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## **Homosocial, Homoerotic, Bisexual, and Androgynous Bonds in Shakespeare's Comedies**

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Homosocial, Homoerotic, Bisexual, and Androgynous Bonds in Shakespeare's  
Comedies

by

Klarisa Sokolovic-Cizmek

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of English  
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To Tvrtko

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**ABSTRACT**

In the thesis I inquire into the nature of the same-sex bonds in Shakespeare's comedies. I discuss seven pairs of characters and demonstrate how in his comedies, Shakespeare first created homosocial relationships, later homoerotic relationships, then bisexual relationships, and, finally, a couple that may be described as androgynous. I demonstrate that in the early comedies the relationships are primarily homosocial and serve the purpose of self-realization. The self-realization includes reaching of a balance between a "feminine," and a "masculine" self, with the goal of becoming a mature, androgynous human being. Although there are some homoerotic undercurrents in both the male and female relationships created during this period, I do not believe that these relationships are intended to represent a permanent sexual orientation. I see them as a part of the pattern that occurs in most of the plays, which possibly reflects Shakespeare's concept of the process of maturing into an adult who is ready to accept the bonds of marriage.

All of Shakespeare's comedies contain homosocial relationships, sometimes with homoerotic undercurrents. The primary purpose of these relationships is the realization

of the self. A young person enters into a relationship with another young person, a coeval, who resembles him/herself in numerous ways. They spend a lot of time together, involved in activities that are of interest to both of them. They see themselves in their friend. They identify not only with the persona, but also with the physique of the friend. Therefore, the (homo)erotic undercurrents that are present in some of the relationships are in fact the realization of the characters' own eroticism and sexuality and are therefore not directed at the other character with the aim of gratification of sexual desire. The relationships with (homo)erotic undercurrents are merely a stage in the development of the self, and do not constitute a permanent sexual orientation. The final stage in the above pattern is marriage. Once the character has realized him/herself, (s)he is ready to marry.

The homoerotic undercurrents begin to emerge in 1598, and in 1599 Shakespeare creates Antonio and Sebastian as his first homoerotic couple. In the same play appear the first three bisexual characters: Olivia, Orsino, and Sebastian. Again, since the three characters reach self-realization and marry at the play's end, the issue of bisexuality can be interpreted either as a lifestyle, or as a stepping stone in one's development toward adulthood and marriage. Another possibility is that the occurrence of bisexuality and the androgynous twins Viola and Sebastian serve to open up space for an *inward* marriage. In other words, the twins represent the climax of the pattern of self-realization through friends and lover, and add the notion that the better we know ourselves, the more we are aware of our androgyny.

In the pattern that I trace through the four comedies, I demonstrate how Shakespeare uses homosocial, homoerotic, and bisexual relationships as means of learning about the true self, the self which reaches beyond the boundaries of gender, into—androgyny.

## Chapter One

### Prologue

In this thesis I will inquire into the nature of the same-sex bonds in Shakespeare's comedies. I will discuss seven pairs of characters and demonstrate how in his comedies, Shakespeare first created homosocial relationships, later homoerotic relationships, then bisexual relationships, and, finally, a couple that may be described as androgynous. In this context, I am defining the "homosocial" relationships as single-sex bonding without presence of sexual desire, "homoerotic"<sup>1</sup> relationships as same-sex affiliations based on love and physical desire, and a "bisexual" person as one who experiences love and physical desire oriented toward both sexes. Finally, an "androgynous couple" would consist of two individuals who possess both "masculine" and "feminine" psychological qualities, defined as follows: "[...] The masculine [is associated] with active, instrumental traits—leadership, courage, resolution—while [...] the feminine [is associated] with passive, receptive qualities—obedience, patience, compassion" (Deats 14).

In the Western culture, "masculine" traits have traditionally been considered superior to "feminine" ones. The origin of this prejudice probably derives from Plato's

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<sup>1</sup> The reason why I use "homoerotic" instead of "homosexual" are the negative connotations implying medical disorder ascribed to the latter term, as outlined in Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.

division of people (souls) into five types. In the division Plato champions the philosophical soul in which *reason* (one of the three parts of the soul) rules over spirit and *desire*. On the other hand, the lowest, tyrannical soul is driven primarily by *desire*, while *reason* traipses last, after spirit. If we read the following lines in light of the above, “[...] the masculine personality has traditionally been conceived as rational and logical, [and] the feminine as passionate and intuitive,” it is easy to see why the former has usually been considered superior to the latter (Deats 14). In my disagreement with the bisection of the above *human* qualities into “masculine” and “feminine” ones, throughout this text, I have placed quotation marks around them to indicate that they are “under erasure” (Derrida qtd. in Deats 227). In other words, the above terms, like the adjectives “male” and “female,” are necessary for communication (at least today when I am writing this), but the quotation marks will indicate that they are “misleading and inaccurate,” and therefore “under erasure” (Derrida, Deats 227).

Having defined my terminology, in the following discussion, I will demonstrate that in the comedies dating from 1594 and 1596, the relationships are primarily homosocial and serve the purpose of self-realization. The self-realization includes reaching of a balance between a “feminine,” and a “masculine” self, with the goal of becoming a mature, androgynous human being. Although there are some homoerotic undercurrents in both the male and female relationships created during this period, I do not believe that these relationships are intended to represent a permanent sexual orientation. I see them as a part of the pattern that occurs in most of the plays, which possibly reflects Shakespeare’s concept of the process of maturing into an adult who is ready to accept the bonds of marriage.

All of Shakespeare’s comedies contain homosocial relationships, sometimes with homoerotic undercurrents. The primary purpose of these relationships is the realization

of the self. A young person enters into a relationship with another young person, a coeval, who resembles him/herself in numerous ways. They spend a lot of time together, involved in activities that are of interest to both of them. The joy that they derive from their relationship is the joy of the realization of the self. They see themselves in their friend. They identify not only with the persona, but also with the physique of the friend. The friend serves as a mirror through which they realize themselves. Therefore, I believe that the (homo)erotic undercurrents that are present in some of the relationships are in fact the realization of the characters' own eroticism and sexuality and are therefore not directed at the other character with the aim of gratification of sexual desire. The relationships with (homo)erotic undercurrents are merely a stage in the development of the self, and do not constitute a permanent sexual orientation. The characters are not homosexual; they are merely discovering their sexuality. The final stage in the above pattern is marriage. Once the character has realized him/herself, (s)he is ready to marry.

During the period 1598-1601 the pattern changes somewhat, but it is still present. The homoerotic undercurrents begin to emerge in 1598, and in 1599 Shakespeare creates Antonio and Sebastian as his first homoerotic couple. In the same play appear the first three bisexual characters: Olivia, Orsino, and Sebastian. Again, since the three characters reach self-realization and marry at the play's end, the issue of bisexuality can be interpreted either as a lifestyle, or as a stepping stone in one's development toward adulthood and marriage. Another possibility is that the occurrence of bisexuality and the androgynous twins Viola and Sebastian serve to open up space for an *inward* marriage. In other words, the twins represent the climax of the pattern of self-realization through friends and lover, and add the notion that the better we know ourselves, the more we are aware of our androgyny.

In the pattern that I am tracing through the four comedies, I demonstrate how

Shakespeare uses homosocial, homoerotic, and bisexual relationships as means of learning about the true self, the self which reaches beyond the boundaries of gender, into—androgyny.

## 1.1 Homosocial and Homoerotic Liaisons in the Early Modern Period

In 1533 English parliament passed the statute which “designated sodomy to be a felony with the punishment of forfeiture of property and death” (Mager 142). The statute was in effect for the following three hundred years, except during the brief reign of Mary I. From the socio-linguistic point of view, it is important to note that today’s meaning of “sodomy” as “copulation with a member of the same sex [...] or, noncoital and especially anal or oral copulation with a member of the opposite sex” is similar to the early modern meaning, yet not quite the same (*Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*, hereafter referred to as MWOD). In Renaissance England, apart from today’s MWOD meaning, “sodomy” stood for “bestiality, [...] both priestly celibacy and clerical concubine-keeping, an adult man’s sexual abuse of a young girl, sexual intercourse between Christians and Jews, masturbation, coitus interruptus, birth control, pederasty, and luxurious consumption” (Hunt 360). Furthermore, sodomy was sometimes associated with heresy; “the Protestant party was doing no more than adapting to its own use the identification of heresy with sodomy that the Catholic Church had itself constructed [...]” during the papal inquisition (Bray 19).

I shall try and explain why “sodomy” in early modern discourse had such broad and confusing connotations by discussing the socio-historical background of the term. Significantly, the OED lists the first occurrence of the term “sodomy” as 1297. Furthermore, Lawrence Stone states that “the sixteenth century inherited from the medieval church a strong hostility to homosexuality, which over time, particularly because of the affair of the Templars and the Albigensian crusade, had become closely associated in official thinking with religious heresy.” Moreover, Alan Bray, as well as

Stone, points out that in early modern parlance homosexuality was usually related to sorcery and Popery (21). This odd trio can be better comprehended when viewed in the context of historical events of the Middle Ages and earlier times. In his *Essays on the Historical Roots of Homophobia from Ancient Israel to the End of the Middle Ages* Rictor Norton discusses Manichaeic beliefs and practices, and explains that they exclude some Christian rituals and instead include homosexuality and some other practices that were later related to witchcraft and “vigorously attacked by the Christian church” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, hereafter referred to as *EB*). Albigensians and Cathars, among other Manichean orders, practiced Manichean doctrine, making them heretics in the eyes of the Christian church. According to Norton, the heretics gained popularity and wealth, thus becoming a threat to the church, and in “1209 Pope Innocent authorized the Crusade against the Albigensians in France.” Besides relating Albigensians and Cathars to homosexual practices and non-Christian beliefs, Norton proceeds to associate the Knights Templars (whose order was established in 1118) to the sodomitical and heretical practices they embraced while intermingling with other cultures in the East, particularly with Manichees in Persia. The Knights, like the Albigensians and Cathars, became a powerful and wealthy threat to the Church, so in 1307 “Pope Clement V persuaded King Philip le Bel to issue an arrest order, accusing the Knights Templars of sodomy, heresy, general abominations and criminal acts” (Norton).

