Exactly What is That Worth to You: Gifting Ornamentation and Relationships in Shakespeare's Plays

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ABSTRACT

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Exactly What is That Worth to You: Gifting Ornamentation and Relationships in Shakespeare's Plays

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I examine the connection between giving personal ornamentation, such as jewelry, personal accessories, and gemstones used or set in order to create ornamentation, and how it drives, defines, and affects relationships in Shakespeare's plays. I address social obligations and debts from giving and receiving said personal ornamentation as gifts, a dynamic examined by Marcel Mauss in *The Gift* and in other works of gift theory. In the first chapter, I investigate the ways in which women use courtship tokens of personal ornamentation to act as agents and to evaluate others in the pursuit and definition of romantic relationships in *Twelfth Night* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. The second chapter addresses how women use inherited personal ornamentation gifts to effect change, securing their husbands in family roles and proving their own worth in *Cymbeline* and *All's Well That Ends Well*. The third chapter highlights how characters utilize exquisite largess in giving ornamentation as a method to create individual and community relationships and to gain power as master givers in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens*. Chapter four identifies how kings give courtly favors to repay debt and create a bond with a deserving character of a lower station, making the gift a recognizable carrier of the character's bond and the giver's protection in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Henry VIII*.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Michael Venn,

and my parents, Joseph and Margaret Butt

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I offer sincere thanks to my director Jill Ingram for her encouragement, constructive feedback, and patience during the time it took for this project to develop. I also owe thanks to my committee members Beth Quitslund, Mary Kate Hurley, and Matthew Cornish for their kind support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

INTRODUCTION

In the first scene of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we are asked to consider the power of love tokens.[1] Egeus, a gentleman of some standing in Athens and father to Hermia, blames Lysander for the hold his courtship gifts have produced over Hermia:

> Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
> And interchang'd love-tokens with my child
> ……
> And stol'n the impression of her fantasy
> With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gauds, conceits,
> Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats (messengers
> Of strong prevailment in unharden'd youth):
> With cunning hast thou filched my daughter's heart,
> Turn'd her obedience (which is due to me)
> To stubborn harshness. (1.1.28-38)

Egeus claims that it is Lysander's gifts that have "stol'n the impression of her fantasy" and "filched [his] daughter's heart," much to his dismay. Lysander uses "love-tokens" to turn Hermia's head and to secure her affections without obtaining Egeus's permission for the relationship; the father—with phrases such as "stol'n" and "filched"—implies that Lysander has used his gifts to steal his daughter's mind and heart. This scene, in

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[1] All citations to the play in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Edited by Harold F. Brooks, Arden Shakespeare, 1979.

highlighting the social and emotional resonance of gifts, is characteristic in Shakespeare for also linking that resonance to larger cultural and political issues.

Before considering those larger issues, however, we are made to linger on minute, particular details in the gifts themselves. Egeus is very specific about the kinds of gifts that Lysander has given to woo Hermia, beginning with bracelets made of Lysander's hair. Lysander has given Hermia parts of himself to wear upon her person and treasure as keepsakes. These types of jewelry pieces are incredibly intimate and personal, usually reserved for loved ones, and though they have little market value in comparison to gemstones or precious metal, they have high sentimental value. Hair does not have much durability, so it would have to be handled with care to avoid overmuch wear and damage. Usually hair tokens or locks of hair would be put in a locket or other item to protect them and make them more private. However, wearing them as bracelets would make them more noticeable to public observation and likely allow them to come into direct contact with the recipient's skin, making them a visual and sensory reminder of the giver. Details such as these regarding the gifts mentioned in this scene are worth attention because they allow us to enter the headspace of the lovers and to understand why the couple values the romantic bond their gifts create over the marriage laws of their culture and community.

Rings immediately follow the bracelets of hair in the list of gifts about which Egeus complains. While newly purchased rings do not carry the giver's genetic material as hair does, they are highly symbolic gifts for romantic relationships. During the early modern period, as in current days, rings serve as a symbol of commitment between lovers and are closely connected with the romantic steps of engagement and marriage. They are

also associated with the idea of sexual penetration and chastity within a relationship, as Kaara L. Peterson mentions in her examination of these ideas as they apply to *All's Well That Ends Well* and Elizabeth I's marriage to England with her coronation ring.[2] Egeus does not mention the material that the rings are made of, so it would not be easy to discern their material worth, but that does not detract from the intimacy of the recipient wearing the rings on her person. The other gifts listed are other items for Hermia to wear, collect, or consume, but "gauds, conceits, / Knacks, trifles" are more generalized terms, and Egeus places the most emphasis on the pieces of jewelry by naming them both specifically and first in his list of Lysander's gifts.

Lysander's gift-giving is highly effective in winning Hermia's love because he marries the pleasing gift of "rhymes" with his gifts of personal ornamentation and food, and he also receives gifts from Hermia, continuing the cycle of giving and receiving, which strengthens their bond. The words he gives to Hermia in rhymes and songs do not contradict the meaning of his material gifts, but heighten the gifts' effects on Hermia. Egeus claims Lysander's gifts have "turn'd her obedience…/ To stubborn harshness," so she now will not obey her father's order to marry his chosen suitor, Demetrius. She has elected to enter into a gift-giving bond with Lysander, which is an example of Lewis Hyde's observation of a similar courtship exchange in twentieth century New Caledonia where, "To accept a boy's gifts initiates a series of oscillating reciprocations which leads finally to the formal gifts of nuptial union" (57). Instead of allowing her father to give her

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[2] See Peterson's article, "The Ring's the Thing: Elizabeth I's Virgin Knot and *All's Well That Ends Well*." (*Studies in Philology,* vol. 113, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101-31).

in marriage to the man with whom he wants to form bonds, Hermia rejects her role as gift to Demetrius. The consequences for this breach in her Athenian culture's gift-giving etiquette are that Hermia faces the law of her community, which requires that she be killed for disobedience or become a nun, withdrawn from society and denied any contribution to the reproductive pool. Only the lovers' escape from the community or magic can intervene to save her from either of these fates.

This focus on gift-giving between Lysander and Hermia is significant because it shows how strong Hermia's and Lysander's love bond is. This bond is due, in large part, to the different tokens that they have "interchang'd" during their courtship. Their love, developed and strengthened by their gift ties, is what drives the play, and it shapes the actions other characters take in their attempts to break or to benefit from it. It takes accidental interference from the fairy realm to turn Lysander from Hermia, and Hermia refuses to relinquish her love for him even when he spurns her openly under magical influence. Even Oberon, the King of the Fairies, is angry to find that Puck, his messenger, has mistakenly tampered with this love: "Thou hast mistaken quite, / And laid the love-juice on some true love's sight; / Of thy misprison must perforce ensue / Some true love turn'd, and not a false turn'd true" (3.2.88-91). The fairies and sprites, mischievous as they are, recognize the value of Lysander and Hermia's love as "true love," and set about reuniting the lovers and removing the obstacles that prevent their marriage. By turning Demetrius's affections back to Helena and leaving all four to be discovered by the duke, Egeus, and their hunting party, the fairies prepare the opportunity for Demetrius to withdraw his claim on Hermia as gift-bride and to allow the duke to overrule the

proposed exchange between Egeus and Demetrius that is now moot. Armed with Demetrius's lack of interest in receiving Hermia, Theseus can determine that Athenian law no longer applies, dispel the consequences of a thwarted exchange that would have cut Hermia off from society, and confer Hermia on Lysander in marriage. The couple that would have been, at best, fugitives have their love celebrated by receiving each other in marriage the same day that the duke marries his bride. Shakespeare rewards this "true love" built upon the foundation of well-given gifts of personal ornamentation as part of courtship exchange.

Gift-giving theory, when applied to Shakespeare, has fallen short of examining the full weight of personal ornamentation gifts as they apply to relationships in the plays. The majority of gift-giving criticism of Shakespeare focuses on the giving and receiving of people in marriage and the economic exchanges that take place. The tallying of debts to determine which character triumphs in gathering the most social status as creditor is also fairly commonplace. Critics often acknowledge Marcel Mauss and his study, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, with the theory of "the system of total services" (5-6) as central to our understanding of gift-giving in Shakespeare. That theory finds that social entities require the cycle of giving, receiving, and repayment of gifts and services among their members in order to maintain status, with the surface illusion that these gifts are offered voluntarily. Mauss also extends forth the concept of "total services of an agonistic type" (7), in which participants utilize gift-giving as a form of competition to determine dominance, giving or using up increasing amounts of wealth and goods to win higher honor or rank and to subjugate their rivals.

According to Mauss, "everything—food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions, and ranks—is there for passing on, and for balancing accounts" (14). Claude Levi-Strauss, C.A. Gregory, Lewis Hyde and Arjun Appadurai are additional theorists who subscribe to the idea of social and individual connections between groups based on the foundation of exchange, be it in goods or marriage. It is not uncommon for gift-giving critics to focus on a concept from one or two of these theorists as they lay out their approaches to gift-giving in Shakespeare's work.[3]

Critics applying gift theory to Shakespeare's work usually make direct references to personal ornamentation gifts only when they are major plot devices or are identified as useful visual props, and there is not usually significant attention to more than one aspect of the gift's symbolism or social context. More often than not, personal ornamentation gifts receive a passing reference as the writer pursues another train of thought. This work

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[3] See Anne Enderwitz as an example of looking at Mauss for reciprocity in her "Gift, Credit, and Obligation in *Timon of Athens*." *Shakespeare Seminar Online*, vol. 11, 2013, pp. 13-14. Andrea Caroline Lawson uses a combination of Mauss and Levi-Strauss in her "Reading Farewell Gifts in Early Modern Drama and Poetry." Dissertation, 2008, pp. 118-19, while Karen Newman adds Bordieu to Mauss and Levi-Strauss in "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1987, pp. 20-23. Stephanie Chamberlain turns to Mauss and Bordieu for gift theory in her "'Rings and Things' in *Twelfth Night*: Gift Exchange, Debt and the Early Modern Matrimonial Economy." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium,* no. 7, 2007, pp. 1-3. Jyotsna G. Singh references Mauss and Hyde while pushing back against Jacques Derrida's notion that the true gift is impossible because cannot involve reciprocity in her "Gendered 'Gifts' in Shakespeare's Belmont: The Economies of Exchange in Early Modern England." *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. Edited by Dympna Callaghan, Blackwell Publishers, 2000, pp. 144-47, 149, as does William W. Demastes in *Comedy Matters from Shakespeare to Stoppard*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 128-29, 131-34. Katherine Gillen relies more on Arjun Appadurai's work regarding commodities and Igor Kopytoff in "Chaste Treasure: Protestant Chastity and the Creation of a National Economic Sphere in the *Rape of Lucrece* and *Cymbeline*." *Early English Studies*, vol. 4, 2011, p. 3, and Valerie Wayne addresses Appadurai, Kopytoff, and C.A. Gregory in her work, "The Woman's Parts in *Cymbeline*." *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*. Edited by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, Cambridge University Press, pp. 288-92, 295. Ronald A. Sharp works with Hyde for commodity exchange in "Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in 'The Merchant of Venice.'" *Modern Philology,* vol. 83, no. 3, 1986, pp. 252-53, 257, 259-60.

will use the moments of gift exchange to show how the manner of giving the gift, its characteristics and symbolism, its material value, and the social associations and uses for it contribute to a fuller perspective of how the gift affects relationships, identity, and community of the giver and recipient. Such an approach will build on the ideas of gift exchange laid out by Mauss, Gregory, and Hyde, among others, as well as the different applications of gift-giving theory critics have advanced with these theorists in mind.

One field of thought in gift-giving criticism shows the intent of giving gifts of personal ornamentation as a way to control sexuality, virginity, and chastity, usually with a focus on women.[4] Another line of thinking sees giving these gifts as a way to secure or establish identity in terms of relationships or family, either for oneself or another.[5] A

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[4] For this subject and the added objectification of women, see David Golz's "Diamonds, Maidens, Widow Dido, and Cock-a-diddle-dow." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2009, pp. 168-72. For other works that touch on giving gifts to control sexuality, virginity, and chastity in *Cymbeline*, see Patricia Wareh's "Reading Women: Chastity and Fictionality in *Cymbeline*." *Renaissance Papers,* 2013, pp. 132, 134, 136-41; Steven Doloff's "Iachimo's Wager and Hans Carvel's Ring in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*." *Shakespeare Newsletter,* no. 48, 1998, p. 67; Murray M. Schwartz in "Between Fantasy and Imagination: A Psychological Exploration of *Cymbeline*." *PsyArt: An Online Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, 2005; Constance Jordan's "Contract and Conscience in *Cymbeline*." *Renaissance Drama*, no. 25, 1994, pp. 38-41; Gillen's "Chaste Treasure: Protestant Chastity and the Creation of a National Economic Sphere in the *Rape of Lucrece* and *Cymbeline*." *Early English Studies*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 2-7, 13-29; and Wayne's "The Woman's Parts in *Cymbeline*." *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*. Edited by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, Cambridge University Press, pp. 288-315. Singh branches out to *The Merchant of Venice* on this topic in her work "Gendered 'Gifts' in Shakespeare's Belmont: The Economies of Exchange in Early Modern England." *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. 2000, pp. 146-59. Peterson addresses a focus on the link between rings and virginity or chastity in *All's Well That Ends Well* in her piece I've already mentioned, "The Ring's the Thing: Elizabeth I's Virgin Knot and *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Studies in Philology,* vol. 113, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101-31. Nicholas Ray also examines a possible link between the ring and the king's sexuality and terminal illness in his article "'Twas Mine, 'Twas Helen's': Rings of Desire in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *All's Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays*. 2007, pp. 183-193.

[5] For examples of this approach, see Chamberlain's "'Rings and Things' in *Twelfth Night*: Gift Exchange, Debt and the Early Modern Matrimonial Economy." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium,* no. 7, 2007, pp. 1-12; Ann Jennalie Cook's *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and His Society*. Princeton University Press, 1991, pp. 151-58, 162-63, 166-67, 175, 183; Marianne Koos's "Wandering Things: Agency and Embodiment in Late Sixteenth-Century English Miniature Portraits." *Art History*, vol. 37, no.

third theoretical field focuses on the use of gifts of personal ornamentation in order to gain a desired place in society or to influence a community.[6] Yet another perspective examines personal ornamentation as a way to carry or create memory and inspect history.[7] My view draws from these perspectives in order to focus on creating a fuller picture of how giving personal ornamentation as gifts affects relationships, with a focus on jewelry and gemstones. When we look carefully, we can see that Shakespeare often uses personal ornamentation to add richness and dimension to the gift exchanges in his plays, often doubling gifts from his source plays, tying them more closely to characters' development, sense of worth, or family, or giving characters agency by making them gift-givers of these items.

5, 2014, pp. 837-852; and A.M. Roos's "Limnings of Love: Portrait Miniatures of the English Renaissance Can Bring Delight to Modern Eyes." *Art & Antiques*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2008, pp. 59, 62.

[6] For examples of this topic in *The Merchant of Venice*, see Joan Ozark Holmer's "The Education of the *Merchant of Venice*." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, vol. 25, 1985, pp. 324, 329-32; William Dunlop's "The Virtue of the Ring." *Modern Language Quarterly*, no. 50, 1989, pp. 6-7, 12-22; Sharp's "Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in 'The Merchant of Venice.'" *Modern Philology,* vol. 83, no. 3, 1986, pp. 250-57, 260-65; and Lynda E. Boose's "The Comic Contract and Portia's Golden Ring." *Shakespeare Studies,* vol. 20, 1988, pp. 246-52. Two articles that focus on this topic in *Timon of Athens* include Newman's "Rereading Shakespeare's Timon of Athens at the Fin De Siècle." *Shakespeare and the Twentieth Century*. University of Delaware Press, 1998, pp. 380-82, 386-87; and Coppélia Kahn's "'Magic of Bounty': *Timon of Athens*, Jacobean Patronage, and Maternal Power." *Shakespeare Quarterly,* vol. 38, no. 1, 1987, pp. 35, 39-45, 48-50, 52.

[7] For more on this topic, see Patricia Fumerton's *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament*. The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 2-5, 8-27, 29-85; Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.'s "'Be This Sweet Helen's Knell, and Now Forget Her': Forgetting, Memory, and Identity in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 1, 1999, pp. 60, 63-68; Juliet Fleming's "Wounded Walls: Graffiti, Grammatology, and the Age of Shakespeare." *Criticism*, vol. 39, 1997, pp. 6-7; Roy C. Strong's *The English Renaissance Miniature*. Thames & Hudson, 1983; Joan Evans's *English Jewellery from the Fifth Century A.D. to 1800*. 1928, pp. 102-4, 106-7, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870*. Dover Publications, Inc., 1989, pp. 108-10, 117-22, and *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance Particularly in England*. Oxford University Press, 1923, pp. 169-70, 176; and Diana Scarisbrick's *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*. Thames & Hudson, 2007, pp. 66-79, 162-65, 302-17.

The true significance of a particular object changing hands results from a variety of factors. Any message or verses that accompany the gift can amplify its effect if it matches the symbolism and meanings associated with the gift; if inaccurate or offensive, it can nullify the best of gifts. The manner in which the recipient receives the gift determines whether she or he will allow it to alter her or his identity in connecting with the giver, especially in terms of that person's romantic, political, or friendship relationship with the giver. Giving a piece of personal ornamentation that is rare or expensive relays positive information about the class and wealth of the giver for being able to procure the gift; it also confers a compliment on the recipient, indicating that the giver believes the recipient worthy of the expense or difficulty in acquiring the gift as well as sharing the giver's class and wealth. A person in a position of power often shares some of that power through the gift by forming a connection with the recipient, and this connection can be strengthened by any additional vows given with the gift. All of this does not fully take into account the additional characteristics that are associated with the items due to their physical properties, history of source, and visibility in being worn or favored by powerful or popular figures.

I examine the meaning, background, and symbolism of the items themselves during the early modern period. Gemstones have different qualities and characteristics that led them to be associated with lending these qualities or showing them in the recipient. Diamond's superior hardness led people to associate it with invincibility and steadfastness, in battle and character; its rarity and value became associated with royalty; its excellent light reflective capabilities and beauty led people to associate it with people

who are beautiful and illuminate those around them with their good qualities. The color of a gemstone or precious metal could be associated with emotions, natural elements, and humors, and gemstones and organic materials have long been associated with protection or enhanced influence on their wearers due to birth months or astrological signs. Inscriptions or posies in items served as a major form of public and private communication in court and personal spheres, with the two frequently overlapping. Pearls, miniatures, engagement rings, family or signet rings, and royal rings carry connections to sexual purity or chastity, beauty, art, religion, love, intimacy, family lineage, reputation, buying power, and political power, to name some of the associations.

The material value and market trade of the gifts mentioned in Shakespeare's plays during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are worth examination: it is illuminating to identify the sources, the supply, and the popular demand for different gemstones and jewelry. In a time of frequent exploration and colonization, there was a constant push to find the next source of precious gemstones and metals to satisfy the appetites of the reigning sovereigns and aristocracy, so this needs to be taken into account when considering gifts that characters exchange. Clues from the texts often lead to more detail about what sort of pieces characters are giving to and receiving from one another, filling in context about value or availability that may have been assumed by contemporary audience members or readers.

I focus on how givers use the gifts of personal ornamentation to represent themselves to the recipients, and vice versa. Gifts often carry part of the giver with them, as Mauss indicates, and women characters often prove more aware of this essence in a

gift than men. This is why the women givers offer courtship tokens that highlight their positive attributes in order to entice potential partners, or they reward new husbands or husbands-to-be with gifts that promise elevation to their level of nobility, royalty, or wealth. I find that the men are usually more likely to give courtship or marital gifts that claim the recipient for their intentions, whether it is to remove them from circulation or place them on pedestals higher than the ladies of their contemporaries. The women's awareness of gift essence is also why the women have the ability to turn gifts against the givers in rejection of half-hearted courtship behavior or to claim their right to the privileges and class of a new marriage.

My argument demonstrates how giving personal ornamentation gifts develops relationships and trust. Royal characters often give tokens to show their favor in subjects who do them great service. Other people in positions of power or wealth give these types of gifts with clearly stated expectations of loyalty and reciprocation. Even the act of offering the gift can test and reveal the heart of the recipient. All of these situations lay the foundation for mutually beneficial relationships between giver and receiver. When the recipient meets the conditions, both parties flourish and the cycle of giving and receiving continues. When the receiver flouts the conditions, trust is broken and consequences and humiliation follow for at least one of the two parties. The relationships and the trust rely on proper handling of the gifts and the ethical responsibilities that accompany them.

I highlight how personalized ornamentation items given as gifts carry power, protection, and sentimental depth as an extension of the relationships and trust covered in the previous concept. When givers offer notably visible gifts that bear their signs, initials,

or crests, they offer the recipients power and protection associated with the givers' public rank, class, and wealth. In the case of inherited family rings, the giver surrenders a token that carries the identity and honor of the family line and history to the recipient. In both cases, the gift functions as a public seal of approval for the recipient, marking the wearer as worthy of the notice and favor of the family, house, or throne, if not a member of its ranks. Offering up a gift of this magnitude indicates that the giver cares for the recipient enough to trust him or her with the reputation and honor for which the gift stands.

My work contributes to the critical attention surrounding gift-giving by identifying how giving personal ornamentation affects the communities and societies of the givers and recipients. I contend that a gift-giver's ability to give these gifts thoughtfully, with purpose and connection to the recipient, can teach the recipient and those around them the responsibilities involved in honoring the conditions of the gift and continuing the cycle of giving and receiving. A giver can generously allow another person to take part of the responsibility for giving a gift in order to foster a sense of community and gratitude, as well as encouraging others to see giving as expected behavior within the group. This study also demonstrates that givers who publicly remonstrate with or punish recipients who do not keep the vows made in gift-giving and receiving ensure that the consequences discourage the violation of the gift-giving cycle in the future.

In Chapter 1, titled "Personal Ornamentation and Courtship Tokens as Tools to Create and Define Relationships," I address how *Twelfth Night* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are examples of how women use gifts of personal ornamentation to take control of their

identity and relationships as part of courtship. As a major part of *Twelfth Night*, Olivia gives gifts to Cesario and Sebastian in order to express her positive qualities as a potential marriage partner and to pursue her desired relationship. I focus on the historical context and value of each of her three gifts of jewelry or a gemstone and show how they represent desirable characteristics about Olivia and her situation in life that would induce the recipient of her gifts to marry her. By using her courtship gifts in this way to convince her recipient, Olivia is proof of Mauss's idea that a gift "still possesses something of [the giver]" (12). Olivia's well-chosen gifts and manner of offering herself through them lead to her success in obtaining marriage during the course of the play.

In *Love's Labour's Lost*, however, I develop an example of how the women choose to turn the gifts of the ineffectual men's courtship against them and to define their own identities for any potential future relationships. The King of Navarre and his men attempt to impose idealized identities upon their chosen partners through the letters that accompany their courtship gifts of jewelry and gloves, rendering the symbolism and power of the gifts ineffective in urging the men's suits. I argue that the Princess of France and her ladies choose to consider the aesthetic and economic value of the gifts because of this faulty manner of gift-giving. In doing so, they sidestep the identities the men envision for them, deftly turning aside the consequences of Lewis Hyde's precept that "gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity" (45). The princes and her ladies take control of the gifts instead of being defined by them, and they use them against the men to reveal the shortcomings that their suitors will have to rectify before being considered for marriage.

In Chapter 2, "Inherited Ring Gifts and How They Are Connected to Marriage and Family Relationships," I examine women's use of inherited rings in *Cymbeline* and *All's Well That Ends Well* to either symbolize their virtues and their acceptance of a new husband into the royal family or to prove that they are worthy of entering a noble family's lineage by marriage. Both women use the rings to effect change, which embodies Hyde's theory of gift exchange as such an agent of change. According to Hyde, "gift exchange [is] a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or maker or catalyst. It is also the case that a gift may be the actual agent of change, the bearer of new life" (45). Princess Imogen of *Cymbeline* gives the diamond ring that she inherited from her late mother, the queen, to her new husband Posthumus in order to show how much she values him and to help him accept his new place as part of her family, despite the king's disapproval. The ring also serves as a symbol of the princess's virtues and faithfulness to Posthumus. I maintain that the new husband parts from the ring for losing his faith in Imogen, and he must become a better man before his faith and the ring are restored to him.

In *All's Well*, I focus on how Helena manages to have Bertram give her the family ring that has been handed down through the male line of the house of Rossillion for five generations. Acquiring this ring as part of her bed-trick ensures that she meets Bertram's challenge to have him accept her as his wife, and it proves that her virtues provide a worthy contribution to the noble lineage of the Rossillion family. It is significant that she uses her intelligence and agency to protect the family ring while simultaneously training

Bertram in how to better deserve his ownership of the ring and to take his place in the family line and in the French royal court.

In Chapter 3, "Master Givers of Ornamentation and Their Links to Power," I use *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens* to create the idea of the "master giver," a character who uses jewelry gifts in order to form individual bonds, to build their social status, and to influence communities by giving more than others can ever repay, demonstrating a version of Marcel Mauss's idea of "potlatch" (6). Portia of *The Merchant of Venice* serves as my example of a successful master giver, as she uses the giving and receiving of her ring to reappropriate control of her person by giving herself in marriage and to build a foundation for her relationship with her new husband. As part of her management of the same ring gift, she also forms a community by including others with gifts and instituting the expectation of keeping commitments and one's word to others regardless of their gender. Portia goes so far as to initiate an apprentice master giver by including her waiting gentlewoman with the giving and receiving of her own ring gift to her husband.

In *Timon of Athens*, I expose the ineffectiveness of Timon's attempts to become a master giver that lead to his deterioration into a hermit, trying to use gifts to destroy the community that betrays him. In tracing the path of the diamond ring gift he purchases at the beginning of the play, it becomes clear how Timon's careless giving and his refusal of reciprocal gifts precipitate his failure to create relationship bonds of true emotional connection and allegiance. Timon also devalues his signet ring as the symbol of his

buying power and his household, making it impossible for him to maintain his lifestyle and that of those who serve him.

In my final chapter, Chapter 4, "The Favors of Kings' Rings: Identity through Courtly Favor and Bonds of Protection," I prove how the kings in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Henry VIII* alter subjects' identities and relationships through giving gifts of royal rings. I also examine how kings, in giving their royal rings, prove to be examples of Marcel Mauss's precept that a gift "obliges a person to reciprocate the present that has been received" (7). By giving these rings to repay services by worthy subjects, the kings bestow protection and support, only to receive even more benefits to themselves and their kingdoms for their trouble. The King of France in *All's Well* gives Helena his ring after she heals him of his seemingly terminal illness. I find that his gift of the ring and its accompanying promise of aid provide Helena with the support system she needs to secure her unwilling husband and to establish the bridge of a young family between the aging French court and its next generation of nobility and courtiers. I also elaborate on how the involvement of the king and his ring throughout the play are a significant departure Shakespeare makes from the source plays.

I then focus on the example of the king's signature ring he gives to Archbishop Cranmer in *King Henry VIII*: it serves as a means of the king's protection and support before Cranmer's hearing before the Privy Council. I examine how the ring gift is Cranmer's reward for passing Henry's close examination of his heart and motivations, as well as a symbol of the relationship Cranmer builds with his sovereign through his moral living and many services for the king prior to the test. I argue that the king's gift of the

ring is the beginning of his acknowledgement of the debt he owes Cranmer, and in mounting the defense he promises with the ring, he becomes a better ruler in several aspects. It is only by fulfilling the vow made with his ring gift that Henry earns Cranmer's vision of his legacy's success through his daughter and her heir after her, which leads the king to declare himself a man.

Early modern English culture was characterized by attention to aesthetic detail and the lavish use of personal ornamentation whenever possible. By incorporating detailed examination of the many facets of meaning, symbolism, and associations with these items into the territory of gift-giving theory, I offer a fresh perspective on how they influence relationships within Shakespeare's plays.

CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL ORNAMENTATION AND COURTSHIP TOKENS AS TOOLS TO CREATE AND DEFINE RELATIONSHIPS

Gift-giving scenes in Shakespeare's plays stress the agency of female recipients and givers, thus challenging the cultural norm that women are prizes, worthy mainly for their exchange value. Instead of being objectified themselves, such characters use other objects, namely jewelry and gems, to proclaim their own agency and to evaluate the status of others. Within this chapter, I will examine two plays in which women utilize courtship tokens as gifts in this manner. In the first play, *Twelfth Night*,[8] Olivia expresses her positive attributes through gifts of jewelry and a loose pearl in order to notify Cesario of her interest and to convince him/her to marry her. In the second play, *Love's Labour's Lost*,[9] the King of Navarre and his gentlemen attempt to impose their Petrarchan ideals of romantic love on the Princess of France and her ladies through their tokens, and their letters of disingenuous flattery neutralize any chance the rich gifts have in winning the women's hands in marriage. The women appreciate the beauty and value of the gifts of jewelry and fine gloves, but they stand firm in their self-knowledge and appropriate the power of the gifts to evaluate the men's behavior and courtship missteps with a critical eye. In a notable contrast to the men's attempts, Olivia's aptitude in bestowing her jewel gifts succeeds in helping her to secure a formal betrothal to Sebastian, even though he is not the person whom she originally intends to pursue.

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[8] All citations to the play in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night.* Edited by Keir Elam. Arden Shakespeare, 2009.

[9] All citations to the play in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Edited by H. R. Woudhuysen. Arden Shakespeare, 1998.

In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia chooses to give herself away through the different types of ornament that she offers to Cesario, and accidentally to Sebastian, as courtship gifts. She proves to be an excellent example of Marcell Mauss's theory that gifts "still possess something of [the giver]" (12). Olivia hopes to emphasize her beauty, wealth, class, and other positive attributes in her gifts to present herself as a desirable marriage partner and to gain the marriage relationship she wants with her chosen partner. Olivia uses her first gift, a ring, to hurriedly establish a connection and show interest in Cesario, and her second and third gifts, a miniature portrait of herself in a pendant or brooch and a loose, undrilled pearl of quality, to give evidence of her beauty, wealth, femininity, intelligence, and social status in the hope of securing a relationship with Cesario. The countess refuses Duke Orsino's attempts to pursue her as a passive object while she actively seeks to build Cesario's exposure to her through gifts that function as reminders of all the benefits a match with her would bring.

Many critics have examined Olivia's attempted courtship of Cesario, her gifts, and her formal betrothal to Sebastian. Stephanie Chamberlain sees Olivia's initial withholding of herself and her wealth and her later participation through gifts as an important change for Illyria's economy. John V. Robinson emphasizes the nuances of the wording in how Cesario accepts Olivia's ring, Cynthia Lewis scrutinizes his/her awareness of the gift's meaning, and Michaela Röll details how Olivia surrenders herself sexually through the gift of her ring.[10] Although critics have written this and more in their

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[10] See Robinson's "A Ring of Truth: Another Look at a Crux in *Twelfth Night*." *English Language Notes*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1996, pp. 1-6; Lewis's "Viola, Antonio, and Epiphany in *Twelfth Night*." *Essays in*

attention to Olivia's pursuit of a relationship and marriage through gift-giving in this play, I shall focus on how Olivia presents courtship gifts of jewelry and gemstones that showcase her qualities and desires in a positive light to win a partner of her own choosing.

It is significant that none of the plays commonly acknowledged as possible sources for *Twelfth Night* portray Olivia's character, the woman that Orsino's character pursues, as a giver of material or ornamental courtship gifts. In *Gl'Ingannati*, also known as *The Deceived*, the maiden Isabella goes so far as to say "I am all yours" to Lelia dressed as a boy in 2.4 (309), but that is the extent of the gifts that she gives.[11] Olivia's character match in Barnaby Riche's "Of Apolonius and Silla," Julina, eagerly feasts Silla's brother Silvio and beds him before she realizes her mistake much later in the play (354).[12] The only ornament material courtship gifts come from Orsino's counterparts, with Riche acknowledging the standard gifts expected from men: "accordyng to the maner of wooers, besides faire woordes, sorrowfull sighes, and piteous countenaunces, there must bee sendyng of lovyng letters, chaines, bracelettes, brouches, ryngs, tablets, gemmes, juels, and presentes, I knowe not what" (351) from his Apolonius to the widow lady Julina when he learns how to woo properly. In Matteo Bandello's *Thirty-Sixth*

Literature, vol. 13, no. 2, 1986, p. 196; and Röll's "'Three'-Floating Sexuality: Viola's Identity in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*." *Upstart Crow,* no. 18, 1998, pp. 48-49.

[11] All citations to the play in this chapter are to "*Gl'Ignatti (*The Deceived), by the Academy of the Thunderstruck in Siena (1537) (Translation)." *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, vol. II, Columbia University Press, 1958, pp. 286-339.

[12] All citations to the play in this chapter are to Barnaby Riche, "From *Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession* by Barnaby Riche (1581) 'Of Apolonius and Silla: The Argument of the Second Historie.'" *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, vol. II, Columbia University Press, 1958, pp. 344-363.

Novel, often referred to as *Nicuola and Lattantio*, Viola's character equal Romulo/Nicuola receives a diamond from Orsino's counterpart Lattantio to solemnize his commitment to marry her for her chaste heart and service to him (233).[13] Shakespeare clearly departs from what others have written by deciding to make Olivia the primary gift-giver in her relationship with Cesario.

In a notable change from source plays, Olivia takes on the role of wooer and relies on a ring gift to establish a connection with Cesario almost immediately after their first meeting. She impulsively takes a ring from her finger and has her steward deliver it to the eloquent and romantic young messenger that Duke Orsino has sent to woo on his behalf; this is before he/she even has the opportunity to leave the grounds after their first encounter. Uninterested and unwilling to enter into a relationship with Orsino, Olivia is surprised by Cesario's decision to break with his/her directed missive and court in thoughts he/she actively invents on the spot. Jami Ake adds: "Viola's breach in Petrarchan convention, in turn, frees Olivia from her own scripted role as inaccessible sonnet mistress- ones she has seemed passively to accept- and stirs her interest" (378). Catherine Thomas agrees that "her (Cesario's) words transform Olivia from a shut-in to a colorful, assertive lover" (315). Awakened from a passive role into that of an active participant, Olivia takes on agency as she pursues what and who she desires in courtship. She removes a ring from her finger as an impulsive action based on her newly discovered

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[13] All citations to the play in this chapter are to Matteo Bandello, *"The Thirty-Sixth Novel of Bandello. Volume the Second*." *Shakespear Illustrated: or, The Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear are Founded*, edited by Charlotte Lennox. AMS Press, 1973, pp. 197-236, with the selected text from the 1753 edition.

attraction, and she quickly makes use of what she has at hand to provide a gift for Malvolio to deliver. Olivia instructs her steward to unknowingly make her case by ring and message:

> He left this ring behind him,
>
> Would I or not. Tell him I'll none of it.
>
> Desire him not to flatter with his lord,
>
> Nor hold him up with hopes: I am not for him.
>
> If that the youth will come this way tomorrow,
>
> I'll give him reasons for't. (1.5.294-99)

Olivia indicates to her steward that she does not want the ring or the implied social, romantic, and economic debt assumed to be part of the supposed gift from the duke. She does, however, secretly hope to convey them to Cesario with little chance of refusal.

Olivia makes it clear that she wants nothing to do with *Orsino's* courtship in her message for Cesario "not to flatter with his lord, / Nor hold him up with hopes: I am not for him" (1.5.296-97). The countess does not desire for Cesario to mistake the ring or her attention as intended for his/her master. However, the wording of "I am not for him" also indicates that while she is not available or interested in Orsino, she is no longer necessarily uninterested in other men. Otherwise, Olivia could have said that she is "not for" any man or she is "not for" marriage, because shortly before she meets Cesario she has sworn off the company of men for years to mourn her father and brother. While shutting down any hopes for Cesario's master, Olivia encourages the messenger to return

and see her again. Olivia can "give him reasons" for sending her own ring after Cesario, namely her interest and attraction to him/her.

Olivia's primary intention for the ring is to make Cesario aware of her feelings for him/her, and in this her gift proves successful. Cesario quickly recognizes the purpose of the ring as such: "The cunning of her passion / Invites me in this churlish messenger" (2.2.22-23). Cesario is likely referring to Malvolio as the "churlish messenger" here, but the ring also acts as messenger because it carries "the cunning of her passion." Cesario recognizes that it is Olivia's ring and interest in him/her that drives this act. Lewis comments that "He [Cesario's] vision is not so dreamy eyed as to obscure the true meaning of receiving the ring" ("Viola, Antonio, and Epiphany" 196). Olivia's "cunning" decision to have the thinly veiled gift delivered under false pretenses "invites" Cesario to return to see her with the sanction of his/her master. The ring effectively carries out the giver's purpose in notifying Cesario of Olivia's interest in him/her as a possible marriage partner, but it also hints at the giver's sexual availability and wealth.

Rings were often used during the Renaissance as betrothal gifts or signs of a marriage, so the significance of the gift of a ring could quickly escalate according to the intent of the giver and the recipient. Ann Jennalie Cook points out that "while nothing but the bare promise mutually made (*consensus nuptualis*), was required for a valid contract, the customary procedure involved the presence of witnesses, the joining of hands (if possible by the bride's father), oral vows or other signs of assent, the gift of a ring or another appropriate token, a spousal kiss, and the signing of legal documents" (155). Some people, often men, utilized the giving of a ring to attempt to make a claim on

a woman, even if she had not formally consented to marriage. By giving Cesario a ring, Olivia hopes to put him/her into a debt that the page could not repay in any other coin but attention and a growing relationship. Cesario could, as Malvolio suggests, leave it lying on the ground if he/she is uninterested in the ring and the feelings that it carries. The decision to abandon the gift would, however, cause a rift in Cesario's newly established connection with Olivia and make it difficult for Cesario to continue suing in favor of his/her master's suit with Olivia. Cesario knows the difficulty of his/her place in the love triangle and laments, "Oh time, thou must untangle this, not I. / It is too hard a knot for me t'untie" (2.2.40-41). Chamberlain makes the case that this "knot metaphor, in fact, is itself linked to the concept of matrimonial union" (10) which Cesario is unable to legally fulfill with Olivia as a woman. However, Robinson argues that "the 'knot' Viola speaks of is the misdirected affections of Orsino, Olivia, and Viola" which will require Sebastian to be untied (6). The choice of a ring from Olivia's own finger as a gift suggests a high degree of intimacy, and Cesario could potentially consider her giving a gift in pursuit of a duke's page as aggressive and improper.

In addition to the possibility of beginning a courtship, Olivia also lays her sexual interest in Cesario open in giving him/her a ring as a gift, as rings often function as symbols for sex with women at this time. Michaela Röll applies this to Olivia's behavior and gift: "Not only had she unveiled herself before Cesario, but she had also presented her/him with the ring, the "O-thing" or "no-thing," a signifier of female sex in several of Shakespeare's earlier plays (e.g., *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Merchant of Venice*)" (48). When Olivia removes the ring from her finger and

has Malvolio deliver the ring, as likely as not still warm, to Cesario, she encourages the object of her affections to wear the metal that she has worn against her skin. This item could also carry the scent of her body oils and perfumes for a time, providing olfactory stimulus for Cesario to think of Olivia until his/her scent is carried on the ring in its place. Olivia makes her desire and interest clear in her ring and message, and she must hear from Cesario again to find out how effective they are.

Giving a gift so brazenly open about her marital and sexual interest in Cesario leaves Olivia in a compromised position, with her reputation open to detriment by Cesario if he/she so chooses, as well as Duke Orsino. This is why Olivia needs to gauge Cesario's response to her proposed connection and find out if her gamble has paid off:

> Under your hard construction must I sit,
>
> …….
>
> What might you think?
>
> Have you not set mine honour at the stake
>
> And baited it with all th'unmuzzled thoughts
>
> That tyrannous heart can think? (3.1.113-18)

She believes that Cesario could consider her action and desire with "hard construction" and "set …[her] honour at the stake" for making her desire for him/her plain, but she hopes to find out that this is not the case. As an open acknowledgement of her desire, Olivia's gift places her reputation at the mercy of a young seeming man both below her station and openly enlisted in the service of her refused, powerful wooer. By pursuing Cesario with the gift of her ring, disguised as a gift she has rejected from Cesario's

master, Olivia rejects the intent of Cesario's assigned task and proposes a match with the messenger instead. Cesario does indeed understand the significance of Olivia's gift, to his/her dismay, and denies the possibility of the relationship that Olivia seeks. By refusing Olivia's advances, Cesario proves that Olivia could consider him/her a "tyrannous heart" in the face of the lady's gift and overtures. Olivia continues her efforts and attention to Cesario in the hope of wearing down his/her resistance with a gift that highlights her positive qualities that Cesario admires during his/her first attempt at wooing for Duke Orsino.

Olivia attempts to confer her status to Cesario through her second gift, a miniature portrait of herself that she intends for Cesario to wear. Orsino's page repeatedly proclaims that Olivia has beauty in their first meeting, and in this gift the countess manages to combine a reminder of this with a benefit of her favor. Cesario says aloud when he/she first sees Olivia that her face is "excellently done" (1.5.229) and "But if you were the devil, you are fair" (1.5.251). Olivia's miniature portrait gift includes her "two lips, indifferent red" and the "two gray eyes" (1.5.239) that Olivia claims she will leave to the world in place of children when pressed by Cesario on Duke Orsino's account in their first meeting. These eyes and features in the gift stand sentinel and silently plead her case with the resistant Cesario. Olivia urges her gift upon him/her with the recommendation: "Wear this jewel for me: 'tis my picture. / Refuse it not, it hath no tongue to vex you" (3.4.203-4). If Olivia can convince Cesario to "wear this jewel" as a form of ornamentation, he/she could gain status and attention from others for having a

beautiful lover if worn openly. This could be problematic, however, given that Duke Orsino employs Cesario to woo Olivia on his behalf.

If Cesario wears Olivia's gift on his/her person out of sight as many people did during the time, it could also be considered dearer as a token of a secret and private love worn near the heart. It is likely that this is Olivia's hope for the gift; that it will support a growing intimacy between her and Orsino's page. Marianne Koos indicates in her article about miniatures from this time period that "such miniature portraits are material 'things,' resting directly on the owner's body. They are meant to be worn on the body, warmed (that is animated), kissed and touched. They allow the person depicted to be 'held in the hand,' and – viewed up close – to be contemplated in a concentrated 'private' act or concealed on intimate parts of the body" (837). This gift gives Olivia's beauty the advantage of being readily available for Cesario to consider and contemplate alone in quiet moments, as "it hath no tongue to vex you" (3.4.204). Olivia hopes that repeated exposure to her beautiful countenance in the miniature may wear down Cesario's resistance and make him/her reconsider accepting her as his/her marriage partner.

Miniatures were considered extremely personal gifts, usually confined to the realms of royalty, gentry, and nobility, and Olivia establishes her place among the upper classes with this gift. Creating miniatures was referred to as the art of limning. David Starkey notes that the English court was quite taken with creating miniatures after a member of the French court sent miniatures to King Henry VIII when requesting leniency for a relative, and as such, "Limning had begun within the court and it always remained closely associated with it" (45). Elizabeth I received miniatures from her courtiers and

ladies, and Koos reveals that the queen "owned an entire collection of miniature portraits which she kept in her most intimate rooms (her bedchambers)- stored in a locked cabinet, individually wrapped in paper and titled in her own writing" (839). In a time before photography, painting and sketching were the means of recording two-dimensional images of subjects for public or personal use. Nicholas Hilliard, Elizabeth's favored miniaturist, produced miniatures for her and the English court. Koos points out that "according to Hilliard, a miniaturist should only paint for such 'noble persons,' as only 'gentlemen' are suited to this kind of 'gentle painting'" (840). When Olivia chooses to give the gift of a miniature to Cesario, she shows her familiarity with courtly gifts and the highborn connections that she can give as part of drawing him/her into her world of titles.

By having the wherewithal to commission a miniature portrait of herself, Olivia's gift also proves her wealth to her chosen partner. She has the funds to pay an artist to paint a miniature portrait of her, and she also has the time at her leisure to pose for the artist in order to create a good likeness. Olivia gives Cesario proof that she has her estate well in hand and she can afford to be a patron to an artist when paints, dyes, and other materials are dearly bought, when they are available, from apothecaries. Jim Murrell relays in his work, "The Craft of the Miniaturist," that apothecaries used vermilion, red lead, lead-tin, arsenic sulphide, minerals like azurite and malachite, gold, and silver in powdered form as pigments that limners would then mix with gum Arabic to produce matte colors (3). For an English miniature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the tones of the carnation, the signature "smooth, opaque, colored [back] ground" (Murrell 4) area around the central figure(s), were carefully worked: "The laying of the carnation was

critical to the success of the portrait and considerable care had to be taken in mixing and applying it. It was essential that the carnation chosen was as pale as the lightest tones of the complexion" because it could be darkened, but not lightened (Murrell 9). Hilliard brought his training as a goldsmith to bear in his careful reproductions of gemstones and jewelry in the miniatures themselves by layering different pigments and materials in careful pairings to produce the same kind of luster and finish as the originals.

In having time to sit for the portrait, Olivia communicates that she has the luxury of leisure time to invest in having the portrait miniature made for Cesario; by marrying her, Cesario would be able to leave service under Orsino and to join her in that luxury. The miniature gives proof of this because "it took at least three sittings and a minimum of seven working hours to complete a portrait miniature" (Murrell 13). As the child of a gentleman, Cesario would have been aware of this practice and the time Olivia would have to give to have the miniature portrait completed by a limnist for it to be accurate. By the end of the painstaking process and time it took to complete miniatures, they were highly detailed and considered jewels in their own right, as Olivia points out when she requests that Cesario would "wear this jewel" for her sake (3.4.203). By giving Cesario this "jewel" that represents the wealth, leisure, and attention that Olivia will give him/her if the relationship progresses to the state of wedlock, Olivia proves that she is driven and smart enough to draw from their previous shared encounter and to set it to work for her benefit.

Olivia's gift of the miniature shows her intelligence in the tactic of returning to Cesario's established admiration of her beauty. She reveals this in her replies to Cesario's compliments. Upon seeing Olivia's face in their first meeting, Cesario says:

'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.
Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive
If you will lead these graces to the grave
And leave the world no copy. (1.5.231-35)

Michaela Röll aptly points out that "Like the Petrarchan wooer, Cesario idealizes Olivia while reminding her of her procreative duties" (45). Not only does Olivia wittily riposte this comment by claiming that she will leave the different features of her face to the world in the case of her passing, she remembers Cesario's praise. That is why she attempts to convince Cesario to accept her affection and to begin a relationship with the aid of her second gift, which she has planned and secured in advance of their next meeting. Olivia thereby furnishes the reluctant messenger with the "copy" of herself and her beauty as a gift in the miniature. By doing so, Olivia hints at taking up Cesario's earlier admonition as guidance; she proves that she is willing to create a living "copy" of herself in a child that could result from a marital and sexual union with her desired partner.

The third gift, however, carries a meaning different from the other two. Olivia's third gift is an undrilled loose pearl, which she mistakenly gives to Cesario's twin, Sebastian. He is in awe of her gift for many reasons, one of which is the rarity of the

pearl. Pearls were incredibly popular in Europe during the sixteenth century, which the English later referred to as the Pearl Age due to the immense demand for the gem. The fortunate few who managed to acquire them covered their attire with as many as possible. Joan Evans intimates: “It was the age of pearls, either used alone or set with other gems. They were worn on every conceivable jewel, threaded through the hair, forming the belt, studding the tours or bordures de tourel—the framework on which was expanded the prodigious winged collar then in fashion—and strewn over the whole dress” (*English Jewellery* 105). A major problem with this amount of demand is that pearls were not easily obtainable during the British Renaissance because they were not cultured with man’s assistance. The natural pearls were the result of mussels’ and oysters’ defense systems to protect their soft, fleshy insides from the damage that sand, shell, or other outside debris could cause them if they got inside their shells. Many mussels and oysters did not have these iridescent spheres in them, thus developed countries battled over who would have control of the areas where beds of these creatures lived in the sea or rivers. Spain gained a large amount of control over these areas as part of their explorations of the Americas. It was not uncommon for Spanish explorers to enslave native peal divers and to force them to dive repeatedly in the hope of obtaining the prized pearls. This often led to the divers’ early deaths due to the pressure involved with diving down deep into the water (Joyce and Addison 100). Once the pearl beds were overharvested, there would not be enough oysters to replenish their numbers and a new source would need to be discovered.

England's explorers were highly encouraged to find sources of pearls in the new world, and if they couldn't find them, they weren't opposed to raiding other countries' ships and towns to obtain them. Robert E. Morsberger writes that "Most of Spain's wealth comes from the mines of Mexico and Peru and the pearl fisheries of the Spanish Main, and Drake was determined to seize it for England" through acts of piracy (1). This is how he gained a good deal of wealth and acclaim from Queen Elizabeth I. The lengths to which the royalty and nobility of different countries were willing to go in order to obtain them indicates how difficult it was to access these treasures. Sebastian considers the situation and the gift as an "accident" as well as a "flood of fortune," which refers to its value (4.3.11). Hence, Olivia's gift of a pearl shows that she has the influence to acquire rare and valuable items and to share them with whom she wishes.

Olivia's gift also dazzles Sebastian because the pearl has established associations with the higher classes of nobility and royalty. Queen Elizabeth I was an eminent fan of pearls, as was her father before her. She collected many valuable and storied pearls during the course of her rule, including the necklace now known as the Hanoverian pearls, six pearl strands and twenty-five large pearl drops that was originally a marriage gift to Catherine de Medici from Pope Clement VII, later given to Mary Stuart as a gift on her marriage to Francis II. Elizabeth eagerly purchased the highly coveted pearls for £300 sterling after Mary's death (Joyce and Addison 98). Courtiers and well-wishers ready to please the queen gave her pearl gifts and jewelry to add to her collection during her acclaimed New Year's gift exchange and other events because she wore pearls on her gowns, in her hair, and in numerous types of jewelry. Rühle-Diebener-Verlag relates that

"The queen possessed dresses that were embroidered with thousands of pearls and on certain occasions she was seen wearing up to seven necklaces at a time, some of which even reached down to her knees" (29). This is also related to her desire to draw from the association of pearls as symbols of purity, since she never married and enjoyed the title of the "Virgin Queen."

Another reason that Olivia's gift of a loose, undrilled pearl is significant to Sebastian as a courtship gift is that a pearl carries great associations with virginity, chastity, and love. Olivia is, in effect, offering her virginity up to Sebastian with this beautiful, undrilled pearl. Pearls, even to this day, lose some of their value once they have been drilled because the act limits the number of ways in which it can be set in jewelry. Before it has been drilled, a pearl could be used in anything from a strand of pearls to part of a pearl stud, a pendant, a ring, carved, and so on. As a maiden, Olivia is using this pearl to represent her untouched status, which is something that women of the upper classes and their families jealously guarded. Ann Jennalie Cook confirms that "the importance of guaranteeing correct lines of inheritance and descent increased the significance of virginity for wealthy and titled females" (189). The connection between pearls and love is also strong, to the point that Venus, the goddess of love, had already been painted standing in a shell in the sea, where a pearl would normally be found, in the well-known Italian painting *Birth of Venus* by Sandro Botticelli created about a hundred years earlier in the 1480s. Bruce G. Knuth writes in *Gems in Myth, Legend and Lore* that "the pearl was believed to be the favorite jewel of Venus and was thought to be necessary

for love potions" (161). This gift of a pearl leaves no room for doubt of Olivia's intentions and clearly bespeaks the advantages for a man in joining his life with hers.

All of these positive characteristics associated with a pearl contribute to Sebastian's shock at receiving it as a gift from a previously unknown woman who is clearly wealthy, attractive, and interested in him. Her protective behavior upon discovering him fighting in the street with her relative and her invitation to her home are highly unusual for a stranger, and her continued attentions only add to his awe. His wonder is evident when he says to himself after he leaves Olivia's home:

> This is the air, that is the glorious sun;
> This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't
> And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
> Yet 'tis not madness
> ……..
> Yet doth this accident and flood of fortune
> So far exceed all instance, all discourse,
> That I am ready to distrust mine eyes. (4.3.1-4, 11-13)

He is so surprised by his experience that he has to collect himself after the encounter, checking his senses and ability to feel the weight and texture of the pearl, its appearance in his hand: "I do feel't and see't." Sebastian acknowledges that "'tis wonder that enwraps me thus" in contemplating the situation that Olivia offers him. He is "ready to distrust [his] eyes" as they rest on the luminous surface of the pearl that he holds. Lindheim comments that "Although Sebastian may fall in love with Olivia at first sight,

his reaction is rationally unfolded in soliloquy: he talks of wonder, madness, disputes, error, discourse, distrusting senses, and wrangling with reason" (684). He has to work through how the lucrative and beneficial circumstances the pearl gift represents could just be offered to him, and he relies on the evidence of Olivia's "smooth, discreet and stable bearing" (4.3.19) and her well-run household to settle his initial concerns about her judgment. L.G. Salingar agrees that "Sebastian…is ready to 'wrangle with his reason' and welcome the gift of love" (130), and Chamberlain takes his acceptance further by concluding that "Sebastian readily reciprocates Olivia's material gift with promises of love, affection and, perhaps most importantly, commitment, something Cesario is both physically and emotionally unable to do" (10). Olivia's persistence and method of gifting ultimately result in her secret exchange of rings and vows in a formal espousal to Sebastian, which means she succeeds in giving herself away and securing an actual future husband through a procession of gifts instead of the created person of Cesario.

Shakespeare's conscious decision to add Olivia's material gift-giving to Cesario is a significant change for Olivia's character, transforming her and helping to drive the plot of the play. Olivia gives gifts calculated to notify Cesario of her interest in him/her as a sexual and marriage partner and to build on their interactions. She makes an excellent case to win over Cesario both emotionally and logically through maneuvering in her courtship gifts or favors. Shakespeare's choice to craft her as a skillful gift-giver renders Olivia as a more developed character. She is both focused and intelligent in her pursuit of a relationship with Cesario. Olivia is also more assertive in her continued gift-giving interactions with Cesario and finally Sebastian, asking Sebastian to be led by her into

accepting the gift of herself through a formal espousal exchange of oaths and rings in front of a priest.

Shakespeare turns a woman—unwilling to be acquired by the duke in marriage following the death of her father and brother—into a supporter of marriage by giving her the power to pursue, through gifts, the person whom she finds intriguing and attractive. Olivia rejects the tired advances of Orsino, which are steeped in the Petrarchan tradition and demonstrate more passion with being in love than in admiring and loving Olivia as she is. She pursues the marriage partner she desires by giving gifts that carry hints of her best qualities, shedding her role as an object for men to claim. This shows a pattern in Shakespeare's work, as the ladies in *Love's Labour's Lost* also use gifts to become active participants in potential courtship, appropriating their suitors' tokens to strive against the impersonal nature of Petrarchan courtship and to reject the idealized identities that men would confer on them with their gifts.

…

As opposed to Olivia's offering herself through gifts, the King of Navarre and his men of *Love's Labour's Lost* try to impose their claims and their idealized forms of women on their lovers with their courtship tokens instead of offering themselves through the gifts. The gifts themselves are well chosen to make the women feel valued and special, as deserving of gifts that represent the offering of relationships beneficial in wealth, class, and attention. However, the suitors' words and actions neutralize the gifts' success at creating social or romantic bonds. Therefore, while the princess and her ladies recognize how expensive and aesthetically pleasing the gifts are, they do not recognize

them as legitimate courtship gifts. The women instead choose to claim the power of the gifts for themselves and use them to judge the men's lackluster performance as givers and suitors.

