

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘Parting is such’: Those Who Stay and Those Who Go in Early Modern Domestic Drama

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With tears and exhortations, resignation, bravado, and resistance, the performance of parting for war in early modern drama invites viewers to question conventional assumptions about women – especially when wives and mothers – as unsophisticated anti-war voices or conservators of, even metonyms for, the ‘home’ that is ‘back home’ during war. In this paper, we parse such scenes of parting in order to read wartime female stage presence and agency in William Shakespeare’s *1 Henry IV* and *Othello*, Thomas Heywood’s *1* and *2 Edward IV*, and Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. We show that moments of parting for war on stage figure in powerful ways the instability that characterized domestic life in early modernity, particularly for women, and we demonstrate that the various modes of resistance enacted by Kate Percy, Mortimer’s Welsh bride, Desdemona, Jane Shore, and Jane Dampport expose not only the threat to domestic life posed by war, but also the broader threat to women’s lives posed by commercial, political, and military decisions from which they are often excluded. While directors and critics often reduce these ‘partings’ to so much ‘sweet sorrow’, we argue that these charged junctures complicate the assumption that wives are fainthearted or selfish when their husbands are called to war, that they reveal the commercial concerns that often underlie men’s wartime absences, and that they emphasize the marital alienation, economic precarity, sexual exploitation, and physical danger that face women who stay and those who go to war in early modern domestic drama. We want our attention to domestic ruptures in drama generally to contribute new

ways to expand the particular definition of domestic tragedy: these plays share a pattern in which matters of international politics and commerce are shown to impact directly domestic lives and in which wives respond in a broader range of ways than has previously been recognized.

1.

In scenes of farewell women articulate present concerns about and future consequences of the absence of men, including the threat of widowhood and economic insecurity. The exigencies of war in the drama point to the fact that ‘family fragmentation was a national problem by 1610’, as Beier has shown: ‘even brief absence [of husbands and fathers] could plunge families into desperate poverty’.¹ Poverty is one of numerous vulnerabilities and insecurities worsened by male absence. In *Unsettled*, Patricia Fumerton argues that sea ballads ‘begin with and stay focused on a parting’, a situation that arguably characterizes domestic life in early modernity.² The ballad seaman commonly speaks of being ‘forced to go’; he is ‘impressed’ or ‘pressed’ by outside forces, and he blames abstract ‘cruel fate’, but ‘the motivation clearly comes as well from within’; he takes ‘delight’ in or is ‘resolved to sail, / And bid his dear adieu’.³ Departing seamen begrudge imprecations to stay, while their lovers must accept that it is the man’s ‘will’.⁴ As Ann has argued elsewhere, merchant husbands in domestic tragedy, such as Leantio in *Women Beware Women*, blame their absences on their wives’ requirement of economic support.⁵ In this paper we read the highly specific wartime farewells on stage as commenting on the broadly experienced ‘unsettledness’ that was most acutely felt in maritime and commercial communities and is central to domestic tragedy.

When forced to part from their husbands called to serve in armed conflicts – across the Channel in Ralph Dampont’s case and at London’s gates in Matthew Shore’s – their

¹ A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* (London, New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 52

² Patricia Fumerton, *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 137.

³ Quoted in Fumerton, p. 138; her italics.

⁴ Fumerton, p. 138.

⁵ For a longer discussion of the ways that merchant husbands project onto their wives some of the unsavory aspects of the mercantile ethic, see Ann Christensen, ‘Being Mistress Eyre in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* and Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*, *Comparative Drama*, 42.4 (2008), 451-80. For more on separations caused by business, see her *Separation Scenes: Domestic Drama in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