Norton’s essay sheds light on the two above mentioned issues. The first of these is the multivalence of the early modern term “sodomy,” which encompassed in a very vague way all the abhorred practices of the twelfth and thirteen century heretics—Albigensians, Cathars and Templars; the second issue is the use of sodomy and heresy charges in power struggles. Initially the struggle was between the Roman Catholic

church and the increasingly powerful Albigensians and Templars, and later between the Roman Catholic church and the Protestants, following Henry VIII's separation. "Making sodomy, along with sorcery and heresy, a felony under the civil law [gave] Henry's agents the legal power they needed to make answerless accusations during the [...] visitation of the [Catholic] monasteries" (Smith 44). Following the "answerless accusations" Henry VIII was able to seize the Catholic estates in England, in this way further diminishing papal, and increasing his own authority. According to Bray, this practice became quite widespread even on lower levels of the society where "an allegation of homosexuality whether true or not was a convenient means of carrying out a malicious design, against the humble and the powerful alike" (73). For example, Christopher Marlowe was one of the victims of "heresy, homosexuality, and treason" charges (Bray 20). The reason why *treason* was added to the all-encompassing term "sodomy," at this time, was that since the reign of Henry VIII, the English sovereign had been recognized as head of the church, thus to follow a different religion— such as Socinianism, or a "belief in God and adherence to the Christian Scriptures but denying the divinity of Christ and consequently denying the Trinity," as in Marlowe's case— constituted betrayal not only of God, but also of the sovereign (EB).

Having discussed the all-encompassing early modern term "sodomy" and its (ab)use, I shall now discuss several other popular beliefs related to the issue of homoeroticism. The average Elizabethan probably had an idea of the Great Chain of Being, and, of course, sodomites had no place in the Chain. Having no place in the Chain was almost apocalyptic to an Elizabethan and, as a result, the sodomite became Mr./Ms. Everyman's enemy. (S)he was responsible for dissolution of the divinely-ordained universal order, even though by playing the public enemy (s)he actually incited bonding within the society, thus *reinforcing* the social order. The idea that sodomites

were responsible for a possible destruction of the whole society is also reflected in the frequent relation of homosexuals to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. Therefore, the general attitude towards sodomites was hatred and it is “difficult to exaggerate the fear and loathing of homosexuality to be read in the literature of the time” (Bray 62). Recalling that popular literature associated homoeroticism with “revulsion, violent hostility [for] the loathsome and evil thing” and that to the Elizabethans it was everything that was “abhorred, polluted and unclean...all that is beastly and obscene,” one would think that the Elizabethan society would not tolerate anything remotely resembling homoeroticism, and yet, at least according to Bray and other scholars, homoerotic practice was quite widespread in the early modern period among both men and women (Bray 58-62). Moreover, Bruce R. Smith claims that there is a consensus among social historians “that age-graded sexual relations—men taking their pleasure with younger boys—characterized Renaissance Europe just as it had fifth-century Athens” (76). Finally, since both men and women of the early modern period engaged in homoerotic relationships, it is reasonable to assume that bisexuality occurred as well. According to Harriette Andreadis, women who engaged in homoeroticism were usually members of the higher classes and since ninety-five percent of all of them eventually married, it allowed for occurrences of bisexuality (Andreadis 245, Stone 38).

The non-sequitur relationship of the ominous official law and the hateful popular attitude with the enforcement of the same law, as well as the actual sexual practice, is indeed puzzling. Alan Bray explores this discrepancy in three forms of institutionalized early modern homoerotic practice: in brothels, educational institutions, and households, and describes how homoerotic activity was omnipresent and unpunished!

The first of the institutionalized modes of homoeroticism was in molly houses where male prostitutes, the mollies, served male clients (DiGangi 7). Even though some

critics such as Lawrence Stone and Sara Munson Deats place the first occurrence of molly houses in the eighteenth century, others, such as Bray, record their existence as early as 1589 and 1649 (Stone 337, Deats 84, Bray 53). Because of this chronological discrepancy, I shall proceed without further examination of the molly houses.

Bray relates the homoerotic discourse in Elizabethan households to common social practices. Namely, Keith Wrightson proves statistically that early modern men married for the first time at the age of twenty-eight, and women at the age of twenty-five, which was very late considering the life expectancy of only thirty to forty years (Stone 50-5). Both men and women married late because in England, unlike in some contemporary European societies, it was uncommon for a newlywed couple to live with either one's parents (Wrightson 69). Therefore, with some variation related to the social class, most young people of both sexes left parental homes to enter either service or boarding schools in their early teens (Stone 84). In the new environment, be it household or educational institution, homoerotic liaisons were very common, as were heteroerotic ones, for there was little adult supervision (Wrightson 74), but, according to Bray's research of early modern court records, judges were more concerned with punishment of parents of illegitimate children than with homosexual transgressors. The reason was practical: the illegitimate children would be the responsibility of the community and thus endanger the well-being of the society. Therefore, given that the age of marriage was so late, some servants chose homoerotic practice as a sexual outlet until they could afford to marry (Bray 47). In this sense, homoeroticism functioned as a stabilizing mechanism in the society: there were no illegitimate children to burden the society and young people had an outlet for their sexual desire (78). Another occurrence of homoeroticism in a household was that between a master and his servant(s). Sometimes the servants participated voluntarily, other times they did not, but, in either case, this practice was

punished only in cases when it involved a scandal, violence, or when an “illegitimate child was produced” (50). In other words, despite the fact that officially homosexuality was a felony punishable by death, in practice it was punished only if it threatened social order, as in the cases of the Earl of Castlehaven, and (a different case) of Francis Bacon (49).

Apart from becoming apprentices and co-habiting with their new masters, the early modern teenagers from higher social ranks moved from their parents’ home to an educational institution, and there “[...] homosexuality was institutionalized not only at the universities but also in grammar schools and even in village schools” (52). Occasionally there was a small scandal and the headmasters or teachers would be put on trial following child molestation charges, but they were usually not punished and they were allowed to continue working without any damage to their careers.

From the twenty-first century viewpoint it seems really odd that a society that expressed such deep hatred for homoeroticism tried a servant for rape of another boy-servant, only to have them continue sharing the bed afterwards (sharing a bed was a common practice, but...)! Similarly, an Eton headmaster and child-molester was also tried, only to be allowed to continue in the same function after the trial (53)! Evidently, the hiatus between the official law and popular attitude, *and* the actual practice was enormous. I have already discussed homoeroticism as a stabilizing mechanism in the society in which marriages took place late in life, and now I shall discuss another possible explanation of why sexual transgressions were overlooked.

Lawrence Stone’s close study of the transitions that took place in early modern society includes an analysis of the Elizabethan perception of the *self* as an individual, as opposed to the *collective self* of the Middle Ages (150). However, even though the changes took place in the early modern period, they may not have yet been fully

incorporated into the Elizabethan consciousness. Therefore, one could attribute the early modern inability to react to sexual transgressions to a lack of awareness. In her study of *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, Deats also explores the concept of the self in the early modern period, stating that “some philosophers and moralists conceived of the self as stable and autonomous; others, forecasting Lacan, judged it plastic and shifting [...]” (88). Similarly, [or even consequently], boundaries of sex and boundaries of gender were equally blurred, thus rendering transgressions difficult to define (88). For example, in his essay “Erasmus’s ‘Tigress’: The Language of Friendship, Pleasure, and the Renaissance Letter,” Forrest Tyler Stevens discusses Elizabethan epistolary conventions between same-sex correspondents that today seem “compromisingly passionate,” yet, at the time, were considered “precisely proper,” *despite* the official condemnation of homoeroticism (128). In addition, in *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare’s England*, Smith discusses the use of Latin in Renaissance education and claims that it was the “language of sexual knowledge” that served, eventually, as a vehicle of “homosexual initiation into manhood” (83, 115).

So whether the reason was preservation of the social order, or the blurred or dispersed idea of the self, evidently male homoeroticism was present in the early modern period and it was often ignored.

Concerning the homoerotic liaisons between women of the same period, Andreadis discusses numerous occurrences of such behavior in her article, “The Erotics of Female Friendship in Early Modern England” (245). According to Andreadis, female homoeroticism existed in the Renaissance, but it was regarded differently from male homoeroticism, owing to the patriarchal nature of the society. “In the sixteenth century, same-sex female erotic behavior was often treated misogynistically, but also with relative matter-of-factness or as a curiosity in texts that were accessible to largely male

readership” (243). Thomas Laqueur and Valerie Traub, on the contrary, believe that the “tribade (*fricatrice*), [the] one who illicitly assumed the active role [...] stood accused as a woman who had violated the law of gender by playing the man’s part during the intercourse” (Laqueur 136, Traub 69). Considering the confusing context of male homoeroticism in the early modern period, it does not come as a surprise that the attitudes towards female homoeroticism are equally controversial. Interestingly, the same kind of stigma as that attached to the tribade was apparently attached to the catamite, i.e. the passive member in the male homoerotic liaison, who was often held in contempt. When discussing the contempt for a catamite in the Hellenistic society, Michel Foucault related it to the fear of “[...] overturning the social hierarchy,” i.e. equaling oneself with a slave, servant, or a woman (19). Therefore, I assume that the contempt for a catamite in Elizabethan society stems from the same root: the *lowering* of a man to the position of a woman who was situated below him on the Great Chain of Being. Therefore, I conclude that the main issue, in the case of both male *and* female homoeroticism, was preservation of the social order. In other words, the transgression was not necessarily related to the homosexual practice itself, but to the violation of the established gender order.

