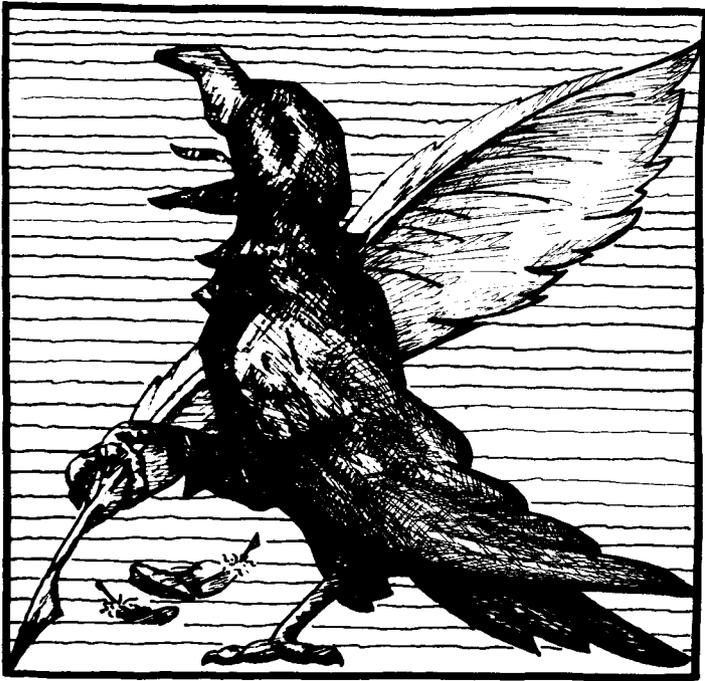


• THE • UPSTART CROW



● Fall, 1978 ●

Vol. I, No. 1 ●

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THE • UPSTART • CROW

*Published at
The University of Tennessee at Martin*

Readers of Shakespeare arrive at many different conclusions about his plays and poems. Although the Editors have certain predilections and prejudices, we are always glad to consider other points of view. Therefore, we hope to show a range of ideas and styles in *The Upstart Crow*.

Sincerely,

William E. Bennett, Editor

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EVERYBODY'S CROW

by Sue Doss

Vpstart indeed
And beautiful with Greene's feathers.
But how about mine and thine?
A rainbow plumage I'd call it
With no edge for the whom or when,
The before or after which.
Just a feathered foe or friend,
Depending
On how it all comes out.
The flight, I mean,
Or travel, as Keats would have it.
Surely if gold be promise
Tar may very well be threat.



"Bottom's Dream"

CONTENTS

"Everybody's Crow," by Sue Doss.....	iv
"Bottom's Dream," by Ron Gifford.....	v
<i>Othello: Is't Possible?</i> by Wayne Holmes.....	1
<i>Othello: The Logic of Damnation</i> , by Paul Ramsey.....	24
<i>The Infamous Victory of Falstaff</i> , by James B. Burlison, Jr.	36
<i>The Deceitful Hamlet</i> , by Michael M. Cohen.....	41
<i>Hamlet—Divine Physician</i> , by Michael R. Richards.....	53
<i>Humanity Is Enough</i> , by E. Sue Doss.....	64
<i>Speaking of Reason To the Danes</i> , by Gordon K. Thomas....	69
<i>Intuitive Knowledge in Cymbeline</i> , by John W. Crawford....	74

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OTHELLO: IS'T POSSIBLE? by Wayne Holmes

"Such an attachment from so true and loyal a gentleman could make no woman angry. Desdemona was not angry with Cassio, though there is very little doubt she saw the lieutenant's partiality for her (and I for my part believe that many more things took place in that sad affair than the worthy Moorish officer ever knew of)"

W.M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, (1848), p. 534

ye duskiest despot's goldenest gal
did wring that dragon's tail
(for men must loaf and women must lay)
and she gave him a desdemonial
that took his breath away

From E. E. Cummings', "XII, it was a goodly co," 1 x 1 (One Times One) (1944).

A close study of *Othello* reveals that the play may have been misinterpreted for over three hundred years—indeed perhaps ever since editors began tampering with and deviating from the First Folio of 1623. There is considerable evidence—evidence almost entirely overlooked up to now—within the text to show that Desdemona and Cassio, some time prior to Desdemona and Othello's marriage, had an affair and that Cassio, tiring under Desdemona's strenuous physical demands and at the same time seeing a chance for personal advancement, served as go-between and arranged the marriage for Desdemona and Othello.

Although there has been some disagreement over the matter of Desdemona's character, critics have almost universally seen her as "divine" and "virtuous." Thomas Rymer heaped scorn upon himself for calling her "Fool" and saying such things as "No Woman bred out of a Pig-stye could talk so meanly."¹ Since then it has been a rare critic who has demurred against the romantic view of Desdemona. Nevertheless, there have been persistently recurring doubts.²

While several critics have hinted or stated that Desdemona's sensuality is an amorphous factor behind Othello's suspicions of her, apparently no one before has adequately examined the text within this framework. I propose to show that a close textual

look at *Othello*—especially the First Folio—reveals that Speaight and Kott's estimates of Desdemona are correct; but that instead of the evidence being "whispered behind the poetry of the play and the psychology of the characters," it is possible to see the evidence in the words and actions of the characters.

At the beginning of the play Iago describes Cassio as:

One Michael Cassio, A Florentine
(A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife.)³

"A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife" is superfluous or ambiguous at best unless the reader can apply it to someone with whom Cassio is or has been connected. Bianca later in the play might be construed as the "fair wife" except Cassio makes it clear that he has no intention of marrying her. Of course she hardly fits the definition anyway.

I marry her? What, a customer! Prithee bear some
charity to my wit, do not think it so unwholesome.
Ha, ha, ha!

IV, i, 137-39

Iago presses the issue by saying it is rumored that Cassio will marry her. There is no doubt in the reply:

This is the monkey's own giving out. She is
persuaded I will marry her out of her own love
and flattery, not out of promise.

IV, i, 145-47

This, then, removes Bianca. The only other woman Cassio is connected with is Desdemona. Is it possible that he had been intimate with Desdemona but for some reason decided against marrying her? If so, is there anything within the text that indicates the extent of their intimacy as well as hints at the reason why he did not marry her? Cassio's reply to Montano's question about whether or not the general was wived, if taken literally, may be an important hint:

Most fortunately. He hath achieved a maid
That paragons description and wild fame;
One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens:
And in th' essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.

II, i, 68-72

Taken literally, “in th’ essential vesture of creation” means naked. If Desdemona while naked “does tire the ingener” then can ingener refer to engineer—as most critics agree—but in the full implication of creating which includes the sexual act?⁴ “One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens” is generally taken as a laudatory statement. But taken with the literal meaning of the last two lines, perhaps this is a comment on Desdemona’s sexual capacity, especially since this reiterates and closely parallels “And in th’ essential vesture of creation / Does tire the ingener.” Could Shakespeare with “blazoning pens” have been employing both a euphemism and a pun?⁵

This may appear as an unduly harsh attack on “honorable” Cassio. Even his strongest critics stop short of linking him with Desdemona.⁶ But can he be at one and the same time a “sensual young man” with a “tepid passion” who had aroused in Desdemona an “embarrassingly demanding love” which he had been unable to fulfill? His relation with Bianca, as Elliott points out, illustrates that this may be a fair characterization of him because, while he was sensual in his pursuit of her, in a short time his passion was tepid in comparison with hers.

Bian. What, keep a week away? Seven days and nights?
Eight score eight hours? And lovers’ absent hours.
More tedious than the dial eight score times?
O weary reckoning!

Cas. Pardon me, Bianca
I have this while with leaden thought been pressed;
But I shall in a more convenient time
Strike off this score of absence.

III, iv, 192-199

However, in addition to his alliance with Bianca and his drunkenness, both well known and both patently damaging, a closer look reveals other even more damaging evidence against Cassio. It may be remembered—if Iago is to be believed—that Cassio did not deserve his newly gained lieutenantcy. Remember also that Cassio had served as go-between for Othello and Desdemona.⁷ Desdemona first revealed this:

What, Michael Cassio
That came a-wooing with you, and so many a time,
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,

Hath ta'en your part—to have so much to do
To bring him in?

III, iii, 79-83

Shortly thereafter Othello told Iago almost the same thing when he said of Cassio: "Oh, yes, and [he] went between us very oft." But, although Cassio had served as go-between for Desdemona and Othello, he apparently deemed it wise to keep this information from Iago.

Cas. Ancient, what makes he here?
Iago Faith, he tonight hath boarded a land carrack.
If it prove lawful prize, he's made for ever.
Cas. I do not understand.
Iago He's married.
Cas. To who?
(Enter Othello)
Iago Marry, to—come, Captain, will you go?
I, ii, 57-63

Cassio's overextended greetings to Desdemona and Emilia upon their arrival in Cyprus, like his earlier speech to Montano, also reveal his impetuous and indiscreet nature. Incidentally, Desdemona's response—the paddling of his palm, in itself an indication of her amorousness—was noted and misunderstood by both Iago and Roderigo. After this, when Iago engaged Desdemona in bawdy conversation, Cassio did not join in; on the other hand, he made no effort to stop Iago's scurrilous attack. In fact, when Desdemona asked him to come to woman-kind's assistance, he agreed that Iago was correct in his degrading characterization;

Des. How say you, Cassio? Is he not a most profane
and liberal counsellor?
Cas. He speaks home, madam. You may relish him
more in the soldier than in the scholar.
II, i, 192-195

Cassio's later refusal to join Iago in speculative innuendoes concerning Desdemona's voluptuous and sensual nature has generally been taken as evidence of how honorable Cassio was. But just as Cassio earlier feigned ignorance of Othello and Desdemona's marriage to Iago, it appears that Cassio was trying to prevent Iago from making any association between himself and

Desdemona. Cassio was foolish in many respects, but he would not have been so foolish as to deliberately allow the man who apparently deserved his post to link him with the woman who was the means by which he had obtained that same post.

Also, not enough notice has been taken of the use of "virtuous" and "divine" in describing Desdemona. It is Cassio, in his desire to fool Iago, who most pointedly uses the terms. As in the former speech, Cassio's praise is too deliberate, too overdone:⁸

Tempests themselves, high seas and howling winds
 . . . do omit
 Their mortal natures, letting go safely by
 The *divine* Desdemona.

II, i, 76-81

Also:

Cas. I think it freely; and betimes in the morning will
 I beseech the *virtuous* Desdemona to undertake for me

II, iii, 332-333

Similarly:

I have made bold, Iago,
 To send in to your wife. My suit to her
 Is that she will to *virtuous* Desdemona
 Procure me some access..

III, i, 33-36

One of the most damaging and singularly overlooked examples of Cassio's indiscretion while under stress occurs when, after having been drunk and then awake all night, he asks Emilia to allow him to see Desdemona even though Emilia has just assured him that Desdemona has spoken stoutly for him and Othello will reinstate him as soon as he can, with propriety, do so. Tired and desperate, Cassio's words to Emilia are indeed revealing:

Yet I beseech you,
 If you think fit, or that it may be done,
 give me advantage of some brief discourse
 with *Desdemon* alone.

III, i, 54-57

Although Furness' *Variorum* is in the very center of traditional interpretation, an occasional note, both in what it says as well as

what it leaves unsaid, suggests the validity of a different interpretation.⁹

Furness was correct in his observation that the use of *Desdemon* was neither capricious nor merely used for rhythm; he was correct too in showing that *Desdemon* was clearly used as an epithet of familiar tenderness; but he was unable to explain the single instance when Cassio used the same form.

Convincing or disturbing as all of this may be, something more overt, more explicit, may still be needed. Just such a reference can be found. Shortly after Cassio's use of *Desdemon* we see his solicitation to Desdemona for reinstatement and then his hurried stealing away at the sight of the approaching Othello. Desdemona then entreats Othello for Cassio's re-instatement. After Othello has dismissed Desdemona, with the allowance that Cassio may be returned to him at whatever time she wishes, Iago, according to the First Folio, asks Othello:

Did Michael Cassio,
When *he* woo'd my lady, know of your love?
III, iii, 107-108

Othello's answer

He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?
III, iii, 109

convinces Iago that there is something more here than meets the eye. According to Furness' *Variorum*, the First Folio is the only edition up to then that reads

Did Michael Cassio,
When *he* woo'd my lady, know of your love?

All other editions noted read

Did Michael Cassio,
When *you* woo'd my lady, know of your love?

But everything that has been troublesome about Cassio and his remarks and actions fits with the First Folio reading, however it may go against the conventional opinion of both Cassio and Desdemona. In light of this passage Iago's early description of Cassio as "(a fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife)" is much more

understandable. Likewise, his soliloquy at the end of Act II, Scene i, wherein he states

That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it;
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit.

has greater relevance now. Brabantio's description of Desdemona, again according to the First Folio, as "so opposite to marriage that she shunned / The wealthy curled *Deareling* of our Nation" also seems significant. The puzzling singular, *Deareling*, almost always emended by editors to the less specific plural, *darlings*, seems particularly important when considering such passages as

One Michael Cassio, a Florentine
(a fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife)

and

Did Michael Cassio
When *he* woo'd my lady, know of your love?

Cassio's foppish behavior and good looks, seen throughout the play, also attest to the likelihood that he may have been "The wealthy curled *Deareling*" described by Brabantio.

Let us turn back to near the beginning of the play. Is it not plausible that, besides being physically attractive, Othello was appealing to Desdemona, with some hints from Cassio, because of the belief that the black man was sexually superior to the white man? Changing attitudes toward blacks have long influenced the understanding and interpretation of *Othello*. While in the past many readers found it impossible to accept Othello as a black man because of their prejudices, similarly is it not possible that in the present day attempt to minimize the differences between races, especially between the whites and blacks, we are likely to overlook all differences, including those that exist in folklore or common beliefs?¹⁰

If Braddy and Auden are correct in their observations, and if the rest of the critics who have suggested the willful and passionate nature of Desdemona are correct, then is it not likely that Desdemona, finding herself at the same time both physically attracted and repelled by Othello, was convinced by Cassio—particularly since the lieutenancy might be his

reward—that there was some truth in the story about the black man's sexual endowments, prowess, and capacity? The fact that Desdemona had some initial reservations about Othello is illustrated in her words to him when they were discussing Cassio's suit for reinstatement:

What, Michael Cassio,
That came a-wooing with you; so many a time
When I have spoke of you dispraisingly,
Hath ta'en your part—

III, iii, 79-82

But by the time Othello had an opportunity to be alone with Desdemona—apparently for the first time—any reluctance she may have had earlier had disappeared. According to Othello's own account:

My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of *kisses*.

I, iii, 174-175

The most striking thing about Desdemona's behavior, of course, is her extreme forwardness. "Kisses," in the First Folio, suggests an ardor quite uncharacteristic of a virtuous young maiden.¹¹ Moreover, the limitations of their love are revealed in:

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.

I, iii, 183-184

Too, Othello was unaware of how much "the dangers . . . he had passed" were taken as evidence of his own supposed virility, perhaps in contrast to the "wealthy curled Deareling of our Nation." Desdemona herself, when Othello was being sent to Cyprus and she begged to go along, said if she could not go:

The rites for which I love him are bereft me.¹²

I, iii, 279

The reader knows, from Othello's speech following this, that this marriage is destined for trouble.¹³

Vouch with me heaven, I therefore beg it now,
To please the palate of my appetite:

Nor to comply with heat, the young affects
In my defunct and proper satisfaction.

I, iii, 283-286

There is a terrible irony in his words:

And heaven defend your good souls that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
For she is with me. No, when light-winged toys
of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instrument,
That disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation!

I, iii, 288-296

From this speech it appears he is stating and admitting that it is true they will not indulge in wild and riotous sexual activity to the detriment of his command; but the reason will not be solely because of deliberate control. Othello's waning years and general feelings of inadequacy matched with Desdemona who "in th' essential vesture of creation / Does tire the ingener," especially with Cassio on the scene, will set up a perfect situation for Iago.

Another part of the play—Cassio's dream—becomes more significant when viewed within this overall reading. It is generally assumed that Cassio's dream was a complete fabrication by Iago. Sister Miriam Joseph, writing of this part in the play, says: "To give Othello the proof he demands, Iago now resorts to lying, though up to this point he has relied on insinuation and deceit."¹⁵ The latter part of this sentence is, I think, particularly significant. Is it not likely that this dream actually occurred but that Iago, just as he did in the hand paddling scene misconstrued the whole thing? Do we not see Iago even later at the crucial trance scene, hinting and insinuating rather than outright lying? And is it not possible that Cassio's overextended greeting to Desdemona upon her arrival in Cyprus, along with her paddling of his palm in return, shows that the dream was not unlikely?¹⁶

Othello's first speech, a soliloquy, after he is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity, contains more lines which explain why he was so quick to distrust her:

O curse of marriage
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites!

III, iii, 303-305

Note the explicit reference to Desdemona's appetite. Then, even more than now, appetite had a clear cut meaning of lustful desire. Othello's earlier admission about the condition of his appetite further illustrates the point:

I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat, the young affects,
In my detunct, and proper satisfaction.

I, iii, 283-286

Othello imagines this curse is part of the penalty he must pay for having attained high station:

Yet 'tis the plague of great ones;
Prerogated are they less than the base.
'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death;
Even then this forked plague is fated to us
When we do quicken.

III, iii, 308-312

Othello and Desdemona's second conversation after Othello believes she is untrue, like many of the other lines and speeches, seems innocuous enough when viewed superficially; but when looked at closely it shows the disparity in their sexual appetites.

Oth. Give me your hand. This hand is moist, my lady.

Des. It yet hath felt no age nor known no sorrow.

Oth. This argues fruitfulness and liberal heart.

Hot, hot, and moist. This hand of your requires
A sequester from liberty, fasting, and prayer,
Much castigation, exercise devout;
For here's a young and sweating devil here
That commonly rebels. 'Tis a good hand,
A frank one.

Des. You may indeed say so;
For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart.

Oth. A liberal hand! The hearts of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.

Des. I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise!

