Shakespeare and the Domestic: Geraldo U. de Sousa's *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* and Frederic B. Tromly's *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised*

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SHAKESPEARE AND THE DOMESTIC IS A DAUNTINGLY capacious rubric for a short review essay, and Geraldo U. de Sousa's *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* and Frederic B. Tromly's *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised* have little in common other than a place within that category. De Sousa's book takes as its topic the material space of the home and, more specifically, the "dramatic function of dwelling places in the tragedies" (3), arguing that "Shakespeare represents domestic space as a web of tragic relations" (9). Tromly, on the other hand, focuses more narrowly on common patterns in the relationships between fathers and sons in Shakespeare's plays, without singling out a specific genre (although, notably, there are no comedies included in his study). Both of these monographs have been preceded by several decades of historicist and feminist literary scholarship crossing what were once traditional disciplinary boundaries between literary studies, history, sociology, and anthropology to creatively explore literary texts as sites of knowledge on the politics and bonds of marriage, family, and the household. Both make contributions to this interdisciplinary pursuit, although neither breaks new ground.

Of studies that fall under the rubric of Shakespeare and the Domestic, articles and books on marital bonds, customs, and hierarchies are by far

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the most numerous, too numerous to review here in full. Among the most significant studies of marriage from the past thirty years that deserve mention, however, are Linda Fitz's 1980 "'What Says the Married Woman': Marriage Theory and Feminism in the English Renaissance"; Carol Neely's 1989 *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays*; Mary Beth Rose's 1988 *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* and her more recent "The Heroics of Marriage in Renaissance Tragedy" (1998); B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol's 2003 *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*; and Loreen L. Giese's recent contribution, *Courtship, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* (2006). Laurie Shannon's "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness" (2000) also needs to be mentioned, as it offers a crucial corrective to the heterocentric view most modern critics have taken to affective bonds, marriage, and the cultural work of Shakespearean comedy, the genre most often associated with the triangulated nexus of sexual love, romance, and family. Other important queerings of Shakespeare include Mario DiGangi's "Queering the Shakespearean Family" (1996); Julie Crawford's "The Homoerotics of Shakespeare's Elizabethan Comedies" (2006); and Valerie Traub's work, such as "The Homoerotics of Shakespearean Comedy" (1992), "The (In) Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England" (1992), and *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (1992). As DiGangi points out, however, "Shakespeare's contemporaries often present a fuller picture [than Shakespeare] of the early modern household and the same sex relations enabled by its particular functioning and composition" (270).

Catherine Belsey's 1999 *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* is a curious example as a monograph with overt political intentions "to historicize and thus denaturalize family values" (xiv) but which nevertheless maintains heteronormative assumptions and elides any discussion of homoerotic and homosocial ties in the early modern household. It also focuses solely on the nuclear family of husband, wife, parents, and siblings, although an important distinction between the early modern family and the modern family was the presence in the early modern family of "non-kin inmates, sojourners, boarders or lodgers ... as well as indentured apprentices and resident servants" (Stone 26–27). In the introduction to her edited collection, *Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England* (2002) (which includes two essays on plays by Shakespeare), Kari Boyd McBride gives attention to the extended nature of the early modern family, particularly to female servants. However, although article topics range broadly from

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parents, guardians, dowries, and cookery books to the commodification of wives and children and domestic space as a "stage," for "questions about emerging political realities" (13), only one article, Marianne Novy's "Multiple Parenting in Shakespeare's Romances," considers "children's presence in households outside their birth families" (188). This is a shift away from Novy's much earlier work on the family in "Shakespeare and the Emotional Distance in the Elizabethan Family" (1981), where she argues against Lawrence Stone's infamous assertion that families in the sixteenth century were characterized by "distance, manipulation, and deference" (quoted in Novy 316) but takes as her subject the nuclear family of husbands, wives, parents, and siblings. This more recent work again sees Novy expanding the critical conversation about the early modern family in timely directions.

