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Shakespeare

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What a Piece of Work is Man: Masculinity in Shakespeare's Works

Masculinity is a concept that can be hard to grasp. It is a series of signifiers and traits that are often haphazardly thrown together into a crude and occasionally misshapen form, which is then labeled 'man.' These signifiers can change over time, but the basic structure has remained the same for a remarkable length of time. Men are providers, they are protectors, they are strong and persistent and hard-working and they never let their emotions get the better of them. This is, at least, the understanding of men in the English-speaking world, a world that has been shaped by the writings of William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's works have much to say about the role of men in society: what a man should be, how he should behave, how he should think, feel, and act. In these, he mostly reinforces the standards of his time (Henry V), but he subverts them in a few ways, namely that men in his works are permitted to show emotion (Hamlet, Brutus), are punished for rushing to violence (Parolles, Othello), and in many ways find themselves ruled by the women around them (Bertram, Macbeth).

1. *Twelfth Night or, What You Will*

Twelfth Night or, What You Will shows a clear picture of what it means, in Shakespeare's worlds, to be a man. The play itself centers on genderbending and the expectations one faces as both man and woman. As with the Bard's famous proclamation that "all the world's a stage," Ecaterina Hanțiu argues that *Twelfth Night* depicts a world where gender expression, and

therefore masculinity, is something that can be worn as a costume, played and performed (Hanþiu).

In *Twelfth Night*, the young Viola finds herself shipwrecked in Illyria, bereft of any companions save her ship's captain and having (she thinks) lost her twin brother Sebastian. In an effort to make a new life for herself in the court of Duke Orsino, she disguises herself as a male eunuch (footnotes suggest she is disguising herself as a *castrato* so her voice will not give her away). That she feels she needs to do this elucidates a couple of facts about Shakespeare's heightened world, the one he describes in *Twelfth Night*.

First, Viola does not think she will succeed in Duke Orsino's court as a woman. This part is clear. Her first plan to serve the duke in his court is to disguise herself as a man, meaning she did not at any point consider displaying herself as a woman until she has "made [her] own occasion mellow/What [her] estate is" (*Twelfth Night*, I.ii.43-44a). Second, Viola believes she can do this. She tells the captain that in helping her with her disguise, "It may be worth thy pains; for [she] can sing/And speak to him in many forms of music/That will allow [her] very worth his service" (*Twelfth Night*, I.ii.57-59). To Viola, all she needs to do to pretend to be a man is dress up as one and claim to be one. Her performance, in other words, is all that is needed.

And indeed, she is proven right. Her manhood is never called into question, and when she has to reveal herself in Act V, Sebastian is so impressed with her disguise that he thinks he sees himself (*Twelfth Night*, V.i.226). Viola has so successfully put on the performance of masculinity as Cesario that it takes a back and forth between her and Sebastian about the nature of their childhood before she is believed. All of this taken together suggests that Shakespeare sees manhood as a costume that can be worn, assuming the wearer does so convincingly.

And he might well believe this, considering Viola would have been played by a man when he wrote the play. As women were not permitted on Elizabethan stages, the part of Viola throughout the play would have been performed by a male actor, both when pretending to be Viola and when pretending to be Viola pretending to be Cesario. Shakespeare's audience certainly would have had to suspend their disbelief when watching this male actor playact at being a woman, so that same woman playacting at masculinity would not likely have been a stretch for them. This fact of the Elizabethan theater must be kept in mind going forward, as it colors all of the gender expression in Shakespeare's works.

2. *All's Well That Ends Well*

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare offers two characters whose manhood is constantly in question: Bertram and Parolles. Parolles, in his eagerness to rush to war, gets punished, while Bertram finds himself ruled by the strong woman in his life. Richard Wheeler grants Bertram the ignoble honor of possessing "precarious masculinity" and finding that his marriage to Helena is putting that masculinity in danger (Wheeler 41). Parolles, Bertram's good friend, is a braggart and a coward, supposedly a picture of masculinity and yet finding himself exposed in the course of the play as a simpering fool.

Bertram is in an odd position in *All's Well*, being the primary male lead and object of Helena's affection while also being an unlikable snob. Upon his arranged marriage to someone he views as beneath his station, Bertram flees to Florence to go to war, an endeavor he thinks will keep him far away from his wife while also allowing him to exercise his masculine traits. There, like the other various lords and young men who go from France to fight in a foreign war, he expects to win glory for himself and prove how strong he is. As he tells Helena before he

leaves, he does not ever want to go home “Whilst [he] can shake [his] sword or hear the drum” (*All’s Well That Ends Well*, II.v.91).

Parolles, on the other hand, has no external force driving him to Florence to fight in someone else’s war. He is only there to prove himself a brave soldier, a task he fails at spectacularly. Act IV sees him captured by his own side while attempting to recover a lost drum, whereupon in fearing for his life he surrenders every piece of information he knows to those he believes to be his enemies. He even gives up Bertram, the man he claims is his friend, to avoid being hanged. In the end, for all his bragging, he is revealed as Helena called him in Act I, “a notorious liar...soly a coward” (*All’s Well*, I.i.100-101). Later, in Act V, the clearest picture of Parolles’ emasculation comes when he, dressed in fool’s motley, returns to court, and Lord Lafew says, “I saw the man to-day, if man he be” (*All’s Well*, V.iii.203).

Bertram, meanwhile, spends Act V learning just how he has been emasculated. Throughout the play, he has insisted that he will never love his wife unless she bears the ring from his finger and his own child, which he knows to be an impossible task because he intends to never see her again, much less consummate their marriage. But Helena fools him, playing a bed-trick and tricking him into sleeping with her while pretending to be a woman Bertram is infatuated with, that same woman having previously conned him out of his ring while in cahoots with Helena. When she arrives in Act V having met all his demands, the king of France orders the marriage complete before the whole court. Bertram suddenly changes his tune here, insisting that “If she, my liege, can make me know this [her success at meeting his demands] clearly/I’ll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly!” (*All’s Well*, V.iii.315-316).

Bertram never makes his emasculation clear to the audience, but it is clear through the circumstances that he has been. David McCandless claims that through the bed-trick, and indeed

throughout the play, Helena “occupies the masculine position of desiring subject,” while Bertram “occupies the feminine space of the Other, even as he struggles to define himself as a man by becoming a military and sexual conqueror” (McCandless). In having the bed-trick revealed, Bertram discovers that he has not been the sexual force he thought himself to be, but was instead manipulated and pursued successfully by his wife, a traditionally feminine role. Thus, Shakespeare uses *All's Well That Ends Well* to explore what happens to men when they find themselves emasculated, especially men who fight and struggle so hard to prop themselves up as mighty and masculine.

3. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

The gender politics at work in the Scottish Play are writ large across the text, driven as it is by Macbeth’s own need to feel masculine and his wife’s apparent desire to emasculate him and take his power for herself. Alongside the marital drama is a story of kings, murder, and betrayal, but none of it is as thrilling as these conversations between Macbeth and his Lady.

Macbeth tells the story of a Scottish nobleman, Thane of Glamis, who in the aftermath of a battle meets three witches who prophesy that he will soon become King of Scotland. As the King of Scotland is currently alive and well, however, Macbeth determines, at the urging of his wife, to slay the king and take his crown for himself. “At the urging of his wife” is an important part of the previous sentence, as Macbeth spends much of his time pre-regicide vacillating between whether or not to do this thing, and it is his wife, Lady Macbeth, who pushes him onward. Act I sees Macbeth insisting that he “dare do all that may become a man;/Who dares do more is none” (*Macbeth*, I.vii.46-47a). In response, his wife demands, “What beast was’t then/That made you break this enterprise to me?/When you durst do it, then you were a man;/And to be more than what you were, you would/Be so much more the man” (*Macbeth*,

I.vii.47b-51a). Here, Lady Macbeth makes explicit her view of her husband's manhood. His masculinity rests on his ability to seize what he has been promised, his ambition and desire for power make him a man. If he will not murder the king and place the crown on his own head, he is not a man, but becomes one the moment he takes what she believes he is owed.

Lady Macbeth is a complicated figure for those who write about Shakespeare, especially those who wish to untangle the gender politics in his works. Her speech in Act I, Scene V, where she demands to be "unsexed" and filled "from the crown to the toe topful/Of direst cruelty!" is a clear picture of her own belief, that her womanhood is at direct odds with her ambitious nature (*Macbeth*, I.v.41-43). Mafruha Ferdous says that Lady Macbeth understands that "only these features [masculine traits] will help her to reach success in the male-dominated world" (Ferdous). For Lady Macbeth, masculinity equals power, and femininity equals weakness.

Macbeth lives in fear of emasculation. He is, as a character, driven almost entirely by external forces. Ferdous calls him "a weak person, who depends on the opinion of others" and "a tyrant and a meek husband dominated by his overbearing wife" (Ferdous). Aside from his personal ambition, of which he seems to have a healthy amount at the start of the play, his primary motivation for murdering King Duncan is his desire to appear masculine and powerful in the eyes of his wife.

After the deed is done, Macbeth and his wife trade roles. He becomes more paranoid and determined to maintain his grip on power, murdering his erstwhile friend Banquo due to the prophecy that Banquo's sons shall rule after him, while Lady Macbeth becomes horrified by her part in the regicide, frantically scrubbing her hands and clothes to be rid of illusory bloodstains. Here, the masculine and feminine roles flip as well, with Macbeth donning masculinity like "borrowed robes," taking action and no longer allowing himself to be ruled by his wife. In the

end, Ferdous claims, Macbeth “dies as a warrior” fighting Macduff. Ferdous’ conclusion is that *Macbeth* tells the story of a family gone wrong when a woman attempts to assert masculine traits, and that Shakespeare’s assertion is that women “should be meek and kind while a man should be brave and courageous” (Ferdous). While this claim has merit, it does not seem to be the whole story. Macbeth’s troubles arise when he rushes into violence. He is not like Hamlet, whose difficulties come from waiting, but rather like Othello, whose tragic fall comes from his willingness to murder and to listen to others. Macbeth’s tragedy comes from his own insecurities, insecurities which existed in him even before they were poked at by his wife.

4. *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar possesses the strongest examples in Shakespeare’s body of work of men who are emotionally expressive, as well as men who are not, and the conflict between them. Marc Antony expresses powerful emotion, beyond the pale of what men are typically allowed to express, while Brutus and Caesar feel strong emotions that they feel compelled to restrain, with dire consequences for them.

Starting with Marc Antony, he is the best example of this display of emotional masculinity. His speech over Caesar’s body to the masses assembled at the Forum is a *tour de force* of rhetoric, made powerful in part by his emotional expression and his understanding of the emotions of the crowd. A plebeian notes during the speech that Antony’s “eyes are red as fire with weeping,” and another in response calls him the noblest man in Rome (*Julius Caesar*, III.ii.115-116). Antony later, when reading the will, tells the crowd, “If you have tears, prepare to shed them now” (*Julius Caesar*, III.ii.169). It is understood during this scene that Antony is weeping for Caesar’s memory and expects the crowd, who would have been mostly men, to weep as well.

Brutus, then, as Marc Antony's enemy, is by contrast a privately emotional individual, though the emotions he feels are apparently strong. His speech to the assembled crowd comes before Antony's, and speaks of private tears and public stoicism. Delivered entirely in prose in contrast to Antony's blank verse, Brutus talks of love for Rome, not in an emotional way, but in an honorable way, placing his patriotic love for Rome over the brotherly love he possessed for Julius Caesar. He tells the crowd,

If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I lov'd Caesar less, but that I lov'd Rome more...As Caesar lov'd me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honor for his valor; and death for his ambition (*Julius Caesar*, III.ii.20-27).

Brutus loved Caesar, he makes that clear repeatedly, but he does not allow that love to get in the way of his duty as a man of Rome. For this, he weeps privately. No such exclamation of his reddened eyes does he get from the plebes. And as the play winds down and the civil war between Brutus and Antony comes to a close, Brutus finds his reversal of fortune comes partially as a result of his failure to express that emotion. Marc Antony wins in the court of public opinion, just as he and the second triumvirate win on the battlefield.

Caesar himself is a singular man, "bestrid[ing] the narrow world/Like a Colossus" (*Julius Caesar*, I.ii.135-136), dominating a play he only appears in the first half of, save a final spectral appearance in Brutus' tent in Act IV. He is the picture of a Roman man, stern, ambitious, and outwardly humble. He loves Brutus as a friend and brother, that much is known, but of his inner thoughts Shakespeare writes little. The play, then, is spent with those around the great Caesar doing their best to determine what he is thinking, and more importantly, how he is feeling.

