits is amplified. Recall that women of her class during this era

⁶ From the *Oxford English Dictionary*, originally, “villain” was a low-born base-minded rustic; a man of ignoble ideas or instincts; in later use, an unprincipled or depraved scoundrel; a man naturally disposed to base or criminal actions, or deeply involved in the commission of disgraceful crimes. That Shakespeare would use “villain” illuminates an interesting duality, in that Richard embodies a certain “lowliness” but also is cognizant of manifesting Machiavellian behavior.

were wholly dependent on their fathers and then husbands and extended family (mainly male relatives) for security and survival. The women were sheltered and limited in their ability to move freely in society.⁷ In marriage, women ensured their utility and security by bearing an heir. Anne follows the corpse of her father in law, she walks in the wake of the end of the Lancaster legacy, among male supporters of the late king, but not of them. Anne is isolated and adrift with no male to provide safety. During this era, as a widower, she had some autonomy if there were resources through inheritance left for her, but as she is coming from the vanquished Lancasters, her assets could have been repossessed by the crown, and she could have been arrested merely for being a threat to stability. In the broader perspective of evolutionary theory, one can view the York-Lancaster feud (i.e. War of the Roses) through the lens of evolutionary theory in that there is a winner and a loser, and to the victor go the spoils. The victor is the superior mate.

Anne epitomizes the feminine ideal of the era in that she is pious and devoted, and seeks to curse Richard. Though Anne is vulnerable, she exhibits love and loyalty to the newly deceased by cursing Richard with “If ever he have child, abortive be it, / Prodigious, and untimely brought to light, / Whose ugly and unnatural aspect / May fright the hopeful mother at the view, / And that be heir to his unhappiness” (1.2.21-25). For the death of her husband, Edward, and his father Henry VI, Anne curses Richard to produce malformed offspring, exhibiting a sense of procreative agency. It has been noted that the women of *Richard III*, exhibit power in their curses. That Anne curses Richard portends

⁷ From Holinshed and Hall, Anne’s sister Isabel and husband, George, Duke of Clarence, Richard III’s brother, attempted to claim the land in her inheritance, and only through her clandestine marriage to Richard was she able to retain said inheritance.

to the ultimate power a woman possesses in giving birth. That she would wish ill of Richard's offspring is to exhibit that she recognizes the victor in the York-Lancaster feud, but she does not wish procreative agency (i.e. a future through continuing the familial line) it is not simply to reduce the potential future offspring to a curse of being the likeness of Richard, but to end the genetic line.

As Tillyard has noted, the standoff between Anne and Richard exhibits the Christian moralistic dichotomy of good vs. evil, but from the evolutionary perspective, Anne's vengefulness is a display of an attractive trait in mate selection: loyalty. As Richard states, "More wonderful when angels are so angry / Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman" (1.2.75-76). Richard is able to move beyond Anne's acrimony when he claims, "I did not kill your husband" (1.2.92). In this change in tenor, Anne's doubts move from the objective absolute in the accusation that Richard committed murder to a subjective opinion that Richard is a liar. In the interest of self-preservation, Anne cannot succumb to seduction from a murderer, but she can make the case for it if he is merely untruthful. Richard presses the advantage and woos Anne by flattering her for her beauty (mate selection) and speaking to the cost to both families in loss of life (familial ties) (1.2.154-181).

In Anne's reluctance to kill Richard with his sword, Anne has capitulated. He offers her a token with, "Vouchsafe to wear this ring" (1.2.204) illuminating the gravity of the scene as the exchange of tokens were significant in declarations of commitment during this era. Anne responds with, "To take is not to give" (1.2.205) which exhibits complicity while denying her agency illuminating that Anne accepts there are no other alternatives as everyone she has depended on up until this moment is dead (Arden164). In

Anne's receipt of the token, Richard offers her shelter again when he says, "Repair to Crosby House" (1.2.216), his home. Symbolically, she is leaving behind her Lancastrian protectors, but as she moves into Richard's home, she is also moving away from her other alternative, seeking sanctuary in the abbey, which would allow her to survive with the protection of the church, but she would not be able to have a family.

In Richard's famous lines that follow the wooing of Anne (1.2.229-255), Richard unpacks the complexity of the courtship. On the one hand, he has vanquished his rival and has won the woman, but he admits that Edward is the superior mate with "A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman, / Framed in the prodigality of Nature" (1.2.244-245). Richard acknowledges his inferiority to Anne's deceased husband with "On me, whose all not equals to Edward's moiety? / On me, that halts and am misshapen thus?" (1.2.248-250). Then provides a male perspective on Anne's dilemma to engage with Richard after he killed her husband "And will she yet abase her eyes on me, / That cropped the golden prime of this sweet prince. / And made her widow to a woeful bed?" (1.2.251-253). Richard fails to see that Anne does not have many options after the death of her father, her husband, and his father.