III, iv, 39-52

Desdemona repeats, in essence, what she said when arguing to go to Cyprus: "The rites for which I love him are bereft me" when she says "For 'twas that hand that gave away my heart." Othello's rejoinder at this point is the pathetic and often misconstrued:

A liberal hand. The heart of old gave hands;
But our new heraldry is hands, not hearts.

He tells her that in times of old women married men for love first, and then "gave hands"—or sex—but now the situation is reversed for "our new heraldry is hands, not hearts." This is not even a simple reversal because he does not say the present "hands" leads to "hearts." This is "hands" not "hearts." The pathos of this is heightened in that Desdemona lacks the grace to deny any of it. "I cannot speak of this. Come now, your promise" is an admission as well as an insult.

Yet, despite everything that has gone before, it is not until the trance scene that Othello is convinced of Desdemona's infidelity.

Oth.	What hath he said?
Iago	Faith, that he did—I know not what he did.
Oth.	What? What?
Iago	Lie—
Oth.	With her?
Iago	With her, on her; what you will.
Oth.	Lie with her? lie on her—We say lie on her when they belie her.—Lie with her! Zounds, that's fulsome, —Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!—To confess, and be hanged for his labor—first to be hanged, and then to confess! I tremble at it. Nature would not invest <i>her selfe</i> in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus.—Pish! Noses, ears, and lips? I'st possible?—Confess?—Handkerchief?— O devil!

(Falls in a trance)

IV, i, 38-53

This scene, the understanding of which is crucial to the understanding of the entire play, is generally viewed in one way.¹⁷ But are Othello's words in the trance scene just so much incomprehensible gibberish? I think not. It seems to me that the First Folio reading, "Nature would not invest herself in such

shadowing passion without some instruction," means, not as Speaight and others have said: "*Nature* would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction,' " but instead, "*Nature* would not invest *her* [Desdemona's] *selfe* in such shadowing passion without some instruction." Strong validation that Othello is speaking of Desdemona in this line is found in that he is speaking about her both before and after this line in the same speech rather than about nature or "the springs of nature" in himself. Also, in a remarkably parallel passage

And yet how Nature erring from it selfe.

III, iii, 267

Othello uses the neuter *it* when referring back to nature rather than the feminine *her*.

If this reading is tenable, then the entire trance scene can be viewed in a different way. By artful questions and innuendoes Iago causes Othello to supply his own damaging answers to the question of Desdemona's faithfulness. But, unknown to Iago, all this causes Othello to think back on his and Desdemona's previous night of consummated love. On reflection, "*Nature* would not invest her selfe in such shadowing passion without some instruction" is a reference to Desdemona's sexual sophistication. Too, "It is not words that shake me thus" now means that the memory of her knowledgeable performance is what shakes him, and not mere words from Iago. He has withstood words before. Finally, his question "Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible?" suggests that Desdemona indulged in intimacies with Othello which, in retrospect, seem impossible in a virtuous, uninstructed girl. It is this awful certainty that causes Othello to fall into the trance.

Othello's conviction that Desdemona is sexually precocious, if not actually insatiable, is revealed in his later words to Lodovico, Desdemona's kinsman who had been sent to Cyprus from Venice:

Ay! You did wish that I would make her turn.
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on,
And turn again;¹⁸

IV, i, 278-280

Othello has finally echoed Cassio's earlier description of Desdemona:

One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens
And in th' essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener.

II, i, 70-72

as well as Iago's all encompassing remark about women:

Nay, it is true, or else I am a Turk.
You rise to play, and go to bed to work.¹⁹

II, i, 130-131

By the time Othello makes his damaging statement to Lodovico about Desdemona he is so crazed that he imagines the family secretly encouraged and abetted Desdemona's marriage to him in the hope that he, the "lusty" Moor, might satisfy her raging passion. From all that he has said his final words to Lodovico:

You are welcome sir, to Cyprus.—Goats and monkeys!

IV, i, 289

must stand primarily as an indictment and a protest against Desdemona's sophistication as a sexual partner. It cannot be denied that there is jealousy, too, but this jealousy is primarily based on her sexual knowledgeability. This is not to say that Desdemona was unfaithful to marriage. Except for the slight lapse on the quay with Cassio, there is nothing to suggest her marital infidelity.

Especially when considering her earlier willful and assertive nature, Desdemona's almost complete passivity after Othello has called her a whore can be explained by seeing it as the effect of her imagining that her past with Cassio has been revealed. Her answer "Faith half asleep" to Emilia's repeated query "How do you madam? How do you, my good lady" illustrates this passivity. But this does not mean that Desdemona is without hope; her words to Emilia shortly afterward show where her hope lies: "Prithee tonight / Lay on my bed my wedding sheets, remember." On Emilia's departure immediately thereafter Desdemona again refers back to the matter of how she was found out. Far from being a vehement protest of outraged innocence, hers is rather an admission that she is getting what she deserves; only what has she done to reveal her past?

'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
 How have I been behaved, that he might stick
 The small'st opinion on my least misuse?²⁰

Little does she know that her behavior in bed—once Othello really considered it in the trance scene—accounted for his undeviating course toward her destruction.

Desdemona's singing of the Willow Song with its strong tradition of premature or premarital love, portends the impending tragedy; more important, it shows how she feels about the tragedy. The misplaced lines in the song, which refer to herself and Othello, illustrate Desdemona's attitude of resignation and self blame:

Prithee hie thee: he'll come anon.
 Sing all a green willow must be my garland.
 Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve—
 Nay, that's not next. Hark! who is't that knocks?

IV, iii, 58-61

Finally, Desdemona's last words, after she revives, reiterate her innocence of the adultery charge:

Des. A guiltless death I die.
 Emil. O, who have done this deed?
 Des. Nobody—I myself. Farewell.

V, ii, 147-150

It seems unlikely, as many critics claim, that she would say she was guiltless one minute and then, in the very next—and last breath—attempt to shield her murderer. Rather, in "A guiltless death I die" she asserts her innocence of the adultery charge and admits that she brought about her death through her premarital sex acts. She ultimately acts out the Willow Song.

It can be seen that much of the tragedy of *Othello* lies in the character of Desdemona. Her misalliance with Othello aggravated by their disparate sexual appetites and capacities was enough to insure almost insurmountable obstacles to their marital success. Since her initial attraction to Othello was based primarily on sex, this can hardly be underestimated. All of this, coupled with her earlier affair with Cassio, provided a perfect means by which Iago wrought his terrible villainy. Any one of the three factors: Desdemona's sensuality; her earlier indiscretion

with Cassio; or Othello's physical waning; would have been enough to seriously jeopardize the marriage. But all together, with the other drawbacks, the failure was almost inevitable. Qualifying "inevitable" with "almost" seems to be hedging except one is left with the feeling that in spite of Desdemona's words to the contrary, her love for Othello did transcend sex; perhaps the differences in their appetites could have been reconciled, at least to some extent; and, had it not been for Cassio and Iago, her past might not have come to haunt her.²¹ But all of this is what might have been.

As can be seen, this reading of *Othello* provides a unified, consistent set of answers to the troublesome questions that have always surrounded the play. Othello's quickness in distrusting Desdemona and his utter conviction of her faithlessness can be accounted for by his knowledge of her earlier association with Cassio, because he was a middle-aged Moor with feelings of inadequacy and, most of all, by her sexual sophistication on the night of the consummation of the marriage. Cassio's behavior can be explained by the fact that he was ambitious and sexually inadequate.²² Iago's motive was based primarily on his thwarted bid for the lieutenantcy, a post which he deserved more than did Cassio. Desdemona's willfulness, both before and after her marriage, can be seen as examples of innate qualities or characteristics.²³ Her sudden and dramatic change from willful assertiveness to passivity near the end was based on her misunderstanding of Othello's charges; she thought her past was revealed. This reading also does away with the need for the artificial double time which so many readers have found necessary to superimpose upon the play. The normal short time sequence which Shakespeare gives us is not only satisfactory but necessary.

In conclusion, an observation by T.S. Eliot concerning changing criticism of Shakespeare's work seems appropriate:

In any case so important as that of Shakespeare, it is good that we should from time to time change our minds. The last conventional Shakespeare is banished from the scene, and a variety of unconventional Shakespeares take his place. About any one so great as Shakespeare, it is probable that we can never be right; and if we can never be right, it is better that we should from time to time change our way of being wrong. Whether Truth ultimately prevails is doubtful and has never been proved; but it is certain that nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error.²⁴

It may be true that "About any one as great as Shakespeare it is probable that we can never be right . . ." But through a close study of the lines and passages in the most authoritative edition of a play, is it possible to approach the truth (the author's original meaning) in a particular play? I think it is. If not, then I propose a new error.

—Drury College

Notes

¹Thomas Rymer, "Othello: A Bloody Farce," from *A Short View of Tragedy* (London, 1693), in *A Casebook on "Othello,"* ed. by Leonard F. Dean (New York, 1961), p. 120. The epithet "fool" backfired; Rymer himself was later called "Rymer the fool." But captious and mistaken though he sometimes was, not everyone regards him as foolish. T. S. Eliot sees him as a valuable critic of his age in his essay "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca" (1927) in *Selected Essays of T. S. Eliot* (New York, 1950). In "Hamlet," another essay appearing in *Selected Essays*, Eliot, p. 121, writes in a footnote: "I have never, by the way, seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objections to *Othello*."

²Although Alfred Harbage, *As They Liked It*, (New York, 1947), pp. 64-65 writes: "No woman in the plays is more pure than she . . ." he goes on to say: "Shakespeare retained the black skin of Cinthio's character and added a further disabling feature—middle age. In his own words, Othello is declined 'into the vale of years.' In the popular mind of Shakespeare's time as of today the attraction of an Othello for a Desdemona would have only one explanation—the waywardness of lust . . ."

W. H. Auden, "The Alienated City: Reflections on Othello," *Encounter*, XVII (August, 1961), 12, says: "Everybody must pity Desdemona, but I cannot bring myself to like her. Her determination to marry Othello—it was she who virtually did the proposing—seems the romantic crush of a silly schoolgirl rather than a mature affection: it is Othello's adventures, so unlike the civilian life she knows, which captivates her rather than Othello as a person." G. R. Elliott, *Flaming Minister, A Study of "Othello"* (Durham, North Carolina, 1953), pp. 20-30, contends that Desdemona's love for Othello was greater than his for her, and that hers was frankly sexual in nature by the time she eloped with him. He further states that Desdemona would have weakened when brought before the senate had her love only been romantic. Richard Flatter, *The Moor of Venice* (New York, 1950), p. 101, is more explicit: "From Othello's 'unvarnished tale'; from Iago's insinuations, and from the fact Othello, instead of punching his Ancient's nose, attentively and silently listens to Iago's impudent talk about 'a will most rank . . .' etc., we may deduce that in the opening stages of their love and married life Desdemona's part was more responsive than is usually expected of a young and inexperienced girl." Robert Speaight, *Nature in Shakespearian Tragedy* (London, 1955), pp. 75-76, his hesitancy notwithstanding, is even more specific:

When . . . Othello has surrendered to jealousy, he behaves like any lover who fears that his wife is deceiving him. What is the reason for this? I am going to suggest—and the suggestion is no more than whispered behind the poetry of the play and the psychology of the characters—that between the reunion of Othello and Desdemona and Iago's first incitement (in effect, twenty-four hours) the marriage was not merely consummated—so much is clear—but that the experience of consummation was so strong, and perhaps so startling, that Othello never thereafter regarded Desdemona in quite the same way. In a sense, of course, every marriage is modified—enriched and not at all necessarily corrupted—by its consummation. The question I am putting is simply this: was there something in the mutual delectation of Othello and Desdemona which added fuel to his jealousy?

Jan Kott in "The Two Paradoxes of *Othello*," *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary* (New York, 1966), pp. 118-119, agrees with Speaight's account of Desdemona's sensuality; in addition Kott writes:

Of all Shakespeare's female characters she is the most sensuous. . . . Desdemona is faithful, but must have something of a slut in her. Not *in actu* but *in potentia*. Otherwise the drama could not work, because Othello would be ridiculous. Desdemona is sexually obsessed with Othello, but all men—Iago, Cassio, Roderigo—are obsessed with Desdemona.

Kott continues:

The more violently Desdemona becomes engrossed by love, the more of a slut she seems to Othello; a past, present, or future slut. The more she desires, the better she loves, the more readily Othello believes that she can, or has betrayed him.

³William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, The Moor of Venice*, I, i, 21-22, ed. by Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar (New York, 1957). All subsequent lines and passages come from this edition of the play except when I make a specific reference to the First Folio, in which case I am following the wording in *The New Variorum Othello*, ed. by H. H. Furness (Philadelphia, 1886). After citing five pages of criticism on the meaning of "A fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife" Furness, p. 10, says: "In conclusion I merely echo Dr. Johnson's words: 'This is one of the passages which must, for the present be resigned to corruption and obscurity. I have nothing that I can, with any approach to confidence, propose.'" A fairly recent comment by S. L. Bethell, "Shakespeare's Imagery: The Diabolic Images in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Survey*, V (1952), 72, on the same passage is representative of the overall conclusions reached in the *Variorum*: "We know nothing of the wife and I do not find much significance in the phrase, except as an example of Iago's perversion of values. Perhaps Shakespeare originally intended to introduce Cassio's wife into the plot but omitted her on deciding to use Bianca."

⁴It may be noted that *ingener* is closely related to *engender* and *gender*, both of which are used in sexual contexts the only times they occur in *Othello*. Cf., I, iii, 421-422, "It is engend'red', Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light," and IV, ii, 71-73, "Or keep it as cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in. . . ." The *OED* lists *ingenderer* as a form of *engenderer*

meaning "one who or that which engenders. . . . 1587 Golding DeMornay V. 59 One is an ingenderer and another is engendered, among men, a father and a sonne." See also Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (New York, 1960), for engender, gender, generation, work of generation, etc. Concerning "tire" see Partridge, p. 206, "Tire or (of a man) to fatigue oneself in sexual intercourse with (a woman). . . ." At "Disedge" Partridge writes: "To take the edge off a man's appetite. Imogen, apostrophising her absent husband: 'I grieve myself to think, when thou shalt be disedged by her That now thou tirst on, how thy memory Will then be panged by me,' *Cymbeline*, III, iv, 93-96." See also *The Rape of Lucrece*, vv. 705-707, where Tarquin surfeits himself on Lucrece:

While Lust is in his pride, no exclamation
Can curb his heat or rein his rash desire,
Till, like a jade, Self-will himself doth tire.

³Partridge, p. 163, further illustrates this possibility: "pen, (cf. pin) Penis; there being a pun on clerk-Nerissa's quill-pen. 'I'll mar the young clerk's pen,' *The M. of V.*, V, i, 287, says Grantiano to his wife, Nerissa, when she threatens to sleep with that clerk." Notice also that "quirks" is closely related in meaning to "twists and turns," the latter of which Shakespeare often employs in a sexual meaning in his works. Incidentally, I agree with Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952), p. 218, when he says that "Most of what Mr. Partridge sees in the plays actually is there, besides a remnant that he does not see. . . ." Although Partridge sees *Othello* as the bawdiest of Shakespeare's plays, he apparently does not see the play as I do, and especially in the character of Desdemona; nevertheless his close study of sexual allusions in *Shakespeare's Bawdy* clearly anticipates my conclusions.

⁴Auden, p. 10, for example, writes:

Cassio is a ladies' man, not a seducer. With women of his own class, what he enjoys is socialized eroticism; he would be frightened of a serious personal passion. For physical sex he goes to prostitutes and when, unexpectedly, Bianca falls in love with him, like many of his kind he behaves like a cad and brags of his conquests to others.

Yet Auden goes on to say that he sees Cassio and Desdemona's relationship as "perfectly innocent." Speaight, p. 75, for all that he says about Desdemona, takes Cassio at his own word: "Even for Cassio, who is very much the *jeune homme moyen sensuel*, Desdemona is 'divine.'" Elliott, p. 161, says of Cassio:

He is just the sort of young gentleman who would have for this 'fair' and 'sweet' creature [Bianca] a tepid passion and arouse in her an embarrassingly demanding love.

⁷The Elizabethans were dubious of a match arranged by a go-between. Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine of the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, Illinois, 1956), p. 183, says: "Occasionally someone can be found to talk to both, whose integrity and discretion are unquestioned, but this is rare." Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (Houston, 1952), p. 72, writes: "Once the young man has selected the girl of his dreams, the next problem is how to woo her. First of all he should do it himself and not trust his case to an ambassador." Margaret Loftus Ranald,

"The Indiscretions of Desdemona," *SQ*, XIV (1963), 136, using quotes from Alexander Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, (London, 1615), p. 48, tells why not to use a go-between: "Now as is well known, the use of a third party in a wooing is conventionally expected to end in the acceptance of the agent rather than the principal, and consequently the courting books warn young men, 'Woee not by Ambassador,' advising married men further, 'Make not thy friend too familiar with thy wife.'" R. deMaulde La Claviere, *The Women of the Renaissance* (New York, 1905), p. 25, has something even more pertinent: "Very frequently the 'best' marriages were negotiated by intermediaries, more or less obliging relatives or friends Indeed ladies and gentlemen of the court did quite a respectable trade in match-making, *for a consideration*." (Italics mine)

⁹Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman*, p. 68, says: "One practical guide to the reputation of a woman is to notice if men speak often of her, for the most honest woman is least spoken of" Camden, pp. 68-69, further points out that Barnaby Rich, an author of books on the qualities of excellence in both men and women around the beginning of the seventeenth century, "Observes that a virtuous woman is unlikely to have anyone speak even in her favor, unless it be a member of the immediate family"

⁹Such is the present comment, pp. 157-158 on Desdemon:

Desdemon) This instance of the name thus spelled must have escaped Knight's notice (1841 edition), or, I think, he would not have written, or at least would have modified the following note, which he appends to III, iii, 64, [Not now, sweet Desdemon; some other time]: 'In ii, 29, it is used on the last solemn occasion when he speaks to her. 'Have you prayed tonight, Desdemon?' And, lastly, it is spoken by him when he has discovered the full extent of his misery, 'O Desdemon! dead Desdemon, dead!' The only other occasion on which it is employed by her uncle Gratiano,—'Poor Desdemon!' Surely we have no warrant for rejecting such a marked peculiarity.'

