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Desire, Lack, *Objet a*: Quomodo's and Iago's *Jouissance* of Play-writing

慾望、匱缺、小對物：闊莫多與伊亞戈的編劇原樂

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Abstract

This study compares two stage villains—Quomodo in *Michaelmas Term* and Iago in *Othello*—in their unparalleled genius of "dramaturgy." They are playwright-characters: They dramatize roles for themselves or for others, create mini-plays to deceive others, and improvise action with any available resources. Quomodo lies, cheats, plays tricks, and disregards morality and conscience in order to seize a piece of land from a young gallant Easy. He dupes the latter with a commodity scam, which involves cunning operations of plots, disguises and traps. Iago, in an even more sophisticate way, carefully and calculatingly composes scripts for all of his fellow characters. He manipulates the illusion to the extent that it becomes reality for Othello, who is taken in by false appearance and smothers Desdemona in fits of jealousy and rage initiated and intensified by the malicious show staged by Iago. Both plays highlight the dialectic of illusion and reality, imagination and truth. They reveal the artificial construction of meaning. In addition, drawing on Lacanian theory of the subject of lack, I would like to point out that these tricksters' manipulations of others mark out their desire and lack. To temporarily fill up the hole of lack, they acquire some satisfaction from the sheer pleasure of invention and construction of plots and of seeing how they work. It is a *jouissance* of form, which is charged with erotic dynamics and repetition compulsion. But they are doomed to encounter their void and lack because they take the Lacanian *objet a* to be a stand-in for the lost object that satisfies their desire.

【Key words】: Desire, lack, *objet a*, *jouissance*, *Michaelmas Term*, *Othello*, playwright-character, Lacan, gaze

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摘　要

本論文比較《米迦勒節開庭期》的闊莫多與《奧賽羅》的伊亞戈兩位劇作家似人物，他們有如劇作家般運用過人的機智與想像形塑假象、操控他人、設計戲中戲欺敵、甚至就地取材即興演出。闊莫多爲了奪取易立的土地，他說謊、詐騙、施計，不顧道德規範與良心譴責，讓初到城市的年輕仕紳易立以地契交換不值錢的布匹。同樣地，伊亞戈小心翼翼策劃一齣精心製作的復仇劇，報復奧賽羅、凱西歐等人。經由獨白，伊亞戈將計謀與觀眾分享，由於他精巧的編排，奧賽羅聽信了伊亞戈所捏造的故事，憤而勒死妻子黛絲蒙娜。這兩齣戲都凸顯出虛幻與現實、想像與真實的辯證，呈現意義的建構過程。另外，從拉岡的匱乏主體理論觀之，劇作家似的人物對他人的操控暴露出他們的深層慾望，進而標示出他們的匱缺。他們藉著操控別人，得到形式所帶來的原樂，藉著強制性的重複，企求填補自身的匱乏。但是，他們終將面對主體的匱缺與空白，因爲兩人誤將拉岡提出的小對物當作早已失落的慾望物。

【關鍵詞】：慾望、匱缺、小對物、原樂、《米迦勒節開庭期》、《奧賽羅》、劇作家似人物、拉岡、觀視

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I. Playwrights, Manipulation, *Jouissance*

Quomodo and Iago are both resourceful tricksters who are definitely creative in constructing deceitful schemes for their victims. These two tricksters are well qualified as "playwright-characters" (Abel 46). The relation of a playwright-character and other fellow characters in a play is analogous to that of a playwright and his invented characters. A playwright-character, like a dramatist, composes a script or scripts, sets up plots, improvises speeches and dialogues, and dramatizes situations for his fellow characters. He tends to manipulate other characters with carefully wrought illusion, and conducts his action more or less with "a playwright's consciousness" (Abel 46). He is busy with script writing, engaging himself in manipulating plots for others. Playwright-characters are artists, or "artists in deceit" (Righter 96). In short, he is the author of a mini-play.

The essence of a dramatist lies in his ability to create something from nothing. Theseus categorizes the poet with the lunatic and the lover, all of whom possess "shaping fantasies" (5.1.5)[1] that can comprehend beyond physical phenomena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His remarks on the poet are applicable to a dramatist:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name. (5.1.12-17)

In the stage-world, a playwright can construct a believable world and reality from mere shadows, resemblances, or illusions. This study dwells on tricksters' artful

[1] References to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are to the Arden edition, ed. Harold F. Brooks.

manipulation of illusion in the hope to explore the ways how illusion becomes reality, or how fiction turns to truth. In this way the operation and fabrication of meaning can be illustrated.

