

Summer 2017

Shakespeare's "Honest and Vertuous" Ensigns: Transgressing the Military/Domestic Divide in the Henriad and Othello

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SHAKESPEARE'S "HONEST AND VERTUOUS" ENSIGNS: TRANSGRESSING THE
MILITARY/DOMESTIC DIVIDE IN THE HENRIAD AND *OTHELLO*

by

MATTHEW R. WENTZ

(Under the direction of Mary Villeponteaux)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how the military service of the ensign disrupts and ultimately obliterates domestic life in Shakespeare's *Henriad* and *Othello*. The rank of the ensign held expectations of honesty and honor, yet Shakespeare portrays his only two ensign characters, Ancient Pistol and Iago, as ironically failing to adhere to these standards. The received view of Pistol that results from his portrayal in *2 Henry IV* as a stock braggadocio is challenged by a sympathetic reading of his character, especially in *Henry V*. Although Pistol occasionally behaves with honor in *Henry V*, his military service results in the ruin of his domestic life. Shakespeare juxtaposes Pistol to King Henry V, who leaves war with a new wife; his promises of honor and glory in his supposedly inspiring St. Crispin's day speech clearly do not apply to Pistol, whose wife dies while he is away at war. Iago degrades concepts of domesticity, such as family and marriage, to try to advance his military career. One method he employs is to convert Desdemona's handkerchief, a token of domesticity, into a symbol of her supposed infidelity, creating a false ensign. He sacrifices the ensign's honesty and honor, and even his wife's life, in ruthless pursuit of promotion. His rhetoric plays on Othello's fears of replacement, which may occur in both military and domestic contexts. Together, these ensign characters reveal Shakespeare's interest in and distrust of the military's destructive effects on domesticity.

INDEX WORDS: Ensign, Rank, Ancient Pistol, Iago, Honest, Honorable, Military, Domestic, Shakespeare, *Henriad*, *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Othello*

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A.A., Middle Georgia State University, 2014

B.A., Middle Georgia State University, 2015

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ENGLISH

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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Electronic Version Approved:
July 2017

DEDICATION

To Bell (11 February 2007 – 31 March 2017): You were the best. We love you, always.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first and foremost like to acknowledge my committee: Dr. Mary Villeponteaux, Dr. Julia Griffin, and Dr. Candy Schille. Thank You for Your help not only with my thesis, but with my development as both a student of literature and, more importantly, a human being. Your insight, dedication, and patience throughout the thesis process and in the graduate courses I was privileged enough to take with You went above and beyond the call of a university professor. I can only hope that I might one day influence students in the ways that You have influenced me.

My most sincere gratitude to each of You.

Next, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Nancy Bunker, who first fostered my love for Shakespeare. Thank You for Your tireless dedication to the development of my and countless other students' appreciation of early modern dramas.

I would additionally like to thank: Linda Wentz (Mom), Terry Wentz (Dad), and Ashley Wentz (Sister), who are the absolute best family a person could hope to have. Without Your support – both emotional and financial – I never would have made it to graduate school, let alone through writing this thesis. I love You all with my entire heart.

Next words of appreciation to: James Thetford, Aaron Patterson, Gabriel Ruberti, Colin Penndorf, and Stephen Wisker (soon to earn a Ph.D. specializing in our favorite author). You have all helped me to write my thesis – as readers, as sounding boards, and as amazing and lifelong friends. I love You all with my entire heart.

Finally, to Shakespeare: thank You for Your plays. It is redundant, yet unavoidable, to remark how truly great and timeless they are.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE ENSIGN

The ensign occupied the lowest officer rank of the Elizabethan military. As a symbolic representative of the military as a whole, the ensign embodied for a playwright a spectrum of theatrically exciting possibilities, especially in his capacity to stage the extremes of military service, from cutthroat aspiration to martial cowardice. Though the ensign originally carried a flag, by Shakespeare's time, he no longer bore a standard; instead, he had become merely a junior officer in the company. As Paul Jorgensen explains,

The older meaning persisted, however, both in the military books and in Shakespeare's general usage. So late a play as *The Tempest* shows the association of ensign with standard-bearer (III.ii.18):

Stephano. Thou shalt be my lieutenant, monster, or my standard.

Trinculo. Your lieutenant, if you list; he's no standard. (107)

The ensign's characteristic flag preserved according values of honesty and honor, which Shakespeare exploits for ironic purposes; this irony may have been, at least in part, what led him to create two drastically different ensign characters in the *Henriad* and *Othello*. Ensigns rarely appear in early modern dramas, but Shakespeare seems to have been much more interested in the rank than his peers, writing two ensign characters and further devoting the most lines of any of his plays to one of these two, Iago.¹

Shakespeare regularly uses imaginative license in representing the military, and especially in the case of the ensign's rank and prescribed duties. J. W. Draper attributes this license to his knowing "little of army organization and the ranks and grades of officers; but the psychology of both officers and men, and the general conditions of military life, he thoroughly

¹ Although such characters exist, they almost never have spoken lines. One notable exception occurs in John Fletcher's *The Loyal Subject*, which features the boastful ensign Ancient, a corrupted term for ensign.

understood: in short, it was the human, rather than the institutional, side of army life that impressed him” (qtd. in “Military Rank” 17-8). Shakespeare’s vision of the ensign differs in two notable ways from its contemporary practice. First, it is implied that Shakespeare’s ensigns are expected to uphold the honesty and honor associated with the standard-bearer, despite the shifting duties that Jorgensen notes during the middle of Elizabeth’s rule. A second difference is the implication that the ensign occupies the lowest *military* rank rather than the lowest officer rank. By demoting him in this way, Shakespeare exploits the idea that the ensign maintains the nearest connection to a former civilian life.² The ensign in Shakespeare’s plays thus represents the military as a whole because he retains the traditional association with the duties of bearing the flag that symbolizes the army, yet he is essentially only one rank’s difference from a civilian. Shakespeare’s ensigns therefore are military actors on the border between the domestic and the military. For a poor soldier such as Pistol, this means going to war to fund a domestic life; for an ambitious soldier such as Iago, it means manipulating domestic concerns as a resource for advancement. Jorgensen argues that Shakespeare exhibited “in the years between *I Henry IV* and *Othello* a special interest in the qualifications, problems, and psychology of army offices” (65). My thesis explores how Shakespeare uses the figure of the ensign to interrogate cultural notions of military rank and the relationship between domestic and military worlds.

The fact that there has been no sustained investigation into Pistol’s and Iago’s similarities and shared rank is quite surprising. Both present a counterfeit demeanor, and both pursue extralegal means of accomplishing their goals, raising questions about military service and the honesty and honor that ostensibly characterize their rank. Though occupying unequal space in their respective plays, performing under different generic expectations, and operating with differing military authority, both Pistol and Iago embody a connection between the military and

² Shakespeare does not depict Pistol or Iago as superior officers in command of any troop of soldiers, but rather as military servants who receive and are expected to carry out the commands of their superiors without question.

the domestic realms.

Shakespeare's ensigns variously confront and reinforce an apparent irreconcilability between military and domestic values. He highlights this irreconcilability by juxtaposing Pistol and Iago with noble characters such as King Henry V and Othello. Charles Edelman explains that Shakespeare's "plays often turn on the difficulties of reconciling military values with those of peaceful society... [as well as] the divergence between military distinction and civilian value" (418-9). For Pistol, military obligation destroys the hope for achieving the postwar domestic peace that he desires, whereas Iago uses his own and Othello's domestic affairs as resources for cultivating his military ascendancy. Pistol's soliloquy undercuts the glory that Henry V promises in his St. Crispin's Day speech, and his report of Nell's death stands in contrast to Henry's triumphant wooing of the French princess. War is detrimental to the domestic lives of lower ranking officers; however, the nobility receives domestic rewards for military service. Iago's abuse of Emilia juxtaposes Othello's love for Desdemona, which Iago exploits for promotion. Whether at the English camp by the battlefield of Agincourt or at the Venetian military encampment in Cyprus, domestic concerns seem just as significant for both Pistol and Iago.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZING SHAKESPEARE'S ENSIGNS

Some confusion may arise as to Shakespeare's seeming distinction between the terms 'ancient' and 'ensign' for the same military rank. Neither the *Henriad* nor *Othello* uses the word *ensign* to indicate rank; editions where the word 'ensign' signifies rank are examples of editorial alteration. The *Henriad* refers instead to Ancient Pistol, and Iago detests his lowly status as "his Moorship's ancient" (1.1.35).³ The *OED* definition for "ancient, n.2" indicates that ancient is a corrupt form of the word *ensign*; the words apparently had a more similar pronunciation in Shakespeare's speech than in modern mouths. A slightly controversial instance of textual emendation illustrates the importance of determining Shakespeare's precise, or purposefully imprecise, use of these terms.

Gary Taylor edited the *Oxford Shakespeare* in 1985, and when he altered Ancient Pistol's name to Ensign Pistol, Jennifer Krauss, among others, took issue. The term ancient not only denotes Pistol's rank, but as Krauss describes, has "an association with classical tradition and with physical age, both of which the *OED* documents as operative meanings of 'ancient' for the time and both of which are germane to our understanding of Pistol" (523). Krauss succinctly states that she prefers the indeterminacy of 'ancient': "'ancient' merely leaves the door open, where 'ensign' shuts it" (524). In the same issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Taylor responds somewhat dismissively to Krauss, citing Iago's age, given in the play as 28, as an indication that the term 'ancient' "need have no temporal connotations" (525). One would do well to remember that Iago and Pistol are separate characters, operating under different generic conventions and performing different character types. While Iago might be relatively young compared to Pistol,

³ *The Norton Shakespeare* does read "ensign," but the two texts on which it bases its reading, the Folio of 1623 (its control text) and the Quarto of 1622, read "Auntient" and "Ancient," respectively. According to Edelman, "Although 'ancient' is a variation of *ensign*, and both spellings are found in *F* and various *Qq* to indicate a banner or standard, the office held by Iago and Pistol is always 'ancient'" (10).

Krauss's argument for Pistol's age is valid, especially considering Pistol himself complains at the end of the battle of Agincourt, "Old I do wax" (5.1.75). Shakespeare did not maintain such consistencies as age in his depiction of the ensign figure. An analysis of Shakespeare's ensigns, then, requires contextualization both within the military treatises and other primary documents that inspired his depiction of this rank and within the plays themselves.