The precariousness of the position that Anne is in as a woman and entering into a dysfunctional family is illuminated in Act 1.3, with the exchanges between Queen Elizabeth and Queen Margaret, the wife of the dethroned and deceased Henry VI. In the familial dynamic, the animosity exhibited by Richard with his sister-in-law with "What, marry, may she? Marry with a king, / A bachelor, and a handsome stripling too" (1.3.99-1.3.100) which reiterates the fitness and position of his brother, and how Elizabeth is a social inferior, therefore the likelihood of familial support appears unlikely. To heighten

the situation, Queen Margaret enters, and she acts as a cautionary tale of Elizabeth's potential fate, accusing Richard, "Thou killed'st my husband Henry in the Tower, / And Edward, my poor son, at Tewkesbury" (1.3.118-119). To which Richard responds, "Ere you were queen, ay, or your husband king" (1.3.120). Richard diminishes the Margaret's position as Queen, by implying that she was queen simply because her husband was king by using "ay, or" rather than using "and". In a dramatic moment, which shows how little agency women of the era possessed, Margaret laments what she has lost in losing her son and husband, yet still expects allegiance though she has no position any longer in "I was, but I do find more pain in banishment / Than death can yield me here by my abode. / A husband and son thou ow'st me; / - And thou a kingdom; - all of you, allegiance. / This sorrow that I have, by right is yours, / And all the pleasures you usurp are mine" (1.3.167-172).

The vulnerability of women within the social construct, as political machinations play out, is illuminated again towards the end of the play when Richard seeks to court Elizabeth of York, Queen Elizabeth's daughter and his cousin, and Queen Elizabeth must consider the marriage. By Act 4.4, Anne has died and Richard has no heir, it is presumed he has killed the princes in the Tower, and his political foothold is waning as his supporters begin to abandon him. A male heir would strengthen familial ties as well as ensure the Plantagenet legacy for another generation. At the outset of the act, one finds the three matriarchs caught in the cross-hairs of political power plays as orchestrated by Richard's machinations and rumblings of political maneuvers from afar. Queen Elizabeth has learned her boys, the princes, are dead. In their precarious position under the reign of Richard III, they find no security under the umbrella of his reign: there is no cooperation

among them nor Richard (reciprocal altruism), no strong familial relationships (extended kin relationships) as the only one who is related to Richard who remains is the Duchess, and there are no males (procreation) who can provide any legal security from the current monarch as the princes are dead (4.4.1-135).

Richard and Queen Elizabeth have had a long-established animosity from the outset of the play that is on the one hand an expression of political maneuvering, and on the other hand, a fundamental destabilization of the family. This destabilization jeopardizes the extended family unit, planting the seed for the end of the family by the “irreconcilable conflicts they produced” (Rackin 50). Act I established the root the conflict between Queen Elizabeth and Richard as her marriage to Richard’s brother Edward⁸ was not supported by Richard, at least, which created a chasm within the family. Though it is only alluded to that Richard is responsible for the deaths of the princes in the tower, Queen Elizabeth holds him responsible. As an ultimately causal act, pedicide⁹ is antithetical to survival in evolutionary theory as all action should be to ensure continuation of the family. The imminent dissolution of the family leaves the few remaining characters hedging possible outcomes. Before Richard begins negotiating for consent from Queen Elizabeth to court Elizabeth of York, the Duchess curses Richard and departs, leaving only Richard and Queen Elizabeth from the extended family while Elizabeth of York is hiding in an abbey for protection. Richard needs another spouse from a noble family to consolidate his power base, claim to the throne, and produce a

⁸ Historically, Elizabeth Woodville (Queen Elizabeth) and Edward secretly married. Until their marriage, there was an understanding that Edward would marry Warwick’s daughter, Isabel Neville, Anne’s older sister, to unify the two families, and as a reward to Warwick for his efforts as a Yorkist supporter. The Woodville-Plantagenet marriage would cause Warwick to join the Lancastrian supporters, and dethrone Edward, albeit, for only a brief period of time.

⁹ Listed here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_types_of_killing#cite_ref-1

legitimate heir. Queen Elizabeth is in a vulnerable position as she has no male relatives to offer security except Richard who has, according to the play, arguably killed all her other immediate male relatives. Queen Elizabeth summarizes the perversion of his attempt to woo Elizabeth of York and weakened position as a potential mate with:

Where were I to say? Her father's brother
Would be her lord? Or shall I say her uncle?
Or he that slew her brothers and her uncles?
Under what title shall I woo for thee,
That God, the law, my honour and her love
Can make seem pleasing to her tender years? (4.4.336-342)

Perricone argued that Shakespeare's Procreation Sonnets (Sonnets 1-17) are assertions for nature to battle against the tyranny of time and procreate lest one's youth be squandered. For example, "Which hides your life, and shows not half your parts.../ But were some child of our alive that time, / You should live twice in it and in my rhyme" (Sonnet 17 6-8) is a meditation of using time to increase your time through begetting a child. In Queen Elizabeth's final push to dissuade Richard from pursuing her daughter, she states:

That thou hast wronged in the time o'erpast;
For I myself have many tears to wash
Hereafter time, for time past wronged by thee.
The children live whose fathers thou hast slaughtered,
Ungoverned youth, to wail it in their age;
The parents live whose children thou hast butchered,
Old barren plants, to wail it with their age.

Swear not by time to come, for that thou hast
Misused ere used, by times ill-used o'erpast. (4.4.388-396)

In the framework of ultimate causation, Queen Elizabeth is arguing that Richard embodies the polar opposite of an optimal mate as he has used his time to be an agent of death rather than an advocate for procreation and cultivate an environment in which the offspring would survive.