Despite the critical elision of the extended family and the much greater focus on the nuclear family, the parent-child relationship is not as prevalent in scholarship as one might expect. Only a few published, full-length monographs in the past thirty years have taken the father-son relationship in Shakespeare's plays as their primary focus. Tromly's *Fathers and Sons* thus fills a significant gap. Of the existing studies, psychoanalytic approaches are represented by Avi Elrich's 1977 *Hamlet's Absent Father* and John Russell's 1995 *Hamlet and Narcissus*, as well as chapter 3 of Coppelia Kahn's *Man's Estate*, which examines male identity and filial succession in Shakespeare's history plays. Taking a more historical approach, Alison Findlay examines questions of filial legitimacy in *Illegitimate Power: Bastards in Renaissance Drama* (1994). The "family romance" of the father, the legitimate son, and the illegitimate son is the subject of Harry Berger Jr.'s "Text Against Performance: The Gloucester Family Romance," available in *Making Trifles of Terrors* (1997); Berger also looks at the York/Aumerle and Gaunt/Bolinbroke relationships in a chapter on *Richard II* in that collection. Shakespeare's use of the prodigal son narrative is the subject of Lawrence Danson's "Shakespeare and the Misrecognition of Fathers and Sons" (1998), wherein Danson contrasts the "gloriously sentimentalised reunions" (238) of fathers and daughters in his plays with the "deferred, denied and disappointed reunions between Shakespeare's fathers and their estranged sons" (236). (An earlier study of the prodigal son motif in English Renaissance literature is Richard Helgerson's *The Elizabethan Prodigals* [1976], although it examines romance and didactic prose rather than drama.) More recently, anxieties about filial succession are examined by Robert W. Reeder in "Siring the Grandchild in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Fawn*" (2008), where he points to the concerns of fathers that their

successful acts of "self-copying" will be undone if their sons marry badly and argues that Shakespeare and Marston "stage paternal efforts to control children's sexual maturation and thereby to 'sire' grandchildren" (349).

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More broadly, the relationships between children and parents have been covered in their various permutations in a number of other studies. The most significant study of mothers and sons in Shakespeare's drama is still Janet Adelman's 1992 *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*, in which she fuses psychoanalytic theory with sixteenth-century accounts and practices of mother-infant relations to explore the relationship between masculinity and the maternal body, pointing to "fantas[ies] of maternal malevolence" (3) in the plays and arguing for their basis in the maternal body as a site of psychic distress resulting from its status as a site of abandonment. Individual articles about mothers and sons tend to take Hamlet and Gertrude or Coriolanus and Volumnia as their most frequent topics; Kahn's chapter 6 examines the latter. Full-length studies of the father-daughter dyad in Shakespeare are limited to two: Diane Elizabeth Dreher's 1986 *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare*, which claims to be the first critical study to "fully explore the relationship of Shakespeare's fathers and daughters in its historical and developmental context" (2) and which draws for its analysis on Jungian developmental psychology, Renaissance moral philosophy (stressing hierarchy, obedience, and reverence), and domestic conduct and sermon literature, and Lagretta Tallent Lenker's more recent *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw* (2001), a comparative study which asserts that both Shakespeare and Shaw were "emerging feminists" (3) who should not be judged by present-day standards and which argues that both authors have inordinate focus on the father-daughter relationship and use it as a metaphor for larger social issues. Two important early articles on the father-daughter relationship are "Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare's Romances" by Hoy Cyrus (1978), which rather sentimentally (and sententiously) argues that in the romances, "the dramatist is engaged in [creating] … an ideal of femininity on whom the imagination can bestow its tenderest sentiments, without the distractions of sexual desire" (84) in order to "free the imagination from all the shrill mistress-wife-mother figures who have inhabited the late tragedies" (84), and Lynda Boose's 1982 "The Father and the Bride in Shakespeare," wherein she explores the excessively possessive love of fathers for their daughters as they reach marriage age and the destructive potentialities for individuals and family structures if the severance rite of marriage is not completed. In 1980, Myra Glazer Schotz pointed to the

critical lacunae that was studies of mothers and daughters in "The Great Unwritten Story: Mothers and Daughters in Shakespeare." It has by no means been filled, although Mary Beth Rose's magisterial "Where are the Mothers in Shakespeare? Options for Gender Representation in the English Renaissance" (1991) accounts for "both the presence and absence of mothers in Shakespearean tragedy and comedy" by considering the intersection of discourses on motherhood and "the terms and limits of dramatic structures" (295). More recently, Michael Basile has offered "Teaching Mothers in *Romeo and Juliet*: Lady Capulet, from Brooke to Luhrmann" (2000), and Juliet's nurse has also received some attention. One final recent book should be mentioned, which takes on the underdeveloped topic of children during childhood rather than in their grown or nearly grown stages, *Shakespeare and Childhood*, edited by Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy (2007). The first half of this collection of essays looks at the children within Shakespeare's plays, while the second half moves beyond the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to "trace the rich histories of negotiation, exchange and appropriation that have characterized Shakespeare's subsequent relations to the cultures of childhood in the literary, educational, theatrical and cinematic realms" (i).