The rank of ensign came with certain cultural expectations. Shakespeare's familiarity with the ensign's role is likely a result of speaking with ex-soldiers and reading any of the numerous military conduct handbooks published in his lifetime.⁴ Honesty was one of the primary qualities of the ensign. According to Jorgensen, "The ensign should be, as writers of handbooks almost unanimously state, a man of signal honesty.... Honesty is the one common factor" (109). For example, in their military treatise, Leonard and Thomas Digges describe the traits of the various military ranks, explaining that "the Ensigne [should] be a man of good accompte, honest and vertuous" (89). Barnabe Rich, another conduct author, is here worth quoting at some length to illustrate the extent to which the according traits of honor and courtesy, as well as the duty of standard-bearing, were given emphasis:

As the Ensigne in the field is the *honour* of the bande, so the *Ensigne bearer* in like care shoulde bee *honoured* by his company, and this reputation is best attained, by his owne *curteous demeanour* towards y [sic] souldiours, the looue of whom concerneth greatly his owne safety, in all perrilles and attempts... The *Ensigne bearer* therefore should be a man of *curteous disposition* towards the Soldiours, couragious and cheerefull when he is before the enemie, in any

⁴ Jorgensen explains that civilians learned about military rank and service from ex-soldiers and handbooks: "But how, it may be asked, could the civilian public gain even a semi-technical knowledge of military rank? Partly, we are told, from discharged soldiers, many of whom discoursed of their services, like Ancient Pistol, 'in the phrase of war.' But a more accurate source of popular knowledge may well have been the innumerable military books published during the age" ("Military Rank" 18).

distresse resolute to loose his life, then to loose hys Cullours. (italics mine)

Rich's characterization of the ensign's duty adds honor, courtesy, and good cheer to the idea that an ensign is expected to be honest. Rich's assumption that the ensign is the standard-bearer conforms to Jorgensen's assessment that this association persisted in military literature longer than on the battlefield, and offers one explanation of why the duties of the standard-bearer to be both honest and honorable persist in Shakespeare's plays. The ensign's role as standard-bearer endeared him to his higher-ranking counterparts, and inculcated him with pride as a form of propaganda and military strategy – the lowest ranks were the least embedded and the most easily sacrificed. While Pistol has no standard, Iago subverts the supposedly straightforward representations of the standard through his deceptive use of Desdemona's handkerchief to fool Othello into believing that Cassio has cuckolded him. Shakespeare does not include the standard itself as a part of his characters' performances, but maintains the expectations of honesty and honor that had, through previous service and contemporary military handbooks, attached themselves to this symbol by his lifetime.

As further inspiration for Pistol, Shakespeare borrowed from the figure of the *miles gloriosus*, most famously represented in Plautus' play *The Braggart Soldier*. According to Graf, Shakespeare

split the *miles gloriosus*. Everything in him capable of raising him to the figure of a natural, jovial good fellow he allotted to Falstaff; everything distorted and repulsive he gave to Pistol... Pistol is entirely typical, with no attempt at individualization... in him everything is coarsened, the caricature of the *miles* even more distorted. (629)

This rather uncomplicated view of Pistol represents a critical tradition of praising Falstaff, rightfully considered one of Shakespeare's greatest characters. Shakespeare himself, however,

replaced Falstaff with Pistol in *Henry V*, which indicates that Pistol has a much more complicated connection to the *miles gloriosus* tradition than Graf perceives.⁵ Shakespeare transforms the stock type of the braggart soldier into a character with a specific rank, and with clear motivations to return to a domestic and civilian lifestyle; his military service is a means to domestic ends. He is not only a thief, a braggart, and a coward, but a kind and a loving husband. Shakespeare elaborates the *miles gloriosus* figure, framing his braggadocious bluster as a defensive mechanism both to distance himself from the less savory means of his existence and to retain the honor of his rank.

As inspiration for Iago, Shakespeare drew primarily from Cinthio's tale "The Moor of Venice" in his *Hecatommithi*. The story tells of a "wicked ensign" (118) who is "a man of handsome figure, but of the most depraved nature in the world" (116). It is clear that Shakespeare borrowed several elements from this description for Iago's character: his rank, and his duplicity, which combine to create an ironic effect. His handsomeness indicates the likelihood that he is relatively young, as is Iago. Othello's unwitting adherence to Iago's advice finds precedence in Cinthio's story as well: "This man was in great favor with the Moor, who had not the slightest idea of his *wickedness*; for, despite the *malice* lurking in his heart, he *cloaked* with proud and valorous speech and with a *specious* presence the *villainy* of his soul" (116, italics mine). The extreme emphasis on the ensign's evil and deceptive nature cannot be missed. The words 'heart' and 'soul' represent the ensign's thorough spiritual corruption. Shakespeare connected these aspects of misrepresentation and corruption with the ensign's characteristic flag, creating greater ironic tension.

⁵ This replacement came despite the fact that the "Epilogue" of *2 Henry IV*, ostensibly spoken by the actor who portrayed Falstaff, promises "If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it" (23-5). According to Grace Tiffany, "Melissa Aaron argues, in fact, that Pistol's significant role in *Henry V* was included in lieu of Falstaff's – who dies offstage in *Henry V* – only because of the 1599 departure from Shakespeare's company of Will Kempe, who, she surmises, had played the fat knight" (314, n. 15). Whether for practical or for literary purposes, Pistol's replacing Falstaff indicates their shared heritage in the *miles gloriosus* character and suggests that he is just as complex a character as Falstaff.

The rest of this thesis discusses how Shakespeare uses the figure of the ensign to explore the relationship between the domestic and the military. The *Henriad* blends military and domestic concerns more often than one might initially perceive. When Pistol leaves his newly made home at the Boar's Head Tavern for the battlefield, marital happiness yields to financial necessity, military obligation, and both national and international politics. His soliloquy at the end of the Battle at Agincourt reveals how war disrupts domestic life, as does the conversation Henry has with Williams and Bates the night before. *Othello*, too, blends domestic and military concerns. Othello employs Iago, his military subordinate, to determine the private matter of Desdemona's fidelity. Their interactions portray a domestic realm under siege by military actors.

Nevertheless, there are significant differences between Pistol and Iago. While Pistol acts out of concern for his and Nell's financial and domestic well-being, Iago acts out of concern only for himself and ruthlessly sacrifices Emilia's honor and, ultimately, her life. Despite these military actors' opposite attitudes toward domesticity, however, both reveal that military service and advancement sacrifice domestic values. Once joining the military, even the lowest rank must commit to its larger goals at the expense of their own. Iago and Emilia receive orders to sail to Cyprus without advanced notice. Pistol's going to France to make meagre pay as a soldier and with the ultimate hope of returning home becomes nearly tragic when one considers the great risk that he endures only to go home to nothing.

CHAPTER 3

ANCIENT PISTOL: BRAGGART, HUSBAND, FRIEND, AND SOLDIER

When Ancient Pistol first appears onstage in *2 Henry IV*, Shakespeare exploits the role of ensign by creating a character who violates all of the audience's expectations of honesty and honorable demeanor. Pistol's appearance in *2 Henry IV* has affected critical response to him in *Henry V*. Partially due to his less complex characterization in this play as compared to *Henry V*, the received critical view is that he is merely a stock braggadocio. This thesis challenges such readings, examining the ways in which he both conforms to and defies this characterization, especially in *Henry V*. Critics as recent as Grace Tiffany have advanced the received view of Pistol, who "issues challenges at the drop of a hat. The challenges are rendered absurd partly by Pistol's usual failure to follow through on them" (305). She argues that Pistol's combined aggression and cowardice extend to absurdity. He draws his sword at nearly the same rate that he retreats from his own challenges, such as when Bardolph chases him out of the Boar's Head Tavern. He even reneges on his bet with Nim, instead promising him greater future pay by helping him to become a sutler at war. Although Tiffany does not explain what else comprises Pistol's absurdity, one might reasonably assume that she alludes here to his consistent perception of personal insult. She later claims that "Loud, hollow challenges are 'ancient' behavior for Ancient Pistol," citing Pistol's anger at Bardolph for calling him host as well as at Nim for "requesting a conversation 'solus' (probably a euphemism for a challenge to fight outside)" (306-7). However in *Henry V*, Shakespeare expands Pistol's characterization beyond that of a would-be brawler when he uses him to replace Falstaff as the play's comically dishonest and dishonorable military character with a kind heart. Pistol thus becomes a much more sympathetic figure as both a husband and a military actor. One reason for the persisting interpretation of Pistol as a simple character who cannot live up to his boasting is his name, which seems to

indicate him as a stock character and thus belies his complexity.

Pistol's name indicates several ways that he fails to live up to the office of ensign; it is furthermore ripe for the complex and clever type of punning that early modern audiences so thoroughly enjoyed. Throughout *2 Henry IV*, 'Pistol' accumulates significations of his military rank, his lechery, his simultaneous braggadocio and cowardice, his easily triggered temper, and his age. To a contemporary audience, Pistol's name would further associate him with thievery, as Nate Probasco explains: "By Elizabeth's reign pistols overtook daggers as the preferred weapon of criminals" (369). Shakespeare relied on his audience's knowledge of both handguns and military rank to understand the layered irony of Pistol's character. According to Tiffany, Shakespeare uses Pistol's name in part to link notions of the gun as a relatively dishonorable weapon to the triviality of dueling for personal honor. Tiffany clarifies that although Pistol challenges others by brandishing a sword, his name and its association with both his quick temper and the relative lack of skill in firing a pistol compared to sword fighting render "proud honor... subject to the inhuman power of the gun" (312). For Tiffany, "Pistol... tempts [today's] contemporary audiences to look forward to the time when men would carry handguns rather than swords, and not even the minimally regulating custom of noble training in swordplay would impose order and distinction on violence and death" (313). Pistol's name and character in *2 Henry IV* exhort us to consider the future moment when guns replace swords, and when brute force replaces honor. This debut also establishes his connection both to the military and to the more domestic life of the tavern, a tension that Shakespeare expands later in *Henry V*.

Pistol's first scene in *2 Henry IV* exemplifies Shakespeare's ironic use of the ensign figure, who is supposed to represent the military with honor. His language often combines sexual and martial connotations, indicating his lack of honor in degrading women as objects of his sexual satisfaction. Pistol enters the Boar's Head claiming he will "discharge upon [Nell]... with

two bullets” (2.4.97). His innuendo conflates sex with violence, establishing his consistent use of weaponized language. His punning on his own name often conflates military might with sex and love, and he frequently sexualizes and romanticizes implements of war. Tiffany similarly observes, “Pistol carries a sword around and waves it in frequent challenge. More, he speaks love-language to it (“sweet heart, lie thou here” [2 *Henry IV* 2.4.183])” (308). He habitually applies domestic language to military contexts, and military language to domestic contexts, as he does in the tavern with Nell and Doll. Nell’s retort that she will “drink no proofs, nor no bullets” causes Pistol to soften his language (2.4.100). He thus presumes just to “charge” Doll Tearsheet, a complex pun invoking his own name (2.4.102). He apparently intends to command her to have intercourse with him, and ironically, to charge her for it despite her implied profession as a prostitute. His language mixes both military command and offensive maneuvers with sexual desire and the exchange of currency, reversing the typical direction of this exchange. Pistol insists on his superiority to Doll not only as a man and a customer, but as a military commander capable of ordering her to perform the activities of her profession, and furthermore to pay for the opportunity. Doll proves an equal partner in their verbal sparring, telling Pistol “I am meat for your master” (2.4.105). She insists on her superiority to Pistol even as he attempts to assert dominance over the domestic scene by cultivating a false military importance. Pistol backs down from Nell just as he runs from Bardolph during their brawl shortly after.