Family: Curses and Dysfunction

Throughout the play, critics has argued about the merits and utility of the curses the female character employ. Taken from an evolutionary perspective, Margaret's particular curse in (1.3.221-1.3.227) illuminates fissures in amongst Richard's kin and lack of reciprocal altruism with, "The worm of conscience still begnaw the soul; Thy friends suspect for traitors while thou liv'st, / And take deep traitors for they dearest friends; / No sleep close up that deadly eye of thine, / Unless it be while some tormenting dream / Affrights thee with a hell of ugly devils. / Thou elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog." Again, the word "abortive" appears spoken a woman whose personal agency is conflated with her reproductive abilities. Reproduction is reiterated by Margaret "Thou slave of nature and son of hell; / Thou slander of thy heavy mother's womb, / Thou loathed issue of the father's loins / Thou rag of honour, thou detested-" (1.3.229-232) where she is abruptly cut off by Richard with "Margaret / Ha?" (1.3.233, 1.3.235) nullifying any command of the situation Margaret thought she possessed.

Though *Richard III* has been viewed through various lenses of literary criticism as observations of Richard's tragic undoing, few have viewed the play as the undoing of the Plantagenet family as a viable family unit. In Act 2.2, Queen Elizabeth's husband, and Richard's brother, Edward dies. Unlike in Act 1 when Clarence is killed, Edward dies of natural causes as Queen Elizabeth laments, "Edward, my lord, thy son, our king, is dead. / Why grow the branches when the root is gone? / Why wither not the leaves that want their sap?" (2.2.40-46). Where Queen Elizabeth laments from a hereditary and familial sense with words such as "branches" and "roots," the Duchess initially responds with "Ah, so much interest have I in thy sorrow / As I had title in thy noble husband" (2.2.47-48). Arden notes that from the O.E.D. these lines are viewed as legal metaphors where "interest" is to possess a right to share in something and "title" is the right to possession of property (Arden 227). That the Duchess would first respond with these underscores the legal protections both women have lost. The Duchess goes on to empathize with "I have bewept a worthy husband's death / And lived with looking on his images;" (2.2.49-2.2.50) where the images are the children they had, which in one respect demonstrates the reproductive success in passing along genetic material by the Duchess and her husband had in creating progeny, and foreshadows the fate of the Princes in the Tower. The Duchess expands the sentiment with "But now two mirrors of his princely semblance / Are cracked in pieces by malignant death, / And I, for comfort, have but one false glass / That grieves me when I see my shame in him" (2.2.51-54). where the false glass is Richard. In the emotional and familial sense, the Duchess concludes "Thou art a widow, yet thou art a mother, / And hast the comfort of thy children left;" (2.2.55-56), but also as a mother has the protection of her progeny as her son is the heir apparent. The Duchess

concludes her speech with “But death hath snatched my husband from mine arms / And plucked two crutches from my feeble hands. / Clarence and Edward...” (2.2.57-59).

Unlike Queen Elizabeth, in losing her husband, and her age, does not have the opportunity to have more children, and she has lost the two children she feels she could rely on, Edward and Clarence, and has no husband either to offer protection. Her immediate familial network is reduced to Richard III.

Within the Plantagenet familial network, the dysfunction of the network is illuminated when the children of Clarence, Boy and Daughter, call out their aunt for her lack of empathy and mourning when she heard their father died. Queen Elizabeth illuminates the fractured family network. The Boy begins with “Ah, aunt! You wept not for our father’s death. / How can we aid you with our kindred tears?” (2.2.62-63), and Clarence’s Daughter: “Our fatherless distress was left unmoaned; / Your widow-dolour likewise be unwept” (2.2.64-65). Queen Elizabeth responds, “Give me no help in lamentation, / I am not barren to bring forth complaints” (2.2.66-67). This highlights the fractures within the family unit as Queen Elizabeth stands isolated with the extended family, but the use of “not barren” suggests that she literally can find enough sorrow that she needs no support or commiseration, but that she is still fertile, thus can move beyond the Plantagenets. This isolation is underscored when in the following lines the Duchess, as an ideal matriarch, exhibits empathy and sorrow for all generously (2.2.79-88). Interceding, Rivers injects a moment of lucidity with “Madam, bethink you, like a careful mother / Of the young prince your son: send straight for him; / Let him be crowned. In him your comfort lives. / Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward’s grave / And plant your joys in living Edward’s throne” (2.2.96-100). On the one hand this exhibits the

political situation, in that Queen Elizabeth's son Edward is heir apparent to the throne. On the other hand, this illuminates the precarious situation that Queen Elizabeth is in, she does not possess close kin affinities with her surviving kin, but she can ensure the safety and survival of herself and her children if her son is crowned.

Unlike Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess possesses no options beyond relying on Richard. Toward the end of the play, the Duchess' curse to Richard is the culmination of the familial relationship of the tragedy that is antithetical to survival. She curses Richard with death. Phyllis Rackin argues that within the play the women work within the normative language of the play, though diminished, but ultimately work towards the establishment of the Tudor dynasty, a proximate causation in establishing a new political regime. The ultimate causal perspective is that leadership will have a fundamentally different genetic makeup. Rackin contrast the female characters of *Richard III* to other female characters in Shakespeare's plays arguing that the Otherness of other Shakespearean female characters lent an agency to act and speak out of normative societal constructs, which empowers them with demonic attributes (Rackin 51-52). That Rackin employs supernatural descriptors such as "demonic" to transcend normative societal constructs shows what is necessary to employ by female characters in Shakespeare's plays, which illuminates the ultimate causal system women are embedded within and must maneuver using the normative language of the system. The Duchess, like Anne and Queen Elizabeth, is fundamentally disempowered within this patriarchal system, but is lucid of ultimately causal outcomes. In her final lines, she states:

Therefore, take with thee my more grievous curse,
Which in the day of battle tire thee more

Than all the complete armour that thou wear'st.
My prayers on the adverse party fight,
And there the little souls of Edward's children
Whisper the spirit of thine enemies
And promise them success and victory.
Bloody thou art; bloody will be thy end.
Shame serves thy life and doth thy death attend. (4.4.188-196)

Through the lens of evolutionary theory, that she uses normative language to curse him with death. First, she addresses his fitness and curses him to tire more therefore losing to his rival and she confronts him with the pedicide he committed with the death of the princes. As the mother who brought Richard into the world, to curse Richard with death is to acknowledge a wish to reverse the genetic variation she presented to the world, thus reneging on her contribution to ultimate causation.