Thus while scholarship on parents and children is by no means a new field, there is still terrain to be covered. Tromly breaks no new ground in creating a categorically new type of subject matter for literary studies; nor does he do so methodologically. This is not a "sexy" book, and its somewhat overwrought title will diminish it with those who like a bit of edge in their monographs. The book reflects what, in the past thirty years, has become a fairly conventional form of literary scholarship, the carefully historicized close reading. Happily, this is a successfully executed version of such endeavours, and its solid research and careful analysis yield the significant pleasures of new insights into the plays he examines, namely, *Henry VI, Part One*; *Richard II*; *Henry IV*, *Parts One and Two*; *Hamlet*; *King Lear*; *Macbeth*; *The Winter's Tale*; *Cymbeline*; and *The Tempest*. Tromly argues that social pressure in Elizabethan England created an untenable weight of filial obligation on sons, particularly first-born sons, reflected in Shakespeare's plays by sons who "disguise their aggression from paternal observation and censure" (6) by adopting various roles. Tromly's conclusions are informed primarily by early modern textual discourses of church, state, and school. He does consider Freudian concepts, namely that of "filial ambivalence" (7) but, wisely in my view, uses psychoanalysis more as a heuristic lens than a universal, transhistorical explanation of the psychic attitudes of sons toward fathers. Tromly locates the ambivalent

attitude of early modern English sons toward their fathers in the "uneasy confluence of two powerful currents of thought—one demanding the unconditional obedience and obligation of sons, the other asserting, or at least acknowledging, the value of filial talents and autonomy" (14). The latter discourse had its source in humanist education, with its emphasis on autonomy and rational choice, as well as in the Protestant conception of the vocation, which symbiotically stressed achieving one's full potential in the life journey to which one was personally called. The former attitude is reflected in texts such as Robert Cleaver's *A Godlie Form of Household Government* (1598), which perceives children as in such debt to their parents that they must, if need be, " 'give their lives for them: remembering that they are their parents' goods and possessions' " (quoted in Tromly 11). Filial obedience stems in part from having received the gift of life and thus is, in the words of Prince Hal that comprise Tromly's title, a "debt … never promised"; it is also "one that is never payable" (13). As Tromly puts it, "Children can no more repay their manifold debts to their parents than sinful man can win redemption without divine grace" (19). While Tromly agrees with recent historians of the family that Lawrence Stone's theory of the brutal patriarch is overstated, he nevertheless insists that a father's authority "carried great weight" (16) and also argues that eldest sons, particularly among the propertied classes, were treated with more discipline and subject to greater control because they were to carry on the family fortune and name—precisely the sort of sons who figure most prominently in Shakespeare's plays.

Emblems of the prodigal son and the Icarus myth figure in the first three plays Tromly examines, and Tromly begins by arguing for changes in how these well-known cautionary tales were written in the latter half of the sixteenth century, from moralistic exemplum reinforcing paternal authority toward a tendency to cast the prodigal as "attractively rebellious" (37) and the Icarus character as a "celebration of youthful desire" and "admirable ambition" (38). In his chapter on *Richard II*, Tromly notes that Richard himself is imaged as a wastrel prodigal, but he also demonstrates how the prodigal son motif in the play complicates the usual morals favouring the father figure by "representing [their] claims as less than compelling" (72). A chapter on *Henry VI, Part One* insightfully demonstrates how both the iconic models of Icarus, the son who deserts his father, and Aeneas, the son who rescues his father, exist within the character of young John Talbot, illustrating the "conflicting impulses" that sons have toward their fathers, (40). Tromly's interpretation acknowledges the standard emphasis on the two John Talbots as an emblem of Elizabethan father and son unity but