The ladies' rejection of the lords' misguided use of love tokens has drawn the attention of critics, who most often see this dynamic as a failed attempt at gift-giving under the guise of group courtship by the men. Mark Thornton Burnett focuses on gifts in the play, with a more substantial interest in the debt or dowry situation between France and Navarre.[14] Janet Adelman points out the problem of the men's continued focus on homosocial bonding in wooing as a group.[15] John Alvis makes the connection between the men's half-hearted attempts at scholarship and their forays into courtship.[16] Katherine Larson points out the men's surprise and dismay at the women's control of the game of the masque and their attempted courtship within it.[17] I shall examine how the King of Navarre and his men counteract the effects of their suitable courtship gifts of ornamentation, leading the Princess of France and her ladies to seize the power of the gifts to evaluate the men and to define the status of the relationships themselves.

The men of Navarre begin well in their courtship by giving rich gifts: the king gives the Princess of France what seems to be a cameo surrounded by diamonds in a

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[14] See Burnett's "Giving and Receiving: *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Politics of Exchange." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 23, no. 2, March 1993, pp. 290-92, 294.
[15] See Adelman's "Male Bonding in Shakespeare's Comedies." *Shakespeare's "Rough Magic": Renaissance Essays in Honor of C.L. Barber*. Ed. Peter Erickson and Coppélia Kahn. University of Delaware Press, 1985, pp.74-75.
[16] See Alvis's "Derivative Loves are Labor Lost." *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, vol. 48, no. 4, 1996, pp. 247-58.
[17] See Larson's "Conversational Games and the Articulation of Desire in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2010, pp. 174-78.

pendant or brooch; Dumaine offers Katherine a pair of fine gloves; Longaville sends Maria a chain or strand of pearls; and Berowne bestows a pearl mounted in some unmentioned fashion as a gift to the fiery Rosaline. Each of these gifts proves suitable for a princess or a lady that attends upon a princess and, as a courtship gift, each has the potential to become a beloved symbol of the giver's love and affection. These gifts, on their own, show great promise for the courtships the men have begun for a number of reasons. I will enumerate the positive symbolism and attributes that these gifts carry in order to register the power they would normally have to further the success of a courtship. This will demonstrate the significance of how completely the men's Petrarchan letters of wooing counteract these exemplary gifts through their idealized depictions of the women as distant goddesses, fairest of the fair. According to theorist Lewis Hyde, "gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating the new identity" (45). The women of France reject the inaccurate descriptions and unrealistic expectations that accompany the gifts by refusing to consider the items as serious tokens of affection and courtship. In doing so, they remain secure in their identities and appropriate the power of the gifts to examine the men's words and actions, thereby becoming judges of their suitability as prospective marriage partners.

The King of Navarre's gift of a cameo surrounded by diamonds in a pendant or brooch for the Princess of France proves complimentary and appropriate as a courtship gift for a woman of royal birth. In giving the princess a piece of jewelry surrounded with diamonds, he acknowledges her place in the world of power and leaders. Diamonds are known for their incredible hardness, which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary,

is part of their name based on the "Middle English diamant, -aunt, < Old French diamant … an alteration of Latin adamas, -antem, or perhaps of its popular variant adimant-em" ("diamond, n.") with adamas being defined as "A very hard substance mentioned by Pliny and other classical writers" ("adamas, n."). The diamond's hardness begat the belief that it brought invincibility in battle, and because of this, Antoinette Matlins writes, "uncut diamonds adorned the suits of armor of the great knights" (3). Those who wished to be seen as leaders and warriors would search out and acquire diamonds for this talismanic property alone.

The diamond's hardness is also a large factor in the late entry of diamond into fashioned jewelry due to the difficulty in polishing and cutting it, but before Elizabeth I's reign it was sparkling on the persons of royalty and nobility in court as well. According to Jerry Sisk's *The Sisk Gemology Reference*, diamonds were at best fashioned in few ways until the sixteenth century: "point cuts," polished natural octahedral diamond crystals; "table cuts," a basic cut with one larger flat surface on top; or later on an "eight cut," with as many facets cut into the surface of the gemstone. The "rose cut" and "double rose cut" were introduced in the sixteenth century, and these multi-faceted cuts did much to improve the brilliance and sparkle of these coveted gems (132). These cuts only added to the beauty of a gem that was already admired for its unusual strength and scarcity. Diana Scarisbrick relates: "Because of its properties, rarity, beauty and value, sovereigns liked to be associated with this stone, and gave diamond rings as rewards for loyal service and as diplomatic gifts" (311) in addition to the growing practice of giving them as engagement or marriage rings. A favor with cut diamonds is an excellent way for

the King of Navarre to hint that the Princess of France is a royal with both brilliance and fire.

In choosing a brooch or pendant with a cameo likely to be the centerpiece, the King of Navarre presents the Princess of France with a gift that gives obeisance to her homeland and its art. According to Anna M. Miller and Diana Jarrett in *Cameos: Old & New*, "the majority of shell cameos were carved in France and Italy" during this time (31). Not only does the cameo serve as a beautiful piece of jewelry with ties to her country, it compliments the princess's mind: "cameos were not carved as amulets or charms, as they had been in Roman days…[but] were regarded as art objects and considered a sign of high intellect" (Miller and Jarrett 29). Gods, goddesses, and biblical figures were the most common figures in cameos, as was the anonymous female profile, referred to as "the Lady cameo" (Miller and Jarrett 61), which we can gather the princess's cameo has in her reference to "a lady walled about with diamonds" (5.2.3). If it had been a recognized public figure or goddess, the "lady" in the cameo would likely have been identified in the play. Since she remains unnamed, we can deduce it is an anonymous "lady cameo." However, Miller and Jarrett do point out that "Elizabeth I of England is credited with introducing the custom of using cameo brooches or pendants as payment to her loyal subjects for favors or for a particular service" (31), which means that she gave cameos with her likeness carved in them to both show recognition and her ownership of them as her subjects.

By giving the Princess of France a cameo of a lady surrounded by diamonds, the King of Navarre makes it clear that he acknowledges her royal bloodline, her status as the

daughter of a king, and the craft of her home country. This is a kingly gift of wealth and class, and it is a highly appropriate courtship gift for a woman that he hopes to make his queen. Navarre's favor implies that he intends to surround her with wealth, grandeur, and protection. It is worth noting, however, that the king's gift can also give the subtle impression that he wishes to make the princess his own and wall her about with diamonds, or surround and control her with his expectations of her as his future wife or courtship partner. Golz points out that women are also often referred to as diamonds or jewels in literature: "The focus was on the exchange value of the female prize involved, its diminishing of her humanity, and the deceptions that often accompanied anything that was especially valuable and alluring" (171). It is easy for the king to slip into the mistake of objectifying the princess in his pursuit and to fall prey to his tendency to idealize her and the idea of love.

Longaville and Berowne choose well in their gifts of one or more pearls for Maria and Rosaline. A pearl is often considered the queen of gems as it reflects light softly, as if with an inner light. This effect, iridescence, is unique to it among gemstones. Pearls' luminous quality is flattering for many people's complexions, especially when pale skin is popular, and they are highly sought after by members of the English Court. As mentioned earlier in the chapter regarding the pearl in *Twelfth Night*, pearls are especially popular in Europe during the mid-sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, and they are closely associated with love, beauty, and purity. They are also part of a visible representation of power. Joan Evans, an expert on historical jewelry in Europe, writes:

> this account of the jewellery of the second half of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth has been confined to the jewels of royal personages and their courtiers. Theirs was the wealth that could order them; theirs the dress—still magnificent and unpractical—on which they could be displayed. It was the age when dress was distinctive not only of nationality but also of class. (*A History of Jewellery* 125)

By giving pearls as their courtship gifts for the ladies to wear, Longaville and Berowne imply that they believe the women worthy of gifts that are highly prized within courtly life.

Dumaine's gift to Katherine is a pair of gloves, a rich gift that denotes both her class and a level of intimacy. Fine gloves were usually expensive and perfumed, an accepted gift among royalty and nobility. Elizabeth I received many pairs of gloves as gifts during her annual New Year's Eve gift exchange, and Peter Stallybrass and Rosalind Jones note that "Gloves were among the material forms in which the English monarchy stored its supposed virtues" (116). These are not gloves that should be worn to do labor of any sort, but to highlight the fact that they restrict the owner from completing anything beyond minor tasks and social functions. Hence, Dumaine's gift recognizes Katherine as a lady of the court. In addition to this awareness of class, "Gloves, like hands, were given and taken as the embodied form of social acts—the bonding of friend to friend, of lover to lover" (Stallybrass and Jones 118). The gloves become representative of the wishes, desires, and actions of those that wear them. It is a form of intimacy to be as close as a glove to a woman's skin, as Romeo wishes to be the glove Juliet wears on her hand when

she touches her cheek in *Romeo and Juliet*. Women also often give a single glove to their love interest or favorite as a sign of their favor for him to wear, and Katherine could very well choose to give Dumaine one of her gloves if he proves himself worthy of her affections.

It is highly to the detriment of these gifts and their courtships that the king, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine choose to woo the princess and her ladies as a group activity to take the place of their previously declared pursuit of knowledge. Upon discovering that they all have taken a fancy to a different woman in the princess's company, Longaville brings the issue to the forefront of the conversation to make a decision for the group as a whole: "Now to plain dealing. Lay these glozes by. / Shall we resolve to woo these girls of France?" and the king replies: "And win them too!" (4.3.344-46). The king furnishes their rallying cry for the sport of courtship, not the serious business of solitary wooing. John Alvis plainly voices his opinion about the men pursuing the women with anything approaching genuine ardor: "Navarre, his paid sophist, Berowne, and the others conduct their love on the same queasy basis as they had proposed to conduct their studies" (248). The men's lack of commitment and focus on their sworn pursuit of scholarship does not bode well for their chances of accurately studying the minds and hearts of the ladies to learn their innermost desires.

It is significant that the King of Navarre and his men accompany their gifts of personal ornamentation with lengthy letters of exaggerated praise and inaccurate descriptions of the women's beauty, as their words make it clear that each man either doesn't know his beloved well, or he chooses to care more about the show of his

Petrarchan love-making than his actual beloved. These letters betray the suitability of the men's courtship gifts and spur the women to mock the imprecise descriptions and sentiments that accompany their tokens. Rosaline points out that Berowne's description of her in the letter does not match her well at all: "Much in the letters, nothing in the praise" (5.2.40), noting that the dark color of the ink more faithfully resembles the color of her hair or complexion than the terms that he uses for her. The praise Berowne gives in his letter foolishly addresses Rosaline as being a lady who matches the idealized fair hair, skin, and eyes of model Petrarchan verse. Rosaline tells the other women that, according to the letter he sent with her pearl, "I were the fairest goddess on the ground. / I am compared to twenty thousand fairs" (5.2.36-37). In Berowne's first sonnet to her that goes astray, Holofernes reads aloud that Berowne addresses it "To the / snow-white hand of the most beauteous Lady Rosaline" (4.2.130-31). Even the king, who is quite a proponent of Berowne's ability to rationalize the men's choices, tells Berowne plainly: "Thy love is black as ebony!" (4.3.243). The witty and self-aware Rosaline can hardly accept this sort of flattery as accurate or pleasing even if she originally hopes to find Berowne a match for her.

The other women do no better in suffering the men's attempts to admire invented features and characteristics. Katherine denounces the letter that Dumaine sent her with a pair of gloves as "Some thousand verses of a faithful lover. / A huge translation of hypocrisy, / Vilely compiled, profound simplicity" (5.2.50-52). Therefore his writing is: lengthy, being "some thousand verses"; unoriginal as "A huge translation"; poorly put together, "Vilely compiled"; and utterly simplistic in nature, offending her rather than

earning her esteem and affection. The King of Navarre and Longaville are accused of focusing more on the amount of writing and the length of their letters instead of what would best reach the hearts of their ladies. The princess reports that the king sends her "as much love in rhyme / As would be crammed up in a sheet of paper / Writ o'both sides the leaf, margin and all" to the point that he has to seal the letter over some of the text (5.2.6-8). Maria points out that Longaville sent her a letter that "is too long by half a mile" with his gift of pearls (5.2.54), and she openly admits that she would prefer a short letter. Cynthia Lewis therefore contends that "The men, whose hackneyed love poems…reveal that they are more in love with love than with individual women, cannot love the women because they do not know them" ("We Know What" 254). The men are more concerned with how well their honeyed words sound rather than connecting with their desired partners and engaging their minds, and the women choose not to settle for such superficial wooing.

The ladies evaluate the diamond and cameo brooch or pendant, gloves, and pearls in terms of aesthetics and monetary value as part of a cognizant response to the men's longwinded, bombastic letters that cancel out the sentimental value of the tokens that they give. The princess declares: "we shall be rich ere we depart / If fairings come this plentifully in" (5.2.1-2). She points out that she has no doubts that they will be leaving again after they settle the financial matter of Aquitaine, and the gifts the women receive are no more than "fairings", items or prizes that people would get at a fair, even if they are "rich" and "come this plentifully in" while they are in Navarre. Rosaline describes the gift she wears as less valuable than the princess's, claiming: "An if my face were but as

fair as yours, / My favour were as great" (5.3.32-33). Katherine gives no more description of her favor than "this glove" and its mate (5.2.48). Maria readily agrees that she would prefer the longer chain of pearls when the princess asks: "Dost thou not wish in heart / The chain [of pearls] were longer and the letter short?" (5.2.55-56). This would greatly increase the value, cost, and rarity of the strand of pearls because multiple factors have to be considered for each pearl to match the others on the strand well. Each pearl would need to closely match the rest of the pearls in size, shape, color or colors, luster, and the quality of the nacre or pearl material in order for the necklace to be considered a fine piece of jewelry.

Explorer Thomas Harriot related in his travel notes that a man in his company managed to gather about 5,000 pearls from mussels, and out of these, Harriot chose a matched set for a fair chain of round, orient, and pied pearls of many excellent colors. He meant to present this chain to Elizabeth I, but they were lost in an extreme storm he and his crew encountered on the return trip (511-12). As it takes a large number of pearls to choose from to be able to put together a well-matched strand of pearls, the effort and time to find them translate into the higher cost and rarity of the finished piece of jewelry. Therefore, the Princess of France and her ladies acknowledge the courtship presents they receive with evaluative comments, some with more fervor than others, but they see the gifts as spoils to take back home when they depart Navarre and note how they could be increased in aesthetic and monetary value as items separate from themselves and their affections.

The princess and her ladies are too intelligent to be taken in by meaningless praise, and they will not readily believe that men who write them such idealistic verses can truly mean for their gifts to be taken as serious accoutrements of courtship. Jami Ake confirms that "implicit in the conventions of coterie verse exchange was recognition that women, more than symbolic objects of exchange (as Vickers observes), also figured as powerful readers of men's Petrarchan verses" (378). The women prove to be "powerful readers" of what they have been sent, and they choose to resist the idea of becoming ladies "walled about with diamonds" (5.2.3). They are not taken in by the wealth of the tokens to the point that they will be claimed by men whose letters give solid evidence that they are more interested in the frivolity of idealized courtship behavior than they are in cultivating serious relationships. Burnett relates that "gifts are coveted for the histories they represent and the relationships they articulate" (289), and the women of *Love's Labour's Lost* are cognizant enough to accept the gifts as part of their courtly entertainment, not as representative of relationships that promise lasting attachment.

The ladies refuse the expected sentimentality of their assigned ornaments and turn these gifts against their wooers in light of the men's decision to court them as part of their entertainment. The princess and her ladies decide to assume disguises and switch favors when they learn of the men's plan to woo them in costume. The princess espouses her reason for deliberately tricking the men with their jewelry and ornament favors in the game of the masque:

There's no such sport as sport by sport o'erthrown

To make theirs ours and ours none but our own.

So shall we stay, mocking intended game,

And they, well mocked, depart away with shame. (5.2.153-56)

The princess and her ladies see the men's planned masque as "sport" and "game", an opportunity for the women to mock the men and overthrow their attempt at surprise with a plan of their own. She could be referring to the masque itself when she plans "To make theirs ours and ours none but our own," gaining control of the men's planned amusement for their own ends, but the princess also draws attention to her and the ladies' decision to claim the power of the men's favors and use them against their opponents to establish control over the game. Lewis defends the women's tactic: "With clear cause to read the lords' amorous gestures as casual pastime, these ladies are justified in large part for handling that courtship as a mere game" ("We Know What" 257). Larson revels in the acuity of the women's discernment: "In the final scene Berowne is flabbergasted that the women will not seriously consider their proposals. The Princess, however, correctly points out that the men wooed within the parameters of a game" (176). The women have little reason to believe that the men who plan to disguise themselves as foreigners and dance with them in a field can intend more than an evening's amusement for their visitors. Thus, these ladies are justified in wishing to triumph over the men in this game as they have in their other instances of oral contest.

The ladies also reveal the men's ignorance of true courtship when they utilize the gifts to evaluate the men's knowledge of the women they claim to love utterly and completely. Instead of considering the spirit and intelligence of the women who have met them in verbal battles, the men assume that the women will willingly mark themselves

with the tokens the men have given them, passively taking on the identities their suitors have envisioned for them and their lives. The women correctly anticipate the insufficiency of the men's attachment and personal knowledge of their lovers to differentiate one woman from another when all are disguised:

> The gallants shall be tasked;
> For, ladies, we will every one be masked,
> And not a man of them shall have the grace,
> Despite of suit, to see a lady's face.
> ……
> And change you favours too; so shall your loves
> Woo contrary, deceived by these removes. (5.2.126-35)

The king and his men blindly follow their chosen courtship tokens into their created game of the courtly masque, "[woo] but the sign of she" (5.2.469), and swear oaths of love to the wrong women without suspecting that anything could be amiss. They also do not know their presumed lovers well enough to catch any tricks of speech, carriage, perfumes, or even know the eyes that must be visible. The men each see their gift as a "sign" of the woman that they have chosen and the relationship they wish to acquire, but they do not think about the possibility that the woman might choose not to wear the gift, or think so lightly of it as to trade it with another person. Therefore, the women humiliate the men utterly when they reveal that their trick with the gifts have made the men swear love and allegiance to a completely different lady than intended. The princess displays their control of the gifts when she offers to return Rosalie's pearl she borrowed to

Berowne: “Will you have me or your pearl again” (5.2.458). Berowne does not desire the return of the valuable present that has been passed around and caused his and the others’ scorn. He and the other men lament their decision to use their courtship gifts as game pieces when the women embarrass them, but they fail to grasp the danger of mixing the serious business of their courtship and tokens with that of courtly amusement.

The women have to explain why they discount the possibility of entertaining the men’s courtship as serious, as the men remain ignorant of the deleterious effects their poorly chosen words and actions have on their gifts and the suits they represent. The princess replies to the men’s requests regarding the status of their courtship attempts by stating:

> We have received your letters full of love,
> Your favours, the ambassadors of love,
> And in our maiden counsel rated them
> At courtship, pleasant jest and courtesy,
> As bombast and as lining to the time. (5.2.771-75)

The men’s misuse of their tokens, their “ambassadors of love,” renders them ineffectual in creating the bonds of love and marital security the givers expect. Unlike Olivia’s attempts to give herself through her tokens and her ability to secure her new relationship in a future marriage in *Twelfth Night*, the men try to use their ornaments to play at love, entertain themselves, and approach the solemn joining of two people as a group activity for men to pursue together. Janet Adelman identifies the king and his men’s reliance on their fellows through the play: “At the start, the men band together to eternize themselves

independent of women, explicitly vowing to exclude women; and though they seem to move toward heterosexual union, they remain more bound to one another as members in a society of lovers than bound to the women as individuals" (74-75). The women refuse to build relationships on what they consider to be forms of courtly entertainment, "pleasant jest and courtesy" that they could expect from their hosts in another royal court. The princess makes it clear that she and her ladies see the show of the letters as nothing more than "bombast" and "lining to the time" that they spend in the king's country as they wait to hear about the matter of the debt between France and Navarre. It is no wonder that the women would require additional time and proof of sincere devotion before they are willing to join their fates and fortunes with their suitors.

In *Twelfth Night*, Olivia accepts her formalized betrothal to Sebastian and celebrates a new sisterhood with Viola as the result of her chosen courtship ornaments and determination. When the men fail to bring their courting words and activities up to equal the potential of their courtship favors of fine jewelry and gloves, the women of *Love's Labour's Lost* choose to enjoy the gifts for their beauty and value while they appropriate the power of the gifts. They do not allow the gifts to alter their self-perception, but instead use them to evaluate the men's unsatisfactory attempts at courtship and general conduct. These two plays show how women adeptly give and receive personal ornamentation gifts to gain agency in the pursuit or rejection of courtship and marriage relationships. Instead of having them passively accept the marriages presented to them, Shakespeare gives these women an excellent understanding

of how to use these objects so that they can avoid being acquired as gifts or objects themselves.

CHAPTER 2: INHERITED RING GIFTS AND HOW THEY ARE CONNECTED TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *All's Well That Ends Well,* characters use valuable, inherited rings to cement or to challenge romantic ties and to signal emotional value in relationships with their marriage partners.[18] In *Cymbeline*, the princess Imogen has a diamond ring of her late mother, the queen of Britain, while in *All's Well That Ends Well*, the new Count of Rossillion, Bertram, has received upon his father's recent death a time-honored ring passed from father to heir for generations. Each has or marries a spouse that is inferior to the inheritor in class and wealth, but has been raised in the care of that person's family to varying degrees. In each play, the wife utilizes the inherited ring as a way to solidify the married couple's relationship and its security. This demonstrates Lewis Hyde's idea that, "gift exchange is a companion to transformation, a sort of guardian or maker or catalyst. It is also the case that a gift may be the actual agent of change, the bearer of new life" (45). The women use inherited or family rings to effect positive moral change in their husbands and to draw them firmly into the social and political roles associated with their families. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen's diamond ring she inherited from her late mother functions as a symbol of her unchanging virtues and faithfulness to her new husband, and she intends for the ring to be a gift that supports their desired, legal marriage that others are trying to pull apart. Posthumus surrenders

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[18] All citations to these plays in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*. Edited by J. M. Nosworthy, Arden Shakespeare, 1998, and William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*. Edited by G. K. Hunter, Arden Shakespeare, 2007.

both ring and relationship in his exile, and he has to learn and grow as a person to become worthy of her and her gift. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram uses his ring that has been passed down the patriarchal line of the house of Rossillion to issue a challenge that Helena uses to prove herself worthy of the Rossillion family honor and bloodlines. She succeeds in protecting and adding to the honor and line of the Rossillion family that the ring represents despite her reluctant husband's actions that could bring disgrace to himself and his family.

In *Cymbeline*, Princess Imogen gives Posthumus the inherited diamond ring in order to signal their love, marriage, and his worthiness to be part of her family despite his lower class and lack of wealth or family as an orphan. Posthumus goes through five different phases of learning how to value himself, his marriage and partner, and the ring that represents his relationship to them during the play. These phases are: consolation; performance; disavowal and destruction; redemption; and vindication. By the final phase of Posthumus's development in the play, he learns to trust his own judgment and to value Imogen and their relationship above all else. The ring once again returns to him as a sign of this achievement.

The significance of the ring centers on its symbolic value of Imogen's unwavering faith in Posthumus, as well as the behavior and personal growth he goes through to become the man worthy of the love and regard she bestows with this emblem. While some critics have addressed the ring in terms of its connections to chastity and sexuality or to power in Imogen and Posthumus's relationship in *Cymbeline* as part of their work, they have not adequately considered Posthumus's possession of or distance from the ring

as a metric to gauge his character development. Katherine Gillen argues that Shakespeare uses the ring and bracelet to release "chastity-as-treasure tropes" in order to examine how "personal attributes, markets, and national identity" are interwoven (2).[19] Andrea Lawson briefly touches on the different types of symbolism that a diamond carries with it during the early modern period, but she focuses more on how Imogen attempts to define her relationship with Posthumus through giving him the ring and how Posthumus ultimately gains the authority that the ring carries.[20] Several critics including Murray Schwartz, Patricia Wareh, and Valerie Wayne discuss the implications of the bracelet or "manacle of love" (1.2.53) that Posthumus gives to Imogen in terms of imprisoning her with his love, as well as its connections to Imogen and her chastity or sexuality.[21] There is no need for me to address this item at length except as it affects the characters' interactions with the ring, as I focus on the gift of the inherited diamond ring as a symbol of Imogen and Posthumus's relationship and his interactions with it through the different stages of his development during the play. Posthumus does not understand the value of the bond that Imogen offers him in her love, faith, and the gift of her inherited diamond ring, and it is how Posthumus interacts with the ring that shows how he develops into a better, more

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[19] See Gillen's "Chaste Treasure: Protestant Chastity and the Creation of a National Economic Sphere in the *Rape of Lucrece* and *Cymbeline*." *Early English Studies*, vol. 4, 2011, pp. 1-38.
[20] See Lawson's "Reading Farewell Gifts in Early Modern Drama and Poetry." Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2008, pp. 115-55.
[21] See Schwartz's "Between Fantasy and Imagination: A Psychological Exploration of *Cymbeline*." *PsyArt: An Online Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*, 2005; Wareh's "Reading Women: Chastity and Fictionality in *Cymbeline*." *Renaissance Papers,* 2013, pp. 138-40; and Wayne's "The Woman's Parts in *Cymbeline*." *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, edited by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, Cambridge University Press, pp. 288-315.

self-possessed person through his five phases of consolation, performance, disavowal and destruction, redemption, and vindication.

In the first phase, consolation, Imogen gives Posthumus her gift to support his spirits and to ease the pain at his rejection and exile by Cymbeline, but Posthumus is all too aware of his recent injuries and loss. The British princess gives Posthumus the gift of her late mother's diamond ring as a material symbol of their love, recent marriage, and his being part of the royal family to give him a physical token of connection before his looming exile. In her book *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty*, Diana Scarisbrick relates that, in addition to its beauty and rarity:

> It was also on account of its hardness and supposed resistance to fire and the blows of hammer that the diamond ring was acknowledged as symbolic of the fidelity promised with the marriage vows. This concept was expressed in the pageantry devised for the wedding of Costanzo Sforza and Camilla d'Aragorna in Pesaro on 25 May 1475, which was recorded in an album of thirty-two miniatures. (302)

This symbolism continues to be carried by diamond rings through the Renaissance and even to the present. Imogen indicates that her love and their vows are unbreakable, despite the hardships and separation that are imposed on them. She calls him "love" and "heart" (1.2.42, 43) as she gives him the ring, as if to fasten her feelings for him to it and to strengthen their connection to it. Imogen holds fast to their vows and her love for him from this moment on, rejoicing in his survival and their marriage even after he later

attempts to have her murdered. Her commitment to him withstands hardships the way that the diamond was believed to resist fire and blows.

It is significant that Imogen highlights the ring's connection with her family and uses it to claim Posthumus as part of that family despite her father's recent rejection of him. She deliberately points out to her husband the ring's sentimental importance to her, that "This diamond was my mother's" (1.2.43), in order to foster a sense of inclusion for her newly married husband. Jansen agrees that: "By offering him an heirloom piece, Imogen stresses Posthumus's new place within her family, despite Cymbeline's protests" (152). The princess tells her father that instead of making the British throne "a seat for baseness" in her choice of husband as he declares, she "rather added / A lustre to it" (1.2.73-74) by choosing the man he raised and educated. In mentioning Posthumus as bringing "lustre" to the British throne, Imogen plays upon the shine and scintillation of a fine diamond like the one in the ring she gives Posthumus. She openly tells Posthumus that she withstands her father's anger "not comforted to live, / But that there is this jewel in the world / That I may see again" (1.2.21-23). Imogen refers to her new husband as "this jewel," as if she is giving him a diamond that represents his worth to her.

Instead of receiving the ring from Imogen as a material gift celebrating their marriage, family, and love as she intends, Posthumus chooses to draw attention to his inferiority, beginning with the comparison of the diamond ring to the humble bracelet he offers Imogen in return. He laments: "As I my poor self did exchange for you / To your so infinite loss; so in our trifles / I still win of you" (1.2.50-52). She gives him support and her unshakeable faith, but he only sees how much he falls short of her in class,

family, and wealth as his "poor self." Gillen remarks, "Posthumous understands the marriage as an exchange in which he must compensate for perceived inadequacies. To him, Innogen not only lost personal value by marrying him but also made an unprofitable trade when she exchanged her precious diamond for his less costly bracelet" (16). Posthumus is all too aware of Cymbeline's rejection of him and his marriage to Imogen due to his exile, but the rejection is doubly painful for him because he loses Cymbeline as the only father figure he has ever known. Posthumus is being turned out of doors by the very man who takes him in as an orphan baby, names him, "Breeds him, and makes him of his bed-chamber" (1.1.42), raising him and educating him in the royal court. Posthumus takes the ring gift as a connection to his love, but he must console himself with this in the face of losing all else he lives with up until this point. All he has now rests in her and her mother's ring.