wives, both named Jane and both London shop women, ask their husbands to stay home. But unlike the wives of the ballads Fumerton discusses, neither wife is contented; Kate Percy demands not cohabitation but information from her spouse about a military action yet undeclared: ‘O, what portents are these? / Some heavy business hath my lord / And I must know it’ (2.4.56-8).⁶ The Welshwoman wants to ‘go to the wars’ and Desdemona does go. Moments of war parting – whatever the generic register – are dramaturgically and emotionally unique: the sometimes private spousal dialogues, by the Shores and Percys for example, are unprecedented illustrations of marital domesticity – crucial contexts for the wars and warriors of the plays.⁷ For example, *Shoemaker* Jane’s public display of emotion momentarily disrupts the scene-one muster that carries her recently wed spouse off to fight in France. Desdemona, too, interrupts the business of war as she challenges the arrangements that the Venetian Duke proposes for her ‘accommodation and besort’ (1.3.238)⁸ during her husband’s absence. With a public demonstration of her previously secret passion for Othello, Desdemona announces that her ‘heart’s subdued / Even to the very quality of [her] lord’ (1.3.250-51). Many farewell wives assert their ‘will’, unlike the seafarers’ partners discussed by Fumerton. Jane contradicts Matthew: ‘Ye shall not go, if I may have my will’ (8.45), Kate vows, ‘In faith, I’ll know your business, Harry, that I will’ (2.4.72, also 58). Desdemona first reasons – ‘if I be left behind, / A moth of peace, and he go to the war, / The rites for why I love him are bereft me’ (1.3.255-7) – but soon exchanges the conditional for the imperative, commanding, ‘Let me go with him’ (1.3.259). Jane Dampont, as the relatively powerless young wife of a ‘newly entered’ journeyman and conscript, is a less willful, but nonetheless strong stage presence around whom the entire scene revolves, exactly like the Welshwoman.

2.

The characters we consider here are not afraid of war but instead show in their scenes of parting a determination to use their roles as wives to resist marital alienation and family

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry the Fourth: Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Barbara Hodgdon (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997). All quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

⁷ The first ten scenes of *Edward IV*, for example, almost exclusively comprise male rebels and citizens fighting or parlaying. Jane’s appearance in scene 8 is the lone disruptor of that pattern. See Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. by Richard Rowland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005). All quotations from these plays are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Jessica Slight (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2017). All quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

fragmentation by participating in political decision-making processes. ‘She’ll be a soldier too, she’ll to the wars’ (3.1.191). Thus Glendower ‘translates’ for Mortimer his wife’s Welsh words, twice predicting that the soldiers’ departure will cause huge domestic disruptions and even madness in the remnant women (141, 207). Glendower tries to preempt such a scene, first advising the men to ‘steal and take no leave / For there will be a world of water shed / Upon the parting of your wives and you’, later granting time to ‘break with your wives’ (90-2). As feminist critics have pointed out, this central pre-war scene’s alignment of the rebellion with feminine elements in the play signals the rebels’ work/life balance (relative to the lack of family life in the royal faction), or, alternatively, their association with the misrule of tavern life and the unruly Welshwomen who desecrate English corpses.⁹ The scene of rest and music in Wales in any case feels domestic and is surely focused on a parting. But are the scene’s wives, weeping, and song limited to battle fears? That ‘the Lady speaks Welsh’ (see o.s.d. 192, 195, 199, 207, 241) points not only to impending family fragmentation, but also to long-term dislocations and alienation (Mortimer had been a captive to Glendower, and he ‘speak[s] ... no Welsh’ [189]).¹⁰ Lady Percy illustrates, along with Desdemona, a resistance to marital alienation, not primarily worry for war.

The Welsh parting reprises the Percys’ earlier separation on English soil in 2.4, set at their Northumberland castle when Hotspur announces, ‘I *must* leave you within these two hours’ (2.3.26, italics added). Kate accosts him with over twenty-five blank-verse lines listing his nightly utterances – ‘Of palisadoes, frontiers, parapets’, and so on – revealing not only her comprehension of his military life (‘tales of iron wars’), but also the immediate political crisis: ‘Mortimer /doth stir about his title’ (46, 42, 73-5). This intimacy/knowledge is further conveyed through the unlikely vehicle of Prince Hal’s mock enactment of ‘a day in the life of Harry and Kate’ in the scene that follows their separation:

I am not yet of Percy’s mind, the Hotspur of the north; he that ... says to his wife ‘Fie upon this quiet life! I want work.’ ‘O my sweet Harry’, says she, ‘how many hast thou killed to-day?’ ‘Give my roan horse a drench’, says he; and answers ‘Some fourteen’, an hour after; ‘a trifle, a trifle.’ (2.5.94-9)

⁹ Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation : A Feminist Account of Shakespeare’s English Histories*, Feminist Readings of Shakespeare (London England ; New York: Routledge, 1997); Laurie E. Maguire, “‘Household Kates’: Chez Petruchio, Percy, and Plantagenet’, in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 129-65.