Pistol further lacks honor because he consistently misrepresents his rank, which clearly violates as well the ensign’s prescribed honesty. His name is not only, as Tiffany observes (305), a reference to the noisy, inaccurate, and inefficient early modern weapons of the same name, but also a pun on ‘penis.’ Nell makes this pun clear when she mistakenly and hilariously renames Pistol as “Captain Pizzle,” a new name that comes with a promotion to Captain and connects his own bawdy language with his rank (2.4.137). Pistol’s sword would be an appropriate prop to

serve as a visual extension for Nell's bawdy pun conflating penises and pistols, further reinforcing the connection between sex and military violence. While Nell mistakes Pistol's rank as captain, his military commander Falstaff seems confused about it himself, referring to Pistol as "Lieutenant" (5.5.83). Pistol constantly misleads others about his rank. Critics such as Draper might attribute this confusion to Shakespeare's limited knowledge of rank, but it seems more likely that he is subtly suggesting that Pistol has been lying to Nell and Doll and somehow even tricks Falstaff. Although Doll expresses incredulity that Pistol could be a captain, she might be even more surprised to learn that he is an ensign due to the honor supposed to accompany the rank (2.4.116-7).

Pistol not only misrepresents his rank through false promotions, but linguistically demotes even the highest ranked member of the military. At the end of the play, he uses familiar language inappropriate for speaking to the newly crowned King Henry V. When Pistol addresses Henry, he proclaims "The heavens thee guard and keep, most royal imp of fame!" (5.5.40). Pistol's informal address to Hal both follows and magnifies Falstaff's example in the previous line, "God save thy grace, King Hal, my royal Hal!" (5.5.39). While Falstaff refers to "thy grace," Pistol refers directly to Hal as "thee." Although Falstaff commits a similar mistake in referring to Hal by his tavern name, rather than his new title, he acknowledges his new title first and their former connection ("my royal Hal") last. Pistol, however, refers to Hal only with his informal address, revealing his difficulty in separating his domestic life at the tavern from appropriate military decorum for addressing the King as the most superior military official.

In addition to continuing his previous comically braggadocious behavior and sophisticated punning on his name, Pistol's role in *Henry V* significantly complicates his role as both a military actor and a husband. Shakespeare changes direction and portrays not only a more complex but also a more sympathetic ensign, who replaces Falstaff as the play's most subversive

military character. He also explores the idea that Pistol's military service is caused by financial necessity. Pistol's experiences at war in France consistently contradict King Henry V's own privileged experiences and promises to his soldiers, especially those in his supposedly inspiring St. Crispin's Day speech. Pistol's juxtaposition to King Henry replaces that of Falstaff to Hal, and therefore fulfills a similar role in prompting audiences to question the bravery and the glory of war and of the military. His cowardice likewise receives an update, albeit audiences do not see it, but only hear about it as contemptuously described by Fluellen. Pistol further describes his own reasoning for going to war in rather contemptible terms: "Yokefellows in arms, / Let us to France, like horseleeches, my boys, / To suck, to suck, the very blood to suck!" (2.4.45-7). He clearly expresses a financial motive for going to war. He characterizes his role in the war and as a soldier in dishonorable terms. However, as will be explored, Pistol's address to his friends also suggests his perception of brotherhood with them, and exposes his domestic and financial motives for leaving both his new home and Nell to go to France. He often acts with honorable intentions, such as securing his future with Nell and cheering his brothers in arms in the midst of a brutal war. When Pistol acts dishonorably, such as by taking a hostage, he typically acts within the expectations of soldiers at war. His plea to Fluellen to pardon Bardolph shows another instance in which he displays honorable intentions mediated through the appropriate mechanisms of military hierarchy, although his request does question military rule. Pistol in *Henry V* is ultimately a complex figure, at times dishonorable but, in accordance with the ensign's expected behavior, at other times honorable, inspiring in the audience both disapproval and sympathy. Shakespeare uses Pistol to raise questions about the honor of military endeavors and to explore the effect of military service on domestic life.

In *Henry V*, Pistol continues to constantly draw his weapon at the Boar's Head, seeking to assert his dominance over what has since *2 Henry IV* been his home and suggesting again how

his military and domestic identities merge. Although Pistol appears to have been married for some time, the play's audience experience him and Nell essentially as newlyweds, especially if the audience recalls her distaste for him in *2 Henry IV*. Tiffany rightly notes the fact "That she abhors Pistol here [in the tavern of *2 Henry IV*] increases the irony when, in *Henry V*, we see she has married him," although he has not amended his sword-wielding and threatening (307). Pistol's sword functions as a symbol both of his masculine rule over the tavern and of his military authority over Nim. In *Henry V*, it is being called "host" by Nim that arouses Pistol's ire (2.1.25). Although as Boughner observes, Pistol "regards as base the term of 'host' he had honestly acquired by marriage" (236), his desire to fight over the use of the name recalls Gertrude's remark about the Player Queen (*Hamlet* 3.2.210).⁶ He despises the name because he has resolved that Nell will no longer host lodgers at the Boar's Head, which now serves as their private home together, and possibly still as a tavern.

Audiences further witness in this scene a fairly humanizing aspect of Pistol: his destitute poverty. When Nim demands of Pistol the eight shillings he won in a bet, Pistol explains his inability to pay:

A *noble* shalt thou have, and present pay,
 And *liquor* likewise will I give to thee,
 And *friendship* shall combine, and *brotherhood*
 I'll live by Nim, and Nim shall live by me.
 Is not this just? (2.1.96-100, italics mine)

The nearness in value of a noble (six shillings, eight pence) to eight shillings emphasizes both how little money Pistol has and his determination to honor the bet as near as possible. John Kerrigan explains Pistol's reasoning and Nim's willingness to accept his seemingly reduced

⁶ "The lady protests too much, methinks" (*Hamlet* 3.2.210).

offer:

Nim has repeatedly asked Pistol for the eight shillings he won of him at betting... Nim cannot be happy that a noble is two shillings short of eight. On the other hand, it does sound good. A noble, like a crown, is the sort of word for a coin that can make a mercenary settlement seem like the acquisition of honour. And this is but a foretaste of the 'profit' that Pistol says Nim will share when he becomes 'sutler' to the camp (100–1). It seems worth a handshake.

(560)

Nim focuses on the money ("I shall have my noble?" [2.1.103]), but he eventually accepts Pistol's assurance of payment. Indeed, in addition to future financial support, Pistol offers Nim several other more valuable consolations: liquor, friendship, and brotherhood. Pistol's offer of liquor indicates the poverty he and Nell endure as they attempt to support themselves without keeping "lodgers" (2.1.27). Pistol must amend his determination to cease serving guests and rely on old means of surviving to maintain his lifestyle.

Pistol's offer to Nim to become brothers at war suits his typical linguistic conflation of the military with the domestic. Pistol clearly intends to make Nim a part of his family and to support him as his brother in arms. Although Pistol's experiences at war rarely express domesticity, he here states very clearly that his reason for going to war is entirely for profit: "I shall sutler be / Unto the camp, and profits will accrue" (2.1.100-1). He has recently taken on a large financial burden because he is determined that Nell will not "keep lodgers" (2.1.27) anymore. However, his plan to become sutler seems later to fall through (Fluellen calls him "Ensign Pistol" [3.6.15] and praises Pistol's service in the battle of Harfleur). Pistol goes to war, then, not for his ensign's honor or for the honor that King Henry promises in his St. Crispin's

Day speech, but for money. But Pistol's plan to return to his work as an ensign unfortunately provides little hope for increasing his wealth. According to Draper, Elizabethan

Army life was on a very low plane, partly because the organisation and the method of recruiting were changing from the feudal to the modern professionalised system, and partly because Renaissance society, without the organised capital of modern industrialism, could hardly finance this new system which political necessity imposed. Soldiers, in consequence, were very little and very irregularly paid; and, as no provision was made for them in peace time or in old age, they often had to live by their wits and turn professional bully or downright highwayman. (416)

Draper's observation illuminates why Pistol resorts to extorting ransom and ultimately vows to become a bawd and a thief: his soldier's income provides little during his service and nothing when he is not directly serving. The lack of a pension during peacetime would make even the meager pay of a soldier's service attractive to Pistol, especially since he has previous war experience.

When the play returns to Nell and Pistol's home in 2.3, domestic mourning over Falstaff's death yields to military duty. Nell importunes Pistol, "Prithee, honey, sweet husband, let me bring thee to Staines" (1-2), but Pistol refuses because his "manly heart dotherne" (3) for Falstaff's passing. Pistol departs for the war just as his greatest friend has died, an ominous portent for events to come. Nell's death before he can make it back home from the war frames Pistol's military service with the death of the two most important people in his life, and his two other friends (by now brothers) Nim and Bardolph are hanged for stealing during the war. One should always remember that Pistol in *Henry V* is an extremely bereaved individual. War deprives him of the time to grieve Falstaff, of his friendships (despite his anticipation that war

will make them brothers back at home), and of the precious final moments he could have spent with his wife, for whose sake he went to war in the first place. This level of domestic tragedy stemming from his military obligation shifts Pistol's character closer to the tragic, away from the singularly comic role he served in *2 Henry IV*.

The most heartfelt domestic moment audiences witness from Pistol occurs here in this scene, as he kisses Nell goodbye for what turns out to be the final time. He first instructs her to be careful with money, asking her to "Look to my chattels and my movables. / Let senses rule. The word is 'Pitch and pay.' / Trust none, for oaths are straws, men's faiths are wafer-cakes" (2.3.40-2). His emphasis on saving money and ensuring payment from tavern customers highlights both his financial motive for going to war and his and Nell's preparation for the future. Nell likely knows better than most how hollow some oaths and faiths may be considering that she married Pistol, but his instructions nonetheless spring from his hope for their future financial security. Pistol first turns to depart with his "Yokefellows in arms" (2.3.45), another phrase that clearly conflates kinship with military service, but turns back to his wife for one last time, saying to himself, "Touch her soft mouth, and march" (2.3.49). This concise command mingles images of domestic pleasantries and military necessities. Combined in one line, these images convey the sacrifice of domestic affairs that military service requires. His use of the imperative mood associates his language with military orders, highlighting his obligation to leave his wife for the battlefield at France.

Without knowing it, Pistol is speaking to his wife for the last time. He leaves home for the urgency of a war intended to distract from domestic quarrels and to circumvent rebellion.⁷

⁷ On his deathbed, King Henry IV provides his son with this idea: "Be it thy course to busy giddy minds / With foreign quarrels, that action hence borne out / May waste the memory of the former days" (*2 Henry IV* 4.3.341-3). One of King Henry V's first actions as King is to "call we our high court of Parliament, / And let us choose such limbs of noble counsel / That the great body of our state may go / In equal rank with the best-governed nation; / That war, or peace, or both at once, may be / As things acquainted and familiar to us" (5.2.133-8). Henry V desires war for the sake of

The turmoil of the national political climate and the King's hopes for the glory of war juxtapose Pistol and Nell's newly married happiness and the disruptive unhappiness of war. Henry's war encroaches on the domestic realm in France as well, as audiences witness Catherine learning English in her bedroom, already preparing for the English invasion and apparently anticipating an English victory.

Pistol's conduct at war is informed by his desire to use his military service to create the possibility for a future of domestic happiness. Such a perspective would certainly lead to his brave actions on the battlefield, seeking to protect his brothers in arms around him and begging pardon for his friend Bardolph. Although not represented onstage, Pistol's actions in battle hold great importance because they can help to determine how he fulfills the ensign's prescribed duties, and whether he has followed through on his promise to treat his friends as brothers. Pistol does not explicitly pledge brotherhood to Bardolph, as he does to Nim, but he treats Bardolph with a similar familial kindness when he seeks pardon for him.

The first assessment of Pistol's behavior at war comes from the Boy who acts as his servant. His observation neatly aligns with previous statements from other characters about Pistol's braggadocious nature: "he hath a killing tongue and a quiet sword – by the means whereof a breaks words, and keeps whole weapons" (3.3.32-4). The potential pun on the 's' sound, carried over from 'breaks' to 'words,' forms quite the paradox: Pistol breaks swords and still has a complete weapon. Just previously in this scene, however, Pistol addresses Fluellen courteously, and it is actually Fluellen who is first verbally abusive to Pistol: "God's plud! Up to the breaches, you dogs! Avaunt, you cullions!" (3.2.19-20). Audiences have just witnessed

distracting from domestic affairs, and especially from the infighting that characterized Richard II's reign and empowered his father. Jorgensen elaborates that "Neither war nor peace should be expected to exist permanently in a healthy commonweal.... Shakespeare's recognition of this case is perhaps shown in its acceptance – as a fact rather than a moral principle – by his exemplary King Henry V" (Jorgensen "Shakespeare's Use" 343).

misbehaving and singing, which he only does after Nim complains about the heat of the battle. In fact, Bardolph opens the scene encouraging the group to continue “To the breach, to the breach!” and it is possible that Pistol would have followed if not for Nim’s feelings of discouragement (3.2.1). Going further into battle with a soldier with low morale could prove deadly. While one might think that Pistol is being cowardly, his motivation seems more to provide his fellows in arms with courage and good cheer, which is his duty as an ensign. At that point, they could continue into the breach safely together, and with renewed courage. Pistol speaks for his friends nobly, seeking to protect them from Fluellen’s wrath: “Be merciful, great duke, to men of mould” (3.2.21). Pistol continues to develop his love language to brothers at war, gently urging Fluellen to “Use lenity, sweet chuck” (3.2.24). His response to Fluellen, despite the latter’s shouting and swearing, shows Pistol’s calm disposition on the battlefield upon first arriving; he intends to serve with dignity and to use his duty to provide the company with good cheer to protect his fellow soldiers from feeling demoralized in the midst of a vicious battle. While The Boy likely has witnessed some of Pistol’s characteristic bluster offstage, the honorable behavior audiences here witness firsthand significantly contradicts his usual demeanor.

Praise of Pistol’s noble service comes from Fluellen himself. He tells Gower, “There is an ensign lieutenant” – note the continued confusion about Pistol’s rank – “there at the pridge, I think in my very conscience he is as valiant a man as Mark Antony, and he is a man of no estimation in the world, but I did see him do as gallant service” (3.6.10-3). The rank of the ensign receives here little of the honor that Rich describes, and Pistol has perhaps contributed to the confusion of his rank by continuing his dishonest self-promotion. More interesting is Fluellen’s comparing Pistol to Mark Antony, a military ruler undone by domestic concerns. While Antony ultimately commits suicide, domestic affairs have a very different outcome for rulers in *Henry V*, as the King receives his war dowry in his marriage to Catherine, whom he

objectifies in his demand to marry her as the main condition of his peace negotiations. Fluellen's comparison once again evokes King Henry's triumph at war, which results in his betrothal, asking audiences to compare Henry's success with the disruption of Pistol's domestic life as a result of his military service.

One major loss for Pistol is the executions of his friends and adopted brothers Nim and Bardolph. Pistol goes so far as to beg Fluellen to pardon Bardolph, a service that shows him once again working to build good morale amongst the soldiers, who would likely be horrified to see a fellow soldier executed. Framing this incident is Fluellen's discussion with Gower of Pistol's brave service on the battlefield: "I'll assure you, a uttered as prave words at the pridge as you shall see in a summer's day" (3.6.60-1). Although the word 'brave' (or 'prave' as Fluellen lispes it) held the meaning of 'making a brave show,' Pistol's "prave words" nonetheless indicate his faithfully performing his duty to display the courage and "curteous disposition" that Rich prescribes for the ensign's encouragement of the company. According to Maurice Hunt, "The synesthesia of Fluellen's metaphor – seeing something heard – serves to stress the fact that Fluellen saw no brave doings of Pistol" (12). However, Fluellen himself claims to have seen such "gallant service" (3.6.13), language that emphasizes action, just lines earlier. Fluellen's praise here appears immediately after Pistol's bravery at battle, and is more credible than the later confusion that Hunt identifies, which comes after an interruption from an angered Pistol seeking pardon for Bardolph. When Fluellen denies this favor, Pistol verbally abuses him: "Die and be damned! And *fico* for thy friendship" (3.6.51), twice repeating this latter insult (3.6.53;55). The words would likely be reinforced with a rude hand gesture, and both directly contradict his duty to behave honorably. Pistol's anger stems not only from Fluellen's denial of his request, but his perception that he has transgressed an unspoken bond of their friendship and the familial bonds forged between soldiers at war. The fact that Fluellen maintains his assertion

of Pistol's bravery (at least in word if not in conduct) after this rough treatment proves Pistol a decent soldier, and his "synesthesia" may be forgiven by his sudden encounter with Pistol's wrath. Fluellen's praise in 3.6 allows the reasonable presumption that Pistol behaved admirably after Fluellen's rough encouragement in 3.2. Other evidence of Pistol's (mostly) good conduct emerges from a close inspection of the text.

The night before the St. Crispin's Day battle, King Henry tours the soldiers' camps in disguise. He first encounters Pistol and then Williams and Bates. Each conversation draws parallels between kinship and war. Pistol unknowingly praises his old tavern friend Hal directly in front of him, calling him "an imp of fame, / Of parents good" (4.1.47-8). He uses the same expression when greeting Henry at the end of *2 Henry IV*, showing his honest feeling toward the King (5.5.40). Pistol's inability to recognize Henry illuminates their stark differences as common soldier and King. His reasons for his "love" (4.1.45) include Henry's noble kinship, illuminating the importance Pistol places on family. Pistol does not recognize the King, or the transparent name he uses, "Harry *le roi*" (4.1.50), a name he mistakes for "Cornish" (4.1.51). When Henry insists that he is "a Welshman" (4.1.52), Pistol becomes incensed to learn of Henry's kinship with Fluellen. Pistol's anger shows him behaving dishonorably toward someone he presumes to be a fellow soldier, but also reveals his deeply family-oriented mindset: individual reputations reflect on a family as a whole. The scene foregrounds issues of kinship on the night before battle, suggesting that domestic concerns are foremost in Pistol's mind as he confronts the possibility of a soldier's death.

Henry leaves Pistol after being insulted for his relationship to Fluellen, and talks with Williams and Bates. Their discussion displays the privilege that nobility experiences, which detrimentally affects soldiers such as Pistol, who leave home to fight in a war that threatens their

domestic happiness. His conversation with Williams and Bates becomes a debate about a King's relationship to and duties toward his subjects, which he characterizes in paternal terms:

Bates: But if the cause be not good, the King himself hath a heavy reckoning to make, when all those legs and arms and heads chopped off in a battle shall join together at the latter day, and cry all, 'We died at such a place' – some swearing, some crying for a surgeon, some upon their wives left poor behind, some upon the debts they owe, some upon their children rawly left. I am afeard there are few die well that die in a battle, for how can they charitably dispose of anything when blood is their argument? Now, if these men do not die well, it will be a black matter for the King that led them to it – who to disobey were against all proportion of subject.

King Harry: So, if a son that is by his father sent about merchandise do sinfully miscarry upon the sea, the imputation of his wickedness, by your rule, should be imposed upon his father that sent him. (4.1.134-142)

Bates argues that war bereaves women and children of husbands and fathers. His vision of dead and maimed soldiers, broken families, and "wives left poor behind" shows that Pistol's concern to provide for Nell is one commonly held among soldiers. Bates asserts that the King holds responsibility for these consequences when soldiers die carrying out the King's commands. Henry applies Bates' assertion to familial relations, in which the King is the father and the soldiers the sons, to demonstrate its falsity. He suggests that if the soldiers sin before or during battle, he has no responsibility for their action, only for sending them to war. Henry sends his troops to war expecting them to achieve victory, sacrificing some of their lives for a supposedly greater good of his own design, which provides him both domestic and political benefit. Henry's argument exposes his guilt over his father's usurping the throne from Richard II, which he fully

reveals in soliloquy later in the same scene, praying, “Not today, O Lord, / O not today, think not upon the fault / My father made in compassing the crown” (4.1.274-6). As King, however, Henry has much less to worry over than Pistol, who enters the battlefield at Agincourt friendless and desperate to supplement his soldier’s income.

Bardolph and Nim’s deaths sever Pistol’s hopes that they may prosper by each other’s goodwill. Pistol consequently seeks other means of securing the financial necessities for a domestic future, taking a French soldier hostage. This scene directly follows Henry’s concern that Montjoy will “once more come for a ransom” (4.3.129) and his St. Crispin’s Day speech, continuing to elicit comparison of Pistol’s experience as a common soldier to Henry’s experience of war as a King. 4.4 exposes a radically different aspect of war from the glory and honor that Henry promises. Though allowed to take hostages, Pistol acts both with dishonor and cutthroat savagery in attempting to extort money from the soldier. When the soldier says, “*O pardonne-moi*” (4.4.19), Pistol mistakes him to mean money: “Sayst thou me so? Is that a ton of moys?” (4.4.20). Pistol’s ruthless pursuit of money is actually related to another pun on his name.

Kerrigan explains, “It is true that Pistol’s name primarily suggests a firearm... but a *pistole* was also a Spanish gold coin. He is the incarnation of acquisitiveness” (564-5). His desperation comes most clearly into focus when he threatens to “cut his throat” (4.4.29), a threat he made earlier in a domestic context in response to Nim’s attraction to Nell (2.1.64-6). He makes the threat here in a martial context against his personal hostage, although he does not carry it out. The command appears a third time as a military order to execute prisoners of war, showing that Pistol’s words can carry killing weight (4.6.39). Henry gives the initial command, but then assigns Pistol to “Give the word through” (4.6.38). The phrase tracks Pistol’s progression through the play from a domestic scene, to one showing his financial desperation, and then to one displaying the obligatory carnage of his military service. Pistol’s behavior becomes more

brutal as he loses his friends and as he progresses through his military service; he becomes increasingly more dependent on his own soldier's wit until, by the end of the play, he is no longer even a soldier. The Boy implies distaste for Pistol's abusive treatment of his hostage, but only after Pistol leaves: "Bardolph and Nim had ten times more valour than this roaring devil i'th' old play, that everyone may pare his nails with a wooden dagger, and they are both hanged, and so would this be, if he durst steal anything adventurously" (4.4.62-5). Pistol isn't killed for looting, a common means of making a living at war, like Bardolph and Nim. He is a more self-regulated and aware soldier, seeking financial opportunities through means that advance, or at least do not interfere with, the English army's goals in France.

Pistol's lament at the end of 5.1 offers the last word of the common soldier, and a bleak outlook for his future. Before this soliloquy, Fluellen beats Pistol while forcing him to eat a leek, and Pistol pleads, "Quit thy cudgel, thou dost see I eat" (5.1.46). This line portrays Pistol's thorough defeat despite the larger context of English victory. Fluellen's punishment represents what the war has in a more general sense resulted in for Pistol, and suggests that the English soldiers have collaborated in a cause that ultimately sets them at odds, despite his attempts to encourage solidarity among his fellow soldiers in battle. Military service has beaten Pistol's resolve and forced him to act in a morally distasteful manner. This personal defeat leads Pistol to succumb to self-pity as he remains alone onstage, wounded and mourning:

Doth Fortune play the hussy with me now?

News have I that my Nell is dead

I'th' spital of a malady of France,

And there my rendezvous is quite cut off.

Old I do wax, and from my weary limbs

Honour is cudgelled. Well, bawd I'll turn,

And something lean to cutpurse of quick hand.
 To England will I steal, and there I'll steal,
 And patches will I get unto these cudgelled scars,
 And swear I got them in the Gallia wars. (5.1.71-80)

Pistol's soliloquy grieves the impact of military service on his marriage, offering a rare moment of truthful insight into his characteristically blustering façade. His pun on "rendezvous" represents the battle at Agincourt as a type of military meeting, and represents his desire to return home to his wife postwar as the more desired rendezvous, but one which has been prevented by his military obligations. Military affairs encroach on and disrupt the peace of the domestic realm.

When Pistol seeks Bardolph's pardon earlier in the play, he mentions "Fortune's furious fickle wheel" (3.6.24). Fluellen interrupts to lecture him on the symbolism of Fortune, concluding, "Fortune is an excellent moral" (3.6.33). As the opening question of Pistol's soliloquy suggests, he persists in his dishonorable attitude toward women, which indicates a larger lack of change in character. Fluellen's insistence that fortune imparts a moral lesson contradicts Pistol's vow to return to his old dishonorable methods of earning a living as a thief and bawd. He has not learned a moral, but rather had his military and domestic identities stripped of him despite his moral attempts to create family and to protect and cheer his friends in the midst of war. Aaron Spooner explains that the ravages of war often forced men into the difficult position of resorting to dishonorable means of earning a living: "What Pistol has lost while he has been in France, he now intends to regain by theft in England, if indeed thievery can restore a lost spouse and lost honor. Fluellen's harsh treatment of Pistol seems only to confirm Pistol's future path as a cutpurse, much as the harsh conditions of military service led many men in England to turn vagabond" (76). The image of "Honour" being "cudgelled" out of Pistol's body recalls Fluellen's beating and invokes the ensign's requisite honor. Combining notions of the

ensign's honor with his physical assault, Pistol's language suggests that his military service has effectively stripped him of his rank and reputation as an ensign. Just as a soldier's pay ends with his military service, so does his identity as a soldier. Nell's death reinforces this disconnection from identity. Pistol's conversation with Henry shows that he places great importance on family ties, and without a wife, he loses his identity as a husband. This loss of reputation is the reason that Pistol vows to revert to his former occupations as a bawd and a thief. Pistol must become resourceful and resort to what he knows to do, just as he initially went to the war in France because it provided him a financial opportunity.

Shakespeare stages Pistol's rhetorical return to crime to inspire both fear and compassion. Heather Dubrow observes that in Pistol's soliloquy,

The lines stage recurrent cultural fears of the demobilized soldier who becomes beggar and thief.... Yet the passage makes Pistol somewhat sympathetic even as it associates him with the most unsavoury types of thief and rogue. Notice, for example, how different it would seem if it read not 'My Doll' (81) but 'Doll.' Similarly, the references to Fortune and to his apparently genuine exhaustion establish him as victim as well as predator.... Pistol's speech, then, swerves between its predominant drive to discredit this thief and its urge to complicate that judgment by making him somewhat sympathetic. (74)⁸

The lines vacillate between Elizabethan fears of soldiers-turned-thieves and their sympathy for the soldiers who sacrifice their lives and fight for English victory, and then are demobilized into poverty, disability, or both. This vacillation acknowledges an ambivalent audience. In terms of

⁸ There is some textual confusion here as to whether Pistol's soliloquy refers to Nell Quickly or Doll Tearsheet, who are distinct characters in *2 Henry IV*. As shown above, the Quarto version that Dubrow uses contains the reading "My Doll is dead." *The Norton Shakespeare* follows the Folio, and thus resolves this issue by having Pistol here refer to Nell rather than Doll, which is likely a term of endearment. Earlier in the play, Pistol refers to Doll Tearsheet as a whore and by her full name: "Fetch forth the lazar kite of Cressid's kind: Doll Tearsheet she by name" (2.1.69-70). Pistol has no sentimental connection to Doll, and she never appears onstage in *Henry V*, making a strong case for a reading of Pistol's soliloquy as referring to his wife, whether the text shows Nell's name or Doll's.

temporal movement onstage, the lines register first Pistol's losses, then his plans for the future, suggesting that he is thinking out loud, assessing his situation and working through the best avenue for surviving back home. His plan to become a thief and a bawd and to lie about his wounds ends the speech on a sour note. Perhaps this final portrait of Pistol causes distaste among audience members. This conclusion to his role occurs in the context of a disconcerting perspective of his criminal activities, although some audience members may certainly also feel sympathy for his difficult position.

The "malady of France" that kills Nell ironically reflects Pistol's own military service in France. Howard Schmitt considers Nell the play's "second war bride" (77), a name that evokes the union of military and domestic concerns. Though Schmitt considers Catherine as the play's first war bride, Nell is chronologically the first. Catherine's marriage ends the war with England. Nell's death represents the domestic casualty of war, the carnage unseen by privileged aristocrats like Catherine. Like many bereaved individuals, and as a character motivated by domestic relationships, Pistol might partially blame himself, questioning if the outcome would have been different had he been home with his wife. Although Nell likely died from syphilis, commonly considered a French disease, the phrase "malady of France" suggests Pistol's self-blame. The malady is not only a sexually transmitted infection (which perhaps she would not have contracted had Pistol remained home), but his tour in France.

Pistol's speech reinforces the alternative view of Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech begun in 4.4. Hunt argues, "if Henry's eloquent St. Crispin's Day battle oration swells English valor to beat the French despite the odds of five to one, it does nothing for Pistol and those among Henry's troops like him" (12). Pistol's soliloquy contrasts with Henry's prediction of soldiers reminiscing about St. Crispin's Day. In his speech, Henry proudly reflects on soldiers living to an old age. Rather than being an old soldier who will proudly "strip his sleeve and show his scars

/ And say, ‘These wounds I had on Crispin’s Day’” (4.3.47-8), Pistol characterizes himself as already being an old soldier who plans to lie and say that his wounds from Fluellen’s beating were obtained in the course of battle (5.1.75-80). He proves Gower’s earlier accusation that he is “a gull, a fool, a rogue, that now and then goes to the wars, to grace himself at his return into London under the form of a soldier” (3.6.63-5), someone who will return to London speaking military jargon to trick people into believing his stories. According to Rich, ensigns had a reputation for such behavior: often, when the ensign has “bene a moneth of two in the lowe Countries... and can speak a little of the new Discipline, they will discourse of greater exploitēs than ever was performed before Troy” (qtd. in *Shakespeare’s Military World* 83). This characterization directly contradicts the ensign’s reputation for honor and honesty. Rich establishes the ensign’s dishonesty postwar about his service as posing questions about standards of rank. He does not, however, indicate that the ensign is expected to be dishonest in the midst of battle, but only after, and only in inflating his war stories. The ensign who returned home and lied about his service would certainly have been perceived, like Pistol often is, as a disgrace to military service. Without family, however, Pistol must cling to the most honorable reputation available to him. The ensign’s honor provides a necessary cover to his illicit activities. A battle-scarred Pistol would furthermore foster a tougher persona that may be taken more seriously by Londoners upon his return home, and prevents the discovery that his primary role at war was providing encouragement rather than fighting.

Henry further promises that the English troops will tell their sons war stories: “This story shall the good man teach his son” (4.3.56). Clearly this cannot apply to Pistol, who has no son, nor any longer the opportunity to have one with Nell. Henry famously calls the soldiers “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. / For he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother” (4.3.60-3). Pistol probably feels little brotherhood with the other soldiers; his friends

have been executed and Henry encounters him alone the night before the battle at Agincourt. Henry's promises stretch the limits of irony in how neatly they undercut Pistol's suffering. Pistol's war scars come from an encounter with another English soldier, he has no son to tell war stories, and his brothers have died. Henry implies that the English soldiers' social rank will rise commensurate with their share of glory with him on the battlefield; however, Pistol falls in rank as a soldier (when war ceased, so did a soldier's pay) and a citizen (from husband to widower), which necessitates his return to old habits. Once again, Henry's experience is juxtaposed with Pistol's as he demands marriage as a type of domestic reward for his military service: "Yet leave our cousin Catherine here with us. / She is our capital demand" (5.2.95-6). Pistol's reason for the war is financial and domestic security; his wife dies and he attains neither. Henry's reason for war is to maintain authority as King of England, and he leaves victorious, having expanded both English territory and his power, and with a wife. Pistol leaves the stage beaten, bereaved, and in poverty, his domestic happiness destroyed as a casualty of war. Pistol's role thus ends with a portrait of how military service may lead to dishonor and dishonesty, and how it disrupts domestic life.

CHAPTER 4

IAGO: A DOMESTIC DEVIL

Pistol and Iago's rank and duties connect them to both military and domestic spheres, the tension between which animates their roles in *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Othello*. The two characters are nonetheless near opposites in their attitudes toward and actions within martial and domestic contexts. While the previous chapter has emphasized a predominantly sympathetic portrayal of Pistol, it is important to remember that Shakespeare also uses the ensign's supposed honor and honesty to undercut the honor that King Henry V attributes to being a soldier. Pistol initially views the military as a means for attaining a financially secure future with Nell; however, Iago views his and Othello's marriages as expendable resources for his military advancement. Pistol uses military service to try to improve his domestic life, but Iago uses the domestic to try to advance his military career. Shakespeare's depiction of domestic and military issues in these plays nonetheless yields similar results: the destruction of the domestic as a result of military rule. Shakespeare uses the ensign figure to explore ironic differences between rank and behavior in both characters, who violate expectations of honor and honesty. Pistol and Iago are near opposites in terms of how they are perceived. Nell and Doll easily recognize Pistol's blatantly dishonorable behavior and his failure to fulfill cultural expectations. His relatively honorable service in France nonetheless results in his return to dishonorable means of living. Roderigo, Emilia, Cassio, Desdemona, and especially Othello have great difficulty recognizing Iago's dissimulated honesty and consistently misjudge him as an honorable person. His rank reinforces his reputation as an honest man, and it is not until the final scene of the final act that Othello knows his falsehood.

Although Iago is an ensign, he does not carry one in the play, nor do audiences witness him in battle. However, at the beginning of the play, he vows to "show out a flag and sign of

love, / Which is indeed but sign” (1.1.157-8). This important line signals that Shakespeare is playing with the tradition of the honest and honorable ensign: Iago is an ironic ensign in that he creates false flags, or representations, in order to mislead others. This ability exposes Othello to Iago’s manipulation. To match and reinforce his verbal deception, he reconfigures Desdemona’s handkerchief to create an ensign of her supposed infidelity. Iago thus convinces Othello to view the handkerchief as a symbol of domestic truth, substituting the handkerchief for his own military ensign, and consequently substituting military strife in the place of marital cohesion, which subsequently disintegrates. Desdemona’s handkerchief represents the corrupted remnants of the ensign’s former duty to uphold the standard. Julia Genster argues that Iago is able to transform the handkerchief into a symbol because “his duties as ensign transfer readily into an ability to construct new signs as he requires them, to turn, as with the handkerchief, sign into emblem” (794-5). The handkerchief becomes a type of anti-ensign for Iago, both in the sense that it misrepresents the meaning of appearances and in that it does not actually belong to him. Iago preys on his wife’s love, gaining possession of the handkerchief through Emilia, who does “nothing, but to please his fancy” (3.3.303). Emilia has access to Desdemona, and Iago uses their connection to gain proximity to Othello’s marriage, as if advancing in a battalion at war. Iago consistently abuses women to try to advance his military stature, showing that he subordinates his domestic affairs to his desire for military advancement.

Whereas the *Henriad* focuses primarily on the military world, *Othello* is equally a domestic and a military tragedy. Draper makes a common observation when he writes “*Othello* is a domestic tragedy of the English Renaissance” (724). Marvin Rosenberg goes as far as to claim that it is “the most recognizably domestic of all [Shakespeare’s] tragedies” (150). What receives little attention, however, is the curiosity of a domestic tragedy that takes place both away from the characters’ homes in Venice *and* in a military context, which offers Iago an

opportunity to unsettle other characters' concept of home. More recently, James Siemon argues: “*Othello* portrays struggles surrounding attainments, affirmations, and losses of office, rank, and place – military, civil and domestic” (179). The play stages a domestic tragedy in a notably martial context, one in which the prescribed duties of rank interfere with and disrupt domestic concerns, producing anxieties about being replaced in rank, in marriage, or both. This context leads Othello to place Desdemona in Iago's care during his absence, both a military and a domestic duty that Iago uses to his advantage. Because Othello conflates being married with his military status and he subordinates his marriage to military rule, Iago is able to use the domestic to promote his own military aspirations. Iago despises domesticity, which he rhetorically degrades to manipulate others. Military responsibility destroys domesticity because dishonorable military servants such as Iago are often assigned to perform domestic duties. For example, when Othello appoints Iago as Desdemona's escort, he yields both domestic and military authority to a lower ranking, dishonest officer.

Othello's orders to go to Cyprus result in a similar blending of military and domestic concerns, which proves fatal. Just as in *Henry V*, Shakespeare uses the figure of the ensign to explore the effect of military service on domestic relationships. Othello twice affirms that he assigns Iago to oversee and preserve the sanctity of his marriage as a result of his trust in Iago's honesty, which he clearly associates with his rank. When the Duke issues Othello's orders, he asks who will look after Desdemona, and Othello says: “So please your grace, my *ensign*. / A man he is of *honesty* and *trust*. / To his conveyance I assign my wife” (1.3.282-4; italics mine). The Duke's question reconfigures Othello's marriage as a military matter. Othello accordingly “assign[s]” Desdemona as if she were one of his military inferiors rather than his wife. After Othello receives orders to Cyprus, he explains to “Honest Iago, / My Desdemona must I leave to thee” (1.3.293-4). Othello believes that Iago's rank and honesty as a military servant will lead

him to take care of his marriage with similar honor. He similarly perceives a connection between his own rank and his marriage. C. F. Burgess observes “So closely linked for Othello are the two major motivating forces in his life, that they are interdependent; if Desdemona’s love is gone, so too is Othello’s occupation” (210). Considering that Othello wooed Desdemona with tales of his military bravery, they share this interdependency, which Othello nurtures by tying his marriage to his military service, protecting it with military force.

In contrast to Pistol’s transparent braggadocio, Iago’s manipulative behaviors remain undetected until the play’s final scene. Iago easily deceives Othello because he trusts his ensign to fulfill the cultural expectations of his rank. Despite making Cassio his lieutenant, the officer in charge in his stead, Othello appoints Iago as Desdemona’s escort at least in part due to Iago’s rank as ensign and his trust in his “honest” reputation (2.3.309; 3.3.5; 5.1.32; 5.2.79). Iago is thus empowered by his rank’s reputation to lie and evade Othello’s suspicion for the overwhelming majority of the play. Iago’s promotion is ironic because it both expands the ensign’s prescribed duties and Othello’s later concerns about Desdemona’s fidelity. Iago solidifies this promotion by further connecting the duties of his rank to his oversight of Desdemona. He recreates her handkerchief as a symbol of his occupation of both the military and domestic spheres. Othello is unaware when he assigns Desdemona to be escorted by Iago that he does not adhere to his military duties. Extending Iago’s duty to honest and honorable behavior in a domestic sphere, and with his own wife, Othello reveals his blind trust in Iago’s rank and honesty. Once again, Othello’s actions conflate military and domestic responsibilities. Iago’s promotion is furthermore ironic because it is not to the rank of lieutenant that he desires, but rather conscription to domestic duties that he regards as base. Even when Othello promotes Iago specifically to the rank of lieutenant later in 3.3, it is only for the purpose of serving him in domestic matters.

Despite Othello’s trust in Iago, their relationship often involves anxieties about

replacement. Military ranks remain more or less fixed, but individuals occupying a particular rank may be easily replaced. Iago exploits the fear that domestic positions might also be transferrable. As his military superior, Othello commands Iago to perform his own domestic duty – taking care of Desdemona – effectively promoting Iago to the role of husband-lieutenant. Because Othello is Iago’s superior officer, his later order, “Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,” also compels Iago with the same impetus of a military command, and in fact even more so because a lieutenant’s duty is to serve as an extension of his commander’s authority in his absence (3.3.364). Iago initiates the sequence of events that causes Othello to issue this command, and seizes it as an opportunity to advance his military status. His ability to do so hinges on Othello’s mistake of assigning him to care for Desdemona. Iago not only symbolically replaces Othello, but fears that Othello has replaced him when he says, “I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leapt into my seat, the thought whereof / Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards” (2.1.182-4). Iago characterizes sexuality, particularly sexual jealousy, in terms of digestion. As will soon be explored in greater depth, Iago uses rhetoric that degrades concepts of sex and domesticity by locating them in bodily materiality and forcing others to envision replacement to prey on their fears of sexual jealousy. Here, Iago himself fears the materialization of his own rhetorical maneuver: that Othello has replaced him in bed, has taken his office as a husband. Iago’s grievances reflect an anxiety about replacement, which he rhetorically exploits in others. Iago uses this anxiety against Othello to convince him of his honesty.

Iago presses Othello to investigate Desdemona’s infidelity by using the rhetoric of replacement. In *Henry V*, Pistol’s military superior, Fluellen, physically abuses him; in *Othello*, it is the military inferior Iago who emotionally abuses his commanding officer, Othello. When Iago finds Othello less susceptible to his lies than he would like, he offers to relinquish his military rank to prove his devotion to Othello, proclaiming “God buy you, take mine office,” an

expression that welcomes someone to replace him in his position (3.3.380). Genster explains why this angle would be so effective in assuring Othello of the honesty he already attributes to Iago: “The offer is particularly calculating: it reminds Othello of what he expects from his ancient, and it recalls the general's own words in the Senate. There he declared he would renounce his post if Desdemona's testimony proved him false; here Iago offers to resign his if she proves true” (795). Othello has just previously lamented the loss of his military office, saying “Othello’s occupation’s gone” (3.3.362) as if by cuckolding him, Cassio would replace him both in his marriage and in his rank. Othello fears being replaced in the two most important roles in his life: General of the Venetian army and husband to Desdemona. Iago’s offer encourages Othello – in opposition to the usual encouragement required of the ensign – with a false example of bravery in the face of such replacement, one which suggests that a man should be willing to suffer replacement in order to know the truth.

The scene concludes with a dramatic blending of the domestic and military: a parody of marriage in which Othello and Iago kneel to pledge their love for one another and Othello promotes Iago to lieutenant. Iago’s false show of allegiance to Othello contrasts with Pistol’s brotherly treatment of his fellow soldiers. According to Elizabeth Mazzola, “Iago only seems able to persuade Othello to adopt his view of things when Othello can be removed from more public spaces” (45). Iago similarly chastises Emilia to “Speak within door” (4.2.149) when she loudly proclaims that Othello has been abused by “some most villainous knave” (4.2.143). Iago feels most comfortable in confined or specifically delineated spaces, and his images of enclosure reflect private, domestic spaces. Othello and Iago’s ‘marriage’ occurs in the garden of the citadel, exactly the type of secluded pastoral scene in which one might expect a legitimate wedding to take place. Their dialogue conflates domestic ceremony with military promotion, as it concludes with Othello’s proclamation “Now art thou my lieutenant” (3.3.481). Iago, bride-

like, accepts Othello's proposal, declaring "I am your own for ever" (3.3.482). According to John Baxter, "though Iago himself does not believe in marriage, he feeds parasitically off the energies of the ceremony" (285). He appeals to Othello's possession of him, both body and soul, to encourage his resolve to investigate Desdemona's infidelity and to ease the anxieties – being replaced, dishonesty, and infidelity – that plague his real marriage to Desdemona. Iago's appeal to temporal duration – "for ever" – reflects the idea that a wedding vow lasts even beyond life. He secures his new promotion with language that precludes his replacement.

Despite Othello's trust in Iago's honest and honorable behavior in domestic affairs, at the beginning of the play, Iago makes clear his disdain for domesticity, which he associates with women. He has the exact opposite perspective of Pistol, who values and cultivates domestic relationships even in the midst of battle. Even in the absence of war, Iago seeks to degrade his fellow soldiers rather than to cultivate solidarity with them. He insults Cassio as an inexperienced soldier who has "never set a squadron in the field, / Nor the division of a battle knows / More than a spinster" (1.1.22-3). Iago's famous grievance, part of his motivation for seeking Othello's ruin, is a jealousy of military rank: Othello has promoted Cassio to be his lieutenant over Iago. Along with the ensign, the lieutenant has historical characterizations in Elizabethan military documents; these two ranks were in fact characteristically at conflict with one another. The Digges' military conduct treatise suggests that strife might emerge between the ensign and the lieutenant because the lieutenant's duties are rendered unnecessary by the ensign and other officers: "This Officer [lieutenant] I find not in the *Romane* Armies, neither see I any cause why in these Dayes we shoulde neede them, if the Ensigne and other officers sufficiently knewe theyr duetie" (91). Replicating this tradition, the ensign, Iago, makes clear his scorn for Cassio, the lieutenant, by labeling him "a great arithmetician" (1.1.18) and a "bookish theoretic," someone whose military experience derives from study rather than from field experience

(1.1.23).⁹ He similarly disparages the domestic duties performed by housewives, to whom he derogatorily refers as “spinster[s].”¹⁰ Iago degrades Cassio’s military experience by assigning it this domestic term. For Iago, soldiers with experience are men, and soldiers with theoretical experience are as useless for military service as he perceives married women to be. His language makes domesticity irreconcilable with military service. Perceiving domestic concern as a weakness in the other characters, he exploits it to facilitate his military aspirations.

Iago holds not only a military jealousy of Cassio, but a domestic one. Shortly after revealing his fear of an affair between Othello and Emilia, he implicates Cassio as another rival to his marriage: “For I fear Cassio with my nightcap, too” (2.3.294). The ensign’s jealousy of the lieutenant was described in exactly such terms by the Digges. Using a domestic metaphor for military service, their text explains in the very first paragraph outlining the Ensign’s qualities and duties that “so ought especiallye this Officer to whom the charge of Ensigne is committed, as aboue al other to have honorable respect of his charge, and to be no lesse careful and jealous therof, than euery honest and honorable Gentleman should of his wife” (88). Given the potential overlap between the office of the ensign and the lieutenant recorded by the Digges, domestic jealousy would most appropriately apply to the lieutenant. Iago’s jealousy is provoked not only by Cassio’s promotion, but in Cassio’s greeting Emilia early in the play. Cassio walks right up to Emilia and kisses her with a self-admitted “bold show of courtesy” (2.1.102), saying “Welcome, mistress” (2.1.99). Cassio’s greeting to Emilia displays Iago’s fears of replacement right before his eyes. The fact that Cassio was promoted over Iago adds further insult to the situation and

⁹ Rich suggests that the lieutenant’s rank “requires great knowledge in the field,” so Iago’s claim of Cassio’s strictly theoretical understanding of war could represent another instance of Shakespeare exploiting the expectations of military rank for ironic effect.

¹⁰ The Norton Anthology here glosses the word ‘spinster’ as ‘housewife,’ drawing attention to the fact that in the mind of an early modern audience, the word would be clearly connected with marriage, rather than our contemporary understanding of a spinster as an unmarried woman. Iago expects housewives to know very little, if nothing of war and the military. However, Jorgensen’s assertion that the public learned of military exploits from soldiers returning from war (see n. 4) suggests that housewives actually might have gained second-hand knowledge of the military through family and friends (“Military Rank” 18).

heightens the anxiety of replacement: after being promoted over Iago, Cassio now appears to be seeking to replace Iago's domestic authority. Emilia's attitude toward adultery, expressed later in the play, informs her openness with other men such as Cassio: "who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch?" (4.3.73-5). Her language associates infidelity with the possibility of achieving the highest of military ranks. For Iago, too, adultery and lustful sex offer opportunities to control other characters. It is exactly the possibility of a wife's unrepentant infidelity that both Iago and Othello fear. Emilia's position on adultery and Iago's double fear of Cassio, both martial and marital, again portray the blurred boundary between military and domestic spheres.

Iago intentionally uses language to degrade concepts of domesticity, unlike Pistol, whose language expresses a positive perspective of domestic life. In particular, he uses the desires and anxieties, both familial and marital, of Emilia, Brabantio, Roderigo, and Othello, to steer their actions in his favor. His rhetoric calls into question and ultimately destroys the other characters' perceptions of domesticity, exchanging related concepts with less appealing material substitutes. Genster explains this rhetorical maneuver: Iago "seems, in line with his peculiarly concretizing imagination, to conceive of places, military, social, and sexual, in spatial terms, so that one occupant drives the other out" (798-9). Ken Jacobsen elaborates:

Iago repeatedly subverts conceptual and moral norms, replacing them with alternative universals that support his radically temporal, materialist, and power-centered perspective. Love, for example, is represented as nothing but appetite misrecognized and therefore unstable: "These Moors are changeable in their wills. . . . The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coliquintida. She must change for youth. . . . She must have change, she must" (1.3.346-52). As a result of this manipulation, Iago's auditors are

plunged into uncertainty and anomie, becoming even more manipulable. (521-22)

Iago destabilizes the conceptual norms of domesticity, such as family, romance, and marriage. He effectively replaces these ideas with physically distasteful and grotesque processes, rhetorically besieging, bombarding, and occupying the minds of others. For example, Emilia echoes his statement about men's destructive appetites for women: men "are all but stomachs, and we all but food. / They eat us hungrily, but when they are full, / They belch us" (3.4.99-102). Iago and Emilia's assessments reify male romance and sexuality, recasting these ideas in material, specifically gastrointestinal terms. Locating love and sex as crude processes of the human body, Iago and Emilia degrade these concepts to nauseating materiality. Although Emilia is not present for Iago's claim, it is worth noting that it comes before Emilia's statement, suggesting that Iago uses such language around her often, which has led her to adopt his perspective. In fact, when Iago accuses Emilia of being "a foolish wife," she merely replies, "O, is that all?" (3.3.308-9). Iago occupies Emilia's thought processes and language in the same manner that the Venetians occupy Cyprus, awaiting a war that oddly never materializes, yet nonetheless seems to manifest itself within the domestic relationships of the play, and especially within Iago's warlike speech.

Iago degrades family and sex as part of a rhetorical strategy that operates like a military siege when he convinces Brabantio that Desdemona has become sexually involved with Othello. He calls out "Awake, what ho, Brabantio, thieves, thieves, thieves! Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags. Thieves, thieves!" (1.1.79-81). Iago rhetorically surrounds the true target of his alarm, Desdemona, with Brabantio's property (his "house" and his "bags"), intentionally confusing the domestic concept of daughter with material ownership. He characterizes the matter in terms of Brabantio's material loss, creating the rhetorical illusion of a siege on his possessions. The imagery conveyed by Iago's phrase "an old black ram / Is tugging

your white ewe” degrades marital romance to bestial lust (1.1.88-9). The separation of light and dark, of “ram” and “ewe,” by the line break reinforces Iago’s manipulation of Brabantio’s fears of miscegeny, suggesting that Othello and Desdemona should be apart, yet have joined together in their concupiscence. The result of their miscegeny, according to Iago, will be that Brabantio will “have your nephews neigh to you, you’ll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans” (1.1.113-15). Iago devalues the concepts of family and birth by once again using bestial terms. The solidifying and proliferation of family ties are the opposite of what he wants: the destruction of the domestic, which he achieves through the use of a false ensign that equates marriage with war. As will be explored below, the product of birth for Iago is always something monstrous or evil. Rather than a type of conceptual birth, such as he refers to elsewhere, Iago here proposes the literal birth of Brabantio’s grandchildren: “the devil will make a grandsire of you” (1.1.91). Iago’s calling Othello a devil becomes ironic at the end of the play when they both imply that Iago is the true devil. Light/dark, animal, and demonic imagery fill Iago’s alarm, and these patterns often function in unison to degrade concepts of domesticity such as sex, love, and marriage.¹¹ Iago’s rhetoric in this scene not only resembles a siege, but a barrage of images intended to distort Brabantio’s perceptions of family, marriage, and sex, substituting these concepts with a revolting materiality. The intended effect is to disrupt Brabantio’s sense of domestic security.

As he does with Brabantio, Iago often targets characters in the manner of a rhetorical siege, indicating the military field experience of which he boasts at the beginning of the play. Cassio characterizes this tactic in terms of archery: Iago, he says, “speaks home” (2.1.166). While the term resonates with Iago’s use of the domestic, Sam Wood notes its origin in

¹¹ I must here acknowledge Alexander G. Gonzalez for identifying these patterns of imagery. He does not, however, extend his discussion to include how these images degrade the domestic.

“marksmanship, where home is the target, just as one may also say that a person’s aim is true. To speak home then is to speak directly or honestly, to tell home truths” (para. 22). Wood identifies what he considers “the important connection the play makes between home, or the idea of belonging, and honesty” (para. 9). He pursues the concept of home as “an affective sense of belonging more intimate than identity” (para. 9). As both the play’s ostensibly honest ensign and actually greatest prevaricator, Iago maintains no fixed identity, recognizing as Wood argues “the very idea of home, the origin of any essential being, to be a fiction, because he realizes that any home is no more than a collection of stories that give a person identity” (para.24). Iago’s dishonest behaviors seek to unsettle other characters’ sense of home, of fixed human identity constructed by consistent narrative. For example, Cassio’s assessment relates to Iago’s misogynistic ‘praise’ of various types of women, and just before he begins, he characterizes his thought process in terms of conception: “my muse labours, / And thus she is delivered” (2.1.130-1). Iago constructs a type of linguistic affair with his muse, which produces his dishonorable speech. The idea of his adultery, especially in terms of producing family with another person, and his ironic praise of women would unsettle Emilia’s identity as his wife.

Iago consistently characterizes his thought process in terms of birth, associating his manipulative practices with family. In Cinthio’s narrative, the ensign and Emilia have a child together, but Shakespeare does not characterize Iago as a father. His procreative thought process in Shakespeare’s version represents him rather as both the mother and the father of the play’s evil, or perhaps more accurately, as a self-replicating evil. After Othello appoints Iago as Desdemona’s escort, Iago complains “I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad that ‘twixt my sheets / He has done my office. I know not if’t be true, But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety” (1.3.368-72). This domestic motivation, which Iago himself seems unable to verify, reveals his habit of mind. Reputation “abroad” forms a solid enough reason for

his hatred. Iago labors over the creation of a plan to satisfy this hatred, and expresses its formulation in terms of giving birth: “I ha’t. It is ingendered. Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light” (1.3.385-6). Even alone, Iago degrades conceptual norms of domesticity such as parenthood, substituting it for a type of demonic procreation. Iago’s language mixes two of the rhetorical patterns Gonzalez identifies – hell imagery, and light and dark imagery – with notions of parenthood and monstrosity. In Iago’s conception, parenthood becomes its opposite: a material destruction rather than the creation of new life. The result is literally “monstrous,” a word that suggests deformity and entropy rather than fertility. He concretizes his thought process, revealing once again his strictly materialist perspective. Iago even locates his hatred for Othello “twixt his sheets,” as if this abstract concept needed material existence for him to make sense of it.

Later in the play, Iago manipulates Roderigo into murdering Cassio, using language meant to unsettle Roderigo’s concept of home. Iago associates violence with home as target, identity, and domestic space: “Wear thy good rapier bare, and put it home” (5.1.2). Since Cassio is meant to replace Othello in Cyprus, his death would prevent Othello and Desdemona from returning to Venice. Iago urges Roderigo to make his aim true, to deliver a killing blow that will obliterate Cassio’s identity. His language subtly prompts Roderigo to think of a concrete domestic future in which he and Desdemona share a home. The only impediment to this future is Cassio’s appointment, and Iago suggests that by putting his rapier “home” into Cassio, Roderigo will initiate a relationship with Desdemona, consummating it through violent proxy. This violence dissociates the concept of home from its more comforting associations with identity formation and marital happiness established on trust, honesty, and honorable behavior, virtues that Iago, as an ensign, is supposed to encourage in others.

The carnage at the end of the play results primarily from Iago’s rhetorical debasement of

the other characters' perceptions of domesticity. Next in charge after Cassio, Lodovico orders Graziano to "keep the house" (5.2.375) as he makes public the play's outcome. *Othello* consistently stages replacement in domestic and military office, even in the play's conclusion in which the domestic problems of the plot are, in a sense, cleaned up by relatively uninvolved military actors. Iago's rhetoric, as has been shown, preys on the anxieties that arise from replacement and absence. Although Lodovico seems determined to preserve domestic sanctity, the play ends with the total disruption, even the obliteration, of domesticity: Emilia, Desdemona, and Othello die, and Iago slinks off to be tortured for his crimes; none of the domestic relationships established in the play remain.

Just as at the end of *Henry V*, the domestic sphere associated with the ensign has shattered, though in *Othello*, the ensign Iago is the agent of this destruction. The "house" that Lodovico desperately wants to protect no longer exists, but is a casualty of Iago's military aspiration; the play no longer contains the sense of 'home' that defines a belonging beyond identity, in the sense that Wood uses the word, but rather merely a house, simply a place in which people live. As is now commonly expressed as a type of proverb, a house is not a home. The difference is between simply occupying space and feeling that one belongs in the space one occupies. This sense of homelessness in terms of identity leads Roderigo to observe Iago's "words and performances are no kin together" (4.2.186-7). Iago is a man without connection to family or domesticity, but instead sacrifices these concepts to his military advancement. The unmasking of Iago's nefarious actions leads Othello to make the observation: "If that thou beest a devil, I cannot kill thee" (5.2.293). Iago's assertion he "bleed[s], sir, but not killed" (5.2.294) may be understood as a confirmation of Othello's statement, yet Iago's acknowledgement of his own blood seems to assert his humanity as much as it affirms his status as a type of devil that Othello cannot kill. Iago is both man and devil. His status as a devil suggests that he maintains

no concept of home in terms of human identity; he maintains no connection to domesticity other than preying on other characters' anxieties of replacement.

One primary truth confronting the characters at the play's ending is that their domestic affairs have been irrevocably altered, subsumed within military culture. The revelation of Iago's crimes reflects Emilia's reconciliation with truth. She realizes that Iago has told "an odious, damnèd lie" to deceive Othello (5.2.187). He attempts to regain control over the scene by commanding Emilia "I charge you get you home" (5.2.201). Iago has no military inferiors in the play, but nonetheless orders his wife as if she were a soldier in his charge. The word "charge" has a distinct military meaning. Rich uses the word twice in his description of the ensign's jealousy of the lieutenant. Pistol uses it as both military command and sexual innuendo when speaking to Doll Tearsheet. Othello interrogates Iago about Cassio's drunken fight with Montano by asking "Who began this? On thy love I charge thee," a command that equates military order with personal love (2.3.161). Iago's charging Emilia to go home demonstrates that he has psychologically transformed his marriage into a military arrangement in order to mobilize an attack against Othello's own marriage. This transformation is reflected in the play's action through his and Emilia's physical journey from Venice to Cyprus. Emilia exposes her destabilized identity when she responds "Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (5.2.204). She must reconcile what has appeared to her an honest and honorable husband with the man who has abused her trust throughout the play. The most direct reading of her line would interpret her to mean that she will not be returning to their home in Venice, but in Wood's understanding of 'home' in the play as referring to identity, she is also expressing that she will never again be able to return to being Iago's wife, or to her former domestic identity. Iago has utterly destroyed Emilia's concept of trust, which is so crucial both to his duty as an ensign and to happiness in a home and in marriage. Read together with Lodovico's command to Graziano, her revelation

expresses the absolute destruction of domesticity; characters no longer seek positive identity formation within the types of domestic spaces Iago has invaded and corrupted, such as Desdemona and Othello's bedroom. Instead, military actors only try to "keep the house," to preserve what little remains of the domestic, which has now become merely a space to be occupied rather than a space in which memories may be created and shared, cultivating trust and domestic identity (5.2.375). Iago's rhetoric razes the characters' sense of home, a place where identity is cultivated, so that only military order prevails. The emptiness of Emilia and Iago's home reflects the fears of replacement on which Iago preys, though now there is nothing to be replaced, as both Lodovico and Emilia so succinctly and tragically express. Iago's rank permits him to exploit marriage, family, and sex as resources for advancement; his actions ironically empty the domestic of its honor and honesty, values he is meant to uphold as an ensign.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIZING ENSIGNS

As argued in the introduction of this thesis, Shakespeare's two ensigns, Pistol and Iago, share a counterfeit demeanor, and both pursue extralegal means of accomplishing their goals, raising questions about military service and the honesty and honor that ostensibly characterize their rank. Shakespeare dramatizes the potential for irony through the ensign's purposeful violation of military duty: Pistol seeks military service for personal financial motives rather than for the pursuit of honor within his company, and Iago is Shakespeare's greatest prevaricator, abusing others' belief in prescribed military social practices. The office of the ensign is intended as a representation of the military, and the dishonesty and dishonorable behaviors of Pistol and Iago suggest that Shakespeare viewed the military as an organization less than honest or honorable.

Shakespeare further uses the figure of the ensign to explore the relationship between the military and the domestic. This relationship ultimately results in the destruction of the domestic. In *Henry V*, Pistol's financial condition makes his military service a material necessity. Although King Henry, in an attempt to instill courage in his soldiers, proposes a blissful domestic future as the outcome of English victory, Pistol's final speech exposes Henry's promises as empty rhetoric meant to inspire martial courage rather than to express his desire to secure his soldiers' happiness. *Othello* portrays matters differently, though the result is still the loss of domestic peace. Military ranks are easily refilled with any number of other personnel. Iago replaces Cassio, just as he suspects that Cassio has replaced him in his marriage. Partly because their wives accompany them to their military service, Iago and Othello both fear that this practice may infiltrate the domestic realm; the same logic of replacement could corrupt their marriages. The play's martial context generates greater trust between military personnel than domestic partners.

For example, Othello trusts Iago as his officer and an honest ensign. This trust renders the domestic vulnerable to military force.

Shakespeare's representation of the ensign reveals his sense of the fragility of the domestic sphere. In *Henry V* and *Othello*, this sphere proves especially fragile since it is forced to yield to military actions or modes of thought. Pistol's military service prevents his spending time with Nell in her final moments of life and destroys his hope for a domestic future, replacing it with cynical criminality. Iago views promotion as an end in itself, and uses military tactics to destroy the characters' domestic identities in pursuit of lieutenantancy. At the play's very beginning, Iago laments being passed over for promotion. His plan to "show out a flag and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign" both clearly and ironically shows him acting to avenge this grievance with ruthless determination (1.1.157-8). Just like the ensign's prescribed military duties, a peaceful domestic life requires honesty and honorable behavior. However, such qualities may be easier to enact in a private context wherein individuals mutually encourage one another to form identities based on trust, rather than in a highly competitive and hierarchical atmosphere such as the military. Both Pistol and Iago prove the failure of military theory as social practice. Shakespeare stages the tragic ramifications of this failure through Pistol, who loses a wife while at war, and Iago, who sacrifices his wife to advance his military career and finally in a desperate attempt to conceal his deceit. Domestic affairs in the *Henriad* and in *Othello* become subject to military actions, ultimately opening the characters' private affairs to the tragedies of war, martial rivalry, and marital jealousy.

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