Posthumus next enters his phase, performance, where he allows his actions to be dictated by his need to gain masculine, outside approval for his marital alliance with the peerless Imogen and the diamond ring as proof. Although Posthumus claims that he will "remain / The loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth" (1.2.26-27), this only extends to arguing with other men that Imogen is more exceptional than any of their wives or mistresses and threatening them with violence if they disagree. The exiled man does not engage in constructive activities and try to gain fame or fortune to convince his royal father-in-law of his worth; he relies on his marriage with Imogen and his notable ring to compete with his companions for social standing in France and then Italy. Homer Swander comments on his pattern of poor behavior: "We understand from such an

innovation that the argument with Iachimo that results in the wager is not an isolated incident. Posthumus is apparently the tourist of the joke book, loudly insisting that his wife is 'more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, and less attemptable' than any lady in whatever land he visits" (260). He naively draws attention to himself and his desperation for approval, and it is no surprise that Iachimo marks him as an easy target for profit and humiliation.

As part of his bid for his new companions' approval, Posthumus does not contest Iachimo's direct comparison of Imogen to her gift, the diamond ring, and his reduction of her from a wife to a prize that can be evaluated in economic terms. The Italian trickster equivocates:

> If she went before others I
> have seen, as that diamond of yours outlustres many
> I have beheld, I could not believe she excelled many:
> but I have not seen the most precious diamond that
> is, nor you the lady. (1.5.69-73)

Iachimo modifies the "lustre" that Imogen uses to describe the quality she believes Posthumus would bring to the British throne by her side. In changing it to "outlustres" in describing the light reflection of the diamond in the ring, he turns it into a word that begs comparison or competition with other diamonds, and, in this case, comparing Imogen with other women. Iachimo sets the stage for his chance at the wager, and early modern audiences would likely make the connection. David Golz remarks that "Shakespeare and his fellow playwrights were well aware that both coins and diamonds were objects

symbolic of the monetary and mercantile aspects of their society and that those objects provided the suit signs for the cards with which they played gambling games" (174). Posthumus does not see the danger in this step, and meets Iachimo in his game of objectifying Imogen to defend his lady and his possession: "I praised her as I rated her: so do I my stone" (1.5.74). In doing so, Posthumus unwittingly agrees to Iachimo's terms of engagement and valuation; that his wife can and should be "rated" and tested against the standards of other men. Posthumus still does not grasp that the ring as gift and his wife should not be referred to as objects of value or status, but reserved for their personal connection to him.

The same ring that Posthumus puts on his finger and instructs "Remain, remain thou here, / While sense can keep it on" (1.2.48-49) is what he agrees to wager against 10,000 ducats in his bet with an Italian that he has never met before that day. Although he is still conscious and alive, his likely intended meaning of "sense [that] can keep it on," Posthumus clearly abandons a second meaning of "sense" when he puts at risk the ring, lady, and relationship which he knows to be true. Constance Jordan condemns his choice: "The fact that his wager is for a considerable sum does not obscure the lack of faith and bad conscience that has motivated it. His wager has removed his wife from an inner world of feeling and faith and placed her in a market of items and objects" (39). Posthumus's desire to establish himself as the chosen favorite of a matchless princess only brings their relationship and the ring that illustrates their bond into peril.

As part of his performance as the most confident husband of his redoubtable princess, Posthumus, as Shakespeare pens him, heightens Iachimo's chances of assailing

Imogen's honor and winning her and her mother's ring. It is already poor judgment on Posthumus's part for him to succumb to the demands of his pride in proving Imogen's superiority to the men around him, but his weakness leads him to fail in his duty of protecting his new wife's safety and reputation. He chooses to put his wife through an unnecessary test for the sake of bragging rights when she is already suffering as a prisoner in her own family's household for her unstinting loyalty to him and to their marriage. Wareh states: "While Posthumus no doubt imagines that the social competition of the wager will augment his own reputation, he neglects to consider that he is putting Imogen's reputation at risk right from the start" (137). He is so far enveloped in his own need for male validation that he writes a letter to his wife to recommend the man invested in testing her virtue: "He is one of the noblest note, to whose kindnesses I am infinitely tied. Reflect upon him accordingly, as you value your trust" (1.7.22-24). Imogen already has the stress of daily resisting the attempts of her unintelligent and aggressive stepbrother to pursue her, and now her husband encourages her to think well of the man who would sunder their trust and humiliate them both. Swander relates that, "No other husband in the cycle of stories enters so far into the attempted seduction as to send a letter of 'commendation' along with the villain" (261). At most, the corresponding characters in Boccaccio's related tale in *The Decameron* and the anonymously written *Frederyke of Jennen* agree not to send word to give their wives any clues regarding the wager. This exiled husband increases the odds against his wife succeeding, and she still proves true. He already has a faithful wife and a treasured gift to confirm her regard for him before he falls prey to this charlatan. He needlessly puts them both at risk with his

attempts to gain the masculine approval he no longer receives from his royal father-in-law.

In his third phase of development, disavowal or destruction, Posthumus decides to believe his rival's slander of his wife and launches himself into the disavowal or destruction of his relationship and his ring, all for his perceived loss of status in front of the other men. When Iachimo relates his tale of how Imogen gave him the bracelet as a gift that she *formerly* valued and Posthumus realizes that she has not written that she is sending the bracelet to him, Posthumus almost immediately cedes the victory of the bet to Iachimo and offers up the ring: "O, no, no, no, 'tis true. Here, take this too" (2.4.106). Posthumus's weak attempts to hear more evidence at Philario's urging after the bracelet's appearance only delay his inevitable capitulation. Because of this, Valerie Wayne refers to Iachimo as "An exceptionally lucky villain,…he creates a fictional scene of a gift exchange between himself and Innogen while he is displaying the manacle that, for Posthumus, ruptures the bond created by the former exchange" (294). Posthumus, despite his lifetime spent with Imogen, trusts the appearance of his bracelet gift and Iachimo's story that she has been unfaithful and no longer cares for him. Cynthia Lewis also admits: "Posthumus falls prey to faulty vision by relying on outward 'fashioning'—what Iachimo tells him—rather than on the inner vision of the heart, whose reasons can be neither explained nor proved" ("Big Love" 272). In the shock of seeing the gift he so readily declares as inferior to the diamond ring in due proportion to how he is inferior to Imogen, Posthumus agrees to trust that Imogen's servants are unimpeachable and Iachimo is implacable; it must be that his revered wife has fallen. For the man who earlier directs his

ring, “Remain, remain thou here, / While sense can keep it on” (1.2.48-49), the moment has come: he has lost his sense and discards both ring and established love.

Shakespeare heightens Posthumus’s reaction so that he cannot rid himself of the ring, as his connection to Imogen, fast enough as soon as he loses faith. While the husbands in the accepted source plays disbelieve or find fault with the evidence Iachimo’s character provides up until the very mention of the private mole or body marking, Shakespeare’s Posthumus is much too easily persuaded. The difference makes Posthumus appear immature and overly dramatic in his reactions. He claims that the relationship and ring that represent all he has of value in the world are now lethal to look upon: “It is a basilisk unto mine eye, / Kills me to look on’t” (2.4.107-108). What he claims earlier as “my ring I / hold dear as my finger, ‘tis part of it” (1.5.129-30), he now feels is poisonous to him and his reputation among men. To remain exposed to the ring’s influence and beauty is to wound him as the mythical serpent could kill with its glance. What set him apart is now his shame, and as Iachimo has supposedly acquired Imogen’s favors, it is likely that Posthumus would give him the ring he associates with Imogen and her family even if it were not part of the terms of the bet just to be rid of it. His recognizes Iachimo as his conqueror rather than confirming the truth with his servant or his wife, thereby choosing his new allegiance. Lawson declares, “When Posthumus abandons the ring he confirms what began with the wage: a bond with Giacomo rather than with Innogen. It does not matter that it is an antagonistic relationship; Posthumus chooses to trust Giacomo rather than Innogen” (143). Posthumus loses his faith in the

ring as bond and Imogen as wife, so he separates himself from them both as best as he can.

It is significant that Posthumus chooses to elevate his disavowal of all women and Imogen in particular to destruction after his pride is wounded and he surrenders the ring, turning the violence with which he so recently threatened Imogen's detractors back onto her. He falls to ranting for over thirty lines against the women in his life, frothing at his imagined betrayal by those who birthed or loved him, with some key phrases being:

> yet my mother seem'd
> The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
> The nonpareil of this. O vengeance, vengeance!
> .....
> For there's no motion
> That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
> It is the woman's part. (2.4.158-174)

His faulty logic determines that if Imogen has betrayed him, his mother must have done the same to his father and all women must have and continue to do so to their husbands. Posthumus now claims that women must be the root of all evils. It is thus that he builds himself up to the ignoble frenzy in which he writes his servant Pisanio to murder his wife. He has cast aside the ring she gave him as gift, and now he wishes to write her out of existence. Posthumus can thus sever their bond and her existence entirely to punish her for his embarrassment. He all too soon realizes that his indiscriminate reliance on the words and approval of his male peers leaves him with nothing.

As part of his fourth phase, redemption, Posthumus learns how to establish his own inner value and to rely on his judgment in beginning his journey to redemption. This phase is especially significant because his decision to forgive Imogen and to loathe his actions in spite of her supposed infidelity is a major departure from both Boccaccio's similar work in *The Decameron* and *Frederyke of Jennen* as precursors to the tale. Neither of the other misled husbands forgives his wife's adultery, nor do they regret their actions until the accuser confesses his falsehood before a sovereign. Posthumus acknowledges his grave mistake in having Imogen murdered "For wrying but a little" (5.1.5), he wishes the gods had "struck / [him], wretch, more worth your vengeance" (5.1.10-11) instead of his wife, and he carries the bloody rag that is Pisanio's proof of death. He now greatly reduces the importance of what seems to be Imogen's only false step in her regard for him and judges himself for overreacting. Robert Miola details Posthumus's fresh perspective and reaffirmation of his love: "He grieves for her, speaks to her in death, desires to offer his own death for her, 'though he thought his accusation true.' The adultery is forgiven and forgotten, rendered irrelevant by the power of authentic marital love" (204). Posthumus's grasp of finding value in the love of a woman who may have been imperfect shows his growth and increased emotional perception, especially when compared to his earlier determination to judge his wife, marriage, and her gift repeatedly in terms of their economic and social status. Gillen agrees that in "altering his orientation toward human value, he abandons the perspective that allowed him to treat his wife and her ring as commodities and adopts Innogen's emphasis on intrinsic and unique human value" (24). By learning to forgive others for their faults

against him and claiming responsibility for his volatility, Posthumus makes progress in honing his character and moves closer to being reunited with both his wife and her ring gift.

In the latter part of his redemption, Posthumus earns notice for his martial skill and noble conduct on the battlefield. As I noted in chapter one, diamonds are associated with invincibility during the medieval and Renaissance time periods, and the best knights often wore them on their armor as talismans and as symbols of their prowess. Not only does Posthumus draw attention through his fighting in the battle between the Romans and Britons, but the first opponent he subdues is the man who still possesses his diamond ring and Imogen's bracelet. Posthumus goes back into battle seeking to fight only until he can gain his purpose of joining Imogen in the afterlife. He doesn't attempt to gain death by performing half-heartedly in battle, but shines in his martial ability when his earlier violent tendencies are properly channeled. Posthumus Leonatus now taps into his inherited military skill:

> Let me make men know
> More valour in me than my habits show.
> Gods, put the strength o' th' Leonati in me!
> To shame the guise o' th' world, I will begin,
> The fashion less without, and more within. (5.1.29-33)

The man who originally believes that he is inferior in ancestry prays to the gods for the abilities of his martial forbearers, perhaps the strength of heart as well of that of the body. However, in restraining himself from killing Iachimo, he shows evidence of his

determination to cultivate better inner fashioning. Cynthia Lewis comments that, "Posthumus's refusal at the opening of the scene to avenge himself on Jachimo would indicated that he has already discovered this truth. Surely Jachimo is moved to repentance thereafter because Posthumus has spared him" ("With Simular Proof" 359). Iachimo does take his defeat as a sign of retribution from the land of the princess he slanders, and the "shame" Posthumus gives him prepares him for the confession of his deeds. It is fitting that Posthumus's attempts to redeem himself set the stage for his reunion with a live Imogen and the return of Imogen's gift of faith and love.

It is significant that Posthumus achieves his final stage, vindication, after he develops his emotional maturity through forgiveness, accepts responsibility for his mistakes, and relies on his own judgment of what is valuable and important. He seeks no glory for his part in turning the tide against the Roman invaders and rescuing the British king with Imogen's brothers and a disguised Belarius. Only when he no longer cares for the honors of men and the opinion of those around him and decries himself as "most credulous fool, / Egregious murderer, thief, any thing / That's due to all the villains past, in being, / To come" (5.5.210-14) for his part in the wager and Imogen's death does he receive what he initially had and more. Posthumus does not discover Imogen's survival and continued love until his former companion produces the diamond ring and the bracelet as he confesses his foul trick upon Posthumus and Imogen to Cymbeline. It is only when Iachimo produces these tokens that Posthumus reveals himself and Pisanio identifies the page as Imogen. This cements the connection between the gifts of the diamond ring and the bracelet with the state of Posthumus and Imogen's relationship and

Posthumus's betterment. Iachimo refers to the man he defrauded as a "true knight" (5.5.186) and he offers up his life along with the bracelet and the ring that represents Posthumus and Imogen's bond:

> Take that life, beseech you,
> Which I so often owe: but your ring first,
> And here the bracelet of the truest princess
> That ever swore her faith. (5.5.415-18)

Iachimo now refers to the diamond ring, not as Posthumus's connection to Imogen's worth, but as his rightful property as a battle hero. He earns the opportunity to wear the diamond through his martial prowess and knightly behavior of fighting honorably for his country.

It is also only in Posthumus's vindication phase when he eschews revenge that he manages to earn Cymbeline's acknowledgement of him as a family member, and this is a measure of both Posthumus's and his father-in-law's growth. Iachimo's confession and offer to return the diamond ring and the bracelet brings the ring back into Posthumus's possession as he regains his relationship with Imogen. Posthumus chooses noble forgiveness in telling his defeated foe, "The power I have on you, is to spare you: / The malice towards you, to forgive you. Live / And deal with others better" (5.5.419-21). This is a changed Posthumus, notably different from the one who threatened to use his sword against Iachimo if he tried Imogen's chastity and failed. Posthumus's refusal to gain violent revenge leads Cymbeline to acknowledge Posthumus as his son-in-law and to follow his example in pardoning the bested Romans: "Nobly doom'd! / We'll learn our

freeness of a son-in-law: / Pardon's the word to all" (5.5.421-23). This is the same father-in-law who originally contends that Imogen's marriage to Posthumus would make his throne "A seat for baseness" (1.2.73). While Imogen is no longer the direct heir to the throne because of her two brothers' returns, her husband now has acceptance as part of the royal family. In both of the acknowledged sources, the king or soldan orders a painful and demeaning public death for the deceitful character in Iachimo's place. In giving Posthumus the power to make the decision and to choose mercy, Shakespeare draws attention to a changed man who is now worthy of his wife's unwavering love, the gift of her inherited royal diamond ring, and an acknowledged place in the British royal family. Posthumus's penance brings him back into contact with the ring; the delivery of the ring redeems his royal love, unblemished; and this revelation convinces the king to openly accept Posthumus as family. Posthumus's new appreciation of Imogen and her ring gift succeeds in bringing him into the family which he so desperately wanted to join.

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In the case of *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram inherits the family ring from his father, the Count of Rossillion, upon his recent death. This ring, unlike the diamond ring Imogen inherits from her mother in *Cymbeline*, is an established material symbol of the Rossillion family, passed down from father to son along with the family title for several generations. It is a sign of the continuation of the male line and the power that is collected in the practice of primogeniture. Nicholas Ray agrees that "Bertram's ring, is, moreover, an emphatically masculine token, having been bequeathed 'from son to son, some four or five descents, / Since the first father wore it'" (187). While Ray refers to

Bertram's hasty description of his family's ring, Bertram's mother, Countess of Rossillion, describes the ring's history with more exact detail: "Of six preceding ancestors, that gem / Conferr'd by testament to th' sequent issue, / Hath it been owed and worn" (5.3.195-97). It is likely that this ring is a signet ring, with an indentation of an R or a family coat of arms that would leave its imprint in a seal when used with wax on important documents.[22] Thus, the family ring would be worn by the male head of the household and used to give the family's seal of approval to purchases or important documents in place of or accompanying a signature or mark. This is the ring that Bertram wears as he defies his king and rejects nearly every aspect of his expected roles as the next Count of Rossillion, bringing the ring and all it stands for into danger.

The ring's significance as a signet has gone largely unnoticed, and instead critics often link the ring with Helena's virginity or chastity. David Golz equates the possession of the Rossillion family ring with loss of virginity, first serving as proof of Diana's lost virtue to Bertram before ultimately confirming instead Helena's desired consummation of their marriage.[23] Kaara L. Peterson sees the ring as a sign of virginity-turned-chastity in

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[22] Signet rings have an extensive history of use, dating back to Egyptian scarab rings with "the underside neatly engraved with pictorial devices and hieroglyphs giving the names and titles of the official or priestly owners…introduced in the middle of the XIIth Dynasty (c. 1800 BC)" (Scarisbrick 9). Signet rings, later also known as seal rings, were used with differing types of marks or images set in metal and later hardstones by the Greeks, Romans, Etruscans, Anglo-Saxons, and Franks. This use continued through the Middle Ages, where "the major innovation in the Middle Ages was the use of heraldry as a theme for signets" (Scarisbrick 28) and other rings carried symbols of occupations or favored activities as alternatives to initials (32). The signet rings of the Renaissance continued with a variety of the preceding themes and some additional embellishment, and people have continued to use variations of the signet ring through the remaining ages into the present day.

[23] See Golz's "Diamonds, Maidens, Widow Dido, and Cock-a-diddle-dow." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2009, p. 172.

marriage that Helena achieves in comparison to Elizabeth I's ring that she wore as a sign of virginity enforced by a marriage to her country.[24] Jean Howard makes an excellent case for Helena's resourcefulness and agency in healing the king, winning Bertram's consent of their marriage, and making her new husband take his required place in the family's patriarchal hierarchy.[25] I will add to Howard's perspective of Helena's influence on Bertram regarding family by focusing on how Helena protects the family ring and all it stands for, adding value to it by counteracting Bertram's selfish actions against the French king and court, preventing both his attempts to seduce Diana and the possible result of illegitimate children, ensuring Bertram's installation in the roles of husband and father, and producing a legitimate heir for the family so that the ring will continue to pass down the generations of the Rossillion family. It seems likely that in the process Helena manages to instill in Bertram a healthy regard for the immense value of all he has taken for granted by forcing him to face its near loss. Her use of the Rossillion family ring serves as an example of Hyde's idea of gift as "catalyst," as she is driven by his ring challenge to change her husband enough so that he will accept his marriage to her and his responsibilities in the Rossillion family and French royal court.

It is noteworthy that Shakespeare alters the significance of the ring from a piece of jewelry of personal value for the count to a symbol of Bertram's family honor and bloodline. In both works identified as likely sources for the play, Boccaccio's day three,

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[24] See Peterson's "The Ring's the Thing: Elizabeth I's Virgin Knot and *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Studies in Philology,* vol. 113, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101-31.
[25] See Howard's "Female Agency in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Journal of the Australasian University of Modern Language Association*, no. 106, 2006, pp. 47-48, 51.

ninth story of *The Decameron* and William Painter's "The Thirty-Eighth Novell" in his *Palace of Pleasure*, the ring is an important part of Bertrand's/Beltramo's challenge to Iuliet/Giletta because he attaches personal value to the ring: "He greatly loued that ring, and kepte it very carefully, and neuer toke it from his finger, for a certaine virtue that he knew it had" (Painter 392). Shakespeare makes a notable change by establishing the ring as an inherited symbol of the patriarchal line and power of the Rossillion family with its own part in a time-honored tradition. Instead of the ring serving as a mystical piece of jewelry with an unnamed virtue or property that a single count values, it signifies a family legacy and honor that can be increased or decreased according to the actions of the members of the house of Rossillion. This concept was familiar to those of European landed households and those that interacted with them during the time. Diana Scarisbrick states:

> That such veneration accorded these heirlooms was universal is also illustrated by the will in which a ring inherited from Stephen Bathory, King of Poland and Prince of Transylvania (1533-86), who had it engraved with his arms after his great victory over the Turks in 1577, is bequeathed by his namesake, Stephen Bathory, in 1603: the younger Stephen leaves it to his son Gabriel, the future Prince of Transylvania, confessing that he had never worn it because he felt he did not deserve to do so, although he hopes that Gabriel or his heirs will be worthy of it. (37)

This type of ring serves as such a symbol of honor and family pride that the current head of the household does not think that he deserves to wear it because his actions do not

merit being associated with the ring. He clearly plans for the ring to be passed down to the members of the Bathory family bloodline in perpetuity with the hope that his son and his son's heirs will wear the ring and "be worthy of it," adding to the ring's stored prestige for the family. Shakespeare's decision to recreate Bertram's ring as another such family ring makes it the ultimate repository for glorious or honorable deeds, or, in Bertram's case, a symbol that can be detracted from by dishonorable acts of the wearer as head of the household.

Bertram wears his ring steeped in Rossillion family tradition as he leaves his ancestral home to begin his time as a ward of the throne in the French royal court, but his actions there and abroad subtract from the storied ring's legacy. The count repeatedly makes choices that have the potential to injure the reputation of his house, family, and the ring as the symbol of Rossillion. Howard relates "That he cannot bend his will to suit the wishes of the King and his mother signals his unreadiness to carry on the inheritance of his father" (47). It is actually Helena, the wife Bertram attempts to discard as beneath him in class and wealth, who counteracts each of his destructive decisions in order to earn his acceptance and to protect the family's honor and its ring. Her forethought and utter loyalty to Bertram and his family prove that she is worthy of his recognition as his wife and a member of the Rossillion house: securing favor with the court of the land in which he inherits the title of count, including its monarch; safeguarding the keeping of the family ring itself within the family; bringing about the consummation of their marriage, thereby cementing his role as husband; protecting the Rossillion line from possible illegitimate children; and producing a legitimate heir to continue the Rossillion name.

Helena is present when the Countess of Rossillion clearly states her blessing and wishes for her son's character upon his departure for the royal court, and therefore she hears the example that Bertram should follow to be a proper successor to the family:

> Be thou bless'd, Bertram, and succeed thy father
> In manners as in shape! Thy blood and virtue
> Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness
> Share with thy birthright! Love all, trust a few,
> Do wrong to none. (1.1.57-61)

Bertram listens to his mother, but he does not internalize her advice, as he fails at all of these charges: in his "manners," he initially stands against his sovereign's recommendation for his bride and he then abandons his wife and country; in his "virtue" and "goodness," he woos another woman while married; and under the charge to "Do wrong to none," he proceeds to leave Diana after he thinks he has seduced her and proposes to engage himself to a third woman. He does not represent his house and family well in much other than his physical resemblance or "shape" of his father, thus he must be taught and protected by Helena.

Helena's actions show that she has faith in the honor, value, and reputation of the house of Rossillion, represented by the family signet ring, because she has been raised as part of the family and taken in when her father passes. Bertram admits to her association with his family in front of the court: "I know her well: / She had her breeding at my father's charge" (2.3.113-14). Even though Helena's father did not pass until recently, she has regular interactions with the family and has built a foundation of trust with the

Countess of Rossillion. Thus, she is more than amply prepared to guide the man she loves in the proper comportment of his duties. Howard agrees that, “It thus falls to Helena, the Countess’s pseudo-daughter, to teach Bertram the behavior appropriate to his family’s status and noble history, a status he demeans and a history he at first fails to honour” (48). Even though the man who inherits the family ring and status naturally does not properly serve them, the late Count and the Countess of Rossillion have reared another young person willing to secure them.

It is significant that Helena is willing to test the value of the greatest medical cure that she received from her father as her inheritance, as well as her life, to heal the king and secure Bertram as her husband. This is all that Helena has left to gamble for her love for Bertram, and she chooses to wager all. Lynne Simpson agrees in pointing out the value of Helena’s family gift: “Rare and precious as a ‘triple eye,’ the cure handed down from father to daughter is not unlike a royal diadem. As ‘th’ only darling,’ the inherited cure is imagined- like herself- as an only child” (174). This cure serves as Helena’s inherited jewel. She risks her life and reputation in curing the king to request the boon of being allowed to marry Bertram and to join the Rossillion family. This should properly communicate the measure of how much Helena adores Bertram and admires his family.

Helena establishes a rapport with the king and his court members, placing her and the Rossillion family she joins in good stead socially despite Bertram’s actions. Bertram’s rebellion against the king’s orders and wishes while wearing the family ring reflects poorly on him as a ward, courtier, and countryman, therefore it places the social status of the family and its ring at risk. The young count chafes under the king’s

insistence that he is too young to go into battle in another country, ultimately choosing to flout his sovereign's order by leaving, in part, to fight anyway. Simpson invites us to "Observe Bertram's difficulty with actually rendering dutiful service: he resents being grounded, unable to go outside and play war with the rest of the boys" (182). In addition to this, Bertram rejects the bride that the king chooses for him openly, folding only when the king threatens "both my revenge and hate / Loosing upon thee in the name of justice, / Without all terms of pity" (2.3.164-66). This is hardly the way to gain the trust and support of the king who is in charge of his land and the people that live there.

Helena, however, comports herself with respect and humility, soon winning over the king as a favorite and gaining the loyalty of Lord LaFew among the others of the court. It is no surprise that the king is grateful for Helena curing him of a disease that should have been fatal, but Shakespeare crafts the king as an admirer and steadfast ally of Helena. In the acknowledged sources for this tale, the king complies with her request for Bertram's hand only because the marriage is her promised reward for his cure, but he foists her upon Bertram regretfully due to the class difference. The king in *All's Well* is so attached to Helena that when all believe her dead, he mourns: "We lost a jewel of her, and our esteem / Was made much poorer by it; but your son, / As mad in folly, lack'd the sense to know / Her estimation home" (5.3.1-2). The king resents Bertram's low opinion of the royal former favorite and actually considers her death a personal loss that detracts from his royal court and "esteem." There is much more to the bond between Helena and the king represented by the ring he gives her than I have the space to address here, therefore I will do so comprehensively in my fourth chapter of royal favors and

relationships. Lord LaFew is a steady supporter of Helena after her first court appearance, and he speaks of her as one "Whose beauty did astonish the survey / Of richest eyes; whose words all ears took captive; / Whose dear perfection hearts that scorn'd to serve / Humbly call'd mistress" (5.3.16-19). With the king, LaFew, and the countess as named supporters among others in the court, Helena builds a secure social standing that will protect the court's favor behind the Rossillion family ring despite Bertram's hijinks. This group serves a support system for Bertram even after Helena is believed dead and he returns to wed another.

With this kind of social system in place, Helena also protects the economic purchasing power behind the family ring's seal. In abandoning his country and the people who rely on the Rossillion family for work, sustenance, and care, Bertram places the financial stability of his family in question. He also spends the king's "present gift" (2.3.285) of Helena's dowry for their wedding to travel alone to Italy and to furnish himself with what he needs to fight in the war. While Bertram's mother and his new wife can still work with a steward to oversee the family assets in his absence, it could be injurious for the credit and purchasing power of the family name and ring that the man who should become Count of Rossillion declares that "Till I have no wife I have nothing in France" (3.2.73). Helena's relationship with the king and court members would be likely to help the family secure forgiveness or financial support from the crown or other established lords like LaFew in case of financial emergency. Legitimate children from Bertram's marriage would also add stability to the Rossillion house and its line of inheritance, and Helena's later pregnancy promises fair for this as well.