convincingly complicates it, arguing instead that the son won't accept a "corporate family honour" (49) by choosing rather to assert his own individual honour and identity. Tromly's interpretation of Prince Hal, Shakespeare's most notorious prodigal son, upends the standard reading, which takes Hal to the Eastcheap taverns out of an unruly immaturity (which is then conquered in his victory over Hotspur), in order to argue that Hal's motive is "to put some distance between himself and his [usurper] father" (99). In what are usually characterized as the reconciliation scenes (3.2 and 5.4), Tromly sees oblique disapproval on the part of Hal toward his father. Insightfully, Tromly notes that Prince Hal is characterized by an obsession with paying debts, unlike his father who has both stolen a kingdom and turned his back on those who helped him do so. When Tromley moves to *Hamlet*, however, his readings are less fresh than those of other chapters. Hamlet, like Hal, is "trapped in a dilemma created by previous generations" (153), but it is no new observation that Hamlet is caught between a revenge ethos espoused by his father and his own values of "sceptical, humanist thinking" represented by his status as a student. However, caught as he is between obedience to paternal authority and desire for autonomy, Hamlet is, essentially, the embodiment of the type of son examined in this study, and Tromly is perceptive on how he resists even while he idealizes his authoritative and manipulative father. In Tromly's analysis of *King Lear*, both Edmund and Edgar "possess ambivalent feelings" (196) about Gloucester, and while there is a polarized distinction at the beginning of the play between the bastard and the legitimate son, the "masterfully Machiavellian" Edmund and the "pitiably naïve" Edgar (197), the "opening contrast becomes increasingly attenuated and indistinct" (197) through the action of the play. Both sons don disguises and roles and deceive and manipulate their father. More significantly, Edmund's cruelty is countered by a bitter desire for Gloucester's love, while Edgar's Aeneas-like duty is contradicted by his refusal to identify himself and thus put Gloucester out of his misery and by his "coldly moralizing critique" (204) of his father, justifying his blindness as a punishment for adultery. Ambivalent sons, for the most part, disappear in *Macbeth* and the romances. With the exception of *The Winter's Tale*, in the romances father and son reunions are distanced and emotionally thin, and despite the symbolic import underwriting *Macbeth* of the unbroken line of sons from Banquo to James VI, there is little interaction between fathers and sons, they are rarely onstage together, and there is little "expression of mutual concern" (214). But while this model works for the formal relations represented between Duncan and his sons and Old and Young Siward, it is somewhat simplified in its

application to Banquo and Fleance, and Tromly himself has to modify it considerably for discussing Macduff and his son.

Tromly ends with a biographical coda, wherein he speculates on the degree to which Shakespeare projects his own relationship with his father into the father-son dyads of his plays. It makes for interesting reading but remains far too conjectural for this skeptical reader. The patterns of father-son ambivalence Tromly traces throughout *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised* are, on the other hand, fully convincing, and my understanding of the plays was enriched by this genuinely enjoyable book.

Geraldo U. de Sousa's *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* is considerably less successful than Tromly's study, although its scope and methodology are more ambitious. Tromly's book lacks a material dimension. He considers practice to a limited degree in his historical context chapter, but the dynamic history of "stuff"—land, objects, homes, wills, any material thing that might mediate relations between father and sons—is not a part of his analysis. Defining place as bounded but evocative of an affective response, and thus both material and "always *imagined*" (5), De Sousa proposes "to explore the complex, dynamic interplay between tragic character and emplacement of action, leading to an understanding of the place of the home in the tragic experience" (7). This is in accord with a recent move in early modern English literary studies toward considering how relations between subjects and material things can reveal different histories than the histories illuminated by ideologically driven contextualizing texts (such as those Tromly relies upon). Natasha Korda articulates this with particular acuity in *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (2002), where she argues for the importance, particularly for women's history, of "interrogating the rift between ideology and material practice" (7). *Domestic Economies* argues that practice may have been "far more varied and complex" (7) than the prescriptive patriarchal stories told by ideological texts, and Korda seeks out a revisionist history of female agency and participation through understanding women's "historical relations to household stuff" (7). De Sousa similarly pursues knowledge through the relationship between immaterial experience and the material world.

At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies is primarily about loss and lack—vanishing castles (*King Lear*), "unhousedness" (*Othello*), chasms in the concept of home (*Hamlet*), and the "failure of architecture" to close off a porous boundary between inside and a "fantastical, wild world" (142) outside (*Macbeth*). Two other recent full-length monographs that take on

domesticity, space, and the loss or lack of it should be mentioned here: *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature*, by Linda Woodbridge (2001), and *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss*, by Heather Dubrow (1999). Dubrow examines three types of domestic loss: the loss of goods from burglary, the loss of parents, and the loss of the physical abode itself, both as "locale and as haven" (2). She focuses on threats to the household from outside, presenting *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss* as supplementing Frances Dolan's *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (1994), which emphasizes threats to the household from within, such as murderous wives and husbands, rebellious servants, infanticide, and witchcraft. Dubrow argues, however, that transgressors from outside were a "threat to the very categories of 'inside' and 'outside'" (6), and notes as well that the physical edifice of the home is often represented to be as unstable and permeable as the female body with which it is commonly associated. Linda Woodbridge takes a slightly different focus to her study of domestic instability. The historical record has determined that the fear expressed in early modern English representations of homeless vagrants was enormously exaggerated with regards to the dangers they actually posed, and beliefs about the lives and habits of the poor and destitute were equally distorted. Woodbridge examines the cultural implications of these discrepancies.

Linda Woodbridge takes a slightly different focus to her study of domestic instability.