Therefore, it seems that if a person engaged in homoerotic practice in the early modern period, as long as (s)he observed the patriarchal mores, and did not cause too great a scandal, “homosexual behavior was rarely recognized as [...] sin [...], and thus rarely persecuted” (DiGangi 7). A good example of this theory would be James VI who successfully divorced his “body politic” from his “temporal body” in order to fulfill his royal duty and produce not one, but seven heirs, while, at the same time, satisfying his personal erotic preferences (Bredbeck 52). For example, according to the Official Web Site of the British Monarchy, initially “[James] married Anne of Denmark. Happy together

at first they had three sons and four daughters, but gradually drifted apart.” Smith argues that they drifted apart because of the king’s relationships with Robert Carr and George Villiers, one a page, the other a royal cupbearer, both later raised to the aristocracy. Furthermore, King Philip le Bel, the same monarch who supported Pope Clement V in persecution of the Knights Templars as sodomites, “was homosexual, but he stood to gain much wealth by outlawing the ‘heretics’” (Norton). Even though Philip II may have had in mind preservation of order and benefit of the state, and thus his decision appears almost Machiavellian, his conduct also seems to comply with the early modern treatment of homoeroticism. He divided himself into two bodies, the politic and the temporal, and without causing a scandal, perhaps with the benefit of the state in mind, he proceeded about his business (Bredbeck 52). Finally, as I have discussed above, homosexual behavior was frequently not recognized because the borders between homosocial and homoerotic liaisons were blurred. Having examined the background of these “blurred boundaries,” I shall now explore these “gray areas” in four of Shakespeare’s comedies.

**Chapter Two**  
**Homosocial, Homoerotic, Bisexual, and Androgynous Bonds in**  
**Shakespeare's Comedies**

**2.1 Hermia and Helena (Circa 1594-1595)**

Is all the counsel that we two have shared,  
The sister's vows, the hours that we have spent,  
When we have chid the hasty-footed time  
For parting us – O, is all forgot?  
All school days friendship, childhood innocence?  
We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,  
Have with our needles created both one flower,  
Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,  
Both warbling of one song, both one key;  
As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds,  
Had been incorporate. So we grew together,  
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,  
But yet an union in partition,  
Two lovely berries molded on one stem;  
So, with two seeming bodies, but one heart;

Two of the first, like coats in heraldry,  
Due but to one, and crowned with one crest.  
And will you rend our ancient love asunder,  
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?  
Is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly.  
Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it,  
Though I alone do feel the injury. (*MND* 3.2.198-219)

According to Jill Ehnenn (333) and Jessica Tvordi (117), this extract is an allusion to the homoerotic bond between Hermia and Helena in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I agree that "the double cherry, seeming parted," as well as the red color and succulent texture of the fruit, evoke erotic, although not necessarily homoerotic, associations. Instead, I would like to stress the idea of friendship, female allegiance, and oneness that is also evident in this passage, and, in my opinion, more important. Helena describes the conversations and the vows that she and Hermia shared and the time that is flying by while they are enjoying the days of friendship and childhood innocence. They spent so much time together and shared so many experiences that they virtually became one person, one soul, or the mirrored image of the other person. To borrow a description from Lauren Mills, Hermia is to Helena "[a] friend with whom [she] share[s] [her] feelings, prayers, dreams, bed, board, and books [and is], though in another body, the counterpart of [her] soul. In the language of the time, to have such a friend [is] to be 'one soul in bodies twain'" (Mills qtd. in Stevens 128). Similarly, in Helena's words, they are "a double cherry [...] with two seeming bodies, but one heart." Therefore, even though the image of a cherry invites erotic, but *not necessarily* homoerotic connotations, I believe it is used to underscore their friendship and oneness. Moreover, Shakespeare introduces the symbol of the cherry

after the discussion of friendship, and childhood innocence, and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a cherry could also represent virginity, or—young girls. Finally, in line 216, Helena clearly seeks female allegiance, without homoerotic undertones, in contrast to Hermia's "joining with men." This image of sisterhood and innocence is further stressed in the following line which once again evokes pure images of maidenly friendship: "[It] is not friendly, 'tis not maidenly" (217). Helena and Hermia are two young girls engaged in a homosocial relationship that serves the purpose of self-realization. They are each-other's mirror and through the other they become aware of themselves and their sexuality. In fact, the following lines suggest that with each other's help they have completed the journey through childhood, and are now ready to bid farewell to one stage of their lives, and begin a new one:

And in the wood, where often you and I  
Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,  
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,  
There my Lysander and myself shall meet,  
And thence from Athens turn away our eyes  
To seek new friends and stranger companies.  
Farewell, sweet playfellow. (*MND* 1.1.214-20)

In other words, Hermia is saying goodbye to her childhood, and her "playfellow" Helena, who is from now on going to be replaced with Lysander and adolescent love. Until now, Helena has been Hermia's confidante (line 216), but, in the future Lysander is going to be the person closest to Hermia's heart.

The above lines serve to underscore not only a part of the pattern that I am tracing in the four comedies, but they also open up space for discussion of an important segment of that pattern. As I have explained in greater detail in the Prologue, the pattern

includes a process of coming of age with the aid of a friend, realization of the self, courtship with a new friend/partner, and marriage. The aspect that I wish to discuss now occurs early in the pattern, and it is related to the immaturity of lovers that is reflected in childish manifestation of love, and that can be further traced to an imbalance between “masculine” and “feminine” principles. At this point I shall discuss only the couples from *A Midsummer Nighth's Dream*, but I will refer to this issue when considering the other couples in the following sections. Demetrius and Hermia, Lysander and Helena, Titania and Bottom are all at some point infatuated with the wrong person, and, in most cases, the more they are rejected, the more they pursue the object of their love. The fact that their love, or infatuation, appears and disappears, i.e. shifts to another person in an instant, indicates that it is not deeply rooted; instead, it is impulsive, transitory, and—immature.

One of the characteristics of immature love is being in love with appearances, instead of the person. Most of us went through a stage in our adolescence when our physical appearance had to meet certain standards, because they indicated who we “really” were. Similarly, we were only amorously interested in people whose appearances met *our* standards. Often we were not secure enough with ourselves to ignore somebody's clothes and the image (or the lack of it), and accept the person for him or herself. Instead, very often we would follow our friends' lead (for young people tend to go about their business in groups, probably because it makes them feel more secure) and fall in love with the popular person. Of course, the popular people were usually in a minority and in demand, and thus we could not always have whom we wanted, i.e. we were rejected. Instead of being reasonable and accepting the situation, we became spiteful and we desired these popular icons even more *because* we were rejected. When this happened, we were ruled by our emotions instead of reason.

However, in order to rediscover our androgynous state, i.e. a state of balance between the two, we had to patiently endure our journey through the kingdom of “feminine” principles, governed by emotion, and the kingdom of “masculine” principles, governed by reason. At the end of the journey, when we became acquainted with both sides of our persona, we reached maturity. This (re-)connection with our complete self is ideally symbolized through marriage, as indeed happens in the cases of the young people discussed in this thesis (Kimbrough 54). Coming back to the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I claim that they fall in love with the appearances because of the use of the magic potion (again something from the “feminine” realm). The potion impairs their vision and reason, and they perceive appearances as reality. Moreover, the potion blows their emotions out of proportion. Once they become *charmed*, they become blind to reason, and begin acting completely irrationally. They follow their heart while doggedly pursuing the object of their love. In another words, the use of potion causes an extreme imbalance between emotion and reason, in favor of emotion. Significantly, the enchantment and the infatuation begin when Titania refuses to give the changeling boy to Oberon. In other words, while Titania, representing the “feminine” principles, possesses the boy, the whole forest is overpowered by emotions. Eventually, Oberon takes the boy, and the king and the queen are reconciled, i.e. the “masculine” and the “feminine” principles are in balance again. But while the “feminine” principles still rule, the blindness to facts is most obvious, and most ridiculed in case of Titania and Bottom. Despite wearing an ass's head, and being quite a fool in the first place, Bottom is still perceived as both handsome and intelligent by the infatuated Titania. The line “Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful” (3.1.142) provides the climax of Shakespeare's good-natured ridicule of adolescent love.

Now I would like to return to Hermia's statement that she is ready to begin the journey into the kingdom of emotion: "[...] from Athens turn our eyes / To seek new friends and stranger companies. / Farewell, sweet playfellow" (*MND* 1.1.218-20). Having completed the journey through childhood, and having bid farewell to her "sweet playfellow," she is now going to look away from Athens. Hermia's looking away from Athens is very symbolic when we take into consideration that apart from being "the goddess of war, handicraft, and wisdom, and patroness of Athens" (*EB*), Athena is not even born of a woman, but springs as a fully armed adult from the head of Zeus. In other words, Athena is the embodiment of pure reason, or the "masculine" principle. By looking away from Athens, Hermia is not signaling that she has mastered the faculty of reason, for that will not happen until the end of the play when she returns to Athens with her partner; instead, she is merely announcing the beginning of her journey into the kingdom of emotion, the realm of "feminine" principles, where she shall seek "new friends" in whose company she shall become acquainted with her "feminine" self.