Moreover, these tricksters often gain erotic pleasure from seeing their success in duping their victims. On the surface they each have specific targets: Quomodo wants to become a landed gentleman, and Iago plans to revenge for undeserved "demotion." But as they proceed, they manipulate people in a way that they are somehow not the controlling agents, because they are compelled by an unspeakable compulsion to manipulate. In other words, they are led by a repetition compulsion to seek certain unattainable satisfaction. They are driven by their innermost desire, and mistakenly believe they could achieve satisfaction if they accomplish their plans. They indulge themselves in a fleeting sense of *jouissance*, which brings them enormous "pleasure in pain" (Homer 89). As prescribed by Jacques Lacan's algebra for the fantasy structure ($\$\diamond a$),[2] they are trapped in a series of struggle to fill up their split subjectivity with a privileged lost object. They are doomed to encounter their lack.

In the following section, I would like to focus on the main plot about Ephestian Quomodo's manipulation on Richard Easy in Thomas Middleton's *Michaelmas Term*.

II. *Michaelmas Term* and *Objet a*

Michaelmas Term sets in a vividly detailed London milieu, including streets, shops, St. Paul Cathedral, and taverns, where middle-class citizens and young

[2] This formula is to be read: "the barred subject in relation to the object" (Evans 60). Simply put, it establishes a subject's desire for a privileged object in his fantasy. But it is an impossible relation, because the privileged object is only a stand-in temporarily filled the hole, the gap, the void, or the lack of his desire.

gallants all yearn "the city powd'ring (1.1.58),[3] a social transformation brought about by means of splendid clothes, new names, fashionable friends, and urban pleasures. The play centers on the conflicts between wily citizens and prodigal gallants, fighting over money, women, and land. Ephestian Quomodo, a wealthy woolen draper, in the hope to advance himself to a landed gentleman, plots a series of intrigues to seize Master Richard Easy's inherited land. His manipulation of deceitful schemes infuses a lot of sexual energy into the action of the play. On the other hand, young gallants squander money on urban pleasures and luxuries. As a consequence, they suffer from a worse and worse financial deterioration, which in turn motivates them to seek to marry wealthy merchants' daughters or seduce their wives in order to obtain handsome dowry or ready cash. The play depicts intrigues and counter-intrigues involving gains and losses of money, land, and sexual exploits. Middleton sets early 17th-century London as a site of conflicting economic, social, and sexual forces: a "man-devouring city" (2.2.21) where pursuits of social mobility and economic changes are clearly marked.

Class conflicts are embodied in the form of an intrigue involving complicate schemes to swindle Easy out of his inherited land, and a counter-intrigue accidentally triggered to retrieve Easy to the lost title. At the very beginning of the play Quomodo reveals his desire for a piece of land to his servant Shortyard:

Quomodo — Where I have seen what I desire.
Shortyard — A woman?
Quomodo — Puh, a woman! Yet beneath her,
That which she often treads on, yet commands her—
Land, fair, neat land. (1.1.100-3)

This exchange underscores the eroticism in Quomodo's craving for land, which is

[3] References to *Michaelmas Term* are based on the Revels edition, ed. Gail Kern Paster.

charged with sexual charms and intensity comparable to those of women. Such an eroticized fantasy of land not only exposes Quomodo's desire, but also tellingly marks out his lack. Quomodo, in charging his anxious and amorous desire on a piece of land, makes it a kind of "*objet a*." To Lacan, an *objet a* is a desired object that mediates between a split subject and his lack, and thus marks out the subject's desire and lack. Lacan defines the *objet a* as "a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real" (83). *Objet a* is the leftover of separation, denoting a hole or lack in the subject. On the other hand, it is a stand-in of the lost object, enabling the subject to sustain the illusion of oneness and wholeness before being alienated and separated. Since the *objet a* serves as a symbol of lack in the subject, it consequently becomes the cause of desire for the subject.

The aspiration to be a landed gentleman makes Quomodo a resourceful schemer. When he spots the target, Richard Easy, in 1.1., he instructs his spirit (servant), Shortyard, the effective ways to ruin the gull:

> Shift thyself speedily into the shape of gallantry; I'll swell thy purse with angels. Keep foot by foot with him; out-dare his expenses; flatter, dice, and brothel to him; give him a sweet taste of sensuality; train him to every wasteful sin that he may quickly need health, but especially money; ravish him with a dame or two. Be his bawd for once, I'll be thine for ever. Drink drunk with him; creep into bed to him; kiss him and undo him, my sweet spirit. (1.1.122-30)

Quomodo precisely enlists the corruptive urban sins to ruin a naïve young gallant in this long instruction to his apprentice. Urban pleasures and luxuries, ranging from gambling, sex (with both men and women), and drinking, are initiation rites for a new comer to the city. The key concept is the establishment of male bonding for an inexperienced young gallant like Easy. To ruin Easy, it is necessary to win his trust and love. And the effective way is to bind him in a "homosocial" relationship through the disguised gallant, Shortyard. In contrast to the traditional homosocial relationship in constructing and consolidating male hierarchy, it is built with an aim to destroy the victim. Quomodo's agent, Shortyard, is witty and resourceful to execute Quomodo's script.