Furness continues:

Walker (*Crit.* 1, 230) suggests that Knight supposed the spellings in the present instance, the sixth, 'to be an erratum'; but it is not; the verse requires, as Walker says, that we should read *Desdemon*, and assuredly there can be no thought of 'familiar tenderness' here, from Cassio. This alone is a serious, perhaps fatal, objection to Knight's theory, which I regretfully relinquish; nor is the objection lessened when we find, as Walker points out, that a double form of proper names is by no means uncommon. There are half a dozen instances of 'Helen' for *Helena* in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and again in *All's Well*.

¹⁰See Haldeen Braddy, "Shakespeare's Sonnet Plan and the Effect of Folk Belief," *Midwest Folklore*, XII-XIII (1962-63), 235-240. It is significant, as Braddy observes, that Shakespeare concerned himself with the attraction between black and white lovers in *Othello* and the *Sonnets* as well as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, i, 63, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, V, ii, 8-72. The passage in *T. G. of V.* also illustrates that the attraction of the black for the white woman was part of the old beliefs:

Thu. What says she to my face?
 Pro. She says it is a fair one.
 Thu. Nay then, the wanton lies, my face is black.
 Pro. But pearls are fair; and the old saying is,
 Black men are pearls in beauteous ladies' eyes.

Braddy, pp. 239-240, continues:

The folk notion, or fantasy, that a black person possesses great sexual potency as contrasted with the idea that love represents a spiritual experience . . . affords another illustration of . . . [Shakespeare's] preoccupation with the theme of opposites.

Braddy also notes that Auden, p. 10, makes a similar observation:

No doubt there are differences between colour prejudices in the 20th century and colour prejudices in the 17th and, probably, few of Shakespeare's audience had ever seen a negro, but the slave trade was already flourishing and the Elizabethans were certainly no innocents to whom a negro was a comic exotic. Lines like

. . . *an old black ram*
is tugging your white ewe . . .
The gross clasps of a lascivious Moor . . .
What delight she shall have to look on the devil . . .

are evidence that the paranoid fantasies of the white man in which the negro appears as someone who is at one and the same less capable of self-control and more sexually potent than himself, fantasies with which, alas, we are only too familiar, already were rampant in Shakespeare's time.

¹¹And how was the kiss regarded in Elizabethan times? Kelso, p. 183, says: "The kiss, potent to move love only less than the eye, though denied directly, can indirectly play its part." Wm. Boulting, *Woman in Italy* (London, 1910) pp.51-52, sees a considerably stricter view: "If the future couple were present at their betrothal it was ratified by the gift of a ring and a kiss in Genoa, Naples, and many other places, the kiss being specially important as the recipient was supposed to be half-deflowered thereby."

¹²Robert Heilman, *Magic in the Web* (Lexington, 1956), p. 173, says of this: "Rites' may mean the whole experience of living together, even of sharing life at the front; but it is difficult to exclude from it the sexual meaning." Partridge, p. 146, cites sexual meanings to "rites of love" in "I must not yield to any rites of love," by Joan of Arc in *I Henry VI*, ii, 13, and in "The perfect ceremony of love's rite," *Sonnets*, 23, V, 6. Also remembered is Juliet's reference to "amorous rites" in *Romeo and Juliet*:

Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
 By their own beauties; or if love be blind,
 It best agrees with night.

III, ii, 8-10

Under the heading "prerogative and rite of love," p. 171, Partridge further quotes from *All's Well*, II, iv, 39-41, "The great prerogative and rite of love, which is your due, time claims he does acknowledge; But puts it off by a compell'd restraint." Partridge then defines prerogative and rite of love as "The privilege of consummating one's marriage by the solemn custom (or practice) of sexual intercourse."

¹³Auden, p. 13, observes ". . . one cannot but share Iago's doubts about the durability of the marriage."

¹⁴Partridge, p. 134, states that instrument may be used for penis. "The instrument (cf. organ and tool). Hortensio, amorous wooer in guise of music teacher, says to Bianca, 'Madam before you teach the instrument, To learn the order of my fingering, I must begin with rudiments of art' *The Taming*, III, i 64-66; by innuendo, 'instrument' here equals penis."

¹⁵Sister Miriam Joseph, C.S.C., *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York, 1947), p. 235.

¹⁶Auden, p. 9 says of Iago's lies: ". . . to Roderigo and, I think, to Roderigo alone, Iago tells direct lies . . . for it is obvious that, even if Desdemona is seducible, Roderigo will never be the man." Concerning the dream Auden asserts: "Iago . . . has no need to tell lies. Even his speech 'I lay with Cassio lately' can be a truthful account of something which actually happened; from what we know of Cassio, he might very well have had such a dream as Iago reported."

The editors of one edition of *Othello*, Oscar J. Campbell, Alfred Rothschild, and Stuart Vaughn (New York, 1962), p. 282, offer an instructive note which may help explain Othello's certainty that Iago's account of the dream was true:

But this denoted a forgone conclusion. In Elizabethan English this phrase meant 'a previous experience.' In modern English it has become an idiom meaning, 'an event that is so sure to happen that it may be regarded as certain.' This is another interesting example of the unpredictable evaluation of language.

¹⁷F. R. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero: A Note on *Othello*," *Scrutiny* VI (1937), p. 221, for instance, says: "There is even a symbolic foundering when, breaking into incoherent ejaculations, he 'falls in a trance' (IV, i, 35)." Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (New York, 1939), p. 237, writes ". . . he falls into a trance, barking incomprehensible prose (IV, i, 34-44) sooner than reason and psychology can explain . . ." Of the same speech Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (Oxford, 1934), p. 221, says: ". . . Othello's verbal music is transformed by the working of Iago's 'poison' into incoherence—something chaotic, absurd, hideous . . ." Also pertinent is Bodkin's remark, p. 223: "Desdemona has become 'a fair devil'; he feels 'a young and sweating devil' in her hand. The cry 'O devil' breaks out among his incoherent words of raving." Speaight, p. 16, observes: ". . . his language becomes charged with physical and sexual allusions. We have 'noses, ears, and lips' . . . The springs of nature in the man are poisoned, and there is an agonizing pathos in his admission of this."

Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus.

Furness was furthering the standard interpretation when he quoted Wilson (*Blackwood's Magazine*, April, 1850) in the *Variorum*, p. 367:

Could . . . (Othello) have the most horrible, revolting and loathsome of all thoughts, that he wedded her impure? and not a hint given of that most atrocious pang? Incredible—impossible! I can never believe, if Shakespeare intended an infidelity taking precedency of the marriage that he would not by word or hint have said so.

However, in noting Daniel's rejoinder (*Notes and Emendations*, 1870) to Wilson's statement Furness at least toyed with the idea that a different interpretation might be warranted.

The very foundation on which Iago builds up Othello's jealousy is the relationship existing before marriage between Cassio, Desdemona, and the Moor himself; 'surely,' says Daniel (p. 229), this is a pretty strong hint, and Othello in IV, ii, 103, ('I took you for that cunning whore of Venice') when he first accuses Desdemona of unchastity, 'gives another pretty strong hint too.'

Is it possible that Speaight and—less directly—Bodkin are correct in their observations that 'Pish, noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible?' has a sexual meaning? Furness in the *Variorum*, p. 237, quotes Steevens: "Othello is imagining to himself the familiarities which he supposes to have passed between Cassio and his wife."

¹⁸Partridge, again, anticipates me. "Turn i' the bed. *Messenger to Cleopatra*, concerning Antony, 'He's bound unto Octavia.—*Cleopatra*, For what good turn?—*Messenger*, For the best turn i' the bed' (II, v, 58-59). Relevant too is 'Never count the turns' in *Cymbeline*, II, iv, 142. Under "turn to" Partridge includes a quote from *The M. of V.* III, iv, 78-80: "'*Nerissa*, Why, shall we turn to men(=become men)?—*Portia*, Fie, what a question that, If thou wert near a lewd interpreter!' " Partridge has another pertinent quote: "Frame love, to. To devise and arrange a love-bout. 'She burnt with love, as straw with fire flameth; She burnt out love, as soon as straw out-burneth; She framed the love, and yet, she fell a' turning'; *The Passionate Pilgrim*, VV, 13-16." Also cf. the King and Costard's witty exchange in *Love's Labor Lost*. *King*: "This maid will not serve your turn sir." *Costard*: "This maid will serve my turn sir." I, ii, 300-301.

¹⁹The belief, current in Elizabethan times, that women possessed stronger physical appetites than men runs through much of the literature of the period. Shakespeare often played variations on this theme. Obvious examples are to be seen in *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* (trans. Thomas Hoby, 1561, repr. London, 1900), p. 251, wrote that women had greater appetites than men, although he thought they

generally showed more restraint:

But I saye (my L. Gaspar) that in case they be as
you affirm more inclined to appetites, then men,
and notwithstanding absteine more then men (which you
your selfe graunt) they are so much the more worthy
praise as their kinde is lesse able to withstand
naturall appetites.

Carroll Camden, "Iago on Women," *JEGP*, XLVIII (1949), 70, has pointed out that Ercole Tasso in *Of Mariage and Wiving* (London, 1599) wrote that women are "insatiable and unsatisfied." Camden himself, *The Elizabethan Women*, p. 27, says:

Perhaps the vice most often laid at woman's door is that of eroticism. Elizabethan writers begin by quoting Proverbs, "Who shall find a virtuous Woman?" and go on to speak of women's 'insatiable lust' and 'lewde behaviour' calling them 'incontinent, insatiable, and unsatisfied,' and more hot than goats. . . .

Of course such a play as John Marston's *The Insatiate Countess*, first acted in 1613, by its title—and to a much greater extent by its contents—suggests that the subject of women's physical insatiability was a common one. Also, that Venice is the scene of part of *The Insatiate Countess* appears to further show how the Elizabethans regarded that city.

²⁰Furness and others in the *Variorum* said or intimated that the First Folio reading is objectionable because "The small'st opinion on my least misuse" suggests there had been some misuse to stick opinion on.

²¹Since Cassio was not merely Italian, but like Machiavelli, a Florentine, he may very well have been more suspect concerning his self-advancement than, say, a Venetian or a Neapolitan would have been.

²²While some readers may view my characterization of Desdemona as too demeaning already, it is possible that I have let her off too lightly. The literal etymological translation of *Des demon a*, coupled with Othello's almost obsessive use of the term *devil* in reference to Desdemona, suggests that Shakespeare was playing on the belief that a person could be possessed of a demon or devil. The traditional belief that the devil was the force behind sensuality also lends credence to a stricter view of Desdemona.

²⁴Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," p. 107.

OTHELLO: THE LOGIC OF DAMNATION by Paul Ramsey

Many writers have discussed the question whether Othello is damned.¹ No consensus has been reached, though writers who support salvation are apt to be tentative, hopeful, or indirect.

The position taken in this essay is that (1) through Othello's "whip me, ye devils" speech (V, ii, 258-52)² the case for Othello's damnation is unanswerably strong, for a number of reasons, including (here the essay is on new ground) the logical form and implication of important speeches in the play plainly intended by Shakespeare and that (2) after that speech, though the damnation is not revoked, the concentration shifts, to Othello's regaining of his military dignity, and to a compound and contradictory image.

A Brief for Othello's Damnation

Hell and Heaven, damnation and salvation, are demonstrably important in the play's themes and atmosphere.³ Othello commits mortal sin because he submits his reason to passion; he pledges himself to Hell for vengeance; when he learns the truth about Desdemona, he turns to remorse, consciously and deliberately willing his damnation; nor does he later repent or ask forgiveness of God. The last scene reflects the tradition of the art of holy dying.⁴ Desdemona exemplifies holy dying; Othello casts away his pearl of great price, an image for Desdemona and salvation,⁵ submits to the sin of despair, kissing Desdemona farewell and killing himself. As he kissed her when he separated her from him, so he kisses her as he separates himself from her: "I kiss's thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" (V, ii, 358-9).

A Brief for Othello's Salvation

Salvation is possible up to the last second of one's life, since God is forgiving. Iago has said he will work evil out of Desdemona's goodness; Desdemona would work good out of evil. She ends Act IV by saying, "[God] me such uses send, / Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend." She has her wedding sheets put on the bed. She dies well, calling on God. When asked

who has killed her, she replies, "Nobody; I myself. Farewell / Commend me to my kind lord. O, farewell!" (V, ii, 24-5). She, thus, Christlike, takes on herself Othello's sin and forgives him. When Othello learns the truth, at first he turns to the bitter remorse and willed damnation of the "whip me, ye devils" speech. At the end, though, he confesses, asks for and receives Cassio's forgiveness, offers true penitence, tears which are "medicinal" (V, ii, 351),⁶ kills himself as an act of military justice, an act of expiation, and returns to Desdemona and their holy wedding sheets, saved through her, accepting her forgiveness and love. "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss."

Embarrassments

Anyone who holds that the question of Othello's damnation or salvation is irrelevant is faced with, among much else, Othello's "whip me, ye devils" speech in which he speaks of and wills his damnation.⁷ One who holds that Othello is saved is faced with the evidence for damnation, including that same speech, the lack of any specific retraction of that speech by Othello, and with the suicide in a Christian context, in which willful suicide means damnation.⁸ One who holds that Othello is damned must face first of all the standard theological doctrine that last-minute repentance is possible. However good the case for damnation until Othello's dying speech, the option of salvation remains. Of the arguments for salvation given, I would here stress Othello's gaining self-knowledge, his seeking and receiving Cassio's forgiveness (compare Hamlet and Laertes), and Othello's final turning to Desdemona; he is reunited with her on their wedding sheets, hardly a lucid way to signify their eternal separation. The sheets, however, are stained with blood, and Lodovico says "the object poisons sight," hardly a lucid way to signify Othello's salvation. The puzzle is genuine.

The Logic of Damnation

Emilia dies well.

What did thy song bode, lady?
Hark, canst thou hear me? I will play the swan,
And die in music. [*Sings.*] "Willow, willow, willow."

Moor, she was chaste; she lov'd thee, cruel Moor;
 So come my soul to bliss, as I speak true;
 So speaking as I think, alas, I die. [Dies]
 (V, ii, 246-5)

She speaks to her mistress, communes with her, sings the song the troubled Desdemona sang before her foreboded death. Emilia speaks truth, and dies. It is a lovely close. It is also logical; the close is syllogistic. Put into standard form, the syllogism is "If I speak true, my soul come to bliss. I speak true." The death concludes the hypothetical syllogism, antecedent affirmed, valid—standard traditional logic,⁹ which Shakespeare learned in school. Emilia's soul comes to bliss. The argument is valid; Shakespeare unmistakably intends the premises to be accepted. Logic, sentiment, and drama are one.

Throughout the play, logic is important. The plot depends on proof. Othello is accused by Brabantio of witchcraft, but is proved innocent; Iago apparently proves Desdemona false; Desdemona is proved true; Iago is proved false. Iago's scheming depends largely on evidence: testimony, words overheard and misunderstood, the handkerchief. The handkerchief, despite many critics from Thomas Rymer on, is hardly trivial as evidence. A husband, already suspecting his wife, would be greatly perturbed to learn that an important wedding gift he had given to her was in the possession of the suspected lover.

Logic is also insistent in the play in speeches, many of which involve the four last things: death, judgment, Heaven, Hell. Emilia says of Iago: "If he say so, may his pernicious soul / Rot half a grain a day! He lies to th' heart" (V, ii, 155-6). Formally:

If Iago say so, he should be damned.
Iago says so.
 He should be damned.

Iago says, "This is the night / That either makes me, or foredoes me quite" (V, i, 128-9). Here the argument takes the disjunctive form: Either A or B; not A; therefore B. The play completes the argument. Iago is undone.

Desdemona says to Cassio, "thy solicitor shall rather die / Than give thy cause away" (III, ii, 27-8). Choices are disjunctions, here "Either to die or fail in courtesy." The play

completes that syllogism also. She does not fail in courtesy; she dies.

Logic keeps affecting Othello in what others speak of him. Brabantio says, "If such actions may have passage free, / Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be" (I, ii, 98-9). The prophecy is false, because Othello is a great leader, not a slave; a Christian, not a pagan. The prophecy becomes true. Othello becomes enslaved by his passion and Iago, he casts off his Christianity for Hell's vengeance, and kills himself as a pagan. Iago holds (II, iii, 342-8) that Othello would "renounce his baptism" because he is "enfetter'd by Desdemona." Like much cynicism, the underside is true. Othello need not renounce his baptism to love Desdemona. Othello becomes other than himself when he says, "That's he that was Othello; here I am" (V, ii, 284). The renunciation of the baptism, the paganizing, is specific at the last; Othello strikes himself as "a malignant . . . Turk" (V, ii, 353), an infidel.

Othello, early in the play, admits the justice of punishment. He says to the Senate, "If you do find me foul . . ., let your sentence / Even fall upon my life" (I, iii, 117-20). He is not foul and thus is rightfully acquitted. Later, when he is foul, he applies the same syllogism to himself; the conclusion is his death.

The ironic prophecy implicit in Othello's boasts that he will not be blinded by the toys of Cupid (I, iii, 268-74) is another syllogism. If Cupid blind me, let me be dishonored. Cupid blinds him. He is dishonored.

Othello says, "Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (III, iii, 90-2). The first statement is partly an idiom for asseverating truth, comparable to such statements as "I'm not so foolish as to doubt that." But the logic also has its truth, its ironic foretelling. "If I love you not, may I be damned." He does turn love to hate; he wills not to love. By his own stated logic, it is *just* that he be damned. The second part of the statement has logical form and fierce anxiety: "If I were to cease to love you, metaphysical and moral destruction would come to me." Yes.

He says of Desdemona, "If she be false, [O then] heaven [mocks] itself! / I'll not believe't" (III, iii, 278-9). If A, then B. Not B. Then not A. The form of line 278 is the hypothetical

syllogism, consequent denied, valid. Since Heaven cannot mock itself, Othello is right to believe Desdemona true. When he believes her false, he—by his own logic—mocks Heaven.