The last point I wish to address before proceeding to the next play is Titania's and Oberon's heterosexual relationship. Even though they both live in the forest, the realm of the "feminine," they still represent the "feminine," and "masculine" principles. I could say that Oberon's masculinity is somewhat undermined by the fact that he is the King of *Fairies*, but since the queen of the other, "male" world, Athens, is somewhat "masculine" (Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons) the world, on the whole, is in androgynous balance... ..Until the royalty begins to fight. In the "masculine" world, the king and the queen wage a bloody battle (1.1.16-17), just as men should, while in the realm of the "feminine" the opponents use trickery and magic, as is suitable to women. Still, while Oberon and Titania fight over the changeling boy (whose name suggests the allegedly changeable "female" nature, also reflected in the changeable feelings of the

lovers in the forest), a “progeny of evils comes from [their] debate” (2.1.115). There are natural disasters and various diseases abound (2.1.82-117). However, once Titania and Oberon are reconciled at the end of the play, harmony is restored, and all nature sings and dances, while they “Hand in hand, with fairy grace / [sing], and bless this place” (5.1.394-5). Similarly, the rulers of “masculine” Athens, she-warrior Hippolyta and Theseus, seem to have also become reconciled at the end of the play. At the beginning of the play Theseus mentions winning her love in a bloody battle (1.1.16-17), and asks her to cheer up (1.1.122), but at the end of the play the proud Amazon seems to have become reconciled with her new station since she is commenting on the tradesmen’s play just like everybody else. As per the young lovers, they too have found their stability. They have journeyed through their childhood; they became acquainted with their “feminine” selves in the forest; and by returning to Athens and accepting Theseus’s rule they have become reconciled with the “masculine” principle. Significantly, the two worlds have also become more androgynous: while patriarchy seemingly wins in the “feminine” world of the forest because Oberon eventually snatches the changeling boy, in “masculine” Athens Theseus abrogates his own cruel law, thus demonstrating his newly acquired “feminine” quality—mercy. Finally, the newly matured, well-balanced, androgynous selves are being underscored by the unity of marriage (Kimbrough 54).

Thus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* Shakespeare primarily explores two types of interpersonal relationships: homosocial bonding between women and heterosexual liaisons between men and women, with perhaps some subtle foreshadowing of the homoerotic relationships between women that he will develop in later comedies.

## 2.2 Antonio and Bassanio (Circa 1596-1597)

The first allusion to homoerotic love between Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* occurs at the very beginning of the play: Antonio is (mysteriously) melancholy. “In sooth, I know not why I am so sad. / It wearies me, you say it wearies you” (MV 1.1.1-6). Antonio knows that Bassanio is looking for a wife and his sadness could, therefore, be attributed to his homoerotic feelings for his friend. However, if one were to apply the pattern shown in the relationship of Hermia and Helena, one could say that the two “[...] male protagonists [have found] their identities, not in romantic love or in philosophical ideals, but in their relationships with each other” (Smith 57). It appears that the two friends have spent a lot of time together, mirroring each other, learning from one another. Now, their lives are about to change drastically; they are going to have much less time for male bonding, and it seems that Antonio is not ready for the change. He is supportive of his friend, but he does feel a little bit left out, since he is left behind. However, he probably realizes that the best way to manifest his friendship is to remain supportive, and to help Bassanio move on to the next stage in *his* life—the marriage. Having all this in mind, I maintain that Antonio’s feelings are probably those of a friend, not a lover.

The next cause for suspicion regarding the nature of Antonio’s and Bassanio’s relationship are the terms “love” and “lover,” which are frequently used by Antonio in reference to Bassanio. Of course, today when a man says to another man that he loves him, it is reasonable to assume that they are engaged in a homoerotic relationship. Therefore, when Antonio asks Bassanio to give Portia’s ring to Balthasar for *his love*, one has to suppose that their relationship is not homosocial, but homoerotic. Still, I

would like to point out several reasons why one should not necessarily think so. First, “[t]he word ‘lover’ as ‘friend,’ without erotic connotation, was quite common” in early modern English (Pequigney 211). Moreover, Smith relies on Aristotle when analyzing the above terms. He concludes that “[s]ixteenth-century moral philosophy would suggest Aristotle’s [...] comparison of species to species, the appropriation of the name of one thing (erotic desire) for another thing (male bonding)—two distinct species of emotions within the genus of human affections” (55). In Smith’s opinion, Shakespeare fuses the two highly charged feelings into one in order to make the audience aware of the strength of the friendship. Furthermore, there were other “Renaissance writers [who] used erotic images to describe male friendship [...] only because they wanted an especially powerful metaphor” (Smith 54). Second, I would like to comment on a phrase that is exchanged between friends in Italy (Antonio and Bassanio are Italians, living in Venice), that does not have any homoerotic connotations. The phrase is “lo ti voglio bene” and it translates into English as “I love you.” Third, there are cultural differences between Italians, Americans, and (for the sake of the argument) Arabs, and there are behaviors that are socially acceptable in each society, while being unusual in the other: Italian men kiss each other when they meet, Americans hug, Arab men hold hands while they walk in the street. All of these behaviors could be seen as homoerotic in the other two societies, but in the one in which they occur, they are clearly not. Accordingly, all the alleged occurrences of Antonio’s homoerotic love for Bassanio could be disregarded. Therefore, at the beginning of the play Antonio could be simply worried about his cargo and, at the same time, he could be sad because his best friend is considering marriage and he will have less time to spend with Antonio.

Yet, the following lines offer another argument in favor of homoeroticism in this relationship, as Antonio is going to sacrifice himself for his “lover”:

Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well!  
Grieve not that I am fall'n to this for you,  
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind  
Than is her custom. It is still her use  
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth  
To view the hollow eye and wrinkled brow  
An age of poverty; from which ling'ring penance  
Of such misery doth she cut me off. (MV 4.1.262-70)

Antonio's sacrifice could be seen as motivated by homoerotic love, because of the words "loved" and "love" in reference to Bassanio, as well as because of the magnitude of his gesture. However, I choose to see it as the "bella figura." This is an Italian term applied to a situation in which the outcome is obvious, inevitable, and unpleasant, but the speaker makes a gesture or a statement that shows him as the one who is sacrificing him/herself for someone else. Antonio thinks that his ships are sunk and he has lost all his fortune. Therefore, he finds it easy, in an earlier scene, to vouch for Bassanio with his life and even to actually sacrifice his life, since he has no desire to live as a poor man. Antonio proceeds to lament, "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" (MV 4.1.273-75). "Love" could here be understood as "friend" or "friendship," as explained above, and the whole scene loses all its homoerotic connotation. Bassanio then replies that he is ready to sacrifice *his* life, wife, and all the world to save Antonio. In the context, this statement could be seen as homoerotic, since Bassanio is ready to give up his newly-wed wife in exchange for a man. Still, at this point, Bassanio is not aware of Antonio's *bella figura*, and he is remorseful, emotional, and moved, and he wishes to reciprocate the gesture. In addition, he has already "given up the world, to win another"

twice before this and it benefited him in both cases (Bevington 73). The first time he gets the loan from Antonio, and the second time he wins Portia's hand (and fortune) in marriage. Moreover, neither experience provides any lessons for him; on the contrary, both experiences are non-threatening to him, since both Antonio and Portia are inclined to help him. Antonio knows about Bassanio's debts, for he has lent him most of the money, but he is still willing to lend more, since his own fortune and future seem like a lost cause at the moment, and it does not make much difference whether he adds another loss to the loss of his ships. As for Bassanio, he irresponsibly borrows more money to "shoot" in the same direction as the money he has already squandered: he purchases expensive attire for himself and his men, and a showy ship—all calculated to impress Portia. Prior to this, he has already been living a "prodigal" life and he squandered his own wealth (*MV* 1.1.129), and now he is planning to "shoot" more money in the same direction—just as he did with arrows in his youth—in order to regain both Antonio's money *and* more (Portia's) wealth on top of it (*MV* 1.1.129). He has already lost his own world/wealth, but now he is gambling with Antonio's world/wealth, and also with his friendship with Antonio, all with a goal of winning a more affluent (Portia's) world. Once he comes to court Portia, looking his best in new, expensive clothes, she is impressed and she facilitates his decision with caskets by ordering a song to be played. The lyrics, ironically, guide Bassanio towards the true values, and he chooses the right casket. His bluffing with Antonio's money proves worthwhile since Portia agrees to marry him. In marriage with Portia Bassanio wins not only the amount/the world he owes to Antonio, but a new, wealthier world in addition. In conclusion, in Bassanio's experience it pays "to give up the world to win another," and it does not have anything to do with the homoerotic love for another man that such a grand gesture might imply. If anything, it has more to do with immature, reckless, and impulsive behavior.

At this point, I would like to relate “the play’s central paradox of losing the world in order to gain the world” to the pattern I am tracing in the four comedies. For example, Antonio’s reaction to Bassanio’s decision to marry reveals maturity and balance. Antonio does indeed love his friend (homosocially), but he allows reason to control his love, i.e. his emotions. He acts lovingly, in the best interest of his friend, yet he is reasonable enough to accept that it is now time to give up the world that he and Bassanio have shared. Unlike Bassanio, he does not childishly expect to be immediately rewarded by gaining a new world. Bassanio’s actions, on the other hand, do not demonstrate such maturity. He is impulsive, emotional, and childish...somewhat like the young lovers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. His “feminine” side still overpowers his “masculine,” reasonable, side. He, too, needs to learn his lesson before he is ready for marriage, and Portia shall be more than happy to teach him.