Like a chameleon, Shortyard turns into different disguises, including a young gallant, an officer, and a wealthy citizen respectively in the gulling process. First, his disguise as Blastfield. The name "Blastfield" aptly describes his assigned mission to destroy the chosen landed gentleman while the name "Easy" denotes the victim's simplicity. The crafty and experienced crook forms a seemingly close "homosocial bonding" with his victim within a very short time: they both "affect [each other's] society very speedily" (2.1.21-22). They are "bedfellows": "our purses are brothers . . . w'are man and wife" (2.3.166-68). The relation between Blastfield and Easy is no doubt homoerotic, highly charged with sexual intensity, not just "homosocial" union.

Besides sexual connections, their relation is also permeated with economic exchanges. To fulfill his promise to Easy at their first meeting, "you must not want money as long as you are in town" (2.1.13-14), Blastfield goes to Quomodo for a loan of two hundred pounds in pretense when they both lose everything in a dicing game. This is the first step to hook up, to echo the play's fishing imagery, the gallant. It is interesting to note that the symbol of bonding in male friendship often involves exchanges of money. Antonio gives his purse to Sebastian before they depart in *Twelfth Night*. Another Antonio bounds his pound of flesh to

borrow three thousand ducats from Shylock in an attempt to furnish his friend Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*. The monetary exchanges in these male friends bring to the fore the underlying mercenary nature of male bonding.

The main action in 2.3 is modeled on commodity scams that consist of a series of tricks. Quomodo is again presented in a self-indulged fantasy of Easy's land in Essex: "O that sweet, neat, comely, proper, delicate parcel of land, like a fine gentlewoman i'th' waist" (2.3.88-89). He infuses sexual excitements in his fantasy of transforming himself into a landed gentleman. His ingenuity in gulling Easy is prompted by this desire, which however exposes his lack for wanting to be a landed gentleman. On the surface, Blastfield borrows money from Quomodo to furnish Easy for the coming dinner party. But Quomodo offers a commodity of cloth equivalent to two hundred pounds because he does not have ready cash. Blastfield does not want to take the offer in pretense. Easy, afraid of the shame if he has no money to maintain his bounty, joins Quomodo to persuade Blastfield. Another trick comes up when Blastfield finally yields to this offer. The debt has to be signed by a second citizen. Quomodo at first disqualifies Easy as a possible candidate on the notion that he is merely a stranger, a gesture that tones down and covers the ultimate intention to bind Easy as the one and only target. Propelled by an urge to prove himself a sufficient and valid guarantor, Easy willingly co-signs the bond without realizing his fall into indebtedness. Quomodo fantasizes himself set foot upon the land at the moment when Easy signs his name on the bond.

After the bond signing, a third trick is present. Falselight, Quomodo's another spirit, returns from his mission to exchange the cloth that Blastfield

willing to pay sixty pounds cash at most for the two-hundred-pound worth cloth. Thus, they enter a two hundred pounds debt, but only get sixty pounds cash in the end. The gulling of Easy is half completed. The remaining half of the gulling project is the disappearance of Blastfield, leaving Easy to be wholly responsible for the bond.

The disappearance of Blastfiled is staged in 3.2 with Easy's inquiry to Blastfield's boy of his master's whereabouts. In the next scene, a Sergeant and his Yeoman, disguised by Shortyard and Falselight, arrest Easy. In 3.4, he is brought to Quomodo. Shortyard pretends to be friendly and sympathetic with Easy. He promises Easy to find two citizens to bail him out. Then he and Falselight disguise, again, as wealthy citizens to bail Easy out. At this point, Blastfield's boy brings in a purposefully misleading news that Blastfield "has received a thousand pound and will be at his lodging at supper" (3.4.210-11). This message greatly relieves Easy, and makes him willing to bind his "Body, goods, and lands" (226) to the citizens if they will bail him out. Shortyard not only bails him out, but also accompanies him to search for Blastfield, his former disguise. This gesture infuses a sadistic pleasure into a seemingly kind deed because Shortyard watches his victim suffered from the disappointment and torture in a frenetic search for Blastfield in vain. In 4.1, Shortyard turns Easy, and resigns his bond, to Quomodo, who pretends to refuse the forfeited land: "What shall I do with rubbish? Give me money" (4.1.23-24). But, after some gestures of pretense, he accepts the offer and takes the papers. Thus, Easy is ruined and loses his land to the cunning merchant. It seems that the gulling process has completed. But, ironically, the momentum of gulling tricks