In preventing Bertram's seduction of Diana, Helena protects the Rossillion family line and its symbol from the possibility of illegitimate children. In acquainting Diana with her situation as his abandoned wife and her plan to meet Bertram's challenge, Helena also provides the poor gentlewoman with the ability to enrich her dowry and to take an active role in her life instead of continually rebuffing her married admirer. Diana has another option than to be continually tempted by the man she admits "has done most honour- / able service" (3.5.3-4) in the war, admitting that he is handsome and "'tis a most gallant fellow" (3.5.78). There is no guarantee that she would not eventually succumb to his persistent attentions, for it is clear that she admires him before Helena tells more of his abandoned wife. Helena, in heading this off, prevents Bertram from the dishonor of adultery as well as the responsibility for the illegitimate children that might result from his desired liaison with Diana. Not only would the Rossillion estate be taxed with the expenses of raising any of the children, as Diana would likely pursue him and place a complaint before the King of France as she does on Helena's behalf, the children would likely not be considered for inheritance and continuing the family line. Friedman notes, "Despite his duty to his house, Bertram gives away the symbol of his honor to a woman who cannot produce for him a legitimate heir, thereby endangering his link in the generational chain in both directions at once" (85). Helena, however, turns the threat of a break in the established bloodline of the Rossillion family into an opportunity to secure her husband and to contribute to the stability of Bertram, his family, and its ring as "the symbol of his honor."

Due to her knowledge of Bertram's character, Helena can accurately foresee that Bertram will not be able to resist the chance to purchase his physical desire of having sex with Diana with anything he has, no matter how precious. She uses her knowledge of his weakness to obtain and protect the family ring and honor that he would trade away. While some critics argue that Bertram cannot consent to having sex with his wife due to the bedtrick, he has set her the challenge to become pregnant with his child and obtain his ring in order for him to recognize her as his wife. He also, legally, is attempting seduction against Diana and adultery against his wife. Emily Ross justifies Helena's method of meeting Bertram's challenges: "But even though Helena pays Diana to set up a liaison that will enable her to trap Bertram by fulfilling his conditions without his consent, Bertram's lust provides the opportunity and justification" (207). As Bertram is willing to sacrifice not only his own honor, but that of his family for his physical pleasure, he shows poor judgment when tempted. He makes this clear when he surrenders all to Diana: "Here, take my ring; / My house, mine honour, yea, my life be thine, / And I'll be bid by thee" (4.2.52-54). The family ring and all of the rest of these things, including himself, should no longer be available for him to give to another, as he already has a wife. Helena is wise enough to seize upon the opening her husband's fascination provides, and her quick thinking and alliance with Diana ensure that the possession of these things, including the ring as symbol of them all, will come to her. Ann Jennalie Cook comments, "Ironically, the ring will in fact go to one rightly responsible for safeguarding his house, his honor, his very life, to one with a right to bid him obey—to his wife, Helen" (230). By having Diana require the family ring as the price of her virginity, Helena confirms

how much Bertram puts his own desires before his responsibilities as wearer of the Rossillion family ring. In acquiring the ring, she safeguards the family symbol from being separated from the family and meets half of Bertram's challenge in guaranteeing his recognition of her as worthy of being the wife of the Count of Rossillion.

Helena's resourcefulness and ability to create alliances in pursuit of the Rossillion family ring succeed in bringing about the consummation of Helena and Bertram's marriage and thereby confirm Bertram in the role of husband with her as his wife. Bertram makes it clear for much of the play that he does not take the institution of marriage seriously, and he follows Parolles's adage that "A young man married is a man that's marr'd" (2.3.294). He abandons Helena even though "before the solemn priest I have sworn" (2.3.265) and he abandons Diana after telling her that he and everything he has belongs to her in exchange for enjoying her favors. Yet he still requests the opportunity to marry Lord LaFew's noble daughter Maudlin after he returns to the French court from war in Italy, offering as a love token to his intended third wife the very ring his recent bed partner gives him to secure their promised marriage. Even the king notes: "I wonder, sir, since wives are monsters to you, / And that you fly them as you swear them lordship, / Yet you desire to marry" (5.3.154-56). Helena's patience, courage, and intelligence in placing the Rossillion family signet ring in her possession and the King of France's gift ring in Bertram's ultimately earn her the chance to "lose it [her virginity] to her liking" (1.1.147) with Bertram as well as the opportunity to conceive and mingle her bloodline with that of the Rossillion family. Peterson observes: "Though Bertram has 'sworn to make' her ''not [/knot] eternal" (3.2.21), through her perseverance Helena will

gain control of Bertram's ring(s) and thus maintain control of her knot's or ring's loss" (113). Helena's plan renders the scene in which Bertram eagerly realizes her return from death and accepts both her as wife and his family ring from her hand in front of the French court. McCandless reasons that, "Indeed, their brief exchange of lines amounts to a renewal of vows in a second, extemporized marriage ceremony, complete with presentation of ring" (172). Helena and Bertram as good as reaffirm their marriage bond before several witnesses, and Helena makes sure that Bertram will acknowledge his role as a married man; a man married to her.

In order to ensure the continuation of the Rossillion bloodline and the family ring's passage through inheritance, Helena secures Bertram in the role of father via the bedtrick. With a potential heir noticeably present in her belly and proof of Bertram's contribution through her control of the family ring and the king's ring, Helena ensures her place in the Rossillion family. She meets the challenge that he so callously flings before her in his letter: "When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which / never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy / body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a 'then' I write a 'never'" (3.2.56-59). What is meant to dishearten her and to reject her as unworthy to be the wife of the Count of Rossillion for her low birth and lack of wealth instead serves as a spur to her creative mind and her brave heart. Not only does she conquer the seemingly impossible challenge, she protects the honor of the family from his actions and adds to the security of the Rossillion house. Shakespeare departs from acknowledged source texts by having Helena grow pregnant after a single assignation with Bertram. Both Iuliet and Giletta have several sexual encounters, and

only after each confirms that she is pregnant does she leave her husband's company. Helena's health and fertility are highlighted in her speedy pregnancy, especially considering Bertram's immediate departure after his intended seduction. Howard celebrates Helena's creative and procreative abilities in meeting Bertram's challenge: "She translates his words into deeds, gives life and bones to his title as Count de Roussillon, and ensures that he himself will be a father" (56). Despite Bertram's destructive and self-centered behavior, Helena manages to turn his illicit lust into his legitimate offspring that will carry the hopes and ring of the Rossillions.

Helena brings Bertram to learn the consequences of his abandonment of his duties to his family and country. The wife and family ring he dispenses with soon bring him to value what he nearly loses in family, respect, wealth, and life. By engineering the circumstances in which Bertram returns to the French court, Helena guarantees that the king, the countess, and LaFew will recognize the ring that the king gave Helena, which Bertram wears, and remember her limited conditions in which she would part with it:

> She call'd the saints to surety
> That she would never put it from her finger
> Unless she gave it to yourself in bed,
> Where you have never come, or sent it us
> Upon her great disaster. (5.3.108-112)

Because Helena carefully crafts the significance of the ring's return, Bertram is held until Diana can make her claim of her ruined honor and promised marriage with the Rossillion family ring in hand. As a result, Bertram and Helena's support system suspect him as

guilty of murdering his first wife and seducing an honorable Italian gentlewoman by promising that she will become his second. Helena has Bertram clearly in danger of losing his family title, being disowned by his mother, left penniless, and possibly executed as a murderer. McCandless makes a similar evaluation of Bertram's situation: "Having achieved, through his military exploits, an enviable worldly standing, confirmed by the king's forgiveness of his misdeeds and the honorable marriage that he is poised to make, Bertram instantly loses it and comes face to face with utter ruination—with censure, disgrace, and possibly even death" (174). Helena only sees to it that her errant husband abruptly realizes what he has put at risk in abandoning country, wife, and the symbol of his and his family's honor.

Helena's miraculous return and her effectiveness as Bertram's saving grace is only highlighted by how Bertram proceeds to sink himself lower in the estimation of king, mother, and court in his pathetic attempts to extricate himself. Shakespeare emphasizes Bertram's need for Helena to restore him to the family as a true representative of the house of Rossillion and bearer of its ring. He writes Bertram as the opposite of the self-sufficient count of the source plays who is left by his love in Italy and receives his wife with accolades when she returns to his home with his ring and children in tow. Instead, Bertram is the young lordling who is too proud to accept what his mother and king recommend early on for his benefit; upon the reveal of his behavior abroad, he retreats to a maze of lies to disown his actions, claiming first that he received the king's ring thrown "from a casement" (5.3.93) by a noblewoman whom he honorably dissuaded from pursuing a relationship, and second to have given his esteemed family ring to a

"common gamester to the camp" (5.3.187) in order to enjoy her favors instead of entering into an agreement to marry her. Elizabeth Sewell astutely observes: "The Bertram who is laid bare in the final scene seems almost to have reverted to childhood, a small boy twisting and turning, trying to lie his way out of serious trouble" (299). It is only in this state of desperation that Bertram can truly appreciate the wife that he conveniently describes to the king upon his near marriage to Maudlin as, "she whom all men prais'd, and whom myself / Since I have lost, have lov'd" (5.3.53-54). Helena orchestrates an admirable moment in which her entrance produces at once utter shock and gratitude in her husband. She appears and claims "'Tis but the shadow of a wife you see; / The name and not the thing" (5.3.301-302), but Bertram immediately acknowledges her as "Both, both. O pardon!" (5.3.302). She primes him so well that the man who could not stand being married to such a base maiden declares he will "love her dearly, ever, ever dearly" (5.3.310) if she can clarify how she has brought all about to carry his family ring and his child.

Helena succeeds in laying a path for the continuation of the Rossillion family by excellent planning and her adept handling of the Rossillion family ring and the ring her king gives her. She thoroughly earns the title of "jeweller" that Diana bestows upon her in the Italian maid's performance before king and court: "The jeweller that owes the ring is sent for / And he shall surety me" (5.3.290-91). The poor daughter of a famed physician restores both son and family ring to the Rossillions with the addition of his marital accord and an heir to come. She returns the king's ring with a reformed courtier and count to merit his attention and service. While Helena, as accepted wife and soon-to-

be mother, will no longer grace the French court, she has proven her worth to Bertram and gained inclusion in his family and world through her loyalty and perspicacity. Julia Reinhard Lupton remarks, "If Helena's pregnancy signals the end of her public life, it is also the trophy of her active virtue, delivering the promised end of her situational intelligence, her medical savvy, and her tactical virginity" ("*All's Well*" 128). This young woman's love, loyalty, and brilliance ensure that all does, in fact, end well for her family and the bearers of the Rossillion family signet ring.

In Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, inherited rings serve as significant plot pieces; however, they truly merit attention as indicators of how married characters interact with these rings to show their growth as characters or to prove their worth in their relationships. Shakespeare takes a ring with a diamond point mentioned in passing as an item taken from the bedchamber of Ambrose of Jennen's wife in *Frederyke of Jennen* and turns it into a valuable diamond ring once belonging to Imogen's mother, which she gives to Posthumus at the beginning of the play. He then uses Posthumus's interactions with his wife's gift to show how he falls short in faith before he learns to value love and family over outside opinion and reputation. Centering his moral compass allows Posthumus to be reunited with the ring, Imogen, and his father-in-law's recognition. Shakespeare also writes a notable change in altering Bertram's ring from one that carries personal meaning for the count's character in Boccaccio's day three, ninth story of *The Decameron* and Painter's "The Thirty-Eighth Novell." He transforms it into a ring of significance as a family signet ring that serves as a symbol of the Rossillion family's honor, viability, and continuation. It is noteworthy that through careful planning

Helena is the one who protects the ring from Bertram's selfish attempts to serve his own desires, uses it to help her meet his challenge for recognition as his wife, educates her husband in the importance of fulfilling his roles that support both the family and its symbol, and adds to family and ring's security in social, economic, and familial aspects.

The women in these plays act as agents through their gifts of the inherited rings. These family or inherited rings serve as Lewis Hyde's "catalysts" for change in the new husbands. The women place importance on having the men they marry accept their places in their families, and in Posthumus's place, also having the royal father-in-law, Cymbeline, accept him. The women do not change; they are as beautiful, faithful, and intelligent at the end as they are at the beginning of each play. Their giving or receiving of the rings only prove definitively that they possess and retain these properties. The different characters' interactions with the rings test the men and reveal their basest natures to others, but also to themselves. The men, at least, beg pardon for their actions and readily take their places in their families as husbands and sons; at best, they stand in awe of their loving wives' capabilities and develop into forgiving and valiant men. The presence and importance of inherited rings within Shakespeare's plays provide us with yet another lens with which to examine relationships, family, and personal growth in early modern literature.

CHAPTER 3: MASTER GIVERS OF ORNAMENTATION AND THEIR LINKS TO COMMUNITY

In this chapter, I will develop the idea of how characters in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Timon of Athens* use jewelry gifts of personal ornamentation to build identities for themselves as "master givers," those who construct their social status and make connections based off of their ability to give more than others can ever repay.[26] In *Merchant of Venice*, Portia demonstrates how she mindfully gives a ring to establish secure relationships with her new husband and his best friend, gaining a support system of people who will always remain in her debt. In *Timon of Athens*, the title character's gift-giving is immoderate and impersonal, destroying relationships, bankrupting his credit and estate, and sinking his reputation as a master giver. Shakespeare crafts Portia as a successful master giver in *The Merchant of Venice*, a leader who uses one or more gifts to fashion and maintain individual relationships as part of creating a community of social interaction and loyalty. These contrasting examples show different approaches to Mauss's concept of "potlatch" (6), with Portia following a version "more moderate… where those entering into contracts seek to outdo one another in their gifts" (7) as she establishes her marriage and community in Belmont with her ring gift. Timon, on the other hand, uses his gifts of diamond rings and feasts as potlatch with the intent to win "a struggle between nobles to establish a hierarchy among themselves" (Mauss 6) which

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[26] All citation to these plays in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. Edited by John Drakakis, Arden Shakespeare, 2011, and William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*. Edited by Anthony B. Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, Arden Shakespeare, 2008.

would place him at the top of Athens's social ladder. Portia's success in giving personal ornamentation for the purpose of fostering individual bonds, including others in giving, and setting healthy expectations for a respectful community approach to gift bonds rises above Timon's flawed and, ultimately, unsuccessful goal of being the best and only giver of Athens.

When they are not focusing the lion's share of attention on the casket test and Portia's exploits as Balthazar in the Venetian court, several critics have made observations about giving and relationships within *The Merchant of Venice*. Ronald A. Sharp names Portia the "grand unifier" of Venice (256) and Lynda E. Boose identifies her as "the veritable exemplum of generosity" (250).[27] Critics in the field also give Portia attention as a gift-giver as part of what many refer to as the ring trick with Bassanio and Gratiano. However, they do not closely examine the centrality of Portia's mastery in giving and receiving her ring and Nerissa's mirror ring gift. I will contribute to critical attention on Portia's accomplishments by examining Portia's giving and receiving of a ring to regain and give herself, to secure a solid foundation with her new husband, to include others in gift-giving to form a community, and to institute respect and value for keeping commitments and honoring one's word within that community.

Portia utilizes her ring gift to Bassanio as an opportunity to re-appropriate control over herself. She understands her position as prize for the man who successfully solves

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[27] See Sharp's "Gift Exchange and the Economies of Spirit in *The Merchant of Venice*." *Modern Philology,* vol. 83, no. 3, 1986, and Boose's "The Comic Contract and Portia's Golden Ring." *Shakespeare Studies,* vol. 20, 1988.

her dead father's casket challenge, and she laments her lack of choice in a matter that will prove central to the remainder of her life:

> O me, the word
> 'choose'! I may neither choose who I would, nor refuse
> who I dislike, so is the will of a living daughter curbed
> by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that
> I cannot choose one, nor refuse none? (1.2.21-25)

It is clearly frustrating for Portia, as an intelligent woman, to have her father's will mandate how the rights to herself, her life, and her worldly goods will be given to another man without the right to "choose" or "refuse" should his test go astray. Jyotsna G. Singh states: "Most notably, Portia herself is the gift being offered by her dead father within the terms of a patriarchal sex/gender system" (149). Instead of passively submitting herself to her new husband as gift, however, Portia realizes that she can technically comply with the terms of her father's will while claiming ownership of her future. She gives herself along with her worldly goods publicly attached to the gift of a ring:

> Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
> Is now converted. But now, I was the lord
> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
> This house, these servants, and this same myself,
> Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring. (3.2.166-71)

She also adds her conditions that if he does not keep the ring, its absence indicates that he no longer loves her and it gives her the right to declare against him. Anne Parten notes the connection: “The ring itself is seen almost as the embodiment of the right to control Portia’s actions: to forfeit the one is to forfeit the other, and as the gift of jewelry is transferred, so is the gift of self” (151). Portia of Belmont is now the giver of herself, and she sets a precedent to justify her ability to reclaim herself if her husband does not respect her gift.

It is significant that Portia not only uses her manner of giving the ring to take back the right to bestow her own hand in marriage, but she also uses it to indicate openly the financial and social power that she is accustomed to wielding when she presents it to Bassanio. She wisely chooses to bestow her goods and herself formally, in a recognized legal guise, to Bassanio before it would automatically be transferred when they take their marriage vows. Gary Watt argues that: “Indeed, it is from a legal perspective that Portia’s giving of the ring achieves its real power and its supremacy over her father’s capricious casket test. When Shakespeare was writing, the public giving of a ring was a well-known method of transferring title to freehold land” (241). Portia enacts what was referred to as livery of seisin by publicly giving land or goods with a ring. She elucidates the level of power that she is accustomed to wielding up until this point in her possessive statement that she is giving Bassanio, “Myself and what is mine,” (3.2.166) as former “lord,” “master,” and “Queen” (3.2.167-69) of all at Belmont. She declares that she is giving him a “fair mansion” and “servants” (3.2.168-69) along with herself, and Portia tells her new husband that she was “master” (3.2.168) of all that he now considers his. Therefore, she

is giving him everything of which she was previously in control, yet she uses the ring as a way to set conditions for their marriage and bond. Her conditions prompt Bassanio to swear that he will not part from the ring while he is alive, ensuring his participation in the bond of the ring and the value of their new status together.

The lady of Belmont not only uses her ring gift to establish her identity in giving herself in marriage, but she sets terms with her ring gift to stipulate Bassanio's responsibilities in order to keep her love and fidelity, or else she can reclaim them. Portia proclaims:

> I give them with this ring
> Which, when you part from, lose or give away,
> Let it presage the ruin of your love,
> And be my vantage to exclaim on you. (3.2.171-74)

She gives precise instructions regarding Bassanio's keeping of the ring, and forewarns him of how she will react to its loss. Portia highlights that she accords her new husband-to-be's protection and care for her ring gift as evidence of how he values their love, as its loss in any way indicates "the ruin of your [his] love" for her. Catherine T. Wildermuth notes, "The ring is a symbol of the love which underlies Bassanio's newfound wealth and represents the bond of mutual obligation that Portia demands be forged between them. Portia's father has given her a husband, but Portia herself retains the power to give her husband a loving wife" (8). This wise woman demands what she believes will aid in maintaining their relationship and affection, and she prepares him for what happens when love and faith are neglected.

It is significant that Portia chooses the word "when" instead of "if" when she describes the consequences of Bassanio's separation from her gift (3.2.172). She clearly anticipates that Bassanio will fail in the keeping of her gift, the symbol of their commitment and love. While Portia is pleased that the husband she would have chosen succeeds in passing the casket test, she does not surrender herself wholly to him without requiring him to give of himself as well. She retains the power to call him to account through her gift, which gives her "vantage to exclaim" against a husband who is careless of the ring that represents her value and their bond. Gary Watt observes, "It is fitting, then, that the outward giving of herself by the ring turns out to be in substance a taking of Bassanio by the ring. The dynamic is one of taking by giving" (244). Portia does indeed succeed in using her ring to give her love and fidelity while requiring that Bassanio demonstrate the same for her in his keeping of her gift.

Portia also frees Bassanio from his debt to Antonio to relinquish responsibility for either the borrowed money for their courtship or Antonio's death for failure to pay the required bond. She offers up large sums of money to pay the bond, utilizes her wit and verve in a court defense that saves Antonio's life, and uses her ring gift to Bassanio to prove the debts have been paid. This is even after she becomes aware of how Antonio tries to claim supremacy as Bassanio's love and debtor. Portia hears one of Antonio's most competitive and dramatic statements when he believes he will die to Shylock's knife:

> Commend me to your honourable wife;
>
> Tell her the process of Antonio's end,

Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death,

And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge

Whether Bassanio had not once a love.

Repent but you that you shall lose your friend

And he repents not that he pays your debt. (4.1.269-75)

Portia is all too aware that if Antonio dies due to debt he accumulated on Bassanio's behalf, her new husband will never be emotionally or morally free of the guilt associated with it. She also has no desire to be held openly responsible for separating Bassanio from "a love" who martyrs himself as "he pays [Bassanio's] debt." Therefore, Portia ensures that Antonio's life is saved by her performance in court and this service is associated with the ring she gave Bassanio and requests as payment in the guise of Balthazar. Thomas C. Bilello declares that, "Portia succeeds brilliantly: she obtains Antonio's release from the bond, thereby relieving Bassanio from his moral debt" (12). While many would consider it a success that Antonio lives and his debt to Shylock is voided, Bassanio does not believe himself relieved of his debt to Antonio for risking his life; he seems only to have added a debt to the doctor who made it unnecessary.

Portia must take further steps to release Bassanio from the debt he believes that he owes the doctor. She casually gives Antonio the ring for Bassanio:

Portia: Give him this,

And bid him keep it better than the other.

Antonio: Here, Lord Bassanio, swear to keep this ring.

Bassanio: By heaven, it is the same ring I gave the doctor!

Portia: I had it of him. (5.1.254-58)

Portia's possession of the original ring brings Bassanio to question how she could have obtained it since he recognizes it as the one he gave to the doctor. She has physical proof of how she has cleared Bassanio's debt to Antonio once she presents Bellario's letter, which relates Portia and Nerissa's roles in court as doctor and clerk. Thus, Portia's return of the ring through Antonio proves to Bassanio that instead of being in debt to Antonio and the doctor, Antonio owes his life to Portia's legal maneuvering. Henceforth, Bassanio's gratitude can be reserved for his wife. Boose agrees that, "The ring game of the final scene, where Antonio steps forward and finally yields his claim on Bassanio, is where Portia acquires control over any remaining male debts owed to the play's initial chief banker" (249). Portia's cancellation of Bassanio's debts leaves them free to enjoy the consummation of their marriage and their relationship without owing anyone else for their happiness.

Portia also successfully builds lasting relationships with other members of her intended community by using gift-giving to cement bonds between them. She allows Nerissa to copy her gift of the engagement ring; we learn that Nerissa presents a ring to Gratiano and extracts an oath of commitment for its possession. Nerissa later relates this to her lady, referring to: "my husband's ring / Which I did make him swear to keep forever" (4.2.13-14), a variation of what Portia does with Bassanio. Portia does not scold Nerissa for copying her giving style and purpose, and she does not discourage her waiting-woman from seeking to obtain Gratiano's ring. She welcomes an ally and apprentice in remedying the situation of Bassanio giving away her ring, and she gives

Nerissa permission to pursue her ring: “Thou mayest, I warrant. We shall have old swearing / That they did give the rings away to men, / but we’ll outface them and outswear them too” (4.2.15-17). Portia agrees to the mission of ring recovery and deliberately uses “we” to include Nerissa in a united purpose to “outface” and “outswear” the husbands who would part with their gifts. Her inclusion of Nerissa extends into planning and introducing the issue with rings by arguing with Gratiano in the final scene. Portia does not question Nerissa’s ability to carry out her roles of clerk in Venice and angry, chastising bride in Belmont upon her ring’s loss, but relies on her support and intelligence to carry out her plans.

Portia is also generous in crediting Nerissa for gifts to others, transferring recognition to her as one who bestows good gifts upon those tied to Belmont. She tells Lorenzo: “My clerk hath some good comforts too for you” (5.1.289), referring him to Nerissa as carrier of these “comforts.” Thus, Nerissa is the one who has the pleasure of delivering to Lorenzo and Jessica the deed of gift for the right to Shylock’s goods and money after he dies. She takes possession of giving when she says: “I’ll give them him without a fee. / There do I give to you and Jessica/…a special deed of gift” (5.1.290-92). Nerissa claims the act of giving to others by her language of “I’ll give” and “I give” in the process, and Portia does not contradict this ownership. As a result of Nerissa’s involvement, Lorenzo recognizes both Portia and Nerissa as givers when he replies: “Fair ladies, you drop manna in the way / of starved people” (5.1.294-95). As a true master giver, Portia takes on Nerissa as an apprentice giver and recognizes her efforts in giving

and enforcing the value of gifts. In doing so, Portia ensures Nerissa's loyalty and practice in being a giver and a valued participant of the court at Belmont.

Portia also recognizes and includes Antonio as a giver by accepting his offer to be bound for Bassanio's future behavior and faithfulness to her. She uses the gift of a ring to bring Antonio into their relationship as a welcome part of family and court at Belmont instead of an opposite or disruptor trying to claim supremacy in Bassanio's love. Portia accepts Antonio's offer of his soul as guarantee for Bassanio's faithfulness: "Then you shall be his surety. Give him this, / And bid him keep it better than the other" (5.1.254-55). She recognizes Antonio as having a legitimate claim to offer himself again as "surety" for his friend, and she acknowledges their remaining bond by passing him the ring to have his friend swear again his faithfulness to his new wife. Joan Ozark Holmer points out that, "Not only does Portia forgive both Bassanio and Antonio, but also she emphatically and harmoniously *includes* Antonio, 'the semblance of [her] soul' (III.iv.20), in her relationship with Bassanio by handing Antonio the ring to give Bassanio" (331). Portia could easily refuse Antonio's right to act as go-between due to her knowledge of his previous attempts to lay claim to Bassanio's affections, but she chooses instead to involve him in their relationship and to accept his gift of self and re-gifting of her ring.

Other critics recognize Portia's method of recruiting Antonio as well. Dunlop summarily states, "So, with the utmost brevity, she in effect remarries Bassanio, and this time not only in Antonio's presence, but with his full participation. Portia includes Antonio in the ceremony that he had feared was a guarantee of his exclusion by having

him solemnize it" (20). Indeed, Portia's acceptance of Antonio as continued gift-giver to Bassanio draws him into the Belmont court's inner circle and conveys her intention not to part Bassanio from his friend. Instead of isolating Bassanio from a man loyal enough to die for his sake, she gives him a new place in their lives. William W. Demastes acknowledges that: "Portia goes beyond the wildest expectations of a partner in marriage and expands the circle […] bringing Antonio into the circle/ring" (151). By allowing and encouraging Antonio to remain an integral part of Bassanio's existence by giving himself, Portia turns a competitor for her husband's affection into an advocate to support their marriage.

It is significant that Portia draws attention to how she obtained the ring by giving Antonio the same ring to give Bassanio for a renewal of his commitment. In this way, she leads the men and the others present to understand her gift of Antonio's life and freedom due to her actions as Balthazar. Although it is not described in any detail, the ring has one or more characteristics that make it easy for Bassanio to recognize the ring immediately as Portia's original gift that he subsequently gave to the doctor. Readers can only guess whether it has any distinctive metalwork, a noticeable gemstone, or an inscription or posy like the ring Nerissa gives to Gratiano. Regardless of our ignorance in what sets this ring apart from others, Portia knows that Bassanio will question how she came to be in possession of her original ring to give it again. After Portia and Nerissa put a bit of fear into their new husbands by claiming to have rewarded sexual favors to the doctor and clerk bearing the rings that should only belong to their husbands, they sufficiently gain

their attention. Portia sets the stage with the men's despair before she produces proof of her and Nerissa's sexual loyalty as well as her particular prowess in court:

> Here is a letter, read it at your leisure;
>
> It comes from Padua, from Bellario.
>
> There you shall find that Portia was the doctor,
>
> Nerissa there, her clerk. (5.1.267-70)

In revealing her role as doctor and Nerissa's as clerk, Portia secures the men's relief and amazement in the true enormity of their debt to her: Antonio owes his life to her oratory skill and strategic dismantling of Shylock's bond; and Bassanio is indebted to her for saving both his friend and his conscience from the responsibility for Antonio's demise. Gratiano's debt is not so large as his lord and the merchant, but he remains relieved that he has not been made a cuckold by a scrubby boy clerk. Portia is a master giver not only because she has a flair for the dramatic, but she gives the ring as a gift to Bassanio, receives it and gives it again to Antonio to present to Bassanio, and then uses it as a vehicle to reveal her even greater gift of Antonio's continued existence. It would be difficult to accomplish any more with the gift of a single ring, but this is not the end of what Portia manages to undertake with it.