Bassanio demonstrates his irresponsibility and immaturity at the very beginning of the play, when he asks Antonio to lend him a substantial sum of money, while he knows that the only way he can return the money is by winning Portia’s hand and wealth. Since it is a well-known fact in Venice that numerous suitors have already been turned away, Bassanio is actually gambling with his friend’s money. His only guarantee, or financial *coverage*, which is too strong a word, is his “childhood proof” (*MV* 1.1.143). When he lost one arrow as a child, he would shoot the other in the same direction and thus find the first one. In other words, he would give up (yet another) arrow to win both of them back. This practice would seem plausible enough, if it were not preceded by Bassanio’s own confession of previous dissipation, or, at least, recklessness, which has “disabled [his] estate” and put him into great debts (1.1.123-28). To sum up, Bassanio is using a childish guarantee to vouch for the return of the money that he plans to gamble with. His immaturity and irresponsibility remain uncurbed even at Shylock’s request for a

pound of Antonio's flesh as *his* guarantee for the loan. The contrast between Bassanio's "childhood proof" and the pound of flesh Antonio is willing to give as *his* financial coverage clearly depicts the difference in the maturity of the two friends. Even by the trial scene Bassanio has not yet matured, despite the turmoil Antonio has been through, and he again reveals his impulsive and emotional nature:

Antonio, I am married to a wife  
Which is as dear to me as life itself;  
But life itself, my wife, and all the world  
Are not with me esteemed above thy life.  
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all  
Here to this devil, to deliver you. (MV 4.1.280-85)

Again Bassanio thinks that he can give up one world (wife, life, world) and he will promptly be given another. In an almost dissipating manner, he is (rhetorically) throwing away most precious things. It seems as if he is not aware of the value of his wife's love, his own life, and his whole world because he gives them up much too easily. A little later, again on an impulse, he is again generous with someone else's money when offering three thousand ducats to Balthasar, i.e. Portia (4.1.409). His impulses, compassion, and irrationality, in short—his "feminine" side—are running wild and desperately need to be reined in. And Portia, with Antonio's help, will do just that.

Mercantile Venice is a man's world, as opposed to Portia's estate, Belmont. The court, ruled by reason and logic, admits men only (all the characters are, seemingly, men), and could therefore be seen as the nucleus of the "male" world. It is only appropriate that the first part of Portia's lesson is administered exactly there. Portia, like Antonio, exhibits control over both her "feminine" and "masculine" sides. Her estate, Belmont, is the embodiment of the "feminine" traits, yet she is also able to employ

reason and logic when necessary (Bevington 72). While pretending to be a young doctor of law Balthasar she exercises most of the traditionally “masculine” traits as defined by Deats (14, 40, 71). She is *brave* and dares to violate the “masculine” court with her impersonation. She is *resolute* and exhibits the qualities of a *leader*: when she sees that her happiness with Bassanio is threatened, she takes the matter in her own hands and goes to the Venetian court. While in court, she is *assertive*, *rational*, and *logical*. She leads the discussion, directs the course of actions, and outsmarts the law by allowing Shylock to cut out the pound of flesh, only if he does not shed any blood. Finally—ironically for one who speaks so eloquently in defense of mercy—she is merciless in the punishment of the Jew, who when defeated wants to take the money instead of the flesh (4.1.318-19). The same quality, mercilessness, is probably going to come in handy in her marriage, since Bassanio seems to require strictness. And the first lesson he needs to learn is related to his impulsive scattering of goods. He needs to employ reason and learn to value things. Portia twice comments on his being “liberal in offers,” the first time while she is still in court, and the second time when Bassanio swears on *her* eyes (4.1.436). Therefore, in order to teach him a lesson, Portia/Balthasar, requests his ring, the one she has given him and he has sworn never to relinquish. Bassanio struggles, but eventually does give up the ring and it provides an opportunity for Portia to drive home her lesson. Once they all return to Belmont she pretends to notice that the ring is gone from Bassanio’s finger. When he tries to explain the circumstances, she seems merciless. She calls him “unreasonable,” thus underscoring my argument that his reliance on reason is too weak, and she ridicules his yet another attempt to be generous with somebody else’s property, i.e. his swearing upon—Portia’s eyes (*MV* 5.1.241)! Only after she ridicules this “oath” does Bassanio begin to change and swear upon his own soul. However, given Bassanio’s previous inability, or at least reluctance to change, his

word does not seem sufficient. Therefore, it is necessary for Antonio, with whose maturity and balanced self we are already acquainted, to step in and (again) vouch for his friend's future reasonable conduct (*MV* 5.1.252). It appears that Bassanio can complete the journey through childhood to the "feminine," and "masculine" world only with Antonio's help.

So far I have argued that the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio is only homosocial, and not homoerotic. Now I would like to point out that at the end of the play there are homoerotic allusions in Bassanio's speech to Portia/Balthasar: "Sweet doctor, you shall be my bedfellow. / When I am absent, then lie with my wife," and in Gratiano's reference to Nerissa: "Till I were couching with the doctor's clerk" (*MV* 5.1.283-84, 305). Furthermore, the opening scene with the sad Antonio who says that he needs to get to know himself better could be interpreted as foreshadowing homoerotic inclination (*MV* 1.1.7). If so, this play could be viewed as a step forward from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which I argue that the relationship between Hermia and Helena is purely homosocial and solely serves the purpose of self-realization as a step towards marriage; once the two young women are married, their relationship is completely dissolved. In *The Merchant of Venice*, the relationship between Bassanio and Antonio is also homosocial: the two friends act as mirrors for each other as one of them proceeds towards marriage. The difference between the two relationships occurs in the foreshadowed possibility of Antonio's homoerotic inclination (as implied in the first scene), which is further stressed in the final scene, if not throughout the play. Also, Antonio remains present in the last scene, *and* in Bassanio's life, even though the younger man is now married. Moreover, his presence seems necessary, for without him Bassanio might lose touch with his *reasonable* self. Still, it remains uncertain what will be the nature of the two men's relationship after Bassanio's wedding. I am inclined to

think that it will be homosocial, but I am aware of the homoerotic undercurrents that I have just discussed and therefore I see this relationship as the beginning of the progression from homosocial to homoerotic relationships in Shakespeare's comedies.

### 2.3 Celia and Rosalind (Circa 1598-1601)

George Eliot writes: "O shall I spread my wings then and caress you with my antennae," 'and' "[every letter] is like a little winged angel to me, seems to fondle and fan me with its soft dove-like wings" (337). Using this quotation from Eliot's letter to a female friend, Jill Ehnenn argues in favor of the presence of homoeroticism between women in the eighteenth century and also between the female characters in the plays by Shakespeare. The following, as well as certain other lines in *As You Like It* have led other critics, too, to postulate a homoerotic relationship between Celia and Rosalind:

[...] We have slept together,  
Rose at an instant, learne'd, play'd, eat together,  
And whosoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,  
Still we went coupled and inseparable. (AYL 1.3.71-75)

Before I discuss these lines, I wish to include a quotation that provides some background to Eliot's statement:

'Tribades' and 'fricatrices' , occasionally called 'rubsters' in English, were known in the sixteenth century through a variety of texts available to literate men who read Latin. [...] Quasimedical and folkloric accounts of females with enlarged clitorises which they could not help but 'abuse' seem regularly to have titillated the prurient interests of educated males. (Andreadis 243)

Ehnenn quotes another letter by Eliot in which “Eliot uses Rosalind and Celia as a model of her own feelings toward her friends: she writes to Maria Lewis, ‘I heartily echo your kind wish that we should be ‘like Juno’s swans coupled together’” (Ehnenn 336). In her article, Ehnenn employs the above quotation to allude to the homoeroticism between Celia and Rosalind (333). Jessica Tvordi also argues very strongly in favor of a homoerotic bond between Celia and Rosalind:

Although Rosalind's appropriation of male power through her masculine disguise as Ganymede appears transgressive, Celia's verbal displays of her love for Rosalind and her attempts to coerce Rosalind into a homoerotic alliance are more so. [...] Indeed in pursuing her alliance with Rosalind, Celia materializes not only as confident and assertive, but also as a character who aggressively, and sometimes ruthlessly, woos the object of her desire and who persistently resists the play's movement away from the ideal of the female homoerotic alliance. (Tvordi 117)

Tvordi cites several other passages to substantiate her claims concerning the presence of homoeroticism in the play. One is the occasion at the beginning of the play when Rosalind and Celia discuss falling in love (*AYL* 1.2.24).

Although Celia appears to be offering Rosalind friendly advice, she is conveying a veiled directive. If Rosalind sports no further than ‘the safety of a pure blush,’ she will maintain her virginity, her place within the realm of the female homoerotic, and her subservient position to Celia. (Tvordi 119)

I fail to see the homoerotic element in the above discourse. What I do see are two girls talking about love and boys, as girls in homosocial relationships often do, and warning each other to be careful and aware of the consequences. Tvordi also discusses the discourse following Rosalind's attempt to have Celia conduct a “mock” marriage

between Rosalind and Orlando as yet another proof of homoerotic nature of the girls' relationship. In Tvordi's opinion "Celia recognizes that Rosalind can easily exchange one love object for another, that Orlando has earned her own place in Rosalind's heart, and that he will soon enjoy the access to Rosalind's body that Celia desires" (Tvordi 121). In my opinion, Celia does not desire Rosalind's body, but her company. She is experiencing emotions similar to those of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* when Bassanio is looking for a bride. She feels abandoned because her best friend has shifted his/her attention to someone else and Celia (or Antonio) finds it hard to accept the new situation. The feelings that they are both experiencing are not homoerotic, but homosocial. Both Celia and Antonio feel abandoned, and, consequently, irritated or melancholy. The final straw for Celia occurs when Rosalind asks *her* to be the one to conduct the "mock," but, in Elizabethan society real, marriage. Her best friend is clearly shifting her interest to someone else, and, in addition, Rosalind requests Celia's help in the very act of abandoning her. Of course Celia objects, but not with homoerotic feelings for Rosalind as her motive. She merely refuses to be the instrument of her own marginalization.