¹⁰ See K. Vomero Santos, “‘O ransom, ransom!’: Negotiating Exchange on Shakespeare’s Multilingual Battlefields’ (unpublished manuscript).

Hal's parody of his enemy's married life draws on conventional expectations about household spaces and the ostensibly uninformed women supposed to dwell contentedly within them during wartime. The Hotspur of Hal's imaginary rails against the constrictions of 'quiet life' on the home front to an unnamed wife who assumes her husband's 'work' is to kill and her own function merely to keep score of the corpses. The juxtaposition of this broad caricature with the previous scene of Kate's heartfelt resistance to just such marital alienation invites viewers to recognize not simply how far wide of the mark the unmarried prince's verbal attack has fallen, but also how inaccurate are the stereotypes on which he draws. Furthermore, Hotspur makes good on his promise to bring his wife along: 'Today I will set forth, tomorrow you', a gesture that Glendower later repeats: 'In my conduct shall your ladies come' (2.4.107-8; 3.1.89).¹¹ In that play, partings foster reunions.

Another conspirator's wife – Portia in *Julius Caesar* – initiates a similar confrontation with an insomniac spouse: both wives ventriloquize their menfolk's distracted sleep-talking, and both insist on 'know[ing] [their] business' and 'secrets' (*IHIV* 2.3.57-8; *Julius Caesar* 2.1.256-7, 303). For Kahn, *Julius Caesar's* Roman wives worry and warn.¹² Because these interventions take place in the hours before dawn, the wives are usually costumed in night clothes in performance, which highlights their vulnerability, but this appearance can also visually undermine the reasonableness of their speech.¹³ Our point is that no wartime wife belies squeamish or abstract hopes for peace; rather, these women use their authority over household wellbeing to counter family fragmentation, and to know, if not participate in, their husbands' decision-making processes. Kate finds herself 'a banished woman from my Harry's bed', just as Portia 'dwell[s]... in the suburbs' of Brutus' 'pleasure' (*IHIV* 2.3.29; *JC* 2.1.2867), metaphors suggesting physical separation and emotional alienation superseding fears of danger.¹⁴

¹¹ Hotspur promises, 'Whither I go, thither shall you go, too' even as he repeats, like the ballad mariners, the inevitability of his parting: 'Whither I must, I must' (2.3.30, 94, 96-7, 106). See also Mihoko Suzuki. *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688*. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003), p. 53.

¹² Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*. (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 99.

¹³ See, for example *Henry IV Part 1* in *The Hollow Crown*, producer, Rupert Ryle-Hodges; a Neal Street Productions co-production with NBCUniversal and WNET Thirteen for BBC. *The Hollow Crown: The Complete Series* (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios, 2013). Lady Percy (Michelle Dockery) speaks from bed.

¹⁴In fact, both women threaten or perform violence themselves: Portia's self-mutilation on the thigh and her later suicide; Kate's threat to 'break thy little finger' and 'head' (*IHIV* 2.3.76, 3.1.233). For Maguire, this shows Kate using Hotspur's own main mode of violence to communicate with him. See Laurie E.

In sum, domestic ‘eve-of-battle’ (or other dangerous action) scenes set in orchards or on rushes point to unsettled conditions shared by domestic tragedy wives like Alice Arden and Bianca Capella. These farewells also impact the meaning of those oft-quoted tented moments, when the ‘happy few’ English gear up for the many French in *Henry V* or when ghosts appear to frighten their killers, as we are reminded that no soldier is ever untethered from domestic matters.

3.