The action precipitates after Quomodo successfully grabs Easy's title to the land in Essex. Quomodo, driven by his compulsion to manipulate others, wants to find out how his son Sim Quomodo would manage his patrimony: "I am as jealous of this land as of my wife, to know what would become of it after my decease" (4.1.115-16). He desires to know the fortune after his death. This move not only defines him as an over-reacher who craves to be all-knowing, but also exposes his lack that propels him to seek further manipulation after he acquires the much-desired "object." He plans to counterfeit death, and observes how his family takes his death in the following soliloquy:

> [H]ow pitiful my wife takes my death, which will appear by November in her eye and the fall of the leaf in her body, but especially by the cost she bestows upon my funeral. There shall I try her love and regard, my daughter's marrying to my will and liking, and my son's affection after my disposing. (4.1.109-14)

He indulges himself in a fantasy of his family's grief over his death. As he tells the audience, he stages his own death off-stage in 4.3. But nobody seems to be sad about his death at all. For example, right after the report of his death, Shortyard revels over this great news because he will dupe Sim and get the land (4.3.12). Thomasine hurriedly dispatches a maid to Easy with a ring and a letter, confessing her love to him.

Quomodo disguises as a Beadle to oversee his funeral (or more exactly mock-funeral), and overhears people's comments on him like an omniscient god in 4.4. But ironically, he hears one of his friends in livery, his own son, and his spirit all calling him a cozener. Even worse, his wife, Thomasine, proposes to marry Easy during the procession of his funeral:

> Delay not now;
> Y'ave understood my love. I have a priest ready.
> This is the fittest season, no eye offends us.
> Let this kiss
> Restore thee to more wealth, me to more bliss. (4.4.80-84)

But Quomodo does not hear this proposal because he follows his fake corpse off stage, leaving him still in the belief that his wife is truly virtuous and faithful. This arrangement will heighten the dramatic effect of poetic justice when he finally finds out the truth about his wife's sudden remarriage.

The writings of Easy's land change hands quickly after Quomodo's "death" from Sim to Shortyard, from Shortyard to Easy. Shortyard, having tripped Sim off-stage, emerges as "Quomodo's Heir" (5.1.2-3). But he soon yields the writings to Easy when Easy attempts to lay hands on him: "I have cozened him [Sim] again merely for you,/ Merely for you, sir. 'Twas my meaning then/ That you should wed her and have all again" (5.1.29-31). The cunning and resourceful Shortyard seems to lose all his wits and strength he no doubt possesses in earlier scenes. Here he yields too easily.

Besides being betrayed by Shortyard and Thomasine, the once master-playwright Quomodo is duped by his own mischief with which he intends to disclose his real identity under the disguise of a beadle to unwitting Thomasine: "I'll discover myself to her ere I go; but, came it off with some lively jest now, that were admirable. I have it! After the memorandum is written and all, I'll set my own name to't, Ephestian Quomodo" (5.1.98-101). He signs his real name on the memorandum that quits Thomasine and Easy for his funeral service as the beadle. But, to his amazement, he hears Thomasine calls Easy "husband" after he signs the memorandum, and has to reveal his true identity to claim his

right in his own house.

Their argument is brought to a court. In the trial scene that ends the play, the judge asks Quomodo to prove his identity as the lately deceased merchant. And to prove so, he has to admit he is the "famous coz'ner" (5.3.22) who deceives Easy of his right and lays nets over his land (24-25). This confession may serve as a verbal evidence of his crime. Moreover, the memorandum that he signs is one more piece of evidence that disclaims his right to Easy's land:

> Memorandum, that I have received of Richard Easy, all my
> due I can claim here i'th' house or any hereafter for me.
> (5.2.114-16)

The trial scene dramatizes Quomodo's failure to be a god-like dramatist. Yet, his manipulation of illusion and deception in gulling Easy exemplifies the fabrication of man-made reality, a reality that may be real on a temporary basis for the characters involved in the action. Quomodo tactfully shapes and fashions malleable appearances to satisfy his needs and to achieve his ends. But he is not the controlling figure as he imagines: he could not attain the desired satisfaction even when he acquired the *objet a*. He is urged by the blind drive to keep seeking satisfaction through more manipulations.

In the next section, I would like to look at another skillful playwright: Iago fabricates an even more convincing man-made reality in his revenge tragedy.

III. *Othello* and Gaze[4]

Iago manipulates Othello in a much complex and delicate manner. He is the playwright who carefully composes a script of revenge, and sets up dramatic

[4] This section on *Othello* is a revision of the third chapter of my dissertation, "Self-reflexivity in the Mirror of Theater: Metatheater in Five English Renaissance Plays."

actions and plots for those actors in his revenge tragedy. His manipulations of the other characters are cunningly built into almost every word he says and every action he takes. His capacity to build illusion is deftly interwoven with his manipulation on Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello respectively.