Finally, both Tvordi and Ehnenn find the lines quoted at the beginning of this section (AYL 1.3.71-75) most suggestive. However, sleeping together, rising together, and all the other activities that the two girls perform together serve only to stress the idea of oneness, as argued in the case of Helena and Hermia. They derive joy from self-realization as the result of the time spent together, and, therefore, they love being in each other's company, and, consequently, love one another. Furthermore, to hold their sleeping together as a sign of homoeroticism would be anachronistic, since the early modern period "was a society where most people slept with someone else and where the rooms of a house led casually one into the other and servants mingled with their

masters” (Bray 42). In fact, Shakespeare’s daughter Susanna married a physician, and their very upscale house in Stratford still stands and is open to visitors. The house, despite being the home of a wealthy family, had a truckle bed for servants—in the master bedroom. The reason was not really the lack of space, for the house was large, but convenience. The masters insured their privacy with a curtain, a measure that seems very insufficient from today’s point of view, and the servants were at hand at all times. Renaissance France was not different in this sense. Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptameron* also mentions a “gentleman who slept in [the prince’s] bedchamber,” possibly also for convenience, and since the main occupant of the chamber was a prince, his servant had to be a gentleman (Navarre 386). Finally, Smith also insists that “young men [and women] studied together, played together, ate together, and, like everybody else in the sixteenth century, slept together two to a bed” (84). Next, those arguing in favor of homoeroticism in this relationship interpret the terms “Juno’s swans” and “coupled” as very suggestive. However, I believe that Shakespeare did not necessarily intend these allusions to be homoerotic. First, according to the *OED*, *The Random House Webster’s Dictionary*, and *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Juno is the wife of Jupiter, queen of heaven, and goddess of light, birth, women, and marriage.” Neither of these sources suggests homoeroticism in relation to the Juno myth. Instead, the image of Juno represents female allegiance and sisterhood, just as in the case of Hermia and Helena. Second, the swans were described in all three sources, as well as in Chevalier and Gheerbrant’s *Dictionary of Symbols*, as symbols of “a person or thing of unusual beauty, excellence, purity and the like” (*RH Webster’s Dictionary*). Sometimes the swans were mentioned in connection with “Persons or things, in reference to the pure white plumage of the swan taken as a type of faultlessness or excellence; often in contrast to *crow* or *goose*” (*OED*). Finally, the *OED* states that “In classical mythology,

the swan was sacred to Apollo [...] and to Venus (occasionally, as by Shakespeare, wrongly ascribed to Juno).” According to this quotation, Shakespeare might have inaccurately ascribed the swans to Juno, but, what is more important, the swans that are related to Apollo were sacred and they symbolized purity. Therefore, I conclude that the swans, in this passage, symbolize purity and faultlessness, without any allusions to homoeroticism. Finally, I am aware that the term “coupled” might be interpreted as referring to copulation, as Tvordi and Ehnenn probably believe, but “copulation” is only the third meaning of the verb “couple,” according to all of the above dictionaries, and the first two refer to *oneness*, as in the case of Hermia and Helena.

On the basis of the above evidence, I maintain that the relationship between Rosalind and Celia is not homoerotic. Still, I agree that there are certain ambiguities that invite a different interpretation, and, consequently, the shift from homosocial relationships to homoerotic ones continues. The development of this idea can be seen in Shakespeare’s following comedy, which was written approximately five years after *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, four years after *The Merchant of Venice*, and a year after *As You Like It*. In *Twelfth Night* the idea of bonding with same-sex friends as a step toward adulthood and marriage is still present, but, for the first time, the homoeroticism is clearly stated, while bisexuality is more apparent than in *As You Like It*. But, before I proceed to discuss the relationships in *Twelfth Night*, I would like to discuss the first occurrence of bisexuality in *As You Like It*.

## 2.4 Ganymede and Orlando (Circa 1598 – 1601)

The roles of the women and girls in Shakespeare's comedies were played by boy actors. The idea of "Girle-boye" inevitably invites reactions such as those discussed in Philip Traci's article "*As You Like It: Homosexuality in Shakespeare's Play*," in which every interaction between a female character (played by a boy actor) and the character of her male lover inevitably invites possibilities for homoerotic interpretations (Ehnenn 327). Still, despite Traci's argument that the audience knew that all the female roles were played by boys, thus encouraging homoerotic connotations, I suggest that the audience was willing to participate in the artistic illusion, and, having thus excluded the other possible homoerotic couples in *As You Like It*, I will focus only on the relationship of Ganymede and Orlando. So far in his development, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare has dealt only with homosocial bonds that were gradually (from one play to the next) assuming ever stronger homoerotic undertones. The purpose of these homosocial bonds is self-realization which includes command over both the "masculine" and the "feminine" sides of the self as preparation for marriage, the "symbol of androgyny" (Kimbrough 54). The homoeroticism is present as a part of the self-realization, and gratification of the homoerotic desire is not expected. In my opinion, the role of Ganymede represents a progression from allusions to homoeroticism to allusions to bisexuality, yet still with the purpose of self-realization and without the desire for gratification in the homoerotic relationship between Orlando and Ganymede.

Ganymede is Rosalind in disguise. She is a girl, dressed as a boy, whose daily activities include teasing and wooing Orlando. She is, at the same time, both the go-

between of New Comedy, mediating between herself (as Rosalind) and Orlando, *and* the *senex* who prevents the two young people from being joined in a relationship. Orlando is a young man with childish ideas about love. When Rosalind openly offers herself to him after the wrestling match, he is dumb-struck and unable to accept her offer (AYL 1.2.243). Still, he falls in love with her and, once in the forest of Arden, writes Petrarchan poetry as an outlet for his immature infatuation. Obviously, he is young and he needs a companion, a coeval, somebody who would be his mirror and help him achieve self-realization. All the men he associates with in the Forest of Arden are either too old or simply do not share his interests. Indeed, Touchstone even (rightly so) mocks his poetry. Therefore, Orlando is appreciative of the friendly Ganymede, who not only is friendly, but even looks like Rosalind (AYL 5.4.28-29). By being with Ganymede who resembles Rosalind, Orlando feels closer to Rosalind. When Ganymede suggests that (s)he would pretend to be Rosalind, he accepts because he can now experience what it would be like to be close to her. Ganymede is to Orlando what Hermia is to Helena, and what Antonio is to Bassanio. (S)he is his mirror and Orlando grows in the same way that the other four characters develop through their relationships. Furthermore, as in the case of the other two couples, homoerotic undercurrents exist and they open up the space for Orlando's bisexuality. Clearly, Orlando is in love with the girl Rosalind but he is also drawn to the boy Ganymede who is not so named in vain. Saslow observes that "for Renaissance Englishmen [...] the story of Jupiter and Ganymede was the best known, most widely recognized myth of homoerotic desire" (qtd. in Smith 191). Clearly, the audience would be inclined to assume at least homoerotic undercurrents, if not more. Moreover, Traci quotes Jan Kott by saying that

The name [...] 'remained above all, as it had been in antiquity, the symbol of pederasty.' Kott's analysis demonstrates his awareness both of the homosexual aspects of the Ganymede-Orlando relationship and of the fact that this is but one side of the relationship. Kott tells us, for example, that 'Orlando does not recognize Rosalind in the shape of Ganymede.

Rosalind woos him with intensity, but she does it as a boy, or rather as a boy who in this relationship wants to be a girl for his lover. (Traci 92-93)

Finally, the scene in which Ganymede announces that (s)he is in "a holiday humour," "like enough to consent," and in which (s)he, quite vigorously, proceeds to invite Orlando to "Come, woo me, woo me," clearly has very erotic undercurrents (*AYL* 4.1.65-66). But, who is lusting for whom? Rosalind, maybe, forgets herself and enjoys the game with the object of her love. But what is Orlando doing? Who is the object of *his* desire? Could he really forget that a boy Ganymede stands in front of him, and not his Rosalind? Finally, the scene climaxes with the couple's wish to be married. This should have been alarming enough for Orlando because of the binding power of betrothal in the early modern society, but he nevertheless proceeds most willingly. Maybe he feels safe *because* his partner is a boy and the betrothal would thus not be valid. Still, let us not forget that the exchange between Orlando and Ganymede *is* erotic, that Orlando's partner's name *is Ganymede*, the symbol of pederasty, and that the title of the play *is As You Like It*, which definitely invites different approaches to, and interpretations of, sexuality. Also, Traci points out that Ganymede's lover Jupiter is mentioned six times in the play. Moreover, "at the last point the name is mentioned three times" (Traci 97). Therefore, Shakespeare proceeds from homosocial to homoerotic to bisexual

undertones in Orlando's relationship with Ganymede and Rosalind. Still, it is all a part of Orlando's development and self-realization, until he is ready for a relationship with a girl, Rosalind, and for marriage.

From the beginning of the play Orlando is in touch with his "masculine" self. In the first scene he is assertive and fights with Oliver. Shortly afterwards he bravely wrestles with a professional wrestler—and wins. Yet, when Rosalind openly shows her attraction to him, he remains mute. His first clumsy attempts at dealing with his love for Rosalind, i.e. with his emotions, are the Petrarchan poems that he hangs on the trees of the Forest of Arden. Clearly, he needs guidance in discovering the other side of his persona. Moreover, he is not alone in his imbalance. Silvius and Phoebe are both crazily in love with the person who constantly rejects them—just like the adolescents in the forest by Athens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They are all overpowered by their emotions, and disregard the voice of reason. The "feminine" principles are outbalancing the "masculine" ones. Luckily for Orlando, Rosalind disguised as Ganymede successfully acts as his guide and he discovers his whole self. Just as the characters' maturation, i.e. growth into the whole, balanced self, is punctuated by return of the changeling boy to Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, so, in *As You Like It*, the shift is underscored by the snake and lioness scene (4.3.109-133). Walking through the forest Orlando spots a man with a snake around his neck. He approaches and the snake glides into a bush. In other words, Orlando's "masculine" self, as symbolized by the image of the snake gliding into a bush, is giving way to his "feminine" self embodied in the image of the lion-ess lying in the bush's shade (4.3.115). Growing up is never easy, so Orlando on his journey to maturity has to struggle, too: he, therefore, fights with the

lioness, his “feminine” self, and—wins. His success in acquiring “feminine” traits is evident in the following lines of the same scene: he sheds tears (4.3.141) and he faints (4.3.149).