Just as the threat of a Cypriot war disappears from *Othello* (2.1.21-22), so the rebel uprising that opens *Edward IV* and ends midway through *Part I* is not the sole cause of domestic disruptions. The Shores’ *multiple* partings initiate Jane’s demotion from contented shop wife to unharbored exile and are important contexts for and counters to Jane’s apparent one-dimensional antiwar stance in scene 8, when she begs Matthew to stay, rebuffing the Mayor’s officer: ‘tell my lord he does my husband wrong, / To set him foremost in the danger still’, repeating to Matthew ‘do not go’, and last-ditching ‘Let me go with thee, Mat’ (8.43, 45, 47, 60; see also 22, 103). Jane Shore must part from both husband and, later, consort Edward in rapid succession in the two parts of *Edward IV*: Matthew musters twice in *Part I*; he attends to his commercial business away from their goldsmith shop (allowing Edward’s access to Jane); and he flees England at the end of *Part I* because, as he sees it, ‘there is no place allowed for [him]’ (22.96). Like Fumerton’s absent seamen, he is by turns ‘pressed’ for duty, away pursuing work, or ‘resolved’ to leave his homeland.¹⁵ Edward, too, leaves Jane unprotected – first, when he pursues a political mission in France (*Part 2*, sc. 1-8), and again after he dies (2 sc 18); these absences by Jane’s would-be protectors leave her open to incursion from outside, or uproot her altogether.¹⁶ She is removed from her home and shop by royal command; she moves into public space as she manages the peoples’ petitions, whence again she vainly ‘entreats’ Matthew to stay (2, 18.219); next, newly crowned Richard III’s proclamation forces her into the streets; and finally Jane is thrust out the very city gates that Matthew had defended in the play’s first movement (2, 20.2).

Maguire, “‘Household Kates’: Chez Petruchio, Percy, and Plantagenet’ in *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private in the English Renaissance*, ed. by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 129-65.

¹⁵ Matthew eventually becomes a mariner, later apprehended aboard a privateering vessel in the Channel.

¹⁶ Dorset drags Jane off to face the jealous Queen: ‘What will she doe to me? / Use violence on me, now the King’s away?’ (9.112-13); and later Richard can freely punish her when he drains the swamp of Edward’s administration.

4.

Recognizing scenes of parting as vivid structural devices allows us to mark out moments of domestic tragedy even in the midst of ostensible comedy and as more than one-offs in history plays. This recognition reveals how women's responses to threats to domestic peace are less predictable than we might have anticipated, encouraging the acknowledgement that while war poses a threat, that threat is eclipsed by broader risks involving lack of social, economic, and physical security – concerns shared with domestic tragedy. When Simon Eyre and his workers enter into scene one of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, their joint plan is to get Jane's 'husband discharged' from service, with Eyre, Hodge, Firk, and Margery each explicating Jane's sole line: 'O let him stay, else I shall be undone!' (1.142). Because '[h]is country's quarrel says it shall be so' and because he is unable to bribe or scheme his way out of the muster, Ralph eventually parts from Jane and 'falls in amongst [the conscripts] passing over the stage (180, o.s.d. 235). In this parting scene Ralph reminds his master and mistress of their obligation: 'in mine absence think upon my wife', whereupon Margery quickly curtails Jane's responsive line, 'Alas, my Ralph', by explaining, 'She cannot speak for weeping' (201-2). Jane, however bleary-eyed, is clear-headed enough to focus on her future as an unpartnered city wife: 'what shall I do when he is gone?' (205) – the same question Jane Shore asks before Matthew returns to the front, and the same that Kate Percy asks after Hotspur dies, when she essentially prevents Northumberland's war parting (see *2HIV*, 2.3). By way of reply, Firk makes a bawdy joke about her keeping busy by 'doing' him or Hodge, Eyre barks out his paean to 'work', and Ralph hands her a pair of pinked shoes: 'And every morning when thou pull'st them on, / Remember me, and pray for my return' (232-33).¹⁷

Thus another war, inseparable from other sources of domestic disruption and not unlike the civil war in *Edward IV*, divides another household; Jane is rawly and multiply left, and her scene of parting in London, like the scene in Wales, is notable for its potentially misleading embedded stage direction via onstage commentary. Shakespeare's directions specify more than once the 'Lady' speaking, answering, and singing 'in Welsh', with nothing about crying, yet Glendower reports her near distraction. Despite Jane's mostly