In making a point of the re-gifting and passage of the rings, Portia and Nerissa insist on the qualities of commitment and keeping one's word in maintaining social and marital bonds with women as well as men. The men are all too eager to promise devotion upon winning their brides, but they soon give their rings away to keep their reputation and honor within the ranks of men. Bassanio makes the excuses of his departure from his

pledge because he felt "enforced" (5.1.216), he was concerned about "shame" and "courtesy" (5.1.217), and he wished to maintain his "honour" and avoid "ingratitude" (5.1.218) among men in Venice. Portia, with the aid of Nerissa, drives home the importance of valuing gifts, honor, and commitment to women as well as men. In doing so, she directs a larger community in which women are able to use the objects to re-appropriate that power that the culture takes away from them and to direct the behavior of their mates.

Portia, with the aid of Nerissa, establishes with the men and the other people present at Belmont that the social import of their gifts' value is more than their marketplace price. Thus, Nerissa protests: "What talk you of the posy or the value?" (5.1.151) when Gratiano attempts to reduce his fault in giving the ring away by representing the ring she gave him as "paltry" with a "posy…like cutler's poetry / Upon a knife" (5.1.147-50). "Paltry" acts as a clear diminutive of the ring's value, and "cutler's poetry" of a posy on an object would be common, readily engraved and available for purchase from tradesmen. Gratiano reasons that if the ring is not too valuable monetarily and it can be easily replaced, then his fault must not be inexcusable. Gratiano follows the precedent Bassanio sets in first trying to dissuade the doctor from taking his ring by declaring: "Alas, it is a trifle" that he "will not shame" himself by giving (4.1.426-27). If the men can establish that the rings lack monetary or trade value, they think that it can reduce their responsibility for their actions in giving or keeping the rings. However, Juliet Fleming represents the importance of any posy connected to gifts or favors: "Pinned to trees and curtains, set upon conduits. [sic] and wrapped around gifts; or plaited into

bracelets, embroidered onto clothes and copied into books, the posy plays a crucial role in the material exchange of favors that articulates life at court" (7). Therefore, the love and sentiment with which Nerissa gives the ring that bears the posy, "'Love me and leave me not'" (5.1.50), is affected by Gratiano's treatment of her gift. Bassanio's abandonment of Portia's ring reveals to her that he does not hold her love for him above all as he originally claims, and his love cannot presently stand against outside influences. Portia and Nerissa intend to teach that love and its favors cannot be treated as secondary to other interests. Sigurd Burckhardt beautifully states: "As the subsidiary metaphors of the bond and the ring indicate, *The Merchant* is a play about circularity and circulation; it asks how the vicious circle of the bond's law can be transformed into the ring of love. And it answers: through a literal and unreserved submission to the bond as absolutely binding" (242-43). For the men to be in the "ring of love," they have to learn the value of gifts and the importance of keeping vows to maintain social order, love, and trust with those around them.

Portia proceeds to engage the men with Nerissa's aid by stressing the importance of keeping one's pledges made to women as well as to men. The women clearly illustrate the consequences of breaking those vows, as it can lead others to break theirs as well. As part of the plan that she mentions to "outface them and outswear them too" (4.2.17), Portia allows Nerissa to remonstrate with Gratiano about the importance of keeping a vow regardless of the value of any items involved as a set up for her disappointment in Bassanio:

You swore to me when I did give it you

That you would wear it till your hour of death,

And that it should lie with you in your grave.

Though not for me, yet, for your vehement oaths,

You should have been respective and have kept it. (5.1.152-56).

Nerissa emphasizes the importance of keeping oaths to be "respective" or respectful of others, regardless of the person to whom it is made. If he took his own "vehement oaths" seriously, the only way that the clerk could only obtain the ring by taking it off of Gratiano's body in his grave. Portia steps in with sympathy for Nerissa's plight and blames Gratiano for his poor choice: "To part so slightly with your wife's first gift, / A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger / And so riveted with faith unto your flesh" (5.1.167-69). She emphasizes that the ring was "stuck on with oaths" and "riveted with faith" to his person, or at least it should have been.

Portia follows up on the matter by driving home the importance of keeping a pledge when she supposedly discovers that Bassanio has likewise broken his vow to keep his ring:

If you had known the virtue of the ring,

Or half her worthiness that gave the ring

Or your own honour to contain the ring,

You would not then have parted with the ring. (5.1.199-202)

She connects his "own honour" with his responsibility "to contain the ring" as he promised upon first receiving it. Portia points out that even if he did not know "the virtue

of the ring" in itself or as a gift or consider "half her worthiness" as the giver, that honor should have held him fast from parting with it. In view of the men's default on their side of the vows, Portia and Nerissa can claim justification in breaking their own vows, including their sexual fidelity in marriage.

In denying their husbands their beds and claiming to have lain with the new owners of the rings, Portia and Nerissa emphasize the importance of respecting gifts and keeping vows. Portia explains how Bassanio's infidelity leads her to act in return:

> Since he hath got the jewel that I loved
> And that which you did swear to keep for me,
> I will become as liberal as you;
> I'll not deny him anything I have,
> No, not my body, nor my husband's bed. (5.1.224-28)

She enforces the conditions that she first bestows with the ring, including her right to exclaim against him in the case that he parts with it in any way. Portia makes it clear when she initially gives the ring that she gives herself and all she has with the ring, so now they transfer with the ownership of "the jewel that I loved" to the new possessor. Portia highlights the danger to Bassanio's reputation, public masculinity, and the bloodline of any children Portia has, says "I will become as liberal as you; I'll not deny him anything…not my body, nor my husband's bed." Nerissa and Portia use the farce of their supposed infidelity in regaining their rings as a way to frighten the men into realizing that if they are not true to their vows, the women have no reason to keep theirs. It is not for nothing that Gratiano half-jokingly claims "while I live, I'll fear no other

thing / So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (5.1.306-307). Bassanio, Gratiano, and the members of the community at Belmont learn of the giving and forgiving nature of Portia and Nerissa, but also that they are intelligent and self-possessed partners who demand respect. The new wives reinforce that in order for trust and faith to be kept, people joined by a vow or oath must uphold their word; otherwise, these individuals and the community they make up will deteriorate rapidly.

Shakespeare crafts Portia as a giving, powerful force for good through the aspect of the ring: it gains in symbolic importance from its first appearance as an engagement gift in Belmont, to just after court in Venice, to ending in levity in Belmont. Portia does not attempt to entrap and defraud potential suitors who venture into her island's harbor as the Lady of Belmont does in the source play by Giovanni Fiorentino, *Il Pecorone*. She instead uses the giving and receiving of a ring to re-claim herself, to cultivate relationships, to grow a community, and to set societal standards within this group. Shakespeare uses Portia and Nerissa as examples of how women are able to use jewelry and gemstone gifts in order to re-appropriate that power that the culture takes away from them and to direct the behavior of their mates. He shows how the women characters use these objects well, while the men misuse the items or are careless with them to their detriment.

…

In *Timon of Athens*, Timon attempts to build a group of allies and friends upon the system of gift-giving, placing himself as the ultimate host of his banquet table who gives extravagant gifts. By failing to ensure his ability to continue to spend at the pace at which

he begins, however, and by failing to establish emotional bonds of connection and loyalty through his gifts, he soon loses the popularity and attention enjoyed in his time of plenty. This shows that, unlike Portia in *Merchant of Venice*, Timon's attempts to secure a place for himself as master giver within a community are unsuccessful. Instead of becoming a model for giving and securing meaningful social connection through gifts, he falls to the position of a hermit who loathes humanity in general and the people of Athens in particular. The man who initially wishes to preside over all in Athens as a community later gives raw gold for the purpose of bringing about the fall of the same.

Several critics focus on Timon's downfall as a result of his generosity, and more than a few draw connections to James I of England's outpouring of wealth and preferment to many. While this is important, it neglects the significance of jewels and jewelry in Timon's missteps in giving. David Bevington and David L. Smith do draw attention to Timon's gift-giving as patron in purchasing the diamond ring from the jeweller at a high price.[28] This makes a step in the right direction, as Timon does not differentiate between giving to gain relationships and giving to secure dominance. His manner of giving material gifts also allows the recipients to draw a line between the value of gifts he gives to them in friendship and the money that he owes them from loans. By tracing the path of Timon's gift of an exceptional diamond ring and other jewels, we can see the faults in Timon's system of giving, from the point of purchase, presentation to the recipient, the acknowledged number of gifts and recipients, the studied ignorance of the

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[28] See Bevington and Smith's "James I and *Timon of Athens*." *Comparative Drama*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1999, pp. 74, 77.

gifts as debt, and the presence of the diamond at Timon's feast of revenge. The decline of Timon's credit and household through poor management is revealed by his creditors' and his associates' rejection of his signet ring, the symbol of his house and reputation.

Timon considers himself a patron instead of a customer even when he is purchasing the gifts that he distributes to his companions. The jeweller already anticipates that Timon will pay full price when he tells the Merchant the diamond is for Timon, "If he will touch the estimate. / But for that –" (1.1.15). He hints that it is a foregone conclusion, indicating that he has successfully sold jewels to Timon at his named price before this one. Timon considers the diamond in front of the jeweller, but he acts as if he believes the price for the ring will be more than he can afford: "If I should pay you for't as 'tis extolled, / It would unclew me quite" (1.1.171-72). The diamond is described as having "a good form" (1.118) or shape and cut, and the jeweller draws attention to its fine "water" (1.1.19), which the relevant Oxford English Dictionary entry references as "The transparency and lustre characteristic of a diamond or other gemstone, or a pearl" ("water, n"). A diamond of this quality would be worth a premium, but bargaining would still be considered part of the trade in the regular market. Bevington and Smith address Timon's decision: "Even when he barters with jewelers and the like to make purchase of their creations, his role as patron demands that he act as benefactor, not simply pay what the market will bear. A jewel is hardly distinguished from a poem or a painting; it is an investment in social status, and its acquisition must follow a certain code" (77). Despite his initial statement that he cannot afford the diamond, Timon continues the process of considering it for purchase.

It seems quite likely that Timon agrees to pay too much for the diamond ring by paying the asking price, as he takes it from the jeweller to examine it when the jeweller observes: "You mend the jewel by wearing it" (1.1.176). There is no indication that he returns the diamond ring to the jeweller, and he asks Apemantus: "How dost thou like this jewel…What dost thou think 'tis worth?" (1.1.214-17) twenty-six lines after the jeweller stops being part of the conversation. Karen Newman acknowledges Timon's decision to handle the diamond: "In fact, what Timon gives most generously even in the first half of the play, when he has the property to give is words; he never handles money, rarely handles a gift. We never see him engaged in the work of exchange, though the play would perhaps allow him to take up the proffered jewel at 1.1" ("Rereading Shakespeare's Timon" 380). Timon's handling of the "jewel" or diamond as an exception to Newman's rule emphasizes its importance as an example of his gift giving from start to finish. The jeweller does not request the return of the diamond, therefore it seems most likely that Timon retains the diamond at the jeweller's price to give as gift at his feast in Act 1, Scene 2. Timon overpays for the privilege of briefly owning an exceptional diamond and acting as patron, all to give it away in the next scene.

Timon fails at being a master giver because he gives jewels and other gifts too frequently for them to be held in esteem by his recipients. His steward Flavius says to himself "More jewels yet?" (1.2.160) when Timon tells him to come forward with the casket of jewels in the first banquet scene. This reaction supports the impression that Timon gives jewels frequently as part of his entertaining. Timon presents the jewel to 1 Lord at his feast table, a character which Shakespeare does not bother to name at this

point, emphasizing Timon's habit of giving to one and all: "my good lord, / I must entreat you honour me so much / As to advance this jewel - / Accept it and wear it, kind my lord" (1.2.169-72). He wishes for the lord to wear his gift so that he will identify himself willingly as another associate and "honour" Timon. The lord accepts the ring after protesting that he has already had so many gifts from Timon, and the other guests confess they have as well. This indicates that Timon of Athens is more concerned with the show and the continual dispensing of gifts than using individual items to create more than a surface connection with the recipient of the gift. Coppélia Kahn observes that: "his openhandedness toward anyone and everyone, awakens their admiration. On the other hand, the lack of discrimination, ostentatiousness, and compulsiveness of his giving awakens our suspicions" (39). While he gains the admiration of the social elite of Athens, Timon's repeated giving does not secure the men's loyalty and it brings into question the wisdom of giving on this scale.

By attaching little or no significance to his gifts, Timon makes it all too easy for the receivers to belittle the value of what they receive. Timon does not proffer the diamond as a sign of his affection, nor does he highlight the value of the piece as proof of his relationship to the receiver. Lord Lucius later proves how the recipients will respond when he is approached to aid Timon in his financial distress. He admits, "I must needs confess I have received some small / kindnesses from him, as money, plate, jewels and such / like trifles—nothing comparing to his [Lord Lucullus]" (3.2.20-22). Instead of considering the gifts as bonds to his friend that he can repay in money or forgiving his debts, he and the other gentlemen and lords from the feasts see them as extras, "small

kindnesses" and "trifles" that they believe should not be considered in weighing what he owes them. This is the danger of presenting gifts to those he wishes to collect as his friends *en masse*; while the receivers are glad to receive expensive items from a generous man, they honor him only as a genial host whose connection to them exists only as long as the feasts and gifts do.

Timon makes an unwise decision to present his gifts because he can, not because he is celebrating any special relationship with loved ones or milestones in their lives together. If his gifts were signs of appreciation for some good deed done, or a celebration of a long-established relationship, they would carry more meaning to the giver and the recipients. This manner of giving gifts would go much further in securing the loyalty of the recipient to Timon and aid him in building lasting relationships. Julia Reinhard Lupton makes the point that: "Unlike Job, who is initially surrounded by wife and offspring, Timon has been single from the start, and he never quite fits into the social world he has built, ever subject to exceptional extravagance rather than regulated giving" ("Job of Athens" 146). As it is, Timon does not pursue a stable family structure with his gifts and he continues to give because he is noted for his generosity alone. The gift of the diamond to 1 Lord does not clearly represent love, deep attachment, or notable favoritism; it is little more than a request for him to continue to mark himself as one of Timon's many associates.

The number of people to whom Timon gives gifts dilutes the strength of any bond associated with his gifts as well. When 1 Lord responds to the gift of the diamond with the response: "I am so far already in your gifts" and the others at the feast chime in with:

"So are we all" (1.2.171-72), the instant shows the multitude of people to whom Timon has given gifts repeatedly. He spreads his favors too readily in his attempts to obtain many friends rather than concentrating his attention on a few who could prove their loyalty to him. Laura McKee points out that after his descent, "Timon remembers that he once had 'the world as my confectionary. / The mouths, the tongues, the eyes and hearts of men / At duty, more than I could frame employment' (4.3.259-61), suggesting that it was the sheer number of these friends which eventually left him friendless" (18). It is in his bid to encompass a large number of important men in his pool of recipients and to tie them to him in "duty" that Timon fails to realize the flaw in his method of giving. Part of what makes jewels and gifts precious is their rarity; therefore, the more that Timon gives, the less unusual and valued his gifts become in the eyes of his beneficiaries.

By striving to always be the giver of the most valuable or biggest gifts, Timon fails to create the community of givers he claims to desire. He reveals his short-sightedness in refusing one attempt at reciprocation, stating: "there's none / Can truly say he gives if he receives" (1.2.10-11). This proves another area in which Timon shows his ignorance of the rules of giving. In discouraging gifts or giving more valuable gifts in return, he removes himself from the cycle of giving and receiving that would validate and strengthen bonds. His attempts to place himself above the others through magnificent gifts, like the highly extolled diamond of the first act, only distance him from his intended friends. Jody Greene also indicates Timon's mistake in denying equal reciprocation in gifts: "This circle binds a community together by virtue of the 'mutual ties of obligation' which gift-giving imposes—ties which, when broken, condemn the

breaker to a loss of status, rank, and, paradoxically, wealth. It can immediately be seen, from the standpoint of a gift economy, that Timon's mistake lies in his refusal to receive more than token gifts from his courtiers" (181-82). Timon's espoused belief only sets up his great disappointment more severely for when those whom he only rarely expected to act as givers deny him financial aid in his time of need. His methods only succeed in cultivating open-handed dependents rather than developing true fellowship.

Timon makes a significant mistake in giving carelessly by borrowing money to give exquisite gifts like the diamond ring and other jewels, placing himself and his estate in jeopardy to continue enriching others. He has no guarantee that those to whom he gives gifts will give him money in time of need, yet he assumes that they will do so despite his history of discouraging return gifts. Timon's need to produce the lavish celebrations of plenty that he rains down upon the upper crust of Athens society soon outpaces his means and leaves him vulnerable to his creditors. Michael Chorost relates that, "Timon nurses two fictions. His gift economy creates the fiction of vast monetary wealth, which props up his line of credit; he uses the real money obtained on credit to create the fiction of a gift economy" (353). Therefore, these fictions collapse once Timon's lenders notice that he does not stint in his gift-giving as his debts continue to mount, and his supposed friends quickly send their servants to collect payment for any debts he owes them while they wear his gifts of jewels. Titus reveals that Hortensius is waiting for money while his lord "wears jewels now of Timon's gift, / For which I wait for money" (3.4.19-20). With no surety for himself or his household, Timon delivers

himself into the clutches of ruin in order to grace the necks, fingers, ears, and hats of the prominent men of Athens with his jewels and other gifts.

The consequences of Timon's misplaced generosity are evident when Shakespeare has the servants of Timon's debtors lament their masters' demands for money, made while they continue to wear the jewels that Timon's debt has purchased for them. The servant Lucius points out to his fellows waiting for money before Timon's door:

> Mark how strange it shows,
> Timon in this should pay more than he owes:
> And e'en as if your lord should wear rich jewels
> And send for money for 'em. (3.4.21-24).

It does prove "strange" that Timon has to pay back the debts he has incurred for the "rich jewels" that he gives to his debtors. If they are not willing to forgive the debts on behalf of their former feast-giver, they could easily sell the gifts to recover at least some, if not all, of the money owed to them. Instead, Timon's former associates intend to benefit twice from his financial missteps. Hortensius states that, "I'm weary of this charge, the gods can witness; / I know my lord hath spent of Timon's wealth, / And now ingratitude makes it worse than stealth" (3.4.25-27). He has no wish to be party to the greed and "ingratitude" he sees in his master's actions to extract money from Timon when he is in deep necessity. This proves especially heartless after the master has enjoyed the benefits of Timon's open-handedness during his period of seeming wealth. Anne Enderwitz accurately states Timon's situation: "In juxtaposing Timon's material debt with the lords'

moral obligation, the play depicts a world in which moral obligations suffer while the debt bond thrives" (19). Disillusioned by the abandonment and grasping nature of his former parasites, Timon discovers too late the flaws of his gift-giving system.

The once overwhelmingly generous Timon allows his ire to drive him to the opposite end of the giving spectrum, where he doles out physical retribution in place of promised feasting. The fate of the diamond he gives 1 Lord is representative of Timon's lost wealth and the unrepentant attitude of his former recipients. Timon's revenge feast entails the host's liberal bestowing of rocks, water, and other objects within reach in place of food, accompanied by his declaration of his lack of faith in all humanity. Ken Jackson points out Timon's violent reaction to his disappointed expectations: "At Timon's last supper, he reacts not with divine forgiveness, not with turning the other cheek, but with rage and madness, throwing 'lukewarm' soup in their faces" (57). Jackson's play upon the comparison of Timon's last feast to the Lord's last supper highlights that Timon allows his fury to consume him when his chosen community fails him. When the guests flee and collect outside to recover, 1 Lord says:

> He's but a mad lord, and naught but humours
> Sways him. He gave me a jewel th'other day, and now
> He has beat it out of my hat.
> Did you see my jewel? (3.7.109-12)

Timon's attempt to make his former associates regret their false friendship and greed fails to satisfy him or bring them to any state of penitence. 1 Lord does not acknowledge that he has used Timon ill by taking gifts meant in friendship repeatedly and then abandoning

him in his time of need. He is more concerned that he cannot find the jewel that he now considers his property, "my jewel," a part of his wardrobe. It must be Timon who is to blame for being a "mad lord," mercurial in "humours" and temperament. Lord 4 only confirms the lords' inability to recognize their part in Timon's decline when he complains: "One day he gives us diamonds, next day stones" (3.7.115). There is no realization of responsibility among the lords for the change in their former host and his gifts, only judgment of Timon as an unstable and changeable man who has lost his worth. Bevington and Smith note Timon's regretful decisions: "Attempts to buy friendship, loyalty, and respect are doomed to last only as long as the wealth used for the purchase. Instead of coming to terms with this hard truth, Timon tears himself apart in rage" (79). The diamond is lost, just like Timon's faith in human nature and his former glowing hopes for a wealth of friends.

Timon's misguided efforts to be a master giver render his own household and credit irredeemable, as is evident in the rejection of his signet ring as the symbol of his reputation and honor. Timon fails to realize that by impoverishing himself in his gift-giving, he ruins his house, name, and the signet ring that stands for both. When his steward goes out to request money for his master to satisfy his debts, he must return bearing the bad news that Timon's name and his signet ring no longer carry any value:

> I have been bold
>
> (For that I knew it the most general way)
>
> To them to use your signet and your name,
>
> But they do shake their heads, and I am here

No richer in return. (2.2.199-203)

It is the utmost insult to a man's estate and credit to have others "shake their heads" or refuse respect for the symbol of his house and his name. Timon attempts to blame his ignorance of his financial state on his steward Flavius, who quickly counters: "I did endure / Not seldom nor no slight checks, when I have / Prompted you in the ebb of your estate / And your great flow of debts" (2.2.139-42). Flavius makes it clear that the fault for financial negligence is Timon's alone, pointing out that it is "your estate" and "your great flow of debts" from extravagant giving that have reduced him and his household to this state. Timon is short-sighted in his desire to give when his means can no longer support it; this ensures that he will have no legacy to bequeath to an heir, and no future employment for those who serve him. McKee observes that, "By this point in the play we have already seen Timon's household begin to dissolve; soon we will see his servants leave for uncertain futures and potential vagrancy" (15). Timon's need to rise above all and attract the attention of Athens's elite renders desolate his legacy and those who have served him.

In striving to establish himself as a master giver, Timon proves unsuccessful at maintaining the most basic level of a home and community, his servants. Their dispersal is final evidence of his abject failure to construct a loyal system of friends and supporters through giving gifts. They cannot afford to stay with Timon despite their recognition of his kindness and giving nature. Renato Rizzoli notes: "His generosity is trampled on by his covetous and calculating friends and the bonds of solidarity are made ineffectual by being professed only by his humble servants" (20). Flavius, however, seeks his former

master outside of Athens and offers to share what little he has left in return for his company and recognition: “I beg of you to know me, good my lord, / T’accept my grief and whilst this poor wealth lasts / To entertain me as your steward still” (4.3.482-84). Timon still cannot bring himself to accept a gift, but he recognizes the honesty and loyalty of his steward by giving him some of his newfound gold. He will not relinquish his hatred of all other men, and he refuses to give in to Flavius’s request to share his time and attention. Timon wishes to separate the one true man he acknowledges from society when he gives him a gift of gold for his loyalty and advises him to avoid other men. If Timon could bring himself to accept the company of his steward and to build a comfortable life outside of Athens and its society, he might learn the value of sharing and giving within a friendship, even if it would not be a companionship of equals in class. However, he chooses to continue his attempts to set himself apart from others, but he now gives gifts to his chosen few in order to purchase his physical separation as a hermit instead of using them to set himself above the leaders of Athens society.

Timon evolves into the opposite of a master giver as he gives his final gifts of raw gold in order to bring about the destruction of Athens. Timon’s gifts change from jewels, which are regularly associated with being precious or intimate, to the unpolished raw gold from the ground. When his desires for friendship and recognition among the social elite of Athens are not reciprocated, he would prefer that all of the city should be punished for disloyalty and false seeming, man and woman, from the elderly to the babes. He gives Alcibiades gold to attack Athens: “There’s gold to pay thy soldiers— / Make large confusion and, thy fury spent, / Confounded be thyself” (4.3.140-42). Timon does

not even wish a connection or kindness to his champion, but curses him to be "confounded" after "thy fury [is] spent" against the Athenians. He gives gold to whores to infiltrate the city with venereal disease so that the men will suffer emotional and physical pain along with impotence. Timon's obsession with ripping apart the community that used and abused his hospitality for personal gain devours him; when he cannot build the community that he envisions, his rage demands that none should remain. If gifts of jewels, plate, and minted money approved as a cornerstone of a society fail to build a community of friendship among men, his presents of raw gold torn from the ground should be able to reduce the Athenians to grief and obliteration. Although he is hurt and disillusioned, this is hardly the manner of a man who would prove to be a community leader and a true master of gifts and giving.

Regardless of what Timon belatedly learns about the greed of men and his need for caution, he continually refuses to give of himself throughout the play. He repeatedly gives precious jewels and entertains his desired friends with revelry, but we do not hear of him investing time and personal attention regularly to those he would befriend with his gifts. Timon fails spectacularly as a master giver because he does not marry his gifts of diamonds and jewels with the boundaries and trials that construct true bonds of love and friendship. He breaks the cycle of giving by refusing to allow others to reciprocate with gifts of their own to strengthen their connection. Timon turns gift-giving into a contest that he can control, and he does not wish to have equals in generosity. He will not share in his gifts to others or apprentice givers to grow into a community of appreciated supporters. The temporary darling of the Athens social scene pays too much for gifts that

he cannot afford so that he might gain the admiration of men he does not truly know. His studied ignorance of his financial responsibilities as the head of a household render those who truly deserve his gifts friendless and homeless. His unregulated giving reduces his name, his signet ring, and his house until they are empty of meaning or credit.

Timon ultimately gives in order to humiliate and destroy the men, women, and children of Athens who do not become the willing followers that he hopes to obtain in his misguided attempts to become a master giver. He wishes to use the gold he pulls from the dirt to bury the Athenians who fail to value his excessive generosity. Timon may initially hold the idea of friendship as precious as the fine diamond he is so eager to give at the beginning of the play, yet he does not understand the effort required for it to form and withstand the blows of misfortune.

In *Timon of Athens* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare gives us two examples of characters who pursue the objective of becoming master givers, those who can utilize gifts of jewelry and precious metals to form and secure bonds of friendship and community. Portia from *The Merchant of Venice* models healthy and productive giving and generosity in a way that cements social cohesion and provides for social mobility. She utilizes her ring gift masterfully so that she succeeds in her role as a figure for the public good. Portia instills meaning in her gift beyond its evident purpose as an engagement ring or a sign of property transfer to her husband-to-be. She uses it to teach others how to give constructively and to highlight the importance of vows that accompany gifts, whether they be made to men or women. Portia develops gift-giving to

an art that raises and establishes the societal standards and expectations for her community.

In contrast, Timon's giving is selfish and self-serving, and his blindness to actions or attitudes keep him from leading others to social good. Timon's gift of a costly diamond ring to an unnamed lord confirms that he does not understand the significance that the gift of a diamond ring carries as a sign of ultimate regard, royalty, and commitment. His studied ignorance of his financial responsibilities as a leader and caretaker of a household render his signet ring, the symbol of his house, credit, and name, worthless. Timon's efforts to gain and maintain the status of a master giver end with him seeking to destroy or break social unity and create dissonance with his final gifts of raw gold. His failures as a giver leave behind a legacy of pain and anguish, serving as a lesson of how giving unskillfully can bring ruin to individuals and communities as a whole.

CHAPTER 4: THE FAVORS OF KINGS' RINGS: REPAYING DEBT THROUGH COURTLY FAVOR AND BONDS OF PROTECTION

Sovereigns reward favorites with courtly favors, which sometimes consist of titles, positions, or livings, but they can also be material objects. Sometimes those objects are items of personal ornamentation, such as an item of clothing, a miniature of the ruler, or a ring. These items can convey important advantages for their wearers. One of those advantages is actual physical protection from those who might wish them dead through personal action or skewed political trials that would carry the sentence of death by execution. Another of those advantages is an enhanced social status with the court and the kingdom. These conditions provide a support system for worthy recipients of these objects, meaning that they can have the confidence to pursue goals that can seem unattainable, conduct their lives and work without fear of undue slander, and enjoy the attentions of their sovereigns as the royal courts and kingdoms benefit from healthy relationships. In this chapter, I examine two plays that show how courtly favors from kings, specifically royal rings, alter their subjects' identities and relationships with the king and others. *All's Well That Ends Well*[29] displays how the gift of a king's ring brings his maiden healer a personal relationship as well as support and protection from her sovereign. *King Henry VIII*[30] indicates how a king provides political protection and recognition for his subject's service in giving him his ring. Both of these plays show the

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[29] All citations to the play in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *All's Well That Ends Well*. Edited by G. K. Hunter, Arden Shakespeare, 2007.

[30] All citations to the play in this chapter are to William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*. Edited by Gordon McMullan, Arden Shakespeare, 2000.

king giving a ring gift in order to achieve particular goals: as the king's repayment for a debt to a subject on the one hand; and as a means to strengthen his bond with a subject on the other. This shows the cycle of the gift economy in creating a bond and benefiting giver and receiver. Marcel Mauss states: "The most important feature among these spiritual mechanisms [giving and receiving] is clearly one that obliges a person to reciprocate the present that has been received" (7). In *All's Well That Ends Well*, the King of France gives Helena his ring after she cures him of his terminal disease, saving his life. His value for his savior and his complete belief in the oath she makes on his ring supplies her with a valuable support system. Her belief in his protection makes it possible for her to secure her initially unwilling husband and establish a young married family as a link between the old French court and the new. In *King Henry VIII*, Henry VIII gives his ring to Cranmer as security before he enters a meeting with those who seek to defame and destroy the religious leader. In offering him this safety, the king realizes Cranmer's genuine Christian service to him and cements his own confidence in his new actions as a ruler.

Critical work on *All's Well* frequently focuses on Helena and Bertram's relationship and Helena's methods to secure her desired marital and sexual union with him, while the significance of the relationship between Helena and the King of France often escapes notice. Shakespeare creates the king as a completely different character from sources, with an entirely new relationship between him and the Helena figure. In William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* source, "The Thirty-Eighth Novell," Giletta is a wealthy woman in addition to her other positive attributes, but the king's disdain for her

request to marry Count Beltramo, a noble above her station, is clear: "The king was very loth to graunt him unto her: but for that he had made a promise which he was loth to breake, he caused him to be called forth" (391). He enforces the marriage with Beltramo only because he must honor his debt for her cure, and his involvement in the plot ends after it is complete. In *All's Well*, the King of France shows affection and a true bond with Helena; he functions as an adamant supporter of his savior, mourns her after her reported death, and intercedes when he believes that she has met her end due to foul play. Susan Snyder notes: "the King of France is many-sided and deeply involved in the play's power competitions and nuanced relationships. Greatly developed from the corresponding figure in Boccaccio's story, he is effectively Shakespeare's invention" ("Naming Names" 266). Even when he is not present in the play, Helena carries his ring as a symbol of his favor and affection until she passes it on to Bertram after the bed-trick. The king's notable reaction to its reappearance in Bertram's possession affords Helena time to resolve all to everyone's liking in the end.

The king's ring gift to Helena has attracted some critical attention, but not to the significance that it merits. Kaara L. Peterson examines the exchange of Helena's exchange of "hymeneal 'ring'" (103) for the connubial chastity of the wedding ring, making comparisons to Queen Elizabeth I's claim of retaining both virginity and her coronation ring as a sign of her marriage to England.[31] Elizabeth Sewell maintains that the king's ring gift is the "active ingredient" (297) in the alchemical reactions and actions

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[31] See Peterson's "The Ring's the Thing: Elizabeth I's Virgin Knot and *All's Well That Ends Well*." *Studies in Philology,* vol. 113, no. 1, 2016, pp. 101-31.

of the play.[32] Nicholas Ray argues that Shakespeare's decision to add a second ring from the king serves as part of the evidence of the consummation of Bertram's and Helena's marriage, but more so that it is symbolic of the fistula of which Helena cures him and his possible sexual deviance.[33] I agree that Helena uses the king's ring in *All's Well* as evidence of her and Bertram's consummation of their marriage to gain her husband's acknowledgement and to restore him to his social and genetic responsibilities as part of the French nobility. I will show that this is possible because the king's ring gift functions as a symbol of the king's relationship with Helena and his protection as well as a sign of royal and maiden healing power. The king makes it clear that he admires Helena for her ability to heal him, but also independently for her beauty, and the courage and wisdom she could pass on to future children. Helena tells Diana and the widow that the king is a great personage, and she relies heavily on the king's honor and vow on their ring to bring all to right by the end of the play.

In giving Helena his ring, the King of France provides her with an easily recognizable item of status: the ring marks her as the sovereign's favorite in court. The ring serves as wearable proof of his affection and personal value for the woman who heals him, because he would not part with his royal ring easily. The king declares to Bertram and the court: "Plutus himself, / That knows the tinct and multiplying med'cine, / Hath not in nature's mystery more science / Than I have in this ring" (5.3.101-104). The

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[32] See Sewell's "Alchemical-Chemical Love Knots: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 78, no. 2, 1995, pp. 297-98.
[33] See Ray's "'Twas Mine, 'Twas Helen's': Rings of Desire in *All's Well That Ends Well*." *All's Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays*. Edited by Gary Waller, Routledge, 2007, pp. 183-193.

ring holds great value for the king undoubtedly due to its monetary value, but he also knows the details and characteristics of "this ring" better than anyone else. This is due to his possession of it during the time before he gives it to Helena. The king's confidence in his knowledge of it must be absolute if he is willing to claim it is equal to the knowledge that Plutus, Greek god of abundance and wealth and son to Demeter, has of "multiplying med'cine" and "nature's mystery." Wearing a ring for an extended period of time would lead him to become accustomed to its weight, its texture, and any minute marks accumulated in the course of his ownership of it.

Being the king's ring initially, it is likely a highly stylized piece of jewelry or, at the very least, composed of expensive and rare materials like gold and one or more exquisite gemstones. The countess and Lord Lafew both notice the ring on Helena's finger before she leaves France, and they immediately recognize the ring when Bertram offers it up as an engagement gift for Maudlin. A startled Lafew states: "Helen that's dead / Was a sweet creature; such a ring as this, / The last that e'er I took her leave at court, / I saw upon her finger" (5.3.77-80). He swears by every hair in his beard that he's seen Helena wearing "such a ring as this." The countess proclaims: "on my life, / I have seen her wear it, and she reckon'd it / At her life's rate" (5.3.89-91). She is so sure of its identity and meaning that she is willing to stake her life on it being the same ring that Helena "reckon'd" or valued at being worth her own life. The ring must be distinctive enough to merit this certainty, and Bertram is the only one who is ignorant of the ring's origin and importance. It is an interesting connection that Bertram also does not recognize Helena's value as everyone else does until the end of the play, so his

obliviousness to the ring's existence before he receives it at the conclusion of the bed-trick is fitting.

When the king refers to the "science" that he has in the ring, Shakespeare may also be referring to the healing power the royal touch usually had associated with it during this time in England. When the king's health fails, it is Helena's application of her father's remedy that returns him to his position of a royal who can dispense healing through his touch or items he has touched. In *Magical Jewels*, Joan Evans mentions the traditions of royal healing items such as cramp-rings, made from the money in the royal donation on Good Friday which then "the king rubbed between his hands while prayers were repeated, to impart to them that virtue his hands had received from the holy oil at his coronation" (137), and "'touching pieces' given by the king as amulets to those he touched for the King's Evil" (138). By healing the healer, Helena restores the power of the royal touch along with the heartiness of the king, and the ring benefits from being worn by the royal hand before it is compounded with exposure to the divinely aided hand of a virgin healer. The ring is doubly blessed, and it only makes sense that Helena can then use the ring to heal her marriage and to close the rift in the French royal court that Bertram opens with his abandonment. Sewell states: "it is the second ring which is the active ingredient in all that is happening. It enters with the first transmutation, a royal gift from the King to Helena in gratitude…she keeps the ring, with fateful consequences. She puts it onto Bertram's hand during their secretive mating, and immediately, it would seem, he comes under its power and hers" (297). The ring's "power" that it accrues

affects Bertram and the other characters in addition to the social connection that it carries as a gift from the king to Helena and from Helena to Bertram.

It is significant that Helena uses the ring that the king gives her as a cure both for her and Bertram's marriage and the aging decline of the French royal court. Helena's bestowal of the king's ring on Bertram serves as his wedding ring after the bed-trick. Diana sets it up so that Bertram expects Helena's ring gift: "on your finger in the night I'll put / Another ring, that what in time proceeds / May token to the future our past deeds" (4.2.61-63). The ring on his finger does "token…past deeds" when it serves as proof that his and Helena's marriage has been consummated. Kaara L. Peterson states that, "Bertram is unaware Diana's ring is really Helena's is really the King's. In this sense, when Helena loses her virgin's 'ring' during the bed-trick, it is a sign of the king's support, sanction, and authority—a true 'sovereign' (marriage) cure" (114). Helena has the ring "as a sign of the king's support, sanction, and authority," and the king fully supports her goal of having a fully functioning marriage with Bertram as her reward for healing her sovereign. What the king cannot bring about by force, Helena achieves by wit and stratagem, crowning her achievement with the symbol of her favor with the king. As I mentioned in chapter two in focusing on Bertram's family ring, Helena adds the evidence of the king's ring to her pregnancy and the required possession of the Rossillion family ring, securing Bertram's pledge to "love her dearly, ever, ever, dearly" (5.3.310) as long as she can make him understand how she managed to bring all to fruition.

By obtaining Bertram's acknowledgement of their marriage, Helena secures his place in the king's court and sets a pattern for the continuation of the court in the younger

generation. The king laments the loss of Bertram's father as a courtier and soldier: "Such a man / Might be a copy to these younger times; / Which, followed well, would demonstrate them now / But goers backward" (1.2.45-48). He also mourns Helena's late father as a renowned physician. Lord Lafew frequently comments on his growing age, and the king sees his own decline with illness all too clearly for his comfort. The young nobles and lords go to fight in a foreign war, if able, or remain with baited breath out of obedience. It seems that the court is divided by the end of the previous age and the lack of establishment for the new one. Helena takes up the gauntlet of service by healing the king with her father's receipt and follows it with the accomplishment of marrying Bertram, carrying his child, and convincing him to accept their marriage with the rings of his king and his family line, thereby pleasing the king and his mother. Jean E. Howard observes: "In fulfilling her desires, Helena also fulfills the desires of the Countess and the King and engineers Bertram's consent as well" (47). This is true because both the king and the countess want Helena in Rossillion and the court as Bertram's wife, with the countess willing to disown Bertram in favor of Helena when he abandons his wife and his country for wartime glory. Now Helena and Bertram will serve as the new established family for the younger generation, and she uses the symbol of the king's favor to bring about the court that will become his new legacy.

The most important reason that the king's ring is useful to Helena, however, is because he designates it as a token of favor and his protection for her. The king willingly offers his preserver the ring as a vessel to carry the promise of deliverance for her alone: "if her fortunes ever stood / Necessitated to help, that by this token / I would relieve her"

(5.3.84-86). The king promises his assistance for Helena without specifying any limits or conditions as long as the ring is sent or presented. This is the depth of his debt and bond with the woman who has restored him from a terminal illness. Helena adds more specific conditions to why she would part with the king's ring to tighten the bond and to define its meaning to both:

> She call'd the saints to surety
> That she would never put it from her finger
> Unless she gave it to yourself [Bertram] in bed,
> Where you have never come, or sent it us
> Upon her great disaster. (5.3.108-12)

She calls "the saints to surety," indicating that the saints, those blessed for truth, honor, and great deeds, would vouch for her, as she swears that she would definitively "never" take the king's gift off except in the case of these two extremes. Helena sets the king up to have one of two reactions when he next sees the ring out of her possession: be excessively happy for her in the belated consummation of her marriage with Bertram, the husband the king aggressively pursues as Helena's chosen prize for healing him; or be prepared to seek vengeance upon those that would endanger or bring a "great disaster" upon his new favorite. The king's specific and personal bond with Helena present in the form of the ring shows his recognition of her intelligence and how her life is now inextricably intertwined with his. This explains the king's adverse reaction to seeing Bertram offer up his and Helena's ring as a gift for a new fiancée immediately following Helena's reported death. Ira Clark notes: "Bertram offers Lafeu's daughter the ring

placed on his finger, he believes, as a nuptial pledge by Diana. But both Lafeu and the King recognize the ring and its significance as the royal pledge to protect Helen" (293). The countess, Lafew, and the king recognize the ring, and that is why the king relays Helena's pledge to Bertram and the court to confirm how Bertram comes to possess this ring. When Bertram tells an unconvincing lie about a lady tossing it from a window and denies bedding Helena, the king decides that he must pursue justice for his lost favorite according to the bond of the ring.

Although Helena does not state her reliance and admiration of the King of France as often as he does for her, she articulates that importance of the ring's bond in act four, scene four. Helena makes it clear to the widow and Diana that she thoroughly believes in the king's support: "That you may well perceive I have not wrong'd you / One of the greatest in the Christian world / Shall be my surety" (4.4.1-3). While she acknowledges that he is "one of the greatest" in rank and power as the sovereign of an established country, she also trusts that he will remember and honor his pledge to her made on his ring gift. Helena does not question whether or not the king will join her in justifying the actions she takes to reform Bertram to their marriage. All she plans relies on his ability to notice the ring he gave Helena in Bertram's possession, his determination to question the meaning of its presence without her, and his influence as he holds court where she makes her reappearance from the dead. The king's indulgence in allowing her the court floor provides a public place for her to present the proofs of Bertram's defeated challenge and to claim her husband's acknowledgement of her as his wife. The monarch provides an excellent opportunity for Helena to prove herself, and he does not disappoint her as he

shows himself to be her staunchest ally in every step she takes toward her goal of becoming the acknowledged wife of her chosen husband.

The ring also conveys the value of its bond in negative terms, such as when the king punishes those who he thinks have not properly valued it or Helena. He threatens to imprison Bertram, the heir to the previous count who was a favorite courtier and soldier for the king, when he offers up the king's ring gift to Helena as an engagement gift to Maudlin. Ann Jennalie Cook notes, "the 'amorous token' (69) he produces for betrothal to Maudlin turns out to be Helen's gift from the king, arousing suspicion that Bertram might have murdered his unwanted wife" (231-32). It does not matter that this man is a ward of the king's, nor that he is a war hero returned home with acclaim from the Duke of Florence. Bertram's possession of the ring and his fabricated story of an Italian lady tossing it to him is evidence enough to make "conjectural fears" (5.3.114) grow in the king's mind that Helena's life has been "foully snatched" (5.3.153) instead of a natural death resulting from grief as reported. He sees through Bertram's lie and orders the errant noble to "Confess 'twas hers, and by what rough enforcement / You got it from her" (5.3.107-108). The king knows that there must be a reason that Bertram chooses to lie, even if he does not yet know the reason. He soon remembers that "thou didst hate her deadly, / And she is dead; which nothing but to close / Her eyes myself could win me to believe, / More than to see this ring" (5.3.117-20). The king's belief in Helena's oath to keep the ring supersedes the trust and honor of the family connection that Bertram has. He does not wish to believe that the son of his beloved former count could be capable of being "so inhuman" (5.3.116) that he would kill Helena, but the presence of the ring

convinces him to imprison Bertram while he will "sift this matter further" (5.3.124). In order to obtain justice for his former favorite, the king does not balk at the prospect of trying a young count for murder.

The French sovereign also does not withhold the threat of severe consequences for Diana when he suspects her of conspiring against Helena to gain possession of his ring gift. When she riddles with the king about whether or not Bertram has taken her virginity as well as how she did or did not acquire the king's and Helena's ring, he loses his patience and orders:

> Take her away. I do not like her now.
>
> To prison with her. And away with him.
>
> Unless thou tell'st me where thou hadst this ring
>
> Thou diest within this hour. (5.3.275-78)

He "does not like her now" that she is withholding evidence that can help him trace back the ring to how it left Helena's possession. He threatens her with death "within this hour" if she does not provide him with the information that can convey how Helena parted with the ring. The king will have justice for Helena regardless of the social cost, even if it is to put to death or torture a woman who has just been recognized as Bertram's new wife. Once the king figures out that Helena is alive and Diana has in actuality aided Helena in securing Bertram's acknowledgement, he rewards her with the power to pick a husband and a pledge to pay her marriage dower. He puts together her introduction of Helena as the jeweler from whom she had his ring with her willingness to risk her own maiden reputation on Helena's behalf. By helping Helena bring about the consummation of her

marriage with Bertram, Diana contributes to the closure of the king's debt to Helena and the return of his ring. The king can now celebrate the happy reason for Helena to part with his ring by rewarding Diana for her assistance and courage.

The king invests himself and his ring in a relationship with Helena almost from the beginning of the play because he recognizes Helena's worth when she bargains for the opportunity to treat him. He observes that:

> Thy life is dear, for all that life can rate
> Worth name of life in thee hath estimate:
> Youth, beauty, wisdom, courage—all
> That happiness and prime can happy call. (2.1.178-81)

He openly evaluates her and finds her full of positive attributes, all of which she is willing to risk for a chance to cure him and to gain her requested boon. All of this draws him to her beyond what could be expected from a king resigned to his impending death. Kathryn Schwarz observes: "When Helena stakes her integrity and life against the King's corruption and death, she offers a contract forged as much between actor and audience as between woman and man, subject and monarch, or physician and patient" (214). It is difficult not to be attracted to a woman who possesses the strength of will and character to risk all for the chance of her dearest wish, and the king offers his hand to seal the agreement: "rest, / Unquestion'd, welcome, and undoubted bless'd…If thou proceed / As high as word, my deed shall match thy deed" (2.1.206-209). When Helena proves the effectiveness of her father's receipt and her application, her achievement not only gains

her the power to choose her desired husband; it secures the support and affection of her royal patient.

Helena's beauty is a virtue that eases her path into the good graces of the King of France, helping convince him that she acts as a vessel for heaven's will and grace in healing him. This continues into the bond of the ring gift when he can neither take her into his royal bed or ensure the consummation of the marriage he secures for her. The king refers to Helena as "fair one" (2.1.98) when he first meets her and again describes her as fair when he describes her merits to a resistant Bertram in Act II, Scene III. LaFew points out that when the king returns to court that "he's / able to lead her a coranto" (2.3.42-43) in dance before he has her sit beside him to choose her husband. It is clear to the court members and wards present, including Bertram, how much the king admires Helena, especially during his lead-up to her choice of a husband from his noble wards: "Make choice, and see, / Who shuns thy love shuns all his love in me" (2.3.72-73). Helena controls who will maintain the king's favor in how they respond to her request, and the choice of "love" displays the degree of the king's feelings for her. Susan Snyder states Bertram's case: "From this point of view, he himself and the marriage forced on him are displacements of the old King's sexual fascination with Helen: the formal coupling with her that would be unseemly for the King he imposes by fiat on his ward" ("The King's Not Here" 25-26). The king can raise the object of his regard to make her title and wealth respectable enough to marry a count, and he plans to do so in order to grant her earned wish. This is why he attempts to reason with Bertram: "If thou canst like this creature as a maid, / I can create the rest. Virtue and she / Is her own dower; honour

and wealth from me" (2.3.12-44). The healthy king can "create" the "honour and wealth" his beloved maiden healer might need to supplement what she was born lacking for this marriage. Michael D. Friedman acknowledges that the king can "bestow enough wealth upon Helena to make her what he considers an eligible match for Bertram, through whom the King may vicariously experience a legitimate consummation with Helena and thereby perpetuate the current social structure of the Court" (88). The king can take comfort in seeing her married to Bertram and eventually, in carrying the evidence of the consummation in her pregnancy.

The French sovereign also enters into the bond of the ring gift with Helena because he values her as a potential mother of noble subjects. This unusually resourceful woman can pass along her excellent qualities of wisdom and courage to her future children, who will be born subjects of France. Allowing Helena to choose her husband from a noble family is a privilege few would experience, but Helena dares to risk her life and succeeds where no one else does in saving the king. Marrying her childhood love would move Helena to a completely different social class as a countess, but her husband gains a highly intelligent wife who still respects the societal structure and expectations of patriarchal leadership. Emily Ross relates that: "The King assures Helena of his intention to reciprocate by granting her 'my promised gift' (2.3.47). Later in the scene the King flips this dynamic, castigating Bertram for rejecting the 'gift' of marriage to Helena (2.3147), as if Bertram was the recipient of the King's beneficence rather than the object the King is giving away" (190). The king indicates that marrying into the higher class is a gift to Helena, and marrying an unusually gifted and royally endorsed woman is a gift to

Bertram. By marrying Helena to Bertram, the king will likely secure future courtiers that will serve him and his line both skillfully and faithfully. Repaying his debt to Helena will grant her request and benefit the royal court of France. Michael D. Friedman observes: "After praising Helena's ability to 'breed honour' for Bertram, the King moves the other direction along the chain of influence and criticizes Bertram's failure to live up to his father's example of honorable behavior" (88-89). Bertram does not initially possess his father's benevolent behavior and respect for others regardless of class, but Helena's influence and the continued guidance of the countess, Lafew, and the king could help him mature over time with the marriage. By bringing together the daughter of a skilled physician, a woman of "Helena's ability to 'breed honour,'" with Bertram's noble bloodline, the king can hope to ensure a noble heritage in both title and deed.

The king's gift of a royal ring to Helena demonstrates the interwoven relationship that the two share after they strike their contract and she delivers him from his illness. It is not simply a debt made and repaid as it is in the sources, but genuine admiration and concern that link these two characters. Shakespeare crafts a sovereign and a ring gift that lend an entirely different flavor to the tale of a bright woman who must convince the noble man she loves that she deserves to be his wife. The King of France continues his bond with Helena by offering her his royal ring after his debt to her is technically repaid by giving her his ward in marriage. This ring gift is an example of Lewis Hyde's observation that "a gift, when it moves across the boundary, either stops being a gift or else abolishes the boundary" (61). The gift bond removes the boundary between king and subject as much as their class positions will allow, as the king is involved in Helena's life

and relationships from his cure on. Even though he is not present for the consummation of Helena's and Bertram's marriage, the ring that symbolizes his support for Helena is. Helena does not have to seek out Bertram with twin sons that are old enough to resemble him and his favored ring to make her case as in the source plays; she appears before the king and his court in Rossillion pregnant and in control of the Rossillion family ring as the king is investigating the return of his royal ring gift without Helena. Helena keeps her vow of the condition of consummation for parting with his gift by sending it back on Bertram's finger, and this serves as evidence of her unborn babe's lineage. Nicholas Ray notes, "While Shakespeare chooses not to give his Bertram the ocular proof of paternity so bountifully afforded Beltramo, the introduction of the second ring into the story—the ring which the King first presents to Helena, and which Helena subsequently gives Bertram during their unseen night together—provides a supplementary evidentiary token" (184). This "evidentiary token" shows how the sovereign's gift of favor and protection support the goal of a brave and loyal subject, as well as how a resourceful woman can use it to begin establishing the continuation of an aging court in its young nobility.

…

Whereas the ring functions as symbol of the king's protection, support, and affection for Helena that she relies on as she pursues her desired marriage in *All's Well*, it serves as both the king's test and his reward of protection for Cranmer as he faces stiff political opponents in *King Henry VIII*. Cranmer's constant selfless provision of services for the king as an adept advisor and an expert on spiritual law results in a disparity

between his expenditure of time and effort and any profit of material or political advantage; over time, the king and others cannot help but notice. The notion of owing someone for support or services is a type of social debt, one examined by scholars of gift theory. C.A. Gregory states: "The gift economy, then, is a debt economy. The aim of a transactor in such an economy is to acquire as many gift-debtors as he possibly can and not to maximize profit, as it is in a commodity economy" (13). We can apply this concept of acquiring "gift-debtors" to Cranmer in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. Cranmer's service constitutes honest gifts that hold no apparent expectation of creating debt on the part of the king, only that he wishes to serve his king as part of his earthly duties. That does not mean that the king and others are not aware of the mounting obligation that the king has to his spiritual leader for services rendered. In giving his ring to Cranmer, the king acknowledges his debt to the archbishop and recognizes him as the best of his subjects, worthy of his protection and respect. The ring serves as a shield for Cranmer, projecting the king's seal of approval on his life and service for the king and his country. It is the beginning of the king's open acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Cranmer as well as his attempts to strengthen their bond and draw him closer to the royal family.

Critics have given the ring gift cursory attention as part of Henry's rescue of Cranmer in the political attack that takes place in the Privy Council. Paul Bertram observes that "the importance of each major character depends (as usual in the histories) on the relation between that character and the king" (157).[34] Cranmer is noticed

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[34] See Bertram's "*Henry VIII*: The Conscience of the King." *In Defense of Reading: A Reader's Approach to Literary Criticism*, Reuben A. Brower, 1962, pp. 156, 169-70.

throughout the play by the king, lords, and gentleman for his good service to the king, but he is not brought to the foreground until the king openly acknowledges their bond with his ring and defense. Maurice Hunt sees the ring as a symbol of the king's "supreme verbal power" (237), and Mark Rankin briefly notes the king's signet ring as part of the king's exertion of his authority for Cranmer.[35] Gerard Wegemer steps closest to my focus by acknowledging that the king, "gives the royal ring as a sign of personal protection" (123).[36] The king's giving of his ring serves as his test for his relationship with his second spiritual leader, and Cranmer's response in accepting it proves his sovereign's trust is well-founded. I will show that the king's ring serves as protection and a confirmation of all of the service and transparency with which Cranmer aids the king. I will also address how Henry's ring test and the actions that follow it demonstrate the king's recognition of the debt he owes his archbishop. His efforts to discharge his debt to the loyal Christian leader require him to mature as a ruler in defending the faith, authority, decision-making, speaking, and trust.

The king's ring is infused with his power, and Cranmer's possession of it speaks volumes to the men who summon him and plan to ruin him out of jealousy and desire for personal gain. Cranmer declares: "By virtue of that ring, I take my cause / Out of the gripes of cruel men and give it / To a most noble judge, the King my master" (5.2.133-

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[35] See Hunt's "Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII* and the Triumph of the Word." *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 75, no. 3, May 1994, p. 237, and Rankin's "Henry VIII, Shakespeare, and the Jacobean Royal Court." *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2011, p. 361.

[36] See Wegemer's "Henry VIII on Trial: Confronting Malice and Conscience in Shakespeare's *All Is True*." *Renascence*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2000, p. 123.

35). Cranmer confidently rebuffs his accusers "by virtue of that ring," and strips the men of their right to judge his actions; now he must only report to the king. Chris R. Kyle notes: "When the Privy Council examines Cranmer, Henry secretly watches the proceedings and intervenes to scold the Lords after Cranmer has shown the ring to illustrate he has the king's trust" (85). The king abstains from interfering in the process of the Privy Council until Cranmer can find no quarter in his honest defense and produces the king's ring to halt their determined onslaught. Presenting the ring is all Cranmer needs to do to "illustrate he has the king's trust" because it is the physical manifestation of the king's power and approval.