Othello tells Iago that reason shall be arbiter: "I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove; / And on the proof, . . . / Away at once with love and jealousy" (III, iii, 190-2). Othello is not to be reasonable; he is to be deluded by false proof.

In the scene in which Othello is to vow himself to Hell for revenge, Iago is in the contradiction which is evil. Earlier, he said, "I am not what I am" (I, i, 65). Othello is in the contradiction which is confusion: "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not; / I think that thou are just, and think thou art not" (III, iii, 384-5).

Othello says to Iago, "prove it / . . . or woe upon thy life!" (III, iii, 364-6). The disjunction is completed, first in appearance when Othello is convinced, then in reality when Iago is proved a liar. The consequence is woe.

Othello further says to Iago, "If thou dost slander her and torture me, / Never pray more . . . For nothing canst thou to damnation add / Greater than that" (III, iii, 368-73). The first statement is literally carried out, for when Iago has been proven a slanderer and torturer, he vows, "From this time forth I never will speak word" (V, ii, 304), to which the horrified Lodovico responds, "What? Not to pray?" The remainder of Othello's speech is also carried out. Iago slanders, to damnation.

Othello insists on proof; Iago convinces Othello that the ocular proof (III, iii, 368), which to Othello would be "death and damnation" (III, iii, 397), cannot be had. Then Iago offers a syllogism about evidence: "If imputation and strong circumstance / Which lead directly to the door of truth / Will give you satisfaction, / You might have't" (III, iii, 406-8). The metaphor is ironic; Othello will come to the door of truth, truth on the other side.

Iago goes on to "thicken . . . proofs" (III, iii, 429), the handkerchief being the crucial addition. Again a hypothetical syllogism appears, Iago saying of Cassio's possessing the handkerchief, "If it be that . . ., / It speaks against her with the other proofs" (III, iii, 440-1).

Othello is now convinced, "Now do I see 'tis true" (III, iii, 433.) The "see" is ironic enough in the speech of one who shortly

before demanded ocular proof and who now does not even insist on seeing Cassio with the handkerchief.

Othello had earlier said to Iago, with another of the ironic prophecies which are keynotes of the play, "I am bound to thee for ever" (III, iii, 213). He now proceeds formally and blasphemously to the binding.

All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven.

. . .

Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell!
Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne
To tyrannous hate!

(III, iii, 445-9)

He speaks truly, because of and in spite of himself. The "fond" is true. He is foolish. The love that he felt was heavenly, until perverted by the devilish Iago. Othello has what he wills; he sends his love (Desdemona) to heaven.

Othello then swears, "my bloody thoughts . . . / Shall nev'r look back," (III, iii, 457-8), which is a definition of damnation: the will fixed in evil. He kneels and blasphemously pledges "the due reverence of sacred vow" (III, iii, 462). Iago kneels with him and pledges himself to "what bloody business ever" (III, iii, 469); the "ever" is a pun: whatever and forever.

They are pledged. Othello has chosen wrongly. Appearance and reality are reversed. He says of Desdemona, "Damn her, lewd minx!" (III, iii, 476) and pledges "swift . . . death / For the fair devil" (III, iii, 478-9). He calls the devil Iago his own, "Now art thou my lieutenant (III, iii, 479), and Iago responds, "I am your own for ever" (III, iii, 480). Othello has pledged himself, eternally, to Iago, Hell, and damnation.

So far, so bad. Othello wavers, hesitates, but goes forward to evil; even when Emilia confronts him with the truth, a wager is followed by a hypothetical syllogism:

I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest;
Lay down my soul at stake. . . .
If any wretch hath put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!

(IV, ii, 12-16)

She will win the wager. The play carries out the syllogism, down to the ambiguities of "it," which refers to the wretch, to "this" lie

He has first misjudged, then failed as self-appointed judge. She offers him forgiveness with her dying breath; his response is to call her "a liar gone to burning hell" (V, ii, 129).

When Emilia faces him with truth, he offers the most telling hypothetical syllogism of the play: "O, I were damn'd beneath all depth in hell / But that I did proceed upon just grounds / To this extremity" (V, ii, 137-9).

He says it; no one else. If he did not proceed upon just grounds. First, he was wrong, and wrong because he let passion blind his reason. Second, he failed to appear just in the murder of Desdemona, submitting once more to fury.

When he learns the truth, he predicts and wills his own damnation, speaking at first to the dead Desdemona.

. . . when we shall meet at compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,
And fiends will snatch at it. . . .
Whip me, ye devils,
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
(V, ii, 273-80)

If the play ended here, I do not see how any serious case would be made that Othello is not damned, that his damnation is uncertain or irrelevant. The play is reiteratively concerned with death, judgment, Heaven, Hell. Othello has acted unjustly, has made a pact with Hell, has carried out his unjust deed in an unjust fashion, and has turned to willed damnation rather than repentance when he learns his error. Syllogism after syllogism has closed down, and Othello has chosen Hell. To choose Hell is to have it; man is free to make that choice.

After that, to save Othello would be theologically possible but dramatically demanding, crossing the repeated statements, the logic, the atmosphere, and the driving impetus of the play. Were it to be done, it should be done clearly; what follows does not clearly show Othello to be saved.

Yet in what follows the focus is less on damnation. Othello rewins some stature; contradictions of feeling occur. It is understandable that thoughtful readers disagree. It is not that Shakespeare is being many-sided or ambiguous on undeciding

principle.¹³ Desdemona and Emilia are saved; Iago is damned. The choice between good and evil is real; the consequences, eternal. Nor does Shakespeare release Othello from his choice of Hell. He offers him some consolations of honor, which can persist in Hell (one thinks of admirable qualities retained in Dante's *Inferno*: Brunetto Latini, Farinata; one may also think of Macbeth).

Othello never repents, never turns from despair, never accepts forgiveness and grace, though he regains dignity. To put it only a little too simply, he regains his occupation but loses his soul. Even after asking and receiving pardon from Cassio, he says that Iago "hath . . . ensnar'd my soul and body" (V, ii, 302). The present perfect tense matters; "had ensnar'd" would be very different: Othello's soul is still in the snare. In his next-to-last speech, he justly condemns himself. He is, then, justly condemned. The despairing tears are "medicinal" (V, ii, 351), not to salvation, but as a release of his grief.

Lodovico, whose authority has been justified by Desdemona herself ("a proper man," IV, iii, 35), speaks not of saving but destroying suicide: "O bloody period!" (V, ii, 357). His view is seconded by Gratiana, "All that's spoke is marr'd" (V, ii, 357); and though Cassio speaks of the suicide as "great of heart" (V, ii, 361), he also says, as Christian and friend, "This did I fear" (V, ii, 360).

Othello turns to the wedding sheets and Desdemona; he is, as one of my students said, "kissing her goodbye." He also is fulfilling his false-true prophecy that the "bed, lust-stain'd, shall with lust's blood be spotted" (V, i, 36).

Lodovico has the last, hard, same word. He says that the "tragic loading of the bed" is an "object" that "poisons sight" (V, ii, 363-4); and he turns to his sad duty: "Myself will straight aboard, and to the state / This heavy act with heavy heart salute" (V, ii, 370-1). No flights of angels sing unto a rest.

Yet that is not all.

Conclusion: An Image

At least four attitudes toward suicide are expressed in Shakespeare's work:

(1) the Roman view, an honorable act. *Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar*.

- (2) escape from ill. Sonnet 66. Hamlet's "to-be-or-not-to-be" soliloquy.
- (3) Christian, an act of despair leading to damnation. Debated with respect to Ophelia. Goneril.
- (4) Romantic, suicide as union in death. Romeo and Juliet.

All four attitudes converge in feeling in Othello's death. He would escape from ill, from his weeping and perplexity. Lodovico and Gratiana state with authority the Christian view Cassio's "great of heart" suggests the Roman view, and Othello's last words, "to die upon a kiss," suggest the romantic view. The ambivalence of triumph and destructiveness is greatly felt. The kiss restores. The object poisons sight.

Christian and romantic feeling run deep throughout the play; until the ending the strands unite in the ideal of Christian marriage. The great love of Othello and Desdemona is sanctified. Then, when Othello turns to ill, he sins at once against religion and romantic love, against his vow and his trust of Desdemona. In the final image, Christian and romantic do not entirely accord. Nor does Shakespeare unambiguously choose. He presents.

The last event, which Shakespeare added to Cinthio, is laden: stabbing, blood, poison, sexual violence and sexual frustration, staining, falling down to kiss a corpse. The group had occurred in Shakespeare before, every item included each time: in *Venus and Adonis*, *Lucrece*,¹⁴ and, evidently enough, *Romeo and Juliet*. The image holds contrary impulses in savagely fierce tension; more precisely, it does not quite hold them. In *Romeo and Juliet*, triumph is major; in *Othello*, what triumph is present is subdued, made grim. The turning back to Desdemona is a reconciliation, a staining, an assault. Othello's dying speech echoes a passage in *Venus and Adonis*, revealing something of the psychological tangling in the image. Venus says, that if the boar saw Adonis's face, "why then I know / He thought to kiss him, and hath kill'd him so" (1109-10). She adds, making the rape unmistakable, "the loving swine / Sheath'd unaware the tusk in his soft groin" (1115-6), then repeats the kiss-kill motif, "With kissing him I should have kill'd him first" / (1118) before she falls and "stains her face with his congealed blood" (1122).

Taken by itself, "I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this, / Killing myself, to die upon a kiss" is triumphant (what

poet could resist it?). In the contexts of the plot of *Othello*, of "the object poisons sight," and the passage it echoes, it is furiously ambivalent. The lines of force—Christian, romantic, military—converge, to an image, not a statable doctrine.

The damnation has not been recalled; the focus is on the present. The narrative, logic, doctrine carry forward to salvation for Emilia and Desdemona, damnation for Iago and Othello; the image holds what Shakespeare would deeply contend with, and does not abstractly say. Ambivalence is present, of psychological necessity. Shakespeare is not, however, content with contradiction, many-sidedness, 'relativism' any more than he is content with simplification. Contradiction is a sign of trouble; he strives always toward truth.

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Notes

¹For instance, G. R. Elliott, *Flaming Minister* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1953), p. 234; M. D. H. Parker, *The Slave of Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1955), pp. 126-9; Robert H. West, "The Christianness of Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 15 (1964): 334, 340. Harold S. Wilson, *On the Design of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 57, writes, "And if heaven has compassion upon human limitation . . . it may perhaps find pity for a man honest . . . , brave . . . and loving" as Othello. Irving Ribner, *Patterns of Shakespearean Tragedy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960), pp. 111-3, holds that Othello to the end considers himself damned, but that the audience has been prepared to infer his salvation "in spite of all" (including, one may note, Othello's own will).

²The texts of *Othello* and other work of Shakespeare quoted and referred to in this essay are those in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Brackets are given as in the text.

³The demonstration has been made by S.L. Bethell, "Shakespeare's Imagery: The Diabolic Images in Othello," *Shakespeare Survey*, 5 (1952): 62-80; Paul Siegel, "The Damnation of Othello," *Publications Modern Language Association*, 68 (1953: 1068-78; Harry Morris, "No Amount of Prayer Can Possibly Matter," *Sewanee Review*, 77 (1969): 8-24.

⁴M. D. Faber, *The Summoning of Desdemona*, *Othello V*, ii, 1-82," *American Notes and Queries*, 9 (1970): 35-7; and Bettie Anne Doebler, "Othello's Angels: The *Ars Moriendi*," *ELH*, 34 (1967): 156-72. One could add to their examples, as typical of the tradition and highly opposite to *Othello*, a cut in *Art de be morir*, facs. of 1493 (?) ed. (Barcelona: Ediciones Torculum, 1951), p. 20 [sig. A6v], in which one devil holds up a table of the dying man's sins before his eyes while another devil offers the man a knife.

⁵John E. Seaman, "Othello's Pearl," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 19 (1968): 81-5.

⁶R.N. Hallstead, "Idoltrous Love: A New Approach to Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 19 (1968): 123-4.

⁷Helen Gardner, in "The Noble Moor," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 41 (1955): 191-2, meets the problem with calm superiority to embarrassment or evidence, arguing that since references to Heaven and Hell are very frequent, since Othello talks specifically about being damned, since the revelation of Iago as devil or demi-devil is specific, and even though the "whip me, ye devils" speech is "great and moving," that "damnation and salvation are outside the frame of reference."

⁸Roland M. Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 25, "No one [of the theologians of the period] questioned that successful suicide, wilfully committed, led to hell."

⁹I use standard terminology, which overlaps the frequently varying Elizabethan terminology.

¹⁰Faber, "Summoning"; and Winifred T. Nowotny, "Justice and Love in Othello," *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, 21 (1952): 330-44, esp. 340-4.

¹¹Doebler, "Moriendi," p. 166.

¹²Doebler, "Moriendi," p. 170n., shows that the imagery here could for an Elizabethan represent Hell as well as Purgatory. In any event, the imagery must be of Hell, since Purgatory does not continue after the Last Judgment, of which Othello is speaking.

¹³As is claimed by, among others, Edward Hubler, "The Damnation of Othello: Some Limitations on the Christian View of the Play," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 9 (1958): 299-300.

¹⁴Note, for "stain," *Venus and Adonis*, 1122 and *Lucrece*, 1708; for "poison," *Venus and Adonis*, 1143, and *Lucrece*, 1659.

THE INFAMOUS VICTORY OF FALSTAFF

by James B. Burleson, Jr.

At the battle of Shrewsbury in *I Henry IV*, Falstaff attempts to rob Prince Hal of the honor of having vanquished Hotspur. After Hal's exit (V, iv) the fat knight, who has been feigning death, rises and timorously approaches the slain rebel. To assure himself that Hotspur is dead and will not rise to pursue him, Falstaff stabs the corpse in the thigh. He twice specifies the location of this wound—once as he delivers it and once to the Princes, Hal and John, as he claims the reward for killing Hotspur:

therefore, sirrha, with a new wound in your thigh,
come you along with me (11, 126-7);

Ile take it upon my death, I gave him this wound
in the thigh (11, 148-9).¹

Falstaff's repetition of this line suggests that a thigh wound had special significance to the author.²

There are several explanations for this particular wound. First, it was a very practical move on Falstaff's part. Second, there is a curious historical parallel. Finally, there is some evidence that a thigh wound is euphemism.

Whatever our attitude toward Sir John—whether we consider him cowardly and unsympathetic or essentially superior in character—at this point in the play we must ascribe to him the natural human reaction of fear. Before exiting, the Prince spoke of disemboweling and burying his apparently dead friend. However, to our surprise and relief Falstaff stands up. After rationalizing his "counterfeiting," he realizes that the Northern warrior may also be feigning death:

The better parte of valour is discretion, in
the which better part I have saved my life. Zounds
I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be
dead, how if he should counterfet too and rise? by
my faith I am afraid hee woulde prove the better
counterfet, therefore ile make him sure, . . .

(11, 119-124)

From realizing the necessity of making sure, he takes the short step to claiming full credit for having actually fought:

. . .yea, and ile sweare I kild him. Why may not
he rise as well as I? Nothing confutes me but eies,
and no body sees me: therefore sirra, with a new
wound in your thigh, come you along with me
(11, 124-127)

He then delivers the supra-fatal blow for the simple, pragmatic, and obvious reason that the leg is the most logical place to stab someone in an attempt to prevent pursuit.

The armor worn by knights suggests a second reason for such a blow. Prince Hal and Hotspur probably fought with broadswords. Heavy shields, although still used by mounted knights in tournaments, were rarely used in battle by 1403 (or by 1598); thus the combatants possibly had small bucklers to ward off blows, but more likely depended solely on their skill in swordsmanship to parry opponents' attacks. The broadsword was a shock weapon designed to stun the adversary with a solid, overhand blow to the head, shoulder or neck, possibly dislodging some portion of his armor, after which he could be dispatched by a stab wound in an unprotected, vital area of the body. These areas were two: the underarm (from which the organs of the chest cavity could be reached) and the inside of the thigh. The head and neck would be especially vulnerable if the helmet were loosened or removed, as it often was upon dismounting. (For the stage battle the actors would likely appear without head protection.) At any rate, Hal vanquished Hotspur and left his corpse near that of his companion who had no way of being sure that the Prince had done more than stun Hotspur. Thus when Falstaff rose, fearful, and saw Hotspur's thigh readily exposed to his blade, he, characteristically, took the easiest means to "make him sure."

One more practical reason for Falstaff's blow is that some thigh wounds are almost instantly fatal. Shakespeare need not have been aware of Harvey's theory of the dual circulatory system or of the technical name of the femoral artery to have known that men with leg wounds can bleed to death within seconds when that artery is severed. Scholars like Paul Jorgenson (*Shakespeare's Military World*) have shown that there was widespread public knowledge about military affairs during Elizabeth's reign. Noting widespread reports of various military abuses, C.A. Greer has suggested that Shakespeare may have

been familiar with such reports in specifying Falstaff's malpractices.³ A similar conclusion may be drawn about Shakespeare's knowledge of wounds. He could easily have known the seriousness of thigh wounds from current military or medical literature, or indeed from his rural childhood.

Besides available publications, London was filled with ex-soldiers who were possible sources of information. In *The Times Literary Supplement*⁴ John Dawtrey identifies just such a veteran. He suggests his ancestor, Nicholas Dawtrey, who may have served as a model for Falstaff. The sixteenth-century Dawtrey was a captain in Her Majesty's army and a well-known court figure who pestered all those with court influence to help him gain pensions and appointments. In 1584 he had been second in command to Sir Henry Bagenal, leader of an expedition against the Scots. In that campaign Bagenal reported Dawtrey's being wounded in the thigh by an arrow. Though that particular wound was not fatal, interestingly the report records the difficulty encountered in moving the casualty from the battlefield, inasmuch as he was "a goodly portly man, i'faith, and a corpulent."