¹⁷ For discussions of the meaning of the shoes see Andrea C. Lawson, 'Saying Farewell with Shoes: The Gift Cycle and Unresolved Class Tensions in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*' *Early Theatre* 15. 2 (2012), 93-110 (p. 100); Juana Green sees them as Ralph's fantasy of 'the protective custody of his trade' (24). See Juana Irene Green, 'Desired Properties: Materializing and Managing Social Relations in Early Modern City Comedy', unpublished PhD. thesis, Columbia University, 2000.

speechless presence during her separation scene, she is chided by Eyre for ‘whining...whimpering...puling ... [and] blubbering’, and instructed to ‘dry up thy tears’ and ‘disquiet not the brave soldier’, while the draft-dodging Lacy also puts in, ‘Woman, be patient’ (178). Given Eyre’s trademark exaggeration, ‘blubbered Jane’, as he presents her, may be played more subdued and red-eyed than loudly bawling. In either case, her non-verbalized stage presence points to the collective recognition that Ralph’s departure will leave her socially, sexually, and financially vulnerable, if not altogether ‘undone’, as she herself and Firk each predict (140, 142).¹⁸

The emotional and dramaturgical center of this muster scene is a woman whose concern is less about a distant war than the domestic consequences of male absence, suddenly ‘rendering her vulnerable to the hazards of earning a living outside th[e guild] system’.¹⁹ Without chorus to instruct us to imagine France, we almost forget the war until Ralph comes limping home (10.osd52). Instead, the Dampport plot focuses on the sequential abandonment and uprooting of the wife left behind, like Heywood’s Jane: first when Ralph arms and departs (1); then, when Jane is ‘checked’ and let go (off stage) by the Eyres (10.80) to relocate: ‘a wench, [who] keeps shop on the Old Change’ (9.51);²⁰ later, having been falsely widowed and instructed by yet another man (Hammon) to ‘weep not’ (12.92, 98, 112), she leaves her new shop to wed Hammon. After more traumatic disruptions, she reunites with wounded Ralph, whose travails in France had left him unrecognized. Whether parting bride, war widow, cast-off servant, or woman unpartnered through the impact of economic expansion, Jane documents male absence and urban alienation in a commercial climate that Margery has called ‘ka me ka thee’ (10.82).²¹

¹⁸ The brisk critical debate about *Shoemakers*’ ‘happy ending’ has a lot to do with the initial parting scene: for Lawson, Ralph’s departure marks his and Jane’s enduring ‘isolation from the fraternity’ (p. 103), while Kastan, Harris, and others see a camaraderie. See David Scott Kastan, ‘Workshop and/as Playhouse: Comedy and Commerce in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*’, *Studies in Philology* 84. 3 (1987), 324-37 and Jonathan Gil Harris (ed.), *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008). As for Jane’s ‘occupational vicissitudes’, Korda stresses that Jane’s ability to work allows her to take an ‘opportunity in the new economy, making and selling the latest fashions in England’s first shopping mall’; see Natasha Korda, “‘The Sign of the Last’”: Gender, Material Culture, and Artisanal Nostalgia in *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 43 (2013), 573-97 (pp. 588, 589).

¹⁹ Korda, 586.

²⁰ Perhaps successfully, since Firk reports second hand that she is ‘very brave and neat’ (10.96).

²¹ Korda aptly characterizes this world as ‘the prospect of a new mode of production in which artisans and their clients are separated by distance and anonymity in an ever-expanding metropolis’ (580).

5.

We have been arguing that performances of parting for war furnish grounds for challenging the perception of women as politically unsophisticated and reflexively anti-war. Shakespeare's *Othello* strengthens this case by staging female resistance to such parting altogether. Refusing to be a 'moth of peace' (1.3.256) left behind in Venice while her husband embarks to face the Ottoman fleet, Desdemona spiritedly contests expectations about women's place during war and assumes a role as a 'fair warrior' (2.1.175). Desdemona greets the news that 'the Turk with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus' (222) without any apparent signs of fear. Nor does the revelation that her new husband will lead an expedition to this vulnerable outpost elicit any expressions of dismay or exhortations for him to stay behind with her. Instead, she moves decisively to secure permission to join him abroad. Evidently uncowed by the formality of the circumstances, undaunted by the fact that she is the only woman in the Senate chamber, and undeterred by the expectation that she will remain in Venice under her father's roof, Desdemona seeks the Duke's support for her plan to accompany Othello to Cyprus (1.3.244-6). Respectful and polite but adamant, Desdemona echoes Othello's technique of sharing publicly the tale of their private courtship as a means of communicating the strength of her desire, 'trumpet[ing] to the world: 'I did love the Moor to live with him' (250, 248). Desdemona's violent and tempestuous love and her concern for Othello's 'dear absence' emphasize that she is not afraid of conflict but rather concerned to insure her marriage against the ravages of alienation (259).