The artistic implication of Iago's manipulative plots is long recognized. William Hazlitt regards Iago as an artist who

> takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his
> plot at home, casts the principal parts among his nearest
> friends and connexions, and rehearses it in downright earnest,
> with steady nerves and unabated resolution. (42)

Swinburne calls Iago "an inarticulate poet" (qtd. Bradley 198). To explore this exposition further, A. C. Bradley postulates that we can recognize a curious analogy

> between the early stages of dramatic composition and those
> soliloquies in which Iago broods over his plot, drawing at first
> only an outline, puzzled how to fix more than the main idea,
> and gradually seeing it develop and clarify as he works upon it
> or lets it work, (198)

The parallel of the gradual formation of Iago's plot to that of a dramatic piece is illuminating. Based on these inspiring comments, I intend to excavate the less discussed eroticism buried in Iago's devilish enterprise.

Iago is enslaved by his desire to revenge, first kindled by a sense of inequity and humiliation for not being promoted. His desire is structured by the Lacanian gaze, the privileged object or *objet a* in the scopic field. Lacan develops his concept of gaze as an *objet a* that embodies the lack of the subject. To illustrate his concept of the gaze, Lacan relates an anecdote about a sardine can. Guiding

Lacan's look to a floating can on the surface of the waves, Petit-Jean jokingly remarks: "You see that can? Can you see it? Well, it doesn't see you" (Lacan 95). Despite Petit-Jean's words that the can does not see him, Lacan realizes that the can is looking at him all the same: it makes him see the stain concealing and marking the existence of the gaze. The function of the stain is in marking "the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen" (Lacan 74). Or, to put it more precisely, the stain is used to ground the gaze in the scopic field. The stain conceals, and also reveals, the gaze, which points to the void of the subject.

The sense of being-looked-at-ness is like the sardine can Lacan sees: "It was looking at me at the level of the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated" (Lacan 95). The can returns a gaze upon Lacan and makes him realize he is no longer someone who sees, but becomes part of the picture. Lacan draws a diagram with two inverted triangles to explain the mechanism of gaze (Lacan 106). The gaze is placed exterior to the subject, whereas the subject is the subject of "representation" in the picture. A third term, screen, mediates between the gaze and the subject, indicating that the subject is always "photo-graphed" (Lacan 106) in the shape of the screen (Silverman 133). The screen is opaque and blocks the point of gaze. Lacan uses the camera as a signifier of the gaze, giving "the camera/gaze a constitutive function with respect to him or her" (Silverman 131). By dividing the word "photograph" into "photo" and "graph," Silverman argues, Lacan underscores the capacity of the gaze to "schematize" the subject-as-spectacle within light, placing the subject on an object-like position (132). The gaze, as an *objet a* and thus a cause of desire, "photo-graphs" the subject as a subject of desire.

But the gaze is "unapprehensible" (Lacan 83) and is "excluded from our field of vision" (Quinet 139). Then how can we grasp it? We can only approach it

through the screen. In Iago's case, it is revealed on the screen that Iago paints with his play-writing pen for his arch-spectator Othello and other audience onstage and offstage. Now let us turn to Iago's play-writing.

As the play opens, Iago "confides" his hatred for the Moor to Roderigo on the ground that Othello rejects his promotion. Later he takes audience into his confidence, and reveals his hatred for the Moor because Othello probably has an adulterous relation with his wife Emilia, a much more secret motive not unfolded to Roderigo. Note the play-writing process in this soliloquy:

> Cassio's a proper man: let me see now,
> To get his place, and to plume up my will
> In double knavery. *How? How? let's see*:
> After some time to abuse Othello's ear
> That he is too familiar with his wife.
> He hath a person and a smooth dispose
> To be suspected, framed to make women false.
> . . . . . .
> *I have't, it is engendered*! Hell and night
> Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.
>
> (1.3.391-97, 402-3; emphases added) [5]

He is in the heat of "writing" a play script, and shares his plot outline with his audience. This is only a rough draft, which will be gradually developed into a much clearer shape. He concludes with an invocation to "hell" and "night," muses appropriate for his black artistry.