Apart from these three practical reasons for the thigh wound, there is an interesting historical parallel. In the Johnson-Steevens 1778 *Variorum Edition*, Richard Farmer wrote this footnote to line 149:

The very learned Lord Lyttelton observes that Shakespeare has applied an action to Falstaff which William of Malmesbury tells us was really done by one of the Conqueror's knights to the body of King Harold. I do not however believe that Lord Lyttelton supposed Shakespeare to have read this old monk. The story is told likewise by Matthew Paris and Matthew of Westminster; and by many of the English chroniclers, Stowe, Speed, &c., &c.

Lord Lyttelton's observation suggests the following parallels of wounds incurred at Hastings and Shrewsbury: Harold was wounded in the face by an arrow, so was Prince Hal; Harold was dealt the same blow that Hotspur received. In describing Harold's death, William of Malmesbury wrote:

. . . he fell, from having his brain pierced by an arrow.
 . . . Wherefore, as I have related, receiving the fatal arrow from a distance, he yielded to death. One of the soldiers with a sword gashed his thigh [. . . *unus militum gladio proscidit*; . . .], as he lay prostrate; for

which shameful and cowardly action, he was branded with ignominy by William and dismissed the service.⁵

If Shakespeare were not acquainted with William of Malmesbury, or with one of the other older chroniclers, we must wonder at the curious similarity of these pairs of wounds. Holinshed, one of his principal sources for the play, makes no mention of Harold's thigh wound. He simply states that Harold was wounded in the left eye by an arrow and later killed by foot soldiers. He then notes the chroniclers' disagreement concerning the details of Harold's death. Whether Shakespeare read William of Malmesbury may never be decided, but it is significant that there were stories current giving the details of Harold's death which he may have known and adapted to his dramatization of the battle of Shrewsbury. Scene iv in particular contains much original material since Holinshed recorded no details of the death of Hotspur.

One possibly significant relationship between the legends about Hastings and the dramatic battle at Shrewsbury is the stigma attached to wounding a knight in the thigh. It was dishonorable because it took unfair advantage of the opponent. Such an act carried with it the opprobrium of the modern phrase "a stabbing in the back," since the thigh of a knight was a much more vulnerable spot than his armored back. Matthew of Westminster expresses great indignation at the deed:

But one of the Normans rushed forwards, and, giving vent to his execrable hatred, cut off the king's thigh while he was still gasping; on which account, he was disgraced for his baseness by William, and beaten in a most shameful manner and expelled as an abominable person, as one who had done a detestable action.⁶

There is one other possible significance of the thigh wound; it may be a euphemism for emasculation. Apparently medieval churchmen used *femur* as an inoffensive expression for genital organs. William of Malmesbury and Matthew of Paris both use the unlikely verb *abscidit* (to cut off) to describe Harold's wound (. . . *femur regis abscidit adhuc palpitantis* . . .).⁷ Earlier in *Henry IV* Westmoreland reports the rumor that upon the bodies of Mortimer's troops "there was much misuse, / Such beastly shameless transformation / By those Welch-women done, as may not be / Without shame, retould, or spoken of" (I, i, 43-46).

This passage and the tone of strong disapproval in the chroniclers suggest that both Harold and Hotspur may have been emasculated by their attackers.

Though I am too fond of Falstaff to insist that he was guilty of such a vindictive act, such a reading may be acceptable. In any event, he set out to rob both Hal and Hotspur of their reputations, and he did so by an act not only practical, but also dishonorable and cowardly. This conclusion neither simplifies nor settles the debate about his character. Falstaff remains one of Shakespeare's most complex and, to many readers, most appealing characters.

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Notes

¹*Henry IV, Part 1*, ed. Samuel B. Hemingway, *The New Variorum Edition* (Philadelphia, 1936), pp. 330,332. All further references to *I Henry IV* are to this edition.

²According to William H. Fleming in the *Bankside Edition of I Henry IV* (New York, 1890), there are so few textual differences between the first Quarto of 1598 and the 1623 Folio that he assumes both to be accurate copies of what Shakespeare actually wrote, p. 5. These particular lines are the same in both First Quarto and Folio.

³"The Source of Falstaff's Contamination of the Army," *N & Q*, 198 (1953), 236-7.

⁴Review of *The Falstaff Saga*, June 2, 1927, p. 388

⁵*Chronicle of the Kings of England*, trans. J. A. Giles (London, 1846), pp. 277-8.

⁶*The Flowers of History*, trans. C. D. Yonge (London, 1853), I, 563.

⁷*Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. R. Luard (London, 1890), I, 596.

THE DECEITFUL HAMLET

by Michael M. Cohen

When Gertrude uses the word “seems” in the second scene of *Hamlet*, the Prince explodes at her:

Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not ‘seems.’
 ‘Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
 Nor customary suits of solemn black,
 Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
 No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
 Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
 Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
 That can denote me truly. These indeed seem,
 For they are actions that a man might play,
 But I have that within which passeth show—
 These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(I, ii, 76-86)¹

Hamlet is disturbed at what he perceives to be merely the trappings and suits of woe in all those about him who have pretended to mourn his father, especially his mother and uncle’s “mirth in funeral” and “dirge in marriage.” This duplicity and hypocrisy upsets and sickens him. But regardless of this initial view we get of Hamlet’s abhorrence of deception, or “seeming,” we see him, in the course of his play, become a veritable expert in deception. Hamlet tries, with varying degrees of success, to dupe everyone else in the play, and becomes an illustration of the often quoted saw that in fighting evil one can too easily become what one hates.²

Certainly Hamlet’s “antic disposition” after Act I is not his first pretense in the play. The soliloquy at the end of his first scene shows him already involved in misrepresenting his true feelings out of necessity—it begins with an almost audible sigh of relief that he can give over his “loving and fair” replies, and ends with his telling us that he must “hold his tongue” because his real opinions of his mother’s marriage and husband are hardly polite. With Horatio’s news Hamlet continues playing things close. He bids Horatio also to hold *his* tongue about the appearance of the ghost (“If you have hitherto concealed this sight, / Let it be tenable in your silence still”), even though the presence of a man armed “from top to toe” might be an item of interest to the King,

who has set these very sentries because he fears some hostile act in the present negotiations with Norway. To the sentries and to his friend Horatio, Hamlet shows no more of an inclination to be candid. He reacts to the ghost's revelation with deception and concealment. By swearing his companions to secrecy he gives them to believe that he will reveal the ghost's message, but what he actually imparts to them are the "wild and whirling words" which are no more than a screen for his thoughts. Here, as elsewhere, Hamlet reveals an inclination for subterfuge when it hardly seems necessary, and an abiding unwillingness to let any of his comrades in on his task. It might reasonably be argued that he fears the information will be carried to the King or someone close to him, but there is no reason to suspect Horatio in this regard. When Hamlet does bring his old schoolfellow into his plans—just before the Mousetrap is presented—nothing seems to have happened in the interim to increase Hamlet's confidence in him.

Hamlet's attempted deception of the court by putting on his "antic disposition" is perhaps the least successful of his various ruses. It fails to fool Claudius, who is its most important target. Maynard Mack points out how in this part of the play Hamlet "with his doublet all unbraced, / No hat upon his head, his stockings fouled, / Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle," wears a costume which is a true reflector of his disordered state of mind.³ But this disarray was intended to convey something else, and to be a device for concealment. As it is, it deceives only fools and those unimportant to Hamlet's plans. Mack's idea that Hamlet is "one in whom appearance and reality are attuned" does not take into account that for the other players Hamlet is attempting to make appearance and reality disparate, and that the disorder of the mind which his costume conveys to the audience is not the same as that disorder which he wishes Ophelia, and through her Polonius and the King, to take for his true state. The judgment that Hamlet's costume in this section reflects his state of mind can be made only by the spectator—it is hardly obvious to Ophelia or the others. Shakespeare's intention may indeed be that of "giving the verbal imagery a theatrical extension" with Hamlet's dress, but Hamlet's intention is to deceive with it.⁴

Hamlet's baiting of Polonius is often considered to be a brilliant display of wit on the part of the Prince; he puts the old man off and fools him by saying nothing but the truth. But the facts of the matter are somewhat different. The beginning of the exchange may serve as an example:

Polonius. Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet. Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

(II, ii, 173-4)

Most modern editors, following the lead of E. K. Chambers, have glossed *fishmonger* as "procurer" or "bawd." On an assumption of Hamlet's candidness, the editors see Hamlet making a sally at Polonius's "loosing" his daughter to Hamlet. Aside from the fact that such a sally depends on Dover Wilson's unverifiable hypothesis that Hamlet has eavesdropped on the conversation between Polonius and the King, this gloss of fishmonger has recently been made very doubtful by M. A. Shaaber. Regardless of the number of times it has been repeated, no editor, according to Shaaber, has come up with another example from the period confirming the gloss.⁵ It is, after all, not fish but flesh which Hamlet has on his mind, and suspects Polonius of purveying. Being told that he is no fishmonger, the Prince can only wish that Polonius were so *honest* a man.

What of the rest of Hamlet's catechism? His replies, which seem so "pregnant" to Polonius, are no more truthful or communicative than those of the gravedigger in the last Act. Hamlet knows long before the gravedigger's demonstration that to be too literal, to speak too much "by the card," is not to be scrupulously truthful, or to be truthful at all, but quite the opposite. This is language used to obscure and hide the truth, and it is as deceptive as a direct and deliberate lie. Hamlet knows Polonius' intention is to sound him and discover his purposes—knows this as surely as if the question were directly put. He seems to have learned something of his uncle Claudius' technique of verbal obfuscation. The conversation between Hamlet and Polonius, or, to put it more pointedly, Hamlet's monologue to which Polonius is made to play straight man, turns much upon *honesty*:

. . . I would you were so honest a man. . . . To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand. . . . All which, sir,

though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down. . . . (II, ii, 176, 178-9, 199-201)

Hamlet uses the words *honest* and *honesty* about a dozen times in the play, and though the concept of honesty may not be "worried" here in the same way that Empson argues it is in *Othello*,⁶ Hamlet does seem to be concerned with the words in several of their usual senses. The last use of honesty in the lines quoted, for example, carries not the common meaning of truthfulness, but something more akin to being honorable, respectable or decorous. The word is also used in the sense of chastity when Hamlet inquires of Ophelia whether she is honest (III, i, 103) Hamlet is very much concerned about the honesty of methods (II, ii, 433), ghosts, men, and women, but there is little he can say for himself except that he is "indifferent honest." Had his auditor in this case (Ophelia) been as literal as he himself is during most of the play, she would have advised him even as he advises the players when they thus qualify their reform of stage manners: "Be honest *altogether*, my lord." Before the end of the play Hamlet can vouch for the honesty of Ophelia and of his father's ghost, has inquired into the honesty of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern, has reaffirmed his trust in the honesty of Horatio, and finds himself deceived in his confidence in Laertes' honesty. His own honesty erodes with each step of these inquiries.

Hamlet's treatment of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern needs to be examined especially. He tells us at the end of the play that their deaths are not on his conscience (V, ii, 58), presumably as much because they were fairly warned as that "they did make love to this employment" of Claudius'. But they were not warned off as unequivocally as he implies. Certainly it would take someone fairly obtuse not to get the point of Hamlet's unsubtle hints in the "recorder" speech, but neither Rosencrantz nor Guildenstern demonstrates any particular quickness of mind in his speeches. At their first meeting Hamlet indeed gives them what seems to be a direct warning, though he accompanies it with the outright untruth (twice repeated) that they are welcome to Elsinore:

Hamlet. But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.
Guildenstern. In what, my dear lord?

Hamlet. I am but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw. (II, ii, 366-70)

Now what are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to make of this? They have just heard the Prince's own description of his present distraction (which Rosencrantz reacts to like any talented amateur psychologist, getting the "patient's" mind off his problems by bringing up the prospect of entertainment when the players arrive). Would they not take Hamlet's curiously worded disclaimer as the denial of the really disturbed man, furnishing further evidence of his disturbance? For Hamlet it does not seem to matter how they take it; he does not see himself as the "caitiff . . . that under covert and convenient seeming / Has practiced on man's life" whom Lear condemns. It is not near his conscience, either, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern went to their deaths unaware of the contents of Claudius' letter, either before or after the switch, while Hamlet at least informed himself of his own danger. The accessories in this play come in for a more summary judgment than does Claudius himself.

But in some particulars Hamlet is perfectly open with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. After all, when they tell him there is no news abroad but that the world's grown honest, he replies candidly that their "news is not true." After their further adventures with the Prince they can testify to that.

The central scenes of the play, from III, i to III, iv, are a mass of deceptions involving all the major characters and building in complexity to Hamlet's two great scenes of the Mousetrap and the interview with Gertrude. But no one in this sequence—not Polonius planning his "lawful espials," nor Claudius, taking from them the conscience-lashing hint of the difference between his deeds and his "most painted word," nor Gertrude, in her feverish attempt to assign Hamlet's scathing of her vice to his "ecstasy"—no one can compete with Hamlet for sheer virtuosity in the game of appearances.

The sequence begins with the "To be or not to be" speech in which Hamlet shows us the impartiality of his deceit, for he spares no one, not even himself. His self-deception takes the form of an argument which begins well enough but ends in a *non sequitur*. The disjunction that it is "nobler in the mind" either to suffer or to destroy oneself is answered by considerations which

are both religious and naturalistic: it is not only that "the Everlasting" has "fixed His canon 'gainst self-slaughter" as Hamlet says in his first soliloquy, but the prospective suicide would also be prevented by what dreams might come in his sleep of death, what unexpected things he might find in exploring that undiscovered country. But Hamlet extrapolates to see conscience preventing *every* action and defeating all "enterprises of great pitch." His conscience has done nothing of the sort, and at this moment he has an enterprise of great pitch in train. Nor is this speech a lone instance of Hamlet's failure to speak the truth in soliloquy. Earlier he had accused himself of being pigeon-livered and lacking gall to make oppression bitter (II, ii, 562) when his actions already demonstrated much courage and resolution: he had approached the ghost in defiance of his friends' warnings, formulated a plan to assure himself of the ghost's credibility, and defied the King's counsellor. How much he had dared is evident in how much he is feared; Claudius would never say the Prince lacked gall.

The conversation with Ophelia is another interview in which Hamlet is curious about the "honesty" of the person to whom he speaks. The form that Hamlet's words take is easily liable to mask the apparent intention of the scene as Hamlet forces it to be played, but the fact that we cannot get away from is that Hamlet is *saying one thing* and *intending another*, which he is doing during most of the play, and which, however much we talk of irony and wit, is the usual definition in plain language of lying. Granted, Hamlet seems to be telling us what is on his mind in his "paradox":

. . . if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty . . . for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. (III, i, 107-8, 111-13)

That honesty has no power to show itself through appearances, and that the force of beauty can prove more effectual than motives of virtue Hamlet has learned to his sorrow. But the reader must decide whether Hamlet is providing himself with a rationale for forsaking honesty by simply observing that the world does not go that way. What we have to face in much less problematical language is the contradiction of Hamlet's

statements about his feeling for Ophelia. "I did love you once," he tells her, and then three lines later, "I loved you not." In Act V, for the benefit of Laertes and the other mourners at her grave, he says "I loved Ophelia." Ophelia cannot be blamed for being puzzled at the first two statements; I do not think we can pretend to more knowledge than she, or perhaps than of Hamlet himself, about which is true. But taken together all three statements demonstrate that Hamlet's attachment to the truth is not great.

Having overheard the preceding scene, Claudius shows that Hamlet's antic disposition has not fooled him:

. . . what he spake, though it lacked form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood,
And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose
Will be some danger. (III, i, 163-67)

Claudius reads Hamlet well in spite of the Prince's attempts at deception. Through Claudius—through the contrast between the King and his nephew—we can see the difference between the younger man's dishonesty, which is not native to him but grows from his tragedy, and that of the older man, which is indigenous and characterizes his very language. Claudius realizes the openness of Hamlet's nature and comments on it when near the end of the play he tells Laertes that Hamlet will not check the foils, "being remiss / Most generous, and free from all contriving" (IV, vii, 133-4). The last phrase is a surprise, since Claudius is perfectly aware of Hamlet's varied deceits. But Claudius knows that the Prince is predictable even in his deceptions, and of course he himself is slightly dissembling in trying to talk Laertes into the plot.

Hamlet's instructions to the players involve a double deceit. First, he is pretending that "this piece of work" is merely what it seems to be, an evening's entertainment with "no offence i' th' world" in it. Second, he pretends (through the players) to a circumstantial knowledge of events for which he has only an authority impugned by his own very grave doubts. If Hamlet's doubts about the ghost are real then Claudius' reaction is no more valid a confirmation than Desdemona's denial of having lost her handkerchief should be of her guilt, standing against her, as Iago says, with the "other proofs." There are no other proofs

in either case, if Hamlet really doubts the ghost's honesty. But he is not candid (or consistent) about his opinion of the ghost. The ghost's accusation of Claudius is not a great surprise to Hamlet, if I interpret his reaction ("O my prophetic soul!") correctly. Hamlet first assures Horatio and Marcellus of the ghost's credibility, in the confirmation of his prophetic soul's suspicion: "Touching this vision here, / It is an honest ghost, that let me tell you" (I, v, 137-8). Only later does he admit to doubts:

The spirit that I have seen
 May be a devil, and the devil hath power
 T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
 Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
 As he is very potent with such spirits,
 Abuses me to damn me. (II, ii, 584-89)

It does not seem to occur to Hamlet that the abuse might extend to a completely wrong interpretation of Claudius' reaction to the play, that Claudius might be reacting to what he sees as a heavy-handed and slanderous personal insult there. That we in the audience know Claudius' guilt should not blind us to Hamlet's limitations, and we should remember that almost immediately after the play-within-the-play Shakespeare shows us how Hamlet can be deceived when he tries to look into Claudius' soul again.

Thus Claudius unintentionally deceives Hamlet by his appearance of repentance, and Hamlet deceives himself in supposing that the damnation of Claudius is part of his task; he seeks to "play at God," as Mack says.⁷ Meanwhile the Prince is on his way to an interview which has been planned by Claudius, Polonius, and Gertrude as a deception, as he plans his own deceitful measures: "I will speak daggers to her, but use none. / My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites: / How in my words somever she be shent, / To give them seals never, my soul, consent!" (III, ii, 381-4). In the interview with Gertrude the Queen attempts to deceive herself into believing that Hamlet's madness rather than her own guilt has accused her and awakened her conscience. And in one of Shakespeare's always unpleasant images of flattery, Hamlet congratulates himself while he describes his own concessions to the deceit around him:

Forgive me this my virtue.
 For in the fatness of these pursy times
 Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
 Yea, curb and woo for leave to do him good. (III, iv, 153-6)

Hamlet and his mother, both self-righteous, indignant, censuring each other for conduct unbecoming a son/mother, both withholding something from the other (and the death of each of the three characters onstage is bound up in those unspoken thoughts)—the scene could be a dramatic homily on the evils of lying. Privately we might almost begin to think that the members of this family deserved each other, were not Hamlet's torture so plangently real. In fact he dissembles least in this scene, but his mother's conscience is not a match for the rawness of his horror at his father's displacement by the "bloat king," the mildewed ear, paddock, bat, and gib which Hamlet considers Claudius. Gertrude is as deaf and blind to the depth of that horror as she is to the old King's presence and renewed exhortations. Hamlet's one real attempt at honesty fails him here. He may have been right in his first intimation that more than human agency was called for to set things right; the next time he refers to his mother he is exhorting the spirit of long-dead Yorick to sting her conscience as he could not.

In Hamlet's defense, Professor Mack glances at the circumstances which lead the Prince into his deceptions:

The act required of him, though retributive justice, is one that necessarily involves the doer in the general guilt. Not only because it involves a killing; but because to get at the world of seeming one sometimes has to use its weapons. He himself, before he finishes, has become a player, has put an antic disposition on, has killed a man—the wrong man—has helped drive Ophelia mad, and has sent two friends of his youth to death, mining below their mines, and hoisting the engineer with his own petard. He had never meant to dirty himself with these things, but from the moment of the ghost's challenge to act, this dirtying was inevitable. It is the condition of living at all in such a world. To quote Polonius, who knew that world so well, men become "a little soil'd i' th' working."⁶

I have not argued Hamlet's deceitfulness to have "both our judgments join in censure of his seeming" though, as Hamlet urges Horatio to join in observing Claudius. Considering the treachery of Laertes, the villainy of Claudius, the deceitful obsequiousness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the spying

of Polonius, it may well be that deceitfulness is a condition of existence in Elsinore; Ophelia, after all, is the only innocent, and she cannot survive. It can be no accident that in this world where people conceal themselves behind arras, behind paint and painted words, behind disguises as innocent friends, innocent prayer-sayers, and innocent fellow sportsmen, as long as Hamlet plays the game of appearances, he seems to be able to see beyond them and retain control, identifying the true purposes of the others, often with near-clairvoyant precision (see esp. II, ii, 184-5; III, i, 130; and III, iv, 201-4). On the other hand, when he concentrates for a moment on an honest purpose, Claudius' pose of repentance and Laertes' show of fair play dupe him.⁹

Moreover, Hamlet's growth into evil is a consequence of the moral ambiguity of the act which he is required to perform.¹⁰ The force that marshals him to knavery is both unanswerable and suspect, a command from the world beyond and a response to the deepest impulse of Hamlet's "prophetic soul" to requite vengeance with vengeance. But putting these deeper moral questions aside, we can recall Hamlet exclaiming against the particular evil of "seeming" in his first speech of more than one line and see that it is a part of his tragedy to find himself growing into this frailty. His deceit is a kind of synecdoche for the general culpability of his actions. However honest the ghost is, Hamlet becomes an instrument of evil in attempting to follow its behest, and the way this evil shows itself throughout the play is in an almost universal deceit. Hamlet's participation in the deceit shows how the play generates more moral problems than it solves. The courtiers at Elsinore face the dilemma either of accommodation to evil, which results in their becoming accessories (Gertrude), or opposition, which fosters more deceit and more bloodshed. Either way guilt is not expunged, but merely shared.

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Notes

¹Quotations are from the Pelican edition, ed. William Farnham (Baltimore, 1957).

²Among the few critics who have called attention to the unpleasant side of Hamlet's nature are G. Wilson Knight, in *The Wheel of Fire* (Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 1930), esp. Chapter Two, "The Embassy of Death," and Harley Granville-Barker, in *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, third series (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1937). Neither critic concentrates on Hamlet's dissimulation. Other writers simply ignore it, and talk of Hamlet's "relentless breaking down of the barriers raised by hypocrisy" of his directness, and of his "clear view of reality." The first quotation is from Wolfgang Clemens, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 109; the second is from Mikhail M. Morozov, "The Individualization of Shakespeare's Characters through Imagery," *Shakespeare Survey*, 2 (1949), 95. Other affidavits for Hamlet's honesty are to be found in J. Dover Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), esp. Appendix F; and in Peter Alexander's *Hamlet: Father and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), Chapter Five, "The Complete Man."

³Maynard Mack, "The World of *Hamlet*," *Yale Review*, 61 (1952), 511.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵M. A. Shaaber, "Polonius as Fishmonger," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 22 (1971), 180. Shaaber also mentions J. Dover Wilson's hypothesis, which is in *What Happens in Hamlet*, pp. 105-6.

⁶William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (New York: New Directions, 1951), pp. 218-49.

⁷"The World of *Hamlet*," p. 522.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 519-20.

⁹Alfred Harbage's explanation of this point is interesting: "If Hamlet was to remain a tragic hero, was to appear more virtuous than not in the eyes of Shakespeare's audience then and now, he could neither take premeditated vengeance nor be a successful intriguer, no matter how intellectually well-equipped. . . . Hamlet tries to manipulate men and events, but a divinity shapes his ends. That his hand should slay Claudius is symbolically appropriate, but his hand upon the foil and the cup must be covered by the hand of Providence. Hamlet remains the tragic hero. Such characters as Hieronimo and Antonio are tragic heroes only in the hopeful eyes of their creators. It was an artistic necessity of the case that Hamlet should be so fertile in ideas, so sterile in actions, that upon his intrigues should be graciously conferred a soul-saving futility." "Intrigue in Elizabethan Tragedy," in *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*, ed. Richard Hosley (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1962), p. 43. It is true that Hamlet is preserved from the moral perdition of Hieronimo, Antonio, and the much worse Vendice of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. But in the relatively more sanitary world of *Hamlet*, the hero's deceit can sully as well.

¹⁰Fredson Bowers describes this ambiguity in the first chapter of *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), pp. 3-40. It seems to me that those who explain away the moral doubtfulness of Hamlet's subterfuges and of the vengeance itself by appealing to the convention of revenge tragedy are far wrong. If *Hamlet* is not an example of a genre piece which transcends the limitations of its genre by subjecting those limitations to scrutiny, then no such

example exists in our literature. And when Bradley writes, in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), that the ghost is "the messenger of divine justice" (p. 174) whose exhortations unequivocally represent the will of Providence, he ignores the fact that the ghost, who is so far from being in divine favor as to be daily subjected to "sulph'rous and tormenting flames" (I, v, 3) is apparently acting in his own behalf.

HAMLET—DIVINE PHYSICIAN by Michael R. Richards

Senecan tragedy was enormously popular during the Elizabethan Age, and Shakespeare was well aware of this popularity, for he wrote *Titus Andronicus* in the early 1590's. The play "out-Senecas Seneca," for it includes some sixteen incidents of bloodshed. Admirers of Shakespeare frequently lament his association with the tragedy, but *Titus Andronicus*, though a bit extreme, is the "type" of tragic drama that remained popular throughout the Elizabethan Age. Shakespeare's next full venture into the realm of Senecan tragedy came some ten years later and resulted in *Hamlet*.

The sources of Shakespeare's play, Saxo Grammaticus' *Historia Danica*, Francois de Belleforest's *Histoires tragiques*, and possibly the *Ur-Hamlet* provided him with the essential ingredients of Senecan drama: a revenge motif, madness, the supernatural, and enough blood-shed to satisfy the audience as Amleth [Hamlet] feigns madness, lures his uncle along with his retainers into the mead hall, gets them dead drunk, decapitates his Uncle, and sets fire to the hall. All that Shakespeare had to do and all that his audience expected of him was to use the source material and make the play a standard revenge tragedy. *Hamlet*, however, is anything but standard; for Shakespeare gave the original story an increased complexity, creating a unique character in the person of Hamlet.

It is this complexity that distinguishes *Hamlet*; Shakespeare created much of the play's individuality by effecting multiple conflicts and contrasts. In the legend, for example, both Amleth and his Uncle are little more than primitive, bloody killers who are in direct conflict with each other; in Shakespeare's play, they take on new and symbolic dimensions. The additional conflicts created by Shakespeare further serve to enrich the play. A modern-Renaissance world, personified in Hamlet and Horatio, stands in conflict with Elsinore's barbaric-Medieval atmosphere personified in Claudius and the other characters. At Elsinore, the men of reason, again Hamlet and Horatio, are in direct conflict with "beast[s] that want discourse of reason"¹—Claudius,

Gertrude, Fortinbras and Laertes, creatures of action and "passion's slave[s]" (III.ii.73).

It can be believed that Hamlet, a New Testament figure, was commanded to act as an executioner and not as an Old Testament "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" avenger. Another contrast appears in the loyalty that exists between Hamlet and Horatio, a *comitatus*; as opposed to the disloyalty that Gertrude gave King Hamlet; the same disloyalty that Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern give Hamlet.

An additional conflict appears, a conflict which forms the basis of this paper: the conflict between Hamlet, symbolically the skilled Renaissance surgeon who has been commanded to cure the diseased state of Denmark; and the medical alternative, the Medieval atmosphere of Elsinore's forces—the dark and superstitious cure of the barber-surgeon—a conflict between Renaissance and Medieval medicine. Hamlet is commissioned by the ghost to cure the diseased body politic of Denmark; to effect the cure, Hamlet should act as a Renaissance surgeon; he should do what the etymology of the word "surgeon" (which is *kheir ergon*) implies. *Kheir* (Hand) *ergon* (Work). Hamlet must practice the art of healing by manual operation, and his hand-work is to remove the source of Denmark's disease—Claudius. This is Denmark's best cure, but Hamlet fails as surgeon, and the disease, the "rank corruption mining all within" (III.iv.169) continues to spread and "Infects unseen" (III.iv.170) all of Denmark.

The disease imagery, often noted, is introduced in the first scene; it indicates that something is indeed sadly wrong in Denmark, which is in a state of dis-ease. Francisco clearly demonstrates his uneasy emotions: "For this relief much thanks! 'Tis bitter cold, / And I am sick at heart" (I.i.8-9). Horatio, as everyone knows, is at first skeptical about the ghost's appearance. However, Horatio, a Renaissance scholar, is soon convinced; he warns that something is seriously amiss: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state (I.i.81). Eruption means a bursting forth of a rash, or of a pustulous boil, or some other physical disorder. And Horatio *does* remark at this point that it is the State or the body politic of Denmark that suffers the eruption.

Shakespeare's plays are frequently dominated by a central image; in *Macbeth*, for example, the imagery of blood predominates. Although there is considerable blood shed in *Hamlet*, the play is not dominated by imagery based on blood, but by images of sickness or disease. Caroline Spurgeon charts a greater number of sickness images in *Hamlet* than any other play. "We are almost startled at the constant conception of a corrupt and hidden tumour or cancer which is the central imaginative symbol of the tragedy."² Spurgeon is convinced of the disease metaphor in *Hamlet* and she further comments: "There hovers all through the play in both words and word pictures the conception of disease, especially of a hidden corruption infecting and destroying a wholesome body." (p. 213) She also speaks of ". . . *Hamlet* with its underlying idea of a foul tumour, of rottenness and corruption . . ." (p. 79). Denmark's disease is an ulcer, canker, tumour, cancer, a "corruption mining all within" (III.iv.169). Reference to a state infected with a corrupting cancer is contemporary in John Dean's statement to former President Nixon: "I began by telling the President that there was a cancer growing on the presidency and that if the cancer was not removed, the President himself would be killed by it. I also told him that it was important that this cancer be removed immediately, because it was growing more deadly every day."³

The image of Denmark's sickness is most prevalent in Hamlet's mind, and he demonstrates his own reaction in images that almost always involve disease. Even before the appearance of the ghost is revealed to him, Hamlet views Denmark and the world as a very sordid place, ". . . weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" (I.ii.139), and adds, "'Tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely" (I.ii.141-3). Hamlet is probably drawing an analogy to the garden, the world, and to his mother, Gertrude.

Hamlet finds Denmark and the world "an unweeded garden" because he images it as a diseased and corrupt body politic. If indeed he is thinking also of Gertrude, the word "unweeded" would be a multiple pun—unclothed and unwed being two possibilities; and Claudius, the rottenness of Denmark, is the "rank and gross" possessor of both Gertrude and Denmark. Hamlet's belief that the world and Denmark are possessed by "things rank

and gross in nature" (I.ii.142), indicates that manifestations of the nation's disease are evident. Claudius is both rank and gross to Hamlet, who compares his own father, as like "Hyperion to a satyr" (I.ii.146).

Shortly after Hamlet's opening soliloquy which lamented the world and Denmark as "an unweeded garden," Horatio reveals the appearance of the ghost; Hamlet's suspicion is aroused and he echoes Hortio's earlier sentiment: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (I.i.81), with his feeling, "My father's spirit in arms? All is not well. / I doubt some foul play" (I.ii.279-80). Hamlet's fuller realization of Denmark's corruption and disease occurs in the confrontation with his father's spirit. The imagery of the ghost's story with its horror which intended to make "each particular hair stand on end / Like quills upon the fretful porcupine" (I.v.25), intensifies Hamlet's melancholy and his earlier revulsion. The condition of Denmark had already been summed up by Marcellus' now famous line, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.100). The ghost quickly reveals the rottenness of Denmark as, "The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown" (I.v.45-6). Hamlet does not hear pleasant things as he listens to the condemnation of his Mother, ". . . lust, though to a radiant angel linked, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed / And prey on garbage" (I.v.62-4), and hears the description of his father's death, "a most instant tetter barked about, / Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust / All my smooth body" (I.v.78-80). Both the condemnation and the description involve images of disease, corruption, and decay; and because they become engrained in Hamlet's memory, do much to explain his later condition and the language he employs to express his nausea and revulsion.

The ghost has given Hamlet the cause of Denmark's disease, and this disease must be cured by "revenge." That Hamlet fails to "sweep to his revenge" (I.v.36) becomes the crux of the play; during the play he further proves his view of Denmark—the rotten and the diseased. A prince who had been "The expectancy and rose of the fair state, / The glass of fashion and the mould of form" (III.i.163-4), resorts to previously uncharacteristic imagery in referring to the women who have betrayed him. In Hamlet's feigned madness which Polonius confesses to have a "method

in 't" (II.ii.223), Hamlet warns, "for if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion" (II.ii.199-200), and "Conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to 't" (II.ii.202-3). The love he formerly felt for Ophelia has turned to revulsion; it becomes associated with decaying flesh and fornication, in the presence of the "sun," the king. In the bed chamber scene with his Mother, Hamlet resorts to some of his most cutting speeches. He had vowed to speak Daggers" (III.ii.403); Hamlet's words do have a sharp edge because his Mother laments, "O, speak to me no more! / These words like daggers enter in mine ears" (III.iv.107-8). Hamlet is aware of his Mother's lustful nature, knowing that she is always able to rationalize her feelings and actions. He therefore pleads:

Mother, for the love of grace
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul
That not your trespass but my madness speaks.
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whilst rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. (III.iv.165-70)

Hamlet here accurately describes the cancerous condition of Denmark's diseased body politic.

In the prayer scene, Claudius confesses the full depravity of his crime: "O my offense is rank, it smells to heaven / It hath the primal eldest curst upon 't / A brother's murder" (III.iii.39-41). The image with which he associates his offense is in agreement with the play's prevailing metaphor of disease; and it serves as a perfect echo of Marcellus' "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.100). The confession is also in agreement with Hamlet's sentiments, for Claudius appears as the cancer—the cause of Denmark's malaise. As everyone knows, Hamlet comes upon the kneeling king, contemplates the removal of Claudius, the cancer—but again delays the operation because he believes the king to be in prayer. Hamlet's diagnosis comes at the end of his soliloquy, "This physic but prolongs thy sickly day" (III.iii.99). Hamlet believes that physic—in this case, prayer—will perhaps give the king a temporary relief, a respite from the disease. It will not cure him and thereby cure Denmark; what Denmark needs is the surgeon's knife, and ironically enough, the scalpel had just been in Hamlet's hand: "Up, sword,

and know thou a more horrid hent" (III.iii.91).

Hamlet's final realization that Claudius is the diseased member of Denmark's ailing body politic comes after he defends his desire to kill the man who murdered his father, King Hamlet; "stained" his Mother; stole the throne; and made an attempt on his [Hamlet's] life. Hamlet says to Horatio, "Is 't not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm? And is 't not to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil. . . ?" (V.ii.74-77).

Denmark's canker had eaten at its body politic. It has indeed changed Hamlet's view of his own world: ". . . the earth seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air . . . appeareth no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (II.ii.314-18). Denmark's disease caused by its cancer, Claudius, and aggravated by Hamlet's procrastination, not only affects Hamlet's state of mind, but rages throughout Elsinore to touch and deprave almost everybody. The atmosphere of depravity which permeates Elsinore and Denmark is demonstrated in several scenes. In Act I Claudius' first court is held; he blithely implicates the entire court in his hasty and incestuous marriage. To celebrate Hamlet's compliance in staying at Elsinore instead of returning to Wittenburg, Claudius vows to indulge himself in drink:

No jocund health that Denmark drinks today
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse the heaven shall bruit again,
Respeaking earthly thunder. (I.ii.131-4)

When Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus await the arrival of the ghost, the excessive nature of Claudius and the Danish court is again demonstrated by Hamlet's explanation:

The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swagg'ring upspring reels,
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down
The kettledrum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge. (I.iv.10-14)

Nicole Williamson's *Hamlet* used Polonius' "brevity is the soul of wit" (II.ii.96) scene, to indicate the depraved nature of the body politic: Claudius and Gertrude luxuriate in a sumptuous

bed, feast on meats and direct the affairs of state.

It is not only in the actions and behavior of Claudius that Denmark's disease is manifested but also in the actions of those who become touched by the source of the disease. Polonius emerges as the one most affected by the disease. He has played a large part in Claudius' obtaining the throne, "The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father" (I.ii.48-50). Polonius confirms his "rotteness" when he sends Reynaldo to spy on his son, "By indirections find directions out" (II.i.72). Love has also become perverted; Gertrude, "a radiant angel . . ." (I.v.62), fell prey to lust and perverted her love for the former king. Polonius has a lewd imagination; he is, in short, a "dirty old man," and he can only see the love affair between Ophelia and Hamlet on the carnal level. He forces her to reject Hamlet and then uses Ophelia to serve as bait to prove his theory that Hamlet's insanity was love melancholy caused by his daughter's rejection. Friendship also becomes perverted in Denmark. Horatio remains true to Hamlet until the end and even expresses a desire to share Hamlet's death, "I am more an antique Roman than a Dane. / Here's yet some liquor left." (V.ii.363-364). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, have become touched by Denmark's disease and pervert their friendship as they become the king's puppet-spies. They appear to have been Hamlet's close friends. Gertrude calls them "two men . . . / To whom he more adheres" (II.ii.20-21), and Hamlet greets them "My excellent good friends" (II.ii.241). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are manifestations of Denmark's disease, and they demonstrate the spread of evil cancer as they blithely lead Hamlet to his supposed execution in England. The "corruption, mining all within" (III.iv.169), also touches Laertes; he appears as a bit of a prig, but there is no reason to suspect that Laertes is innately depraved. He has been away from the court, living in Paris, leading the life of a not-too-serious student. Hamlet calls him "A very noble youth" (V.i.217), and he returns the perfect avenger—as a foil to Hamlet—but Laertes quickly becomes rotten. It takes only a brief association with the source of Denmark's disease for Laertes to become infected, as he readily agrees to use "A sword unbated" (IV.vii.153) and to compound

the deception with poison.

The ultimate extent of Denmark's disease becomes evident in the final scene of the play—the King's last court. Some of those who have been touched by the disease have met a well-deserved fate—the meddling Polonius behind an arras, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in a double execution. Claudius, Denmark's cancer; Laertes, the king's most recent agent; and Osric, who may well be implicated in this plot, are assembled with poisoned sword and chalice to act out Claudius' final depravity. The poison which first caused Denmark's rottenness and has continued to seep through Elsinore, is ready to compound the disease: both Claudius and Laertes are "justly killed with [their] own treachery" (V.ii.325); Gertrude joins Ophelia as another innocent victim of the disease; and Hamlet falls a sacrifice to the welfare of Denmark. He has rid Denmark of its cancer, but his delay and confusion have caused the deaths of five others. Furthermore, the throne of Denmark has passed to Fortinbras. Hamlet failed in his "hand work;" in his confusion he failed to act as a proper surgeon.

Hamlet's opening words to the ghost, "Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned" (I.iv.44), serve as an excellent indication of his understandable confusion. Hamlet is not sure whether his father's spirit is a beneficial or harmful ghost, bringing "airs from heaven or blasts from hell" (I.iv.45), with "intentions wicked or charitable" (I.iv.46). That the ghost is a "spirit of health" (I.iv.44) had been anticipated by Hamlet: "O, my prophetic soul" (I.v.47), and was later proved by the "mousetrap." The ghost is a "spirit of health" which wishes to cure the diseased condition of Denmark's body politic through the skilled hands of his son. Hamlet is to be the surgeon and to effect the operation. Additional evidence that the ghost is a beneficial spirit interested in the welfare of Denmark, and that Hamlet is to be the surgeon who will cure the diseased state, may be seen in Horatio's replay to Marcellus' recognition that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I.iv.100). Horatio replies, "Heaven will direct it" (I.iv.101): he seems to believe that heaven will direct the cure for Denmark's rottenness, and since the ghost which had been sent by heaven, had "beckoned Hamlet" that his friend would be the one to effect the cure.

Fredson Bowers, in his provocative article, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge" suggests this idea: Since divine permission alone could free the Ghost to revisit the earth, the Ghost's demand for the external punishment of Claudius . . . is not a personal call but in effect the transmission of a divine command, appointing Hamlet as God's agent to punish the specific criminal, Claudius."⁴ The ghost is a divine agent of God's will who has been sent to command Hamlet to operate on the diseased state of Denmark and to cut out the source of the illness—Claudius, the cancer. In Elizabethan times the medieval prejudice against doctors, "*Ubi tres medici duo athei*" and "His studie was but litel on the Bible"⁵ remained and Renaissance man believed that God had a hand in all physical manifestations of disease and in all cures for disease. The Renaissance physician was considered an agent of God. Hamlet, however, does not fully believe he is an agent of God until the end of the play when he speaks the often-quoted lines, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.11-12), and "there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii.218-219). The ghost had given Hamlet the correct diagnosis for Hamlet to cure Denmark and had added the advice, "Taint not thy mind . . ." (I.v.92). Hamlet's mind does become tainted; he uses sharp words, but he fails to operate, to use his sharp sword to dispatch Claudius, because the ghost later returned "to whet thy almost blunted purpose" (III.iv.126).

To suggest, however, that one can view Hamlet as a surgeon, one must first investigate Shakespeare's knowledge of medicine. Next to Hamlet, Falstaff is probably Shakespeare's most famous creation; Sir John is a rogue, but he is an educated man whose references to medicine demonstrate his reading. Falstaff discusses apoplexy with the Lord Chief Justice by saying, "It hath its original from much grief, from study, and perturbation of the brain. I have read the cause of his effects in Galen. It is a kind of deafness" (2 *Henry IV*, I.ii.131-34). It seems that the educated Elizabethan layman knew a great deal about medicine; he would know more about the medical practice of his day than a twentieth-century layman knows about his. Shakespeare, of course, is to be considered an educated Elizabethan, who probably had as much knowledge of medicine as any layman in

the Elizabethan Age. There were more than 150 works in English on various aspects of medicine and surgery published before 1600.⁶ Some of these books were, in fact, written specifically for the layman. For example, Andrew Boorde's *The Breviary of Health, for all maner of sychenesses and diseases the which may be in man, or woman doth folowe. Expressing the obscure terms of Greke, Araby, Latin, and Barbarÿ in to englysh concerning Phisicke and Chierurgye compyled by Andrewe Boord of phisicke Doctour an englishman*, 1547, went through six editions before 1600. To assume that Shakespeare had an extraordinary knowledge of medicine is one of the exuberances of bardolatry. Shakespeare knew the accepted theories of his time but he did not, as some scholars have fancied,⁷ anticipate Harvey's 1628 work on the circulation of the blood. Anti-Stratfordians, of course, are able to believe the displayed knowledge of medicine is so great that only a man of Bacon's stature could have written the plays.

Elizabethan medicine seems to have grouped ulcers, cankers, and tumours together, all being an indication of an unwholesome condition. Shakespeare could have been familiar with works such as John Bannister's *A needful, new and necessaire threatisse of chyrurgerie, briefly comprehending the generall and particular curation of ulcers . . .* (1575) and William Clowes' *A short and profitable treatise touching the cure of the morbus gallicus by unctions and other approved waies of curing* (1579), which discuss the causes and treatments of ulcers, tumours, and cankers. It is, therefore, possible that Shakespeare could have considered the disease of Denmark's body politic to be a canker.

When Hamlet is commissioned by his father's ghost to become the surgeon and to cure Denmark, he is also warned, "Taint not thy mind" (I.v.92). Hamlet's mind does become tainted, and he fails to operate. The depraved, medieval atmosphere of Elsinore permeates Hamlet's mind; he procrastinates and fails to act as a Renaissance surgeon. The disease spreads and Hamlet reverts to medieval medicine and purges the body politic by blood-letting as he becomes responsible for the deaths of Polonius, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Laertes, Ophelia, Gertrude, Claudius and himself.

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Notes

¹William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I.ii.156, ed. Louis B. Wright (New York: Washington Square Press, 1971). The above edition will be used for all citations from text.

²Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery* (Boston: Beacon, 1960), Chart, VII.

³John W. Dean in *The Chattanooga Times*, May, 1973.

⁴Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA*, 70 (September, 1955), 744-745.

⁵Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. John Matthews Manly (New York: Henry Holt, 1928).

⁶See K. F. Russell, "A Check List of Medical Books Published in English Before 1600," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 21 (1947), 922-958.

⁷See Irving I. Edgar, "Shakespeare, Harvey and the Circulation of the Blood," *Medical Record*, 144 (July 1, 1936), 37.

HUMANITY IS ENOUGH

by E. Sue Doss

The most optimistic message in Shakespeare is that humanity is enough—that is, in spite of human weakness, vice, and error, man does very well indeed. To exemplify this claim, we have only to think of Prospero, that master of the elements who gives up control of both natural and supernatural realms; becomes reconciled to the world of man; accepts his common humanity, really a deliberated choice:

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar. Graves at my command
Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music (which even now I do)
To work mine end upon their senses that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (V.i.41-57 *Riverside*).¹

Humanity is enough.² Through his new knowledge of the function of compassion in human life, Prospero recognizes in man both Caliban ("this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine," (275-276) and Ariel ("My tricky spirit," 226; "My Ariel chick," 316; "Bravely, my diligence," 241). He also accepts this recognition, using Ariel as his sounding board:

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?
Though with their high wrongs, I am strook to th' quick,
Yet, with my nobler reason, 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,

The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further. (21-30)

This acceptance of human kind-ness, not the regaining of his ducal title, is Prospero's final triumph.

Prospero faces grave problems successfully. His purpose of revenge gives way to mercy, and he stops just short of tyranny. The old magician has himself suffered a sea-change, for he sees himself at last as a mere man among men. He will return to Milan.

It is this change of Prospero's that may remind us of Shakespearean tragic heroes who are regenerated too late: perhaps most of all of Hamlet, Othello, and Lear; for these three provide contrasts to Prospero in different ways. Two of them never come near Prospero's final acceptance of the world as it is. In fact, Hamlet and Othello go the other way; and as the plays progress, they become more and more dissatisfied with themselves and alienated with man and the world. Lear, however, resembles Prospero in part, for Lear is an old man who comes to open his eyes to the ways of mankind. But unlike Prospero, Lear does not like what he sees. His view of the world is bitter, disillusioned. It is, of course, Prospero's happy solution, his coming to terms with life, that makes *The Tempest* a comedy; but let us give Prospero credit by viewing him in relationship to Hamlet, Othello, and Lear, who sadly mishandle the problem of how to live in the world of man.

Perhaps Hamlet is the one who is least like Prospero. From the first, Hamlet expresses a world-weariness, a pessimistic view of man. His mother is guilty of incest; his uncle guilty of murder. And the bitterness Hamlet feels poisons his mind, darkens his thoughts of himself and others. He finds his own human nature intolerable:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self slaughter! (I.ii.129-132)
I do not set my life at a pin's fee (I.iv.65).

Furthermore, he sees no help for a world that is foul, unkept:

O God, God,
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of this world!
 Fie on't, ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
 That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
 Possess it merely (I.ii.132-137).

Since he can come to accept neither his own human nature nor the world as he finds it, Hamlet does not experience a sea-change. He enters the stage a sick soul, and his condition worsens. But, ah, how different with Othello in the beginning!

In the opening acts, the noble Moor is at peace with himself and with the world. He is a man both proud of his manhood and of his position among men. Furthermore, Othello has just carried off the fair Desdemona, and no man could be more self-assured: "I cannot speak enough of this content," (II.i.196). The words underline his peak of happiness; for, through Iago, who works on his general's passionate nature, Othello is caught off guard, and his change is soon to come—a change that is the diametrical opposite of Prospero's. When Othello, originally the general in command of troops and self, becomes the irrational and tormented creature at the end of the play, we find his conception of humanity to be very different from Prospero's. Othello has lost his sense of value. He comes to think of himself as a "cursed slave" (V.ii.276) and, with all pride in his manhood gone, compares himself to a "circumcised dog" (V.ii.355) and takes his own life.

It is Lear, then, who most nearly approaches Prospero: like Prospero, Lear is the old tyrant who learns that the qualities of mercy and compassion are essential in human relations. The old king, however, learns his lesson too late. With understanding the wicked natures of his false children, Lear opens his eyes to the rest of the world:

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
 That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
 How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
 Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
 From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
 Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
 Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
 That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
 And show the heavens more just (III.iv.28-36).

Finally, of course, he views himself not as father and not as a king, but as a man. Lear does gain insight, but the world he comes to view is a terrible place and man is at most a poor creature:

Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha? here's three on's are sophisticated. Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, fork'd animal as thou art (III.iv.102-108).

What Lear comes to understand about humanity, he dislikes, and he dies in a frenzy:

Kent. Vex not his ghost. O, let him pass, he hates him
That would upon the rack of this tough world
Stretch him out longer (V.iii.314-316).

Hamlet, Othello and Lear fail to find peace within and without. They rage, defy their lot, die violently. It is left for Prospero then to comfort us with man's acceptance of himself and of his world. What is particularly attractive about the optimism in this case is that Shakespeare gives Prospero a choice and rewards him with the good sense to make the right one, while he still has life to be lived. Prospero turns from contemplating "the dark backward and abysm of time" (I.ii.50) to "work the peace of the present" (I.i.22). Thus as one who finds himself content with his own human nature, Prospero stands as Shakespeare's greatest tribute to man.

Yet how can we read of Prospero's self-content without thinking of the tormented selves in other Shakespearean plays—of Hamlet's self-despair, of Othello's self-abuse, of Lear's self-pity? Surely Prospero is telling us that man's salvation lies not in the reservation of his concern for self, but in his turning away from self to man and men. We may even come to reflect that these same processes of self-despair, self-abuse, and self-pity can ultimately lead away from self back to universal man—even perhaps that one must go through these tortured concerns in order to come to terms with self. At least we feel greatly uplifted in acknowledgement that Prospero is reconciled to his own faint strength and content to be a man.

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Notes

¹All textual allusions following come from G. Blakemore Evans, et al., eds., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1974).

²Who of us can forget Miranda's expression of awe that rhetorically records the height of the optimism in the play: "How beauteous mankind is / O brave new world / That has such people in it," 183-184? The wonder here is not really in words too eloquent for the naive young girl (the words are suited to the sensitive maid of so wise a father); rather the wonder is that Shakespeare, pushing fifty as he was, could have thought to write them.

SPEAKING OF REASON TO THE DANES

by Gordon K. Thomas

The Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare (ed. Marvin Spevack, 1973) lists 373 lines in Shakespeare's plays and poems in which the words *reason* or *reasons* are used, not counting a number of other lines using such related terms as *reasonable* and *reasoning*. Sixteen of those lines occur in *Hamlet*, more than in any other play except *Troilus and Cressida*. An understanding of how Shakespeare uses the word *reason*, what is denoted and connoted by it, can make a useful contribution to understanding of the play.

Reason has different meanings in different places in *Hamlet*. Once in Act IV and twice in Act V it seems to have the meaning of definition 5 in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "A fact or circumstance forming, or alleged as forming, a ground or motive leading, or sufficient to lead, a person to adopt or reject some course of action or procedure, belief, etc." Thus when the indignant Laertes demands to know why Claudius has put up with Hamlet's supposedly criminal activities, the King tells him, "O, for two special reasons" (*Hamlet* IV.vii.9, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974]; all references to Shakespeare are to this edition), namely Gertrude and the popularity of the Prince. Similarly, Hamlet, after he has succeeded in prying Laertes' fingers from his throat in Ophelia's grave, asks, "What is the reason that you use me thus? / I lov'd you ever" (V.i.289-90). Finally, in explaining what became of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet tells Horatio that he discovered their commission to consist of "many several sorts of reasons" (V.ii.20) why the Prince should be beheaded upon reaching England. The *OED* definition for *reason* used in this sense mentions grounds or motives alleged or real. It is worthwhile to note that all three times the word is used in *Hamlet* with this meaning the grounds alleged are false, or at least not totally true. Shakespeare uses the word to contribute to the themes of delusion and disillusion in the play.

OED cites a remark by Polonius as an example of the use of *reason* to mean "the ordinary thinking faculty of the human mind in a sound condition; sanity." Polonius says, upon sensing

method in Hamlet's madness, "How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not prosperously be delivered of" (II.ii.208-11). And *reason* is used in several other speeches to call attention to Hamlet's mental state. Perhaps as Strachey says, Hamlet uses himself as the original for his general description of men in whom the preponderance of some "complexion" succeeds in "oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason" (I.iv.27-8); Strachey's comment is cited in Horace Howard Furness, ed., *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Hamlet* [New York: Dover, 1965], 1, 88—hereafter cited as *Variorum*). Here is Hamlet in Act I, his sanity, his reason, seemingly besieged. A few lines later, Horatio echoes this speech as he warns the Prince that the Ghost, if followed to the edge of the cliff, "might deprive your sovereignty of reason / And draw you into madness" (I.iv.73-4). *Reason* denotes sanity again when Polonius argues that Hamlet is "from his reason fall'n" for love of Ophelia (II.ii.165). The same sense is connoted when Hamlet tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "By my fay, I cannot reason" (II.ii.265), although the main denotation here appears to be that of *OED*'s second definition of *reason* as a verb: "To hold argument, discussion, discourse or talk with another." Observe that all five times the word appears referring to sanity it refers to the Prince. Observe too that the word appears in bunches, for an echoic effect, twice in one scene, three times in another. Clearly, Shakespeare uses *reason* to call attention to what various characters are thinking about Hamlet's mental condition.