Although the play's generic status continues to be a subject of some debate,²² putting *Othello* into conversation with other English drama that explores the tragic potential of domestic life for wives who risk being unpartnered by war allows us to recognize how a husband's presence can also have tragic consequences when the pressures of military and economic demands are what drives decision making. That the Ottoman fleet is wracked and the Venetians' 'wars are done' just moments into the second act and before Desdemona sets foot on Cyprus confirms *Othello*'s focus on the familial matters with which domestic tragedy is conventionally associated (2.1.20). This focus is established by the emotional and dramaturgical pivot of the refusal to part in the Senate scene. Desdemona's public resistance to her exclusion from political decision-making echoes Kate Percy's (and Portia's) private insistence on inclusion in their husbands' 'heavy business', revealing how the threat of marital alienation is associated with a religious

²² See Sean Benson, *Shakespeare, 'Othello' and Domestic Tragedy* (London: Continuum, 2012).

war that masks the mercenary preoccupations of those who wage it.²³ The threat of separation in *Othello* and other plays of war, whether international or civil, is closely enmeshed with financial gain. Hotspur and his fellow conspirators seek the rewards that Bolingbroke promised them, while the Venetian Senate is determined to maintain a strong presence in the trade-rich Mediterranean. Domestic tragedy as a genre points up the domestic consequences of the intersection of militarism and mercantilism.

Othello's 'semi-farewell' scene, as we might call it, like the full farewells in other plays, shows how the 'peculiar' – that is, the particular concerns of private citizens – can never compete with the 'general care' (1.3.56-57) of the state; but nor, as Desdemona's murder insists, can the safety of citizens be ensured by the institution of the household whose domestic culture has been impacted by the economic preoccupations and militaristic values of the state. When the Duke dismisses Brabantio's worry and grief over the circumstances of Desdemona's elopement as 'mischief that is past and gone' (205) and counsels the frantic father to move on to focus on 'th'affairs of state' (221), he is insisting on the primacy of the 'general' over the 'particular', the private, the domestic. Brabantio's response emphasizes both his sorrow and his lack of power: 'to pay grief, must of poor patience borrow' (216). Brabantio's assessment of the Duke's 'free comfort' – that is, his valueless consolation – and his figuring of his own exchange with the Venetian state in terms of a debtor who must borrow in order to fund payment mocks the commercial language of the merchant-state. However, his conceit also admits Brabantio's capitulation to the state's mercantilist logic and foreshadows its infection of the Cypriot household inhabited by his daughter and her new husband, that foremost representative of the state's militarism – Othello.

Desdemona herself comes to illustrate this logic: her dialogue with Emilia about sexual double standards suggests that the logic of business culture will trump even the strongest affective bonds of the household. As Desdemona wonders at women willing to betray their husbands, Emilia issues a cool accounting of the worth of domestic loyalty: 'I would not do such a thing for a joint ring, nor for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, petticoats, nor caps, nor any petty exhibition. But for all the whole world...who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?' (4.3.68-71). Value, Emilia insists, following the rationalist logic of mercantilism, is always countable, and

²³ For thorough and thoughtful discussions of the complex interplay of religion, nationalism, and belonging in the militarily and commercially significant space of the Mediterranean, see Emily C. Bartels, *Speaking of the Moor: From 'Alcazar' to 'Othello'* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theatre and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Desdemona's inability to recognize that even the relationship between husband and wife is subject to quantification becomes a fatal miscalculation.