While Woodbridge, Dubrow, and Dolan contextualize their work with ideological texts, de Sousa attempts a materialist analysis. Unfortunately, it is riddled with problems. For instance, in his chapter on *King Lear*, de Sousa notes the drop of all mention of Lear's castle after Lear leaves it and promises to "link the disappearing castle … to a change in housing conditions, a crisis in patriarchal authority, and the disintegration of a way of life" (25). De Sousa mentions "architectural innovation, made possible by new wealth" which led to the replacement of the fortified feudal castle by the house (27), and argues that "Lear fails to negotiate the shift from the medieval castle to the early modern house" because he is "unprepared to make the transition from an unflinchingly patriarchal household to an emerging wider diversity of households, which, though still functioning within patriarchal systems, might be headed by women" (29). He goes on to argue that when Lear's castle vanishes, social relations and rules are thrown into a turmoil: "In Goneril's and Gloucester's houses, the characters redefine and reconfigure their social relations and rules, discard old alliances, form new partnerships, and assert their newly acquired power and authority" (36). But what is the connection between the architecturally new *house* and its newly configured *household relations*? We are

told that "architecture mingles with familial and political conflicts" (43), but how that mingling is represented in *King Lear* remains unexplained. Furthermore, that there even is an architectural shift from castle to house in *King Lear* remains dubious; De Sousa provides no evidence of it, and he himself elides the distinction, at one point noting that "No scenes in *King Lear* are set in or near Regan and Cornwall's *castle*" and on the same page turning his focus to "Regan's *house*" (42 emphases added). Regan and Goneril's cruel and tyrannical exploitation of the power they've been granted by their father may indeed reflect social anxieties about increasing female household authority, even while in the play it is not a function of a change in economics or architecture. But the lack of clarity in the argument and the paucity of details connecting the conflicts in the play with material conditions or with the broader cultural work they may have accomplished is disappointing.

At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies is also characterized by strange tangents and odd source texts. To give a few examples, in a discussion of the hovel on the heath in *King Lear*, de Sousa notes the frequent use of the word "enter" (53). One expects this statement to be followed by analysis of those usages, perhaps supporting the previously established focus on boundaries and "juxtapos[itions] [of] indoors and outdoors, inside and outside" (48). Instead, after a few lines of plot explanation, de Sousa offers an inexplicable digression on a late eighteenth-century English mineralogist traveling in Brazil, who commented about his "miserable accommodations" that "sleep knows little distinction between the hovel and the palace" (quoted in de Sousa 54). In the chapter on *Othello*, Othello's remembrance of "tented fields" leads to a description of the nomads and black tent dwellers of the western coast of North Africa and Tibet, as well as their weavings; an *OED* definition of tent; a potentially useful observation on the unclear boundaries between inside and outside that is not followed up; and a comment that nomads have anxiety about hard roofs over their heads (78). There is no explanation of how these remarks contribute to the overall analysis. The logic between them appears to be that of association, not argument. This is not to say that there aren't some fascinating moments. Othello's rootlessness offers two wonderful close readings. Noting that the handkerchief Othello gives Desdemona is "apparently the only artefact connecting Othello to his home" (77), de Sousa points out how fitting it is that Othello gives two contradictory stories to explain it. It is presented as both a talisman that "an Egyptian" gave his mother and "an antique token" his father gave his mother. Since "Egyptian" could mean "gypsy" in early modern England, rootlessness "lies at the origin of the cloth" (77), but the

uncertainty of the handkerchief's origin is equally significant. Othello is also linked to an unhoused state in that the stories he tells of his roots are, in fact, stories of "routes," including the tales of adventures in strange lands that captivate Desdemona. Equally perceptive are de Sousa's observations on the ghost of Hamlet Senior, who "equates body and citadel, the king's person and the king's castle" (138) as he narrates his murder in the orchard. In the ghost's telling, "his 'ears' become 'porches,' and his veins and arteries, the 'natural gates and alleys'" (138) for the poisonous juice. Overall, however, *At Home in Shakespeare's Tragedies* is a frustrating, meandering book that does not fulfil its promising potential.

When Stephen Greenblatt confessed his "desire to speak with the dead," he articulated the yearning of generations of literary scholars to glimpse the difference of the past in some recognizable form. Historicist literary studies of long-past domestic and personal social relations might well represent the pinnacle of that desire, and there have been many studies that have reached back to recover both the everyday rhythms and the disruptions and traumas characteristic of early modern English life. Understanding how the complex lives of the long-dead are caught in the stories they told themselves, and expanding the ways and types of knowledge we access in those stories, clearly motivates the writers of these latest contributions to the scholarly conversation on the early modern domestic world.

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