Another meaning given by *OED* for *reason* (definition 10) is "that intellectual power of faculty (usually regarded as characteristic of mankind, but sometimes also attributed in a certain degree to the lower animals) which is ordinarily employed in adapting thought or action to some end; the guiding principle of the human mind in the process of thinking." *Reason*, in this sense, is frequently personified, adds *OED*; and so it is in the play. I believe this sense is present, along with the idea of sanity, in all five of the passages just discussed, and that it appears, perhaps even more clearly, in the eight other passages in which *reason* is used in the play. Much of meaning of this tragedy centers on the use or abuse of reason in this sense. Man's unique

reasoning ability attracts Prince Hamlet's admiration: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! . . . (II.ii.303-4). These words state what might be called the ancient faith. But in Shakespeare's time, notes Theodore Spencer, there was developing a controversy between the received opinion of an ordered universe, perfectly centered on man, and the sometimes apparently disruptive views held by such men as Copernicus, Machiavelli, and Montaigne—a controversy that sets the scene for Hamlet's conflict with his world, and with himself ("Hamlet and the Nature of Reality," ELH 5 [1938], 263). The controversy amounted, says Spencer, to "a symptom that the Renaissance in general had brought with it a new set of problems" (p. 271); for man, like Hamlet supposedly, like Gertrude assuredly, was seen more easily falling from reason than exercising his capability. Actually, according to C. S. Lewis, the reliance on reason as the ideal constituted a kind of fall already. Both Aquinas and Boethius had put the faculty they called intellect above reason. Intellect meant the simple, uncompounded grasping or perception of a truth—the basis of correct moral judgments; reason required moving step by step towards proving a truth not in itself evident. Accordingly, that man is in moral trouble who lives, like Hamlet when he is first told of the ghost's visits, by a philosophy according to which nothing is simply "seen," and everything must be proved (*The Discarded Image* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964], pp. 157-58). Thus the Prince, in lamenting that man's "capability and godlike reason" sometimes fusts in him unused (IV.iv.38-9), might be judged guilty, in Lewis' terms, of improperly exalting reason in calling it "godlike," a term perhaps more properly applied to intellect. But if Hamlet, who is as well, it seems, as everyone else he knows, suffers from having relied perhaps too heavily on reason, there is the even worse fault of forsaking reason for still lower faculties. This fault, says E. M. W. Tillyard, is at the center of the conflicts in Shakespeare's tragedies (*The Elizabethan World Picture* [New York: Vintage, n.d.], pp. 76-77). The disastrous overthrow of reason by passion is put in stirring military terms in *The Rape of Lucrece*:

Besides, his [Tarquin's] soul's fair temple is defaced;
To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares,

To ask the spotted princess how she fares.
 She says her subjects with foul insurrection
 Have batter'd down her consecrated wall,
 And by their mortal fault brought in subjection
 Her immortality and made her thrall
 To living death and pain perpetual;
 Which in her prescience she controlled still,
 But her foresight could not forestall their will.

(Lines 719-28)

The ascendancy is reversed, with happy consequences, in *The Tempest*, when Prospero chooses reason over passion in order to arrive at virtue, and forgives his enemies:

Though with their high wrongs I am strook to th' quick
 Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
 Do I take part. The rarer action is
 In virtue than in vengeance. (V.i.25-8)

In *Hamlet*, then, reason is man's pathway to truth. If it is inferior to intellect, it is anyway a far more dependable guide than passion. But we see it everywhere being forsaken. Claudius tells Laertes, "You cannot speak of reason to the Dane / And lose your voice" (I.ii.44-5). He means, of course, that he promises to satisfy any reasonable request. The dramatic irony is clear, however; Claudius, guilty of fratricide-regicide and adultery, cannot be truly reached through reasonable communication. Similarly, when he piously instructs his nephew that reason's "common theme" is the death of fathers (I.ii.103-4), he knows that his lust-motivated murder is an enemy to reason. Tillyard thinks that the whole Elizabethan concept of reason as essential to man's state occurs in Hamlet's reflection on his mother's remarriage:

O God! a beast that wants discourse of reason
 Would have mourned longer. (I.ii.151-52)

"The apostrophe to heaven," says Tillyard, "is more than mere interjection and is meant to bring in man's celestial affinities. Reason, man's heavenly part, has been degraded and he has sunk lower than the beasts themselves. Gertrude's sin is not against human decency alone but against the whole scale of being" (pp. 76-77). The fall from reason afflicts Hamlet too, at least according to Ophelia, who sees his "noble and most sovereign

reason, / Like sweet bells jangled out of time, and harsh" (III.i.157-58). Hamlet tells Gertrude, just after he has stabbed Polonius, that her "compulsive ardour" shows that "reason panders will" (III.iv.86-88). Theobald explains the line as meaning that reason is made the bawd of appetite (*Variorum* 1.294), and it is echoed in *Venus and Adonis*: "When reason is the bawd to lust's abuse" (line 792). It is this same antipathy, as Clarendon says, between right reason and passion, which is reflected in Hamlet's saying that he has "excitements of my reason and my blood" (IV.iv.58; see *Variorum* 1.326).

In *Hamlet*, then, Shakespeare uses the word *reason* often and with essentially three varying but related intents. First, he uses it to show that corrupt men explain their evil conduct by giving "reasons" which are only really rationalizations. Second, he uses the word to point up the ambiguous and ever-fascinating mental condition of the prince, who is thought at times to have lost his "reason." And finally the poet uses the term, perhaps with greatest effect, to describe a world in which men are not what they should be and are in fact becoming worse.

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INTUITIVE KNOWLEDGE IN CYMBELINE

by John W. Crawford

The two primary sources for *Cymbeline* are Holinshed and Boccaccio. The *Chronicles* afford us the account of "Kymbeline or Cimbeline, the son of Theomantius." Shakespeare took the disguised names of the two sons, Polydore and Cadwal, from Holinshed where they represent a historian and a king. The exploits of Belarius and the two stolen princes he derived from the deeds of a husbandman, Haie, and his two sons, in a battle against the Danes, narrated in the *Historie of Scotland*. The *Decameron* gives us in the ninth tale a romantic story of Imogen, Posthumus, and Iachimo. However, nowhere in *specific* form can be found a source for the two young men Guiderias and Arviragus who prove themselves to be true princes. There is an addition to the *Mirror for Magistrates* by Thomas Blennerhasset about a Guidericus and his defeat of the Roman armies, but as Nosworthy points out, "Many of the feats he attributes to Guidericus were attributed to King Arthur by Malory and other chroniclers."¹ The bard has obviously overlooked the ambiguous handling of the two princes and decided to create his own version. It is my thinking that this creation allows him to add literary weight to the prevalent notion that innate or intuitive knowledge transmitted through the blood will always out. Hence, virtuous true nobility will always be victorious.

This theme in Shakespeare has been treated well in a recent article titled "The Theme of *Henry IV, Part I*," by David S. Berkeley and Donald Eidson, *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Winter, 1968). The authors suggest that the theme of that play is "the politic concealment and exhibition of seminally transmitted virtue." When one reads Shakespeare at length he discovers this theme in a number of the plays, especially *Henry IV, Part I*, but also underlying the plots of *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*. Some criticism by Nosworthy, Tillyard and Van Doren touches upon the theme of innate knowledge and seminally transmitted virtue in *Cymbeline*, but none approaches it as a major theme.² Tennenbaum exemplifies this kind of criticism when he says that there is "a dramatic and moral necessity for the exaltation of the characters of the princes."³ Knight's

criticism is more complete. He says in *The Crown of Life* that there is something in the play "peculiarly indefinable and invisible, concerning Imogen in particular, but also the royal boys, and on occasion Posthumus, too; something to do with innate, instinctive royalty or nobility."⁴ It is this innate nobility which serves as a theme of the play, and the creation of the two princes as Shakespeare uses them allows the theme to be fully developed.

Although the concept of intuition was apparently accepted by the common mass of Elizabethans, which would require no written authority, a sizeable record of such an attitude is extant. One writer, Gervase Markham, traces good blood back to Jesus, saying "From the of-spring of gentlemanly Iaphet came Abraham, Moyses, Aaron and the Prophets, and also the king of the right line of Mary, of whom that only absolute gentleman Jesus was borne, perfite God and perfite man."⁵ According to another contemporary, Francis Markham, those fortunate enough to be born into the gentry are capable of exhibiting from "the very first breath . . . without any assistance . . . fulnesse and perfection of honor."⁶ He adds that a prince will not do anything but "what is Rare, Singular, and Unparallel'd, and admirable."⁷

The most popular code book of the day, Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, hints generally at the goodness and virtue of the gentry, and more specifically at the probability of a noble being born with inherited innate knowledge. In the dialogue of the book, Lewis Count of Canosse notes that a capability of having innate knowledge, opposed to sense knowledge, is illustrated with Lord Hyppolitus da Este, Cardinall of Ferrara:

For noblenesse of birth is (as it were) a clere lampe that sheweth forth and bringeth into light, works bothe good and badde, and enflammeth and provoketh unto vertue, as wel with the feare of slaunder, as also with the hope of praise. . . . The noble of birthe counte it a shame not to arrive at the leaste at the boundes of their predeccessours set foorth unto them. Therefore it chaunceth alwaies (in a maner) bothe in arms and in all other vertuous actes, that the moste famous menne are gentlemen. Because nature in everything hath deeply sowed that privie sede, which giveth a certain force and propertie of her beginning, unto whatsoever springeth of it, and maketh it lyke unto her selfe. . . . Truth it is, whether it be through the favour of the starres or of nature, some there are borne endowed wyth suche graces, that they seeme not to have bene borne, but

rather facioned with the verye hande of some God, and abounde in all goodnesse bothe of bodye and mynde. . . Marke me the Lorde Hyppolitus da Este Cardinall of Ferrara, he hath hadde so happye a birthe that his person, his countenance, his words, and all his gestures are so facioned and compact with this grace, that among the most ancient prelates . . . he doth represent so grave an authoritie, that man would weene he were more meete to teach, than to learne.⁸

Medical books of the period also note such a belief. Galen's theory of medicine, in this case the concept of pangenesis, had prevailed for 1000 years. It was not until Harvey's discoveries in the 16th century that Galen was to be dethroned. The culture lag provided Shakespeare use of another commonly accepted theory. A popular medical treatise of the day titled *A Profitable Treatise of the Anatomy of Man's Body* verifies the influence of Galen and the influence of that theory. Thomas Vicary, sergeant-surgeon to Elizabeth and supposed author of the treatise, writes at one point "that a vein goes from the heart to the generative organs."⁹ Dr. J. F. Payne, in an elaborate examination of its contents in the January 25, 1896, issue of *British Medical Journal*, proves that the book is actually a transcript of a 14th century manuscript in English, with a few short additional passages. Its anatomy, therefore, belongs to the knowledge existing before Vesalius, namely the anatomy of Galen.

Elizabethan politics also demanded adherence to the theory of intuitive knowledge transmitted through the blood. Although man was believed to learn generally through sense data, often gentlemen learned in another manner, through inherited blood knowledge. There is a kinship here with God and the divine. The King and hence his heirs ruled as divine representatives of God, shedding light to their ministers as God sheds light to his subordinates. Saint Augustine reminds us, in fact, that God's angels possess intuitive knowledge because of their relationship to God the Father.¹⁰ Biblical illustration cited implied the intuitive powers. Because to the Tudor mind the royalty represents divinity, the angelic characteristic of intuition is implied in the person of the ruler and his heirs.

It is obvious that Shakespeare subscribed to this theory because he presents the idea so very often. If he did not subscribe to it, one is led to wonder why he employed the idea so very much. One finds it in evidence in all the genres he imitates. For

example, in the comedies one outstanding illustration is *As You Like It*. There Oliver notes that Orlando is "gentle, never schooled, and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and indeed so much in the heart of the world . . . that I am altogether misprized" (I.i.172-177). Another good example is Marina in *Pericles*. Even as a child her ability is obvious to Pericles, who requests that she be given "princely training, that she may be / Mannered as she is born" (III.iii.16-17).

In the tragedies we see the theory in evidence in a play like *Hamlet* where true nobility and virtue are found in the Prince of Denmark, as he fights almost single-handedly against corrupt nobility. In *Macbeth*, true nobility wins when evil Macbeth and his wife are overcome by virtuous Macduff. In the first act of *Henry V* the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely marvel at the transformation of Hal. Not only did he mature temperamentally but as the new king, he exhibits skill and wisdom which astounds the archbishop. It is a skill and wisdom that Hal had promised England earlier in *Henry IV, Part I*. He keeps his word.

Among the three forms of Shakespearean drama, however, the romances provide us with the very best evidences of this theme. Florizel in *The Winter's Tale* is awed by the angel-like qualities of Perdita and says that each of her actions "So singular in each particular, / Crowns what you are doing in the present deeds / That all your acts are queens" (IV.iv.144-145). In *The Tempest* it is difficult to explain how Miranda could possibly recognize Ferdinand as being "A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble" (I.ii.417-418). The only possible conclusion is that she, born of gentle blood, did not need instruction.

It is in the young princes of *Cymbeline* that we see the strongest picture of Shakespeare's advocacy of transmitted intuitive virtue. Although we clearly see this theme early in the play, Act II properly establishes it for the audience. The sons of Cymbeline, stolen as babes years before by Belarius (Morgan) in retribution for an injustice, begin to play an extremely important role, for it is they along with Posthumus who will act as the *deus ex machina* in bringing about victory for Britain and a happy ending for the romance.

In order for them to serve in this capacity they must represent nobility. In III.iii Belarius speaks to the boys' true nature. He has just discussed with them the matter of seeing new sights and visiting different places. The boys are expressing typical youthful attitudes in seeking new adventures and have grown weary of the mountain sport which Belarius likes. Unable to convince the boys of the worth of rustic life, Belarius explains the source of his problem:

How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature!
 These boys know little they are sons to th' king,
 Nor Cymbeline dreams that they are alive.
 They think they are mine; and, though trained up thus meanly,
 I' th' cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
 The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them
 In simple and low things to prync it much
 Beyond the trick of others. (11.79-86)

This noble strain is identified for the audience, but unnecessarily so. Later, in Act IV, we are reminded of it in three different episodes. The first contains the discussion of Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius when Imogen, disguised materially as Fidele, informs the group of her illness. Guiderius becomes especially concerned and declares his love for the "boy." Arviragus echoes this love, a love he himself does not understand, for how can he love a stranger with a love that is as great as that love he has for Belarius, whom he thinks to be his father? Belarius in an aside explains to the audience why such an "unnatural" thing can happen:

O noble strain!
 O worthiness of nature! breed of greatness.
 Cowards father cowards and base things sire base:
 Nature hath meal and bran, contempt and grace.
 Doth miracle itself, lov'd before me.—
 'Tis the ninth hour o' th' morn. (ii.24-29)

Later Belarius reiterates the noble birth of the young men. Cloten has appeared and been beheaded by Guiderius. Belarius is concerned at this point that the queen will seek revenge and that the two sons will be slain. No agreement is reached on the wisdom of the slaying, so attention is paid once more to sick Fidele, and Arviragus declares his willingness to slay many Clotens in

order to restore color into Fidele's cheeks. The sons exit and then Belarius soliloquizes on the "two princely boys:"

O thou goddess,
 Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
 In these two princely boys. They are as gentle
 As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
 Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough
 Their royal blood encha'd, as the rud'st wind,
 That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
 And made him stoop to the vale. 'T is wonder
 That an invisible instinct should frame them
 To royalty unlearned, honour untaught,
 Civility not seen from other, valour
 That wildly grows in them, but yields a crop
 As if it had been sow'd. (ii.168-181)

Scene iv again illustrates the theme. The noise of war is all about the countryside, and Belarius, afraid of early recognition by the British or by the Romans, suggests that he and the boys flee to the mountains. The boys cannot accept the idea because the spirit of valour is too great within them:

Guid. Than be so
 Better to cease to be. Pray, sir, to th' army:
 I and my brother are not known; . . .

Arv. By this sun that shines,
 I'll thither! What thing is it that I never
 Did see man die! scarce ever look'd on blood,
 But that of coward hares, hot goats, and venison!
 Never bestrid a horse, save one that had
 A rider like myself, who ne'er wore rowel
 Nor iron on his heel! I am asham'd
 To look upon the holy sun, to have
 The benefit of his blest beams, remaining
 So long a poor unknown. (30-43)

Belarius loses the argument then, giving in, it seems, because he knows that princely virtue cannot be bound. His reply emphasizes the fact that noble blood will out:

No reason I, since of your lives you set
 So slight a valuation, should reserve
 My crack'd one to more care. Have with you, boys!
 If in your country wars you chance to die,
 That is my bed too, lads, and there I'll lie.

Lead, lead! (*Aside.*) The time seems long;
 their blood thinks scorn
 Till it fly out and show them princes born. (48-54)

Belarius realizes that the end is near and that truth will soon out. In fact, with the return of Posthumus from Italy, Britain is assured victory when the four men fight together against Rome, for victory is always on the side of the virtuous, or so said Tudor-Stuart England. Belarius soon tells the King what has really happened, who the boys really are, and all is made right in the world. All is full circle because everything is back in place—order has been re-established.

It seems certain then that Shakespeare's reason for creating the characters of the two young princes Guiderius and Averigus is more than something "indefinable and invisible;" rather it seems that such a creation has a great deal to do with the reinforcement of political, social, medical and religious interpretations of the overwhelming popular idea of transmitted virtue; i.e., intuitive knowledge.

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Notes

¹J. M. Nosworthy, ed., *Cymbeline* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. xviii.

²See J. M. Nosworthy, ed., *Cymbeline* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1955), introduction, p. 51; E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1955), p. 74; Mark Van Doren, *Shakespeare* (New York: Holt and Co., 1939), p. 304.

³*Shakesperian Scraps and Other Elizabethan Fragments* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1933), p. 163.

⁴G. W. Knight, *The Crown of Life* (London, 1947), p. 172.

⁵*The Gentlemans Academie* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1595), p. 44.

⁶*The Book of Honour* (London: Augustine Mathewes and John Norton, 1625), pp. 45, 46.

⁷F. Markham, p. 46.

⁸Sir Thomas Hoby, trans. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1561), p. 32.

⁹*A Profitable Treatise of the Anatomy of Man's Body*, 1548.

¹⁰*City of God*, IX, 22: