The Importance of True Friendship as Exemplified Within Shakespearean Plays

Gretchen Eckert

A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2020

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
Honors Program of Liberty University.

_____

Neal Brasher, M.F.A.
Thesis Chair

_____

Barry Gawinski, M.F.A.
Committee Member

_____

James H. Nutter, D.A.
Honors Director

_____

Date

Abstract

Friendship is a valuable, important relationship, because a friend possesses great influence over a person's life. For this reason, a good friend with a positive character is indispensable. In the Bible, God defined a true friend as selfless, generous, loyal, and honest. William Shakespeare valued the influence of a loyal friend, and his plays include a broad range of friendships that illustrate the impact of a friend's characteristics. In *Macbeth*, Banquo proves to be a true, supportive friend who points Macbeth towards God. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hermia and Helena struggle with the selfishness that injures their childhood bond. In *Othello*, Iago destroys Othello's by posing as an honest friend.

The Importance of True Friendship as Exemplified Within Shakespearean Plays

Introduction

Friendship employs a level of vulnerability and trust that requires consistent evaluation to ensure a person allows a good influence in their life. A friend sees the intimate parts of a person's life that most other people do not get to see, as well as impacts the thoughts and actions of that person. When someone chooses to confide in a friend, they trust their friend and give them authority to guide and influence their decisions and behavior. Therefore, a good friend with a positive influence strengthens a person's perceptions and demeanor.

William Shakespeare, one of the greatest writers of the English language, crafted various friendships in his plays. He created human, three-dimensional characters, not simply ideas (Maginn, 2009). He used the characters in his plays to depict healthy, stagnant, and harmful friendships. Shakespeare's characters and plots illustrate what he valued in a strong friendship: "loyalty, unwavering support, and mutual respect" (Vollrodt, 2017, para. 2). These qualities line up with what the Bible defines as the traits of a true friend, such as loyalty, selflessness, honesty, generosity, and trust. Additionally, the Bible warns that the characteristics of an unhealthy friend are flattery, dishonesty, and selfishness, which Shakespeare utilizes in his depictions of false or failing friendships.

Shakespeare wrote pivotal friendships into the plots of the majority of his plays, placing value on the influence of a true friend. In *Macbeth* (2015a), Shakespeare depicted a true friend, Banquo. Banquo exhibits loyalty and selflessness in his desire to hold Macbeth accountable and support his friend despite Macbeth's dark tendencies. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2015b), Shakespeare portrayed a tenuous friendship between Helena and Hermia. The two girls possessed a strong friendship as children, but their emotional bond weakened over time, leaving

their friendship open to attack from jealousy and selfishness during the play. In *Othello* (2015c), Shakespeare created Iago to warn about the dangers of a false friend. Iago craves revenge on Othello, so he deceives Othello into trusting him as an honest, supportive friend, when in reality he destroys Othello with his flattery and lies. Through the friendships portrayed in these three plays, William Shakespeare depicted the essential characteristics of a true friend and emphasized the importance of discerning them to ensure a trustworthy influence in one's life.

Biblical View of Friendship

The Bible defines the qualities of a true friend and sets out examples of good friends throughout both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God outlines that he created friendships to be sacrificial, selfless, and trustworthy. A good friendship is one that connects two people deeply. Deuteronomy 13:6 alludes to a friend as being one "who is as your own soul" (English Standard Version). 1 Samuel 18:1, 3-4 depicts the character of Jonathan's deep bond of friendship with David—"the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." As a good friend, Jonathan's love for David leads him to generously provide for his friend who is heading to battle with the Philistines by giving him "his armor, and even his sword and his bow" (1 Samuel 18:4). Later when Saul is attempting to kill David, Jonathan makes a covenant with David and defends his friend in the face of his father's fury multiples times, even helping David escape Saul's wrath (1 Samuel 19-20). Proverbs 18:24 states the advantages of investing in a trustworthy friend, asserting that "[o]ne who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (New International Version). Proverbs 17:17 says that "[a] friend loves at all times," marking one of the "basic components of friendship" as "undying loyalty" (Culbertson, 1996, p. 169). Another characteristic of a true friend is honesty, which is found in Proverbs 27:9—"the sweetness of a

friend comes from his earnest council" (English Standard Version). Proverbs 16:28 provides the warning that one who spreads lies and gossip "separates close friends." God lays out the signs of a true, good friend in verses all over the Old Testament and also provides indications of what to look out for when selecting a friend that can be trusted.

In the New Testament, God manifests the principles of a true friend in Jesus' words and sacrificial, selfless actions. Throughout His ministry, Jesus exhibits the friendship trait of speaking plainly to others: "A friend is someone who, both in private and public, always speaks openly and honestly regardless of the cost" (O'Day, 2004, p. 156). In private, Jesus speaks truthfully and directly to the disciples, helping them to understand what He is preaching. Mark 4:34 says that when Jesus was finished preaching to a crowd and telling parables, "privately to His own disciples He explained everything." Jesus "treats the disciples as equals by speaking plainly to them" (O'Day, 2004, p. 155), sharing with them His ministry. In John 11:11, before Jesus goes to heal Lazarus, He informs the disciples, "[o]ur friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." When the disciples seem confused as to Jesus' actions, He tells them plainly in verse 14, "Lazarus has died." He goes on in verse 15 to say, "for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe." Jesus does not try to keep their feelings from being hurt by concealing or softening the truth. In these verses, Jesus "links [H]is 'plain speaking' to the disciples' welfare," because in sharing the truth about Lazarus' death, He ensures they are prepared for witnessing God's glory when He brings Lazarus back to life (O'Day, 2004, p. 155). Jesus also spoke openly and freely in public, proclaiming truth to the world. One prayer that evidences Jesus' bold, honest speech in front of a crowd is recorded in John 11:41-42, where Jesus speaks to the Father before raising Lazarus from the dead, saying, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on

account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." Jesus states openly through His prayer exactly what He and His Father are doing, revealing to all present as an "open testimony" the kind of open friendship He has with God, so they can believe (O'Day, 2004, p. 154). Through this prayer, He also does not attempt to flatter the Father. In the time of the New Testament, the use of flattery did not mark a true friend, because it meant the person had selfish motives behind their speech (O'Day, 2004). When Jesus prays aloud to the Father, His speech illustrates that He "does not attempt to flatter God for [H]is own purposes but seeks only God's glory" in front of the crowd (O'Day, 2004, p. 153). Jesus' open and honest speech prove Him to be a true friend to those around Him.

Jesus not only spoke about how to act out true friendship but then exhibited it Himself when He died on the cross. Jesus' words alone would not be "enough to try friendship; it must be shown repeatedly through acts of generosity and loyalty" (Culbertson, 1996, p. 155). In order for Jesus to be the perfect true friend, He also lived out His teachings. In John 15:13, He says to His disciples, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." He not only preaches this, but "His life is an incarnation of this teaching…[H]e lay down [H]is life for [H]is friends" (O'Day, 2004, p. 150). In John 10:17-18 He says, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." When the soldiers come to arrest Him in the garden, Jesus "came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?'" (John 18:4). As the soldiers say they are looking for Jesus, He willingly tells them in verse 5, "I am He." The Bible makes clear that "Jesus' life is not taken from [H]im; rather, [H]e willingly chooses the ultimate act of friendship" (O'Day, 2004, p. 151). Further, He completes the acting out of His teaching by protecting His

disciples. In John 18:8 He tells the soldiers, “So, if you seek me, let these men go.” Jesus backs up His words with His actions, giving Himself to the soldiers while protecting His friends.

Jesus lived out friendship in His earthly life in order to exemplify for the disciples how they themselves should act as friends. In John 15:14-15, Jesus says to them, “You are my friends if you do what I command you…I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” He commands them in verse 12 to “love one another as I have loved you.” Jesus calls the disciples “to live the same way Jesus has lived, to be the kind of friend that Jesus has been” (O’Day, 2004, p. 152). Jesus tells the disciples that they are His friends if they act like the friend He has been to them: “to love one another as Jesus loved them, to lay down their lives for their friends” (O’Day, 2004, p. 152). In Matthew 16:21-23, Peter attempts to counsel Jesus not to let Himself be crucified. Jesus corrects him by saying in verse 23, “you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Jesus constantly focused the disciples, including Peter, on eternity and godliness, and He reminds Peter in this moment that as a good friend, he should also point others’ attention to God’s ways. The disciples retain the ability to act out true friendship because they witnessed and received Jesus’ perfect acts of friendship (O’Day, 2004). God sent Jesus as “the pattern of friendship for us to follow so that we might do our friend’s will, reveal all our innermost thoughts to our friend and learn his secrets too” (White, 1992, as cited in Culbertson, 1996, p. 155). In his letter to the Philippians, Paul expounds upon Jesus’ command. Philippians 2:1-4 says:

> So if there is any encouragement in Christ…complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Paul tells believers that "the ideal of friendship is to advocate a humility…that considers others more than the self," an attitude they should have because Jesus Himself modeled it through His own mindset (Johnson, 2004, pp. 163-164). Paul also points out the traits that oppose the definition of a true friend: "Competition and arrogance are the attitudes that destroy genuine friendship" (Johnson, 2004, p. 163), which Paul identifies as "selfish ambition" and "conceit" in Philippians 2:3. Paul's call for believers to be unified is centered in the "ideal of fellowship" which "was profoundly reshaped by the experience of Christ," countering "self-aggrandizing attitudes of envy, rivalry, and arrogance" (Johnson, 2004, p. 164).

In both the Old and New Testament, God identifies what makes a friend trustworthy through teachings and examples. A true friend gives generously, thinking of others above himself. Friends are loyal, sticking close when circumstances become difficult. A good friend speaks openly and honestly about matters and addresses their friend with respect. Above all, they should direct their friend's thoughts and actions towards the Lord. Jesus embodies a true friend "not only because of the gift of [H]is own life but also because throughout [H]is life [H]e has spoken openly" (O'Day, 2004, p. 157). These characteristics of His friendship perfectly shown through His earthly life prove Jesus to be "the ultimate friend" (O'Day, 2004, p. 157). Paul teaches believers steps to putting Jesus' example of true friendship into practice and highlights the traits that do not mark a good friend, such as selfishness and rivalry. Flattery, spreading rumors, unreliability, and turning others' focus away from Christ also distinguish a false friend. The Bible specifies the distinctive characteristics of a good friend, and William Shakespeare emphasized those attributes through the friendships he crafted in his plays.

Banquo and Macbeth

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare introduced two characters, Macbeth and Banquo, who are fellow generals in the Scottish army and close personal friends. Shakespeare wrote Banquo as the representation of an honorable, uplifting friend to Macbeth. Throughout the play, Macbeth is drawn deeper and deeper into evil, while Banquo stays by his side and tries to point him toward God and repentance. Banquo's devotion to his friend throughout the circumstances of the play and desire to lead him to confess and trust himself to God are evidence of his true friendship.

Shakespeare did not create a world that merely alluded to Christianity, but "the world of the play is the Christian world" (Fendt, 2009, p. 392). The characters of Macbeth and Banquo continually reference and draw on the spiritual forces surrounding them: "Banquo's home is an earth not separated from heaven," and as a result, he constantly points others around him towards what is godly (Fendt, 2009, p. 390). Macbeth, on the other hand, calls "upon the Satanic forces of darkness" several times in order to carry out his ambitions (Ribner, 1959, p. 150). Shakespeare manifested this darkness by including pagan elements that conflict with Christian fundamentals, primarily the three witches. When the two friends are first approached by the witches, Banquo assesses them, drawing attention to their unnatural appearance (Shakespeare, 2015a). The witches give Macbeth prophecies that he will soon rise in the ranks and eventually become king of Scotland, and they tell Banquo that his lineage will rule. Banquo quickly responds by expressing that he does not "beg nor fear / Your favours nor your hate" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 860). He states that he does not need to hear and is not afraid of what the witches have to say. While Macbeth urges them to stay and explain their proclamations to him, Banquo questions their validity and existence. The prophecies become "hypnotic" (Fendt, 2009, p. 390) to Macbeth. Banquo, however, does not trust the origin of the pronouncements and "is

able to resist the temptation to which Macbeth succumbs" (Ribner, 1959, p. 152). Macbeth is promptly presented the title Thane of Cawdor, fulfilling part of the witches' statement, but Banquo cautions him, saying "[t]he instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 860). Banquo perceives that the witches are an evil influence and does not put much serious thought to their foretelling. Instead, Banquo "places his trust in the divine orderings of Providence" (Fendt, 2009, p. 391). His nature grants him the ability to look past the immediate allure of the witches to see God's will and truth. However, Banquo realizes that the witches have deeply affected his friend. Macbeth, having received proof of what they spoke, trusts them and believes he will become king. He starts warring within himself, trying to discern whether to take action to make the final prophecy happen or to let fate decide (Shakespeare, 2015a). At first, Macbeth is eager to discuss his inner struggles with Banquo and proposes they discuss the sudden events with "free hearts each to other" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 861), to which Banquo eagerly agrees.

The scene then shifts to Macbeth's castle, where Lady Macbeth urges him to take matters into his own hands and assassinate King Duncan. Macbeth insists he will "proceed no further in this business" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 863), but as his wife continues to influence him, he eventually agrees to kill Duncan. Banquo finds Macbeth and pulls him aside, disclosing that he dreamed about the witches and prompting Macbeth to talk about what he is thinking and feeling about the truth forming in their prophecies (Shakespeare, 2015a). Banquo is aware that Macbeth has been "profoundly effected [sic] from the first by their meeting with the Witches," and his loyalty to Macbeth drives him to offer a way to unburden his mind and gain accountability with a trusted friend (Henneberger, 1946, p. 20). He urges Macbeth to be open and honest with him. Macbeth denies the presence of the witches in his thoughts and tries to subtly brush past the topic

in order to hide his dark intentions, asking Banquo to speak about the matter with him at a later time, to which Banquo readily agrees (Shakespeare, 2015a). As a good friend, Banquo knows Macbeth extremely well and indicates that "he considers it very possible…for Macbeth to make proposals not consonant with his, Banquo's, sense of honor" (Henneberger, 1946, p. 20). Although Macbeth tries to dissuade Banquo from knowing his malicious thoughts and plans, he still extends a hint of an invitation to his friend, saying, "[i]f you shall cleave to my consent,—when 'tis, / It shall make honour for you" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 864). Banquo replies, "[s]o I lose none / In seeking to augment it, but still keep / My bosom franchised, and allegiance clear, / I shall be counsell'd" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 864). In this statement, he is clearly reminding Macbeth that he will not do something to undermine his own conscience or honor of the loyalty he swore to the king (Henneberger, 1946). Banquo stands true in his own honor, calling Macbeth to the openness that Jesus shared with His disciples in John 11. He generously offers his time to Macbeth, as well as a way out of the plot against Duncan before it is too late, exemplifying his loyalty to his friend.

When Duncan's murder is discovered, Banquo proclaims he will oppose the evil that surrounds the deed because he stands "in the great hand of God" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 867). This declaration once again evidences Banquo's goal to set Macbeth's mind on God's ways, because he knows they are "higher" than the way Macbeth is following (Isaiah 55:9). After Macbeth is crowned as king, Banquo reveals that he is suspicious of Macbeth's involvement in the deed. As he is thinking over the recent events, he says, "[t]hou hast it now,—king, Cawdor, Glamis, all, / As the weird women promised; and I fear, / Thou playd'st most foully for't" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 868). He knows his friend's heart and is aware of how much Macbeth was affected by what the witches revealed. The suddenness of the king's murder leads him to

believe that Macbeth may have had a hand in it. Macbeth then joins Banquo, inviting him to a feast he is hosting that evening. Banquo accepts and reinforces his loyalty to Macbeth as his king and friend, declaring, "[l]et your highness / Command upon me; to the which my duties / Are with a most indissoluble tie / For ever knit" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 868). Despite his suspicions, Banquo is willing to stick by his friend so Macbeth can come to him and discuss what has been going on in his mind, even though Banquo might be feeling hurt and saddened by Macbeth's betrayal of their king: "Acts of friendship must transcend the volatility of emotions" (O'Day, 2004, p. 145). Several other nobles desert Scotland when they suspect Macbeth (Shakespeare, 2015a), but Banquo lives out Proverbs 17:17 and 18:24 by actively loving Macbeth through his decision to stay by Macbeth's side. He chooses to put Macbeth's "interests," or rather his spiritual needs, above his own (Philippians 2:4). Banquo's willingness to stick by Macbeth at this moment confirms his character as that of a true friend.

When Banquo departs to go on an evening ride with his son, Fleance, Macbeth announces his altered view of his friend. He proclaims that he is afraid of Banquo, because "in his royalty of nature / Reigns that which would be fear'd" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 868). Macbeth knows that Banquo is noble at heart and that the "dauntless temper of his mind" urges Banquo to act with "a wisdom that doth guide his valour" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 868). Macbeth's speech demonstrates that "even in his corruption, [Macbeth] sees Banquo's…spiritual superiority" (Fendt, 2009, p. 392). Banquo's character is a reminder to Macbeth of his own "ordinary humanity" that he "must destroy within himself before he can give his soul entirely to the forces of darkness" (Ribner, 1959, p. 153). He therefore resolves to get rid of Banquo, as well as Fleance, who is a threat to his throne, since the witches declared Banquo's lineage would be kings (Shakespeare, 2015a). Macbeth recruits murderers by twisting the character of his friend,

claiming Banquo had harmed them all somehow in the past (Shakespeare, 2015a). The murderers successfully carry out their orders to kill Banquo but fail to assassinate Fleance.

When he is throwing a banquet for his nobles, Macbeth receives the news of the murderers' assignment. He is relieved to hear that Banquo, "the grown serpent," is dead, and though he is "bound in / To saucy doubts and fears" due to Fleance's escape, he states that his prophesied usurper has "[n]o teeth for th'present" and returns to his guests (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 871). When he turns to sit at his place at the table, he is confronted by the ghost of his murdered friend, Banquo, in his seat. Macbeth is unnerved at the appearance of his murdered friend (Shakespeare, 2015a). He responds to the actions of the ghost and consequently describes its appearance, saying, "[t]hou canst not say I did it: never shake / Thy gory locks at me" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 871). Banquo's ghost "presents Macbeth's sin in all its bloody consequence—to his face" (Fendt, 2009, p. 395). Banquo's sudden presence, still covered in blood from his brutal death, reminds Macbeth of the evil he has done and provides him with another opportunity to repent. When Banquo's apparition first disappears, Macbeth announces to his guests that he has "a strange infirmity," trying to brush aside his sudden fearful outburst (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 872). However, Macbeth "does not confess further to what that infirmity is" (Fendt, 2009, p. 395). The presence of Banquo's ghost provides him with a moment to unburden himself of his evil deeds by confiding in those around him, and it "almost…breaks him to a soul-saving confession" (Fendt, 2009, p. 395). Despite the affront of seeing his sin in his face, Macbeth does not heed the warning of his friend to turn from the darkness he has surrounded himself with and goes on with the banquet, pretending nothing is wrong. He even toasts "to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss; / Would he were here!" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 872). Banquo appears a second time after that exclamation, and Macbeth is even more

terrified, causing the banquet to end (Shakespeare, 2015a). Instead of responding to his friend's promptings and turning from his wickedness, Macbeth hardens his resolve further and seeks advice and knowledge from the witches, delving deeper into darkness (Shakespeare, 2015a). Banquo consistently provides Macbeth with opportunities to repent and be forgiven, even after he has been slain, confirming that "even his ghost is the ghost of the truest friend" (Fendt, 2009, p. 397).

Macbeth approaches the witches once more and demands they tell him about his future and who will come to oppose him (Shakespeare, 2015a). When the witches have finished giving him their predictions, Macbeth asks one final question that has been eating away at him since he became king: "shall Banquo's issue ever / Reign in this kingdom?" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 875). The witches caution him against it, proclaiming it will "grieve his heart," but Macbeth insists he must know, so they reveal a line of eight kings, followed by Banquo's ghost (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 875). As these apparitions appear, Macbeth indicates that the witches' cauldron is sinking "under the very question…of Banquo's blessed line," because the darkness manifested in "their bloody cauldron holds no power against" the workings of God (Fendt, 2009, p. 397). Macbeth is distressed as he sees the kings parading in front of him, followed by Banquo, who "points at them for his" (Shakespeare, 2015a, p. 875). Macbeth realizes that Banquo's blessing and appearance in the place of honor during the banquet "is not due to his own pushiness with fate, or his attempt to control the temporal, wrenching it out of the hand of providence, as Macbeth does" (Fendt, 2009, p. 397). Banquo trusts his fate to God, and Macbeth sees, only too late, the path that he might have taken if he had followed his friend's example and promptings to honesty and truth.

Shakespeare constructed Banquo's character to embody the qualities of a true friend. When the witches first proclaim their futures, Banquo warns his friend of their evil nature, drawing Macbeth's gaze to God's higher design (Isaiah 55:9). Banquo's loyalty and openness emerge when he constantly checks in on Macbeth and offers a safe confidence for his friend to unburden himself from the influence of the witches. After King Duncan is murdered, Banquo suspects Macbeth's role in the bloodshed, but selflessly remains at Macbeth's side, knowing that his friend's needs are greater than his own. Banquo earnestly desires for Macbeth to acknowledge his dark, selfish thoughts, so he continually guides Macbeth to repent from his crimes, even after Banquo himself has been the victim of one. Banquo's selflessness and loyalty to Macbeth, as well as his godly reliance on the Lord's plan over his own, affirm him as a true friend. Macbeth shuns Banquo in favor of his own ambitions, welcoming the influence of the witches above that of his trustworthy, loyal friend, leading Macbeth to his own destruction.

Helena and Hermia

William Shakespeare represented a female friendship between two young Athenian women, Helena and Hermia, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The two friends refer to the strong emotional bond they shared in their childhood; however, the events of the play speak to the weakening of that original friendship. The introduction of Demetrius and Lysander into their lives exposes their true attitudes towards one another. Helena envies her friend and selfishly sees herself as competing with Hermia. Hermia is infatuated with Lysander and lacks loyalty to her childhood friend, Helena. Through this strained emotional bond, Shakespeare depicted the danger that jealousy and selfishness can cause in a previously strong friendship.

At the beginning of the play, the two girls' behavior reveals that they have already been separated by the introduction of two men into their lives prior to the play's events. Hermia's

father is intent on Hermia marrying Demetrius but states that Lysander has "bewitch'd the bosom" of his daughter (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 279). Hermia "frowns on, curses and hates Demetrius" (Stansbury, 1982, p. 58), declaring her love for Lysander (Shakespeare, 2015b). Lysander then reveals Demetrius' past with Helena, proclaiming that Demetrius "won her soul; and she…dotes in idolatry / Upon this spotted and inconstant man" who now confesses love for Hermia (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 280). When Hermia and Lysander are alone, discussing plans to elope in the woods, Helena appears. Helena is obsessed with Demetrius and "[j]ealous of the attention that Hermia now receives from Demetrius" (Hunt, 1986, p. 3). She announces to her friend, "O, were favour so, / Yours would I catch, fair Hermia!...Were the world mine, Demetrius being bated, / The rest I'ld give to be to you translated" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 281). Helena's heartbreak at Demetrius' unfaithful love festers jealousy against her friend, causing separation between the two girls. Hermia discloses to Helena that she and Lysander are planning to run away, saying, "in the wood, where often you and I…were wont to lie, / Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet, / There my Lysander and myself shall meet" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 281). This recall to the girls' childhood conferences in the forest proves their dissolving intimacy and its gradual nature (Bertolet, 2015). Helena later states that the two girls passed substantial time in "school-days' friendship" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291). Where once it had been just Helena and Hermia "spending time together, [Lysander]…joined them and eventually displaced" Helena (Bertolet, 2015, p. 171). Helena feels their separation more keenly, because she is "isolated," while Hermia "has entered a new union" with Lysander and, in Helena's view, with Demetrius (Bertolet, 2015, p. 171). When Lysander and Hermia depart, Helena muses over their conversation. She lingers on her isolation and heartbreak, saying "ere Demetrius lookt on Hermia's eyne, / He hail'd down oaths that he was only mine" (Shakespeare,

2015b, p. 281). Despite her later accusations that Hermia has betrayed her, Helena "breaks [her] promise with Hermia" (Hunt, 1986, p. 5) by telling Demetrius about Hermia's escape into the woods in order to gain Demetrius' attention. She weighs the consequences of her proposed action, deciding, "[i]f I have thanks, it is a dear expense: / But herein mean I to enrich my pain, / To have his sight thither and back again" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 281). Already Helena and Hermia exhibit selfishness in their relationship with one another. Hermia spends her time with Lysander and neglects Helena's needs, in direct opposition to the selflessness Paul calls for in Philippians 2:4. Helena never shows happiness for her friend's situation and thinks only of herself and her misfortunes, which causes her to compete with Hermia. Within the first scene of the play, Shakespeare made evident the holes in Helena and Hermia's friendship.

Shakespeare's descriptions of the two Athenian girls note the deep contrast in their characters through their actions and language within the woods. Hermia's character is "distinguished by her self-possession…and clear-sightedness," while Helena is "wordy and emotionally dependent, less affectionate towards Hermia" and "enjoys imagining pain and violence," even though she reacts cowardly to it (Stansbury, 1982, pp. 62-63). When Helena references Hermia's beauty, she constantly dwells on her eyes. Helena says that Demetrius "errs, doting on Hermia's eyes" and begrudgingly praises Hermia's "blessed and attractive eyes," wondering "[h]ow came her eyes so bright?" (Shakespeare, 2015b, pp. 281, 286). This consistent association of eyes with Hermia supports her character as seeing clearly, especially in her mutual loving relationship with Lysander (Stansbury, 1982). Hermia is confident in herself and in her relationships, addressing Helena with "thou" for the first portion of the play, the more intimate form of addressing someone (Stansbury, 1982, p. 61). She switches to the more distant form of

address, “you,” at the climax of the play during their fight, when she believes Helena has stolen Lysander from her (Stansbury, 1982, p. 61).

Helena is extremely “dependent by nature” (Stansbury, 1982, p. 59). She is identified by the length of her speeches to both herself and others, which she utilizes to “call attention to her isolation” (Stansbury, 1982, p. 59). Helena draws attention to the pain she is experiencing in all of her relationships with “wild and aggressive imagery,” of which most of her speeches consist (Stansbury, 1982, p. 62). As she follows Demetrius through the woods in pursuit of Hermia and Lysander, Helena exclaims, “I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius, / The more you beat me, I will fawn on you” and “[s]tay, though thou kill me, sweet Demetrius” (Shakespeare, 2015b, pp. 284, 286). Her use of violence to draw attention to herself through her pain is only present in her speech. When she is actually threatened by Hermia later in the play, she cries out to Lysander and Demetrius to protect her (Stansbury, 1982). Her use of aggressive imagery is simply for receiving concern, and Hermia’s challenge of it indicates her cowardice. Helena furthers her emphasis on her isolation when she addresses Hermia, as she solely uses the formal “you.” (Stansbury, 1982, p. 61). The nonexistence of intimacy in her language towards Hermia in the beginning of the play attests to her “coolness” towards Hermia and flies in the face of her later claim that they share a deep bond, which Hermia allegedly violated (Stansbury, 1982, p. 61). Helena and Hermia feature unique attributes which expose the cracks that have slowly formed in their relationship over the years.

Helena and Hermia’s loyalty to each other, and thus their friendship, dwindles further as the plot unfolds. Puck, instructed by the fairy king to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena, mistakes Lysander for Demetrius, and puts a love potion on his eyes, causing him to forget Hermia and devote himself to Helena (Shakespeare, 2015b). Upon realizing his mistake, Puck

anoints Demetrius' eyes as well, producing confusion and distress among the four lovers (Shakespeare, 2015b). Both Lysander and Demetrius declare their undying love for Helena, chasing her through the forest, until Hermia appears (Shakespeare, 2015b). Hermia's bewilderment at the unfolding events convinces Helena that her friend is behind their rude behavior, that it is Hermia who is "setting men against her," and wholeheartedly believes her self-manufactured rumor (Hunt, 1986, p. 4). She chides Hermia, saying:

> Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
> Now I perceive they have conjoin'd all three
> To fashion this false sport in spite of me.
> Injurious Hermia! most ungrateful maid!
> Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
> To bait me with this foul derision?
> Is all the counsel that we two have shared,
> The sisters' vows, the hours that we have spent,
> When we have chid the hasty-footed time
> For parting us,—O, and is all forgot?
> All school-days' friendship, childhood innocence?
> We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
> Have with our neelds created both one flower,
> Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
> Both warbling of one song, both in 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 moulded 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 rent our ancient love asunder,
>
> To join with men in scorning your poor friend?
>
> It is not friendly, ‘tis not maidenly:
>
> Our sex, as well as I, may chide you for it,
>
> Though I alone do feel the injury. (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291)

In the midst of Helena’s verbose reproach, she urges Hermia to remember their strong childhood friendship. She recalls the deep emotional bond they shared and manifests it through their common activity, embroidering (Shakespeare, 2015b). Helena calls upon that memory of sharing a sampler “in a desperate attempt to return Hermia to the roots of their childhood devotion…when their friendship was at its strongest” (Bertolet, 2015, p. 160). Shakespeare used the image of an embroidery sampler because it was a common employment of young girls in his day (Bertolet, 2015). According to the culture of England when he wrote the play, Shakespeare’s Helena and Hermia would have been put in a boarding school or another girl’s house for their education and thus would have spent a lot of time with one another (Bertolet, 2015). Needlework was one of the prominent pastimes for girls at time, both academically and for leisure (Bertolet, 2015). Helena employs this shared experience to conjure the sense of intimacy the activity created (Bertolet, 2015). Helena’s language depicts the girls as being “perfectly harmonized” in

both their sewing and singing, implying the same for their thoughts and feelings (Bertolet, 2015, p. 162). She describes their work by referencing images of "entwining and incorporation" in order to illustrate the deep emotional bond they had at the time (Bertolet, 2015, p. 160), such as in her comparison of it to two cherries, "moulded on one stem" (Shakespeare, 2015, p. 291). Throughout her appeal to Hermia, Helena uses the imagery of their combined work on the sampler in an attempt to evoke the friendship Hermia once gave her.

Helena's speech also reveals the reasons for the dissolution of her bond with Hermia. Helena's language implies that their friendship was built mainly on emotion. She "creates a contrast between the closeness of the girls' remembered bodies and their current oppositional stance" to show Hermia what she has done to their friendship (Bertolet, 2015, p. 161). Helena's plea is full of emotional overtures, especially in her detailed picture of the sampler, comparing them to "artificial gods" creating flowers together as they sang "one song" as well as "a double cherry…with two seeming bodies, but one heart" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291). The embroidery becomes an "emotionally charged object" that she uses to manipulate Hermia's view of their friendship and draw her to respond emotionally (Bertolet, 2015, p. 161). To Helena, the time they spent embroidering as children "encapsulates the essence of friendship and maidenhood" (Bertolet, 2015, p. 167). Helena claims that Hermia tore their "ancient love asunder" and betrayed the bond they had formed by joining "with men in scorning" her, accusing Hermia of not acting with loyalty as a good friend should (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291). Helena is even more hurt by Hermia's separation from her because, in Helena's mind, she immediately joined the two men "to engage in a practical joke at the expense of her abandoned friend" (Bertolet, 2015, p. 168). She perpetuates that suspicion, further separating her and from Hermia, just as Proverbs 16:28 warns. Helena's accusation alludes to the idea that the introduction of the men

into their friendship is the first real hardship Helena and Hermia have encountered in their relationship. Helena's "emotionally charged waves" do achieve a result, "reaching such a high intensity that Hermia responds…in an emotional rather than rational way" (Bertolet, 2015, p. 168). Hermia is shocked at Helena's "passionate words" because she believes that Helena is the one making fun of her (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291). Helena and Hermia both believe the other person is at fault, which reveals they do not inherently trust or respect each other, provoking a deeper rift in their friendship.

In her long tirade, Helena mentions the hours they spent side-by-side, indicating that an important factor of their bond is the how much time they invested to create and strengthen it (Bertolet, 2015). Earlier in the play, Lysander alludes to the fact that the time Hermia used to spend with Helena is now spent with him, saying, "in the wood…[w]here I did meet thee once with Helena" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 281). Hermia and Helena have not invested time in their friendship like they did when they were children. As a result, their emotional bond has slowly decayed. Their friendship was built on their proximity and the time they spent together but was not very deep. Helena claims they sang "in one key" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 291), but that is not "truly harmonious" (Hunt, 1986, p. 4). The two girls seem to have lacked going through hardships, which strengthen friendships by building support and respect. They did not have "opportunity for true harmony" and depth in their friendship because it consisted of "empathetic melding" into the unity Helena paints in her speech (Hunt, 1986, p. 4). As time has passed, they have grown "twain, independent, and no longer connected to each other" (Bertolet, 2015, p. 171). Hermia and Helena's relationship began as an emotional connection built on their similar childhood experience, but since then has been weakened by the appearance of the two men the lack of time they invested in each other.

Hermia's ultimate response to Helena's verbal outburst is the threat of a physical altercation. She scares Helena when she says, "I am not yet so low / But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes" (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 292). Helena quickly relents her anger and passion by claiming, "I evermore did love you, Hermia," and confessing that she betrayed Hermia by telling Demetrius about secret elopement with Lysander (Shakespeare, 2015b, p. 292). Helena and Hermia continue to quarrel and fight until Helena gives up and runs away into the forest (Shakespeare, 2015b). Their immediate argument is eventually corrected by Puck, who gives Lysander a remedy for the love spell so that he will once again love Hermia, while Demetrius stays enchanted and in love with Helena (Shakespeare, 2015b). Helena no longer feels isolated and abandoned, as she now has Demetrius' love, and Hermia is once again content as Lysander's love (Shakespeare, 2015b). However, the girls' friendship has still been weakened by Helena's jealousy and Hermia's time spent with Lysander.

Through the events of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* Shakespeare illustrated the decline of a childhood friendship that was not cherished and developed. Helena and Hermia were separated by their own individual characters and the intrusion of two men into their relationship. The two girls do not remain loyal to each other in the face of Lysander and Demetrius. Helena's jealousy, selfishness, and dependence on others causes her to view Hermia's confidence and clear-sighted actions as betrayal of her friendship, sparking rivalry in Helena's actions. Helena calls upon their time spent together as best friends at school, comparing their embroidery practice to their emotional connection. Hermia's selfishness and seeming casual treatment of her friendship with Helena breeds Helena's insecurities and drives her to drastic measures in an attempt to gain the attention she craves. Shakespeare characterized the friendship of Helena and

Hermia as a childhood emotional bond that slowly dissolves due to their lack of loyalty, constant support, and respect for one another.

Iago and Othello

In *Othello*, William Shakespeare designed Iago with characteristics in direct opposition of those of a true friend. Shakespeare valued "loyalty, unwavering support, and mutual respect" (Vollrodt, 2017, para. 2), and Iago's false semblance of these qualities serve as a warning: scrutinize the true character of others in order to avoid misplacing trust. A false friend can cause serious distress if someone relies on him for assistance. Through the example he wrote in *Othello*, Shakespeare stressed that, in terms of false friends, their "promises are false ones, that seeming truths are half truths," and that "evil works through deception, by posing as the friend of man" (Ribner, 1959, p. 151). Iago demonstrates Shakespeare's view of a harmful friend by deceiving Othello, becoming characterized as "one of the cleverest false friends of all time" (Evans, 2001, p. 1). Iago consistently looks to his own gain above others' and seeks revenge on Othello when he does not receive what he believes he deserves. He uses his knowledge of Othello's character to manipulate his emotions and create rumors he knows will drive Othello to evil ends. He offers a false sense of support that Othello implicitly trusts. Iago instigates the total collapse of Othello's perception and life for his own satisfaction, embodying the "unreliable friend" in Proverbs 18:24.

Iago is a soldier in the Venetian army under Othello's command. At the beginning of the play, Iago fumes over what he sees as a slight against him. Othello has chosen a new lieutenant, and although Iago sent "[t]hree great ones of the city, / In personal suit to make me his lieutenant," Othello favored Cassio (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 818). Iago's anger at Othello's decision stems from his belief in his "unrealized potential," (Cressler, 2019, p. 81). He states that

he is “worth no less a place” than as Othello’s lieutenant, and he compares Cassio’s nonexistent military record with his own extensive one, saying Cassio “never set a squadron in the field…[b]ut he, sir, had th’election / And I—of whom his [Othello’s] eyes had seen the proof / At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds Christian and heathen” (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 818). From Iago’s account, Othello “circumvents an established social practice…by elevating…Cassio, over one with a proven military record, Iago” (Tvordi, 2008, p. 91). Since Othello has chosen someone with less military skill, Iago finds it an “insult hard to be borne” (Maginn, 2009, p. 264). Iago is angered that Othello ignores the traditional way of promotions, assessing a soldier’s skill in the field, and instead chooses to base his promotions on his personal feelings of affection for Cassio (Tvordi, 2008).

Iago’s rage leads him to devise a plan to get revenge on Othello (Maginn, 2009). He says, “I am not what I am,” declaring his intent to deceive and undermine Othello for passing over Iago (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 818). Iago’s immediate desire for revenge begins to reveal his character, highlighting his vanity. Because he “so keenly feels and deeply resents [the] personal…affront” of not being promoted, Iago clearly “must set no small value upon himself” (Maginn, 2009, p. 267). This is an early indicator that Iago will not be a good friend within the play. A good friend, as established in Philippians 2:3-4, should not be selfishly motivated, but should think of others’ needs above his own. Iago proclaims that he will still fight under Othello in order to “serve my turn upon him” and compares himself to a servant who seems dutiful but is actually cheating his master out of his money (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 818). His declaration highlights the false loyalty he plans to show to Othello. Iago expressly states that he will only be looking out for his own needs when he explains, “[o]thers there are, / Who… [k]eep their hearts attending on themselves…throwing but shows of service on their lords,…such a one do I profess

myself" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 818). Iago's character as a disingenuous friend exposes itself before he puts any plans of revenge into motion.

Iago's first plan to avenge himself on Othello is through his marriage to Desdemona. Their marriage was a secret, so even Desdemona's father does not know that she is Othello's wife (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago craves vengeance for not being given what he thinks he was owed, so he decides to do the same to Othello: "to give nothing, to transform Othello into the non-placeholder that Iago has become" (Cressler, 2019, p. 83). However, once the plan has been set in motion to alert Desdemona's father so he will take Othello to court, Iago realizes that this plan will not fully destroy Othello. He tells Roderigo, his fellow conspirator, that "the state, / However this may gall him with some check, / Cannot with safety cast him," because they need Othello to help them win the war against the Turks (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 819). The meeting before the Duke and Senate about Othello's marriage ends with Othello being tasked with an important military assignment and Desdemona's father's acceptance of him, so Iago must devise a different scheme to take down Othello (Shakespeare, 2015c).

In Act 1 Scene 3, Iago's true colors fully come to light. Iago confesses that he is just using Roderigo for his own end and not earnestly assisting him in his quest to gain Desdemona's affection, once again looking out for his own interests above Roderigo's (Shakespeare, 2015c). He only supports Roderigo when it serves himself. He then begins to ponder how he will supplant Cassio and exact his revenge on Othello (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago forms a new plot when he considers Othello's character, stating Othello "is of a free and open nature, / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so; and will as tenderly be led by th' nose / As asses are" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 825). Iago's statement reveals that he looks down on Othello's tendency to trust others, and therefore does not respect him. Othello is "gullible enough to swallow Iago's

lies" (Gerard, 1957, p. 100), and Iago needs his gullibility to convince him that Cassio is "too familiar with" Desdemona (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 825). Iago knows his victim's tendency towards trusting anyone, so he builds up his own façade of honesty that Othello believes and forces him to choose who to trust: Iago or Desdemona (Gerard, 1957). As Banquo draws upon light and godliness to help him guide his friend, Iago calls to his aid the powers of darkness. He "looks constantly for inspiration" from hell (Scragg, 1969, p. 62), which he declares at the end of his speech about Othello's character, saying "hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 825). Many of the deceptive maneuvers he employs happen in literal darkness at night, adding to the confusion and further obscuring Othello's judgment so Iago seems to be the one true friend looking out for him (Scragg, 1969). As Iago is the one creating and feeding Othello false rumors, he is the only one who knows the truth from the lies, and he tries to "confuse the distinction between them in his own mind as well as in the minds of others" (Hibbard, 1969, p. 42). One of the reasons he succeeds at flattering and deceiving Othello is because most of the other people around him also believe that Iago is honest (Evans, 2001). Iago also knows that Othello has a tendency to let his passion rule him (Beier, 2014). As a result, Iago plans to use his words to manipulate Othello's emotions: "corrupting Othello's ability to judge both what he hears and sees" (Beier, 2014, p. 40). Iago impresses on Othello a "warped vision of life" (Hibbard, 1969, p. 45) and builds upon that view with each additional deception.

Iago begins his deception of Othello soon after the battle against the Turks ends. Iago mentions when speaking to himself that he believes Othello slept with his wife, Emilia, and just the rumor alone causes him to declare that "nothing can or shall content my soul / Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife. / Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor / At least into a jealousy so

strong / That judgement cannot cure" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 829). His desire for revenge grows stronger as he designs more reasons to hate Othello, forging in him an "absolute need to denigrate and undermine all that is true, good, and beautiful" (Hibbard, 1969, p. 44), especially in Othello's life, even if it does not relate to Iago's own military gain. Iago knows that by calling into question Othello's relationship with his wife, he will destroy Othello from the inside out, robbing him of his peace (Cressler, 2019). Soon after he declares this, Iago orchestrates a brawl in which he frames Cassio and influences Othello to remove Cassio from his office. The entire time, Iago tries to "establish his seeming *ethos*" and "appear good, so his eloquence may effect evil" (Beier, 2014, p. 40, 39). When Othello discovers the brawl, he refers to Iago as "[h]onest Iago" and trusts him to tell a truthful account of what happened (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 831). Iago professes that he "had rather have this tongue cut from [his] mouth / Than it should do offense to Michael Cassio" and gives a show of downplaying Cassio's actions (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 831-832). Othello is convinced of Iago's character and advocacy for Cassio while unknowingly fueling Iago's revengeful attitude. Despite his success, Iago still craves to destroy Othello's happiness and peace of mind (Beier, 2014). He manipulates Cassio to seek Desdemona's help in petitioning Othello to reinstate Cassio (Shakespeare, 2015c). Once he is alone, Iago divulges his newest plan: "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,-- / That she repeals him for her body's lust; / And by how much she strives to do him good, / She shall undo her credit with the Moor" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 833). Iago plans to "infect Othello's judgement in such a manner that he will misinterpret Desdemona" (Beier, 2014, p. 40).

Iago unfolds his plan by making Othello wary. In Act 3 Scene 3, Iago uses small, meaningless observations and comments to suggest to Othello that "something is purportedly amiss" (Beier, 2014, p. 42). As Iago and Othello glimpse Cassio leaving Desdemona, Iago

mutters “I like not that,” then denies he said anything important when Othello asks, as well as refers to Cassio’s retreat as “guilty-like” (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 834). As Othello and Iago talk in private, Iago “simultaneously discourages jealousy in Othello and plants seeds of jealousy” (Beier, 2014, p. 42). He pretends to be a loyal friend, earnestly looking out for Othello’s good and claiming he does not wish to slander others or jump to conclusions. He inquires after Cassio’s role in Othello’s courtship with Desdemona and gives vague exclamations in response, which prompt Othello’s curiosity to discover the meaning behind Iago’s interest (Shakespeare, 2015c). Othello reaffirms his trust in Iago, saying, “thou’rt full of love and honesty, / And weigh’st thy words before thou givest them breath, / Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more” (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 835). Iago has built up his credibility as a good friend in Othello’s eyes, so Iago’s slight hesitations are picked up on by Othello and deceive him. Othello even mentions how much he would distrust a “false disloyal knave” if he tried the same tactics as Iago is currently employing (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 835). Othello compels Iago to tell him what he is thinking about Cassio, but Iago refuses several times to reveal his suspicions. He makes excuses, devaluing the importance of what he has to say and claims that his “nature’s plague / To spy into abuses” is not something to be trusted (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 836). This “guarded” manner of discussing Cassio’s character and honesty “suggests to the Moor both Iago’s fidelity in friendship and his honesty and discretion” (Beier, 2014, p. 40). Iago plans his responses carefully so as to appear open and honest in order to manipulate Othello.

Iago then introduces suspicion in Othello’s mind by exclaiming how unhappy a man must be who adores a wife whose faithfulness he doubts and that one must guard against jealousy (Shakespeare, 2015c). Othello makes the leap from Iago’s general musings to his own life, just as Iago intends. Iago makes a vague suggestion about a man whose wife is cheating on him in

order to arouse Othello's suspicions, but he "forces Othello to articulate his own fears and thereby generate horrendous suspicions unmediated by another mind" (Cressler, 2019, p. 93). Using this tactic, Iago will not raise Othello's suspicions that he is instigating the lies until it is too late. Iago exploits the close friendship between Desdemona and Cassio to imply their betrayal of Othello, not a friendship that admires and strengthens Othello (Tvordi, 2008). Othello initially rejects Iago's claims, demanding to see proof before he doubts his wife's faithfulness (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago strengthens his own trustworthiness by claiming the "love and duty" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 836) that he has for Othello has driven him to reveal the truth about Desdemona and Cassio (Beier, 2014). He recounts times that Desdemona has already lied which spurs on Othello to question her character (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago leaves Othello with another disclaimer that he may not be right, saying, "[l]et me be thought too busy in my fears– / As worthy cause I have to fear I am— / And hold her free, I do beseech your honour" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 837). After this conversation with Iago, Othello is "vacillating between certitude…and contingent thinking that privileges Desdemona's guilt over her innocence" (Beier, 2014, p. 42). Iago's parting words seem to Othello like the honest words of a good friend cautioning him, but their true purpose is to reinforce the doubts already springing up in his mind.

Iago continues his deception of Othello by providing him with some sort of proof of the affair between his wife and former lieutenant. He first puts on a show of professing how awful it is to be honest and try to help one's friends, proclaiming, "from hence / I'll love no friend" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 838). Othello accepts that Iago is acting as a good friend but demands hard proof of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, to which Iago responds with reassurance that he will get proof, albeit circumstantial (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago plans to utilize Desdemona's handkerchief that he obtained: "which he believes Othello's jealousy will twist to a proof equal

in weight to divinely inspired scripture" (Beier, 2014, p. 43). Iago asks Othello if he knows about a handkerchief with a strawberry design, then says he saw a similar one with Cassio (Shakespeare, 2015c). He uses this tactic because it "again leaves unsaid those things that Othello might not believe from another but that seem certain when apparently self-discovered" (Beier, 2014, p. 43). Othello thinks the rumors from Iago are the hard evidence he needs and rewards Iago with his lieutenancy: "never considering that Iago had something to gain for himself in his false report" (Beier, 2014, p. 44). Iago is now Othello's lieutenant, as well as "Cassio's emotional successor," the one whom Othello goes to with his personal problems, giving Iago the opportunity to bring about the "absolute destruction" of Othello's marriage and thus his life (Tvordi, 2008, p. 94). Iago tells Othello that he has arranged a meeting between himself and Cassio that Othello can spy on him from a distance and "mark the…notable scorns / That dwell in every region of his [Cassio's] face" while Iago questions him about his affair with Desdemona (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 843). Othello is "dependent on Iago in his testing of Desdemona," which stems from his "desperation and rage" instead of healthy trust (Tvordi, 2008, p. 93). Iago blinds Othello by playing on his emotions, compelling Othello to solely rely on him. Othello's reliance on his unreliable lieutenant drags him deeper into destruction.

Iago's conversation with Cassio completely convinces Othello of Cassio's guilt. Iago has placed Othello at a distance, so Othello can only imagine and infer what Iago says to Cassio and what Cassio's facial expressions and gestures mean, and "[b]ecause Iago has told Othello that his show will condemn Cassio and Desdemona, it does so" (Cressler, 2019, p. 97). Iago's subtle hints and emotional appeals create proof in Othello's mind, so that he is certain of the affair by just the appearance of the handkerchief, which Cassio's lover, Bianca, brings to him in the middle of the conversation (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago could not have planned a more favorable

way for Othello to see his wife's handkerchief in Cassio's hands (Beier, 2014). The handkerchief gives Othello his "desired physical evidence" (Beier, 2014, p. 44). Despite it not being the total evidence that he initially wanted, in the midst of "Iago's half-truths and lies…it is enough" (Beier, 2014, p. 44). Cassio's body language and the handkerchief create a "mask" that hides Iago's deception from Othello, lending to Iago's continued escape from suspicion (Cressler, 2019, p. 94). After Cassio leaves, Iago returns to Othello and encourages his rage. Iago continuously reminds Othello of the gravity of Desdemona's supposed unfaithfulness and how much that should anger him (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago even goes so far as to suggest that Othello strangle her, instead of Othello's idea of killing her with poison (Shakespeare, 2015c). Iago directly prompts Othello to act in an ungodly manner, disobeying the Lord's command to love (John 15:12).

Iago's influence on Othello is at this point complete. As Iago has worked on his mind, Othello has begun assimilating his false friend's language, taking on Iago's "debased view of life" into his own life (Scragg, 1969, p. 62). Upon hearing Desdemona speak about Cassio, Othello exclaims, "Fire and brimstone!" and calls her "Devil!" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 845), referencing the powers of evil. Iago has thoroughly destroyed Othello's happiness and peace, leaving Othello in only the darkness he calls upon towards the end of the play (Hibbard, 1969). Iago has not pointed Othello to "the things of God," but to the things of the evil one (Matthew 16:23). Driven completely mad by jealousy, Othello kills Desdemona (Shakespeare, 2015c). Emilia, Iago's wife, reveals to Othello what actually happened and bares to him the truth of Iago's character (Shakespeare, 2015c). At this point, Othello realizes he has been fooled by Iago's façade of friendship and "recognizes the utter lack of wisdom" on his part (Gerard, 1957, p. 105). He is fully aware of the "nature of deception" (Scragg, 1969, p. 63) Iago has used on

him, calling him a "demi-devil" and accusing him of having "ensnared [his] body and soul" (Shakespeare, 2015c, p. 856). Othello sees his mistake of rating the declared Iago's declared honesty above that of his trustworthy, devoted wife (Gerard, 1957). Othello's distress at his own actions causes him to declare himself a foolish man whose jealous love and passion got the better of him through Iago's manipulation, and he commits suicide (Shakespeare, 2015c). Othello is a "basically…good man betrayed by an apparently good friend" (Evans, 2001, p. 1). Iago's manipulation results in the destruction of Othello's life, both emotionally and physically.

Othello puts full confidence in Iago, and his misplaced trust in Iago's character shatters his happiness in every other part of his life, as Proverbs 18:24 warns. Iago pretends to be a loyal friend who is only looking out for Othello's best interests, leading him down a path of uncertainty and destruction. Iago assesses Othello's character and personality to determine the most effective way to destroy Othello's happiness. He does not respect Othello and utilizes his passionate and trusting nature to convince him of Cassio and Desdemona's unfaithfulness. Iago disillusions Othello's innocent happiness, causing him to distrust his close relationships, sever his bond with Cassio, and kill Desdemona. Through the drama of *Othello*, Shakespeare warned against the dangers of a disloyal friend who selfishly deceives and destroys.

Conclusion

As the Bible explains, a true friend is someone who puts the other person's needs above their own, no matter the cost, as an act of unconditional love. A good friend also speaks openly and honestly, not out of a desire to flatter. The Bible also provides a perfect model in Jesus, who exemplified a true friend not only through his teachings, but through his actions as well. William Shakespeare valued respect, loyalty, and consistent support in friendships, which line up with the Bible's stance. Shakespeare crafted friendships within most of his plays, including *Macbeth, A*

Midsummer Night's Dream, and *Othello.* Each of these three plays explored friendships with different levels of healthiness. Shakespeare detailed the qualities of a true friend through Banquo in *Macbeth*. Banquo guides Macbeth towards godliness and selflessly seeks to help Macbeth, standing alongside him despite Macbeth's decision to not open himself up to his friend. Banquo proves himself to be a loyal friend, and Macbeth's life degrades when he does not reciprocate. Shakespeare elaborated on the danger of selfishness and jealousy sneaking into a friendship in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Hermia does not consistently support Helena and chooses Lysander's company over her friend's, which Helena, amidst her own selfishness, views as a breach of loyalty. Their treatment of each other illustrates the instability that jealousy can cause in a friendship without loyalty and support. Finally, Shakespeare illustrated the harm that the influence of a disloyal, self-centered friend can produce. Othello trusts the false, manipulative Iago above all others in his life, believing that he possesses loyalty and honesty. Iago takes advantage of his knowledge of Othello's character and vengefully cloaks himself in selfless loyalty to betray Othello, inducing a downward spiral of destruction in Othello's life. Loyalty, selflessness, support, honesty, and respect comprise key values of a true friend. Shakespeare stressed through his written friendships the importance of a friend with a godly, honest influence.

References

Beier, B. V. (2014). The art of persuasion and Shakespeare's two Iagos. *Studies in Philology, 111*(1), 34–64. https://doi.org/10.1353/sip.2014.0002

Bertolet, A. (2015). "Like two artificial gods": Needlework and female bonding in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In Wright, M. (Author) & Netherton, R. & Owen-Crocker, G. (Eds.), *Medieval Clothing and Textiles 11* (pp. 159-178). Boydell and Brewer.

Cressler, L. (2019). Malcontented Iago and revenge tragedy conventions in Othello. *Studies in Philology, 116*(1), 73-100.

Culbertson, P. (1996). Men and Christian friendship. In Nelson, J. (Author) & Krondorfer, B. (Ed.), *Men's bodies, men's gods: Male identities in a (post) christian culture* (pp. 149-180). NYU Press.

Evans, R. C. (2001). Flattery in Shakespeare's Othello: the relevance of Plutarch and Sir Thomas Elyot. *Comparative Drama, 35*(1), (pp.1-28).

Fendt, G. (2009). Macbeth's Banquo: Faux ami as Christian friend. *Literature & Theology: An International Journal of Religion, Theory, and Culture, 23*(4), 388–400. https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frp029

Gerard, A. (1957). "Egregiously an ass": The dark side of the Moor. A view of Othello's mind. In A. Nicoll (Ed.), *Shakespeare survey* (Shakespeare Survey, pp. 98-106). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521064236.010

Henneberger, O. (1946). Banquo, loyal subject. *College English, 8*(1), 18-22. doi:10.2307/370443

Hibbard, G. (1969). “Othello” and the pattern of Shakespearian tragedy. In K. Muir (Ed.), *Shakespeare survey* (Shakespeare survey, pp. 39-46). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521072859.004

Hunt, M. (1986). Individuation in “A Midsummer Night's Dream.” *South Central Review, 3*(2), 1-13. doi:10.2307/3189362

Johnson, L. T. (2004). Making connections: The material expression of friendship in the New Testament: A journal of Bible and theology. *Interpretation, 58*(2), 158-171.

Maginn, W. (2009). Iago. In *Shakespeare papers: Pictures grave and gay* (Cambridge Library Collection - Literary Studies, pp. 256-274). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511692765.009

O'Day, G. R. (2004). Jesus as friend in the Gospel of John. *Interpretation*, *58*(2), 144+.

Ribner, I. (1959). Macbeth: The pattern of idea and action. *Shakespeare Quarterly, 10*(2), 147-159. doi:10.2307/2866920

Scragg, L. (1969). Iago—vice or devil? In K. Muir (Ed.), *Shakespeare survey* (Shakespeare survey, pp. 53-66). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521072859.006

Shakespeare, W. (2015a). *Macbeth*. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. (pp. 858-884). Barnes & Noble, Inc.

Shakespeare, W. (2015b). *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. (pp. 279-301). Barnes & Noble, Inc.

Shakespeare, W. (2015c). *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. *The complete works of William Shakespeare*. (pp. 818-857). Barnes & Noble, Inc.

Stansbury, J. (1982). Characterization of the four young lovers in A Midsummer Night's Dream. In S. Wells (Ed.), *Shakespeare survey* (Shakespeare survey, pp. 57-64). Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CCOL0521247527.006

Tvordi, J. (2008). "In quarter and in terms like bride and groom": Reconfiguring marriage, friendship, and alliance in Othello. *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, *8*, 85–101.

Vollrodt, K. (2017, July 30). Friendship in Shakespeare. *OUPblog, Oxford University Press.* https://blog.oup.com/2017/07/friendship-in-shakespeare/