It is significant that the king's ring is notable in appearance and it is instantly recognized as a symbol of his power and favor. That means that the king wears it regularly in a prominent place, likely on his hand instead of the habit nobility and royalty often had during this time of suspending a ring or rings from the hat, sleeve, or a chain as an ornament. In her *A History of Jewellery*, Joan Evans divulges that, "Henry VIII himself greatly favoured the use of initials in jewellery, though his many marriages involved him in a certain amount of resetting" (96). Henry had pendants and medallions made with his initials and sometimes with those of his wives, so it seems likely that his signature ring that he presents to Cranmer features one or more of his initials or a crest as a signet ring. The identification of the ring is instantaneous for the members of the Privy Council:

Chancellor: This is the King's ring.

Surrey: 'Tis no counterfeit.

Suffolk: 'Tis the right ring, by heaven. I told ye all,

When we first put this dangerous stone a-rolling,

'Twould fall upon ourselves. (5.2.136-40)

All three lords immediately recognize the ring by sight and confirm its validity, exclaiming that it is "the King's ring," "no counterfeit," and "the right ring, by heaven." Suffolk's swearing "by heaven" indicates that the ring clearly carries the king's favor with it, and it is not with them.

The Lord Chancellor, Lord Surrey, and Lord Suffolk now know that Cranmer's relationship with the king is stronger than any of their own, as he would not otherwise entrust his ring and his power to another. Their shock and fear of what this ornament presages for their positions and fortunes is palpable, as it will be followed by the king's wrath and retribution for their poor treatment of his chosen favorite. Gerard Wegemer states: "After flattering Cranmer by calling him the best soul in the kingdom…Henry gives him the royal ring as a sign of personal protection" (123). King Henry VIII's gift of his ring gives his councilor new prestige and protection as a result of his intercession, saving him from imprisonment and ill-dealing from political rivals. This ring gift and the king's intervention occur as both test and confirmation of the relationship and trust that grow between Cranmer and the king. Cardinal Wolsey's tenure as the king's religious leader ends with a grasping betrayal, so Cranmer has to build his credit with the king over time through moral living, acting as his oracle, and performing significant services and ceremonies for the king and his family. Once his archbishop passes the test of the ring

gift, the king comes into his own as a ruler in multiple facets and is blessed by Cranmer's vision of his legacy.

Cranmer lives his life and his actions for the crown, and is presented as an upright, moral religious guide for the people and his sovereign. The archbishop welcomes the opportunity for his life to be examined and his sins to be brought to light. He claims he is "right glad to catch this good occasion / Most thoroughly to be winnowed, where my chaff / And corn shall fly asunder" (5.1.109-11). He sees this as an "occasion…to be winnowed," an opportunity for his life and actions to be tested to reveal his faults as well as what he has done well. Only a true man would be "right glad" for the opportunity to see if his life can stand up to the scrutiny of other men. Cranmer is not suspicious of the process, but calmly prepares to face the trial of his works and service. The archbishop relies on his transparency to save him from political opponents:

> The good I stand on is my truth and honesty.
> If they shall fail, I with mine enemies
> Will triumph o'er my person, which I weigh not
> Being of those virtues vacant. I fear nothing
> What can be said against me. (5.1.121-26)

Cranmer holds that "the good I stand on" is a foundation that will withstand the assailment he faces. He believes that living with "truth and honesty" will preserve him from the attempts of those political "enemies" that seek his ruin and disgrace. Cranmer naively believes that he should "fear nothing" that "can be said against" him because he has done nothing to support the accusations. Camille Wells Slights notes: "Unlike

Wolsey, who finds temporal honours incompatible with a peaceful conscience, Cranmer insists on the harmonious integrity of his 'life and office'…Through Cranmer's courage and its protection, the play celebrates the English Church's respect for the integrity of the conscience" (63). The archbishop's "integrity of the conscience" fuels his "courage" that so astounds the king, which is part of why Henry probes further with the test of offering Cranmer his ring.

Cranmer's reliance on Christian living as protection surprises the king for the major reason that it is in direct contrast to his experience with his previous religious servant and councilor. Cardinal Wolsey saw his position as a religious advisor as a way to collect power and wealth instead of living as a godly servant to others. Henry decides that such an alien thought process and faith as Cranmer's must be investigated to see if it stands up to further scrutiny. Alexander Leggatt observes: "Henry worries about Cranmer: 'Now by my holidame, / What manner of man are you?' (V.i.116-17). To encounter such meekness in public life is a new experience for Henry, and he is not sure what to make of it; throughout the sequence he shows an amused appreciation of the fact that his Archbishop of Canterbury actually behaves like a Christian" (230). Henry does appreciate Cranmer's behavior and belief that good will withstand every onslaught, but he is "amused" because he understands the lengths to which some men will stoop to achieve their desired ends, including false witness. He realizes it is his duty to warn his favorite of the danger that likely awaits him in political warfare, but he still admires Cranmer's innocence. When he offers Cranmer his protection in his ring, he is astounded by the man's reaction: "Look, the good man weeps. / He's honest, on mine honour. God's

blest mother, / I swear he is true-hearted, and a soul / None better in my kingdom" (5.1.152-55). The king recognizes his archbishop as "honest" and "true-hearted," a man in a position of power under him who still manages to have "a soul" of which he can find "None better in my kingdom." Henry learns through the test of his ring gift that power does not always corrupt a man, and both he and his kingdom benefit from the advice of such a one in Cranmer.

Cranmer is also worthy of the gift of the king's ring because he serves the king as his oracle, both by guiding him in major decisions and foretelling the future of his child with Anne Bullen. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an oracle is: **"**A person of great wisdom or knowledge, whose opinions or decisions are generally accepted; an authority believed or claiming to be infallible" ("oracle, n."). Cranmer becomes a person that the king relies on to make decisions regularly. This is why Wolsey sees Cranmer as a danger to his position with the king when he observes: "An heretic, an arch-one, Cranmer, one / Hath crawled into the favour of the King / And is his oracle" (3.2.101-104). Wolsey knows that the king has started to listen to Cranmer's advice regularly in place of his when he identifies Cranmer as "his oracle," and that means that Wolsey is losing his influence over the king's decisions as Cranmer gains it.

Due to the king's intervention with ring and person during the Privy Council, Cranmer soon after serves as another type of oracle when he speaks the blessing of what he foresees for the newly-born Elizabeth. The archbishop gives a detailed vision of how wonderful she and her reign will be, ending with the pronouncement that: "She shall be to the happiness of England / An aged princess. Many days shall see her, / And yet no day

without a deed to crown it" (5.4.56-58). He foretells that the king's newest daughter will be a bountiful, skilled heir who will be loved and admired by her countrymen, and each of her "many days" will have "a deed to crown it." Cranmer predicts with great certainty that the king's legacy will be a great one through his daughter's reign and into that of her heir's time on the throne. The proud king says that Cranmer "speakest wonders" (5.4.55) in predicting such a future for his daughter, and he declares: "This oracle of comfort has so pleased me. / That when I am in heaven I shall desire / To see what this child does and praise my maker" (5.4.65-67). The archbishop rewards his monarch's protection and confidence with the prophecy of a remarkable reign for Elizabeth that brings "comfort" to his king, along with a desire to watch how it unfolds from heaven.

Yet another reason that Cranmer is worthy of the king's signature ring and rescue is that he repeatedly performs significant services for the king and his family. Cranmer serves the king by finding the justification for his divorce from his wife Katherine of Aragon. When the king grows tired of dealing with the non-committal responses from the pope's cardinals about the possibility of a divorce from Katherine in the Catholic Church, he yearns for the return of Cranmer to give him answers: "My learned and well-beloved servant, Cranmer, / Prithee return. With thy approach I know / My comfort comes along" (2.4.235-37). He eagerly awaits the return of his "learned and well-beloved servant" whom he can trust to serve his best interests in this situation. Henry anticipates his return as something that will bring him "comfort" in this delicate circumstance. Cranmer succeeds in proving the legitimacy of the case for divorce, to the point that other lords speak of his assistance. Suffolk tells Norfolk that Cranmer: "is returned in his opinions,

which / Have satisfied the King for his divorce, / Together with all famous colleges, / Almost, in Christendom" (3.2.64-67). He is so adept in supporting the king's case with opinions drawn from scripture and religious literature that he not only "satisfied the King for his divorce," but he also garners the concession of it from almost "all famous colleges…in Christendom," which requires sufficient supporting evidence. Cranmer must be a strong speaker and logician to accomplish this feat convincingly, so his elevation to archbishop shortly after that appears merited by skill along with the king's favor.

The archbishop also serves the king by presiding over Lady Anne's coronation after her secret marriage to Henry is announced. A gentleman tells of "When by the Archbishop of Canterbury / She had all the royal makings of a queen…laid nobly on her" (4.1.86-90) including the crown of Edward the Confessor, the rod, the bird of peace, and the other accoutrements of the ceremony. Cranmer, as religious leader, applies the sacred oil and lays "all the royal makings of a queen" on Anne, effectively transforms her from Lady Anne and creates her as queen. Cranmer sees to Henry's divorce, crowning his new wife, and baptizing his newly born child. He has active involvement in all of the major events happening at this time in Henry's life. This attention is no doubt the reason that Norfolk relates to Suffolk: "This same Cranmer's / A worthy fellow, and hath ta'en much pain / In the king's business" (3.2.71-73). It is clear how faithfully Cranmer serves the needs of his sovereign in personal and public matters, taking "much pain / In the king's business" by drawing the attention and comments of the attendant lords of the king. Cranmer's location in the king's favor is why Lovell warns Gardiner that challenging him is not in their best interest: "Th' Archbishop / Is the King's hand and tongue, and who

dare speak / One syllable against him?" (5.1.37-39). As "the King's hand and tongue," Cranmer sees that what the king wants or needs is put into effect and his opinions carry the full support and confidence of the English sovereign. The cumulative effect of all Cranmer does leads the king to make the ultimate acknowledgment of Cranmer's value to him before the Privy Council:

> My lords, respect him.
>
> Take him, and use him well: he's worthy of it.
>
> I will say thus much for him: if a prince
>
> May be beholding to a subject, I
>
> Am, for his love and service, so to him. (5.2.187-91)

Cranmer's "love and service" to his king is such that not only does Henry order the other lords to "respect him" and "use him well" because "he's worthy" of such treatment, but he openly admits that he "may be beholding" to him if that relationship is possible between a king and a subject. It is an extreme admission of debt for a king of believed absolute authority to make about a subject or servant, as it could be construed as a weakness. In giving Cranmer his signet ring and following through on the promise of his protection, however, the king gains experience in testing his roles of spiritual protector, authority-figure, decision-maker, and speaker as he displays his trust in a moral man.

The king uses the gesture of offering his ring to take on the role of protector for a transparently devout man woefully unprepared to face the stratagems of his earthly foes. While the archbishop can adeptly handle the thorny details of religious law and interpretation for his king, Henry finds he must elaborate on the necessity of having a

powerful political ally to escape the planned ruin Gardiner and the other lords have in store for him. It is only when the king exposes these dangers that Cranmer pleads: "God and your majesty / Protect mine innocence, or I fall into / The trap is laid for me" (5.1.140-43). While the Lord of Canterbury still relies on God first, he now recognizes his need for the king to "Protect mine innocence" in a world that does not always value what is right and good. The king delivers his ring to shield Cranmer, and Cranmer believes implicitly in the ring and the promise of support Henry attaches to it. Anne Shaver points out that, for Henry, "One of the lessons that shapes his view of responsibility is his new awareness of Cranmer's trust. He finds out then that he must *act* [sic] as God's agent on earth, and in rescuing the archbishop from his attackers, this is what he does" (14). The king's worst suspicions are realized when Gardiner and the other lords of the Privy Council proceed in their decided path to subjugate and discard his favorite before Cranmer is driven to invoke that ring's protection and Henry's intervention.

Henry discovers the necessity of his new role as he defends a religious leader of good character, one more focused on his duties than the importance of court politics. This is a significant shift from the king's experience with Cardinal Wolsey, a religious figure mired in political power struggles and more likely to pursue his own interests than the spiritual guidance of the people or their king. Cranmer is presented as ignorant of manipulation, which imparts the new responsibility of shielding this heavenly guide to the king. Edward Berry states: "The relationship between church and state is properly defined in the relationship between Henry and Cranmer—the king serving, literally, as

protector of the faith. The saintly Cranmer, a figure as innocent as Katherine and more patient, brings holiness to high office" (241). The king's new "relationship between church and state" he enacts with Archbishop Cranmer adequately repays his gift of power and protection with the act of bringing "holiness to high office" during and after his split with the pope and the catholic church. The king grows as a monarch when he preserves Cranmer's ability to serve as his spiritual leader and truth-teller.

In cultivating his relationship with a devout man of God, the king begins to exercise his right to wield royal authority and to influence the path of justice. The king reassures Cranmer: "Be of good cheer. / They shall no more prevail than we give way to" (5.1.140-43). He decides to draw the boundaries of power for his subjects, so he will restrain the lords of the Privy Council in their ability to "prevail" over the Lord of Canterbury any more "than [what] we give way to." He invokes the royal "we" in defining the weight of his power and what he will allow his lords to do to his favorite. This is why he can comfort Cranmer to "Be of good cheer" when the archbishop anticipates his trial; the king has the ability and intention to mitigate the deadly plans of Gardiner and his followers. Wolfgang G. Müller observes: "when he has liberated himself from the pernicious influence of the cardinal and accepted the Archbishop of Canterbury, Cranmer, as his counsellor, his majesty emerges in all its authority and splendor" (227). The king unfurls the "authority and splendor" of "his majesty" in his purpose of coming to Cranmer's aid. The grand weight of Henry's sovereign power hangs dormant during Wolsey's possession of the royal seal, and the king first truly dons

his authority when he gives his support and his ring to his new archbishop who faces ruin.

The King of England recognizes that he can use his might to determine what will be accepted as right in his kingdom, and he lends his strength to bolster the archbishop's deeds. Mark Rankin states: "Henry reinforces his right to define 'truth' through a direct assertion of the royal will when he assures Cranmer that '[t]hy truth and thy integrity is rooted / In us thy friend' (V.i.114-5). Henry makes good this assertion by giving Cranmer his signet ring and, on the following day, personally confounding the archbishop's enemies" (361). Therefore, the king asserts his "royal will" by determining that Cranmer's "truth" and "integrity" will stand if for no other reason than because the king is his "friend." The king's ring and appearance in the Privy Council halt the toppling of Cranmer's political standing when his own actions are not enough to support him.

The king steps forward as his own decision-maker due to his relationship with Cranmer, which is significant in the evolution of the king from his disastrous trust of Wolsey. Henry was undermined by a cardinal who claimed credit for the king's corrections of oppressive taxes, jealously guarded his political power, siphoned money for his personal use, and refused to part with the royal seal to anyone but the king after he was relieved of his position. Cranmer advises the king and makes changes, but he does so in the king's name, and for the king's comfort and aid. However, Henry must decide about his stance on Cranmer's examination by the Privy Council, and he makes his own determination about the heart and loyalty of his archbishop beforehand by entrusting his signet ring to Cranmer. Stuart M. Kurland notes: "After acquiescing in the Council's plan

to investigate despite his own feelings about his minister, Henry reserves the decision for himself—without the Council's knowledge—with the ring he gives Cranmer as a token. He thus renders the Council's deliberations meaningless, but by seeming to go along he wins political goodwill" (212). Henry gives the Privy Council the opportunity to carry out "deliberations" about what its members already have in mind for the archbishop so that he "wins political goodwill" for allowing it to take place. The king only finds that his decision is further justified by the Council's poor treatment of Cranmer, and sternly carries out his previous decision in favor of his archbishop upon Cranmer's presentation of the royal ring. The king, in giving his ring and verdict to his favorite in advance, departs from his previous reliance on the conclusions of others.

Henry also evolves as a speaker in determining policy and the importance of his word as law in handling the incident of Cranmer's examination by the Privy Council. Maurice Hunt relates: "If Cranmer's protestations fail, Henry assures his servant that the ring he gives him will bail him, directing his appeal from his accusers to the king himself. Essentially, as an expressive symbol, the ring stands for Henry's supreme verbal power. The king rigs proceedings to put language on trial" (237). Cranmer's opinions and statements are effective in the environment of academic and religious circles when he makes the case for the king's divorce, but his "protestations" of innocence and personal defense and his "appeal" to the better nature of the other lords fall against deaf ears in the political arena of the Privy Council. Hunt points out that: "Henry tells Cranmer that he underestimates the power of slanderous tongues, that he minimizes the 'ease' by which 'corrupt minds' can 'procure knaves as corrupt / To swear against you'" (237). The

archbishop's "verbal power" is limited in the territory of these lords and he is unpracticed in the political demagoguery they handle with ease. The king prepares his favorite for the "power of slanderous tongues" and his vulnerability to dishonest or misleading words that he does not have the power to disprove.

By giving Cranmer his royal ring, Henry provides his spiritual leader with the symbol of the king's word and access to the most powerful verbal tag team possible. The king has learned from his experience with Cardinal Wolsey, a master manipulator of words, and he is impervious to Gardiner's silver-tongued attempts to curtail his impending judgment:

> You were ever good at sudden commendations,
> Bishop of Winchester, but know I come not
> To hear such flattery now, and in my presence
> They are too thin and bare to hide offences.
> To me you cannot reach, you play the spaniel
> And think with wagging of your tongue to win me. (5.2.156-61)

Henry identifies Gardiner's "sudden commendations" and "flattery" for what it is, words "too thin and bare to hide offences" that the king has witnessed in his treatment of Cranmer. He dismisses the bishop's attempts at placating him as the actions of a "spaniel" in the "wagging of your tongue." The man who held verbal sway in the room has been demoted to the position of a dog by the king's pronouncement, and the king orders Gardiner and the other lords to respect Cranmer and be friends with him. All

capitulate to the power of the king's words and the authority that stands behind them, freeing Cranmer's words for his later oracle of Elizabeth's future reign.

In giving Cranmer his ring, his confidence, and his defense, the king recognizes that the archbishop's influence in his life allows him to trust this lord, so he strengthens the archbishop's bond with the royal family. The king immediately follows his rescue of Cranmer and his proclamation of the lord's worth by asking him to serve as the godfather to the king and queen's new daughter: "I have a suit which you must not deny me: / That is, a fair young maid that yet wants baptism. / You must be godfather and answer for her" (5.2.194-96). The king does not give Cranmer the option to decline this honor: he repeats the order that his archbishop "must not" refuse to baptize the child, and he "must be godfather" to the newest royal babe. Henry adds yet another important ceremony and service for the spiritual leader to preside over, and he increases the honor a hundredfold by insisting that Cranmer will be counted as an honorary part of the family. The king will have his trusted adviser as close to his family as possible, and he uses the joy of Cranmer's blessing on Elizabeth to determine that he has reached his zenith: "O lord Archbishop, / Thou has made me now a man" (5.4.62-63). It is Cranmer's words that the king uses to evaluate his life and look forward to when his time as king is past. The man that the king tests with the symbol of the royal name and power proves true, and his need propels the king to fulfill his sovereign potential.

In *All's Well That Ends Well* and *King Henry VIII*, Shakespeare illustrates how a king's gift of his royal ring symbolizes his protection and favor to its recipient as it also builds a beneficial relationship with a worthy subject. Lewis Hyde writes that, "It is the

cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection" (56). Each sovereign lends his support and defense by giving his royal ring to a subject who has completed great service. In return, each king creates a bond that ultimately results in the betterment of king and kingdom. Helena seeks to do service for the king with the clear goal of earning her desired reward, while Cranmer appears only to consider his service to the king as duty and honor, possibly for which he could store up a reward in heaven. Helena uses the king's ring to secure a new count's acceptance of his elders' advice and to establish the continuation of the French royal court, while Cranmer's reaction to his sovereign's gift confirms his goodness and allows Henry to inhabit his responsibilities as a monarch with confidence and authority. It is also significant that the king's ring gift and protection empower Cranmer to serve as prophet, delivering the vision of a grand future for king and country. In each case, Shakespeare shows us how giving a piece of personal ornamentation, the royal ring, as part of repaying services and showing favor creates a bond between sovereign and subject that works to the benefit of all.

CONCLUSION

Why examine Shakespeare's use of personal ornamentation in gift-giving? What does he do differently from other playwrights, and from his sources, in treating these gift-giving and ornamentation exchange moments? Shakespeare creates female agency and enables the characters' desire to create their own social identities through gifts of personal ornamentation. In these plays, women get to push against being given in marriage or chosen by men, using gifts to become active participants and to choose their relationships with marriage partners. In *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare makes Olivia an active wooer of Cesario with intelligent and thoughtful gifts instead of the woman in the source plays who merely falls in love with her wooer's messenger and hopes to marry him/her in place of the master. He recreates Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* as a leader who uses gifts to construct her chosen foundation for her marriage and her court at Belmont instead of a woman who entraps men and strips them of their wealth. In *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare has Imogen lead a prominent gift exchange with her soon-to-be exiled husband, and he fashions the gift of an inherited diamond ring from Imogen's late mother as a way for the princess to induct Posthumus into her royal family. He allows the Princess of France and her ladies of *Love's Labour's Lost* to use the men's courtship gifts to test their suitors, ultimately giving them the power to postpone their answers to the courtships until the men prove themselves worthy. The author uses gifts of personal ornamentation to give women characters freedom and choices in who they wed or not and how they choose to do so.

Shakespeare also uses gifts to help characters prove their worth and take their places as members of families. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare changes the ring Helena needs to obtain from her husband into a storied Rossillion family ring that has been handed down from father to son for six generations. He also makes her return of the ring a royal court affair before Bertram's mother, the members of the court, and the king, where she is recognized as a worthy wife for Bertram and contributor to the Rossillion family bloodline by all. The author also uses Imogen's gift of the inherited diamond ring in *Cymbeline* to show Posthumus's transition from the beginning of the play, when he does not believe himself worthy of the gift or Imogen's love due to Cymbeline's rejection, through five stages of character development. He ends this process of improvement with Iachimo offering to return the ring to a more forgiving and controlled Posthumus, Posthumus's reunion with his wife, and the king's acceptance of him as son-in-law. Shakespeare takes two orphan characters rejected by a member of their married families and uses family ring gifts to help them prove themselves and gain acceptance.

Shakespeare also uses gifts of personal ornamentation to show the benefits of sovereigns having relationships with worthy subjects, which can include better unity within the court and motivation for the sovereigns to become more effective and confident rulers. He adds the King of France's royal ring gift to Helena in *All's Well* and makes it a significant symbol of the markedly close bond the two have, complete with vows both of the king's protection and steadfastness by both parties. This ring gift and relationship are noticeable changes from the disdainful debt relationship between the king

and Helena's counterpart in Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, and they help bring about a bridge between the old generation of the French royal court and the younger members. Shakespeare also covers a historic moment during Henry VIII's reign when the king gives Archbishop Cranmer his royal ring to protect him from the political machinations of the Privy Council, but he uses the gift as a test between monarch and religious leader, breaking down the barriers between the two as much as may be acknowledged between sovereign and subject. In acknowledging and rewarding Cranmer's seemingly disinterested service, the king's gift of his ring and protection brings about positive changes in the king as a ruler and frees Cranmer to give an inspired prediction for Elizabeth's and England's future. Shakespeare uses royal ring gifts to show how these items can build fruitful relationships between sovereigns and worthy subjects.

Another significant way that Shakespeare uses gifts of social ornamentation to affect relationships is utilizing these items to enable social mobility. His characters tend to redefine themselves or choose an identity different from that assigned to them in a static social system. Helena of *All's Well* is the base-born daughter of a prominent physician, however legendary his ability, with no great riches. Yet Shakespeare has her successfully become a beloved member of the aristocracy, a countess, due to saving the king's life and to her intelligent handling of two ring gifts in meeting her husband's challenge. He actually changes Helena's wealth from her counterpart in the source plays, who is quite wealthy, to bring further disparity between the circumstances into which she is born and that which she attains through the king's favor and inherent worth. Posthumus of *Cymbeline* is from a line of warriors, but he is an orphan raised in the king's

household, not a member of the aristocracy. Shakespeare still has him marry a princess and gain the king's approval through his journey in becoming a more focused and forgiving person, the stages of which are delineated by his interactions, or lack thereof, with Imogen's inherited diamond ring gift.

The fictional world Shakespeare has created illuminates specific things differently from real life, like ideas of inherent worth. This leads to the fairy tale of social mobility, which contrasts greatly with the actual lack of availability of social mobility during the time period. The fictional qualities of these moments of gift exchange, these scenes are noticeable, with unmarried or newly married women having significant agency in a time when they were notably controlled by men's decisions, base-born men and women becoming members of the aristocracy or a royal family when social classes were fairly static, and kings protecting and having close relationships with low-born subjects when even churches taught the ingrained idea of merit based on class birth. Gifts of gemstones and jewelry would not realistically have been able to bring about these kinds of interactions and relationships in the lives of the people attending the plays, so Shakespeare creates these moments as escapes into fantasy. The treatment of ornament is made literary here by making these gift exchanges more dramatic, more powerful instances of demonstrating worth and relationship dynamics. Shakespeare shapes these moments into significant parts of these plays, often crafting the exchanges or the gifts into plot points or devices that drive the plays' dramatic structures. While gift exchanges were important in early modern England relationships, especially among the upper classes, they would not have the power to make a physician's daughter a countess and the

darling of a king or encourage a nobly born woman to woo the female messenger of a count.

A separate aspect of how Shakespeare writes these gift exchanges in his plays that should be examined is the context of these personal ornamentation as gifts in performance. Why does he choose to use these gift objects and not just words to accomplish his ends? Shakespeare utilizes gifts to tap into a socially acceptable form of interaction between different class members. Elizabeth I often gave gifts of jewelry that bore her image to those who did her service, and the lists of New Year's gift exchanges within her court are minutely documented. These types of gift exchanges allow Shakespeare to undermine the reality of the stasis in classes and the power of the male gender in a subtler fashion than writing character speeches espousing the value of inherent worth and equality. They do not openly challenge accepted class or social norms, but introduce the idea of precious gifts creating unexpected relationships. Shakespeare has the characters who are awarded power or higher stations due to these items handle their new powers with grace, and they often reinforce the respect due to family or court roles. Helena reforms Bertram to his proper place as son, count, courtier, and father as she becomes the mother of his child and retrieves his family ring; the Princess of France and her ladies only insist on evident proof of reform by their suitors to reconsider their suits instead of rejecting them completely.

Often audiences did not see the personal ornamentation items, at least not well enough for items to makes a significant visual or dramatic effect. It is the atmosphere and presentation in these scenes, these visual constructs, that make the exchange meaningful.

Shakespeare uses characters' reactions to do this: these objects change the nature of relationships. Olivia realizes she can use the ring on her finger to woo someone else, giving life to her newly realized desire, and eagerly sends it after Cesario with a carefully worded message. Cesario sees the ring and realizes a woman is wooing him/her through the gift, placing Cesario in the impossible situation of being unable to reveal his/her gender and love for Duke Orsino. Sebastian looks at the pearl Olivia gives him in the palm of his hand, examining its weight and iridescence in the light outside of Olivia's home, and realizes his life has just changed forever. Shakespeare, with the words in his plays and character reactions to these objects, heightens the dramatic tension in his text to show the social mobility and construction of identity is possible with these objects. This is a pattern, a fictional, dramatic pattern in these plays that I noticed and that truly highlight the moments of social identity and change.

The larger implications of my findings are that social mobility is newly available, and Shakespeare's plays register that. Noble families were beginning to intermarry with families that could give beautiful and valuable gifts. Elizabeth I, and James even more so, were giving titles to those who earned respect through exemplary service or to those who could give handsomely to the crown. The King of France in *All's Well* mentions that he can create the wealth and honor that Helena needs to make her of more equal footing with Bertram, and his royal ring gift and vow of protection show a respect for her intelligence, bravery, and beauty. Shakespeare taps into the change that he sees, encouraging the different classes to build relationships with those of excellent abilities and to give and to appreciate precious gifts of beauty.

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