Chapter IV.

Othello: Procreation Confronts the Patriarchy

Shakespeare's *Othello*, like *Richard III*, is another example of the protagonists' marginalization through a dramatized expression of anxiety towards "otherness" running concurrently to the quickly evolving and expanding Venetian and English societies¹⁰ of the Early Modern Era (Karim-Cooper 1). With the machinations of Iago as a catalyst, Othello and Desdemona are confronted with societal bias and the ethnocentrism of the Venetian patriarchy intent to prevent biological realization of their elopement by preventing the consummation of their marriage in Act 1.

During this era, Venice attracted foreigners seeking to participate in the economic success of the region, and was developed a society that multi-cultural and cosmopolitan (Karim-Cooper 1). As Helen Gardner writes "[Venice] was a cosmopolitan society in which there are two kinds of bonds between the members, the bond of economic interest and the bond of personal friendship, which may coincide, run parallel with each other or conflict" (Gardner 214). During this era, the Venetian civic, military and economic tolerance of foreigners was combined with "a patrician aversion to people from outside the city contaminating their pure lineage" (Karim-Cooper 1-2). This "pure lineage"

¹⁰ Karim-Cooper, Farah. "Strangers in the City: the Cosmopolitan Nature of 16th-Century Venice." *The British Library*, The British Library, 16 Nov. 2015, www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/strangers-in-the-city-the-cosmopolitan-nature-of-16th-century-venice.

From Karim-Cooper: "Just how much Shakespeare's audience saw of itself and London reflected back at them through his representation of Venice will never be known. But what is clear is Shakespeare's sense that the world he was living in resembled the one he was portraying: a diverse city full of arresting contradictions."

created strong extended kin networks and a consolidation of resources amongst the Venetian elite.

Venice of this era was organized into a tripartite structure consisting of the *patriciate* (nobility) at the top, followed by the *cittadini originari* (elite class) comprised of Venetian citizens by birth, and the *popolani* (general public) comprised of those outside the first two classes who can be either native or foreign born (Ruma 36). Social mobility out of the *popolani* was achieved only through conversion to Catholicism. In an effort to facilitate commonality, writes Natalie Rothman, “Conversion in early modern Venice operated as a mechanism for the transformation of Muslims and Jews...into properly-constructed Catholic subjects, capable of filling normative kinship and institutional roles in Venetian society” (Rothman, 57). This is the class Othello belongs as Iago states in 2.3.338 “were’t to renounce his baptism.” By members working within a societally accepted framework, families optimize their procreative options and networks by creating alliances through connecting families. Venetian patrician marriages in this period exemplified the blending of familial and civic concerns: the *case* (family clan) and the *terra* (city-state) (Sanudo 45). When viewed through the biological lens of procreation and creating viable family units, the societal constructs of Venice illuminates the potential for considerable anxiety when members of the state select mates deemed biologically optimal to the opposite sex, but outside of preordained and accepted societal constraints organized along familial, class, racial and religious boundaries, as Othello and Desdemona experience.

Male Competition: Iago

In mate selection, potential mates exhibit their best characteristics as evidence of their biological viability, and ideally, in the heteronormative relationship, the opposite sex chooses the best candidate to attract for procreative purposes and the creation of viable family units to work within the extended kin network. The opening lines of *Othello* find Iago and Roderigo discussing the promotion Iago felt he should have received, but lost to Cassio (1.1.8-26). This discussion as a point of departure illuminates the influence the state has on one's livelihood through meritorious advancement, but in the realm of ultimate causation, the perceived inferiority of Iago as an optimal mate compared to Cassio and Othello based on military performance.

Iago, Cassio and Othello are three foreigners functioning as soldiers who are in Venice to contribute to the economy by fighting on the city-state's behalf and benefit from the infrastructure afforded to the citizens. Iago¹¹ is a Spaniard with military experience who has been denied career advancement on two occasions. In the first instance, Othello has been promoted to be Iago's superior, and the governing body voted Cassio as lieutenant over Iago, which has an emotional effect on him, and affects his economic situation where Iago laments, "Three great ones of the city, / In personal suit to make me his lieutenant, / Off-capped to him, and by the faith of man / I know my price, I am worth no worse a place" (1.1.7-11). Iago feels he had proven himself sufficiently on behalf of the state at Rhodes and Cyprus to be promoted (1.1.28). Yet Cassio has been elected by the state without sufficient experience, by Iago's belief, where he states,

¹¹ It is presumed that Iago is Spanish as the abbreviation for the Spanish name "Santiago" (Arden).