*As You Like It* was written after *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice*, and in it Shakespeare further develops his pattern of self-realization to include allusions not only to homoeroticism but also to bisexuality. The allusions to bisexuality are present in the role of Orlando (in his relationship to Ganymede), and underscored by the title of the play. However, in *Twelfth Night*, which was written approximately a year after *As You Like It*, Shakespeare goes a step further. He no longer only alludes to, but he openly discusses homoeroticism through Antonio and Sebastian's relationship, and the allusions to bisexuality occur in three other cases. Again, just as in the case of the previous play, *As You Like It*, the title of the play is suggestive: *Twelfth Night; Or, What You Will*. In other words, the reader, or the audience, may interpret the sexual preferences of the characters whichever way they choose. A comparison of Shakespeare's two Antonios punctuates this progression. In case of the first one, in *The Merchant of Venice*, there are allusions to homoeroticism, but the nature of Antonio's relationship with Bassanio is, ultimately, only homosocial. However, four or five years later, in *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare creates a clearly homoerotic relationship between Antonio and Sebastian. Nevertheless, as in the earlier plays, the pattern of homosocial bonds as preparation for marriage is still present. Only, this time, the undercurrents of the homosocial bonds are no longer only homoerotic, but bisexual, as well. Furthermore, in the case of Antonio and Sebastian, they are not even undercurrents, but, according to Janet Adelman, *the most “direct expression of homoerotic feeling in Shakespeare's plays”* (qtd. in Smith 67).

## 2.5 Antonio and Sebastian (Circa 1599-1601)

The first time we encounter Antonio and Sebastian they are about to be separated. Sebastian wants to go to Count Orsino's court and Antonio would like to accompany him, but cannot because he has enemies in Illyria. In my opinion, Sebastian feels obliged to Antonio, but, at the same time, will be glad to permanently leave him, as indicated in his speeches in scene 2.1.. For the first time, he reveals his true name and family history to his lover; he expresses his gratitude; and, most importantly, he discourages Antonio's attempts to accompany him. He is worried about Antonio's safety, yet I feel that he is ready to end their relationship, and he actually proves this by accepting Olivia's attentions without much hesitation. Nevertheless, homoerotic feelings are definitely present in the discourse of the two men. In the same scene Antonio says to Sebastian "If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant" (*TN* 2.1.34). Apart from the apparent meaning of the word "servant," according to the *OED*, a servant is "A professed lover; one who is devoted to the service of a lady. Also, in bad sense, a paramour, gallant." Clearly, Antonio's statement depicts his relationship with Sebastian as homoerotic. Antonio further adds "But come what may, I do adore thee so / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go" (*TN* 2.1.45-46). Antonio's passion for Sebastian is stronger than the fear of danger, and he decides to follow his lover. The next time we encounter the two lovers in scene 3.3., Antonio delivers a very passionate and erotic speech, vowing that he must follow Sebastian because "My [Antonio's] desire, / More sharp than filed steel, did spur me forth, / And not all love to see you / But jealousy what might befall your travel" urges him to follow. Antonio then discusses his love and jealousy, and concludes by making a remark about his "willing love." *OED* gives "Carnal desire or appetite" as a definition of "will," and even lists an example of Shakespeare's

use of the above term in its erotic sense: “Thus..holds he disputation, Tweene frozen conscience and hot burning will. (Luc. 247)”. Evidently, Antonio loves Sebastian very passionately; thus when he concludes the scene with a reference to their sleeping arrangements and adds, “There shall you have me,” it is very hard not to give these words a homoerotic meaning. When describing this relationship Joseph Pequigney remarks that “Not his words only but also his correlated actions reflect Antonio’s avid devotion to the master-mistress of *his* passion” (203). The obvious reference to Shakespeare’s twentieth sonnet underscores the homoerotic character of this relationship. Furthermore, Pequigney observes that Sebastian “While he remains heterosexually virginal, he is unlike the virgins Viola and Olivia or Orsino in that he entertains homosexual impulses that are fully conscious and indulged. Antonio awakens those impulses, initiates him into interpersonal sexuality, and perhaps thereby prepares him to receive the sudden, surprising advances of the Illyrian lady” (Pequigney 209-10).

Again, the previously discussed pattern is present: two same-sex characters engage in a relationship (which has progressed from homosocial, in earlier comedies, to homoerotic) as a means of self-realization in preparation for marriage. Pequigney proceeds: “The reason for Antonio’s portrayal as homosexual is that a liaison with him opens space for Sebastian in the diverse bisexual fictions that make up the *Twelfth Night*” (Pequigney 210). Apparently, Sebastian *is* bisexual, and “[he is] able and willing sexually to enjoy, both a man and a woman,” which he proves by becoming Olivia’s husband at the end of the play (210).

## 2.6 Orsino and Cesario/Viola (Circa 1599 – 1601)

Viola and Sebastian, the twin sister and brother, are the central characters in *Twelfth Night* because their roles allow the dominant theme of the play—bisexuality—to be exposed. Before I proceed to discuss the siblings and their role in the play, I will draw parallels between the homosocial and/or homoerotic couples in this comedy with the ones discussed above. The relationship between Orsino and Viola (Cesario) is very similar to that of Orlando and Rosalind (Ganymede). Apart from having similar names, Orsino and Orlando (whose name Virginia Woolf used in her “analysis of gender” to “trace[s] the life of Orlando, who is both a boy in 16th-century Elizabethan England and a 38-year-old woman four centuries later” [*Encarta Encyclopedia*]) are both in what at first appears to be a homosocial relationship with another young man: Cesario and Ganymede. Orsino, like Orlando, prefers to discuss love with a peer, because it is safe, and he cannot get hurt. Orsino, like Orlando, grows in his relationship and, consequently, becomes ready for a marriage. Another similarity is the homoerotic undercurrent, which in the case of Orsino and Cesario (whom Shakespeare created a year later than the other couple) is more evident, especially because of Antonio’s and Sebastian’s openly homoerotic relationship in the same play. In scene 1.4. Orsino refers to Cesario as “youth,” “lad,” and “a man” (*TN* 1.4.15.,30.,31.), but immediately after that he acknowledges the woman in Cesario when talking about his/her ruby lips, gentle voice, and general femininity (*TN* 1.4.31-34).

In "The Sexual Aberrations," Freud comments that a large proportion of male homosexuals "retain the mental quality of masculinity...and that what they look for in their real sexual object are in fact feminine mental traits." Their "sexual object is not someone of the same sex, but someone who combines the characters of both sexes...a union of both sex characteristics, a compromise between an impulse that seeks for a man and one that seeks for a woman." (Qtd in Garner 63)

Therefore, the nature of Orsino's attraction to Cesario is homoerotic, but, as soon as she reveals herself as Viola, he is ready to marry her. Evidently, her gender is of lesser importance, because Orsino is bisexual. "The love for Cesario could not have changed instantaneously with the revelation of his femaleness; if it is erotic then it would have been erotic before; what does change is that marriage suddenly becomes possible, and hence the immediate proposal" (Pequigney 207). The nature of this relationship is stressed by the reference to Shakespeare's twentieth sonnet when Orsino tells Viola "Here is my hand. You shall from this time be / Your master's mistress" (*TN* 5.1.325). The homoerotic and bisexual nuances of this relationship are finally comically underscored in the last line of the play when Orsino refers to Viola as the "queen" after his homoerotic feelings for her as Cesario have just been revealed "[Viola will be] Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen"<sup>2</sup> (*TN* 5.1.388).

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<sup>2</sup> The word "queen" as "A male homosexual, esp. the effeminate partner in a homosexual relationship." (*OED*) was not in use in this sense in Shakespeare's time, but there was the word "quean," with very similar meaning and the same pronunciation.

## 2.7 Olivia, Cesario and Sebastian (Circa 1599 – 1601)

Olivia's relationship with Cesario, and later with Sebastian, is very similar to that of Orsino and his lover. The pattern that I am tracing through the other six relationships here begins to deviate. Olivia is in what seems like a heterosexual relationship with Cesario. (I am still relying on the artistic illusion and ignoring the male actor.) However, the nature of the relationship is homoerotic. Still, owing to the relationship, Olivia becomes ready and, eventually, marries Sebastian. Like Orsino, she falls in love with the person of one sex, but eventually marries a person of the opposite sex, and does not really object. "Like Orsino, Olivia goes through a homoerotic phase that lasts through and beyond betrothal; both have experiences that evince their bisexuality" (Pequigney 208). The absurdity of Olivia's situation is greater than that of Orsino's because he, at least, marries the person that he falls in love with originally, whereas

Olivia ends up engaged to marry a perfect stranger, Sebastian, and not the one she fell madly in love with and thought she had become betrothed to, who all along had been a male-impersonating girl. If she misses the tell-tale signs of femaleness that Orsino picks up on, that is because it is in her erotic interest to fantasize Cesario as virile, yet the feminine subtext, however ignored, remains legible. (Pequigney 207)

The pattern of self-realization differs in this relationship, as the progression I have traced reaches its climax. Shakespeare first created homosocial, then homoerotic and, finally, bisexual relationships. The progression develops over the period of five to six years and it culminates in the following scene:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.

But nature to her bias drew in that.

You would have been contracted to a maid;

Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd:

You are betroth'd both to a maid and a man. (*TN* 5.1.259-63)

Here Sebastian explains that Olivia has been mistaken concerning Viola's sex, but it is all perfectly natural (260). In fact, in him, she finds both "a maid and a man." This is a reference to his relationship with Antonio in which he was both Antonio's master *and* mistress. Furthermore, the same idea is underscored by his similarity to Viola, his female-self: "One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons" (*TN* 5.1.215). At this point, when their true identities and sexes are revealed, the twins blend into one person. They are like a coin with two same sides and Orsino and Olivia, who were originally a possible heterosexual couple, flip the coin and it no longer matters how the coin lands. Whose sexual preferences are heterosexual, whose homoerotic, and whose bisexual—it does not matter, because it is all *natural* (*TN* 5.1.260).

To conclude, you can see the whole play and the sexual preferences of all the characters that I have been discussing *As You Like It*, because the *Twelfth Night* of Christmas holiday is a time of revelry and we can play. Tomorrow we will be back in the real world and all of this will seem like a ...*Midsummer Night's Dream*. But before we wake up, and without forgetting that "will" refers to "carnal desire" (*OED*), let us answer Shakespeare's question: do *you* know What *You* Will?

## 2.8 Viola and Sebastian (Circa 1599 – 1601)

A different reading (or a consequent one) of the above fireworks of sexuality is the explosion of gender. Throughout the four comedies (and other plays, surely) Shakespeare challenges gender boundaries. His mouthpieces are usually his cross-dressed characters who suddenly possess both “feminine” and “masculine” perspective *and* are licensed to talk about them. So far I have explored the individual growth of characters with the aid of a friend, or a lover, and the result of the growth is a balanced person who is ready to enter a marriage, “a symbol of androgyny” (Kimbrough 54). With the introduction of the twins, Viola and Sebastian, it seems that the final stage of the pattern is no longer maturity crowned with marriage, but an *inward* marriage or irrelevance of gender. Viola and Sebastian’s similarity to a coin with two same faces, flipped over by Olivia and Orsino, punctuates the twins’ interchangeability. Olivia and Orsino may not be objecting to which twin they get because they are in love with the core of the twin(s), with their androgynous essence. If so, Olivia’s and Orsino’s needs are met in the fulfillment of the Platonic love for the twin, regardless of the twin’s sex. Moreover, the above scene in which the twins blend into “the coin” definitely recalls Plato’s *Symposium* and Aristophanes’s description of the spherical androgynous being with: “[...] two identically similar faces upon a circular neck, with one head common to both the faces, which were turned in opposite directions” (Fone 31). The twins’ similarity to the mythical creature clearly invites an androgynous reading of Olivia’s and Orsino’s behavior. As suggested above, the reason why Olivia and Orsino do not really object to the switching of the twins may not be related to their bisexuality (even though the bisexual undercurrents definitely allow this reading), but their love for the *person*, the

human being who had been sliced in two, or, to borrow Shakespeare's own words, "An apple cleft in two" (*TN* 5.1.215). It is, therefore, possible to see androgyny as the message of the play.

Aristophanes also states that originally "all human beings were spherical in form" (Deats 13). They were "rounded microcosms" until Zeus bisected the androgynous creatures as punishment for their excessive pride, and the result were "fragmented halves"(13). Since originally there had been three sexes— men, women, and the union of the two, i.e. hermaphrodites [not completely the same as in today's meaning]— the bisection resulted in two sexes, but three sexualities (Fone 31). In other words, the fragmented men became destined to seek their other half in men; the same applies to fragmented women; while the third creature, the androgynous one, became destined to seek its other, androgynous half. Kimbrough states that the early modern period (wo)men were not only familiar with the classical myth of the origin of androgyny, but that in the late sixteenth century there was even a renewed interest in it (6); therefore, it is plausible to assume that Shakespeare was familiar with the notion of androgyny. Moreover, Kimbrough offers a detailed analysis of the Renaissance thought that expands the above meaning of androgyny. He remarks that it "is a word which exists above and beyond the words male and female, [... and it ...] embraces all of humanity [...]" (6). Moreover, he explains that while Shakespeare may not have used the term *androgyny*, he had used the word "kind," both in the sense of *human kind*, i.e. without the division into male and female, and *kind*, as in gentle and noble (6). Next, it is also pertinent to mention that "kind means belonging to *nature*" (6). Consequently, "unnatural" is the opposite of kind, gentle, noble, or even belonging to the human kind. Therefore, for example, when Antonio, whom I have demonstrated to be a homosexual in the above text, states that "In nature there's no blemish but the mind; / None can be called

deformed but the unkind,” he implies that the deviants are not homosexuals (*TN* 3.4.370-71); instead, the deviants are the minds, or the individuals, who lack kindness, i.e. “the unkind.” I believe it is reasonable to ascribe the interpretation of these lines to homosexuals, for if Shakespeare had intended a different meaning, he would have had a different character, not Antonio, utter these words. In addition, Kimbrough suggests that “in sixteenth-century terms, the art of humankindness is the microcosmic attempt to discover and imitate the macrocosmic ideal of unity and harmony—in short, androgyny” (28). The microcosm can be realized by study of humanities, and by learning about one’s self in a manner that I have been describing throughout my thesis: The young people learn about themselves from each other, thus “[...] strengthening [their] innate attributes [and it] leads to human fulfillment”(29). The final outcome of this process of learning about oneself is the realization that “human dignity comes from achieving and maintaining respect for humanity, the self and others” (29). Here the respect for others would include respect for people of a sexuality different than one’s own, but the principle can easily be applied to other walks of life, such as politics. Finally, I would like to note that Kimbrough coined his own term “humankindness” with the purpose of encompassing all the above classical and, especially, Renaissance connotations of androgyny. The use of Kimbrough’s term allows a different reading of Shakespeare’s play, but one that is still in concord with the pattern that I have been discussing in my thesis.

Evidence of the above use of “kind” and “kindness” can be found throughout Shakespeare’s plays, but I shall focus only on the occurrences of these terms relating to the twins, Viola and Sebastian. Having grown up together as twins, the two have already helped each other on their journey to a balanced self. They have mirrored and guided each other and, by the time we meet them, they already exercise both “feminine”

and “masculine” traits, thus exhibiting their androgyny. And while together they form a sphere, or “An apple,” even within their individual selves they are complete (*TN* 5.1.215).

When we first meet Sebastian, he is already exhibiting his (human)kindness when trying to leave Antonio. From the first line we are informed that he wishes to terminate the relationship with Antonio (*TN* 2.1.1), and while Antonio fervently insists on remaining together, or at least on knowing Sebastian’s whereabouts, Sebastian remains resolute (“masculine” trait), yet very gentle (“feminine” quality), and above all *kind* (androgynous trait): “But I perceive in you so excellent / a touch of modesty that you will not extort from me / what I am willing to keep in” (*TN* 2.1.11-13). Following this statement Sebastian does tell Antonio about his background, but then breaks away. However, he is overwhelmed with compassion for Antonio, and is consequently on the verge of— tears: “My bosom is full of / kindness, and I am yet so near the manners of my / mother that upon the least occasion more mine eyes / will tell tales of me. [...] Farewell.” (*TN* 2.1. 37-40). Sebastian’s teary eyes would perhaps compromise his “masculinity,” if it were not for his superior performance in the duels with Sir Toby and Sir Andrew later on, but under these circumstances I can only conclude that he exercises both his “masculine” and “feminine” traits (*TN* 5.1.173-74). He even points to his androgyny himself when he refers to *kindness* in his bosom. Clearly, Sebastian, “both a maid and man,” cannot be classified differently but as a member of the *human kind* (*TN* 5.1.263).

Sebastian’s sister Viola is like him in this respect. When Viola/Cesario appears on Olivia’s doorstep for the first time the mistress asks one of her people what *kind* of a man is (s)he. The reply is, “Why, of *mankind*” (*TN* 1.5.148). This reply is not only in concord with Viola’s masculine attire, but stresses foremostly her affiliation with the *human kind*. (Here I read “man” generically, i.e. representing both men and women.) On

a different occasion, Feste, too, hints at Viola/Cesario's androgynous nature: "Who you are and what you would are out of my / welkin—I might say 'element,' but the word is overworn" (*TN* 3.1.57-58). Shakespeare here deliberately uses the term "element" after he has alluded to the spheres, thus bringing androgyny to mind. Since "welkin" means "the apparent surface of the imaginary sphere on which celestial bodies appear to be projected" ([hyperdic.net](http://hyperdic.net)). By mentioning the "apparent surface" of a sphere Shakespeare makes us wonder what secret does the other, the non-apparent or not visible side of sphere hold. It also makes us think about the androgynous, spherical creatures from Aristophanes's story. Therefore, the use of the term "welkin" in this context suggests ambivalence, and the use of the term "element" drives the point home. Suddenly, the audience or reader sees Cesario as a sphere, with half of it dark and holding a secret, and the half that is visible is neither a man, nor a woman, but an—element!

In the discussion of the last couple, Viola and Sebastian, I earlier offered a different interpretation of bisexuality in *Twelfth Night*. Initially I suggested that bisexuality occurred as a stepping stone towards maturity and marriage, in concord with the pattern that I have been tracing in all of the four comedies. However, with the introduction of "humankindness" in Kimbrough's all-encompassing sense, I now submit that the occurrences of bisexuality serve to introduce the notion of androgyny.

## Chapter Three

### Epilogue

In this thesis I have been tracing the development of a motif over the period of approximately six or seven years: self-realization through homosocial relationships, as with Hermia and Helena. I argue that Shakespeare's characters mature and, consequently, become ready for marriage through homosocial relationships. Over the period of several years, the relationships of Shakespeare's characters change from homosocial into homoerotic, starting with Antonio and Bassanio, and followed by Rosalind and Celia. Next, they progress into bisexual, as in the case of Ganymede and Orlando, and, finally, the motif reaches its climax in *Twelfth Night*, featuring the three bisexual characters: Orsino, Olivia, and Sebastian. In the same play the idea of androgyny, which has been present as an undercurrent in the previous plays, comes to the surface. Whether one chooses to read the above discussed plays as featuring homosocial, homoerotic, bisexual, or androgynous couples remains personal choice, but I do believe that even if one opts for purely homosocial variety, Shakespeare's wit has blurred the edges of the gender boundaries. In his next play, *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare abandons the pattern of self-realization through a homosocial (or other) relationship and begins exploring tragicomedy.

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