Seeing Cassio extend courtly manners to Emilia and Desdemona with kisses (2.1.174-76), Iago, taking the audience into confidence with an aside, shares his

[5] The quotations of *Othello* are from the Arden edition, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann.

plan to slander Cassio's purely polite acts. This is an example of Iago's ability to improvise. He is good at using materials available to him. With this newly conceived "evidence," Iago then rehearses his invention about the adulterous relation between Desdemona and Cassio to Roderigo first. He pretends to tell Roderigo a secret: "Desdemona is directly in love with him [Cassio]" (2.1. 217). Roderigo, though not extremely clever, can tell that it is impossible: "With him? why, 'tis not possible" (218). But Iago is so convincingly inventive that he first argues Desdemona will not love ugly Othello for a long time. When she is sick of Othello, she will naturally fall in love with Cassio, who is not only young and handsome, but also sly and lascivious in Iago's script. He is able to transform a mere polite act into a lecherous one. To make his story even more plausible, he degrades Desdemona from a gentle lady to a lewd woman. He fabricates an unspeakably lustful exchange between Desdemona and Cassio (2.1.251-58). Iago's invented plot of the illicit relationship between Desdemona and Cassio is well received by Roderigo, his trial audience. Being taken in by this plot, Roderigo is then cast in the role of a revenger, whose task is to overturn his rival's fortune. He follows Iago's instruction to arouse drunken Cassio into a fight; the ensuing riots cause the latter's dismissal from the office.

In his soliloquy closing 2.1, Iago confides to the audience his motive of destroying Desdemona:

> Now I do love her too,
> Not out of absolute lust—though peradventure
> I stand accountant for as great a sin—
> But partly led to diet my revenge,
> For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
> Hath leaped into my seat, the thought whereof

> Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards . . .
> And nothing can or shall content my soul
> Till I am evened with him, wife for wife . . . . (2.1.289-97)

Once again, Iago attributes his inexplicable hatred for Othello to the supposed adultery. In this effort to justify his deed, he relates his problem to sexual matters. But to what extent is this confession true and honest? Before supplying an inference, let us move on to a similar accusation on Cassio. Iago tells the audience his next step: to overturn Cassio and deceive Othello. To justify his hatred for Cassio, he accuses Cassio of committing adultery with his wife, again from his guesses.

> I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
> Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb—
> For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too—
> Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me
> For making him egregiously an ass. . . . (303-7)

His accusation on Cassio annuls the earlier one on Othello because it becomes self-evident that Iago would accuse any man that he hates for committing adultery with his wife. No further dramatic action centering on these adulteries suggests that Iago is simply making up stories to justify his action. And, once again, Iago exposes his knavery, still in its crude form, to the audience. He makes a general plot line to proceed, but is not quite sure how it will end or where it will lead: "'Tis here, but yet confused:/ Knavery's plain face is never seen, till used" (309-10). Interestingly, his false accusations on Othello and Cassio bring to the fore the sexual dynamics in his manipulation and trickery. He misleadingly situates his motives in sexual discontent and jealousy. But as the plot unfolds, he acquires, or possibly pursues, sexual excitement from the manipulative trickery

practiced on his enemies.

After being dismissed from the office of lieutenancy, Cassio is advised to implore Othello through Desdemona. Right after Cassio's departure, Iago congratulates himself on his own ingenuity, and triumphs over his seeming honesty: "And what's he then that says I play the villain?" (2.1.331). In this very self-consciously reflexive moment about his role in the play proper, Iago jokes about his seeming honesty. Seconds later, he deflates his boast of honesty by evoking his kinship with the devil:

> Divinity of hell!
> When devils will the blackest sins put on
> They do suggest at first with heavenly shows
> As I do now. (345-48)

In 3.3, the great temptation scene, Iago demonstrates his unparalleled dramaturgic skill to make up a fiction accusing a faithful wife of betraying her husband, who, at first free from any suspicion, is completely taken in at the close of the scene. Iago is a magician of language, who can conjure up the unseen and the unheard with mere words. He plants "seeds of doubt" (Scragg 59) into Othello's mind, which within a short time grow into a gigantic tree of evilness.

Let us take a look of his first bout. Cassio, meeting Desdemona about the possibility of his reinstatement, hurries away when he sees Othello returning. Iago infuses Othello's neutral description of Cassio's departure from his wife with an illicit element, thereby introducing a suspicious connection between Cassio and Desdemona.

> Othello Was not that Cassio *parted from* my wife?
> Iago Cassio, my lord? no, sure, I cannot think it
> That he would *steal away so guilty-like*

> Seeing you coming. (3.3.37-40; emphases added)

Iago maliciously substitutes "parted from" with "steal away," and secretly implants the seed of suspicion into Othello's mind. This is confirmed from Othello's strange outcry after he requests Desdemona to "leave [him] but a little to [him]self" (85) when getting impatient with her persistent suit on Cassio's behalf:

> Excellent wretch! perdition catch my soul
> But I do love thee! and when I love thee not
> Chaos is come again. (90-92)

At this point, nothing much about Cassio and Desdemona is suggested from Iago. If Othello were merely unhappy with Desdemona's interference, he would not have pronounced these strange remarks about his love to Desdemona.

Iago's manipulation of Othello involves very subtle insinuation with excessive repetitions of words such as "think" ("thought" and "thinkings"), "honest" ("honesty"), and "jealousy" ("jealous").[6] Take a look of how Iago insinuates a sense of dishonesty into the character of Cassio with his typical "close dilations" (124).

> Othello Indeed? Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that?
> Is he not *honest*?
> Iago *Honest*, my lord?
> Othello *Honest*? Ah, *honest*.
> Iago My lord, for aught I know.
> Othello What dost thou *think*?
> Iago *Think*, my lord?
> Othello *Think*, my lord! By heaven, thou echo'st me

[6] A total of 25 "think's," 11 "honest's," and 7 "jealousy's" used by both Iago and Othello in this scene from lines 34 to 283.

As if there were some monster in thy *thought*

Too hideous to be shown.

. . . . . .

If thou dost love me

Show me thy *thought*. (102-11, 118-19; emphases added)

Iago plays with Othello's uncertainty and eagerness. Instead of a straightforward slander on Cassio and Desdemona, he inches in with very slow but deadly pace, which proves to be much more effective and indelible, casting doubts and ill omens on his seeming reticence.

In layers of qualification, Iago cautiously states his opinion of Cassio: "For Michael Cassio, / I dare be sworn *I think that he is honest*" (125-26; emphases added). A sense of uncertainty about Cassio's honesty is indirectly implied by the qualification of "I think," which indicates a personal opinion susceptible to faulty judgement. Therefore, Othello insists,

Nay, yet there's more in this:

I prithee speak to me, as to thy thinkings,

As thou dost ruminate, and give thy worst of thoughts

The worst of words. (133-36)

Effectively setting up Cassio's dishonesty, Iago then works on the picture of a jealous husband.

O beware, my lord, of jealousy!

It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock

The meat it feeds on. (167-69)

Hearing Iago's seemingly sincere advice, Othello questions with misgiving:

No, Iago,

I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove,

And on the proof there is no more but this:

Away at once with love or jealousy! (192-95)

Othello seems to be a master of his own judgment. But Iago's discreet manipulation of Othello's judgment indicates that he is only a puppet under Iago's control. Successfully working Othello's mind to accept any story, Iago then pours his fiction into Othello's ears:

I speak not yet of proof:

Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio.

Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure;

I would not have your free and noble nature

Out of self-bounty be abused: look to't.

I know our country disposition well—

In Venice they do let God see the pranks

They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience

Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. (199-207)

Iago does not supply any solid or factual proof for his accusation. But he somehow manages to gather some effective "evidences": Desdemona's betrayal to her father, Desdemona's unusual and unnatural choice of husband, and later Cassio's supposed dream.

When left alone, Othello soliloquizes:

She's gone, I am abused, and my relief

Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage

That we can call these delicate creatures ours

And not their appetites! (271-74)

He already condemns Desdemona, and treats her rudely when she shortly appears. He rejects Desdemona when she tries to bind his "painful" forehead with the

fateful napkin, which is dropped and found by Emilia, who then gives it to Iago. With this handkerchief, Iago again confides in his audience how he will proceed his plot.

> I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin
> And let him find it. Trifles light as air
> Are to the jealous confirmations strong
> As proofs of holy writ. (324-27)

Like an experienced playwright, Iago deftly employs a prop to enhance the illusion. He intuitively foresees the effective and precise destruction of the blind and jealous husband with such a trifle. Such a foresight exemplifies an unusual omniscience, though malevolent, of his creation, which is essential for any successful playwright.

In response to Othello's insistence on seeing an "ocular proof" (363), Iago questions

> Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on?
> Behold her topped? (398-99)

and

> It is impossible you should see this
> Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
> As salt as wolves in pride, and fools as gross
> As ignorance made drunk. (405-8)

Iago invents an obscene tryst of the two with vivid, hideous animal images, and thus incenses Othello's fury and passion to the utmost. He further depicts a dream[7] he "overheard" from Cassio to "thicken other proofs / That do

[7] In Iago's narration, Cassio kisses Iago when dreaming, taking him to be Desdemona. Iago wants to fabricate an adulterous tryst of Cassio and Desdemona. But this

demonstrate thinly" (432-33). In his narration, he dramatizes Cassio's supposedly illicit dream with quotations and actions, converting a dream (that probably does not exist at all) to a deed. On top of all these fictions, Iago adds that "such a handkerchief—/ I am sure it was your wife's—did I today / See Cassio wipe his beard with" (438-40).

Within this temptation scene, Iago cunningly builds up an extremely deceptive and illusory world to entrap Othello: Cassio's suit to Desdemona for his reinstatement is twisted into an unlawful courtship, and Desdemona's enthusiasm in helping Cassio is viciously distorted into a sign signaling her adultery with him. At the close of the scene, Othello and Iago are seen kneeling in alliance, vowing to kill both Cassio and Desdemona.[8] Honest and chaste Desdemona becomes the "fair devil" (481). And within this scene the trust and harmony between Othello and Desdemona are overturned.

In 4.1, a sequel to the temptation scene, Iago stages a deceptive playlet, with Othello hiding in observation of Cassio's revelation about his relation with his mistress (who is Desdemona in Othello's misconception, but Bianca in reality). Misled by Iago's account of the plot, Othello mistakes the appearance of what he sees in this arranged playlet. In reality Iago asks Cassio about his relation with Bianca, but Othello is taken in by the mere appearance and believes this confession is Cassio's admission to his adultery with Desdemona. Unwitting Othello also misinterprets Cassio's sneers at Bianca's love for him. A quick

description also brings in Iago's hidden homoerotic desire because Iago pictures Cassio kisses and caresses him.

[8] In Oliver Parker's film version, Iago and Othello embrace each other after an exchange of vows and bonds. Iago seems intensely moved with tears. This ceremony hints at the much-contended homoerotic desire on Iago's part, and is very much like a mock marriage ceremony.

view of Othello's sarcasm in his remarks on the show will indicate his affinity with Iago in terms of language and mindset.

Othello Iago beckons me: now he begins the story.

Cassio She was here even now, she haunts me in every place. I was the other day talking on the sea-bank with certain Venetians, and thither comes the bauble and, by this hand, falls me thus about my neck—

Othello Crying "O dear Cassio!" as it were: his gesture imports it.

Cassio So hangs and lolls and weeps upon me, so shakes and pulls me! Ha, ha, ha!

Othello Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to. (4.1.131-42)

Othello, the spectator of this staged show, intermittently comments like a lowborn and foul-mouthed groundling. Honigmann, editor of the Arden edition, glosses "nose" as "penis" (263). Othello becomes more and more like Iago, in both language and mindset, whose "jealousy / Shapes faults that are not" (3.3.150-51).

That Iago is an unparalleled playwright is even more obvious when he improvises with Bianca's sudden appearance railing about the handkerchief in his playlet.

Iago And did you see the handkerchief?

Othello Was that mine?

Iago Yours, by this hand: and to see how he prizes the foolish woman your wife! She gave it him, and he hath given it his whore. (4.1.170-74)

Iago may have preconceived how he will stage this inset play with Othello as an onstage spectator. The episode of Bianca's sudden appearance, purely coincidental, is deftly infused into the playlet.

In sum, Iago manipulates a fictional world with his dexterous control of appearance, using it to build up an illusion and to contaminate Othello's mind. Othello is poisoned to a blind jealousy, and finally commits a violent murder because of the "supposed" adultery between Desdemona and Cassio. Othello's mind is contaminated in the form of visual and hearing deception. Iago manipulates the illusion so much so that it becomes reality for Othello, who is taken in by the false appearances and smothers Desdemona in fits of jealousy and rage initiated and intensified by the malicious fiction carefully wrought by Iago. The tragic death of Desdemona illustrates the powerful influence of illusion on reality. The illusory appearances not only encroach upon reality, but also overthrow it in an irreversible manner.

Critics rack their brains to locate Iago's motives, a frenzy reflecting a critical anxiety to resolve the difficult mystery. Samuel Taylor Coleridge calls this critical frenzy the "motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity" (I, 49). Iago's jealousy, professional disappointment, personal hatred of Cassio, homosexual desire and misogyny—these have been proposed to explain the nature of his motivation (Sanders 25; Muir 16). Also, quite interestingly, a close affinity of Iago's manipulative process with that of Shakespeare's own art may be identified (Sanders 25; Bradley 198).

We can clearly see that Iago develops his plot step by step in each soliloquy. We are informed of every step with which he comes up to deceive the other characters. His composition of the revenge tragedy gradually shapes into a more concrete form with each step he takes to further the story line. He does not exactly know how things will end. He just follows the lead of each circumstance he devises earlier, and improvises according to the situation to suit his overall plan of revenge. The sheer *jouissance* of invention and construction of plots and of

seeing how they work, among other motivations of Iago's villainy, must also be taken into account. It is a *jouissance* of form, which is specifically charged with erotic dynamics and repetition compulsion.

But just like Quomodo, Iago is overruled by his desire and is driven by his lack. He mistakenly believes he is the manipulative agent of Othello's downfall. In reality he is like his victim—he is only a puppet of his blind desire to revenge. The script he writes is the screen that hides and exposes his lack and void.

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