“Wherein the toged consuls can propose / As masterly as he. Mere prattle without practice / Is all his soldiership – but he, sir, had th’ election” (1.1.24-26). Additionally, Iago expresses his disgust at being Othello’s subordinate with “And I, God bless the mark, his Moorship’s ancient!” (1.1.32). Iago articulates his frustration with the system in which he functions with, “Why, there’s no remedy, ‘tis the curse of service: / Preferment goes by letter and affection / And not by gradation, where each second / Stood heir to th’ first” (1.1.34-37). Iago possesses a flawed belief in his superior character based on racial prejudice and seeming delusions of the talent he possesses, though he is a Spaniard and viewed more favorably than Othello, Iago is still an outsider to the Venetian elite. Iago will use these same beliefs to frame bias of the Venetian patriarchy against the union of Desdemona and Othello.

The Biological Fitness of Desdemona and Othello vs. Operating within the Social Construct

Recall that ultimate causations, or evolutionary causations, are those decisions and actions that lead to the origin of new genetic programs (Perricone 12). Ideally, these should be combinations of two mates possessing optimal fitness to create improved genetic combinations through their offspring. This is achieved when two members of the opposite sex have identified optimal fitness in a potential mate, attract the potential mate, and intercourse leads to successful in procreation, therefore delivering a new genetic program (e.g. offspring).

In *Othello*, Desdemona epitomizes the pinnacle of desirability in the females of Venice both within Venetian custom and when considering ultimate causation. From the biological perspective, she is young, therefore she possesses optimal fitness for childbearing and, given her presumed age, the high probability of surviving childbirth. Her virtue suggests she is a virgin, therefore whomever she marries will possess certainty that a child she carries will be the product of their union. Within her community, she is valued for her obedience in that her father, Brabantio, expects her operate within to the heteronormative patriarchy that Venice functions, and her noble standing as the daughter of Brabantio affords Brabantio certain utility and leverage in negotiating her potential marriage.

Othello identifies Desdemona through the lens of ultimate causation in mate selection, as he identifies her as a female who possesses optimal characteristics to procreate with him. When defending his elopement before Brabantio, the Duke, and Senators, Othello recalls the qualities that attracted him to Desdemona. Othello is succinct when he states, “She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them.” (1.3.168-169). Through the lens of ultimate causation, this statement illuminates the emotional attraction, but almost the cooperation inherent to creating successful families in that Othello has risked and prevailed in the battles he has fought, and Desdemona possesses the ability to empathize, therefore typifying the fundamental cooperation necessary to create a new family nucleus with a high probability of success. She reiterates this cooperation when she declares that her first duty is to her husband, Othello and second to her father, Brabantio (1.3.185-189). Though this

cooperation comes into question because, according to Venetian custom, she was expected to defer to her father in who she sought to marry in the first place.

In the pursuit of creating variation in the genetic make-up by creating a new family unit with Othello and potentially procreating, Desdemona defies her social utility in the patriarchy, which should strive for the cooperation amongst kin and extended networks, as determined by her father Brabantio. Brabantio articulates this with, “So opposed to marriage that she shunned / The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation, / Would ever have, t’incur a general mock, Run from her guardage¹² to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou?” (1.2.67-71). Brabantio possesses not only an expectation was that she would marry into a wealthy family, therefore aligning her family with another prestigious family, but he also possesses a legal obligation and right to the outcome of a potential marriage (Delgado de Torres 334). His disbelief is a conflation of patriarchal expectation and racial prejudice. His belief is that she, by choosing “the sooty bosom” is turning down access to wealth and security (i.e. access to resources) with the “curled darlings”, a suggestion of European hair texture. Brabantio believes what has happened to him has implications not only for the rule of all Venetian fathers but for the state itself, as he says, ‘For if such Actions may have passage free, / Bond-slaves, and Pagans shall our Statemen be’ (1.2.120). In other words, Brabantio believes male hypergamy, of men marrying above their station, has the effect of reversing the proper order of rule in the republic (Delgado de Torres 335).

¹² The law giving custody of the person, property (or both) of an infant or person legally incapable of managing his/her own affairs. During this era, the legal status of daughters was the same as for infants and mentally challenged.

The hypergamy Brabantio accuses Othello is the point of conflict in placing Othello within the Venetian societal construct. From the outset of the play, Othello is reduced to racially derisive nomenclature often typified in using “the Moor” as a means of identifying his otherness, particularly by those who are at odds with his success (e.g. Iago and Brabantio). He is acknowledged for his military prowess, and is both lauded amongst the Venetian government as “valiant” and envied by Iago. Through the evolutionary lens, Othello is an optimal mate when accounting for biological fitness and resources for survival which demonstrate overt physical fitness and tactical prowess. Othello recounts to the Duke, Senators and Brabantio, “For since these arms of mine had seven years’ pith / Till now some nine moons wasted, they have used / Their dearest action in the tented field, / And little of this great world can I speak / More than pertains to feats of broil and battle” (1.3.84-88). Othello details his masculinity and potency as a viable mate as exhibited in his success on the battle field, but is not politically adept to consider the repercussions of challenging the social construct. He articulates that he is not politically adept with, “Rude I am of speech / And little blest with the soft phrase of peace” (1.3.82-83).

Within the social construct, Othello is afforded merit for his fitness (i.e. military prowess) as it has been used for the benefit of Venice. It is unclear whether his hypergamy is a function of arrogance, ignorance or a combination of both when he states, “My parts, my title and my perfect soul / Shall manifest me rightly” (1.2.31-32). His desire for Desdemona transcends the social construct and reframes through the lens of ultimate causation in that he states, “But that I love the gentle Desdemona” (1.2.25). This is the first time Desdemona is referred to by her name in the play. Brabantio nor Iago

have identified her by her name, only have identified her by possessives (e.g. “my daughter”). Othello is aware of how he functions within the constraints of Venetian society, but pursues the mate he has selected for himself though the societal construct deems Desdemona out of his reach. Othello articulates his place within the Venetian hierarchy, by showing the appropriate deference to the Duke and Senators with, “Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors, / My very noble and approved good masters” (1.3.77-78). He admits that he has made this transgression with, “That I have ta’en away this old man’s daughter / It is most true; true, I have married her” (1.3.79-80). In using the derogatory ‘old man’ to address Brabantio, his new father-in-law, Othello denies the kin relationship with the show of disrespect, and denies the need for cooperation in the extended kin network. This naivety is articulated in the next lines “The very head and front of my offending / Hath this extent, no more” (1.3.81-82). It can be argued that he is applying the same skills he used to prevail on the battlefield to his interpersonal skills when he states, “For such proceeding I am charged withal - / I won his daughter” (1.3.93-94). Furthermore, this line of thought is summarized by Othello when speaking to Iago with:

My services, which I have done the signiory,
Shall out-tongue his complaints. ‘Tis yet to know –
Which, when I know that boasting is an honour,
I shall promulgate – I fetch my life and being
from men of royal siege, and my demerits
May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune
As this that I have reached. (1.2.18-24)

As Othello had risen from being a slave to his rank as an officer, perhaps he does not know how kin networks are vital, and acceptance by the extended network is necessary to optimize survival; regardless, this is a fatal flaw. Iago works to exploit the tenuous belief Othello possesses that the marriage is approved.

Consummation of the Marriage is Crucial

Othello has been conditionally accepted by Venetian society for his utility as preeminent military officer which shrouds his acceptance in ambiguity. In this regard, there is the view that Othello, in his euphoria and over confidence of his achievements in the military service he renders to the state, he erroneously believes that he is fully integrated into the Venetian society (Ruma 36). Yet the thought of him usurping the prized Desdemona creates anxiety as the transgression of crossing the implicit color line threatens the social coexistence (Ruma 37). Brabantio, at the center of microcosm of the family nucleus must consider what his family will become through this union and, within the construct of how Venetian heteronormative practice how this may affect access of resources. Iago is there to frame the repercussions in the worst context. By extension, the patriciate confronts itself as an establishment when Othello is able to usurp a valued female, who is not supposed to be available/accessible to males outside the cittadini originari at least. In the mind of the patriciate, Desdemona should not view anyone outside of the cittadini originari as a superior mate to a member of the elite. Regardless,

consummation of the marriage would solidify the union and procreation will irreversibly challenge the preordained social construct.

In ultimate causation, realization of the union is achieved through sexual relations, the outcome of which are intended to produce offspring representing the evolution of genetic material. Within a social construct, legitimization and assimilation of offspring in a society is achieved through a marriage contract, an agreement recognizing the union before the community. Consummation must take place to make the contract irreversible. Iago recognizes this and communicates this urgency to Othello with, “Are you fast¹³ married? Be assured of this, / That the magnifico is much beloved / and hath in him effect a voice potential / As double as the duke’s: he will divorce you” (1.2.11-14). This illustrates again how ultimate causation supersedes proximate causation in that consummation can potentially create a new genetic program whereas the social construct of the marriage contract can easily be reversed.

Iago becomes an agent to maximize the anxiety created by the union of Othello and Desdemona. Through his words and actions, Iago acts antithetically to evolutionary theory by stoking and encouraging regressive reactions rather than allow the state evolve with the changing face of the citizens, by relying on race and the class system rather than evolve to accommodate superior character and fitness. Iago calls:

Call up her father,
Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
And, though he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies! Though that his joy be joy

¹³ Firmly, consummated. (Arden)

Yet throw such changes of vexation on't
As it may lose some colour. (1.1.66-72)

Iago is committed to presenting the situation, and union, in the worst circumstances, which could be a direct challenge to the established heteronormative state. Within this framework of the Venetian state, marriages are by ultimate consent of the patriarch as the patriarch controls the family resources and represents the family before the state. Children are viewed with patriarchal ownership, exemplified by the language of possession employed by Brabantio in discussing his daughter. Desdemona's duty is to make an advantageous marriage on behalf of her father, and by extension, her family. She is viewed by her father and potential mates as an asset, and when describing her potentially having sexual relations, she is described by her breeding viability, like livestock. Her father never uses her name, rather describes her in the possessive, illustrating her utility to him. During this era in Venice, a bride's personal name is rarely mentioned but only her patronymic emphasizes the societal aspect of a marriage (Sanudo 46). That Desdemona is part of Brabantio's household which he rules makes her part of his being. Desdemona's being is inherited from her father, and as part of his flesh and blood, he never sees her interests separate from his own (Delgado de Torres 335).

Iago functions within the belief system that Desdemona is Brabantio's property as well. He frames the marriage as a thief with "...Brabantio! Thieves, thieves, thieves! / Look to your house, your daughter and your [money]¹⁴ bags" (1.1.78-80). Iago

dehumanizes both Desdemona and Othello, by reducing them to their asset value as livestock, “Even now, now, very now, an old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe! Arise, arise, / Awake the snorting citizens with the bell / Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you” (1.1.87-90) dehumanizing both Desdemona and Othello, as well as illustrating that both are viewed for their economic potential. Yet, that both are characterized as different species suggests their racial and class difference suggests sexually incompatibility (i.e. that they might not produce issue, or if they do, it will be unable to produce issue). The sexual suggestion in the sound of the repetition of “even now, now, very now” suggests ejaculation, and Iago follows soon after with “...you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you’ll have your nephews neigh to you, you’ll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans!” (1.1.109-112) suggesting on the one hand, an evolution of genetic material, but framed as the devolution to an inferior species. Finally, to make the act explicit, Iago explains, “I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs¹⁵” (1.1.113-115). Iago’s focus on the potential consummation of the union illuminates procreative anxieties which suggest an inherent conflict of interest between the evolutionary expectation of procreation between optimal mates to create successful family units and what the established patriarchy views as an optimal mate

(Delgado de Torres 336). “At last Desdemona appears. Her first words describe the daughter’s state: a divided duty (1.3.205). Brabantio believes his daughter is always a daughter, even if she becomes a wife. Hence, her first allegiance is to parent and family. Desdemona disagrees; a daughter is a daughter first, until she becomes a wife, and then

¹⁵ Sexual relations. (Arden)

she is a daughter only secondarily. Brabantio is shocked and wounded that his own daughter prefers and gives precedence to a nonrelative over her own flesh and blood. In his dismay, the legal fiction of generation seems preferable to procreation, for if exogamy means that nonrelatives take precedence over the love of one's own flesh and blood, then better to adopt children than to beget them naturally (1.3.217).

Brabantio's understanding of an optimal mate for Desdemona is rooted in proximate causal considerations such as economic expansion and cultivating influence, and he cannot understand her attraction to Othello. Brabantio frames his initial disbelief with language rooted in possession with "O heaven, how she got out? O treason of the blood!" (1.1.166) and later "she is abused, stolen from me and corrupted" (1.3.61). Early on in Act 1, it is revealed that Brabantio turned down Roderigo illuminating how invested Brabantio was in Desdemona making an advantageous marriage as he says to Roderigo "In honest plainness thou hast heard me say / My daughter is not for thee" (1.1.96-97). Roderigo, as a former potential suitor, understands the social and familial transgression by Desdemona with "That from the sense of all civility / I thus would play and trifle with your reverence / Your daughter, if you have not given her leave, / I say again, hath made a gross revolt, / Tying her duty, beauty, wit and fortunes / In an extravagant and wheeling stranger" (1.1.128-134).

As he defends his anger before the Duke and Senators, Brabantio reveals how little he knows of his daughter's personal autonomy and agency, "A maiden never bold, / Of spirit so still and quiet that her motion / Blushed at herself; and she, in spite of nature, / Of years, of country, credit, everything, / To fall in love with what she feared to look on?" (1.3.95-99). Revealing his differing view of an ideal mate for her, by suggesting she

is the one who possesses flawed judgment with “It is judgment maimed and most imperfect / That will confess perfection so could err / Against all rules of nature” (1.3.100-102). Brabantio does not deny that there is sexual attraction, but does not understand it as it functions outside of his view of who she should be attracted to when he states, “I therefore vouch again / That with some mixtures powerful o’er the blood [sexual appetite] / Or with some dram conjured to this effect / He wrought upon her” (1.3.104-106). In Brabantio’s disbelief, he continues to suggest that Othello has deployed some sort of witchcraft over Desdemona. As mentioned earlier in this paper, there is the argument that this suggestion of witchcraft effectively effeminizes Othello, but through the lens of evolutionary theory, the suggestion of witchcraft reveals about Brabantio a lack of evolution in his thought about what is both possible and viable in mate selection.

The State Prevents Consummation of the Marriage

By extension, the greater patriarchy is challenged to accept the marriage of Desdemona and Othello. The Duke and the Senators personify patriarchy, writing the rules and giving the inhabitants of Venice their identity, and survival within the system of the state is by their consent. To exemplify this, the Duke and Senators are introduced in the play laying the plans for the advancement of Venice in planning battle against the Ottomans in Cyprus. The Duke and Senators control the outcomes for the state, and by extension, the citizens. The Venetian State gives the citizens their identity. For example, within the play, the Duke is the first to refer to Othello by name, but only for his utility,

“Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you” (1.3.49). Additionally, the Duke is the first person, after Othello, to refer to Desdemona by her name, “Fetch Desdemona hither” (1.3.122). Ultimately, it is the Duke and Senators who tacitly accept the marriage union, but prevent Desdemona and Othello from consummating their marriage at the end of Act I.

In the *mise-en-scène* of Act 1.3, Othello is called to defend his marriage before the governing body of Venice whilst the patricians, the Duke and Senators, devise a battle plan to confront the Ottomans in Cyprus. Othello is crucial to the success of the campaign, so there exists a bias to rule in his favor as they mediate the argument between Othello and Brabantio. This is antithetical to the reality of sanctioned Venetian marriages of the era where marriages were public displays, often celebrated as weeklong festivals meant to make the union as visible as possible (Sanudo 44). These festivities took place after long negotiations between the families of the potential mates. Here, under the shroud of battle planning, Othello and Desdemona’s marriage is obscured. This environment is also the only environment in which Othello is permitted access to the patriciate, so the Duke and Senators must hear his argument as a *quid pro quo* to enlisting Othello to defend the Venetian interests in Cyprus.

The nature of the *quid pro quo* between Duke and Senators and Othello manifests into a tacit verbal acceptance of the marriage, but a prevention of the consummation as the patriciate demonstrates Othello’s utility within the State which entails limited agency over his autonomy. By preventing the consummation of the marriage, the patriciate is surreptitiously reasserting itself, and agency, over the procreative outcomes. After hearing both Othello and Brabantio’s sides to the argument, the Duke never endorses the

marriage, rather he suggests that Brabantio reframe his perspective on the perceived transgression of their elopement:

When remedies are past the griefs are ended
By seeing the worst which late on hopes depended.
To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
Is the next way to draw new mischief on.
What cannot be preserved when fortune takes,
Patience her injury a mockery makes.
The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief,
He robs himself that spends a bootless grief. (1.3.200-210)

In *Othello* scholarship, it is common to study and observe how Iago uses blank verse or prose to manipulate those around him unlike the characteristic iambic pentameter of other characters.¹⁶ The Duke employs a similar device of an alternating rhyme scheme to placate and lull Brabantio into accepting the marriage. The Duke nor the Senators have voiced an endorsement or opposition to the marriage, a tacit political move. The political move is that there is still a battle to be fought, and Othello is the champion of the State, therefore they cannot afford to voice displeasure, so the Duke moves to placate Brabantio. Brabantio responds with rhyming lines of his own, “But words are words: I never yet did hear / That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear. / I humbly beseech you, proceed to th’ affairs of state” (1.3.219-221). For the sake of the argument pertaining to this paper, the line “But words are words: I never yet did hear” Brabantio is cognizing that the State never said they endorse the marriage, only that Brabantio would do best to forgive the transgression, therefore, he is still viewed with stature within the societal construct. In reaffirming the bonds of the extended network of the patriarchy,

¹⁶ <https://www.bard.org/study-guides/shakespeares-language-othello>

capitulates with “That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear” which reveals that action, not words will prevent the continuation of the marriage. Then he falls into line with the rest of the patricide to continue with “th’ affairs of state”. In the following lines (1.3.222-229), the Duke employs prose to give Othello direction on Cyprus, highlighting the difference in social stature the Duke views Brabantio and Othello. The Duke ends his lines to Othello with “You must therefore be content to slubber the gloss of your new fortunes with this more stubborn and boisterous expedition” (1.3.227-229) which, in the proximate sense, is merely a command to delay celebrating his new marriage, but when viewed in ultimate terms the sound of “slubber the gloss” is perceived phallically as delayed ejaculation. Othello responds with acquiesce “and do undertake, /This present war against the Ottomites. / Most humbly therefore, bending to your state” (1.3.234-236).

The final lines of Act 1 show that the patriciate has considerable influence over outcomes in ultimate causation and control over procreative agency. It is implied that Othello and Desdemona consummate their marriage in Act 2.3 after Cyprus is secured, but that the state exerted influence to delay the consummation suggests fundamental disapproval. “You must away tonight.” / Desdemona: “Tonight, my lord?” / Duke: “This night.” / Othello: “With all my heart.” This underscores Othello’s utility to the state, not his acceptance in to the state (1.3.279-281). Sexual relations within the marriage are again implied when the Senator states, “Adieu, Brave Moor, use Desdemona well” (1.3.292). At once the Senator is reasserting Othello’s otherness by not using his name and alluding to intercourse with “use”. Procreative agency reasserts itself as the temporal register in ultimate causation returns when Othello declares they have one hour for love. “We must obey the time” (1.3.301).

Chapter V.

Conclusion

Both *Richard III*¹⁷ and *Othello* are labelled tragedies within the body of work by William Shakespeare. The label “tragedy” implies an inauspicious outcome for the main characters as the audience bears witness to plots unfolding, culminating in the tragic outcomes: literal death(s) on stage, figurative death(s) in life. During the Early Modern Era, these plays worked to inform the audience of plausible machinations within their social constructs through these dramatizations, and provided a framework of how to maneuver the terrain as the audience sought to establish their own families. Through the lens of evolutionary theory and ultimate causation, specifically, the implication of a tragedy is that the outcome can only mean the discontinuation of a set of genetic programs and/or their inability to survive through the procreative stage to create a new set of genetic programs in offspring. In a quickly evolving environment, the theatergoers of Shakespeare’s era could use the considerations within these plays, as the plot dealt with the otherness of the protagonists, to inform their own lives outside of the theater in addition to the messages they received from church sermons and the monarchy.

The otherness exhibited by Richard III and Othello creates an opportunity to consider difference as one reconciles ultimate causal considerations and proximate causal considerations. In the realm of ultimate causation, Richard III possesses access to resources, but no fitness, cooperation from his kin network, or reciprocal altruism to

¹⁷ See Arden for an extended conversation on the discussion surrounding Richard III being labelled a “tragedie” rather than a history play, though it was meant to be placed within the universe of Shakespeare’s history plays.

allow for creation of a viable family unit. Othello and Desdemona possess attractive fitness in ultimate terms, but cannot function within the societal construct which is a necessity to optimize survival through cooperation and access to resources.

If these plays were to have a more positive outcome, then by virtue of new genetic material in offspring, the reality of optimal fitness changes. If this new genetic material is significant then the social constructs change as well. For example, consider Othello and Desdemona would have offspring that no longer fit within the physical framework of the Venetian elite, but this offspring could possess superior fitness. A paradox of ultimate causation vs. proximate causation emerges within evolutionary theory in that once new genetic material is created through procreation; the iteration potentially redefines what optimal fitness means and how cooperation is defined, moving the mark, so to speak. Therefore, both ultimate and proximate causations are not fixed and are constantly evolving with each new iteration of genetic material.

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