Despite its Mediterranean setting, the play dramatizes the collapse of traditional English conventions of householding, as Lena Orlin argues in her wonderfully detailed work on *Othello's* relationship to early modern English conduct books. Citing such contemporary authorities on domestic culture as Robert Cleaver and John Dod and William Perkins, Orlin notes that couples were expected to live together in peace after marriage, that husbands were expected to forego absenting themselves for long periods (especially for war), and that women were expected to avoid travel outside the home.²⁴ As emissaries of Shakespeare's fictional Venice, Desdemona and Othello are denied the chance to fulfill what the play's first audiences would certainly have recognized as only the most basic prescriptions for domestic success.²⁵ But this is not for lack of trying on Desdemona's part. Having made the case earlier in the scene that she owes a debt of wifely obligation to her new husband like the one her mother showed her father, Desdemona lays claim to a sacramental ('consecrate', 'rite') duty that understands the danger of being left behind as greater than that of accompanying him into war. While his new bride deploys the claims of domesticity to argue that accompanying her husband into battle is not only her desire but her obligation, Othello constructs domestic life in opposition to his professional duties as he confidently asserts his invulnerability to erotic love as a means of proving his professional commitment to his political masters:

No, when light-winged toys
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instruments
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation. (1.3.268-74)

²⁴ Lena Cowen Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). See also Orlin's 'Desdemona's Disposition' in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 171-92.

²⁵ Desdemona and Othello pass quickly through the problematically liminal space of the Saggiary and set up house on the heavily fortified island of Cyprus, but their domestic space can only ever be a simulacrum of the ideal household envisioned by English conduct book writers.

Offering the Senate the farcical image of their proudest general charging into battle with a frying pan on his head, Othello implies that loving women makes men vulnerable to domestic coups which put both their physical safety and their dignity at risk. Military business bests both romantic love and the more mundane obligations of householding in Othello's view, and thus the affective structure and the civic responsibilities of the household become casualties of war.

While Desdemona is undeniably the victim of a murderous husband, she is also a casualty of a state that uses fear of attack by a Muslim Other to justify military defense of its commercially significant presence abroad while trivializing domestic matters with which it ought to be concerned. And Othello is a victim too. Although the Venetian state, through the Duke, is prepared to counter Brabantio's racist objections to his daughter's match and to claim the 'valiant Moor' as its 'proper son' (1.3.49, 71), it fails to deliver on the pluralist promise implied by its ostensible broadmindedness. As soon as the imminent threat posed by the Turkish fleet has evaporated, and before Othello ever erupts into violence, the Venetian Senate affirms its commitment to efficient administration over equality by ordering the 'extravagant and wheeling stranger' (1.1.133) to relinquish his command to Cassio, the Italian functionary, or 'arithmetician' (1.1.17).²⁶

6.

Our stage-farewell case studies show wives' unsentimental yet sympathetic performances that also point to other sources of domestic disturbance more culturally pervasive than war – global traffic and commercial activity, urban alienation, and adherence to masculine codes of duty and honor, for instance. Scenes of parting expose the pressures on marital cohabitation – abandonment through war, travel widowhood, and other social customs and privileges. Farewells predict domestic insecurity (in both senses of both words). Scenes of parting as striking stage moments that respond to the social trauma that households suffered because of war and other causes of family fragmentation therefore help us to gloss domestic tragedy. This trauma also preoccupies domestic tragedy, a subgenre that dramatizes the power vacuum that the growth of business travel created within households with husbands absent and wives 'unpartnered', that is, left out of decision-making processes and left behind in many

²⁶ News of Othello's recall arrives in Cyprus with Lodovico in Act 4. It is worth noting that the command from Venice presupposes the general's resistance to these orders – 'This fail you not to do', reads the letter – and the emissary immediately suggests displeasure over Cassio's deputation 'in his government' as a reason for Othello's bad tempered treatment of Desdemona (4.1.223-25).

cases. By considering scenes of parting as a category of analysis across genres we can fruitfully expand 'domestic tragedy' beyond the home to the interactions between the home and the broader economy, and, at the same time, we can widen 'war drama' to include the domestic and economic. In every case, this focus militates against readings that presume the domestic to be confined, narrow, or less significant than war, business, and politics.