Brutus' soliloquy in Act II makes it clear that he has "not known when [Caesar's] affections sway'd/More than his reason" (*Julius Caesar*, II.i.20-21), telling the audience that Caesar is known to be a rational man, not prone to emotional decisions. Unfortunately, Brutus' fear that Caesar will become power-hungry and domineering leads to his part in the assassination. Caesar here does everything a Roman man should, and loses his life for it. Taken together, *Julius Caesar* depicts the struggle within men to display their emotions or keep them within, and ultimately decides on displays of emotion being best.

5. *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*

Othello is the story of a jealous man driven by fear, and the jealous man who creates that fear in him. It is the story of two men in conflict, though only one of them knows it, and it is the story of two men deciding the fate of a woman without either of them asking her. Mark Breitenberg suggests that the play is a representation of the gender politics of the era in which it was written, concerned with "male, heterosexual jealousy - the anxiety and violence engendered in men by a patriarchal economy that constructs masculine identity as dependent on the coercive and symbolic regulation of women's sexuality" (Breitenberg).

Othello himself is seen as this shining star within the play itself, as well as in criticism of and scholarship on the play. As a tragic hero, he of course must be set up from the beginning as virtuous, so that he has farther to fall, and so he is. Act I's bulk is made up of Othello's defense before the assembled nobility of Venice against the accusations of witchcraft he has been accused of. He tells of how much Desdemona's father had loved him and invited him to his house, where he then fell in love with the man's daughter and she fell in love with him in turn. This satisfies the Duke, but not her father, and certainly not Iago, whose jealousy grows even further from there.

Othello depicts a kind of jealousy that needs no cause, but feeds on itself and stems specifically from men. In Act III, Desdemona reminds the audience that she is blameless, whereupon Emilia tells her that jealousy requires no true blame, saying, “They are not ever jealous for the cause/But jealous for they’re jealous. It is a monster/Begot upon itself, born on itself” (*Othello*, III.iv.160-163). The particular brand of male jealousy that Breitenberg explores is one that feeds itself and is driven by desire and anger more than anything else.

The jealousy in *Othello* centers women, but not as they are. Rather, the women in the play are discarded in favor of the idea of them, replaced entirely by the beliefs the men in their lives have about them. Iago’s rage is born of a belief that Othello has slept with his wife Emilia, a thing she has not done. But in his mind, she has been replaced by this person who has. The same is true of Othello, once Iago has planted the seed of Desdemona’s infidelity. Breitenberg says that men in these works “often anticipate being cuckolded, as if it were an unavoidable aspect of marriage” (Breitenberg), and that is certainly the brand of green-eyed monster within the play.

The masculine nature of Othello is brought up several times throughout the play. He is meant to be a symbol of manhood; impressive, sexually capable, and militarily proficient. Indeed, his first comparison in the work is to “an old black ram” (*Othello*, I.i.88), a clear picture of power, especially sexual power. Othello is seen as this bastion of masculinity, especially by Iago, who by being subservient to him clearly feels emasculated, though he, like Bertram, never says so explicitly. Iago instead claims to be serving Othello so he may humble him and bring about his ruin, “following him [to] follow but [him]self” (*Othello*, I.i.58). Thus, Iago condemns those servants who do not behave as he does, who “[dotes] upon his own obsequious bondage” (*Othello*, I.i.46). Those servants emasculate themselves through service for service’s sake.

Othello, in being described as both man and master, is shown to link the two, and Iago through his manipulations seeks to unlink them, to prove his own masculinity not in opposition to Othello's own, but in supplanting it.

Othello himself is trapped in a nightmare of his own devising, allowing Iago to poison his mind against his beloved wife. Breitenberg argues throughout his essay that the culture in which Othello lives helps this along, that the image of masculinity that Othello represents is especially prone to these patterns of thinking. In a way, though unlike Macbeth, Othello is ruled by the women in his life. His thoughts are consumed with how Desdemona is behaving in their bed, absorbed completely by jealousy and paranoia. To be cuckolded is to be emasculated, and Othello cannot have that. He is the picture of manhood, and men have faithful wives.

Then, finally, Othello rushes to violence, smothering his innocent wife while hardly offering her a chance to defend herself (Desdemona has the space of seventy lines to offer a defense and Othello spends most of them in accusation, ignoring any of her pleas). This violence is his final downfall, the culmination of the arc of the tragic hero, where his fatal flaw (jealousy) leads to his fall and suicide. Perhaps no other character in Shakespeare's work is punished so famously for rushing into violence, just as Othello is one of his strongest pictures of traditional masculinity. Here, Shakespeare condemns this act as he does everywhere else, but he does so explicitly in this framework of masculinity, as he does in *Macbeth*, showing the great man doing what great men are meant to do, and falling as a result.

6. *The Life of Henry the Fifth*

Henry V is in many ways Shakespeare's ideal man, the picture of what masculinity should look like. He is a war hero, a Christian, and a just king. The Bishop of Ely calls him "a true lover of the holy Church" (*Henry V*, I.i.23), to which the Archbishop of Canterbury says that

Henry has become “a paradise/T’envelop and contain celestial spirits/Never was such a sudden scholar made” (*Henry V*, I.i.30-32). He is considered a good man almost immediately, but of course, throughout the preceding two plays, he was not always considered thus. The arc of Henry the Fifth is one of becoming what Shakespeare considers a good man, and it is one that bears exploring, even if, in opposition to this paper’s thesis, Henry is taciturn with his emotions, never rushes to violence, and has no women in his life to be ruled by.

Firstly, Henry refuses to reveal his inner self. At no point is his heart on his sleeve. He is stoic and sometimes considered cold by those around him. At first this is a deliberate decision on his part, as he reveals in soliloquy in *Henry IV Pt. 1*:

I know you all, and will a while uphold
 The unyok’d humor of your idleness,
 Yet herein I will imitate the sun,
 Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
 To smother up his beauty from the world,
 That when he please again to be himself,
 Being wanted, he may be more wond’red at
 By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
 Of vapors that did seem to strangle him (*I Henry IV*, I.ii.195-203).

Prince Hal is adept at hiding his inner life, an ability which separates him from the other men explored in this paper, though unlike Brutus, this ability brings him good fortune instead of ill, and he succeeds in his goal of hiding his true talent to reveal it later, stunning all. In fact, this hiding of his nature is why the two bishops are so impressed with him at the start of *Henry V*. There “never was such a sudden scholar made” because Hal had hidden his scholarly self behind

a veneer of drunkenness and debauchery. He is so skilled at keeping his heart secret that he fools everyone, including his own father, who only learns of his son's fitness for the crown on his deathbed.

Henry is also not one to rush into anything, much less violence. In this, he is contrasted with Macbeth and Othello, and with his foil in the tetralogy: Henry "Hotspur" Percy. Hotspur is defined by his willingness to take action, to fight for what he thinks is right and not worry himself with overthinking. Henry, by contrast, deliberates before he does anything. As king, he knows his actions have consequences that can be far-reaching, and that he exists as a symbol just as much as a man (*Henry V*, IV.i.230-284). He exhausts every legal precedent before deciding to go to war with France, and in the above citation he walks among his men, getting their honest opinions of their chances at Agincourt. He does not act rashly, and as such is not punished. Henry gets everything he wants in the end: respect, a stable England, a wife befitting his station, and a play written about his exploits some two hundred years later.

Lastly, Henry is not ruled by the women in his life, but this is only because there are no women in his life. His mother is absent from the tetralogy, and he has no love interest until Act V of his final play. He surrounds himself with men, both of high and low caliber, but aside from brief interactions with Mistress Quickly, Hal doesn't speak to a woman until *Henry V's* Katherine and her interpreter Alice. His actions are driven both by an internal motivation to live up to expectations and by external motivations to win glory for England and avoid rebellion at home. Women do not factor into his decision making at all. Thus does Henry become a symbol for England, a man all can aspire to.

However, the play itself is not devoid of commentary on masculinity and the ways it can be toxic and subverted to strange ends. The famous St. Crispin's Day speech, for example,

suggests that valor and bravery in battle is what makes one a man, through Henry's prediction that those who are not fighting with them will "hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks/That fought with us upon St. Crispin's Day" (*Henry V*, IV.iii.66-67). Manhood is explicitly linked to violence and valor in combat, and Henry suggests to his army (more likely to encourage them to war than to make any comment on the nature of masculinity) that they are more masculine because they are prepared to fight and die for their country. Abigail King notes that that same speech uses the men's emotions against them, shaming them for feeling fear when he says that "he which hath no stomach to this fight/Let him depart" (*Henry V*, IV.iii.35-36), saying that "even if a man truly wanted to leave, he cannot after Henry says he would no longer consider the soldier a 'brother'" (King). Thus, not only does Henry himself refute this paper's thesis, becoming the exception that proves the rule, he explicitly calls out aspects of masculinity that Shakespeare elsewhere deconstructs. Henry therefore is even more this symbol of masculinity as Shakespeare's audience would have understood it, but he seems to escape deconstruction unscathed.

7. *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*

Hamlet provides the quote that titles this paper, and for good reason. The perpetually soliloquizing Hamlet offers several meditations on the nature of man and is the clearest single picture of all three aspects of this paper's thesis. Hamlet is emotional, is punished when he turns to violence, and while he is not directly ruled by the women in his life, they play a large role in his motivations for action throughout the play. He is also, like Henry V and Hotspur, contrasted by a foil in Laertes, a man who acts and behaves exactly like a man ought, according to the standards of the time.

Hamlet is remarkably emotional throughout. Though he hides his true nature, pretending to be mad to distract from his plans, he does not hide his emotion well, and eventually ceases to try. He weeps openly when the players perform their speech about the fall of Troy (*Hamlet*, II.ii.520), openly laments the state of mankind to friends he knows to be spying on him, showing that he is not afraid to have his emotions and honest thoughts broadcast (*Hamlet*, II.ii.293-310), and upon discovering Ophelia's death puts on such a show of grief that he leaps into her grave and rambles about his love for her (*Hamlet*, V.i.254-258a). His emotions are never suppressed, and yet this is never condemned in the play. People worry for him, but this is mostly concern for his apparent madness (and later concern for Claudius' life), and never are these displays of emotion seen as unmanly. Even during his display of emotion at Ophelia's grave, he is not seen as effeminate, and indeed Laertes leaps into the grave as well, while being another image of masculinity akin to Othello and Hotspur.

Hamlet for most of the play is the poster child for not rushing into violence. He is patient and cautious, to the point of over-carefulness, and does not make any decision before he considers every single angle. This is true until Act V, when Hamlet makes a rash decision to meet Laertes in a duel. Jennifer Low argues that this duel "embodies the notion of manhood, both through the correspondence of word and deed and through the implicit legitimization of vigilantism...as a means of achieving justice" (Low). Hamlet determines at last to engage in violence, to ignore his own misgivings and "defy augury" (*Hamlet*, V.ii.219), and it ultimately gets him and nearly every major character killed. A character who spends his play agonizing over every decision and refusing to rush into anything nevertheless succumbs to the masculine urge to violence, and Shakespeare yet again punishes him for it.

Finally, Hamlet is absolutely ruled by the women in his life, in the same way Othello is: in his own mind. So many of his thoughts are bent towards his mother's impropriety in marrying the king, especially the "wicked speed" she rushed to her "incestuous sheets" (*Hamlet*, I.ii.156-157). He is also concerned with Ophelia and her propriety, first in his obvious love for her shown in the letters she later shows her father, and then in his insistence that she stay "honest and fair" (*Hamlet*, III.i.106-107). His anger at Claudius seems half pointed at the murder of his father and half at the wedding of his mother, and more than once he calls their union incestuous (which is not literally true, but speaks to Hamlet's understanding of the union quite well).

8. *Conclusion*

Hamlet has had much ink spilled about him in the four hundred years since his play was written, but he, like all others mentioned in this paper, is still worthy of discussion. The ways in which Shakespeare explores what it means to be a man are valuable avenues for debate and scholarship, and his exact beliefs on the matter can be hard to pin down. Throughout this paper, it has been made clear the ways Shakespeare often subverts traditional standards of masculinity, along with one example in which he does not, but there are many more besides these which were not as consistent or universal. In general, Shakespeare seems very concerned with what it means to be a man, and the ways in which men can uphold the standards of their time and the ways they can subvert them, and while he rarely takes a firm moral stance, the consistency in which he depicts these subversions shows that he thinks these are valid modes of male expression. In the end, Shakespeare's time was different from our own in many ways, but men and the expectations placed on them have mostly remained the same, and thus Shakespeare's exploration of manhood remains relevant, that "quintessence of dust" evergreen for evaluation.

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Works of Shakespeare Used

Twelfth Night or, What You Will

All's Well That Ends Well

The Tragedy of Macbeth

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar

The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice

The Life of Henry the Fifth

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark