Shakespeare and Narration: Feminism, Structure, History

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Abstract

Since its first publication, Shakespeare's *Othello* has resulted in both controversy and widely different opinions. Within these different responses, there is repeated interest in certain ideas of identity; identity as formed through the identity of others; identity as supplemental; identity as antagonistic. This thesis fundamentally turns on the question of the limits of the problematisation of identity. What must be in place for this difficulty or collapse to be staged?

One of the most repeated ideas in *Othello* criticism is that it problematises the binary. Othello, black, successful, performative and content is contrasted against Iago, manipulative, malcontent, white; yet in such a way that the lines between the two are always questioned. Through a series of close readings of *Othello*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and their criticism, therefore, this thesis considers how the oppositions often called upon by critics to make sense of Shakespeare's work might echo what *Othello* has been understood to say about how identities are constituted through such oppositions.

To this end, this thesis begins with a consideration of the opposition between 'black' and 'white' through readings of texts by Richard Dyer and Frantz Fanon. It then engages with the critical works of Chris Fitter, Nicholas Royle, Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass, questioning the structural stability of the stage/page dichotomy. It also considers ideas of history through scrutiny of the opposition between text and context in Alan Sinfield and Jerry Brotton's interventions into *Othello* criticism. This thesis concludes with a reading of repetition in *Othello* and the claims of William Empson, T.S. Eliot and Thomas Moisan. Drawing on what Shoshana Felman terms an 'uncanny reading effect', and culminating with a reading of Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*, this thesis challenges appeals to distinct boundaries between Shakespeare's *Othello* and critical and literary responses to it, including my own.

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been

properly and fully acknowledged.

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Acknowledgements

Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Stage/Page; New Historicism/Deconstruction; Original/Version; Othello/Iago; Desdemona/Othello; Shakespeare/Morrison. These are some of the oppositions that, in one sense, this thesis turns upon. My interest, however, is in the way in which such binary thinking is to be challenged. This thesis considers how what *Othello* might have to say about such dichotomies might find repetition in the oppositions often called upon by critics to make sense of the play and Shakespeare's work more generally. I begin, then, with the recent work of the critic Chris Fitter, working on the *Taming of the Shrew* and arguing that the dichotomy between stage and page is resolved through the privileging of the former. I then consider Nicolas Royle's reading of *Othello*, in what can be understood as a text that takes the opposite view, privileging the text and reading it as 'poetry'.

Within different critical responses to *Othello*, there is a repeated interest in certain ideas of identity, identity as formed through the identity of others, identity as supplemental and identity as antagonistic. In Chapter 3, therefore, I closely consider the various problematisations of identity, not in *Othello* however, but in *The Taming of the Shrew* as a play that is also celebrated for its questioning of identity, and to follow up some of the ideas I read in Chris Fitter's problematisation of the stage and page. I then turn to consider the opposition between text and context by introducing what I read to be crucial New-Historical interventions into *Othello* studies by both Alan Sinfield and Jerry Brotton. The final chapter of this thesis considers various and divergent traditions of responses to *Othello*, beginning with William Empson's celebrated consideration of the word 'honest' in the play, and culminating in a reading of Toni Morrison's response in *Desdemona*. In this final chapter I consider the ways in which these responses both differ from and repeat, not only *Othello,* but also one another.

i)   Black and White

My interest in these issues began during my studies for the M(Res.) in Children's Literature with the Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL) at the University of Reading. Already having a keen interest in Black British Literature, I was pleased to see that one of the texts on the reading list was Malorie Blackman's *Noughts & Crosses* (2001), the first from her series of young-adult novels, which has since been adapted for television. Blackman's novel, now a staple of the secondary-school classroom, engages with ideas of class, race, racism, power and identity. And these are issues that have concerned me for most of my life. So having grown up mixed-race in England in the 1980s feeling that the books available to me then somehow did not quite relate to me, I was eager to explore a text that I believed might perhaps speak to me on some sort of personal level. Yet I was completely taken aback by my reaction to the text. The premise of the novel is simple enough: that in a world where black people (Crosses) dominate and supress white people (Noughts), the two main teenage characters, Sephy and Callum, navigate an illicit inter-racial relationship.

But there were problems. Indeed, Clare Bradford places Blackman's novel within a wider tradition of 'Colonial texts for children', lamenting that rather than challenging the historical practices and attitudes towards race that underpin colonial discourses, '[c]ontemporary texts' such as *Noughts & Crosses* 'are not immune from a tendency to fall back on the racialized hierarchies they ostensibly contest'. [1] Whilst I completely understand Bradford's concerns here, concerns I will further explore later in this chapter, my chief difficulty with the text was in my reading of race and skin colour. I found that I frequently had to stop to remind myself which of the characters belonged to which group – that is, who

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[1] Clare Bradford, 'Race, Ethnicity and Colonialism' in *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by David Rudd (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), pp. 39-50 (p. 41).

was 'black' and who was 'white'. Of course, this is in no way to say that the novel does not 'work', indeed I believe it to be a truly important text, and one that clearly, in my reading, raises unexpected questions. And I am certainly not the first to argue thus. Elizabeth Atkinson and Reneé DePalma, for example, contend that:

> The only feature of this world that is unrecognisable, and in which we, as readers, cannot recognise ourselves, is the social hierarchy within which, as gradually becomes apparent, it is black people, not white people, who hold the power. Such is the shock of discovery and rediscovery of this 'impossible' truth that the reader has to adjust and re-adjust continually to it throughout the reading of the book: if characters hail readers, in an Althusserian sense, their hailing will consistently misfire.[2]

If my difficulty, as Atkinson and DePalma argue, is that 'as' a 'reader' I, too, am unable to 'recognise' myself 'in' the 'only' and apparently, here, *objectively* 'unrecognisable' 'feature of this world', then does this not mean that in texts in which there are no 'unrecognisable' 'feature[s]', or in texts wherein 'white people' *do* 'hold the power' I *am* able to 'recognise' myself? What must surely follow from this is that for Atkinson and DePalma, contained within all 'feature[s]' of all texts, regardless of what these 'feature[s]' may be, there are always contained 'ourselves' available to be 'recognise[d]' (or not) by 'readers'. Not only are 'we, as readers' 'in' the text, therefore, but 'we' are there irrespective of our ability to 'recognise ourselves' – 'we, as readers' can be 'in' the text without even knowing it.

Christine Wilkie-Stibbs also perceives the 'inversion' of black and white as a 'profoundly shocking experience' but asserts that this is an experience specific to 'any of [Blackman's] self-defined, liberal-minded, educated, white, middle-class readers who believed themselves to know better'.[3] She expands on this claim in the following:

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[2] Elizabeth Atkinson and Reneé DePalma, 'Imagining the Homonormative: Performative subversion in Education for Social Justice', *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 29/1 (2008), 25-35 (31).
[3] Christine Wilkie-Stibbs, 'The "Other" Country: Memory, Voices, and Experiences of Colonized Childhoods', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 31/3 (2006), 237-259 (241).

In a simple, arguably simplistic, act of inversion, Blackman locates power in the majority black community of her novels who are the "Crosses," and inscribes the white, the "Noughts," as a disempowered minority—a fact that does not become clear in the narrative until fifty pages in. She thus brings into sharp relief the taken-for-granted, internalized, and unexamined assumptions of any of her white, middle-class readers about the way that power and privilege may be located in them. By displacing the white and black characters of her novels in a number of culturally contradictory and discursively estranged locations in this way, Blackman, in the words of Bhabha, "distantiates" them; she makes them "uncanny" by defamiliarizing a set of naturalized assumptions.[4]

Without locating 'readers' 'in' the text, Wilkie-Stibbs can be understood here, to a certain extent, to repeat some of the ideas in the claims of Atkinson and DePalma about what 'readers' can and cannot 'recognise' in her contention that the text highlights to 'white, middle-class readers' that 'power and privilege may be located in them' and that the 'displace[ment]' of 'the white and black characters of [Blackman's] novels' 'makes them "uncanny" by *defamiliarizing* a set of naturalized assumptions'.[5] Wilkie-Stibbs, however, twice limits this 'profoundly shocking experience' to 'white middle-class readers' and does so in spite of the note to this section presented at the end of her article which states that '[a]n audience of ethnically diverse young people in conversation with Blackman admitted to being taken aback to discover the ethnic inversions of *Noughts & Crosses* when they reached page 50'.[6] For Wilkie-Stibbs, therefore, 'self-defined, liberal-minded, educated, white, middle-class readers' *and* '[a]n audience of ethnically diverse young people' can be understood to experience some degree of 'shock' upon their encounter with the 'ethnic inversions of *Noughts & Crosses*'. Yet this 'shocking experience' is only 'profound' for 'white middle-class readers' and this is because of the 'power and privilege' they, by dint of their

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[4] Wilkie-Stibbs, p. 241.
[5] My italics.
[6] Wilkie-Stibbs, p. 256.

'educated', 'middle-class' 'whiteness', possess; 'power and privilege' that the 'audience of ethnically diverse young people' necessarily, for Wilkie-Stibbs, does not.

The 'white and black characters' in Blackman's novel have, for Wilkie-Stibbs, been 'displac[ed]' 'in a number of culturally contradictory and discursively estranged locations' and in doing so, she argues, Blackman 'makes them "uncanny" by defamiliarizing a set of naturalized assumptions'. These ideas about the narration of 'white and black characters' lead me to further question my own reading of the novel. Do I even read or think about skin colour in other texts? And if not, why not? What 'set of naturalised assumptions' do I have that I am unaware of that seem to enforce a reading of 'white' as the norm or even dominant? Or might it also be that there is something in this idea of 'reversal' that implies an essential stability of structure and meaning in the opposition of 'black' and 'white'? Is it not, rather, that 'black' and 'white' are themselves constituted through complex and shifting contradictions and excesses that are not (or cannot) be fully accounted for in this claimed reversal? To help me think through these questions some more, I turn to two texts that explicitly discuss skin colour and its relation to identity: Richard Dyer's *White* and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.

ii)   Dyer

Richard Dyer, in *White*, considers the representation of white people and whiteness in culture and media. He argues that 'the absence of reference to whiteness in the habitual speech and writing of white people in the West' produces a 'sense of whites as non-raced' or 'just human' as opposed to those of other races and skin colours who are always explicitly and necessarily 'raced' and are therefore, conversely, understood as *not* 'just human'.[7] Although this might go some way to explain my difficulty in reading skin colour in *Noughts*

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[7] Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

& Crosses, for Dyer, there are further complexities in constructions of 'whiteness' and he expands on these ideas in the following:

> Whites must be seen to be white, yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen. To be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal. The paradox and dynamic of this are expressed in the very choice of white to characterise us. White is both a colour and, at once, not a colour and the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen: the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death, all of which form part of what makes white people visible as white, while simultaneously signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible.[8]

For Dyer, then, there is a separation between 'Whites' and 'white'. I read 'Whites' here as a group which can be 'seen' from an external perspective, by those who are not 'Whites'. To 'be seen' is thus necessary for the constitution of 'Whites' as 'white' which means that when they are not 'seen' they are not 'white'. In this, therefore, being 'white' is not a fixed or secure quality of 'Whites', but rather is subject to the condition of being 'seen'. Yet, due to this, whether or not they are 'seen', and consequently, whether or not they are 'white', does not alter their status as 'Whites'. Indeed, in this formulation it is not 'white' that is 'seen', but rather it is 'Whites', and it is the act of their being 'seen' that then constitutes them as 'white'. Therefore, for Dyer, the difference between 'Whites' and 'white' is that 'Whites' is a potentially visible status which is unchanging and constant, whereas for 'Whites' to be 'white', they 'must be seen as white' even though 'white' is never 'seen'.

In addition to the necessity of being 'seen', however, the constitution of 'Whites' as 'white' is further complicated because of Dyer's claim that 'yet whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen'. I read the word 'yet' here to indicate a conflict between these two clauses, that because 'whiteness as race

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[8] Dyer, *White*, p. 45.

resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen', there is a difficulty in 'see[ing]' 'Whites', which would then in turn constitute them as 'white'. And whilst 'Whites' are claimed to be a group which is fixed and constant, 'whiteness' is split in that it can be 'as' more than one thing. In this, 'whiteness', for Dyer, functions or can be understood in different ways, namely, 'as race' or 'as power'. Yet although 'whiteness' can thus be read to have multiple properties, it is at the same time still 'whiteness' even when it is 'as' other things. Thus, despite the fact that 'whiteness' functions in different ways, its status as 'whiteness' and therefore its inability to be 'seen' remains. Although there is a sense here that 'white' and 'whiteness' are things which cannot be 'seen', this is problematized by Dyer's claim that 'whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen'. For Dyer, 'whiteness as race' is located 'in invisible qualities', so it may be understood that Dyer claims to know not only that there are 'invisible qualities', but also what is 'in' these 'invisible qualities' despite the fact that they are 'invisible'. There is a sense here, then, that because 'whiteness as race resides in invisible properties', 'whiteness as race' cannot be 'seen' as it is concealed within the 'invisible qualities'. Yet the difficulty with this reading is that in Dyer's assertion that 'whiteness as race resides in invisible properties', only the place in which 'whiteness as race' is located is claimed to be 'invisible'. It is not necessarily the case, therefore, that 'whiteness' or indeed 'whiteness as race' is itself 'invisible', which means that there is, then, a potential for 'whiteness' to be 'seen'. There is a further difference between 'whiteness as power' and 'whiteness as race' in the claim that 'whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen'. Here, 'whiteness as power' is not located in any specific place but is separate and independent of 'other' properties. Yet the word 'maintained' also indicates that 'whiteness as power' is dependent upon remaining 'unseen' in order for its continuation, and thus may be read as vulnerable or unstable. Therefore, 'whiteness as power' is not necessarily 'unseen' but requires to be

'unseen', and even though Dyer claims that 'whiteness' functions 'as power', it only functions as such when it is 'unseen'. As it is the case that 'whiteness as power' needs to remain 'unseen' in order for it to be 'maintained' as such, therefore, it must also follow that if 'Whites' are 'seen' this too will have consequences for the preservation of 'whiteness as power'. And since I read this as a claim to knowing and thus 'seeing' 'whites and 'whiteness', there is a sense that, for Dyer, 'whiteness as power' is not 'maintained'.

Whether 'Whites', 'white' or 'whiteness' are either 'seen' or 'invisible', then, is not, in my reading, unequivocally secure in Dyer's claims. Yet there is a further shift that can be read in Dyer's contention that to 'be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered, yet true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal'. Here, it is definitely possible to 'be seen as white'; but, again, 'white' is itself not 'seen' because what is 'seen' is 'one' '*as* white'.[9] For the 'one' in this claim, therefore, 'white' is not an intrinsic quality, but is rather an excess supplement. In other words, 'white' is only something that the 'one' can be 'as' through the act of 'see[ing]'. I read this appeal to excess again in Dyer's claim that to 'be seen as white is' equivalent to having 'one's corporeality registered' in that 'one's corporeality' is separately owned by the 'one'. And although there is a sense here in which it might be understood that 'white' is connected to the 'one's corporeality', that the 'corporeal' is where 'white' is detectable, in this claim 'one's corporeality' is neither 'white' nor 'seen' but is only 'registered' on account of being 'seen as white'. The 'corporeality' of the 'one', then, is not 'white' - it is only connected to 'white' in so far as being 'seen as white' enables 'one's corporeality' to be 'registered'. Counter to this, however, Dyer also asserts that 'true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal', so that 'true whiteness' can be understood as isolated from the specificity of the 'one's corporeality' because it resides in the broader and more independent, 'non-corporeal'. In this claim, 'true whiteness' is not only associated with the

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[9] My italics.

'non-corporeal', but is contained within it; but what this also means is that even if there is a sense in which to 'be seen as white is to have one's corporeality registered' can be understood to suggest that there is a 'whiteness' that is linked to 'one's corporeality', this is never the 'true whiteness' that 'resides in the' opposite 'non-corporeal'. The 'whiteness' of 'one's corporeality', in this sense, is never 'true'. I read another difference here between Dyer's assertion that 'true whiteness resides in the non-corporeal' and his previous claim that 'whiteness as race resides in invisible properties and whiteness as power is maintained by being unseen' because this is not a claim to 'whiteness' *as* something else, nor indeed, 'whiteness' itself, but a separate and discrete 'true whiteness' which is locatable somewhere else entirely. All of Dyer's previous claims to 'whiteness' can thus also be understood as claims to a 'whiteness' that is not 'true'.

Although Dyer goes on to contend that the 'paradox and dynamic of this are expressed in the very choice of white to characterise us', which can be construed as an acknowledgement of there being both 'paradox and dynamic' in his previous claims to 'Whites', 'white', 'whiteness' and indeed 'true whiteness', I would argue that in my reading there are further shifts and excesses that he has not taken into account here. In this claim, however, both the 'paradox and dynamic of this' are also 'expressed in the very choice of white to characterise us'. This shift in perspective to 'us' now includes Dyer in this claim so that it may also be understood that it is possible for those who are 'Whites' to have knowledge of the 'paradox and dynamic' of 'whiteness', of their own requirement to be 'seen as white'. What this also means, however, is that 'white' is, again, not that which the 'us' *is*, but is instead something 'Whites' have been 'characteris[ed]' as by a perspective external to 'Whites'. Here, 'white' has been selected, ostensibly out of other possible 'characteris[ations]' and then applied as a 'characteris[ations]' to 'Whites'. This 'express[ion]' of the 'paradox and dynamic', which is 'in the very choice of white to

characterise us', then, is not a self-'characteris[ation]', but an application of an excess 'white' 'character' onto 'Whites'. For Dyer, however, another reason why the 'paradox and dynamic of this are expressed in the very choice of white to characterise us' is because '[w]hite is both a colour and, at once, not a colour and the sign of what is colourless because it cannot be seen'. 'White', here, is divided in that it 'is' three different things, and this division is also a 'paradox' because 'white' is constituted to be both a 'colour' and 'not a colour' at the same time. In the claim that white is also 'the sign of that which is colourless because it cannot be seen', however, 'white' is also constituted as 'the sign of' something other to itself. It is not itself 'colourless', nor indeed is it a sign of 'colourless', but rather is 'the' single and definitive 'sign of' something other to itself that is 'colourless'. For Dyer, then, there is a distinction between 'not a colour' and 'colourless', but in spite of this, neither 'white' the 'colour', nor 'white' the 'not a colour' can 'be seen' and this is why it is 'the sign of that which is colourless'.

Dyer's subsequent claim that what 'white' is 'the sign for', namely 'that which is colourless', is 'the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death' suggests, therefore, that these are also things which 'cannot be seen'. These entities are not 'white' but are both 'colourless' and signified by 'white'. Yet for Dyer, these are all separate and distinct parts that are joined together to 'all form part of what makes white people visible as white' and this means that that which 'white' is 'the sign of' is also that which 'form[s] part of what makes white people visible as white'. In this claim I also read that there is something else (or indeed multiple things) which 'makes white people visible as white' because 'the soul, the mind, and also emptiness, non-existence and death' are only claimed to 'form part' of this. That these 'colourless', 'invisible' entities 'all form part of what makes white people visible as white', however, can be read to differ from Dyer's previous claim that 'Whites must be seen to be white' because in the previous claim, 'white' was not 'seen'. Here, however,

'white people' – who are already different from 'Whites' in that these are 'people' who are 'white' – can be 'visible as white'. The excess and supplemental 'white' that constitutes 'white people' as 'white people', is therefore, distinct from the 'white' that 'white people' are 'visible as'. What this also indicates, however, is that in this claim to 'visib[ility]' whereby what is potentially seen, is 'white people' 'as white', it may be understood that what is not 'seen' is 'white people', but 'white people as' something that they not necessarily are.

Simultaneous to this, for Dyer, that which 'form[s] part of what makes 'white people visible as white' which is also 'the sign of that which is colourless', is also 'signifying the true character of white people, which is invisible'. In this I read that 'white people' are here not assigned a 'character' as in the claim that there is a 'choice of white to characterise us', but rather here they have a 'true character' which is separate from them, belongs to them, but is also the 'truth'. This 'true character' also differs from the previous 'white' 'character' because it is 'signif[ied]' by something other to itself, and is 'signif[ied]', what is more, by that which is also a 'sign of' something else entirely which is 'that which is colourless'. The 'true character of white people', then, is 'invisible', it 'cannot be seen', but it can be known to exist because of the external signifiers that Dyer claims point to it. The difficulty, however, is that these signs and signifiers are also problematised, not only because they are themselves claimed to be 'colourless', 'invisible' or even 'white', but because they are also, again, not 'true'. It would seem, then, that for Dyer both 'white' and 'whiteness' and their relationship with 'Whites' and 'white people' can never be stable because of the impossible contradictions by which each of these ideas is constituted.

iii)   Fanon

I now want to turn to another text that has helped me in my thinking about the opposition between 'black' and 'white': Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon's contention is that 'the black man […] will have no occasion, except in minor conflicts, to

experience his being through others' if he remains 'among his own'.[10] Much like Dyer's claims to the importance of 'being seen' from an external position to have 'one's corporeality registered', then, here Fanon argues that 'the black man' is only able to 'experience his being through others' specifically when he is with those who are different from him, when he is in the 'white world':

> And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness.[11]

I read in the statement '[a]nd then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes' that the 'I' had not, prior to the moment when the 'occasion arose' met the 'white man's eyes', and that this is something new and different for the 'I' but that it is also in the past. It may also be understood that 'meet[ing] the white man's eyes' is not the choice of the 'I' because I read here that 'the occasion arose' independently of the 'I', or of its own accord. Thus neither the 'I', nor 'the white man' is responsible for, or in control of the 'occasion' of the meeting of the 'I' with 'the white man's eyes'. Furthermore, because of the words 'had to', 'meet[ing] the white man's eyes' is, for the 'I', necessary or compulsory at the moment when 'the occasion arose'. In one sense this may be understood as a necessity or compulsion from the perspective of the 'I' in that the 'I' perceives meeting 'the white man's eyes' as something that the 'I had to' do. However, 'had to' may equally be read as not solely from the 'I's perspective because there is a sense that the 'I' is compelled to 'meet the white man's eyes' by someone or something other than the 'I' or, indeed, that it is that 'the occasion arose' which compels the 'I'. Therefore, the meeting of the 'I' with 'the white man's eyes'

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[10] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 109.
[11] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 110.

can be understood as something which is forced upon the 'I' and not that which the 'I' wishes or independently decides to do.

Despite the fact that the 'I' is not in control of the circumstances of the 'I's meeting with the 'white man's eyes', however, the claim 'the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes' indicates that the 'I' plays an active role in that it is the 'I' and not the 'white man' who does the 'meet[ing]'.The white man, then, is passive and does nothing. Yet I read also in 'I had to meet the white man's eyes' that the 'I' is, potentially seen or looked at by the 'white man'. Since the 'I' claims to 'meet' and not to see, or as the eyes of the 'I' do not 'meet' those of the 'white man', it may be understood that the 'white man' sees the 'I' but that the 'I' does not see the 'white man'. Thus, for the 'I', this is not a mutual seeing, and indicates that the meeting is, in fact, dominated by the gaze of the 'white man' on the 'I'. However, the fact that 'I had to meet the white man's eyes' simultaneously produces ideas of the 'I's perception of the 'white man's' passivity and seeing, it may also be understood that, for the 'I', whether or not the 'I' is, in fact, seen, is uncertain and unclear.

The claim '[a]n unfamiliar weight burdened me' can be read, however, to mean that meeting 'the white man's eyes' is not only new and different for the 'I', but also that it produces, for the 'I', a new and 'unfamiliar weight' which indicates that other weights have 'burdened' the 'I' previously, but that this 'weight' is, for the 'I', specific to meeting 'the white man's eyes'. In spite of the 'I's uncertainty about what the meeting involves, I read that the 'I' perceives this burden regardless of whether or not the 'white man' sees the 'I'. Thus it is the potential to be seen by the 'white man' which is burdensome for the 'I'. In addition, that the 'I' asserts that the 'real world challenged my claims' furthers my reading of the 'newness' and 'difference' of the 'I's meeting with the 'white man's eyes'. I read 'my claims' as 'sayings' or 'beliefs' of the 'I' which are, for the 'I', established and also secure prior to the meeting of the 'I' with the 'white man's eyes'. It may thus be read that, for the 'I',

meeting the 'white man's eyes' undermines the 'I's previously held beliefs, that the 'I's claims are, in the 'real world', problematized. The meeting, therefore, can be understood as new and different for the 'I' because of both the 'unfamiliar weight' and the fact that the 'I's claims are, here, 'challenged'. However, the assertion that the 'real world challenged my claims' indicates that meeting 'the white man's eyes' also is, for the 'I', what occurs in the 'real world' and that not meeting 'the white man's eyes' is not reality. For the 'I', then, the 'real world', is the world in which the 'I' is compelled to 'meet the white man's eyes'. This not only means that prior to the meeting, the 'I' was not in the 'real world' – which can be understood also to mean that the 'claims' of the 'I' are also not 'real' – but also that there are worlds other than the 'real world' which, for the 'I', exist but are not 'real'. In addition, the claim that '[i]n the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema' indicates that the 'real world' is also the 'white world' and that whilst it may be construed that there are other worlds distinguished by ideas of colour or 'white' and not 'white', the 'white world' is real and therefore it is a reality that the 'I' is forced or compelled to meet the gaze of the 'white man'.

For the 'I', then, the 'white world' is also the 'real world', and I read here also that the 'I' is not part of the 'white world' but is separate from it. This is because the 'I' is not the 'white man', to whom the 'white world' corresponds, but may be understood here as the 'man of color'. I also read the 'man of color encounters difficulties' as a claim which does not concern the 'I' exclusively, but that this is the experience, for the 'I', of all men or any 'man of color'. Indeed the 'I' claims knowledge of what it is like for the 'man of color' when 'in' the 'white world' which indicates that the 'man of color', and consequently the 'I', is not always 'in the white world'. Therefore, since the 'I' is not the 'white man', and is, for the 'I', not always 'in' the 'white world', it may be argued that the 'I' is, therefore, not part of reality, or indeed, not 'real'. For the 'I', then, it is 'the white man' and not 'the man of color' who is

permanently 'in' and belongs to the 'real' and 'white world' but that when 'in' the 'real world', the 'man of color' is forced to 'meet the white man's eyes'. However, because the 'man of color' can, for the 'I', be 'in' the 'white world', I read the 'white world' both as that which can 'contain' the 'man of color' and as that which can be accessed or entered by him. Thus the 'real' and 'white world' is here constituted, for the 'I', not as stable and fixed, but as a 'world' which has boundaries that can be penetrated by the 'man of color'. Yet I read that there is, for the 'I', a distinction between the 'white man' and the 'man of color' in terms of their colour and that to be not 'white' is, therefore, to be 'of color'. It may be understood, therefore, that 'white' is here not a colour, that 'white' is colourless. Consequently, the 'real' and 'white world' is a world without colour, and this further constitutes the 'man of color' as not part of the 'real' and 'white world' specifically because of his 'color'. However, I read too that the 'white man' also differs from the 'man of color' in the sense that the 'white man' *is* 'white' for the 'I', whereas 'man of color' is separate from his colour because he is 'of' it. The 'man of color', then, is, like the 'white man', not *a* colour, but belongs to 'color'.

The claim that in 'the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema', moreover, indicates that the 'color' of the 'man of color' is, for the 'I', connected to ideas of the 'body' and that this is separate from the 'man'. Thus it may be understood that whilst the 'white man' is, for the 'I', inherently 'white' and that there is no separation of the 'white man' from his whiteness or, indeed colourlessness, the 'man of color' is not only separate from his colour, but because colour is related to the 'bodily' he is also, to an extent, separate from his body. That the 'man of color' has a 'bodily schema' furthers my reading of the separation of the 'man of color' from his body in that the 'bodily schema' can be understood as a 'schema' or understanding of the body separate from other aspects of the 'man of color'. In other words, because it is specifically a 'bodily schema', this indicates that, for the 'I', the 'man of color' also has a 'schema' or, indeed, 'schemas'

which are not 'bodily'. In addition, the claim that in 'the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema', indicates that, for the 'I', the 'bodily schema' of the 'man of color' is something which the 'man of color' has, but that it needs further development and is not, therefore, a fully developed 'schema'. Further, it may be understood that because it is in 'the white world [that] the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema', the 'man of color', for the 'I', does not encounter 'difficulties in the development of his bodily schema' when he is not in the 'white world'. Thus I would argue that although the 'I' claims that in the 'white', and consequently, the 'real world', the 'man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema', his 'bodily schema' is something that the he, in fact, develops regardless of which 'world' he is in and that there is an obstruction or hindrance to its development in the 'white world'.

I read also that 'bodily schema' is connected with the claim that '[c]onsciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness' because to have a 'bodily schema' is, necessarily, to also have '[c]onsciousness of the body'. And my reading of 'bodily schema' as that which the 'man of color', for the 'I', develops regardless of which 'world' he is 'in' indicates that the '[c]onsciousness of the body' also occurs both 'in' and outside the 'white world'. Therefore, the 'man of color' is continuously 'conscious' of his body and, for the 'I', developing 'his bodily schema'. Yet there is also a sense that 'bodily schema' is not, for the 'I', a concept which is exclusive to the 'man of color' because the assertion that in 'the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema' can be understood to mean that the *not* 'man of color' also has a 'bodily schema' and, accordingly, '[c]onsciousness of the body', but that the *not* 'man of color' does not encounter 'difficulties in the development of his bodily schema' when in the 'white world'. Therefore, for the 'I', it is *only* the 'man of color' who encounters difficulties

in the development of his bodily schema' and *only* when 'in' the 'white world', and both the 'man of color' the *not* 'man of color' have '[c]onsciousness of the body'.

I read in the claim that '[c]onsciousness of the body […] is a third-person consciousness' that, for the narration, to be conscious of the body is to be aware of oneself from an 'other' or 'external' perspective. Yet this 'third-person' or 'other' perspective is, nonetheless, still the perspective of the 'I', or is, in other words, the 'I's external perspective on the 'I'. This is also, then, a claim to a perspective which is both that of the 'I' and something 'other' and 'external' to the 'I' at the same time. Thus 'third-person consciousness' can here be read as a split of the 'I' into '[c]onsciousness' and 'body', 'I' and *not* 'I', and 'internal' and 'external'. Because the 'I' claims that '[c]onsciousness of the body is solely a negating activity', therefore, it may be understood that the fact that the 'I' too perceives the 'I' from a position that is at once 'I' and *not* 'I', and simultaneously 'internal' and 'external' is, for the narration, paradoxical and that, consequently, '[c]onsciousness of the body' 'negates' the 'I'. And from the word 'solely' I read that, for the 'I', this is, without exception, always the outcome of '[c]onsciousness of the body'. My earlier reading that both the 'man of color' and the *not* 'man of color' have '[c]onsciousness of the body' means, therefore, that both the 'man of color' and the *not* 'man of color' are, for the 'I', 'negated'.

In the following excerpt, however, I read that development of a 'bodily schema', the paradox and negation of '[c]onsciousness of the body' is, for the 'I', further problematized during this episode where Fanon is pointed out by a child to his mother whilst on a train journey:

> I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more.
> "Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

"Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.[12]

The 'physiological self' of the 'I' produces a further split of the 'I' because, by inference, there are, for the narration, other types of 'self' which are not 'physiological'. The 'physiological self', furthermore, can be understood as related to the concept of a 'bodily schema' and '[c]onsciousness of the body' since a 'physiological self' is a claim to a 'self' of the 'I' which is 'bodily'. However, I also read a distinction in that the 'physiological self' is not inherent but is a 'construct' which indicates that it is a 'self' which is produced or created by something other than this particular 'self'. And since the 'physiological self' is claimed as 'construct[ed]' by the 'I', there is a sense that the 'I' and the 'physiological self' are not one and the same thing. Yet I read the 'I' as also connected to the 'physiological self', because it is a 'physiological self' which is constructed by and part of the 'I'. Therefore, the 'I's construction of 'a physiological self' can be understood as, for the 'I', a further paradox and negation. In addition to the 'physiological self' being both of the 'I' and not of the 'I', furthermore, it may be understood from 'to balance space, to localize sensations' that the 'physiological self', for the 'I', is also related to things which are external to and, therefore, *not* the 'I'. Indeed 'to balance space, to localize sensations' indicates that the 'physiological self' is, to an extent, the 'bodily' part of the 'I' which has contact with 'space' and 'sensations' or with that which is external to the 'I'. I also read the words 'balance' and 'localize' as verbs which are carried out by the 'I'. Thus 'physiological self' can also be read as, for the narration, a split of the 'I', which is connected to the 'I', whilst also having contact with the 'space' external to the 'I'.

The claim 'I thought what I had in hand', however, means that constructing a 'physiological self' is not what the 'I' had to do, but is that which the past 'I' believed was the case. Yet because the 'I' is 'called on for more' it can be understood that constructing a

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[12] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 111.

'physiological self' is necessary, but not sufficient. However, this insufficiency is not entirely from the perspective of the 'I' because the statement 'here I was called on for more' indicates a judgement or 'calling' of something other than the 'I' or that it is the fact of being 'here' that compels the 'I' to do more than 'construct a physiological self'. Indeed, the statement '"Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by' can be read as the 'calling' on the 'I' for 'more' than the construction of a 'physiological self'. I read 'Look, a Negro!' as speech because of the quotation marks. However, whilst this indicates that these words are spoken, it is not made clear in the narration, at this stage, precisely by whom the words are spoken. Yet it may be construed that the speaker is neither the 'I', nor 'a Negro' firstly, because of the narration's claims that the 'I was called on for more' and secondly, because 'Look, a Negro!' means that the speaker is not 'a Negro'. Therefore, the 'I' is constituted as 'a Negro' from the perspective of the speaker and it may thus be understood that 'Look, a Negro!' is a claim that it is when it is called on for the 'I' specifically to be 'looked at', the 'I' has to do more than construct a 'physiological self'.

From the speaker's perspective, then, 'a Negro' and, consequently, the 'I', is that which can be looked at, and the 'I' is thus constituted as, for the speaker, visible. Yet because of the speaker's assertion 'Look, a Negro!' there is a sense that the 'I' is equally not looked at because there are others in the train, those whom the speaker ostensibly addresses, who do not 'look'. Furthermore, I read here, because the assertion 'Look, a Negro!' indicates that there are others who do not 'look' at the 'I', that, for the speaker, the 'I' is 'a Negro' regardless of the looking or not looking, that 'a Negro' is definitely what they will 'see' when or if they 'look'. Thus the speech of the speaker draws the attention of the others to the 'I', but what they will 'see' is, for the speaker, 'fixed' and 'absolute'. Since I read also that the speaker is not 'a Negro', it may, therefore, be understood that, for the speaker, the assertion 'Look, a Negro!' is not a claim to a 'look' which constitutes the 'I' as 'a Negro' because that

is 'fixed', but a 'look' which draws attention to the speaker's reading of a distinction between the 'Negro' 'I', and the not 'Negro' others. The claim '[i]t was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by', indicates that, for the 'I', 'Look, a Negro!' is a 'stimulus' which is not part of or within the 'I' but is 'external' to the 'I'. Yet I read also in 'I made a tight smile' that 'Look, a Negro!' 'stimulates' the 'I' to 'make' a 'tight smile'. And as it is the 'I' who makes the 'tight smile', I read a connection between the internal 'I' which does the 'making' and the body of the 'I' which is the 'smile'. Indeed, 'I made a tight smile' can be read as both '[c]onsciousness of the body' because the 'I' is aware of the smile and, moreover, a claim that the 'I' has influence and control over his body. Therefore, since the body is, according to the 'I's claims, external to the 'I', it may be argued here that the 'external stimulus' is, in fact, a 'stimulus' which comes from the external, that is, the speaker, but that it is a 'stimulus' of both the 'internal' and the 'external' 'I'.

The speaker's subsequent, '"Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me' can be read as a repetition of the previous speech. However, the second 'Look, a Negro!' differs from the first because of the shift in the narration's claims. The second 'Look, a Negro!', therefore, is for the 'I', not an 'external stimulus', but is the 'truth'. Thus the speaker's contention that the 'I' is a 'Negro' can be understood as shared by the 'I' as it is also from the perspective of the 'I' that the 'I' is 'a Negro'. Yet whilst the 'I's appeal to 'truth' can be understood to further fix the 'I' as 'a Negro' the splits and shifts in the 'I's perspective problematize any attempt to 'fix' the 'I' as one single and particular 'I'. Indeed, that the 'I' claims '[i]t amused me' indicates yet another split in the 'I' from 'I' to 'me' which means that the second 'Look, a Negro!' is, in fact, also an 'external stimulus' for the 'I', but in this instance differs from the first. This is because the first 'Look, a Negro!' 'stimulates' the 'I' to make 'a tight smile', whereas the second can be understood as a 'stimulus' of 'me'. Yet at the same time I read

that, for the narration, 'me' and 'I' are also a splitting of the same 'I'. Thus the 'I' is, in the narration, never fixed nor stable.

Both Dyer and Fanon can be understood here to construct ideas of 'black' and 'white' which are themselves complex and contradictory. Each indicates that racial identity cannot be secured because it is constituted both externally and internally through multiple and shifting perspectives, divisions, supplements, and excesses. To return to my original question, then, the difficulty with the strategy of reversal of race, as constructed in Blackman's novel, is that it implies there is stability in, and clear separation of 'black' and 'white' prior to this reversal, that 'white' can simply replace 'black' and vice versa without taking account of the narrative frames that they are necessarily constituted by. Over the course of this thesis, I further consider the difficulties and complexities of such binaries, both in Shakespeare's *Othello* and its criticism; beginning, in the following chapter, with a working through of critical works that seem to require a separation of stage and page in order to make sense of Shakespeare's plays.

iv)   Bradford and History

Before I do so, however, I would like to return to consider in more detail Clare Bradford's assessment of *Noughts & Crosses*. As noted previously in this chapter, the issue that Bradford raises is one of historical racism in colonial practices and discourses, and the tendency of contemporary texts to repeat the 'racialised hierarchies they ostensibly contest'.[13] Catherine Butler contends that *Noughts & Crosses* can be read to construct a 'counterfactual historical narrative' whereby '[s]ome centuries before the period of the story, the dark-skinned populations of southern Pangaea (the equivalent of Africa in our world) migrated north, "acquiring along the way the know-how to make the guns and weapons that made

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[13] Bradford, p. 41.

everyone else bow down to them"'.[14] Bradford, however, advances the following argument about history in the novel:

> In the world of *Noughts & Crosses* the colour divide between Crosses and noughts effects a reversal in which blacks are oppressors and whites are powerless. Characters who negotiate between the two groups, such as the mixed-race teacher Mr Jason, and Callum's older sister Lynette (who had a romantic relationship with a Cross and was beaten by nought men), are tortured, self-hating figures. By mapping the power relationships of Crosses and noughts onto practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**, the novel reinstalls those relationships and normalizes them.[15]

For Bradford, *Noughts & Crosses* has its own and therefore separate 'world'. In so far as this world has an '[i]n', it is constituted as the container of what is distinct from both *Noughts & Crosses* and the 'world' that belongs to it. And since here it is specifically and therefore *only* '[i]n' this 'world' that 'the colour divide between Crosses and noughts effects a reversal', it may be understood that *outside* this 'world' the 'reversal' is something that does not occur, that the 'reversal' is exclusive to the 'world of *Noughts & Crosses*' and external to this is a 'colour divide' is not 'revers[ed]'. However, what is claimed to be '[i]n the world of *Noughts & Crosses*' is not only the 'colour divide between Crosses and noughts' but the 'reversal' that this 'colour divide' 'effects': the action is also contained. In this sense, what is 'effect[ed]' is a 'reversal' of something that at one stage exists '[i]n the world of *Nought & Crosses*' in a state that is not 'revers[ed]'. The 'colour divide between Crosses and noughts' can also be understood as present regardless of the 'reversal', it is something that is always there, Crosses and noughts are always separated by a 'between' that is also a 'colour divide'. Yet in addition to ideas of separation, I conversely also read here a claim to connection whereby Crosses and

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[14] Catherine Butler, 'Counterfactual Historical Fiction for Children and Young Adults' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*, ed. by Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp. 179-193 (p. 189).
[15] Bradford, p. 42.

noughts are permanently linked by the 'colour divide' that is 'between' them. For Bradford, then, Crosses and noughts are both 'divide[d]' and connected by 'colour'.

The appeal to containment is furthered with Bradford's assertion that it is 'in' this 'reversal' which is 'effect[ed]' by 'the colour divide between Crosses and noughts' that 'blacks are oppressors and whites are powerless'. Again, I understand 'blacks' and 'whites' here to be both distinct from and connected to 'Crosses and noughts' for although they are definitely not the same as 'Crosses and noughts', 'blacks' and 'whites' can be construed also as 'colour[s]' and as situated 'in' the 'colour divide' that is 'between Crosses and noughts'. I also read the contention that 'in' the 'reversal' 'blacks are oppressors and whites are powerless' to mean that this is a status that is subsequent to the 'reversal' so that prior to the point of the 'reversal' being 'effect[ed]', the opposite of this was the case. Prior to the 'reversal', therefore, 'blacks' are 'powerless' and 'whites' are 'oppressors'. Thus, 'blacks' and 'whites' can be read to be altered, but only in so far as it is their status *as* either 'oppressors' or 'powerless' that is changed, their status as either 'blacks' or 'whites' remains. And because 'blacks' and 'whites' can, in this claim, be *either* 'oppressors' or 'powerless' neither of these classifications can be read as secure or intrinsic, 'oppressors' and 'powerless' are therefore detachable from what 'blacks' and 'whites' are, detached from notions of 'colour'. Likewise, this idea of detachment can equally be read in the claim to 'Crosses and noughts' since in Bradford's formulation, the 'reversal' directly impacts the status of what 'blacks' and 'whites' are and not necessarily 'Crosses and noughts'. The 'reversal' is claimed to switch that which is 'between' them rather than unequivocally altering what 'Crosses and noughts' are.

In spite of Bradford's claims to a number of different categories here such as 'blacks', 'whites', 'Crosses and noughts, 'oppressors' and 'powerless', she goes on to assert that there are, in fact, absolutely and only 'two groups'. This means that in addition to my earlier

readings of both separation and connection 'between' 'Crosses and noughts' and 'blacks and 'whites', and despite the instability produced in Bradford's claim to the 'revers[ibility]' of these categories, they can also be put together to form two distinct 'groups'. Yet this claim to 'two groups' can also be read to further worry the fixity of all of these categories. As with 'Crosses and noughts', these 'two groups' are both separated and connected because they, too, have a 'between'. The 'between', in this instance, is where '[c]haracters who negotiate between the two groups […] are tortured, self-hating figures'. Thus these 'two groups' can be understood as comprised of '[c]haracters' who do not 'negotiate between' and are not 'tortured, self-hating figures'. Consequently, 'blacks', 'whites', 'Crosses and noughts, 'oppressors' and 'powerless' can also be construed as '[c]haracters' '[i]n the world of *Noughts & Crosses*', '[c]haracters' who belong in or to either one of these 'two groups'. However, since there are '[c]haracters who negotiate between the two groups', '[c]haracters' who fall *outside* these 'two groups', then also means that these 'negotiat[ing]' '[c]haracters' problematise the categories of 'blacks', 'whites', 'Crosses and noughts, 'oppressors' and 'powerless' that the 'two groups' are ostensibly comprised of. The 'mixed-race teacher Mr Jason', for example, is claimed here to be neither 'black' nor 'white' so that he can be understood not to fall into either of these categories. Yet according to Bradford, he is not a 'mix[ture]' of either of these colours, but rather the 'mixed[ness]' is about 'race' which is something that is here only constituted by its 'mixed[ness]'. There is a sense, therefore, that the 'two groups' can be understood as unrelated to 'race'. Lynette, Callum's older sister, however, is claimed to 'negotiate between the two groups' because she 'had a romantic relationship with a Cross and was beaten by nought men'. Her 'negotiat[ion] between the two groups', then, concerns relationships and events that involve '[c]haracters' who *are* part of the 'two groups' that she 'negotiate[s] between'. And although it may be taken that Lynette is a nought, because she is 'Callum's older sister' and because her 'relationship with

a Cross' is what renders her a 'tortured, self-hating figure', in Bradford's claims, Lynette's identity is only constituted by her association with those other to her. Indeed, since what Lynette and Mr Jason share here beyond their 'negotiat[ion] between the two groups' is that they (and other 'such' '[c]haracters') are both 'tortured, self-hating figures', I would contend that this shared identity can be understood to construct ideas of another discrete 'group' of '[c]haracters'.

For Bradford, then, the 'reversal' that is 'effect[ed]' and the 'two groups' the 'reversal' concerns are simultaneously contained and not contained; separate and connected; fixed and not fixed. In the subsequent sentence, however, these ideas are further complicated because of Bradford's contention that 'the power relationships of Crosses and noughts' are 'mapp[ed]' 'onto practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**'. Here, Crosses and noughts have 'power relationships' which pre-exist the 'mapping' of them 'onto practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**'. As with the previous claim to 'reversal', therefore, it can be understood that at one stage the 'power relationships of Crosses and noughts' are available untouched by any 'practice' or 'history', they are 'power relationships' which could be encountered without any 'history' of opposition. The 'practices and histories' that they are 'mapp[ed]' onto, moreover, are 'practices and histories' not of Crosses and noughts, but those which have 'privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**', they are 'practices and histories' that do not belong to Crosses and noughts. Thus I read the 'practices and histories which have privileged Europeans over their non-white **others**' as external to Crosses and noughts, as not '[i]n the world of *Noughts & Crosses*'. The 'reversal in which blacks are oppressors and whites are powerless', then, can be understood as the 'power relationships of Crosses and noughts' which, ostensibly subsequent to the 'reversal', have been 'mappe[d]' onto 'practices and histories' that are separate from and external to the 'novel' which, in this claim, does the

'mapping'. 'Europeans and their non-white **others**' can therefore be understood to have 'practices and histories' which are not unique or exclusive to them because they can be 'mapp[ed]' 'onto' the 'power relationships' of others. Indeed, not only can these 'practices and histories' be isolated from Crosses and noughts, but also from 'Europeans and their non-white **others**' that they have 'privileged'. By my reading, in other words, this claim to 'privileged' constitutes the 'practices and histories' as active upon, but also distinct from 'Europeans and their non-white **others**'.

What is at stake here, in my reading, is firstly a moment of reversal that repeats that staged by Blackman, even as it works against it. What I take to be Bradford's historicising argument must, at one stage, posit a moment of a-historicity, the idea that a structure of 'Crosses and noughts' might be isolated prior to its 'mapping' onto 'real world' difference. This, I would argue, is the result of a tension within Bradford's argument, one for which I have a certain degree of sympathy. On the one hand is a structural move, where racism is not to be understood simply as immediate experience, or the specificity of a racist instance, but instead structural. To argue against this risks an essentialising of racism, a naturalisation of white hatred or black othering. On the other is an historicising move, one that understands a danger in any abstraction of racism not rooted in historical reality. The difficulty is that the tension between these two moves return to Bradford's argument, resulting (as she claims of Blackman) in the repetition of what she claims to resist.

v)   Reading effect(s)

A tentative connection could here be made to the work of Shoshana Felman. Tentative because 'connection', thus understood, is in one sense what is at stake here. In 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation', Felman's analysis of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw*, she argues that the critical attempt to diagnose the textual issue sees the repetition of a 'reading effect' – the joke comes upon us:

The scene of the critical debate is thus a *repetition* of the scene dramatized in the text. The critical interpretation, in other words, not only elucidates the text but also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*. Through its very reading, the text, so to speak, acts itself out. As a reading effect, this inadvertent "acting out" is indeed uncanny: whichever way the reader turns, he can but be turned by the text, he can but *perform* it by *repeating it*.[16]

Felman's reading has had a major influence on what follows; due, predominantly, to her ideas about the return of textual issues identified by criticism to the terms of such criticism and the problematisation of sequential history and structural oppositions that follows on from this. But what I write of the 'tentative' nature of the connection must be addressed. Felman's work on *The Turn of the Screw* is about an 'uncanny' exactness: the spooky sense of the missed turn which allows the continuation of the screw and which must come at a precise moment:

The manipulator of the screw, who believes himself to be in control of its successive turns, in control of an enterprise of fixity and closure, discovers that, in reality, he himself is nothing but a screw, a cog in the wheel of a machine that runs by itself, automatically and repetitively. The "incident," however, is never "closed," since the movement of the screw constitutes in fact not a circle but a spiral which never closes: as a perfect illustration of the Freudian concept of the repetition compulsion, the spiral consists of a series of repeated circlings in which what turns is indeed bound to *re-turn*, but in which what circularly thus returns only returns so as to miss anew its point of departure, to miss the closing point, the completion (or perfection) of the circle. The successive turns and returns of the spiral *never meet*, never touch or cross one another; hence, what the spiral actually *repeats* is a missed meeting with itself, a *missed encounter with what returns*. The screw, in order to precisely function properly, be operative, can by no means *close* the circle; it can but repeat it; it can but repeat the turn and repeat its own returns, and its own repetition of its turns, "through the very same movements."[17]

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[16] Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation' in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 94-207 (p.101).
[17] Felman, 'Turning the Screw', pp. 178-79.

Something of Felman's understanding of the 'reading effect', the critical controversy that repeats the textual controversy that it attempts to resolve, can be seen in the critical reception to Blackman's novel. And, as I will argue, it can likewise be read in Shakespeare, Empson, Morrison, Royle and so on. Yet the repetitions I am reading here are not so exact, I do not here read the daemonic sense of the 'uncanny', its inevitability, but rather a more general disturbance. A disturbance that problematises the bounds between black and white, text and criticism, prior and latter, male and female, stage and page, progressive and reactionary, but in such a way that those categories are not invalidated or made to disappear from site, from discussion.

My interest, then, is in the uncanny relation Felman negotiates in her work. Firstly, the impossibility of receiving a pure text; the sense in which a given text will get caught up with its others, even its oppositional others, within a reading. Secondly, the ongoing nature of this operation, sustained even within the criticism that would attempt to diagnose, differentiate, and by so doing finalise a debate or critical scene. Thirdly, the way the 'reading effect', thus understood, problematises linear histories, especially those rooted in appeals to the anxiety of influence.[18] Finally, how these various critical repetitions and collapses cannot be separated from the text of *Othello*. Criticism disagrees on much, but it negotiates always a play that is understood to threaten stable, oppositional structures. Such destabilisation does not invalidate a reading of oppositional violence: the play is, in my reading, concerned with, and an example of, misogyny and racism. Rather, misogyny, racism, and resistance to these, is staged in a world of vertiginous structural collapse. The task of this thesis, beginning with a questioning account of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is to work towards a reading of *Othello* and its criticism in terms of a psychoanalytic 'reading effect', as a way to work through issues of

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[18] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: a Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973). See also Daniela Caselli, *Beckett's Dantes: Intertextuality in the Fiction and Criticism* (Manchester; Manchester University Press, 2005) which in many ways can be read to problematise sequential, linear notions of influence.

iteration, difference, and the insistence and impossibility of identity, including the pressing

questions of racial and gendered identity in Shakespeare.

Chapter 2 – Stage/Page

i)   Staging

In recent years, a return to the text has been forwarded by Shakespeare criticism, a move that testifies to its counter: the privileging of performance. The fear is that a certain a-historical, linguistic-focused 'theory' had dominated Anglo-American criticism of the late 1970s and early 80s, and this needed to be tempered with a more expansive approach to the possibilities and limitations of criticism. If the return to the stage, in its new-historicist form, involves also a problematisation of the opposition, in so far as we do not give up reading, nor do we escape discursive social forces when entering the theatre, or when engaging the history of theatre, there is a sense also that the binary is sustained in criticism to this day, including in what might be understood as contemporary new-historicist writing.

In this first extended chapter of my thesis, I am to work through the dualism in texts that claim to come at it through different angles or traditions. I begin with the recent work of Chris Fitter, who argues for a push towards the actuality of contemporary performance as a way to understand the complexity of the Shakespearian text, simultaneously working against New-Historicist critiques of personalised 'genius', whilst their celebration of non-Marxist 'energies' and 'forces'. I then turn to a text that might be taken to work in the opposite direction to Fitter's: Nicholas Royle's reading of *Othello* in *How to Read Shakespeare*. Here, the stage is put on hold, so that a reading of *Othello* as 'poetry' can be attempted. My move here replicates, yet works against, what I introduced when reading Fitter, as I am interested in the disruptive return of the stage to Royle's reading of the confrontation between Iago and Othello, a confrontation that I will repeatedly return to across this thesis. Finally, I look to the work on material book history by Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass, which can be understood to reconfigure the opposition between stage and page. For Stallybrass and Chartier, the material conditions of publishing have a retrospective effect, constituting

Shakespeare as 'author' of the plays. Rather than reading page as an authored 'script' which is made meaningful by a subsequent performance, the understanding here is that the material book produces certain discourses of authorship, as well as a certain understanding of the stage. My interest here is in challenging the notion of materiality forwarded by Stallybrass and Chartier. Can we ever make the separation between text and object with finality?

ii)   *Radical Shakespeare*

There is, I would contend, something seductive about the structuring oppositions appealed to by Chris Fitter in his recent *Radical Shakespeare*. 'Radical', of course, in the sense that it is a return to origins, as well as forward-looking, political, dangerous. In the contest it sets up between dry, academic encounters with the dead letter of Shakespeare's text, and the early, ebullient actuality of contemporary performance, the temptation is surely to side with the latter. In what follows, however, I will argue that this binary, and the aesthetic and ethical force it carries, is not as secure as it is required to be. Indeed, my suggestion is that Fitter's 'radical' enterprise is founded on the avoidance of subtle shifts in meaning that problematise the easy separation of page and stage. As the constitutive shifts are, indeed, subtle, I find that my approach is of necessity finely grained.

Central to Fitter's thesis is the notion that '[i]nterpretations of Shakespearean drama have been for centuries quite literally readings' and that such 'readings not only employ, but imply, the primacy of "textualist" hermeneutics; privileging deskbound lucubrations and the saturating focus of exhaustive conceptual attentions'.[19] Although the customary 'readings' of Shakespearean drama are numerous and excessive, then, they are also constituted here as 'deskbound', stationary and restricted to a specific, singular location. For Fitter, reading is

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[19] Chris Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare: Politics and Stagecraft in the Early Career* (New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 34. The title is explicitly a response to Alan Sinfield and John Dollimore (eds.) *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), drawing out both a radical politics, in the sense of being anti-authoritarian, and radical also in the sense of original, a Shakespeare of performance, not the received Shakespeare of the page.

not the only way in which to 'interpret' Shakespearean drama, thus these other

'[i]nterpretations' are to be found away from the 'desk'. In his claim to alternatively construe

the drama as a 'set of flexible playscripts, aiming at self-unfolding through action on a stage,

not the turning of the page',[20] therefore, I read that the 'playscripts' are 'flexible' because

they are not limited 'deskbound lucubrations', but are 'actions' which move and change in

different locations. Indeed, for Fitter, they are also 'scripts whose dialogues are crafted for

placement into further dialogue: with a gathered crowd, in a certain locus, within a specific

cultural milieu'.[21] Yet this means that the scripts are not 'flexible', not only because of the

specificity which can be read in the 'certain locus, within a specific cultural milieu', but also

because they are understood here as 'crafted for placement' and are thus material objects. The

'flexibility' of the scripts can thus be read not as a 'flexibility' of meaning, but as a material

change. Furthermore, reading is not, here, a process of meaning making, but is constituted in

terms either of objecthood, because of the materiality of the 'scripts', or in terms of the

physical action which is 'the turning of the page'. Thus, the opposition between 'page' and

'stage' can be read as unstable because both are understood as actions. Fitter develops his

reading of 'scripts' in the following terms:

> Shakespeare's scripts reveal, I suggest, a distinctive repertoire of master
> principles of energy manipulation—carnival dynamics as I will term them—
> grounded in dramatic confrontation of those free waves of jubilant high spirits
> and truant antipathy to authority. Astonishingly, Shakespeare seems to have
> mastered an entire range of such manipulations of the carnivalesque as early as
> *The Taming of the Shrew* (seemingly written c. 1590-91); and a brief survey of
> these techniques will allow us, in effect, to chart much basic structure in that play.
> Such was Shakespeare's skill, I shall argue, in turning festive auditorium
> responsiveness against the ideological enunciations of that play's textual surface

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[20] Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare*, p. 34.
[21] Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare*, p. 34.

that generations of modern critics, raised to the page, have missed the radicalism

of the stage. [22]

In the claim that 'Shakespeare's scripts reveal', I read that the 'distinctive repertoire of

master principles of energy manipulation' is, prior to its revelation, hidden. However, whilst

the 'repertoire' can thus be understood to be as much concealed by the scripts as it is revealed

by them, it necessarily can only be known to be concealed because of this revelation: a

retroactive formation is at work. The 'repertoire' is also 'distinctive', and I read this both as a

claim that it pertains specifically to 'Shakespeare's scripts', and that the 'repertoire' is

distinct from the scripts themselves. The scripts, therefore, conceal and 'reveal' something

which is not 'Shakespeare's scripts', but is in excess of them. And since this excess

'repertoire' is actively revealed *by* the scripts, the scripts do not require anything other than

the scripts in order for the revelation to take place because this occurs independently.

Consequently, neither 'Shakespeare's scripts', nor the excess, revealed 'repertoire' needs to

be read as the scripts independently and actively 'reveal' that which can unequivocally be

known from this revelation. Both the 'repertoire' and the revelation of it are, however,

worried by the fact that this is what Fitter 'suggest[s]' to be the case. It is not, then, that

'Shakespeare's scripts' consistently and objectively 'reveal' anything because I read this

'suggest[ion]' as Fitter's perception or reading of 'Shakespeare's scripts'. Despite the claim

that the scripts independently 'reveal' without reading, therefore, I would argue that the

'repertoire', and both the concealment and revelation of it are indeed that which Fitter *reads*

in 'Shakespeare's scripts'.

The 'repertoire' and its revelation are further problematised by the claim that 'a'

singular, 'distinctive repertoire' is revealed by multiple scripts. Here, I read that either it is

the case that exactly the same 'repertoire' is repeatedly revealed by all of 'Shakespeare's

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[22] Fitter, *Radical* Shakespeare, pp. 130-1.

scripts' – meaning that there are, in fact, as many individual manifestations of the 'repertoire' as there are scripts – or that the 'repertoire' is shared among 'Shakespeare's scripts'. In this latter sense, the 'repertoire' is constituted as that which not only has divisions within it (because it consists of multiple 'master principles'), but also as that which is divided between multiple 'scripts' and not ever, therefore, revealed by a single script in its entirety. Each individual script is thus, in the second understanding, unique in that different 'master principles' are revealed by different scripts, and each script, therefore, has concealed within it different, excess 'master principles' which are specific to that particular script. Hence, Fitter's constitution of the 'repertoire' as such is dependent upon all of 'Shakespeare's scripts' collectively revealing all the 'master principles of energy manipulation' of which the 'repertoire' is comprised.

Although the contention must be that the separate instances of plural 'principles' are all different from one another, they are also the same in that they all pertain to 'energy manipulation' and are all part of a 'repertoire'. Yet the 'principles' do not need to be together in order for them to be in a 'repertoire' but can instead exist separately and independently from the other parts of the 'repertoire'. In this respect, the 'master principles of energy manipulation' are isolated from the 'repertoire' in order to be implemented, they are actions which are carried out individually but at the same time are parts of the structure of the 'repertoire'. The 'repertoire', conversely, is that which is never realised as itself but, in fact, is merely the foundation or structure which holds together the different 'master principles'. But although this produces an opposition between the structure that is the 'repertoire' and the acts which are the individual 'master principles of energy manipulation', this opposition is troubled because what the scripts 'reveal' is not 'energy manipulation' itself, but merely the 'principles' by which energy is manipulated. Indeed, the 'principles' can also be construed as structures rather than acts because they are the fixed, set rules which need to be followed in

order to manipulate 'energy'. There is, therefore, no act of 'energy manipulation' revealed by the scripts, but only the prior, fundamental, ideas of 'energy manipulation'.

Neither the 'repertoire' nor the 'master principles of energy manipulation', therefore, are acts in themselves, but they can both be understood as structures which are prior to the act of 'energy manipulation'. In this, I read the 'principles' as lacking because something in addition to the basic, prior 'principles' is necessarily required in order for the 'energy manipulation' to occur. And in one sense, the 'term' 'carnival dynamics', which Fitter assigns to the 'master principles of energy manipulation', may go some way to explain what this lack may be. Both 'carnival dynamics' and 'energy manipulation' are constituted here as actions as opposed to structure and are, therefore, both subsequent to the 'principles'. Whilst 'energy manipulation' can be understood to require something other than the 'principles' for its realisation, however, I read 'carnival dynamics' as a relationship or interaction *between* different elements of the 'carnival'. The 'carnival' is thus not only constituted as divided, but also as that which requires nothing in addition to itself as the 'carnival dynamics' are within it. If 'carnival dynamics' and 'energy manipulation' are to be construed as the same because Fitter 'term[s]' them as such, then it can be argued that the 'master principles of energy manipulation' are 'principles' which, for Fitter, are realised within the 'carnival', that the 'carnival' can account for the lack. In this sense, the realisation of the 'master principles' occurs outside both the scripts and what it is that they 'reveal'. But since it can also be argued that this is *not* what the scripts state that 'master principles of energy manipulation' actually are, as it is the 'term' by which Fitter proposes to identify them, the different elements of the 'carnival' and the interaction between them can be understood merely as ideas which are imposed on the scripts' revelation by this 'term[ing]' of them by something which is not the scripts. Consequently, I read that the scripts, for Fitter, do not need to 'reveal' how and where the 'master principles of energy manipulation' are realised because it can be explained by this

appeal to 'carnival dynamics' which is external and supplementary to that which is revealed by the scripts.

What the scripts *do* 'reveal' for Fitter, however, is that the 'master principles of energy manipulation' are 'grounded in dramatic confrontation of those free waves of jubilant high spirits and truant antipathy to authority'; and there is a sense here that the 'dramatic confrontation' corresponds to the act of 'energy manipulation' because 'those free waves of jubilant high spirits' may be understood as 'energy' which is actively confronted or manipulated. Indeed, because the 'dramatic confrontation' is that which the 'principles of energy manipulation' (which I read previously as fundamental and basic) are '*grounded in*',[23] the 'dramatic confrontation' is constituted as both the fundamental base and the container of something that can already be read as fundamental. Thus the 'dramatic confrontation' not only further stabilizes and fixes the prior, fixed 'principles' by which 'energy' is manipulated, but also repeats them in the sense that it, too, is fundamental and basic. The 'dramatic confrontation', therefore, is constituted simultaneously as a performed, 'dramatic' action, and as a structure which holds the 'master principles of energy manipulation'. I also read in the statement that the 'master principles' are 'grounded in dramatic confrontation of those free waves', another claim to opposition. Here, the 'dramatic confrontation' can be understood as an opposition between the 'dramatic' and the 'free waves', that the 'free waves' of the audience are confronted by the live, 'dramatic' performance. Unlike the 'term' 'carnival dynamics', therefore, the 'dramatic confrontation' is not outside the revelation of the scripts, and I read in this that the scripts conceal and 'reveal' their own 'dramatic' live performance. However, since 'dramatic' is an adjective which can be understood to *describe*, the 'confrontation', in fact, *is* 'dramatic'. The 'dramatic' is supplementary to the 'confrontation', but it is not a separate entity which is on any one side of it. In addition to its

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[23] My italics.

repetition of the 'principles of energy manipulation' in terms of the fundamental, therefore, the 'dramatic confrontation' also repeats the 'principles of energy manipulation' because here I read, once again, an idea of a lack. In this sense, the scripts 'reveal' both the 'dramatic confrontation' and what it is a confrontation 'of', but what might be on the opposing side, *doing* the confronting is evidently not in the scripts' revelation.

Despite my reading of lack with regard to both the 'master principles of energy manipulation' and the 'dramatic confrontation', there is still, however, a claim here to the potential 'manipulation' and 'confrontation' of 'energy' and 'free waves'. In this, the doubly fixed and secure, fundamental 'master principles' are positioned in opposition to the live 'free waves of jubilant high spirits' of the audience which I read as moving and unrestricted. I also read that in addition to this there is a further opposition between 'those free waves of jubilant high sprits' of the audience and the 'authority' towards which there is 'truant antipathy'. But this freedom and 'truant antipathy to authority' is undermined by the claim that the 'energy' of the 'free waves' of the audience can be manipulated. Here, the 'master principles of energy manipulation' are an authority which controls the 'free waves' in place of the authority to whom the scripts 'reveal' the audience is opposed. That Shakespeare has 'mastered an entire range of such manipulations', moreover, also places him in the position of this substitute authority, as these are 'Shakespeare's scripts' and because of the claim that he possessed a 'skill […] in turning festive auditorium responsiveness'**.** What the scripts 'reveal', therefore, is that there are no truly 'free waves' at all, but 'waves' which are controlled and manipulated by the 'master principles' as revealed by the scripts. Whilst this revealed control of the audience by 'energy manipulation' may be understood to indicate that the audience is somehow different and separate from the scripts, the 'live waves' and the 'authority' they oppose are nonetheless still all under the revelation of the scripts. For Fitter, therefore, the

scripts 'reveal' not only the potential manipulation, but also that the audience that they 'reveal' can be manipulated.

However, both the scripts' revelation of the 'repertoire of master principles of energy manipulation' and the fact that Fitter 'term[s]' them 'carnival dynamics', are further problematised by the statement that '[a]stonishingly, Shakespeare seems to have mastered an entire range of such manipulations of the carnivalesque as early as *The Taming of the Shrew*'. Here, although what 'Shakespeare seems to have mastered' are 'such manipulations' and can, therefore, be construed as some of the same manipulations that the 'repertoire' is comprised of, these 'mastered' manipulations, are not manipulations of 'energy' but are of 'the carnivalesque'. That they are 'such manipulations', then, indicates that, for Fitter, there is no actual difference between 'energy' and 'the carnivalesque', that the scripts 'reveal' both Shakespeare's mastery, and the 'principles' of a single thing which can simply be understood to have multiple names. Thus the claim that Shakespeare 'mastered […] manipulations of the carnivalesque' supports Fitter's 'term' 'carnival dynamics' because not only do 'the carnivalesque' and 'carnival dynamics' both correspond to the carnival, but the 'carnivalesque' is also the same as the 'energy' revealed by the scripts. Yet even in this sense, these 'terminological' differences disrupt the stability of that which is revealed to be manipulated and, once again, challenge Fitter's appeal to the objectivity of the scripts and their revelation. Indeed, the 'manipulations of the carnivalesque' and Shakespeare's mastery of them are not revealed by the scripts but are what 'seems' to be according to the revelation. Thus they can be understood to point to an external perspective on, or reading of the 'repertoire of master principles of energy manipulation' that Fitter reads the scripts to 'reveal'. Neither is it the case, therefore, that 'energy' and 'the carnivalesque' are unambiguously the same, and nor can the scripts be understood to 'reveal' that which is non-textual and unreadable because these differences in the 'term[s]' 'energy' and 'the

carnivalesque' indicate that the scripts and their revelation are indeed open to reading and interpretation.

Moreover, since 'Shakespeare seems to have mastered' not the 'master principles' which precede the act of 'energy manipulation', but the 'manipulations' themselves, Shakespeare's mastery is of that which is subsequent to what is revealed by the scripts. This appeal to both Shakespeare and his mastery not only thus repeats my reading of Shakespeare as authority in the 'dramatic confrontation' that the 'principles' are 'grounded in', but also constitutes Shakespeare as authority and master of the 'energy manipulation' at every stage – that is, during the concealment and revelation of the prior 'principles', and the subsequent realisation of them. Despite the claim that the scripts independently 'reveal' the 'repertoire', therefore, Fitter reads this to be something which is under Shakespeare's control. Yet at same time this control is claimed to only be knowable from the revelation of a 'repertoire' of prior 'master principles' by 'Shakespeare's scripts'. Thus it may be understood that, for Fitter, it is because they are 'Shakespeare's scripts' that his mastery can be read, that all of the scripts and what they 'reveal', at all times, 'belong' to and are under the control of Shakespeare. In addition to this claim to that which I read as supplementary to the revelation of the scripts, however, Shakespeare's 'early' mastery of the 'manipulations' in *The Taming of the Shrew* is 'astonishing' to Fitter, and this indicates a perspective which has prior knowledge of what the scripts ought to 'reveal', but do not. In this, I read a notion that the scripts are different from one another with regard to time, and that because there are scripts which are earlier or later than one another, each script *should* 'reveal' a correspondingly chronological development of Shakespeare's mastery of the 'manipulations'. In this sense, the 'range of such manipulations' revealed by each script should be greater than the script that precedes it. Shakespeare's 'early' mastery is thus constituted as that which challenges or exceeds Fitter's prior assumptions about the number of 'such manipulations' and indeed the amount of

control that Shakespeare should have of this 'early' script. Not only can Fitter be understood to *read* that which he claims does not need to be read therefore, but I would argue also that because of this investment in supplementary and preconceived ideas about Shakespeare and his continuous mastery of the 'manipulations', Fitter's claims, in fact, go beyond what he reads to be revealed by the scripts.

In addition, the assertion that 'Shakespeare seems to have mastered an entire range of such manipulations' further troubles what, in one reading, is the 'repertoire' as that which is revealed to be divided amongst all of 'Shakespeare's scripts'. Again, I read a distinction between the prior 'repertoire of master principles' that the scripts 'reveal' and Shakespeare's mastery of 'such manipulations'. But there is also a sense here that Shakespeare's mastery of this 'entire range of such manipulations' is indicative of the number of individual 'master principles' that *The Taming of the Shrew* reveals. Since these are 'such manipulations', I read that what is revealed by *The Taming of the Shrew* is not the 'entire' 'repertoire' because there are other 'such manipulations' which are not part of this 'range'. It is also not necessarily the case that these other 'such manipulations of the carnivalesque', which are not part of the 'range', are exclusively limited to the 'repertoire' because of my previous reading of the 'carnivalesque' as external to 'Shakespeare's scripts'. Yet regardless of the availability of other 'such manipulations' both within and outside the 'repertoire', the 'range' revealed by *The Taming of the Shrew* is claimed to be 'entire'. And because, like Shakespeare's mastery, the entirety of this 'range' is 'astonishing', I read that the 'entire range' revealed by *The Taming of the Shrew* differs from other 'range[s]' which are not 'entire'. It is not, then, that the entirety of this 'range of such manipulations' is determined by their association with a single script, because the fact that this 'range' is 'astonishing' indicates that either other scripts have 'range[s]' which are not 'entire', or that other 'entire range[s]' are divided between different scripts. Thus the 'range' in *The Taming of the Shrew* is 'entire' in and of

itself and no other 'such manipulations' are needed in order to complete this particular 'range'. The notion of a 'repertoire' of multiple yet individually realised 'principles of energy manipulation' is thus further complicated by the claim that within the 'repertoire' the 'principles' are grouped together into 'ranges' which may or may not be 'entire'.

The 'repertoire of master principles of energy manipulation', then, is a structure made up of individual, prior 'master principles' which are divided among multiple scripts. Within the structure of the 'repertoire' are various groups or 'range[s]', yet these are not of the prior 'master principles', but are instead 'range[s]' of 'such manipulations'. Furthermore, the 'range[s]' are not always 'entire' and are not necessarily confined within a single script. However, in the claim that 'a brief survey of these techniques will allow us, in effect, to chart much basic structure in that play', I read that within individual scripts, these 'techniques' form additional structures. Here, *The Taming of the Shrew* is not structured itself, but is constituted as a container of the 'structure' of 'these techniques' as the 'structure' is 'in' the play. Although, like the 'repertoire of master principles', these 'techniques' may be understood to be revealed by *The Taming of the Shrew*, they are, at the same time, confined and 'structured' within it. In this, I read that like the revealed 'repertoire', these 'techniques' and their 'structure' are constituted as distinct from the play, so the play not only reveals that which is in excess of itself, but simultaneously *contains* this excess. However, whilst the 'structure' of 'these techniques' is already 'in' the play, I also read that, for Fitter, the 'structure' is not self-evident, but additionally requires an external 'brief survey' in order for their 'structure' to be 'chart[ed]'. That the 'brief survey' is sufficient to 'chart' the 'basic structure' of the 'techniques', however, also indicates the ease with which the 'chart[ing]' can be achieved, constituting the 'structure' conversely as simplistic and obvious. Yet the 'brief survey' will only permit the 'chart[ing]' of 'much basic structure in that play', and this means that even after the 'brief survey', some 'basic structure' will remain uncharted. Therefore, the

'brief survey' and the 'chart' it allows is only ever partial and the 'basic structure' cannot, in this sense, be completely known as something more than a 'brief survey' is required to chart the whole 'structure' of 'these techniques'.

Further, in this claim to a 'brief survey', there is a sense that the 'brief survey' is an alternative to reading, that, for Fitter, not only do the plays independently 'reveal' structures which are contained within them, but they also do not need to be read because instead of reading, a 'brief survey will allow us […] to chart much basic structure' in the plays. Yet since the 'brief survey' can be understood as lacking and deficient as only 'much basic structure' can be charted in this way, I would argue that in claiming not to *read*, Fitter also claims to overlook other aspects which are also supposedly 'in' the play. There is a repeat of this division in terms of what is and is not read in the subsequent claim that *The Taming of the Shrew* has a 'textual surface'. Here, the play does not consist entirely of text, the 'textual surface' is part of the play, but is its exterior or frame. The play is thus divided into two: it has an exterior 'textual surface', which can be seen and read, and also has an interior, which is not 'textual' and, as such, can neither be seen nor read. If a 'brief survey' of the 'techniques', rather than reading the 'textual surface', is what permits 'us […] to chart much basic structure in that play', then it may be understood that indeed, for Fitter, it is the case that something different from reading is required here as the 'techniques' are not of the 'textual surface', but are instead *inside* the play which is merely *framed* by text. Yet, in addition to the fact that the 'brief survey' can be construed as insufficient, it is also not a 'brief survey' of the play's non-textual interior, but is of these excess 'techniques' which are claimed to be both 'in', and also independently revealed by the play. In this sense, the non-textual interior cannot be 'survey[ed]' either. It is only, therefore, the 'textual surface' which is available, and this suggests that whatever may be 'in' the non-textual interior of the play can only be known by accessing the play's 'textual surface'.

Moreover, my reading of the play as divided into the 'textual' and 'non-textual' is further troubled by the parenthetical statement that *The Taming of the Shrew* was '(seemingly written c. 1590-91)', because I read a claim to consistency rather than division. Here, the whole play is 'written' in its entirety. Thus, even if the play is divided, the 'textual surface' of the play – what I read to be the exterior, readable, frame – and the not 'textual' interior, are the same in that they are both constituted as that which is 'written'. Fitter's contention that '[s]uch was Shakespeare's skill […] in turning festive auditorium responsiveness against the ideological enunciations of that play's textual surface', therefore, indicates that whilst the 'ideological enunciations' are of the 'play's textual surface' and, as such, can be *read*, what the 'auditorium responsiveness' is both before and after it is 'turned against' the 'ideological enunciations' is also 'written' in the play. The 'written' play thus reveals its own 'written' audience. The 'festive auditorium responsiveness' is not outside the play but can only be accessed because of the play's 'textual surface'.

There is a further claim, however, to the play's divisions in the statement that 'generations of modern critics, raised to the page, have missed the radicalism of the stage'. The play is once again divided here between the 'page' which can be read as 'textual' and the 'stage' in which I read ideas of the non-textual and of performance. For Fitter, to be 'raised to the page' is to be restricted, as it diverts attention away from the 'radicalism of the stage', allowing it to be 'missed'. And because it is that which 'generations of modern critics' have been 'raised to', the 'page' is a limitation which has repeatedly been imposed upon or taught to 'modern critics'. It is a limitation, therefore, which is both customary and unavoidable. The 'stage', on the other hand, is the opposite of the established norm which is 'the page' in that it is constituted here as unconventional, overlooked and as that which possesses a 'radicalism' which is unknown to 'modern critics'. Since it has been 'missed' by those 'raised to the page', the unknown 'radicalism of the stage' also is, and has for 'generations', been available,

but is elsewhere and separate from the 'page'. Thus 'page' and 'stage' are distinct not only because they oppose one another, but also because they are not located in the same place. I read in this, then, a perspective which is outside 'modern critics', one which claims to know the limitations of being 'raised to the page', and one which, unlike 'modern critics', has knowledge of both the availability and the location of the 'radicalism of the stage'. Yet the certainty of these distinctions in terms of what 'page' and 'stage' are, and indeed where they are located, is problematised by my reading of the play's frame, its 'textual surface', being the only way in which the play can be accessed. In this sense, if the 'stage' is to be understood as the non-textual interior of the play because it is distinct from the 'page', then this would mean that the 'stage' is necessarily that which can only be known through the 'page'.

iii)   *How to Read Shakespeare*

Following on from what I read to be Fitter's problematic appeal to the real of performance, I now wish to turn to a text that I consider to be a far more nuanced celebration of the non-performed, poetic text. Subsequent to this, I will be exploring an even more nuanced engagement with what this text by Nicolas Royle can be seen to overlook, which is the materiality of the form itself. My interest here, however, is specifically in a reading of Shakespeare that does not frame the work in terms of a staged performance, but rather reads it as 'poetry'. Crucially, in what may seem to be an especially pointed critique, I must express here that I have found Royle's to be one of the most helpful texts that I have encountered during my research for this thesis; in fact, it opened up for me the whole study of *Othello*. I read Royle in such an exacting way here because, to an extent, I understand my response to be the kind of reading that Royle's text calls up in his promotion of a more detailed textual analysis and I want to work through the ideas I encounter in this text. I am thinking about this text, therefore, in a number of different ways. One of the ways is as a counter to Fitter's

initial praising of the stage real with what can be considered its opposite: the praising of the purely textual. In doing so, I will suggest further ways in which the opposition between stage and page can be questioned because even though Royle can be understood to take these difficulties into account, they can also perhaps be questioned in ways that Royle does not acknowledge. In addition to allowing me a counter for Fitter, then, Royle's text also suggests that if there is an issue with a reading that wholly privileges the stage, then there are equally difficulties with wholly privileging the page.

I am especially interested in Royle's reading of *Othello*, specifically his consideration of Act 3 scene 3 which is one of the most discussed in the study of *Othello*. It has exercised countless important readings and it is one that I will go on to focus on at length in Chapter 5. I have also selected Royle's analysis of *Othello* because it allows me to introduce the ideas of an author that I am profoundly influenced by. Unlike Fitter, I see Royle as self-consciously questioning many of these difficulties, but the question for me is where does the reading stop? By going further, in a sense, than I am supposed to, and even as Royle talks about the open ending of this, what different ideas do I open up? Certainly, one of the ideas that I open up in my reading of Royle is that of the further excesses of identity, the further *strangeness* of identity, of the type that I explore further in my reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* in Chapter 3. If Royle is, as it were, deconstructing character, then what are the limits of that? And what are the excesses that can be returned even to that? This is not in any way an attempt to give the final word on Royle, therefore, but is for me an indication that even such an open and subtle reader as Nicholas Royle is subject to the disruptions of textuality – as, of course, am I. Here, then, I want to first read through some of Royle's arguments in the introduction to *How to Read Shakespeare* where he establishes his perspective on the distinction between page and stage:

> In recent decades the world of Shakespeare studies has given great emphasis to
> the importance of performance, and the increasing dominance of newer visual

media, from TV and film to video, DVD and the Internet has an obvious role in this. *How to Read Shakespeare* proceeds in a somewhat different and perhaps unfashionable spirit, focusing above all on the *literary* dimensions of his work. We don't watch a Shakespeare play simply because it is gory and full of murders (though often it is), or because it's about famous people like kings and queens (though it often is) or because it's got lots of love and romance (though it often has). The enduring power of Shakespeare has to do, above all, with the astonishing nature of his language. To appreciate this it is necessary, I believe, to look as carefully as possible at what he actually wrote. This can entail further challenges, as there are many differences or uncertainties over what the text says or should say.[24]

The 'spirit' in which Royle proposes to proceed in *How to Read Shakespeare* not only differs here from the 'great emphasis' that has recently been 'given to the importance of performance' by the 'world of Shakespeare studies', but for Royle is also 'perhaps unfashionable' in comparison. I read these claims to 'recent decades' and what is currently 'unfashionable' to construct a history of 'the world of Shakespeare studies' wherein 'emphasis', 'focus' and 'fashion' vary over time. What is, according to Royle, 'perhaps unfashionable' now, therefore, may have been fashionable at a time prior to these 'recent decades'. Thus, in addition to countering the present, popular 'emphasis', Royle's 'focus' is also positioned as a potential repetition of a past 'focus' and as such is neither novel nor unique. I also understand these ideas of conflicting emphases to constitute an opposition between the '*literary* dimensions of [Shakespeare's] work' that *How to Read Shakespeare* will be 'unfashionabl[y]' 'focusing above all on' and 'performance' that will therefore be excluded from this focus. Yet here Shakespeare's 'work' has multiple '*literary* dimensions', and because his 'focus' will be 'above all on' them, then it follows that there also exist other 'dimensions of his work' that Royle will not be 'focusing on' and are not '*literary*'. These

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[24] Nicolas Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare* (London: Granta Books, 2014), pp. 4-5.

various, '*literary*' and not '*literary* dimensions' all belong to (because they are 'of') Shakespeare's 'work' and are therefore always and consistently available to be focused upon, or not. What changes over time, then, is not Shakespeare's 'work', but rather, for Royle, it is the external shifting of 'focus' 'on' the supplementary 'dimensions' that belong to 'his work' that fluctuates.

Royle, whose perspective can here be understood to be *outside* the 'world of Shakespeare studies', connects the 'great emphasis' that has recently been 'given to the importance of performance' by the 'world of Shakespeare studies' to the also recent and 'increasing dominance of newer visual media' which, for him, has 'an obvious role in this'. The recent 'emphasis' is therefore not produced solely by the 'increasing dominance of newer visual media' because there are, by inference, other entities that have had a 'role in this' which are not 'obvious' but are known by Royle to exist. Yet in the claim to the 'increasing dominance of newer visual media', which too is positioned here as separate from the 'world of Shakespeare studies' it has influenced, I also read a connection with the 'importance of performance' that the 'emphasis' is on. For Royle, therefore, 'performance' relates to the 'visual media' which is separate and distinct from the '*literary* dimensions of [Shakespeare's] work' and from 'what he actually wrote' not only because it can be located in various locations 'from TV and film to video, DVD and the Internet', but also because it is 'visual'. This would suggest that for Royle, what 'the world of Shakespeare studies has given great emphasis to' is what can be seen to be performed in a variety of different forms and locations. And since this 'visual' 'performance' is separate from, and in opposition to, the 'nature of [Shakespeare's] language' and what 'he actually wrote', these cannot, therefore, be accessed via these 'newer visual media'. However, in my reading, these ideas of separation and opposition are problematised by Royle's claims to 'performance'. For example, the contention that 'the world of Shakespeare studies has given great emphasis to the importance

of performance' suggests that the 'importance of performance' is a 'recent' happening because it is connected here to the 'newer visual media' in which 'performance' can be accessed. However, what is new in this formulation is not the 'importance of performance', but the recent 'great emphasis' that has been 'given' to it by the 'world of Shakespeare studies'. What this means is that both 'performance' and also the 'importance of performance' exist, and are therefore available, prior to the 'increasing dominance of newer visual media' and the recent 'emphasis' of 'the world of Shakespeare studies'. Performance, for Royle, has 'importance' regardless of what the 'world of Shakespeare studies' or indeed Royle himself, gives 'emphasis' to.

A further problematisation of Royle's appeal to the opposition between the 'visual' 'performance' and the 'astonishing nature of Shakespeare's language' can be read in the list of reasons why, according to Royle, '[w]e don't watch a Shakespeare play'. If, as Royle contends, 'watch[ing]' is not 'simply' about the 'gory', or 'famous people', or 'love and romance' even though these things are 'often', so not always, there to be 'watch[ed]', then 'watch[ing]' is also about the 'enduring power of Shakespeare' which, unlike the external 'focus', does not change over time, and for Royle 'above all' has to do 'with the astonishing nature of his language'. In other words, why 'we' do 'watch a Shakespeare play', besides other reasons which are not 'above all', is because of 'the astonishing nature of his language' which can therefore be 'watch[ed]' collectively by the 'we' in this claim, regardless of how and when and for what reason this 'watch[ing]' takes place. I read a distancing here, however, between Shakespeare, 'his language' that belongs to him, and the 'astonishing nature' that belongs to 'his language'. What is available for the 'we' in this claim to 'watch', and the reason why 'we' watch 'a Shakespeare play', therefore, is not Shakespeare's 'language' as such, but the 'astonishing nature of his language' which is in excess of 'his language'. Another appeal to the 'visual' can be read in Royle's subsequent claim that to

'appreciate' the 'astonishing nature of his language' it is 'necessary' to 'look as carefully as possible at what he actually wrote'. For Royle, what Shakespeare 'actually wrote' is distinct not only from 'performance', but also from 'his language' because 'what he actually wrote' is not a claim to possession but is instead about a past writing that is also presently available to 'look' at. Yet unlike Royle's previous claim to 'watch[ing]' where it could be argued that what the 'we' collectively 'watch[es]' is constituted by that which is available to be 'watch[ed]', the degree to which this 'look[ing]' is successful in enabling 'appreciat[ion]' of 'the astonishing nature of [Shakespeare's] language' is reliant upon how 'careful' the 'look[ing]' is. Consequently, neither the 'look[ing]', nor what is seen is fixed here even though 'what he actually wrote' remains the same.

For Royle, then, the 'enduring power of Shakespeare' which 'has to do, above all, with the astonishing nature of his language' is why 'we' 'watch a Shakespeare play', but it can only be 'appreciate[d]' by 'look[ing] as carefully as possible at what he actually wrote'. Yet in these ideas of 'watch[ing]' and 'look[ing]', neither 'performance', 'his language', nor 'what he actually wrote' requires reading because the 'enduring power of Shakespeare' is always 'visual' and thus available to be seen to then be 'appreciate[d]'. I also read in the claim to 'actual[ity]' in what Shakespeare 'actually wrote', an idea that what is also available is something that is not 'actual' but is, in a sense, nonetheless what Shakespeare 'wrote'. In other words, what Shakespeare 'wrote', is here divided into 'what he actually wrote' and what he 'wrote', but not 'actually', which conversely does not need to be 'look[ed]' at 'as carefully as possible' at all in order to appreciate the 'enduring power of Shakespeare'. These ideas are further complicated in Royle's contention that 'look[ing]' as closely as possible at what he actually wrote' can 'entail further challenges, as there are many differences or uncertainties over what the text says or should say'. And whilst, to an extent, I understand Royle's argument here to construct ideas of 'differences or uncertainties' between the various

'number of editions' and 'version[s]'[25] of Shakespeare's plays he asserts that he 'refers to' throughout *How to Read Shakespeare*, his claim also constitutes further divisions of 'the' singular 'text'. As I read above then, for Royle, 'what Shakespeare actually wrote' is unchanging and it is only the external 'look[ing] at' it that differs, but it is also split in that there too exists something that Shakespeare did not 'actually' write. Here, however, there are 'differences or uncertainties over what the text says or should say' which constitutes the text not only as that which actively speaks, but also as that which potentially 'should say' things that it may or may not. I read this claim to 'say[ing]', therefore, to indicate that for Royle, the text actively 'says' things which are in excess of what Shakespeare 'actually wrote'. What the 'text says', however, cannot be known unequivocally because there are 'many differences or uncertainties over' this. Yet since there are, for Royle, also 'many differences or uncertainties over' what the text 'should say', this also means that there is a potential absence in what the 'text says' but only in so far as there are external 'differences or uncertainties over' this. What the text 'should' or 'should' not say, in other words, is wholly dependent on external judgements from a position that is other to the 'text'. The 'text' can thus be understood to definitely 'say' something for Royle, but what this is or whether it is what it 'should' be cannot be known for certain and diverges depending on to whom the text is speaking.

Because, for Royle, these 'differences or uncertainties' are '*over* what the text says or should say',[26] there is once again a sense here that the text does not necessarily require reading; not only because the text independently speaks, but also because any 'differences and uncertainties' about this are 'over' and therefore separate from, and unconnected to, what the text says'. In the following, however, these ideas shift to claims specifically about the way in which Royle 'reads' Shakespeare's plays:

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[25] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, 'A Note on Texts Used', no pagination.
[26] My italics.

> While I have deliberately avoided miring the discussion in technical details concerning the nature of poetic metre, the iambic pentameter and so on, I read Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet. My overriding fascination is with the poetic as well as dramatic texture of a given passage, line or turn of words.[27]

Although this claim to 'read Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet' may suggest that for Royle, Shakespeare is a poet, or that his 'work' is poetry, I would contend that neither of these readings are necessarily secure here. For Royle, 'Shakespeare's plays' collectively are all 'plays' that belong to Shakespeare. They can also all be 'read', however, 'as' something other than 'plays'. I will return to what are, in my understanding, connected ideas of shifting identities and becoming 'as' something different in Chapter 3 where I read through the narration of 'dressing as' someone else in *Taming of the Shrew*. Here, however, 'read[ing]' is consequently constituted as that which shifts the identity of what is being 'read', or as an application of this identity to what is 'read'. In 'read[ing] Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet', therefore, Royle can be understood to both alter the identity of 'Shakespeare's plays' in his 'read[ing]' of them, and to control and limit the 'read[ing]' of the plays in these terms. In this sense, 'Shakespeare's plays' are not the 'work of a poet' unless they are 'read' 'as' such and in doing so, they only ever become 'as the work of a poet'. Royle's 'read[ing]' of 'Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet', furthermore, positions Shakespeare primarily as the owner of 'plays' that can be read 'as the work of a poet'. It is not then, that for Royle, Shakespeare is a necessarily 'a poet' because the 'work of a poet' is only something 'Shakespeare's plays' can be read 'as' and because Shakespeare is positioned, in this claim, as the owner and not necessarily the 'poet' whose 'work' the 'plays' can be read 'as'.

That Royle's 'overriding fascination is with the poetic as well as dramatic texture of a given passage, line or turn of words' further divides the text, not only with regard to there being multiple 'passage[s], line[s] or turn[s] of words' here, or because these all have both

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[27] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, p. 4.

'poetic as well as dramatic texture[s]', but also because his claim to his 'overriding fascination' suggests there are other things about the text(s) that 'fascinate' him but which are not mentioned here. I read this also to be connected with Royle's assertion that he has 'deliberately avoided miring the discussion in technical details concerning the nature of poetic metre' because this means that these are also 'details' that concern both the text and the 'poetic' but which are absent from Royle's 'discussion' of it. These 'technical details' are not required in Royle's discussion then, but because he claims to have 'deliberately avoided miring the discussion in' them, I would also argue that what this means is that for Royle the 'technical' is at odds with the 'poetic as well as dramatic texture' of the text since he cannot have a 'discussion' about this that is not 'mir[ed]' without 'deliberately avoid[ing]' the 'technical'. For Royle to 'read Shakespeare's plays as the work of a poet', therefore, he must also exclude certain 'technical details' of the plays even if they do concern 'the nature of poetic metre'.

Royle's appeal to the 'poetic as well as dramatic texture of a given passage, line or turn of words', then, constitutes the text as divisible. And as I argue above, what any 'given passage, line or turn of words' shares is that they all have 'poetic as well as dramatic texture'. I also read a difference, however, because unlike 'passage' and 'line', the claim to 'turn of words' constitutes 'words' in terms of their movement which suggests that, for Royle, this movement or 'turn[ing]' can only be discerned when the text is divided into 'words'. Each 'passage, line or turn of words', can also be understood here to either have a single 'texture' that is both 'poetic' and 'dramatic', or to have two discrete 'texture[s]' of which one is 'poetic' and the other 'dramatic'. In either case though, this claim to 'texture' constitutes each 'passage, line or turn of words' as having a unique and separate 'texture' or 'textures' that is not what they are, but can rather be understood as an appeal their surface. There are two issues that my readings of division raise for me here, therefore. Firstly, in this, there is a

division or divisions that I read to be in excess of that which Royle negotiates; and secondly, this division can be understood in ways that link this discussion to my previous reading of Fitter's text (and, indeed the text I read further on in this chapter by Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass) as one that calls upon materiality and physicality.

With these ideas in mind, I now want to consider in more detail Royle's specific readings of the text. The following is an excerpt from Royle's chapter on *Othello*:

> Let us pursue these issues by turning to Act 3 scene 3, sometimes known as the 'temptation scene'. Regarded by many (including me and the Arden editor E. A. J. Honigmann) as the single most extraordinary scene in all of Shakespeare's plays, it begins with Othello unquestioningly in love with his wife Desdemona and ends with his vowing to seek 'some swift means of death / For the fair devil (3.3.480-81). In the course of this scene, Othello's mind, his very sense of himself and of his life or 'occupation' (3.3.360) is transformed by Iago's devastating words. Everything in this play depends on the strange idea of knowing, or thinking one can know someone else's thoughts, of thinking that one can see thought, see what is not an object of vision. 'Thought' is the word that Iago drops into the conversation early on in Act 3 scene 3. Just wondering – just 'for a satisfaction of my thought' (3.3.97) he asks Othello how much his lieutenant Cassio knew about Othello's love for Desdemona when Othello was wooing her.[28]

In Royle's assertion that Act 3 scene 3 is 'sometimes known as the "temptation scene"', I read that Act 3 scene 3 *is* Act 3 scene 3, but it can also 'sometimes' be 'known' externally 'as' something that it is not. Division again, therefore. I also read – and I acknowledge the difficulty of this – 'similar' ideas in the subsequent claim that Act 3 scene 3 is '[r]egarded by many […] as the single most extraordinary scene in all of Shakespeare's plays' because here too, Act 3 scene 3 is '[r]egarded' 'as' something other than what it is, but only by 'many' and therefore not by all of those who '[r]egard it'. Act 3 scene 3 is, therefore, both 'known' and

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[28] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, p. 75.

'[r]egarded' differently at different times and from different perspectives, but there is also a claim to sameness in this because there are 'many' who '[r]egard' it in this way. That Act 3 scene 3 is '[r]egarded by many […] as the single most extraordinary scene' also constitutes the 'scene' (for those who '[r]egarded' it in this way) as a 'single' and distinct entity. However, this singularity is constituted only in terms of it being the 'most extraordinary' which means that the singularity of Act 3 scene 3 is relational to other scenes that are not the 'most extraordinary'. Again, we have a reading here of excess and division. And it might be worth pausing for a moment to explain why I am turning on these specific ideas. As we will return to again and again in this thesis, Othello is praised by its many different critics, across timelines and approaches, because of the threat that it poses to the stabilities of identity and form. My question even at this stage, and the question that I am now going to further open up, therefore, is where does division stop? What is the law or limit that has to come in even with as subtle and searching a reading as that offered here by Royle?

Let us return, then, to Royle's claim that Act 3 scene 3 is '[r]egarded by many […] as the single most extraordinary scene in all of Shakespeare's plays' which he contends is because 'it begins with Othello unquestioningly in love with his wife Desdemona and ends with his vowing to seek "some swift means of death"'. I understand this to mean that for Royle, there are 'many' who find something 'most extraordinary' about the difference between the 'begin[ning]' and 'end[ing]' of this 'scene'. Here, the scene 'begins with Othello', so the 'begin[ning]' is constituted as having a supplement 'with' it, the 'begin[ning]' does not stand alone. This can also be read in the claim that the scene 'ends with his vowing'. The difference here, however, is what the scene 'begins with', is 'Othello unquestioningly in love', which is not about language, but it 'ends with Othello vowing' which is an appeal to that which is spoken by Othello. Yet what the scene 'ends with' can also be read as a problematisation of 'end[ings]' because what Othello is, for Royle, 'vowing'

is to 'seek "some swift means of death / For the fair devil"' which is an appeal to a 'seek[ing]' that is necessarily subsequent to the 'end[ing]' of this 'scene'. The scene 'begins' and 'ends' 'with Othello' therefore, but Othello can be understood to continue beyond this 'scene'. In addition to a 'begin[ning]' and an 'end[ing]', this scene also, for Royle, has a 'course' 'in' which 'Othello's mind, his very sense of himself and of his life or "occupation" […] is transformed by Iago's devastating words'. I read Othello's 'mind' here to be fragmented in that it is also 'his very sense of himself and of his life or "occupation"'. Othello's 'mind' can thus be construed as a single, but divided, object that can, in its entirety, be known to Royle both before and after it is 'transformed by Iago's devastating words'. It is not Iago or Iago's intention, however, that is responsible for the 'transform[ation]' of Othello's mind, but the 'devastating words' that belong to Iago. The tension here is that for Royle, Iago's words are 'devastating' but it is not that they 'devastate' because what they do is 'transform'. Iago's 'words' are thus constituted as having the ability to 'transform' Othello's 'mind' even though they are 'devastating' and not 'transform[ative]', whilst at the same time not being 'devastating' because they are 'transform[ative]'. Yet what this also means is that for Royle, words have power – indeed, it is his contention in the introduction of this text that '[w]ords in Shakespeare seem to take on an autonomous life or machine-like power'[29] – but this claim to power is here problematised because these are 'Iago's devastating words' which are constituted as owned and as having an excess in that they are 'devastating' which is also that which they are not because they 'transform'.

There is an impossibility, then, in some of these formulations and another example of this can be read in Royle's claim that '[e]verything in this play depends on the strange idea of knowing'. Here, the play is a container of '[e]verything in' the play so that '[e]verything in this play' is separate and distinct from the 'play' itself. As the container of '[e]verything in

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[29] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, p, 5.

this play', the play can also be understood as a boundary or limit that holds what is 'in' the play within a certain location. And within this container there is more than one 'thing', because of Royle's claim to '[e]verything', but my question here is what, for Royle, is precisely in the play? In one sense, I can understand this idea to be related to my earlier reading of Royle's division of the play into 'passage[s], line[s] or turn[s] of words', but as I also read previously, there are still further divisions and excesses to this which are not acknowledged by Royle. All of the things that are 'in' the play, then, 'depend' on the 'strange idea of knowing, or thinking one can know someone else's thoughts', they are all connected under these limited terms so there is nothing 'in' the play for Royle that is not thus limited. But even what they are 'depend[ent] upon' is divided and to an extent, unknown, because here *either* they depend 'on the strange idea of knowing', 'or' they depend on 'thinking someone can know someone else's thoughts' which is also 'thinking one can see thought, see what is not an object of vision'. These difficulties, however, become yet more complicated with the claim that '"Thought" is the word that Iago drops into conversation early on in Act 3 scene 3'. Here, '"[t]hought"' is a word that initially exists outside and therefore separately from, the 'conversation' that 'Iago drops' it 'into'. This means that, for Royle, the 'conversation' is already there before Iago 'drops' the word '"[t]hought"' 'into' it. What this also means, however, is that there is also an Iago that exists outside 'the conversation' and separately from 'the word' that is in his possession before he 'drops' it 'into the conversation'.

In this claim to 'drop[ping]', I also read an idea of movement of the word '"[t]hought"' which is casual rather than deliberate and controlled. For Royle, however, Iago is '[j]ust wondering – just 'for a satisfaction of my thought'" and in this repetition of 'just', which is outside of what Royle claims is spoken by Iago, outside of the quotation marks, I read, conversely, a claim to limitation. For Royle, therefore, the word '"[t]hought"' here has

movement in that it has been casually 'drop[ped] into the conversation', but which is also limited in Royle's reading of it as '[j]ust wondering – just 'for the satisfaction of my thought'. These impossibilities and tensions which seem again to be excessive to a play that is constituted as one of tension and antagonism, can be further developed when we read the following:

> Iago tinkers with thought. When Othello asks in some exasperation, 'What dost thou think?', Iago merely turns the word back on him: 'Think, my lord?' (3.3.107-8). Othello's anger at this point is underscored by his switch to the third person ('he') to refer to the person to whom he is speaking. It is as if Iago (or implicitly Othello likewise) is beside himself, already an echo of himself: 'Think, my lord! By heaven, he echoes me, / As if there were some monster in his [Iago's] thought / Too hideous to be shown' (3.3.109-11). ('He echoes' and 'his' here are the 1622 version: in 1623 we find the less distinctive, less strange and out of place 'thou echo'st' and 'thy'.) We might indeed think of the entire play as an enormous, eerie echo chamber.[30]

In addition to Royle's assertion that '"[t]hought is the word that Iago drops into the conversation', here Royle also contends that 'Iago tinkers with thought'. This claim to 'thought', however, differs from the previous one in that it does not have quotation marks and is not claimed to be 'the word'. Yet whilst this difference could be read to suggest that this occurrence of 'thought' is distinct from the 'word' '"[t]hought" that 'Iago drops', the 'thought' that 'Iago tinkers with' is also constituted here as an object that is already available for Iago to access. Royle's subsequent claim that when 'Othello asks in some exasperation, 'What dost thou think?', Iago merely turns the word back on him' further complicates these distinctions because here it is 'the word' that Iago 'turns'. I also read the claim that Iago 'merely turns the word back on' Othello to conflict with the contention that 'Iago tinkers with thought' because this is, in fact, 'merely' a 'turn[ing]' of the word 'on' to Othello rather than

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[30] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, pp. 75-6.

a 'tinker[ing]'. For Royle, therefore, Iago is able to possess, then 'drop', 'tinker' with (but also not because he instead 'turns the word'), whilst all the while being outside and separate from the words '"Think my lord?"' because they are objects that he can move and manipulate as well as being that which he is claimed to be 'speaking'.

Othello is also here positioned as an object 'on' which 'the word' is 'turn[ed] back' by Iago. Yet he is further constituted here in terms that are in excess of the words that 'he is speaking'. Royle contends, for example, that Othello 'asks in some exasperation, "What dost thou think?"'. These words that Othello 'asks', and his act of 'ask[ing]', therefore, are for Royle, contained '[with]in some exasperation' which is consequently separate from what is 'ask[ed]'. I read further complexities in these ideas in the claim that 'Othello's anger at this point is underscored by his switch to the third person'. Here, 'Othello's anger' belongs to him and it exists prior to 'this point' in order for 'his switch' – which also belongs to him – to 'underscore' it. Both Othello and 'Othello's anger', therefore, are separate from 'his switch to the third person ("he")' so that he can be understood be 'speaking' the word '"he"', which is also a separate action of 'his switch[ing] to the third person', and which is also separate from his 'anger' which is 'underscored by' this 'switch'. And I read in this claim to his 'anger' being 'underscored by his switch to the third person' a tension in that 'his switch' is constituted as a textual or written 'score' which is 'under' Othello's non-textual 'anger'. The 'person to whom [Othello] is speaking', then, is at the same time 'refer[red] to' by Othello because he 'switch[es] to the third person ("he")'. This claim to 'switch[ing]' also indicates an opposite state that is prior to that which he 'switch[es]' to. In other words, it is not simply that the words Othello 'is speaking' change from '"thou"' to '"he"', but also that it is Othello who 'switch[es] to the third person', indicating that prior to 'this point' there was a different Othello, with a different perspective, who was not 'switch[ed] to the third person'.

Othello's 'switch to the third person', then, which according to Royle, he does in order 'to refer to the person to whom he is speaking', produces further divisions of Othello. In turn, this constitutes Iago as a 'person' who is simultaneously spoken and 'refer[red] to' so that Iago is divided by Othello's 'switch to the third person', by that which can also be read to divide Othello. Royle's claim that '[i]t is as if Iago (or implicitly Othello likewise) is beside himself, already an echo of himself' can therefore, to a certain extent, be construed as an acknowledgement of some of these multiple splits. However, there are still further divisions within this subsequent claim. For example, the '[i]t', which for Royle is something that can be known here, is doubly split because not only is this an appeal to divisions of Iago 'or' 'Othello likewise' in the notion of Othello's 'switch to the third person' which can also be '[i]t', but also because the words 'as if' constitute two distinct concepts of what this '[i]t' is; in other words '[i]t' is '[i]t', but it is also 'as if' something else. The claim in parentheses here also constructs further difficulties because in one sense it may be understood that here it is either Iago '(*or* implicitly Othello likewise)'[31] who is 'beside himself', meaning that both of them cannot be 'beside himself' at the same time, but in another sense it may be understood that Iago is definitely (but not really because this is 'as if') 'beside himself' but if Othello is also 'likewise' 'beside himself', then he is only so 'implicitly' and only because of, and in a way that is 'like', Iago is. In either sense, however, Iago's 'as if' status as 'beside himself' '(or implicitly Othello likewise)' constitutes a potential physical split whereby there is an Iago (or an Othello 'implicitly') that can have another 'himself' 'beside' him.

There is yet another 'as if' split here, however, in the claim to Iago '(or implicitly Othello likewise)' being also 'already an echo of himself'. Here, I read another distinct 'himself' that Iago is 'an echo of', but in this Iago *is* 'an echo' and this produces an Iago who is also 'an echo' of a separate 'himself' which is also echoed by the 'echo' Iago. These ideas

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[31] My italics.

are further complicated, however, because Royle asserts that being 'an echo of himself' is something that has 'already' happened. I read this claim to 'already' as an indication that, for Royle, there is a certain inevitability in being 'an echo of himself', that this is something that has happened before its time. I also understand this claim, however, as connected to the subsequent '"Think my lord! By heavens he echoes me"' which for Royle, is the 'point' at which Othello 'switch[es] to the third person ("he")', the 'point' at which his 'anger' is 'underscored'. Royle's claim that '[i]t is as if Iago (or implicitly Othello likewise) is beside himself, already an echo of himself' can thus be construed as an appeal to it being 'as if Iago (or implicitly Othello likewise)' is 'already an echo of himself' *before* the 'point' at which Othello states '"By heavens he echoes me"', that he is 'already an echo of himself' before he is an echo of Othello. Yet the difficulty with this is that this is the same '("he")' claim that Royle argues constitutes Iago as a 'person' who is simultaneously spoken and 'refer[red] to'. According to Royle's claims, then, these splits occur at the same 'point' *and* they also occur in succession, in other words, Iago is 'already' an echo before the 'point' at which he becomes an echo.

In Royle's contention that '[w]e might indeed think of the entire play as an enormous, eerie echo chamber', I read a connection to his previous claim that '[e]verything in this play depends on the strange idea of knowing', because whilst these statements can be understood to conflict with one another, they are nonetheless both claims to a sameness that is pervasive. Here, however, the notion of 'an enormous, eerie echo chamber' is, for Royle, something that '[w]e might indeed think of the entire play *as*'[32] so that although this constitutes the 'entire play' as a single and complete object, the 'as' also produces a division here in that the 'entire play' can be thought of 'as' something that it is not. And because this is a 'think[ing]' that '[w]e might' do, it is not a necessary 'think[ing]' which suggests that for Royle, there are

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[32] My italics.

other ways in which '[w]e' (or indeed anything outside this '[w]e' claim) 'might think of the entire play', that this is just one of the ways in which '[w]e might' do so. In this sense, then, there are multiple potential divisions of the 'entire play'. In 'think[ing] of the entire play as an enormous, eerie echo chamber', however, the 'entire play' becomes an empty enclosed space and nothing else, a space in which 'echo[es]' can be found or produced, but one that is also constituted by its 'eerie' emptiness. I understand this claim, therefore, as an appeal to 'the entire play' being devoid of things like 'character' or 'agency' because for Royle it is only about language and sound, things '[w]e might indeed think of' as 'poetry'. Yet Royle's claim to read the text solely 'as poetry' is problematised by his very claim to 'an enormous, eerie echo chamber' because his argument here is premised on claims of a 'he' and a 'himself' that is more than just an 'echo'.

iv)   'What is a Book?'

A counter narrative to the opposition between the page and stage can be read in the move that has emerged, especially in the last twenty years, of studying the way in which Shakespeare is the product of his own textualisation. And here I would like to look briefly at the arguments of Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass, as just one example of this burgeoning field. Chartier and Stallybrass assert that it is not that authors create books, but that 'books create authors when scribes, editors, or publishers bring together a range of texts under an authorial name.'[33] What I find so remarkable about this text, however, is the way in which a great many tensions and difficulties are not pushed aside, as I take to be the case of Fitter, but are, as it were, addressed directly. My interest, however, is in the limitations and tensions that persist even in this particularly reflexive response; limitations, of course, that my own work will be subject to because these are oppositions and differences that cannot be mastered. This

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[33] Roger Chartier and Peter Stallybrass, 'What is a book?' in *The Cambridge Companion to Textual Scholarship* ed. by Neil Fraistat and Julia Flanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 188-204 (p. 200).

is a necessary difficulty in language that I must repeat to some extent, and I will further

consider these ideas of repetition and difference in reading in Chapter 5 of this thesis where I

engage with what Shoshana Felman terms an uncanny 'reading effect'.

To engage one example of such a tension, we could begin with one of the

formulations relating to a problematisation of Shakespearian authorship. In support of their

contention that it was not really until the 1623 publication of the First Folio, when all of his

scattered texts were brought together, that Shakespeare 'materially' *became* an author,

Chartier and Stallybrass argue:

> The book form has played a particularly important role in materializing
> authorship. It is difficult to think of a more famous author today than
> Shakespeare. One can buy his texts, collected or in individual volumes, in an
> extraordinary variety of bindings. Yet in his own lifetime, Shakespeare did not
> write a single text that was designed to be bound as a book. His poems were
> written as pamphlets, his plays for performance and secondarily for publication of
> pamphlets.[34]

Here, 'the book' is a 'form' of something in excess of 'the book', and of something of which

there can be other 'form(s)' which are not 'the book'. This claim to 'the book form' thus

constitutes a division between 'the book' and that which it is a 'form' of. It is this divided and

supplemented 'book form', therefore, which for Chartier and Stallybrass 'has played a

particularly important role in materializing authorship'. I read in this idea of 'role' a move

that can be understood to repeat Royle's claim that 'newer visual media […] has had an

obvious role in' the recent 'great emphasis' given to the 'importance of performance' by the

'world of Shakespeare studies'.[35] In both of these texts, it would seem, 'roles' are played by

derivative 'forms' or 'media' of Shakespeare's plays in what is considered to be important at

different moments in time and from different perspectives rather than the 'texts' themselves.

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[34] Chartier and Stallybrass, p. 196.
[35] Royle, *How to Read Shakespeare*, p. 4.

In this appeal to 'materializing authorship', however, it may be understood that it is not that 'authorship' is 'materializ[ed]' as a direct consequence of the mere existence of the 'book form', but rather that 'materializing authorship' is the container (because the 'role' is 'in' it) and site of the performance of the 'book form' in the 'particularly important role' that it has 'played' 'in materializing authorship'. And in this claim, the actions of the 'book form' are in the past, but 'materializing authorship' is also present and continuous. On the one hand, then, the divided 'book form' can be understood here to have, in the past, performed a contributory 'role' that results in 'materializing authorship', which means that there exist other, unspecified entities with 'role[s]' that are less 'important', which have also 'played a […] role in materializing authorship'. But on the other hand, 'materializing authorship' can also be read as continuously occurring separately from the 'book form' because the 'particularly important role' that the 'book form' has 'played' is 'in' it and rather than 'book form' itself. I read these ideas also in the very claim to 'materializing authorship' for here 'authorship' is distinct from, and prior to, the continuous 'materializing' of 'authorship'. In other words, 'authorship' pre-exists not only the 'book form', but also its own 'materializ[ation]' because it is something that is 'materializing' – an action which here, is incomplete.

For Chartier and Stallybrass, then, it is 'difficult to think of a more famous author today than Shakespeare'. Yet their contention is not that Shakespeare is an especially 'famous author' solely because of the 'book form', but because '[o]ne can buy his texts, collected or in individual volumes, in an extraordinary variety of bindings'. Thus there are a 'variety' of different manifestations of the 'book form' which are both internally and externally diverse, but which all, by dint of their diversity and plenitude, are a factor in the degree of 'fame' that Shakespeare has today. However, in spite of these many, and various 'book form[s]', for Chartier and Stallybrass, what '[o]ne can buy' is neither 'books' nor the 'book form' per se, but 'his texts' which are either 'collected' or contained 'in' 'volumes' and 'bindings'. These

texts thus belong to Shakespeare, and in this formulation they are 'his' prior to being 'collected', or 'in' volumes' or 'in' 'bindings' and remain so afterwards because that is what '[o]ne can buy'. These problematisations of the relationship between author and text can be read again in the claim that 'Shakespeare did not write a single text that was designed to be bound as a book'. Here, I read that Shakespeare did, 'in his own lifetime', 'write' 'his texts', but that in excess of those texts was both a 'design' and a separate intention for that 'design' to not 'be bound as a book'. And in a sense, this can be taken to mean that for Chartier and Stallybrass, because it was not Shakespeare's intention for 'his texts' 'to be bound as a book', because that was not the 'design' of them, he cannot then be credited for the subsequent containment of them 'in' 'volumes' and 'bindings' which only then retrospectively positions him as their 'author'. The difficulty here, however, is that what Shakespeare's texts were not 'designed to be' was 'bound *as* a book'.[36] Even this process of 'binding', therefore, can be understood not to alter the state of texts from text to book, but for the text to become 'as a book', whilst also retaining its status as text.

The subsequent claim that Shakespeare's 'poems were written as pamphlets', however, differs because here the contention is that 'pamphlets' were Shakespeare's definite intention when his 'poems were written', that this excess 'as pamphlets' was 'written' concurrent with 'his poems', or that 'poems' 'as pamphlets' are what was 'written'. Yet there is, once again, a division constructed here between 'poems' and 'pamphlets' because of the 'as' claim. Consequently, 'poems' 'as pamphlets' can also be construed here to be primarily 'poems' which are still 'poems' when they are 'as pamphlets'. These tensions are further complicated in the assertion that Shakespeare wrote 'his plays for performance and secondarily for publication of pamphlets' because here Shakespeare's plays have a dual purpose which is ordered in a specific sequence. And for Chartier and Stallybrass,

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[36] My italics.

'performance' and, later, 'publication of pamphlets' is not something that Shakespeare's plays *become* 'as', but is what they were 'written' 'for'. Shakespeare's plays, therefore, are here constituted as 'written' with a specific aim, or on behalf of something other to the plays which also means that both 'performance' and 'publication of pamphlets' are prior to what was 'written' 'for' them. Chartier and Stallybrass's appeal to the origin and sequence of Shakespeare's plays is thus disrupted by their very claim to intentionality.

There are a number of tensions, then, in these claims to 'authorship', 'text', 'performance' and 'book'. Yet in a sense, these tensions are more apparent when Chartier and Stallybrass's argument moves away from Shakespeare to discussions about the idea of material culture in general:

> David Kastan has recently characterized the view that a work transcends any possible material incarnation as "platonic," in contrast to the "pragmatic" view that no text exists apart from the material forms and practices through which it is read or heard. These contradictory conceptions of the text divide both literary criticism and editorial practice, opposing those who attempt to restore the author's immaterial intentions by repairing the "wounds" inflicted in the course of copying the work and setting it in type to those who argue that we must respect the irreducible diversity of a work's historical states.[37]

What this criticism undoubtedly brings to the surface is what is termed as the implicit Platonism of much textual studies, and here I must confess my own. There will not, in this thesis, be any engagement with the material history of these works. This is not my focus and there is, therefore, a difficulty that could be read in my work as not having been worked through. However, when materiality is introduced, there is still a sense that that materiality is required to be untouched by its other. In the following, Chartier and Stallybrass further consider the opposition between the textual and the material:

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[37] Chartier and Stallybrass, p. 201.

A similar tension between the immateriality of texts and the materiality of books characterizes the relations between readers and the texts that they appropriate. In a lecture delivered in 1978 on "The Book," Jorge Luis Borges said: "One day I thought I would write a history of the book." But he added: "I am not interested in the physical aspect of books . . . but in the various ways in which books have been considered." For Borges, then, the material form of a text is irrelevant; what counts is how a "book," meaning the abstract literary work, regardless of its form, has been understood. Borges, in other words, took the "platonic" view. But when Borges dictated his autobiography to Norman Thomas di Giovanni, he spoke quite differently about one of the books that had shaped his life: Don Quixote. Now, he vividly recalls the specific object that he had held in his hands and read. [38]

For Chartier and Stallybrass, then, Borges's claim to not being '"interested in the physical aspect of books"' means that for him, 'the material form of a text is irrelevant'. The 'physical aspect of books' and ''the material form of a text', therefore, are here the same for Chartier and Stallybrass regardless of their previous appeals to the various disparities between 'books' and 'text' and even their subsequent contention that what Borges means by '"book"' is 'the abstract literary work'. These contradictions are made more complex still, however, because neither the claim to the '"physical aspect"' nor 'the material form' can be read to secure the 'specific object' they contend that Borges 'had held in is hands and read' because both the '"physical"' and the 'material' are constituted here by supplements and divisions. They are either the 'form' or an 'aspect', but not the actual, 'material' thing. Furthermore, Chartier and Stallybrass's appeal to the 'specific object' is also problematised because this is something that they assert Borges 'vividly recalls' which means that what we have here is a construction of a memory, of a construction of the 'specific object', from a perspective that is external to both the 'specific object' and the 'vivid' recollection of it.

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[38] Chartier and Stallybrass, p. 201.

These notions of the recollection of the material are expanded in Chartier and Stallybrass's subsequent citation from Borges's autobiography:

> I still remember the red bindings with gilt titles of the Garnier edition. Eventually, after my father's library was broken up and I read *Don Quixote* in another edition, I had the feeling that it was not the real *Don Quixote*. Later, a friend obtained for me a Garnier copy with the same engravings, the same footnotes and the same *errata*. For me, all these things were part of the book; in my mind, this was the real *Don Quixote*.[39]

Chartier and Stallybrass read Borges's account as a contradiction of his previous claim that he is not '"interested in the physical aspect of books"' because here he appeals to the 'real *Don Quixote*' and that in doing so, he takes the '"pragmatic" rather than the opposite, '"platonic"' view. Yet Chartier and Stallybrass also contend that for Borges, the '"real" *Don Quixote* 'took the irreducible material form of an illustrated edition that had been imported from France, the edition that he had read as a boy'[40] and I want to consider these ideas in my own reading of Borges's account.

For Borges, 'the red bindings with gilt titles of the Garnier edition' is something that he '*still* remember[s]',[41] so this particular memory is constituted as that which has endured. What this also means, however, is that there can necessarily also be other things that Borges does not 'still remember', things that he at some point did 'remember', but no longer does. Memory, for Borges, can thus be understood as a recollection of the past which is not guaranteed to persist over time. What Borges does 'still remember', moreover, is 'the red bindings with gilt titles' that are 'of' or belong to the 'Garnier edition' and can consequently be read as supplementary to the 'Garnier edition'. It is not precisely, therefore, as Chartier and Stallybrass argue, 'the specific object that he had held in his hands and read' that Borges

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[39] Chartier and Stallybrass, p. 201.
[40] Chartier and Stallybrass, p. 201.
[41] My italics.

claims to 'vividly recall', but rather that this specific, surviving, memory is of excess 'bindings' and 'titles' that are separate and distinct from the 'Garnier edition' itself. Borges's claim that he eventually 'read *Don Quixote* in another edition' can also be read as a retrospective account of a past 'read[ing]'. And although this is 'another edition', it still has *Don Quixote* 'in' it. I read this other 'edition', therefore as a container of *Don Quixote* as well as a repetition of *Don Quixote* on account of it being 'in another edition'. Another difference here, however, is that Borges claims to have 'had the feeling that it was not the real *Don Quixote*'. For Borges, therefore, it is not simply that this other 'edition' was *materially* different from the 'Garnier edition', but that the difference, and subsequently his claim to 'the real', are both constituted by his past 'read[ing]' of, and 'feeling' about, this other edition.

Borges asserts that the 'Garnier copy' that was 'obtained' by a friend and was also different from the 'Garnier edition' from his 'father's library' was, for him, the 'real *Don Quixote*' because it had the 'same engravings, the same footnotes and the same *errata*' as the 'Garnier edition'. In this claim to the 'same engravings, the same footnotes and the same *errata*' I read further appeals to divisions of the 'book' and indeed, for Borges, 'all these things were part of the book'. This single 'part of the book' is therefore comprised of multiple 'engravings', 'footnotes' and '*errata*', which means that there must also be other parts which likewise could potentially be divided again into multiple parts. What constitutes 'the real *Don Quixote*' for Borges, then, is a single, yet divided, 'part of the book' which is the 'same' as what 'he had read as a boy', but is also an edition that is different from 'Garnier edition'. And not only is this a textual construction of 'the real *Don Quixote*', but it is also something that Borges claims was 'in my mind'. Hence what for Chartier and Stallybrass is 'the irreducible material form of an illustrated edition', 'the real *Don Quixote*', can conversely be understood here not as the 'material form', but rather as a retrospective, a memory, a construction and a narration of the 'material'.

Chartier and Stallybrass's text, then, is another text that can be understood to move away from the stage to the page as Royle's does, but instead of a more 'ideal' notion of poetry, they return to a material aspect of poetry. And in a sense, Chartier and Stallybrass's arguments can also be connected to Fitter's in my readings of ideas in that text of the stage as material. The problem encountered by Royle, however, in his psychoanalytically and deconstructively informed work, is that he acknowledges that he needs to self-consciously create certain limits in order to allow for a work that is a working through of the text. Yet these limits do not hold in any sense because in his reading of the text 'as poetry' he arrives at a point where he also seems to read it as drama. There are, furthermore, limits that Royle does not acknowledge, limits on the very process that he seems to be championing, a process that involves an ongoing and impossible tension. If Royle can be seen to move towards the text rather than the stage, and requires the imposition of certain limits to allow that to happen, then these limits seem entirely pragmatic. Yet for Royle these limits also need to be arbitrary because otherwise it would mean that the text has a definite structure. In Chartier and Stallybrass's argument, however, there is also a move away from the stage to the page, but the limit that they impose might be understood as less arbitrary because this limit is that of materiality. And there is indeed something that is missing – not only from Royle's work, but from my own also – which is any engagement with that materiality. In my understanding, the rejection of materiality and material concerns is one of the things that seemingly allows a limitless free play where it becomes necessary to self-impose limits. Engaging with materiality, is to introduce a limit, a material limit, a book. And as Chartier and Stallybrass contend, there are many ways in which this materiality can be considered, but it is *there* to be negotiated. So for Chartier and Stallybrass, it is not that the materiality is truth, indeed they acknowledge that introducing materiality raises even more complex problems, it is rather that introducing the limits of materiality becomes necessary to their argument as something that is

neglected and must be returned to. Without the idea of the material, and the limits it introduces, we end up with the 'platonic view' where there is nothing to enclose something in order to make it what it is. While I understand Royle's need to simply start somewhere then, and why he needs to impose his own limits, these limits are nonetheless arbitrary and they become problematic because he cannot seem to avoid exceeding those limits.

Chapter 3 – Duty/Performance

i)   'dressed like'

How might the problematisation of identity of stage and page offered by Chris Fitter be read in *The Taming of the Shrew*? Or is it that the text, in its celebrated engagement with the politics and problems of 'shewing', can be read to offer something more akin to Fitter's investment in performed radicalism, one that can be grasped only when separated from the textual? My interest here, to begin with at least, is in the difficulty of locating the drama of identity within *The Taming of the Shrew*. The obvious points of entry might be understood as the Induction, or the narration of Petruchio's arrival at his wedding, Katharina's final speech, her torment at Petruchio's dilapidated residence, or the would-be wooer Vincentio and his cynical servant, Tranio, dressing up as others, and thus opening a discussion of the limitations of identity. Is Tranio who he is because of class, character, clothes, name, or something else?

Even to set the question up in this way, however, is already to have decided much. Take the following stage direction from Act 4 Scene 4: '*Enter Tranio as Lucentio and the Pedant, booted, but dressed like Vincentio*'.[42] Here, I read in '*Enter Tranio as Lucentio*' that Tranio and Lucentio are two distinct and separate identities because they are different names, but also that this distinction is problematised because Tranio '*Enter*[s]' 'as' Lucentio. For this narrative perspective, then, there is a Tranio who can be not '*as Lucentio*' and a Tranio who can still be known to be Tranio even when he is '*as*' Lucentio. Yet whilst it may be argued that Tranio, despite being claimed to be '*as Lucentio*', is nonetheless still Tranio in this formulation, it can also be read, conversely, that he can be Tranio and not Tranio at the same time, because he is '*Tranio as Lucentio*'. Thus Tranio's identity is, for the narration, not

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[42] William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. by H. J. Oliver (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 204. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

definite in that he can assume the identity of, or become 'as' another. In addition to these splits and shifts in Tranio's identity, I likewise read a worrying of Lucentio's identity. Lucentio is here still known to be, and can still be distinguished as, Lucentio, even when Tranio is '*as*' him. What this means, however, is that for this perspective, this is not an identity that is exclusive to Lucentio because it can be appropriated or replicated by another.

The identity of the Pedant is also problematized because he can be understood to take on the identity of Vincentio. However, the distinction here is that unlike Tranio's identification in the narration '*as Lucentio*', the Pedant is '*dressed like Vincentio*'. The Pedant is claimed to not be '*dressed like*' himself, therefore, which means that his dress, or that which is exterior and additional to him, is not '*like*' his own. Tranio, on the other hand, because he is '*as Lucentio*', which is not a claim to the external, can therefore be understood to internally 'assume' Lucentio's 'internal' identity. The identities of Tranio and Lucentio are thus further problematized because this means that what is 'internal' to Lucentio is both known and can be replicated by Tranio, that Lucentio's 'internal' identity can become Tranio's 'internal' identity, whilst Tranio, for the narration, also remains identifiable as Tranio. That the Pedant is '*booted, but dressed like Vincentio*', then, can be read to mean that clothes are also here an indication of identity because there is a sense that being '*dressed like Vincentio*' means that the Pedant is not unequivocally 'himself' when he enters. Yet because he is dressed '*like*' Vincentio, I read that he does not wear Vincentio's clothes, but that he both wears clothes which are '*like*' those which Vincentio wears, and also that he wears these clothes in a way which is, for the narration, '*like*' Vincentio dresses. Therefore, not only is the dress of both the Pedant and Vincentio external and additional to them, but there is also something in addition to the dress, which is not the dress, but can be understood as that which constitutes the dress as Vincentio's and not the Pedant's. What this means, therefore, is that this '*like*[ness]' which the narration claims the Pedant, as with Tranio with respect to

Lucentio's identity, knows and replicates, is not exclusively of Vincentio but can be repeated by someone who is not Vincentio. However, although the Pedant is '*dressed like Vincentio*', I read in the statement that he is '*booted, but dressed like Vincentio*' that '*booted*' is also a claim to that which the Pedant wears, but that this is not '*like Vincentio*'. Therefore, the Pedant is both '*dressed like Vincentio*' and not '*like Vincentio*' which means that, again, as with Tranio, he can neither be known as the Pedant nor Vincentio explicitly.

In addition to the differences I read in the identities of Tranio and the Pedant with regard to them being '*as*' or '*dressed like*' others, I also read a distinction in that they are not identified in the same way in this narration. If '*Tranio*' (along with '*Lucentio*' and '*Vincentio*') is to be understood as a name, then '*the Pedant*' diverges from this because he is identified as '*the*' singular and definite '*Pedant*' which means, however, that there may or may not be other '*Pedant*[s]' who are not this '*Pedant*'. In this sense, I read '*the Pedant*' as a claim to his occupation, that he is, for this narration, identifiable only by his function as a '*Pedant*'. What this also means, however, is that because Tranio is not identified in this way, the identification of both Tranio and the Pedant involve a lack either of a 'name' (as in the case of the Pedant), or of an 'occupation' (of Tranio). The narration can thus be understood to be limited in its identification of them. I also read '*Tranio*' and '*the Pedant*' as corresponding to 'TRANIO' and 'PEDANT' who can be understood to 'speak' further on in the text. However, I also read a shift in perspective of the narration here because of the differences between '*Tranio*' who is claimed to '*Enter*' and is in italics, and 'TRANIO' which is not in italics, but is in capital letters and indicates Tranio's speech rather than his actions. Further, not only do '*the Pedant*' and 'PEDANT' differ in the same way as '*Tranio*' and 'TRANIO', but I also read '*the Pedant*' as a claim to '*the*' specific Pedant, whilst 'PEDANT' can, conversely, be understood as nonspecific. What I read here, therefore, is a further worrying of the identities of Tranio and the Pedant in the narration because of the shifts in narrative

perspective between the claims to what they do and who they are and the claim to what they 'say'.

These problematisations of identity are further complicated in the subsequent conversation between Tranio and the Pedant. Here, the Pedant is concerned that in spite of his being '*dressed like Vincentio*', Baptista may still recognise him as '*the Pedant*':

> TRANIO
>   Sir, this is the house; please it you that I call?
> PEDANT
>   Ay, what else? And but I be deceived
>   Signor Baptista may remember me
>   Near twenty years ago in Genoa,
>   Where we were lodgers at the Pegasus.
> TRANIO
>   'Tis well, and hold your own, in any case
>   With such austerity as 'longeth to a father.
>   *Enter Biondello*
> PEDANT
>   I warrant you. But sir, here comes your boy.
>   'Twere good he were schooled. (4.4.1-9)

In one sense, then, the Pedant's claim 'but I be deceived / Signor Baptista may remember me' can be read as a statement of knowledge, that unless the Pedant is 'deceived', 'Baptista may remember' him. However, whether or not Baptista will remember him is uncertain here because even if the Pedant is not 'deceived', Baptista still only '*may* remember' him.[43] The claim to potentially being 'deceived' also, conversely, constitutes a not knowing in that the Pedant is uncertain about whether or not he has been 'deceived', but this also constitutes a division of the Pedant because this is a potential deception of himself by himself. This notion of deception, in my reading, is not only about what the Pedant knows or does not know,

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[43] My italics.

however, but is also about what is true or false. If there is a part of the Pedant that can 'deceive' the other, then the former must have knowledge of a truth in order to inform the latter of its opposite. And since the Pedant states 'but I be deceived / Signor Baptista may remember me', this 'I' can be understood to know that 'Signor Baptista may remember me' but not know whether this is the truth or not. The divisions of the Pedant here are thus constituted as an 'I' that, whether intentionally or not, can tell himself that which is either the truth or not, but at the same time does not know whether it is the truth, or not, that he knows, or indeed whether or not he has that knowledge at all. This is further complicated, however, because in this formulation, Baptista's potential recognition of the Pedant is not entirely dependent on the memory or knowledge of Baptista, but rather is contingent upon the Pedant's deception, or not, of himself. Indeed, despite my reading of 'Signor Baptista may remember me' as an indication of uncertainty about what Baptista 'may' or 'may' not remember, it is the Pedant in this claim who can be understood to doubt himself.

That the Pedant states that 'Signor Baptista may remember me', moreover, means that it is not the present 'I' which the Pedant claims Baptista 'may' have memory or knowledge of, but a past 'me' who lodged '[n]ear twenty years ago […] at the Pegasus'. Since Baptista's memory can necessarily only be of the past Pedant from '[n]ear twenty years ago', the past Pedant is thus potentially 'fixed' in Baptista's memory, from the Pedant's perspective. Yet there is also a sense that because the Pedant asserts 'Signor Baptista may remember me' that, for the Pedant, there is something about the present 'I' which 'may' cause Baptista to remember the past 'me' and this means that the past and present Pedant are not entirely separate and distinct from one another. Further, the Pedant claims that 'we were lodgers at the Pegasus' which indicates that the Pedant's notion of Baptista's memory is also based on a shared past experience, or his own memory of a past 'we'. Whilst it may be construed that the Pedant's assertion 'we were lodgers at the Pegasus' is a definite account of what both he and

Baptista did in the past, I would argue that '[n]ear twenty years ago' troubles this certainty because the word '[n]ear' produces this past as the Pedant's inability to precisely and definitely fix the time when they 'were lodgers at the Pegasus'. Therefore, I read the Pedant's claims about the uncertainty of Baptista's potential memory of him as, in fact, a claim to the Pedant's memory which can be understood here as also uncertain. I read in Tranio's assertion 'Tis well, and hold you own, in any case / with such austerity as "longeth to a father"' that Baptista 'may remember' the Pedant, but that from Tranio's perspective the Pedant should 'in any case' continue to behave like Vincentio. This, firstly, shifts my reading of the Pedant as '*dressed like Vincentio*', because, for Tranio, the Pedant's 'disguise' is not only an external addition to him, but is also includes the way in which he behaves. Thus it may be understood that, for Tranio, the Pedant needs to 'perform' as or adopt the role of 'a father' in order to deceive Baptista. Indeed, 'with such austerity as 'longeth to a father' can, in one sense, be understood to mean that in addition to the Pedant's dress, the 'austerity as 'longeth to a father' further augments the Pedant's 'disguise' as Vincentio because the 'austerity' does not belong to him. However, because Tranio asserts 'hold your own […] with such austerity', I would argue that this 'austerity' which Tranio claims belongs to 'a father' can be understood as not fixed to 'father' because the Pedant can use it to 'hold [his] own'. And as it is his 'own' which Tranio claims the Pedant should 'hold', the Pedant's 'performance' of Vincentio is produced as something which, ultimately, 'belongs' to him and not Vincentio. [44]

ii)   Act 1 Scene I

To think more about this strange problematisation of identity, and especially with what falls outside the established critical sense in which *The Taming of the Shrew* problematizes

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[44] For the related New-Historicist debate concerning personation and sumptuary laws, for example, Susan Baker, 'Personating Persons: Rethinking Shakespearean Disguises', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 303-316. New-Historicist readings will be addressed in more detail in Chapter 4.

identities, even as it coincides with a scene in which such identities are understood to be contested, I will now turn to Act 1 Scene 1, and its extended engagement with performance. Again, the scene turns on Tranio, Vincentio, and The Pedant:

> TRANIO   You will be schoolmaster,
>   And undertake the teaching of the maid:
>   That's your device.
> LUCENTIO   It is. May it be done?
> TRANIO
>   Not possible. For who shall bear your part
>   And be in Padua here Vincentio's son,
>   Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends,
>   Visit his countrymen and banquet them? (1.1.188-194)

I read here a claim to there being a connection between identity and actions in that the 'schoolmaster' is stated to teach and that for 'Vincentio's son' to be identified, there is a need for someone to 'Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends' and so on. For Tranio, therefore, different identities are both constituted by and require different actions. Identity can thus be read as related to the 'performance' of acts specific to that particular identity. Indeed Tranio's claim that the 'part' or role of 'Vincentio's son' is to 'Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends, / Visit his countrymen and banquet them' means that these different actions are specific to 'Vincentio's son' because they are all related to that which is 'his', and that it is only when these specific actions are both performed (because they are a 'part') and witnessed (by 'his friends [and] his countrymen'), that 'Vincentio's son' can and will be identified. For Tranio, therefore, the role or 'part' of 'Vincentio's son' is that which is known and recognised by others, and because this 'part' can potentially be 'borne' here by someone other than 'Vincentio's son', it is also that which does not actually require 'Vincentio's son' in order for this recognition to occur.

What this means, then, is that despite the claim that the 'part' is 'his', 'Vincentio's son' is not needed in the performance of his 'part'. This idea that his 'part' can be 'borne' by another constitutes his 'part' as separate from him whilst also being known and recognisable as 'his' at the same time. I read also in 'who shall bear your part' that the 'who' – the potential bearer of the 'part' – is also separate and distinct from the 'part' because to 'bear' the 'part' is, in one sense, to perform it, but is also to 'carry' or to 'assume' it. The 'part' is thus an object or entity which is neither the same as the 'who', the 'bearer', nor, indeed the 'performance' of it. This 'part', furthermore, can not only be potentially 'borne' by someone other than 'Vincentio's son', but can be understood as that which 'Vincentio's son' also 'bears' because I read that the reason why another is required to 'bear' this 'part' is because he proposes not to. It is not, therefore, that the 'part' is inherent to him, but is a 'part' separate from him regardless of whether it is performed by him or by another. In this sense, the word 'part' can also be read as a claim to a 'part' of 'Vincentio's son', a fragment or split of him which serves to make up and belongs to the 'whole', but which can exist separately from the 'whole'. Yet I also read this notion of 'part' as a claim to a 'whole' which is comprised of other 'parts' which are not 'Vincentio's son'. A 'whole', therefore, which consists of the performance of other 'parts' or identities. Thus the 'part' is not only a constituent 'part' of 'Vincentio's son', but is also 'part' of a wider performance of identity. Tranio's claim that the 'part' needs to be 'borne' by someone if not by 'Vincentio's son' himself, indicates that, for Tranio, identity is, in fact, constituted by the distinction between the different performances of the different 'parts' within this wider performance.

It is the perception of difference and of performance, therefore, which distinguishes one identity from another. However, this idea that identity is constituted solely by the performance and perception of said identity is problematized by my reading of the existence of a 'Vincentio's son' who may or may not bear the 'part' of 'Vincentio's son'. If the 'part'

of 'Vincentio's son' is that which both belongs to, and yet does not require the performance of 'Vincentio's son' himself in order for this distinction, then there is a sense that if 'Vincentio's son' does not perform this 'part', he ceases to be 'Vincentio's son'. Indeed, my reading of 'Vincentio's son' as a 'whole' identity which is comprised of different constituent 'parts' is troubled further by Tranio's identification of him both as 'Vincentio's son' and as 'you' and also by the identification of him also as 'LUCENTIO' in the narration. This indicates that whilst there is a sense that he is, at once, all three of these identities and that they are further 'parts' of him, the identification of him is here always external, always the perspective of another on him.

It is because Lucentio's 'device' is to 'be schoolmaster / And undertake the teaching of the maid' that there is then, according to Tranio, a need for someone to 'bear' the 'part' of 'Vincentio's son'. This means that if Lucentio is to 'be schoolmaster', the result will be a lack of 'Vincentio's son' in the wider performance of identity. Thus Lucentio cannot 'be' both 'schoolmaster' and 'Vincentio's son' at the same time, if he is 'schoolmaster' he ceases to be 'Vincentio's son'. Yet I read that this is also, for Tranio, because of the different actions or performances that are related and specific to these identities. It is not possible, therefore, to perform two different parts at the same time. However, because Lucentio is claimed at once as 'Vincentio's son' and 'you' and 'LUCENTIO', there is a sense that there is also a way in which identities can be simultaneous which is not necessarily about performance. Indeed the 'teaching of the maid' is here dependent on Lucentio being schoolmaster, in other words, it is necessary for him 'be schoolmaster' before he can 'undertake the teaching of the maid'. And because of the word 'And' it may be understood also that the 'teaching of the maid' is that which is in addition to 'schoolmaster' which indicates that, for Tranio, Lucentio can potentially 'be schoolmaster' and not teach Bianca. Thus I read that to 'be schoolmaster' is simultaneously an identity which is and is not connected with the act of 'teaching the

maid'. That Lucentio cannot teach without first 'be[ing] schoolmaster', therefore, means that there is, for Tranio, something prior to and other than 'the teaching of the maid' which constitutes the identity of 'schoolmaster'.

Such constructions of identity, performance, and part can be read to be further problematized in the following:

> TRANIO
>
> Not possible. For who shall bear your part
> And be in Padua here Vincentio's son,
> Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends,
> Visit his countrymen and banquet them?
>
> LUCENTIO
>
> Basta, content thee, for I have it full.
> We have not yet been seen in any house,
> Nor can we be distinguished by our faces
> For man or master. Then it follows thus:
> Thou shalt be master, Tranio, in my stead,
> Keep house, and port, and servants, as I should;
> I will some other be – some Florentine,
> Some Neapolitan, or meaner man of Pisa.
> 'Tis hatched, and shall be so. Tranio, at once
> Uncase thee; take my coloured hat and cloak.
> When Biondello comes, he waits on thee,
> But I will charm him first to keep his tongue. (1.1.191-206)

In Tranio's question, 'who shall bear your part / And be in Padua here Vincentio's son', I read that to 'bear' the 'part' and to 'be […] Vincentio's son' are different yet related acts. Because it is 'And be in Padua here Vincentio's son', the two occur simultaneously and by the same person. Thus, for Tranio, in order to 'be […] Vincentio's son / Keep house and ply his book' one must necessarily 'bear' the 'part', and to 'bear' the 'part' it is necessary to 'be […] Vincentio's son / Keep house and ply his book'. In this sense, the two acts are not only interdependent, but can be read as an explanation of one another. Yet the word 'And' troubles

my reading of definition because to 'be […] Vincentio's son' is also constituted here as additional to bearing the 'part'. To 'be […] Vincentio's son' is not, then, a complete account of Lucentio's 'part', but is separate from and additional to the 'part' whilst also remaining dependent upon Lucentio's 'part' first being 'borne' before one can 'be […] Vincentio's son'. Furthermore, to 'be […] Vincentio's son' is, conversely, to 'Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends, / Visit his countrymen and banquet them' because these actions are not presented here as additional. Thus Lucentio's 'part' is constituted neither by 'Vincentio's son', nor by the acts listed by Tranio, as these acts are specific to 'Vincentio's son' and not Lucentio's 'part'. What Lucentio's 'part' actually is, therefore, is uncertain and unlike 'Vincentio's son', unexplained.

Lucentio's 'part', however, can be understood as that which belongs to him but is also separate from him; as an object which can be 'borne' by either him or another; and as that which is connected to and separate from both 'Vincentio's son' and the acts which, for Tranio, define what it means to 'be […] Vincentio's son'. Yet if the 'part' belongs to Lucentio and 'Vincentio's son' is an addition to the 'part', then it must follow also that Lucentio and 'Vincentio's son' are not one and the same, but are separated by Tranio's claims to possession, addition, and indeed the claim that someone other than Lucentio can both 'bear' his 'part' and 'be […] Vincentio's son'. I read a further distancing of Lucentio and 'Vincentio's son' because unlike 'your part', 'Vincentio's son' is not something of which Lucentio has ownership, but is a definition in terms of a relationship with someone else. 'Vincentio's son', which is already a separate addition to a separate 'part' that Lucentio owns and others can 'bear', belongs to Vincentio. Thus none of these things can be read absolutely as Lucentio.

Further, I read Tranio's connection of 'Vincentio's son' with actions such as 'Keep house and ply his book, welcome his friends' as yet another claim to separation between

Lucentio and 'Vincentio's son'. Unlike Tranio's direct address to Lucentio in 'your part', which is a claim to Lucentio's definite ownership of the 'part', even when borne by others, 'his book' and 'his friends' are not 'your' and not, then, Lucentio's. They belong specifically to 'Vincentio's son' because he is 'Vincentio's son', and this, in turn, constitutes 'his book' and 'his friends' indirectly as Vincentio's, serving to distance both the actions and 'Vincentio's son' further still from Lucentio. The 'friends' and 'countrymen' of 'Vincentio's son', moreover, can be understood here to be part of the performance of 'Vincentio's son'. They are equally as necessary to the act of being 'Vincentio's son' as the bearer of the 'part'. Thus to 'be […] Vincentio's son' is related to Lucentio only in so far as he is the one to whom Tranio claims the 'part' belongs. Since others can 'bear' the 'part', Lucentio is not essential to 'Vincentio's son'; yet the 'friends' and 'countrymen' of 'Vincentio's son' are. 'Vincentio's son' is always constituted, for Tranio, by someone other than Lucentio, either because it is not necessary for him to 'bear' the 'part', or because others are always needed in the performance of 'Vincentio's son'.

From Tranio's perspective, then, Lucentio's 'part' and 'Vincentio's son' are not exclusive or fixed to any one person, but can be borne by others and, moreover, require others for its constitution. Indeed, he states that the only reason it is 'not possible' for Lucentio to 'be schoolmaster' is because he does not know 'who shall bear' Lucentio's 'part'. Yet despite this, I read in Lucentio's response a claim to the potential fixing of 'Vincentio's son' through the 'seeing' of others. For Lucentio, it is possible for him to 'be schoolmaster' because he has 'not yet been seen in any house' as not 'schoolmaster'. Being 'seen' by others, therefore, can be understood to secure Lucentio as one thing, making it impossible for him to be anything else. Thus, in addition to Tranio's claim that others are needed in the actions that define 'Vincentio's son', others also need to 'see' it for its constitution as such. However, in Lucentio's claim that 'We have not yet been seen in any house' I read that it is

something other than his actions which have 'not yet been seen'. For Lucentio, therefore, no actions are required of either him or Tranio, who or what they are is, in fact, something passive yet visible, something external and something which can definitely be known by them both being 'seen' from an external perspective. And here, because this is when 'seen' as 'we', there is a sense also that who or what they are is established by them being seen in relation to one another. What is 'seen', therefore, is not necessarily what either of them is, but what they are not because each of them can be understood to be constituted by a distinction between them which is visible.

Lucentio's claim 'Nor can we be distinguished by our faces / For man or master', however, indicates that which of them is 'man' and which is 'master' is not knowable from either their faces or the distinction between their faces. Yet there is, for Lucentio, a distinction. One of them is here definitely 'man' and the other 'master', and this is both visible and can be known from seeing. What has 'not yet been seen', therefore, is also not 'our faces' and I read in Lucentio's assertion 'Uncase thee, take my coloured hat and cloak' that the distinction is, for Lucentio, in neither the actions, nor the bodies of him and Tranio, but is in their 'cases' or the clothes they are 'seen' to wear. Which of them is 'man' and which is 'master', therefore, is established and subsequently fixed by something which is in excess of them, from that which 'encases' them but is not part of them. Thus neither 'man' nor 'master' is inherent to them because it is only constituted by the distinction between their 'cases' and both the 'case' and the distinction can be understood here as things which they are not.

Further, I read in 'Uncase thee' a claim that this excess, separate, and externally visible 'case' can be removed and that this uncasing is what makes it possible for Tranio to 'be master in [Lucentio's] stead'. Yet in 'Uncase thee' there is also a sense that the 'thee' remains the same in spite of the uncasing because there is a 'thee' which can exist in either a

cased or uncased state. In uncasing himself, then, Tranio ceases to be 'man', he can put on

Lucentio's 'coloured hat and cloak' and 'be master', but either way, he is still Tranio.

Therefore, it is not only the 'case' but also 'man' or 'master' which can be understood as

surplus to Tranio, neither of these things is actually him but are related to his 'case'. I also

read Lucentio's claim that Tranio will 'Keep house, and port, and servants, as I should' to

indicate that even when Tranio is 'master', he will not 'be master' precisely in the same way

that Lucentio is when he is 'master' because he will only perform these acts 'as' Lucentio

'should'. The acts always remain the acts that Lucentio 'should' perform and Tranio can only

ever perform them 'as' Lucentio. They do not, then, become his. However, 'as I should' also

indicates that Lucentio would not have performed these acts because they are in any way

inherent to him, but because this is what he 'should' do if and when he is 'master'. Thus both

the acts and the clothing can be understood to belong to 'master' and not to either Lucentio or

Tranio.

Yet because Lucentio tells Tranio that 'When Biondello comes, he waits on thee, / but

I will charm him first to keep his tongue' my reading of clothing as that which differentiates

'man' from 'master' is problematized because the need for Biondello to be 'charmed'

suggests that he will not be convinced by their '*exchange* [of] *clothes*'. Biondello will only

'wait on' Tranio, therefore, and consider him 'master' because Lucentio will 'charm' him to

not speak to the contrary. And whilst this could be understood to mean that Biondello has

'seen' them before, with Lucentio as 'master', and that it is only those who 'have not yet […]

seen' them 'in any house' who do not need to be 'first' charmed, I would argue, in fact, that

this indicates that something other than their '*clothes*' allows Biondello to perceive a

difference between Tranio and Lucentio. Biondello has knowledge of who or what they are

which is beyond their '*clothes*'. Moreover, that Lucentio intends to 'charm him first to keep

his tongue' means that Biondello's 'tongue' could, potentially, prevent them from convincing

others that Tranio is 'master' and Lucentio is 'man'. Biondello's silence is also essential for this '*exchange*' to work, and this means that it is not solely their '*clothes*' which even for those who have not yet 'seen [them] in any house' constitutes them as either 'man 'or 'master'. Thus, because Biondello needs to 'keep his tongue', it may be understood that their '*exchange* [of] *clothes*' does not truly allow Tranio to be 'master' in Lucentio's 'stead'. Indeed, in the following passage I read that even after Tranio and Lucentio '*exchange clothes*', which of them is 'man' and which is 'master' is not entirely clear:

> TRANIO
> So had you need.
> In brief, sir, sith it your pleasure is,
> And I am tied to be obedient –
> For so your father charged me at our parting:
> 'Be serviceable to my son', quoth he,
> Although I think 'twas in another sense –
> I am content to be Lucentio,
> Because so well I love Lucentio.
> > *They exchange clothes.*
> LUCENTIO
> Tranio, be so, because Lucentio loves,
> And let me be a slave, t'achieve that maid
> Whose sudden sight hath thralled my wounded eye. (1.1.207-17)

Although the narration states '*They exchange clothes*', then, Tranio nonetheless continues to be 'tied to be obedient' to Lucentio and is only 'master' instead of Lucentio because it is the latter's 'pleasure'. Lucentio is at this stage, therefore, still 'master' of Tranio. Tranio is acting in this way because it is 'your [Lucentio's] pleasure', yet Tranio is obedient because Lucentio's father told him to be, or at least told him to be serviceable to his son. If this suggests a limit to the shift in identity, Tranio also states that he thinks that was in another sense. What the father 'charge[s]' is not straightforward, not a simple limit on the fluctuations of identity, but instead is repeats the division of identity. Or, rather, that the charge is

contained by something else, a sense that is strangely independent from it. And this is framed by Tranio's own thinking. Thus, even the notion of a sense other than Tranio's, of an authority that is being neglected, is compromised, as that authority is constructed as such through Tranio's narration.

iii)   'Come, come, you're mocking me'

At this point, it is helpful, perhaps, for me to make clear again that my thesis is working towards to a reading of *Othello*, and specifically the problematisation of identity read within the play. My interest there is with the excess that I read to be necessary to this problematisation of identity. The play is celebrated for the collapsing of identity it stages, but, in my reading, something is always held outside such collapse. What needs to be in place and unremarked for identity to be thoroughly questioned? The reading of *The Taming of the Shrew* above introduces something of this dynamic. How might a detailed reading problematise the notion of a generalised problematisation of identity?

The notion of a collapsing of identity, or a general notion of such a collapse, brings with it certain problems. There is, perhaps, a danger in understanding my argument in Chapter 2 only to be that Fitter runs into difficulty in maintaining a clear opposition between stage and page in a play that resists either an easy collapse or separation of difference, because this might miss the 'central' antagonism of *The Taming of the Shrew*: it is a play about gendered difference and collapse. The introduction of 'scare quotes' here is problematic, of course. What would it mean to suggest that gender is central? Is there then an absolute structure to this text? And is what is central specifically to 'gender difference and collapse' in this precise formulation? But what would it mean to read gender only as an instance of something else, something that is thus more truly central, such as antagonism of difference or collapse in general? As will be discussed in Chapter 4, it is this question that is of interest to Alan Sinfield in his cautionary reading of deconstructive approaches to *Othello*.

For now, I will simply state that the deconstructive move I can be read to be offering here
should not be 'formalised', extended in an easy way (easy because it celebrates shifts in
identity). My reading requires a reading that is ongoing, caught up on irresolvable shifts,
engaging these points of resistance that are caught up in such an irresolvable operation.

Which is to say that I recognise a danger in a reading that would substitute, without
qualification, Tranio playing Lucentio for Katherina playing Katherina. We should caution
against the return of the same: as well as death-drive, this can be read in terms of stability, of
a comforting, sense-making structure. It is with this in mind that I now turn to a reading of
gender within the play, its shifts, and, specifically, to the narration of Katherina:

> PETRUCHIO
> Katherine, I charge thee, tell these headstrong women
> What duty they do owe their lords and husbands.
> WIDOW
> Come, come, you're mocking. We will have no telling.
> PETRUCHIO
> Come on, I say, and first begin with her.
> WIDOW
> She shall not.
> PERTUCHIO
> I say she shall. And first begin with her.
> KATHERINA
> Fie, fie, unknit that threatening unkind brow,
> And dart not scornful glances from those eyes
> To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor.
> It blots thy beauty as frosts do bite the meads,
> Confounds thy fame as whirlwinds shake fair buds,
> And in no sense is meet or amiable.   (5.2.129-140)

For Petruchio, Katherina is not one of "these headstrong women", but differs from them in
the knowledge she shares with him of "[w]hat duty they do owe their lords and husbands".
Knowledge which the "headstrong women" do not have and therefore require her to 'tell'

them about. I read a further distinction, however, between the way in which Katherina is directly addressed both as "Katherine" and "thee", as opposed to being referred to and grouped together as "these […] women" are. In his address to Katherina, therefore, Petruchio can be understood to perceive her as an individual and separate subject, whereas Bianca and the Widow are constituted as indistinguishable, both in their lack of knowledge and because they are both referred to as "headstrong women". Yet despite this appeal to Katherina's subjecthood and her independence from 'these headstrong women", the fact that Petruchio "charge[s]" her to "tell" and because she subsequently does so, she is equally as obligated to her husband as he claims Bianca and the Widow are to theirs. The difference, then, is that she is not a "headstrong" woman, but one who does as she is "charge[d]", and this, for Petruchio, is because she already knows her "duty" and does not need "telling".

In the opening of Katherina's speech, however, the subjecthood of "these headstrong women" is further problematized. Although Petruchio tells Katherina to "first begin with her", which indicates that here the Widow is separable from Bianca in that she is independently "her", at this stage the Widow is addressed neither by name, nor by a pronoun such as "thee" as previously Katherina is by Petruchio. Indeed, "unknit that threatening unkind brow" can be understood as a beginning in which "her" is absent because of this relative lack of direct address. This absence can thus be read as constitutive of 'the Widow', that she is present in Katherina's speech precisely because there is an absence of 'her' (or 'the Widow'). Yet in another sense, "unknit that threatening unkind brow" may also be construed not as an absence, but precisely as a beginning "with her". The Widow, in this respect, *is* "unknit that threatening unkind brow" and is thus constituted merely as that which can "unknit" or by an action which has not yet taken place. In both these readings, therefore, Katherina's speech can only be understood to "begin with her" because of Petruchio's direction. I thus read Katherina to repeat Petruchio's construction of the Widow because the

absence of "her" in Katherina's speech indicates that she does not share the subjecthood which he perceives his wife to have, and cannot, therefore, be addressed in the same way she is.

To think a little more about the limits of subjecthood, we might turn again to the construction of The Widow. For example, if the Widow is to be understood as that which is to "unknit", then "that […] brow" is not 'her', rather it is separate from her in that she can "unknit" it, but it is also specific to her because of this. I read the word "that" to point explicitly to the brow appealing to its physical presence away from Katherina. Yet Katherina's reference to "that […] brow" can also be understood as distinct from the "that" to which she refers. In her appeal to the presence of "that […] brow", therefore, Katherina produces it as that which cannot be secured as it is necessarily divided by her reference to it. In addition to this distinction between the Widow and "that […] brow", I also read "unkind" and "threatening" not as a claim to "her" but to "that […] brow" because of its need to be "unknit". What is limited to "that […] brow", however, can also be understood as that which is in excess of it: "threatening" and "unkind" are additional to the brow which is itself additional to the Widow. And since there is nothing here to which "threatening" and "unkind" is explicitly directed, I read also that the brow does not necessarily need anything outside itself to be a threat or unkind to – this is simply what it is. Because the Widow is able to "unknit" the brow, however, there is a sense that the brow is not fixed as one thing because it can, under the control of the Widow, be changed. Yet whether "unknit" or not, the brow remains a brow. This change, then, pertains to the brow's excess, only its additional status as not "unknit" can be altered. Consequently, the excess, "threatening" and "unkind" can be understood as also adjustable, these are not permanent qualities of the brow, but can be controlled by the Widow in her ability to "unknit" the brow. However, what this means is that the brow, for Katherina, is always potentially "unkind" and "threatening". Her ability to

adjust her brow to an "unknit" state means that she is also able to do the reverse. Even when

"unknit", therefore, the Widow's brow never ceases to be a potential threat and in

"unknit[ting]" the brow, she can be understood to only conceal this.

The not 'unknit' brow and its status as "unkind" and "threatening", then, appeal to the

adjustable physicality of the Widow, to her physical appearance or that which is necessarily

visible to Katherina. Thus, for Katherina, it is also the Widow's claimed visuality that

produces the brow as potentially "unkind" and "threatening". Ironically, however, the

Widow's own sight is worried in the subsequent "dart not scornful glances from those eyes".

Here, the "glances" are merely the objects which are "dart[ed]". She can neither look, nor

indeed "glance" because her only action is to "dart". For Katherina, the purpose of the

"dart[ing]" is "[t]o wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor". Prior to the "dart[ed]" "glances",

therefore, I read an intention not to see, but to "wound". Since the direction of her "glances"

is not available as they are only darted "[t]o wound" him and not *at* him, the Widow can be

understood to see nothing, there is and absence here of what even *might* be seen. Indeed, it

may be read that her "scornful glances" are intended to "wound" Hortensio without her

seeing him, that it is his potential ability to also see her "dart […] scornful glances" which,

for Katherina, is how the Widow intends "[t]o wound" him. And since Katherina, who does

claim to see the "glances", is not wounded by them, I would argue that this intention to

"wound" is specific to the Widow's relationship with Hortensio, that because he is "thy lord,

thy king, thy governor", he is the only one who *could* be wounded by them. The glances are,

then, "dart[ed]" away "from" her but do not necessarily "wound" anyone as here there is only

intention, and no direction. Thus, in addition to Katherina's claim of an intention to not see,

the Widow is, in fact, unable to do so because the "glances" continually escape her – she

necessarily ceases to have any connection with them after she "dart[s]" them "from those

eyes". In Katherina's claims to the visibility of the Widow, then, the Widow's looking is

repeatedly problematized, not least because Katherina tells her to "dart not scornful glances", but because in this I read also that the Widow neither intends to see, nor is she able to do so. The Widow can thus be understood to lack vision in Katherina's construction of her, but by the same claims is ironically constituted also as that which is to be looked at. Indeed, I read in the subsequent "[i]t blots thy beauty", a further appeal to the Widow as visual.

Beauty, here, both belongs and is additional to her because it is "thy beauty". It is also something seen because it is blotted by the visibly not "unknit" brow and "scornful glances". And since what is also seen, and hence "blots" her beauty, is "unkind", "threatening" and "scornful", I read that these also conflict with beauty. Thus, for Katherina, it is not beautiful for "unkind", "threatening" and "scornful" to be seen. Despite the blot, however, her beauty can be understood as constant, it does not cease to *be* even when blotted. The blot is merely an addition to her beauty, a visible obstruction to its visibility. Another separation of the body and beauty can be read in the claim that beauty is blotted by what the Widow does with "*that* […] brow" and "*those* eyes"[45] which are not, then, hers. In this sense, whilst the individual parts of the body can be read as under the Widow's control, they are not hers in the same way that her beauty is. She does not have ownership of the body but needs to use the control she has over it to ensure that her beauty is always visible. For Katherina, therefore, beauty is prior to the vision of it, it is always there even when it cannot be seen, and because it belongs to the Widow, only she is responsible for ensuring that it is always seen by others.

The "unkind threatening brow" and darting of "scornful glances" not only "blots" the Widow's beauty, however, it also "[c]onfounds thy fame". In this, I read that as with beauty, the fame belongs to the Widow and is troubled by what she does with the body. Yet unlike beauty, fame is not of the body in that it can be understood as neither physical nor visible/

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[45] My italics.

but as a linguistic construction of her produced by others' speech about or claims to knowledge of her. The Widow's fame, therefore, is always that which is both separate from and inaccessible to her because it is constituted by a perspective which is not her own. However, the claim that her fame is problematized by the body indicates a connection between the physical and the language of her fame. Although her fame can be understood as distinct from her body, its existence is dependent on what is seen. For Katherina, therefore, the Widow's fame is subsequent to her body, it is language which refers to something which already exists. Because of this connection, then, it is the Widow's actions and what she does or does not allow to be seen which determines whether or not her fame is confounded.

Since Katherina claims that the Widow has control over the way in which the body is seen, I also read that, like her beauty, she is responsible for confounding her fame. Despite the fact that she can never be anything other than the subject of her fame and can never see herself from the perspective of another, she is responsible for that which others say or think about her and has to regulate her physical actions in order to prevent her fame from being confounded. What I read here, then, are claims about what the Widow should or should not allow to be seen or spoken by others, that there are certain things that she should either physically conceal or reveal. In this sense, the sight and speech of others, their perspective of her, is fixed by what she does because, for Katherina, the Widow's beauty and fame are not about the interpretation of others as others will always see and then say exactly what the Widow shows them.

Indeed, Katherina claims this is 'in no sense is meet or amiable', which means that the Widow's actions are contrary to what is appropriate, that there is a particular, logical way in which she should behave. In the following quotation, however, these claims are shifted from statements related specifically to the Widow, to claims about women in general:

A woman moved is like a fountain troubled,
Muddy, ill-seeming, thick, bereft of beauty;

> And while it is so, none so dry or thirsty
>
> Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it.   (5.2.141-44)

In one sense, '[a] woman moved' can be read here as a direct claim to the Widow's 'inappropriate' display of a 'threatening unkind brow' and the darting of 'scornful glances'. As I argued earlier, 'threatening' and 'unkind' are always there, but can be either concealed or not by the Widow's brow. Thus the knitting of the brow and its subsequent revelation of 'threatening' and 'unkind' is, for Katherina, a physical 'movement', and a not 'moved woman', therefore, is one who does not reveal as the Widow does, but hides the truth of 'threatening' and 'unkind' by remaining still. Yet because this is '[a] woman moved', there is also a sense that this is not a claim which is exclusive to the Widow, but one which concerns all women, and specifically *because* they are women.

In '[a] woman moved is like a fountain troubled, / Muddy, ill-seeming, thick bereft of beauty', I read a further claim to the visible physicality of women, that what can be seen when a woman is 'moved' is 'like' a visibly 'troubled' fountain. The 'troubled' fountain, then, is not seen here, but there is something, for Katherina, which is the same in the two appearances, the 'troubled' fountain is visible in the visibility of a 'moved' woman. What is seen, then, is not limited to what is physically there *to* be seen. Yet Katherina's association of '[a] woman moved' and a 'fountain troubled' is problematized because I also read differences between the two. The 'fountain troubled' is 'ill-seeming […], bereft of beauty', which means that it is not necessarily 'ill', but is only seen to be so. The illness is thus constituted by its visibility. Unlike the Widow, furthermore, the fountain has no beauty, yet can be understood to mourn the loss of beauty which was once there. Beauty is now absent because the fountain is 'troubled', it cannot be seen, but its loss and absence remains visible. Consequently, the 'troubled fountain' is also *not* 'like' a 'woman moved' as the Widow's 'unkind' and 'threatening' brow can be read to be there even when it cannot be seen, and her beauty is never absent but is merely obstructed when she is 'moved'. Yet because of Katherina's

comparison, there is a sense that the visibility of the 'moved' woman also problematizes the truth, that what can be *seen* is also not necessarily what she *is*.

The claim 'while it is so, none so dry and thirsty / Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it' indicates that the 'troubled fountain' is only temporarily so. Therefore, 'like' the knitted brow, 'troubled' is not a fixed state. Women and fountains can thus both be read as unstable and changing. Despite their ability to be 'moved' or 'troubled', however, what remains constant, as with the Widow's brow and beauty, is 'woman' and 'fountain'. I read here, therefore, another appeal to essential and fixed entities which can, on the surface, appear visibly different, but which also cannot change. And because these changes are only temporary, there is also a sense that what is essential and fixed is also that which will always return to reveal itself. When a fountain is no longer 'troubled', it will only be a fountain. Because of Katherina's claim that a 'woman moved is like a fountain troubled', I read that the statement 'none so dry and thirsty / Will deign to sip or touch one drop of it' also applies to a 'woman moved'. This means that not only would others not dare to drink from a 'troubled' fountain, but also that in spite of a need or desire to do so, they would not 'sip or touch' a 'moved woman' either.

The Widow's 'blot[ted]' beauty, therefore, is also an obstruction to physical contact, a hindrance to the fulfilment of the desires of others. The woman's body thus becomes an object of desire or, 'like' the fountain, the location of gratification and consumption. And since it is Katherina's contention that the Widow should 'unknit' her brow and not blot her beauty, I read that it is inappropriate for the Widow to prevent others from satisfying their needs, that she should always be available in this respect. Yet her availability is always dependent on what is *seen* to be. She is constantly woman and always has beauty, but when temporarily 'moved', this is not visible. The desires of others, therefore, can be understood - in Katherina's narration (a narration, however, that one should remember is always framed by

another) - as visual. No matter how 'dry and thirsty' one is, if beauty cannot be seen, 'like' the water of the fountain which appears to be 'muddy', 'thick' and undrinkable, the woman's body is unable to satisfy the needs of others.

How does such a construction of body relate to the subsequent part of Katherina's final speech?

iv)   Excess

In my reading, Katherina's final speech has something to say about both performance and structure. This, I would argue, impacts upon the kind of reading Fitter forwards. For Fitter, performance is a matter of dynamics or context, but these aspects are seemingly untouched by the play's reading of performance. Performance is strangely unframed, for Fitter. To follow performance as it is constructed in *The Taming of the Shrew* would require a questioning of the kind of certainties Fitter's arguments requires. Fitter also divides up the play, understanding it to have certain parts, certain dynamics, with these differentiated yet making up the whole of a recoverable experience of theatre. But what notion of part do we read in *The Taming of the Shrew*? In Katherina's final speech, identity, the body, the self are constituted through antagonisms and deferrals, excesses and necessary differences. What would it mean to foreclose such constructions in a reading of part and structure? If one is free to neglect the text in favour of some idea of recreated real experience, then of course the constructions in the speech do not have to be read. But what if one were to read through critical claims with *The Taming of the Shew*? *The Taming* as critic…

There is an additional challenge thrown up by my extended close reading of *The Taming of the Shew*, however: what would it mean to read the problematisation of identity in the final scene to be the same as that between Tranio and Lucentio? Where, in the construction of Tranio, is the discourse on brows, or unknitting? Where fountains and where threat? As tentatively introduced above, it is Alan Sinfield's contention that there is a danger

in a textual approach to Shakespeare that applies something like a universal corrosive to the text: the break-down of identity cannot be framed by any specific identity, as all is indeed corroded. Without such a frame, the problematisation of Lucentio's identity is not any different to that of Katherina or the Widow. There is no difference in the impossibility of female identity and that of male identity. In the following chapter, I will introduce this New Historical argument in more detail, before engaging one of the most celebrated recent New Historical interventions into *Othello* Studies: Jerry Brotton's reading of the divisions of Othello's textual identity in terms of divisions within sixteenth-century English understandings of the Islamic world.

Chapter 4 – Text/Context

i)   Alan Sinfield and the limits of character

In his promotion of a cultural materialist approach to Shakespeare's plays in 'When Is a Character Not a Character? Desdemona, Olivia, Lady Macbeth, and Subjectivity', Alan Sinfield considers the difficulties with character criticism in various traditions of literary analysis. His contention is that despite recent attempts to move away from 'character' as a mode of analysis, it nonetheless remains dominant in Shakespeare studies. The problem with these types of readings, Sinfield argues, is that they necessarily slip from claims about the individual to the universal – obscuring the social, historical and political processes that inform these plays, and thus missing the opportunity to 'observe the operations of power and envisage alternative scope for human lives'.[46] Yet Sinfield does not seek to discount 'character' completely either, indeed he claims that the danger at the other extreme is that 'poststructuralist theory threatens to make character an altogether inappropriate category of analysis.'[47] For Sinfield, then, in between these two extremes, it is possible to work through ideas of 'character' and 'subjectivity' without resorting to essentialist character criticism. Sinfield suggests that this is because Shakespeare's plays are 'written so as to produce, in some degree, what are interpreted (by those possessing the appropriate decoding knowledges) as character effects'[48] which do need to be addressed. These 'character effects', however, can only be interpreted as such if they are grounded in the ideological structures of the cultures that we know and live in so that they are plausible to those who encounter them.[49] It is this

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[46] Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 78.

[47] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 58.

[48] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 58.

[49] The critique can be seen as part of a delayed Anglo-American reaction to Jacques Derrida's 'Signature Event Context' in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977), pp. 1 – 24. For a recent critique of this ongoing debate, see Neil Cocks, '"Oh, that's Francisco's private joke" […]': Atlas Shrugged, the Gold standard, and Utopia' in Neil Cocks (ed.), *Questioning Ayn Rand: Subjectivity, Political economy, and the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2022), pp. 207 – 235.

necessity for plausibility that leads to Sinfield's critique of Desdemona, Olivia and Lady Macbeth. For Sinfield, these three female characters are in fact not 'characters' because the constructions of their subjectivities lack continuity and are therefore implausible.

Sinfield not only claims to destabilise traditional, essentialist understandings of 'character', then, but also to 'redefine' the concept.[50] Drawing on the ideas of William Nigel Dodd, Sinfield considers how continuous, plausible 'character effects' might be produced. To think about what might be problematic in this argument, I will begin with the following:

> A persuasive account of how dramatis personae may be written so as to produce character effects is offered by William Nigel Dodd. He holds that in such dramatic texts 'the audience demands and receives "information about" something conventionally agreed to be "happening", coincidently with this information, here and now on the stage'.[51]

For Sinfield, dramatis personae are 'written' and they can be 'written' in different ways because the 'persuasive account' 'offered' by Dodd is specifically of 'how' they 'may be written in order to produce character effects'. Sinfield's contention here, then, is that dramatis personae do not always necessarily 'produce character effects,' but when they do it is because of 'how' they are 'written' – which means that what is 'written' is here divided – and that Dodd is able to 'persuasive[ly] account' for 'how' this occurs. I also read an appeal to the chronology of the 'produc[tion]' of 'character effects' whereby dramatis personae are first 'written' and then go on to 'produce character effects', and that this is always a retrospective account, after 'character effects have been produced'. Yet since the production of 'character effects' is a consequence of 'how' they are written, and because dramatis personae are 'written so as to produce' them, 'character effects' are also prior to their own production. In other words, 'character effects' are, for Sinfield, already present in both the aim to specifically write dramatis personae that go on to 'produce character effects,' and in the

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[50] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 62.
[51] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 59

particular way in which they have been 'written'. It follows that writing of the dramatis personae in Dodd's account involves, for Sinfield, an intention to later 'produce character effects' which informs and shapes 'how' they are written. In spite of this, however, 'character effects' are not 'written' per se, but rather are separate from and in excess of both the act of 'writ[ing]' and of the 'written' dramatis personae. This is not only because 'character effects' are constituted both as the intention preceding the 'written' and as that which influences 'how' dramatis personae are 'written' rather than being 'written' themselves, but also because they are separately and subsequently 'produce[d]' by the 'written' dramatis personae. Indeed, for Sinfield, dramatis personae and 'character effects' are distinct: dramatis personae are not 'character[s]' and neither do they intrinsically possess 'character effects', but they 'may' have the ability to 'produce character effects', or the 'effects' of 'character', due to 'how' they have been 'written'. Unlike the 'written' dramatis personae, then, which can be understood here as the genuine object despite the claim that they can be 'written' in diverse ways, 'character effects' differ in that they are the manufactured impression of 'character'. What is 'produce[d]' by the 'written' is the simulation of something which is distinctly not there.

For Dodd, however, the production of 'character effects' requires something more than for dramatis personae to have been 'written' in a particular way. According to Sinfield, Dodd 'holds that in such dramatic texts "the audience demands and receives 'information about' something conventionally agreed to be 'happening'"'. Here, 'such dramatic texts' can be understood as those which consist of dramatis personae which are 'written so as to produce character effects'. The audience that Dodd constructs is not, despite this, an entity independent of the 'dramatic texts,' but rather the 'dramatic texts' additionally *contain* the audience and the "'information about' something conventionally agreed to be 'happening'" that the "audience demands and receives" because all of these are stated here to be located '*in*

such dramatic texts.'[52] And although the audience that Dodd claims is 'in such dramatic texts' can be understood to have a degree of control over the "'information' it "receives" because it "receives" what it "demands", the demand for "'information'" and the "'information'" "receive[d]" from 'such dramatic texts' is "receive[d]" by an audience that is confined within the same 'dramatic texts'. '[S]uch dramatic texts' thus contain supplements which, like 'character effects,' are in excess of the 'written' or 'text[ual] dramatis personae, but at the same time, all are stated to be contained within the 'text[ual]', because of 'how' the dramatis personae have been 'written' with the intention to 'produce character effects'.

The "'information'" that "the audience demands and receives" is, for Dodd, "'about" something conventionally agreed to be "'happening"', coincidently with this information, here and now on the stage."' The shift here from claims about the 'written' dramatic personae and 'dramatic texts', to the claim that "something" is "happening' […] here and now on the stage" means that the "'happening"' and both its time and location is also for Dodd, '*in* such dramatic texts'.[53] In this sense, the 'happening' is also 'text[ual]'. Yet what is "'happening"' is also stated to be 'something conventionally agreed to be happening' and, as such, is already known and obvious because the 'conventionally agreed' is, in my reading, not necessarily an agreement made by the audience 'in' the dramatic text, in the 'here and now', but is instead an agreement which has been established prior to the "'happening"'. According to Dodd, then, what is "'happening"' is taking place "here and now on the stage", but what is "'happening"' has already been "conventionally agreed to be 'happening"'. The audience, however, does not have access to what is 'happening' as such, because it only "demands and receives 'information about"' what is "'happening"'. What is "'happening"' is thus split, both in the sense that there is a "'happening"' that is taking place "here and now on the stage"

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[52] My italics.
[53] My italics.

which is separate from the '"information about"' it that "the audience demands and receives", and also in the sense that the '"happening"' is detached from the audience which Dodd states is also contained 'in' the same dramatic text. Indeed, for Dodd, it is merely "coincidenc[e]" that the '"information about"' what is "conventionally agreed to be 'happening'" that the audience "receive[s]" is the same as that which is '"happening"' "here and now on the stage". I am emphasising this point because, as introduced above, Sinfield's argument is one premised on history, a history that is of a particular moment, its rhythms and structures discrete. It is not my interest to argue for some kind of de-contextualised Shakespeare, but, instead, within these formulations, I read a challenge to history, a problematisation of sequence. New historicism, reacting against what it understands to be the challenge of deconstruction, aims to offer a non-reductive account of history, one in which materialism is not the solution to the textual encounter, but, instead, that which complicates, opens up difficulties, produces additional circulations and repetitions of energy and power. At one stage, however, within Sinfield's formulations – and, in my opinion, Sinfield is the most exacting of New Historicists – I am reading a division or tension that is not taken up, even though it might be understood as part of what, with due hesitation, I will call the main scene: the event is split, divided, we might say, as much as any 'character' in *Othello*. Deferred. The scene is here and not here. It is wholly in the writing and somewhere else entirely. It is tied to the circulating social energies of a society, but bound also with a different history, a history outside the history of such energies, or the history of the performance as it happens before us.

To further read through this challenge, I turn now to Sinfield's contention that further to Dodd's claim that '"the audience demands and receives 'information about' something conventionally agreed to be 'happening'"', what this exchange of '"information"' really is, is the 'transmitting [of] messages' from the 'actors' to the 'audience':

The actors are, in fact, transmitting messages to the audience, but they are scripted to behave as if they are transmitting messages to each other. By thus

appearing to recognize and respond to each other, they "simulate the conditions of social exchange" and hence appear as *selves*.[54]

In Sinfield's reading, the 'messages' are moved, unchanged, from the 'actors' to a passive, homogenous 'audience'. The 'actors' here are not the dramatis personae and are therefore separate from the 'dramatic texts', but they are 'scripted to behave' in a certain way. Hence the 'written' dramatis personae, 'dramatic texts' and indeed 'script[s]' dictate the 'behav[iour]' of the 'actors'. This 'scripted' 'behav[iour]', however, is a deception, since the 'actors' are 'scripted to behave *as if* they are transmitting messages to each other'[55] whereas what they are really doing is 'transmitting messages to the audience'. What the 'actors' are 'scripted' to do, then, is 'behave as if' they are doing something that they 'in fact' are not, they 'behave' in a way that disguises what they are really doing. It is worth noting here that this idea of behaviour 'in fact' will return again when we discuss the classic readings of Othello by Eliot and Empson. In other words, this notion of what occurs on stage is only problematically to be read as the general condition of theatre, as it finds repetition in the specific Modernist or New Critical readings of character. To return to Sinfield's argument: what the actors are really doing – 'transmitting messages to the audience' – is, for Sinfield, knowable, but is not perceived by the 'audience' that ostensibly 'receives' the 'messages' the 'actors' are 'transmitting,' since the 'actors' are 'appearing to recognise and respond to each other'. Thus 'behav[iour]' is here a 'scripted', visible deception, it is what 'appear[s]' to the 'audience' but is not the reality; and, as with the previous claims about 'character effects', can therefore be understood as a visual simulation of what is not there, the 'actors' 'appear as *selves*', but are not '*selves*'.

According to Dodd, then, '[C]haracter effects,' are 'produce[d]' through the simulation of '"the conditions of social exchange"' which enables the 'actors' to 'appear as

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[54] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 59.
[55] My italics.

selves'. For the 'actors' to 'appear as *selves*' there must be the 'appear[ance]' of interaction between them, they must 'appear' 'to recognize and respond to each other'. Yet, for Dodd, in 'appearing to recognize and respond to each other' the 'actors' are not simulating '"social exchange"' itself, but it is '"the conditions of social exchange"' that are simulated. Here, to 'recognize and respond to each other' is what the '"conditions of social exchange"' *are* and whilst these '"conditions"' are other to '"social exchange"', they also facilitate '"social exchange"'. Without the '"conditions of social exchange"', there would necessarily be no '"social exchange"' and no '*selves*'. Sinfield continues:

> For such exchange permits the dramatis persona "not only to reify himself (or
> other) as *sender/receiver*, but also to attribute *intentionality/non-intentionality* to
> self or other, thus creating the prerequisites for the representation of *decision*
> which, as Peter Szondi has shown, is the nucleus of intersubjective drama." [56]

The '"social exchange"' of which only the '"conditions"' are '"simulate[d]"' by the 'actors' '"appearing to recognize and respond to each other"' is here what 'permits the dramatis persona […] "to reify himself (or other) as *sender/receiver*"'. Another distinction is constructed here between the 'actors' and the 'written' dramatis personae; for if it is the case that the simulation of the '"conditions of social exchange"' is what is required for the 'actors' to 'appear as *selves*,' then the dramatis personae do not 'appear as *selves*', because as I read above, the dramatis personae are constituents of the 'dramatic texts' which the 'audience' does not have access to. Yet – and to return here again to the strangeness of pre-history - in this claim to reification, the dramatis persona already is a 'self', a '"himself"', which can then '"reify"' a separate '"himself as"' something other to '"himself"'. The distinction here, therefore, is that in the previous claim to 'appear[ance]' the 'actors' 'appear as *selves*', but here the dramatis personae *are* 'selves' that are both divided and active. The dramatis persona is, for Dodd, active in the reification of '"himself (or other) as *sender/receiver*"' and thus

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[56] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 59.

'such exchange' also 'permits' him to '"reify"' another 'self' as '"*sender/receiver*"', but in both cases this is a 'self' which does not 'appear' to the 'audience' and is therefore hidden. Further, the reification of '"himself (or other) as *sender/receiver*"' also constitutes the dramatic persona '"(or other)"' as already '"*sender/receiver*"' which is therefore another split of the dramatis persona '"(or other)"' that is then '"reified"' under the '"permi[ssion]"' of '"such exchange"'.

These ideas are further complicated because, for Dodd, 'such exchange' additionally 'permits the dramatis persona' '"to attribute *intentionality/non-intentionality* to self or other"'. And I read this claim to '"*intentionality/non-intentionality*"' along with the previous '"*sender/receiver*"' as two opposing words that are simultaneously separated and joined together by the slash, that either it is the case that both of these are jointly '"attributed to self or other"' or that only one or the other is. In this claim, however, '"*intentionality/non-intentionality*"' is not something already present that is then 'reified' as in the previous claim, but is rather '"attributed to self or other"'. Thus, in this sense, '"*intentionality/non-intentionality*"' is constituted here as previously something that the '"self or other"' of the dramatis persona does not have. Yet since '"*intentionality/non-intentionality*"' is '"attributed to self or other"' by the dramatis persona, then this is a 'self'- attribution, a giving of '"*intentionality/non-intentionality*"' by the dramatis persona to '"himself"', but this, for Dodd, can only occur under the 'perm[ission]' of the simulation of '"the conditions of social exchange"'. With all of this in place, then, '"the prerequisites for the representation of *decision*"' are '"creat[ed]"' by 'such exchange'. In this, however, '"the representation of *decision*"' is not necessarily achieved in so far as all that is '"creat[ed]"' by both the '"reif[ication]"' of '"himself (or other) as *sender/receiver*"' and the attribution of '"*intentionality/non-intentionality* to self or other"' are the '"prerequisites"' for this to occur. These '"prerequisites"', which I read, therefore, as separate from, and other to the

"'simulat[ion]' of 'the conditions of social exchange" which "'permits'" the conditions that 'create' these "'prerequisites'", are also the "'prerequisites'" for a "'representation'". I read this claim as related to Dodd's previous contention that the "'actors'" are "'appearing to recognize and respond to each other'" in that the "'representation of *decision*'" is something other to "'*decision*'": it, too, is a 'simulation', an 'appearance', a '*re*-presentation'. Yet according to Dodd, it is this derivative "'representation of *decision*'" that "'Peter Szondi has shown, is the nucleus of intersubjective drama'". The "'representation of *decision*'", then, of which the "'prerequisites'" are "'permit[ted]'" by the *simulation* of "'the conditions of social exchange'", is something that, for Dodd, can be "'shown'" and, what is more, "'shown'" to be something distinct from itself. In other words, the "'representation of *decision*'" is also, in this "'show[ing]'", the "'nucleus of intersubjective drama'", and this means that not only is it two distinct entities, but also that it can be seen to be located elsewhere from "'the conditions of social exchange'" that the "'actors'" are claimed to "'simulate'".

For Sinfield, 'the conditions of social exchange' are essential for the 'audience' to collectively recognise what is happening on the stage as 'intersubjective drama' since 'the conditions of social exchange' are aligned with the social structures that the 'audience' already knows. Yet the difficulty with this is that in my reading above, the "'social exchange'" that is seemingly being secured is repeatedly deferred and never actually 'appears'. Sinfield expands on these ideas in the following:

> My contention is that some Shakespearean dramatis personae are written so as to suggest, not just an intermittent, gestural, and problematic subjectivity, but a continuous or developing interiority or consciousness; and that we should seek a way of talking about this that does not slide back into character criticism or essentialist humanism. This way of talking would not suppose that performances attempted an unbroken illusionistic frame; or that this continuous interiority is self-constituted and independent of the discursive practices of the culture; or that it manifests an essential unity. The key features in this redefined conception of

character are two: an impression of subjectivity, interiority, or consciousness, and a sense that these maintain a sufficient continuity or development through the scenes of the play. The impression of subjectivity I have explored already, using William Dodd's model of how dialogue simulates the conditions of social exchange. A sense of continuity or development is crucial also: it involves the indicators of subjectivity appearing sufficiently connected for the audience to regard the character as a single person throughout.[57]

Sinfield's argument, then, is that Desdemona, Olivia and Lady Macbeth are three examples of where a lack of continuous interiority occasions a collapse of 'character'. Continuity, Sinfield argues, is important because 'it involves the indicators of subjectivity appearing sufficiently connected for the audience to regard the character as a single person throughout'. Yet this appeal to 'subjectivity' raises a number of questions. What precisely, for example, is the minimum amount of 'continuity or development' that is required for 'the character' to achieve 'sufficien[cy]' and how is this measured? If the contention is that the 'indicators of subjectivity appearing sufficiently connected' is what the 'audience' needs to 'regard the character as a single person throughout', then does that not mean that 'subjectivity' does not need to be 'sufficiently connected', but has instead only to 'appear' to be so? Does the 'audience' in this claim, then, collectively see exactly the same 'appear[ance]' of the 'indicators of subjectivity' and collectively know, or gauge them to be 'sufficiently connected' in order to then collectively 'regard the character as a single person'? To think about these questions further, I want to now consider Sinfield's more specific engagements with Desdemona and Lady Macbeth:

Personal consistency, like stability of language and referent, is a myth. Nevertheless, Macbeth's subjectivity appears adequately continuous, unlike that of Lady Macbeth; though many ideological complexities may be observed in his representation, he does not have to fall silent (Othello and Desdemona form a similar contrast). Insofar as the concept of character is active in the play, Macbeth

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[57] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 62.

is compatible with it. But insofar as this concept is suggested in respect of Lady Macbeth, as it is initially, it cannot be carried through. In fact, she is sacrificed to keep Macbeth's story going. Correspondingly, he appears to have the fuller subjectivity (he is scripted so as to produce more of what our cultures customarily interpret as psychological density). [58]

For Sinfield, '[p]ersonal consistency' is a 'myth', but despite this, the distinction between the 'subjectivity' of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is not that Lady Macbeth has none, but rather that hers does not 'appear' to be 'adequately continuous' as Macbeth's does. In this, the 'contin[unity]' of 'subjectivity is, as with '[p]ersonal consistency', not even really there because what is again required is for it to only 'appear' to be so. What this also means, however, is that for Sinfield, a certain, but unspecified, minimum threshold of 'adequacy' needs to be, and in Macbeth's case is, met, but that Lady Macbeth is unable to accomplish this. The 'appear[ance]' of continuous 'subjectivity' of one individual, then, can be measured against both the continuity of the 'subjectivity' of others (as Sinfield does here with his claim to the 'contrast' between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth), and against itself, but neither of these measures account for whether or not it is 'adequately continuous'.

According to Sinfield, 'many ideological complexities may be observed in' the 'representation' of Macbeth, but these 'ideological complexities' do not impede the 'adequacy' of the continuity of his 'subjectivity' because 'he does not have to fall silent'. It is not, then, 'ideological complexities', but the *imposed* act of 'fall[ing] silent' that, for Sinfield, determines a break in the continuity of 'subjectivity' and thus a collapse of character. Lady Macbeth and, by implication, Desdemona can thus both be understood, at some point, to *have* to 'fall silent' where they were not silent 'initially', their 'sile[nce]' is forced upon them. And it is due to this that, unlike Macbeth (or Othello), Lady Macbeth and Desdemona are, for Sinfield, constituted as '[in]compatible with' the 'concept of character' that is 'active in the

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[58] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 64.

play'. I read another distinction in this, however, because the contention here is that with regard to Macbeth, the 'concept of character' is separately from him 'active in the play' and he can then be measured against this 'activ[ity]' to ascertain whether he is or is not 'compatible with it'. In the case of Lady Macbeth, however, 'this concept [of character] is suggested in respect of' her, but this is only 'initially' because it 'cannot be carried through'. It may be understood, therefore, that for Sinfield it is not only Lady Macbeth's enforced silence that disrupts the continuity of her 'subjectivity', but also that there is an external force that is not 'active in the play' which is unable to 'carry through' the suggestion of the 'concept of character' in respect of her. Indeed, the subsequent claim that 'she is sacrificed to keep Macbeth's story going' can be read to support this reading of the external since here it is neither Macbeth, his 'story', nor Lady Macbeth who are stated to have enacted this 'sacrifice', so that it must be a deliberate (for it is done '*to* keep Macbeth's story going')[59] act of that which is necessarily *outside* of them.

Macbeth's 'story', according to this claim, could not have kept 'going' without Lady Macbeth being 'sacrificed', so she can thus be construed as an obstruction to the continuation of his 'story'. But what this also means is that for Sinfield, Lady Macbeth is separate from Macbeth's 'story' in that not only does she not need to be there for it 'keep' 'going', but also because this 'story' belongs to Macbeth and not to her. Despite this, however, Lady Macbeth's 'silence', her '[in]adequately continuous' 'subjectivity', is in addition and prior to the 'sacrifice' of her, this 'sacrifice', her removal from Macbeth's story is not the reason why her subjectivity is not as 'full' as Macbeth's. The difference, for Sinfield, is that Macbeth is 'is scripted so as to produce more of what our cultures customarily interpret as psychological density'. I read in this claim a connection with my earlier reading of Sinfield's argument about the 'scripted' behaviour of the actors on the stage. Here, however, Macbeth is

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[59] My italics.

'scripted' not to behave in a certain way, but in order 'to produce more' (so not all) 'of what our cultures customarily' (so not always) 'interpret as psychological density' which means, once again, that it is not 'psychological density' that is produced, but instead something that can or might be 'interpret[ed]' as such. The difference between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, or Othello and Desdemona is that for Sinfield these women are 'scripted' differently from the men. These women 'produce' less 'of what our cultures customarily interpret as psychological density' than the men do, because that is how they are 'scripted' to be.

ii)   'this bold show of courtesy'

Before turning to a reading of the various female non-characters that Sinfield introduces, I would like to introduce a brief reading to indicate some of the implications of what I have read thus far – extension, externality, performance, psychology, deferral, script – for a reading of a given Shakespeare text. At this juncture, I deliberately move away from what are seemingly the clear cases of character – Iago, Othello, Macbeth – and, in keeping with my reading of certain sections of *The Taming of the Shrew* in the previous chapter – focus upon a moment that might seem peripheral. Here is Cassio briefly encountering Emilia in *Othello*'s second act:

> **CASSIO**   See for the news.
>
> *Exit Second Gentleman*
>
> Good ensign, you are welcome. Welcome, mistress!
>
>   *He kisses Emilia*
>
> Let it not gall your patience, good Iago,
>
> That I extend my manners. 'Tis my breeding
>
> That gives me this bold show of courtesy. [60]

Cassio's kiss can only be understood as such because of the external claim that he 'kisses Emilia'. According to Cassio, however, this is not merely a 'kiss', but is both an 'exten[sion]'

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[60] William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Othello* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2.1.95-9. All further references to this text are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

of his 'manners' and a 'bold show of courtesy'. Whilst his statement – 'Let it not gall your patience, good Iago' – suggests that there is something inappropriate about Cassio kissing Iago's wife, there is also a sense here that this inappropriateness and potential to offend Iago is not generated by Cassio's lack of 'manners' or 'courtesy', but rather because of his capacity to 'extend' or 'show' them. Cassio's 'manners' are multiple in that they are a collection of plural 'manners'. Yet his act of kissing Emilia is not a singular, distinguishable unit within these multiple 'manners' as all of them are 'extend[ed]' at the same moment. Cassio's 'manners' are thus bound together in their constitution as a group of 'manners' which collectively and concurrently account for a single act. However, the claim that they can be 'extend[ed]' also indicates that this unified collection of 'manners' is not a solid, stable entity, but is, in fact, one which can grow and expand, changing in both its original size and location. Thus, even when the 'manners' are 'exten[ed]', they do not separate from Cassio's 'manners', but continue to be part of this unit. Because it is this 'exten[sion]' of Cassio's 'manners' which has the potential to 'gall [Iago's] patience', then, I would argue that, for Cassio, 'manners' are that which ought to be contained within a certain boundary: to remain appropriate, they must not exceed a specific, determinable limit or move beyond their original location.

I also read a sense here that the location of this boundary is connected with Cassio. The 'manners' all belong to him since they are 'my manners' and because of this, they are also produced as specific to him or different from the 'manners' of others. The 'exten[sion]', or the kiss, can thus be understood as an 'exten[sion]' of his 'manners' away from himself, but all the while remaining part of, or belonging to him. What could 'gall [Iago's] patience', therefore, is Cassio's 'exten[sion]' of that which belongs to him towards Emilia rather than maintaining himself as the boundary of his own 'manners'.

Further, that the kiss has the potential to 'gall [Iago's] patience' also indicates Cassio's perception of a tension between Iago's 'patience' (what, from Cassio's perspective, Iago considers appropriate and is able or willing to tolerate) and Cassio's decision to 'extend' his 'manners' in spite of the fact that he is aware of this tension. Cassio excuses his actions by claiming ''Tis my breeding / That gives me this bold show of courtesy'. Thus the tension Cassio perceives can be connected with Cassio's discernment of difference between his and Iago's 'breeding'. I read, as with 'my manners', a claim to ownership in 'my breeding' – Cassio's breeding is separate from him but is also specifically owned by him. However, Cassio's 'breeding' can also be understood as both a reference to his education, or upbringing, and to a notion of family and inheritance. This separate and excess 'breeding', therefore, is simultaneously that which is innate and that which is acquired, and, in both respects, Cassio's 'breeding' is both specific to him and different from Iago's. Indeed, because Cassio needs to explain this to Iago, Cassio's 'breeding' is constituted as unfamiliar to Iago, at least from the perspective of Cassio.

The 'bold show of courtesy' which Cassio's 'breeding gives' him is, once again, something which may be construed as inappropriate because it has the potential to 'gall [Iago's] patience'. And as with the 'exten[sion]' of his 'manners', I read that it is not the 'courtesy' per se which is problematic, but 'this bold show' of it. Courtesy is constituted here as something which can be either 'show[n]' or not 'show[n]'. Not only is this a claim to the visibility of 'courtesy', or in other words, that when it is shown it can also potentially be seen, but the word 'show' also indicates an intention for it to be seen, a deliberate display of it amongst a potential audience. Cassio's reference to it as a 'bold show', furthermore, augments the deliberate nature of the 'show' because 'bold' produces it as daring or audacious and thus as an act which is consciously inappropriate.

Even though Cassio is claimed to kiss Emilia, however, the responsibility of the 'bold show' is somewhat removed from Cassio in the claim that his 'breeding […] gives' him 'this bold show of courtesy' since his 'breeding' can be read as separate from him, and it is his 'breeding' which enables him to do so. Yet as I read previously, his 'breeding' is also constituted as specific to him, as both intrinsic and learned. Thus what Cassio's 'breeding' gives him cannot be 'given' to anyone else. What this means is that Iago does not only differ from Cassio because he does not share his 'breeding', but this difference also produces a lack in Iago as Cassio's 'breeding' affords him privileges that Iago cannot attain since he does not share Cassio's 'breeding'. In this sense, Cassio's 'breeding' allows him to knowingly act inappropriately, which means that, for Cassio, his actions are not, in fact, inappropriate at all. They are only so in Cassio's perception of Iago's perspective and the fact that he tells Iago to 'Let it not gall your patience' suggests that despite the notion that the kiss could 'gall [Iago's] patience', Iago is able to prevent it from doing so with the knowledge that Cassio's 'breeding' allows him this privilege.

What, I am interested in asking, are the limits of character here? And what, too, are the limits of a 'script', the limits of, say, 'breeding'? Even within this admittedly tentative reading, there is a problematisation of performance, of 'show' – of the relationship between performance and the actual, and a problematisation too of externality (the narration outside character, for example, but also the seemingly non-staged identity that is, for all that, caught up always with the extending 'show' that opposes it). The text, in my reading, has something to say about the terms of Sinfield's frame. But to explore this in more detail, we need now to turn once more to what I am calling 'the main scene' of Sinfield's argument: the inconsistent, supportive, and peripheral nature of female (non)character.

iii)   Gendered patterns and plausibility

Sinfield discusses the construction of women and the plausibility of Lady Macbeth and Desdemona 'in our cultures' in the following terms:

> [V]irtually the same pattern is presumed for Lady Macbeth as it is for Desdemona: initial bold behavior is succeeded eventually by a reversion to "feminine" passivity, with an episode of nagging the husband in between. Again, because this sequence seems plausible in our cultures, it seems satisfactory as character analysis, but in fact it is a story about the supposed nature of women. Strength and determination in women, it is believed, can be developed only at a cost, and their eventual failure is at once inevitable, natural, a punishment, and a warning. Lady Macbeth is a fantasy arrangement of elements that are taken to typify the acceptable and unacceptable faces of woman, and the relations between them. And this is what strikes critics as realistic.[61]

Rather than being 'initially' not 'silent', here Lady Macbeth and Desdemona are claimed to display 'initial bold behavior' which is then 'succeeded eventually by a reversion to "feminine" passivity'. Yet there is also a sense in which the 'initial bold behavior' and, indeed, the 'episode of nagging the husband in between' can be understood as 'episode[s]' of not being 'silent' and that the eventual 'reversion to "feminine passivity"' is for Sinfield, also the point at which Lady Macbeth and Desdemona *have* 'to fall silent' so that the 'reversion can equally be read as compelled. This claim to 'reversion' also indicates that '"feminine passivity"' is a state that is prior to the 'initial bold behavior', which can therefore be read to problematise Sinfield's appeal to 'sequence'. What is 'initial', in this claim, is 'succeeded' by a 'reversion' to something that was there before. For Sinfield, however, this 'sequence seems plausible in our cultures' and it is because of this that 'it seems satisfactory as character analysis'. In this, I read that there are, for Sinfield, 'sequence[s]' which are 'plausible in our cultures', but that since this 'sequence' only 'seems' to be 'plausible', that is why it also only

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[61] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 56.

'seems satisfactory as character analysis'. Yet my question here is how far can this appeal to a 'seem[ingly] plausible in our cultures' 'sequence' be read as different from Sinfield's claim I read above that 'Macbeth's subjectivity appears adequately continuous'?[62] For both these ideas can be understood to be constituted through an appeal to what 'seems' or 'appears' to be, to that which is not really there. For Sinfield, however, Macbeth has the 'fuller subjectivity', but with regard to Desdemona and Lady Macbeth, what 'seems' to be is 'in fact a story of the supposed nature of women'. Here, 'this sequence' is also a 'story' but this 'story' is not about the 'true' 'nature of women' but 'the supposed nature of women' which is that '[s]trength and determination in women' 'can be developed only at a cost, and their eventual failure is at once inevitable, natural, a punishment and a warning'. This, of course, for Sinfield, is again, not the truth, but rather is something that is 'believed' to be the case. But if this 'story' is 'supposed' and 'believed' as Sinfield contends, then why is it different from that which 'our cultures customarily interpret'? For Sinfield, 'what strikes critics as realistic' is based on a 'fantasy arrangement of elements' which are therefore not 'realistic', but 'fantas[tical]'. What 'strikes critics as realistic', it would seem, is therefore not the same as what Sinfield perceives, and claims that the 'audience' does also, as 'plausible'.

Sinfield continues:

> Desdemona has no character of her own; she is a convenience in the story of Othello, Iago, and Venice. Othello asks, "Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write 'whore' upon?" (4.2.73-74). The writing is done by Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke, and Lodovico—they take Desdemona as a blank page for the versions of her that they want. She is written into a script that is organized through the perceptions and needs of male dominance in heterosexuality and patriarchal relations.[63]

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[62] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 64.
[63] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 54.

For Sinfield, then, Desdemona, rather than having a 'character of her own', is a 'convenience in the story of Othello, Iago and Venice'. I read this claim to position her status as 'a convenience in the story of Othello, Iago and Venice' as incompatible with having 'character': she cannot have 'a character of her own' *because* 'she is a convenience in the story of Othello, Iago, and Venice'. Here, however, 'character' is constituted as a distinct possession that, in this case, is absent. But what this also means is that in this claim there is, for Sinfield, a Desdemona who can be known to not possess a 'character of her own'. In other words, this appeal to the absence (but also the potential ownership) of 'her own' 'character', constitutes Desdemona as divided because there does exist an 'her own' that is separate from, but that also belongs to Desdemona, an 'her own' which 'has no character'. Since here 'she is a convenience in the story of Othello, Iago and Venice', however, Desdemona is also constituted as being contained within a single 'story' that has multiple owners. And these owners of the 'story' are other to Desdemona in that 'the story' is 'of' 'Othello, Iago and Venice'. Thus, in this claim to ownership, 'Othello, Iago and Venice' can be understood to be outside and separate from the 'story' that belongs to them, so that whether or not 'Othello, Iago' and indeed, 'Venice' do all have 'character[s] of their own', their 'story' is distinct from them and from their 'character[s]'. For Sinfield, it is inside this jointly-owned 'story' which is not 'of' Desdemona, then, that Desdemona is 'a convenience'. I read in this claim to 'convenience' an idea that Desdemona functions 'in the story' for the benefit of something other to herself. Yet it can also be argued that Desdemona is further divided in this claim. The Desdemona who 'has no character of her own' can be read as separate from the Desdemona 'in the story' because in her position '*in* the story of Othello, Iago and Venice'[64] she is only constituted as 'a convenience' and not as Desdemona. There is a sense, here, therefore, in which Desdemona can be understood also as *not* a 'convenience'.

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[64] My italics.

Just as 'Othello, Iago and Venice' can be located separately from the interior of their 'story', so too can the Desdemona who 'has no character'.

iv)   'Was this fair paper…'

The answer to Othello's question, '"Was this fair paper, this most goodly book, / Made to write "whore" upon?"', is for Sinfield, that the 'writing is done by Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke and Lodovico'. This question of Othello's, and its relation to the constitution of Desdemona, is an issue that I will return to shortly. My interest for now, however, is in Sinfield's contention that "this fair paper", or what Sinfield understands as primarily a 'blank page', does indeed have 'writing' on it. In the claim that the 'writing is done by Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke and Lodovico', I read an idea of continuation; this is not necessarily a past, complete 'writing' but can also be understood as an ongoing process. I also read another appeal to incompleteness in Sinfield's assertion that 'they take Desdemona as a blank page', for here the act of 'tak[ing]' can again be construed as present and continuous. Desdemona can thus be understood as a single object which is perpetually there to be 'take[n]' by others. Yet in this claim to 'tak[ing]', it is not that they 'take' Desdemona, but they 'take Desdemona *as* a blank page'[65] which is therefore also something that she is not, at least to the extent that she is only constituted 'as a blank page' through this act of 'tak[ing]'. Each of 'Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke and Lodovico', then, can only 'take' Desdemona into their possession 'as' something other than Desdemona, but they can, and do, also *all* 'take' her in this way which means that she, 'as a [single] blank page', is repeatedly split by way of each of these multiple 'tak[ings]'. This is further complicated, however, because for Sinfield the purpose of this 'tak[ing]' is 'for the versions of her that they want'. In their act of 'tak[ing] Desdemona as a blank page', then, it is not that 'Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke and Lodovico' create or fashion

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[65] My italics.

different 'versions' of Desdemona with her 'as a blank page', but rather that, for Sinfield, there are already multiple 'versions of her' which, belong to 'her' and can be accessed through the 'tak[ing]' of 'her as a blank page'. They are able to select the 'versions of her that they want', therefore, but their options are always and only limited to prior 'versions of her'.

For Sinfield, then, 'the writing is done', but any appeal to there being writing "upon" "this fair paper" is problematised by his contention also that 'they take Desdemona as a blank page for the versions of her that they want'. I read a further tension, however, in the assertion that '[s]he is written into a script that is organized through the perceptions and needs of male dominance in heterosexuality and patriarchal relations' because here the contention is not that the 'writing' is "upon" anything, but rather that Desdemona is 'written'. In this claim, Desdemona is 'written into a script', so that as well as being 'in the story' she is also 'in' a 'script'. The difference here, however, is that this containment is a 'written' or textual containment. Unlike 'the story', therefore, that is not Desdemona's and in which she is contained as 'a convenience', it could be understood that Desdemona is also textually part of that 'script' because 'she is written into a script' that is also 'written'. Yet the difficulty with this reading is that there is again, in this formulation, a 'she' and a 'script' that exist prior to and separately from her being 'written' into it. Desdemona, in this claim, is once more constituted by divisions, as being both located and locatable in different places and in different capacities. I also read the claim that the 'script' Desdemona is 'written into' is 'organized through the perceptions and needs of male dominance in heterosexuality and patriarchal relations' as connected to the men that Sinfield states do the 'writing' and 'take Desdemona as a blank page'. Yet neither is this 'script' necessarily 'written' by 'Othello, Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio, the Duke and Lodovico', nor, indeed, is it necessarily 'written' by men, but rather, for Sinfield, is 'organised through the perceptions and needs of male dominance' which are contained within 'heterosexuality and patriarchal relations'. This, as

with my previous readings of 'the versions of [Desdemona] that they want', therefore, is not a claim to direct male control or 'dominance' of Desdemona either 'as a blank page' or as 'written', but rather it is that the 'script' Desdemona is 'written into' is constructed in such a way that it is controlled by the 'perceptions and needs' that belong to 'male dominance' which is itself contained within the limits of 'heterosexuality and patriarchal relations'.

Sinfield goes on to assert that because of the type of 'script' that Desdemona is 'written into', and because she is only 'a convenience in the story of Othello, Iago and Venice', Desdemona is not a character since a 'character is not a character when she or he is needed to shore up a patriarchal representation'.[66] The repetition of 'character' in this claim, however, can be read to worry the very notion of what, for Sinfield a 'character' is. Here, a 'character' can also be 'not a character', but that means that even 'when she or he is needed to shore up a patriarchal representation', there still remains a 'character' who is at the same time 'not a character'. I read this repetition in identity construction also in the question from *Othello* that Sinfield cites in the above excerpt. What does it mean that Desdemona is claimed to be "*this* fair paper, *this* most goodly book"?[67] To think about these issues further, I now want to turn briefly to that episode in *Othello*, beginning, in fact, with a question that Desdemona puts to Othello. In response to Othello stating 'O thou black weed, / Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet / That the senses ache at thee, would thou hadst ne'er / been born!' (4.2.67-70), Desdemona asks:

DESDEMONA
  Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?
OTHELLO
  Was this fair paper, this most goodly book
  Made to write 'whore' upon?—What committed?
  'Committed'! O thou public commoner,

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[66] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 54.
[67] My italics.

> I should make very forges of my cheeks,
>
> That would to cinders burn up modesty,
>
> Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed? (4.2.70-76)

In one sense, Desdemona's question 'Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?' can be read as a claim to 'ignoran[ce]', that she does not know 'what' 'sin' Othello is accusing her of. But she does know it to be an 'ignorant sin' and that it is she who has 'committed' it. Because it is the 'sin' that is 'ignorant', however, the 'ignoran[ce]', in this sense, is not hers but is that of the 'sin' – it is an 'ignorant sin'. Here, ignorance does not, therefore, concern psychology or a lack of knowledge per se, but is instead about acts which are or are not 'ignorant' since, by inference, there are other 'sin[s]' which are not 'ignorant'. For Desdemona, this 'ignorant sin' is an act which is complete and bound in the past because she has 'committed' it even though she does not know 'what' it is. Yet at the same time, there is also a sense in which the 'ignorant sin' act is ongoing because in the formulation 'have I committed' the 'I' is in the present, split from the past act of 'committed'. The present 'I' is the same 'I' that has 'committed' the 'ignorant sin' and thus the act is in the past, but it carries through to the present nonetheless. As such, Desdemona's question is a questioning of that which is both complete and ongoing, known and unknown.

For Othello, Desdemona is 'this fair paper, this most goodly book', with the repetition of the singular 'this' appealing to both a singular and a split identity. She is thus constructed as a single, yet divided, 'this' object which requires repetition for its constitution, but which also requires discrete qualifiers. She is also constituted as both part and whole of the same entity as she is claimed to be both 'fair paper' and 'most goodly book'. Here, the 'paper' part is independently 'fair' but collectively, as 'book', the whole is 'most goodly. '[T]his fair paper', which I read as a claim to blankness, whiteness and purity, therefore, has to be both repeated and bound together in order for there to be 'this most goodly book'. According to Othello's claims, 'this fair paper, this most goodly book' has been 'Made' as such. Whilst

'this fair paper, this most goodly book' is in the present, therefore, it was also created in the past by something in excess of Desdemona. And since what Othello questions here is the reason for her making, whether or not she was 'Made to write "whore" upon?', Desdemona's existence not only has a purpose, but there is also a past, creative authority which continues to dictate this purpose. For Othello, there is an intention in excess of Desdemona which is known to be an intention, but what this intention is, or is not cannot be known unequivocally.

'[T]his fair paper, this most goodly book' then, has an 'upon', a surface on which text can be added subsequent to and separate from its making. It can exist, therefore, both with and without having "'whore'" written 'upon' it. If it is the case that the purpose of her making was for "'whore'" to be written 'upon' her, then this is predestined, it is part of her constitution and is therefore inevitable. Thus, although there is a sense that the writing of "'whore'" would corrupt or at least modify it, 'this fair paper, this most goodly book' can also be read to remain as it is. For Othello, there has been no change because Desdemona presently still is 'this fair paper, this most goodly book'. Here, Othello's frustration is that he requires certainty and therefore for Desdemona to have a stable, singular identity, but finds instead that not only is the writing of "'whore'" inevitable, meaning that she was always thus and that the responsibility lies with that which "[m]ade" her, but also that she continues to be 'this fair paper, this most goodly book' whether or not "'whore'" has been written 'upon' her.

Othello's claims to the acts 'Made' and 'write' produce Desdemona as passive in that she neither makes nor writes 'upon' herself, despite her admission that it is she who has 'committed' the 'ignorant sin'. In this, the constitution of her requires an excess, the actions of something other than herself. But moreover, this means that the making and writing is independent of her act of 'commit[ing]' the 'ignorant sin'. Indeed, Othello's claims indicate that it is through language, rather than acts, that Desdemona can be constituted as "'whore'". This is not only because of the not-certain inscription of the word "'whore" upon' her, but

also because of his subsequent assertion that 'I should make very forges of my cheeks, / That would to cinders burn up modesty, / Did I but speak thy deeds'. Here, the consequences are not attributable solely to her 'deeds', but to his 'speak[ing]'of them.

Rather than answering Desdemona's question, then, by informing her of 'what' specific 'ignorant sin' she has 'committed', Othello partially repeats her question in the statement 'What committed? / "Committed!"'. In this repetition, neither her appeal to 'ignorant sin' not the 'I' which asks this question has been acknowledged. Her question has been reduced to two words and then even further still to only one, meaning that for Othello, only her questioning of 'What committed?' is important. This further augments the tension I read between acts and language because although here Othello declines to state specifically what it is that he believes Desdemona has done due to the potential consequences to his own 'cheeks' of his doing so, her contention that she in unaware of what the act is, her inability to specify that which she claims not to know, is dismissed by Othello in his partial repetition of her question.

I read another tension in Othello's labelling of Desdemona as a 'public commoner' and his claim that he cannot or will not 'speak' her 'deeds'. In this, her 'deeds' are not private, something only Othello knows but also that which he will not utter, but rather are 'public' and as such, known by and accessible to others. It is not, then, that it is merely the fact that she is a 'public commoner' that is known by others, but also what her specific 'deeds' are. Her 'deeds' are public but are nonetheless unknown to her. That he calls her a 'public commoner' can, furthermore, be read as related to the notion that, for Othello, she is a '"whore"' (because isn't that what it means?) and his later claim that she is an '[i]mpudent strumpet!' (4.2.80). Yet in labelling her thus, Othello remains vague about Desdemona's actions, he is able to label her, but still refuses to state specifically what the 'ignorant sin' Desdemona has ostensibly "committed" is. Sinfield continues:

> There is no stability in textuality, as poststructuralist critics have been able to show. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is some kind of free play of discourse or textuality; nor is it a reason for dispensing altogether with character—as I have redefined it. To the contrary, it is one of the major discursive formulations active in these texts, and it needs to be addressed if we are to explore how subjectivities are constituted. For in our cultures, character is a major category through which we conceptualize. Jacqueline Rose writes of "that myth of linguistic cohesion and sexual identity which we must live by." There is no essential woman or man, but there are ideas of women and men and their consciousnesses and these appear in representations.[68]

Although Sinfield seems to concur here with the position of poststructuralist critics in that there is 'no stability in textuality', he nonetheless perceives there to be limits of 'discourse and textuality' rather than 'some kind of free play'. He also argues, however, that there being 'no stability in textuality' is not a 'reason for dispensing altogether with character', meaning that he perceives poststructuralism to be in direct opposition to any form of character analysis. Yet despite my readings of Sinfield's 'redefinition' of character drawing attention to a number of problems in his ideas of 'story', 'performance' and the collectively known, I do agree with Sinfield's contention that the subject, rather than being rejected, needs to be addressed.

v)   'It stops me here…'

In what follows, then, I consider closely the constitution of difference between Othello and Desdemona in the play:

> **OTHELLO**
> It gives me wonder great as my content
> To see you here before me. O my soul's joy,
> If after every tempest come such calms,
> May the winds blow till they have wakened death,

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[68] Sinfield, *Faultlines*, p. 63.

> And let the labouring barque climb hills of seas
> Olympus-high, and duck again as low
> As hell's from heaven.   (2.1.178-84)

For the 'me', 'wonder' and 'content' are equivalent in their shared status as 'great'. Not only is 'great' relatable to more than one thing, therefore, but because it also remains 'great' regardless of what it is related to, 'great' is also unchanging and fixed. However, since 'great' can also be read here as necessarily connected either with 'wonder' or 'content', it is also the case that 'great' is as much dependent for its constitution on 'wonder' and 'content' as 'wonder' and 'content' depend upon 'great' for theirs. 'Great' is not separable from these concepts, it cannot stand alone and, in fact, it is precisely because it is constituted by these different things that the greatness of 'wonder' can be understood as different from the greatness of 'content'. In addition to my reading of 'wonder' and 'content' as both constitutive of, and constituted by 'great', however, I also read that 'wonder great as my content' is what 'wonder' *is*. In this sense, 'wonder' is not merely 'great', but it is also constituted by the greatness of the 'content / To see'. Yet whilst 'wonder' and 'content' can thus be read as inseparable because the greatness of one is required in order to define the other, there is also a tension between the two. The claim to 'content' indicates satisfaction and fulfilment; but the certainty and completeness of this 'content' is problematized by the additional claim to equally 'great' 'wonder'. Indeed, the 'wonder' 'It gives' produces the sight of the 'you' as that which 'gives' surprise and doubt, meaning that the 'me' doubts both that which he claims to 'see' and the 'content' which is constituted by it. The 'content', therefore, is at once that which constitutes 'wonder', and also that which is undermined by it.

The equivalence of 'wonder' and 'content' is further worried because of their distinction in terms of their relationship with the 'me'. On the one hand, 'wonder' is 'give[n]' to the 'me' by 'It'. Prior to the 'giv[ing]', therefore, 'wonder' is an object located elsewhere and apart from the 'me'; and it is also movable since it is transferred from 'It' to 'me'. The

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'me' is thus passive in the claim 'It gives me', doing nothing in order to gain possession of 'wonder'. 'Content', on the other hand, already belongs to the 'me' because it is 'my content' and is consequently more familiar and specific to the 'me' than 'wonder' is. However, because 'my content' (as suggested above) is bound up with the claim 'To see you here before me', 'content' cannot occur without the sight of the 'you'. Even though 'content' belongs to the 'me', therefore, something external to the 'me' is essential for the 'me' to have 'my content'.

Although 'To see you' can be understood as that which is required for 'my content', 'To see you' is not, in my reading, necessarily a claim to the act of 'seeing'. Rather, 'To see you' functions here as a qualifier of 'my content' and, as such, is not secured as an *act* that the 'me' unequivocally *does*. The stability of this appeal to sight is further troubled because 'To see you' is also referred to as 'It', and, what is more, as an 'It' that 'gives'. Hence, firstly, 'To see you' is split as it is both 'It' *and* 'To see you'. Secondly, however, neither 'To see you' nor 'It' is an action per se, but 'It' is an object which itself acts because 'It gives'. Yet, at the same time, because 'It gives' – and is therefore active – there is a sense in which 'To see you' must also be active, or enacted, for 'It' to 'give'. The 'me' does not claim absolutely to 'see' then, but only *implies* sight through an appeal to the *activity* of part of the sight.

Further to my reading of a secured sight as problematized in 'my content/To see you', the 'me' also asserts that what qualifies and constitutes 'my content' is 'To see' the 'you' at a physical location (namely, 'here') in relation to, or indeed 'before' the 'me'. And whilst this could be read simply to suggest that the proximity of the 'you here before me' is needed for the 'me' to 'see' the 'you', or that it is the combination of both this closeness and the sight of the 'you' which constitutes 'my content', the implication of these readings is that the 'me' is somehow separate from and outside that which may or may not be seen. In 'my content / To see you here before me', however, I would argue that the 'me' is not entirely separate. The

word 'here', for instance, worries any notion of distance between the 'you' and the 'me' because 'here' can be understood as the location of the 'me' as much as it is that of the 'you'. In other words, 'here' does not point away from the 'me', but rather, it positions the 'you' in a place shared by the 'me': they are both 'here'. That the sight is constituted by 'you here before me', moreover, situates the 'me' within the construction of what the 'me' professes 'To see'. The 'me' is thus caught up in the very claim to sight that 'gives' the 'me' 'wonder' and constitutes 'my content'.

Since the 'me' is located within 'To see you here before me', this 'me' in the claim to sight must necessarily also be part of the 'It' in 'It gives me wonder'. The 'me' is thus also split: there is a 'me' which can potentially see itself and which, as a result of this, can also 'give' 'wonder' to a different 'me'. Likewise, a division of the 'me' can be read in 'Oh my soul's joy' because there is a separation of 'me' and 'my soul'. This claim to 'joy' is not that of the 'me', then, but belongs to the 'soul' which in turn belongs to the 'me'. In this, 'joy' is twice removed from the 'me' in that 'soul' is supplementary to 'me' and 'joy' is supplementary to the 'soul'. If there is pleasure in 'see[ing]' the 'you', therefore, it is neither directly experienced by the 'me' to which 'It gives […] wonder', nor by the 'me' within the sight that 'gives […] wonder'.

The 'me', then, claims neither to unequivocally 'see' the 'you', nor to directly have the 'joy' which is ostensibly a consequence of the sight of the 'you'. However, despite this, in 'If after every tempest come such calms, / May the winds blow till they have wakened death' I read that there is still a desire on the part of the 'me' for this to be repeated. Because they are 'such calms', the 'calms' that the 'me' calls upon 'winds' that 'blow till they have wakened death' to attain are grouped together in their sameness as multiple 'calms', but they are also comparable with other 'such calms' which both do and do not form part of this particular group. The 'such calms' which come after 'every tempest' are thus like, but not the

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same as, other 'such calms', whilst at the same time, they are *all* known to the 'me' as 'calms'. In this, 'calms' are not a singular, isolated occurrence, but subject to multiple repetitions, all different, yet all classified as 'calms'.

In my reading, however, it is unclear as to what, precisely, 'such calms' is related. If it is the case that 'such calms' are both known to, and have already been experienced by, the 'me' in order to make this comparison and to desire repetition of them, then it would seem that the previous claims to 'wonder', 'content', 'see[ing]' and 'joy' are either one or all known to the 'me' as 'calms'. Indeed, this uncertainty is augmented further by the fact that 'calms' are constituted here by their opposition to 'every tempest', meaning that what the 'me' desires is stillness and tranquillity – the converse of 'tempest[s]' – which is, by my reading, neither 'wonder', 'content', 'see[ing]' nor 'joy'. This difficulty in locating what the 'me' considers to be 'such calms' constitutes the desire of the 'me' as vague and unclear; yet what is clear here is that the 'me' desires repetition of the 'calms' which do not follow 'every tempest' by invoking the not-identical 'calms' that do.

In 'If after every tempest come such calms' then, there is a notion of distinct and opposing extremes because 'every tempest' is positioned in direct opposition to 'such calms'. And as with 'such calms', 'every tempest' is constituted here as a group. Unlike 'such calms', however, this group encompasses *all* tempests and does not, therefore, appeal to the existence of any 'tempest' or group of tempests outside this 'every tempest' group. The 'me' thus knows 'every tempest' and this claim to knowledge fixes the group 'every tempest' as a singular, complete, and homogenous entity which is in opposition to the group 'such calms' which (as I read previously) is constituted as vague and uncertain. The opposition between 'every tempest' and 'such calms' is consequently not just about the difference between 'tempest' and 'calms', but is also in their distinction in terms of knowledge and grouping, and of sameness and difference.

The extremity of 'every tempest', furthermore, is that which precedes 'such calms' because 'such calms' occur 'after'. This not only produces an idea of sequence, but can be read also as a claim to the limitations of these extremities in relation to time. 'Every tempest' has to cease at some point in order for there to be an 'after' and 'such calms'. Yet these ideas of sequence, limitation, and time are troubled here by the condition of the word 'If'. What comes 'after every tempest' is, for the 'me', not certain. Hence, the point of time at which 'every tempest' comes to an end, if indeed it does at all, is also that which is unknown. Whilst it would seem that the 'me' desires 'such calms' and is prepared to endure 'winds' that 'blow till they have wakened death' in order to achieve them then, it is only ever 'If' 'every' single 'tempest' is definitely followed by 'such calms' that the 'me' permits the 'winds' to 'blow'. Thus, by the 'me's own claims, it is not ever possible to fulfil this desire for 'such calms' because to do so requires a certainty that the 'me' simply does not have.

There is another appeal to the transience of 'every tempest' in 'May the winds blow till they have wakened death', because here the 'winds' cease when 'death' is 'wakened'. The 'waken[ing]' of 'death' however, is not that which comes 'after' the 'winds' (as what follows are 'such calms'), but is, in fact, a direct consequence of them. Yet because of the word 'May', I read that this is merely a request for, or a claim to the possibility of 'death' being 'wakened' by the 'winds'. These multiple 'winds' are, therefore, collectively responsible for the wakening of death' in so far as this is, for the 'me', what 'they' are able to do. Furthermore, it is not the 'winds' themselves which cease in this claim, but rather, it is their act of 'blow[ing]' that comes to an end. The 'winds' can thus be read to be constituted by their actions, they are only know as 'winds' because of their capacity to 'blow' and ability to waken 'death'. And because both their 'blow[ing]' and the cessation of it is prescribed by the 'me' in the claim 'May the winds blow till they have wakened death', it is not necessarily that the 'winds' do cease to blow once 'death' is 'wakened', but only that this is what is required

for the 'me' to achieve 'such calms'. This limitation of the 'winds' is therefore set by the 'me'.

That the 'winds' can waken 'death' also indicates that 'death', prior to the 'winds blow[ing]', is asleep. Since it can be altered, the status of 'death' as either asleep or awake is not fixed, and nor is 'death' autonomous because this alteration of its status is a consequence of a force other than itself. This appeal to limits can be read yet again in the statement 'And let the labouring barque climb hills of seas / Olympus-high, and duck again as low / As hell's from heaven'. Here, the opposing extremes are 'high' and 'low'; but since 'high' is 'Olympus-high' and 'low' is 'As hell's from heaven', then for the 'me', each has a limit which is only identifiable with reference to, or comparison with, something else. These extremes, that the 'me' would 'let' if it could only be known whether or not 'every tempest' is indeed followed by 'such calms', therefore, are not secure in and of themselves because they are only known by the 'me' through something which they are not. They are always located somewhere else. The text continues:

> As hell's from heaven. If it were now to die,
> 'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
> My soul hath her content so absolute
> That not another comfort like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate.
> DESDEMONA   The heavens forbid
> But that our loves and comforts should increase
> Even as our days do grow.
> OTHELLO   Amen to that, sweet powers!
> I cannot speak enough of this content:
> It stops me here, it is too much of joy.
> *They kiss*   (2.1.184-93)

I read 'If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy' as connected to the previous claim to 'my content', that in one sense, it can be understood that 'now' the 'me' has been

given 'wonder as great as my content', that he would 'be most happy' '[i]f it were now to die'. Yet I understand the repetition of 'now' in this formulation to problematise the appeal to the finality of death in this claim. In my reading, the two separate instances of 'now' constitute two separate and distinct moments, that is, one is a 'now' of death and the other a 'now' of 'happ[iness]'. Thus rather than it being that the 'me' would be 'most happy' 'to die' at the same 'now' moment, 'die' and 'happy' are here separated by time. This is further complicated, however, because the 'now' of death in this claim not only precedes the 'now' of 'happ[iness]' but is also a prerequisite for the 'now' of 'happi[ness]'. The 'me' will only be 'most happy' '[i]f' and after 'it were now to die'. '[H]app[iness]' for the 'me', therefore, will come because of and after death, but only if death occurs 'now'.

There is also a further complication of the previous claim to 'my content', which I read above as possession, because in the contention that '[m]y soul hath her content so absolute', 'content' is once removed from the 'me' in that here it belongs to '[m]y soul' which in turn belongs to the 'me'. This 'content' also differs from the previous claim because it is stated here to be 'absolute', which could be taken to mean that, for the 'me', '[m]y soul' could not be more 'content', that an 'absolute' limit has been reached. However, this idea of limit is worried by the very claim to 'absolute[ness]' for here 'content' is 'so absolute / That not another comfort like to this / Succeeds in unknown fate'. This 'absolute[ness]', is '*so* absolute'[69] and is thus constituted as that which can be measured, but which is also measured against something that has not yet happened. In other words, because for the 'me' 'content' is 'so absolute' that it might not be repeated indicates that it does indeed have the potential to be repeated. It is not an absolute and final limit of 'content[ment]', therefore, and even if 'it were now to die', this does not necessarily entail a secure conclusion.

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[69] My italics.

It would seem, then, that an argument can be made here that Othello needs to have 'absolute' limits and certainty in place because to live beyond this moment would threaten the permanence of this state of 'absolue[ness]' and 'content[ment]'. He would rather die than venture into an 'unknown fate'' – that which he cannot know, but also that which he cannot control because his 'fate' is inevitable. But in my reading these notions of certainty and permanence are problematised in Othello's claims about time and 'absolute[ness]'. Desdemona, on the other hand, can be understood to take the opposite view because rather than requiring limits, she contends that 'our loves and comforts should increase / Even as our days do grow'. Here, unlike Othello's seemingly specific and controlled 'now' claims, Desdemona calls for a ceaseless 'increase' of their 'loves and comforts'. Rather than choosing death to evade the 'unknown', she aligns this 'increase' with their 'grow[ing]' 'days', so that for Desdemona, love is not only about multiple 'days', but is also about a joint maturation and fruitfulness. For Desdemona, 'loves and comforts' are not singular, static and dead, but multiple, alive and 'grow[ing]'. There are further divergences here because in my understanding of Othello's claim to 'my content' earlier in this reading, Othello's 'content' is constituted by his 'seeing' her in relation to himself, so that 'now' that he 'sees' her, he needs nothing more from her than what he 'now' has. Conversely, there is no 'me' or 'I' in Desdemona's statement, but instead a repeated 'our' claim. Even when Othello 'sees' Desdemona, he 'sees' himself, but in this formulation, Desdemona only exists, for Desdemona, in this united and equal appeal to 'our'.

Othello's response: 'I cannot speak enough of this content: / It stops me here, it is too much of joy', then, can be read to reinforce these distinctions as here, again, his claims to 'I' and 'me' do not include Desdemona. He also further counters Desdemona's ideas of 'increase' and 'grow[th]' with additional appeals to limits which I also read in the claims 'I cannot speak enough' and '[i]t stops me here'. In these claims, the notion of 'content' shifts

from being constituted as a possession of either Othello or his 'soul', to both that which he alone 'speak[s]' of, and that which 'stops' him alone. However, this claim to speech can also be read to worry Othello's appeal to 'limits' for 'I cannot speak enough of this content' indicates that he is unable to do 'this content' justice with his speech. In other words, there is more that could be said. Whether there is a limit or not, Othello is unable to reach it because the 'content' of which he 'speak[s]' also 'stops me here'. And because for Othello, 'it is too much of joy', it would seem that 'joy' also has a limit, Othello's limit, but that this amount of joy is in excess of that limit. Othello, therefore, can be understood to neither achieve the limits of 'this content' with his speech, and neither is he able to contain the amount of superfluous 'joy' that is achieved by 'this content'.

vi)   *This Orient Isle*

To further engage some of the questions that attentive New-Historicist reading opens up, I turn now to what, in recent years, has been the most popular and celebrated intervention: Jerry Brotton's *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World*. This is an historical work which charts the complexities of Anglo-Islamic relations in the sixteenth century, but one that throughout is attentive to the way in which those relations are both represented in, but also constituted by, popular dramatic representations. Brotton's text culminates in an extended chapter about *Othello*. And rather than simplified versions of contextual history regarding *Othello* and Islam, which tend only to refer to the visit of the Moroccan ambassador, al-Annuri, to London in 1600, it charts a much more complicated and overdetermined construction rooted in the antagonisms within different Muslim communities and countries, and their relationship to popular English understanding. As I proceed, I want to highlight the real force of Brotton's careful analysis by introducing some of his readings of specific sections of *Othello* in order to draw out what I find most convincing about Brotton's arguments. Yet for each of his readings that draws out unexpected shifts in identity, I wish to

read out those other shifts that must remain unread. Ultimately, my argument is that Brotton's problematisation of a singular Muslim identity requires a stabilization of those identities which can never recognise the various frames that constitute them.

I begin, then, with Brotton's analysis of Othello's Act 1 Scene 3 response to accusations from Brabantio that he surely must have bewitched Desdemona into marrying him. Brotton argues:

> What is particularly striking about Othello's speech is his description of how he ended up in Venice. We assume that as a Moor he grows up in Morocco (or what Shakespeare calls 'Mauretania' later in the play), but his childhood is a blank. He claims to have been captured 'by the insolent foe', to have been sold into slavery and then to have experienced some form of 'redemption'. Intriguingly for the Elizabethans 'redemption' meant both 'delivered from sin' and 'freed from slavery': Othello is bought, set free and offered salvation through the sacrament of baptism to become the first Christian Moor on the Elizabethan stage. This would suggest that the 'insolent foe' is the Turk who captured and sold Othello as a galley slave before Christians rescued and converted him. What he does not say is if he was born a Muslim, or a pagan, like many Berbers in sixteenth-century Mauretania. Whatever the case, the audience is presented with a character who moves with suspicious ease from one religion to another. What is the probability, Shakespeare seems to ask, that having turned away from one religion, Othello might just as easily embrace another?[70]

For Brotton, the assumption can be made that Othello 'grows up in Morocco' because of his status 'as a Moor'. In this, identity is constituted as linked to both origins and location in that being a 'Moor' can lead to a conclusion about the place where Othello 'grows up'. I read a problematisation of this claim to location, however, in Brotton's assertion that it is either 'Morocco (or what Shakespeare calls "Mauretania" later in the play)' that 'we' can assume Othello 'grows up in'. This 'call[ing]' that is by Shakespeare and occurs 'later in the play',

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[70] Jerry Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 289.

indicates that what 'Morocco' is 'call[ed]', for Brotton, depends on both time and perspective, so that even this notion of what it is 'call[ed]' is here neither consistent nor secure. In one sense, then, Brotton's claim can be read to suggest that 'Morocco' and '"Mauretania"' are geographically the 'same' place, yet I would contend that the identity of 'Morocco' itself is split by his claim that it can be either one thing, *or* 'call[ed]' something that is not what it is. I read another appeal to Othello's origins in Brotton's contention that what Othello 'does not say is if he was born a Muslim, or a pagan, like many Berbers in sixteenth-century Mauretania'. In this claim, identity is related to birth in that Othello could have been either 'born a Muslim' or born 'a pagan'.[71] But these different identities are also, for Brotton, connected to another group identity, 'Berbers', which is also connected to both time and place again because of Brotton's claim that had Othello had been 'born' 'a pagan' then that would be 'like many Berbers in sixteenth-century Mauretania'. Othello, then, is not a 'Berber', because he is a 'Moor', but he can also be 'like many Berbers', but only in so far as he may have been 'born' a 'pagan'.

According to Brotton, Othello is a Moor who 'we assume […] grows up in Morocco' which can, in certain circumstances, also be 'call[ed] "Mauretania"'. He additionally *may* have been 'born a Muslim', but he also *may* have been 'born' 'a pagan' because he *may* be 'like many', so not all, 'Berbers in sixteenth-century Mauretania'. These uncertain splits and shifts, however, are complicated further still because Othello's 'claims to have been captured "by the insolent foe", to have been sold into slavery and then to have experienced some form of "redemption"' are read by Brotton to indicate that he is 'bought, set free and offered salvation through the sacrament of baptism to become the first Christian Moor on the Elizabethan stage'. Here, Othello's already uncertain 'religious' identity as either a 'Muslim,

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[71] This idea of the connection between birth and identity will be considered further with regard to gender in Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* in the final chapter of this thesis.

or a pagan' – that which he may or may not have been 'born as' – is also constituted as unfixed because it can be altered through the act of 'the sacrament of baptism'. What Othello 'become[s]' in this, however, is a 'Christian Moor', which might be read as a more definite or secure dual identity than the uncertain, multiple possible identities Othello is claimed to may have had before his 'redemption'. Yet the fixity of Othello's identification as a 'Christian Moor' can here be understood as worried by Brotton's claim that 'the audience is presented with a character who moves with suspicious ease from one religion to another' and that Shakespeare here seems to be questioning the likelihood 'that having turned away from one religion, Othello might just as easily embrace another'. Rather than securing Othello's identity, therefore, for Brotton, his 'salvation through the sacrament of baptism' perpetuates the uncertainties he claims to read in Othello's identity up until this point.

In Brotton's reading, then, Othello's identity is bound up with various shifting and divided ideas such as place, time, birth, groups, religion, and nationality, producing an equally shifting and uncertain 'Othello'. Yet much of this argument rests upon readings of Othello's claims that are in line with Brotton's contention that 'for the Elizabethans "redemption" meant both "delivered from sin" and "freed from slavery"', and his inference from this that 'the "insolent foe" is the Turk who captured and sold Othello as a galley slave before Christians rescued and converted him'. Here, 'redemption' has two distinct meanings, but these meanings are also specific to the Elizabethans, an identity which does not, in Brotton's claims, pertain to Othello other than he 'become[s] the first Christian Moor on the Elizabethan stage' after this 'redemption', that this 'stage' is place where he can, eventually, be located. I also read Brotton's reading of 'the insolent foe' as 'the Turk' and contention that 'Christians rescued and converted him' to, in one sense, secure these identities as though, unlike Othello, 'Turk' and 'Christian' are not subject to the same types of divisions and

shifts. It is this appeal to these secure identities, therefore, that leads me to turn to Othello's speech:

> Her father loved me, oft invited me,
> Still questioned me the story of my life
> From year to year: the battles, sieges, fortunes
> That I have passed.
> I ran it through, even from my boyish days
> To th' very moment that he bade me to tell it—
> Wherein I spoke of its most disastrous chances:
> Of moving accidents by flood and field,
> Of hair-breadth scrapes i'th imminent deadly beach,
> Of being taken by the insolent foe
> And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence,
> And portance in my travailous history,
> Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
> Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven,
> It was my hint to speak—such was my process—
> And of the Cannibals that each other eat,
> The Anthropophagi, and means whose heads
> Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear
> Would Desdemona seriously incline;   (1.3.128-46)

I read Othello's claim that he told Brabantio 'Of being taken by the insolent foe' as a retrospective account, of a past telling, of a different event from the past. Here, Othello does not specify who he was 'taken by' other than it was 'the insolent foe', which I take to mean that any other details are not important for Othello at this stage, that what is important is that, for Othello, it was 'the insolent foe' that he was 'taken by'. I also read this claim to 'insolen[ce]', however, as connected to the act of being 'taken' so that it may be understood that 'the insolent foe' was, in that past time 'the insolent foe' to Othello because 'the insolent foe' took him and 'sold' him 'to slavery'. Brotton, however, claims that 'the insolent foe' is 'the Turk' because of the conflict between the Venetians and the 'Ottomites' with whom

Othello is sent to Cyprus to battle; yet this reading, I would contend, does not take into account that this is a claim specifically from Othello's past perspective. Is 'the insolent foe' always and consistently 'the Turk'? Was 'the Turk' Othello's 'foe' at the moment of his capture even though this was before his 'redemption', before he becomes a 'Christian Moor'? In what way is 'the Turk' 'insolent', and for whom? These questions cannot be answered in Brotton's reading because of his need to secure the 'insolent foe' as 'the Turk' without reading through the further implications of Othello's claims.

Turning to another section of *Othello*, after the Turks have been defeated and Othello has arrived in Cyprus, Brotton argues the following about Othello's intervention in the 'drunken brawl' between Cassio and Roderigo:

> Shakespeare transforms the Turk gradually from a military into a more insidious psychic threat. When Iago engineers a drunken brawl between Roderigo and the lieutenant Michael Cassio, Othello intervenes, horrified at the Christian divisions in contrast to the famed Turkish military discipline.[72]

There is, according to Brotton, a change here in what the 'Turk' is, in so far as the type of 'threat' that the 'Turk' has been up till this point, gradually 'transforms' from an external and 'military' threat to a 'more insidious psychic' one. The danger here, then, is that the 'Turk' can somehow attack the psyche or minds of those who are not the 'Turk'. Brotton's claim that Othello is 'horrified at the Christian divisions in contrast to the famed Turkish military discipline', however, can be read to problematise this argument in that the 'Christians' here are divided and are behaving in 'contrast' to the 'Turk'. Othello, however, asks Cassio and Roderigo the following questions:

> Why, how, now! Ho! From whence ariseth this?
> Are we turned Turks, and to ourselves do that
> Which Heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?

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[72] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, p. 291.

For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl! (2.3.160-63)

Here, I read Othello's 'Are we turned Turks' to include Othello in the 'we' that is not, initially, 'Turks'. The 'threat' in this, then, is not only, as Brotton argues, that 'the Turk' is transformed to become a different kind of 'threat', but also that the 'the Turk' is something that the 'we' can 'turn' into and that this includes Othello even though he is not part of 'this barbarous brawl'. I also read 'and to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites' as a claim that is in addition to 'turned Turks' (because of the 'and') so that this is not necessarily what 'turned Turks' means for Othello but is an act that additionally occurs if or because 'we' are 'turned Turks'. What this suggests is that for Othello, what the 'we' is doing 'to ourselves' is that which has been 'forbid[den]' to the 'Ottomites', in other words, in having this 'barbarous brawl', 'we' are succeeding in hurting ourselves in a way that the 'Ottomites' were not able to. The difficulty here is that whether or not 'we' are 'turned Turks', the harm that is potentially done is not done by the 'Ottomites' but by 'ourselves' to 'oursleves'. Crucially, however, this 'threat' is formulated as a question, one that is neither answered nor realised.

Brotton, then, reads the 'barbarous brawl' as a division between Christians, yet his reading of Othello's intervention as a comparison with the 'famed Turkish military discipline' overlooks Othello's claim that in 'turn[ing] Turk' the 'we' hurts itself. In what follows, however, Brotton expands on this idea of 'turning Turk':

> The idea was familiar to many who knew Erasmus' warning in his essay 'On the War against the Turks': that if Christians wanted to eradicate the Turk they must first expel from their hearts the 'Turkish' traits of ambition, anger, hatred and envy. Yet these are precisely the vices that Iago has unleashed in Cyprus and which he cultivates in Othello as he tries to persuade him that Desdemona has been unfaithful with Cassio.[73]

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[73] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, p. 291.

The threat of 'turn[ing] Turk', for Brotton, is linked to 'Erasmus' warning' that 'if Christians wanted to eradicate the Turk they must first expel from their hearts the Turkish traits of ambition, anger, hatred and envy'. In this, Christian identity is not secure because it is possible for Christians to have 'Turkish traits' in their hearts, that if Christians were to display these traits, the danger is that they would become Turkish. What this also means, however, is that these traits, which for Erasmus are 'Turkish', are not restricted to Turkey or the Turkish people, but can also be manifested elsewhere from these supposed borders of nation and nationality. But there is also a sense here that this idea also worries any appeal to the borders of the 'heart' or the 'self' of Christians, that these traits can be in their 'hearts' even though they are 'Turkish traits', and also that they can be 'expel[led] from their hearts', so are not inseparable from, or permanently contained within, them. Brotton's claim here that Iago 'cultivates [these 'vices'] in Othello' can be read to further complicate these ideas of 'turning Turk' for here, these 'Turkish traits' are 'unleashed' and 'cultivated' by someone who is not Turkish into someone else who, as my previous readings indicate, has multiple shifting and unstable identities, so that as well as being 'expel[led]' these 'traits' can be understood to also be passed on.

Brotton reads further problematisations of Othello's identity in the following quotation from Act 3 scene 3:

> OTHELLO
> Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
> Whose icy current and compulsive course,
> Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
> Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up. Now, by yon marble heaven,
> In the due reverence of a sacred vow,

I here engage my words.   (3.3.453-62)

Here, Othello compares his 'bloody thoughts' to the 'Pontic Sea' which 'Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on / To the Propontic and the Hellespont' so that it can be understood that his 'bloody thoughts' too will 'ne'er ebb to humble love'. Brotton, however, reads this speech as a claim to Othello's 'Turkish' identity:

> Othello's vengeance is as irreversible as the sea flowing into the ocean, but the one he chooses is not accidental. The Pontic or Black Sea flows past Constantinople into the Propontic or Marmara Sea before debouching into the Aegean via the Hellespont or Dardanelles. By associating him with the topography of the Ottoman Empire, Shakespeare adds another layer to Othello's already complex identity: Moor, convert, pagan, revert and finally murderous raging Turk.[74]

Whilst Brotton reads Othello's claims to indicate that his 'vengeance is as irreversible as the sea flowing into the ocean', his contention also is that Othello has deliberately chosen the Pontic Sea because it 'flows past Constantinople' which is therefore an association of Othello with the topography of the Ottoman Empire and thus 'adds another layer to Othello's already complex identity'. Now, for Brotton, he is also, 'finally' a 'murderous raging Turk' because of his claim 'Like to the Pontic Sea'. Yet Othello only associates himself with the Pontic Sea to the extent that, for Othello, his 'bloody thoughts' are 'like' it. Othello does not claim, in this, to be a Turk. So although I understand what seems to be Brotton's awareness that Othello's appeal to the Pontic Sea is significant and that this is different from, for example, simply saying 'sea', what Othello also does not say here is 'I am a murderous raging Turk'. In his need to further problematise Othello's 'already complex identity', then, what is instead produced is a *securing* of identity without any textual frame to support it.

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[74] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, p. 292.

This difficulty is still more evident in Brotton's analysis of Desdemona. In the following, Brotton considers the episode from Act 4 scene 3, where Desdemona tells of Barbary and her 'Song of Willow':

> She starts to sing the song of Barbary's abandonment by her lover but as she comes to the end of the first verse she misremembers its last line: 'Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve – / Nay, that's not next.' It is one of the play's most devastating moments: Desdemona admits she loves Othello so much she even approves of his public humiliation of her reputation, even though she has done nothing wrong. She alters the song to fit her own circumstances, not only mistaking the last line but also changing the gender of the spurned lover from male to female. For just a moment she becomes her mother's Barbary maid. 'Barbary' suggests the woman came from Barbary, a loyal servant (or possibly slave) of the Venetian state without her birth name – not unlike Othello, the Moor of Venice, and the Barbary horse of Iago's insults. Desdemona identifies herself as a Barbary maid while Othello, like Henry V, has been tempted to turn Turk. They have both undergone a 'monstrous' and irrevocable metamorphosis, and within hours both will be dead.[75]

Brotton's argument here then, is that in singing the 'Song of Willow', Desdemona, 'for just a moment', 'becomes her mother's Barbary maid'. For Brotton, the word '"Barbary"' indicates that the 'woman came from Barbary' and that she then became 'a loyal servant (or possibly slave) of the Venetian state without her birth name'. Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid' can thus be understood to have had, in the past, 'a birth name' that belonged to her, but to now be 'without' it: '"Barbary"' is not her birth name. Yet it is also not her name at all in this claim, because for Brotton, she is Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid' which Brotton here likens to the 'Barbary horse of Iago's insults'. I also read a tension, however, between Brotton's contention that she is Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid' and his subsequent claim that she is a 'loyal servant (or possibly slave) of the Venetian state' because in her

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[75] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, p. 293.

position as Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid', she belongs to Desdemona's mother and not to the 'Venetian state'. For Brotton, then, Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid' was from 'Barbary', which means she could have also been a 'pagan, like many Berbers in sixteenth-century Mauretania'; she at one point had 'birth name', but as a 'loyal servant (or possibly slave)' who also belonged to the 'Venetian state' she was without it; because of this, she is 'not unlike Othello the Moor of Venice, and the Barbary horse of Iago's insults'. It is this then, that Brotton claims Desdemona 'identifies herself as' in singing the 'Song of Willow', even though Brotton also claims that she 'misremembers its last line', meaning that what she sings is a memory of a song that she cannot quite remember. She also, here, 'alters the song to fit her own circumstances', 'changing the gender of the spurned lover from male to female'. The song that Desdemona sings, therefore, at once is and is not 'the song of Barbary's abandonment by her lover'.

In spite of these 'misremember[ings]' and 'alter[ations]', however, for Brotton, both Desdemona and Othello (who has been 'tempted to turn Turk') are at this stage, transformed. And this is not a hypothetical 'metamorphosis', but rather is one that they indeed 'have both undergone', a 'metamorphosis' that is both '"monstrous"' and 'irrevocable'. Yet, once again, Brotton's arguments can be problematised further with an engagement with the details of the text. Desdemona claims:

> My mother had a maid called Barbary
> She was in love, and he she loved proved mad,
> And did forsake her. She had a 'Song of Willow'—
> An old thing 'twas, but it expressed her fortune,
> And she died singing it. That song tonight
> Will not go from my mind. I have much to do
> But to go hang my head all at one side
> And sing it like poor Barbary: prithee dispatch. (4.3.24-31)

Desdemona's assertion that her 'mother had a maid called Barbary' constitutes 'Barbary' not as a place, but as that which her mother's 'maid' was called'. Thus, even if it is the case that she came from Barbary as Brotton argues above, here 'Barbary' is specifically and only what she is 'called'. It is her name – she is 'poor Barbary'. This is also distinct from Brotton's claim that she is Desdemona's 'mother's Barbary maid' because while she can be read here to be a 'maid' who is indeed constituted as belonging to Desdemona's mother, she is not a 'Barbary maid', but again, is here 'a maid called Barbary'. The 'Song of Willow', according to Desdemona, belonged to Barbary in the past, and although it was an 'old thing' even then, 'it expressed her fortune, / And she died singing it'. The song did not die or cease to exist when Barbary died, however, for 'tonight', Desdemona claims, 'that' same 'song' will 'not go from my mind'. What is in Desdemona's mind, then, is not Barbary, and nor is it in any sense 'transform[ative]' because what will not go from her mind is 'That song' which once belonged to Barbary. The only claim, furthermore, to Barbary 'singing' '[t]hat song' here is that 'she died singing it' so that up until this point it can only be understood as both that which she owned and that which 'expressed her fortune'. In my reading, then, there is indeed a connection between Desdemona's claims that Barbary 'died singing' that song, and that because it will not go from her mind, she has 'much to do / But to go hang [her] head all at one side / And sing it like poor Barbary'. Desdemona can thus be understood to intend to 'sing it like poor Barbary' in so far as Barbary 'died singing it'. Indeed, in this claim to 'sing it like poor Barbary', Desdemona does not become Barbary, she does not even 'sing' it *as* 'Barbary'. Here, it is only the act of 'singing' that is 'like' Barbary, and only in the sense that it is 'like' Barbary 'died singing it'.

Brotton understands Othello's final speech to further destabilise his identity. Here, he claims that Othello 'prepares to take his own life, not before he undergoes one final shocking transformation':[76]

> Nowhere in this speech does Othello mention his blackness or his Christianity. Instead, he compares himself first to an Indian, and then to a Turk. Both comparisons are riddled with contradictions. His behaviour towards Desdemona is like that of an Indian who threw away a pearl richer than all his tribe. 'Indian' is the word used in the 1622 Quarto version of the play, but the 1623 Folio version has 'Iudean'. […] the Elizabethans were convinced that Jews and Muslims (including Moors) were as one in refusing to accept Jesus as the Son of God. The 'Iudean' of the Folio could refer to either Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Christ or Herod's execution of his wife Mariamne, both of which make absolute sense as metaphors for Othello's behaviour. Which was correct? Did Shakespeare change his mind in revising his text, or did someone else quietly amend it? We will probably never know, but it is striking that this irresolvable crux captures Othello's overdetermined character, part Muslim, Christian, Jew and even pagan.[77]

Brotton, then, reads an absence in this speech of Othello's claims to 'his blackness or his Christianity' and takes this to mean that these are not things, that at this stage in the play, he identifies as any longer. Instead, his comparison of 'himself first to an Indian, and then to a Turk', for Brotton, can be understood as Othello's 'final shocking transformation', that because of this comparison Othello self-identifies both as 'an Indian' and 'a Turk'. This is further complicated, however, because of Brotton's contention that the '1623 Folio version' of the play 'has "Iudean"' instead of 'Indian'. Here, then, not only is the fixity of the text itself problematised in that there is more than one version of it, but also the fixity of the words that are 'used in' these different versions because Brotton perceives these different words to each undermine the certainty of the other. This is even further complicated, for

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[76] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, p. 293.
[77] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, pp. 294-5.

Brotton, because 'the Elizabethans were convinced that Jews and Muslims (including Moors) were as one in refusing to accept Jesus as the Son of God'. Even if, then, '"Iudean"' is the 'correct' word, it can mean 'Jew', but it can also have been understood, in the past, specifically by the Elizabethans, as 'Jews and Muslims (including Moors)' because, they were 'considered as one' but only with regard to their refusal to 'accept Jesus as the Son of God'. For Brotton, however, this 'irresolvable crux' is not constitutive of 'Othello's overdetermined character', but rather it is what 'captures' it, meaning that in fact, his 'overdetermined character' is separate from these complex and various identities. Yet for Brotton, this produces Othello's 'overdetermined character' as 'part Muslim, Christian, Jew and even pagan'. Brotton continues:

> It is a conflation that finds its most extraordinary conclusion in the final lines. Othello takes us to Aleppo, the Syrian city where Anthony Jenkinson first met Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent fifty years before the play was written, where al-Annuri had claimed he was heading just the previous year, and which today has a very different tragic resonance. […] The Turk he kills is 'turbaned' and 'circumcised', surely a sign that these are not attributes that Othello shares. If he is not circumcised then surely he cannot have been born or converted into the Muslim faith. Nor is he described as sharing close sartorial affinities with the ostentatiously turbaned al-Annuri. But in acting out his stabbing of the Turk, Othello enacts the most remarkable moment of tragic self-division in all of Shakespeare. He has been interpreted as the loyal Christian soldier, atoning for his sins by defending Venice against the Turk and killing the heresy within himself, or as finally embracing his true barbarism as a demonic, murderous apostate, who becomes the raging, violent Turk, the culmination of a generation of plays depicting the Ottomans. He is of course both simultaneously: a profoundly ambivalent figure who embodies so much of Elizabethan England's contradictory relations with the Islamic world. Here, in the split second of Othello saying 'thus', Othello becomes a Turk. The only one ever to grace a Shakespeare

play appears on stage for a moment and then exits with the self-inflicted blow that kills Othello the Moor–Christian–Pagan–Turk–Jew of Venice.[78]

Brotton's claim that 'Othello takes us to Aleppo' in the final lines of the play, means that he reads the final lines to contain both Othello and an 'us'. These 'final lines', which ostensibly begin with Othello's 'And say besides that in Aleppo once' (5.2.351), are for Brotton, not about language, or Othello's words, but are instead about a 'tak[ing] us' to a place that the 'us' was not, therefore, previously. There is a movement, then, which for Brotton is contained within 'the final lines'. Aleppo does not move in this, however, only Othello and the 'us' do. What this means is that this narration of Aleppo is for Brotton something that can draw the 'us' in and take it to a place different from where it is. Aleppo, then, which previously Brotton has argued is related to identity, is here also a place that is not only constructed linguistically, but is also a place that *is* its linguistic construction.

That the Turk Othello kills is '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' is for Brotton 'surely a sign that these are not attributes that Othello shares'. In the act of killing the Turk, then Othello becomes other to the 'Turk' but only in so far as these 'attributes', '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"', are 'surely' not shared by Othello. One of the difficulties I read here, however, is that this claimed otherness at this stage (which Brotton goes on to argue shifts at the 'split second of Othello saying "thus"') can be problematised by my reading of Brotton's previous contention that not only is Othello 'tempted to turn Turk', but also that he and Desdemona have already 'both undergone a 'monstrous' and irrevocable metamorphosis' at the stage when Desdemona sings the 'Song of Willow'. It would seem, then, that these external 'attributes' are at this stage, privileged over 'Turk' for Brotton: he cannot be a Turk because he claims that the 'Turk he kill[ed]' was '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' and in making this claim, he also claims that he is himself not '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' and

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[78] Brotton, *This Orient Isle*, pp. 295-6.

that means he is not a Turk. There are further difficulties also, though, in Brotton's readings

of 'the Turk [Othello] kills' as '"circumcised"':

> OTHELLO
> Soft you, a word or two before you go:
> I have done the state some service, and they know't—
> No more of that. I pray you in your letters,
> When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
> Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
> Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
> Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
> Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
> Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
> Like the base Indian threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdues eyes,
> Albeit unusèd to the melting mood,
> Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinal gum. Set you down this;
> And say besides that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcisèd dog
> And smote him—thus. (5.2.337-55)

Here, Othello asserts that in Aleppo it was a 'turbaned Turk' who '[b]eat a Venetian and

traduced the state'. What Othello 'took by th' throat' and 'smote', however, is here not a

'"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' Turk, but 'the circumcisèd dog'. And following Brotton's

logic, what Othello is at that precise moment when he kills himself is a 'circumcisèd dog' and

not a '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' Turk. This difference, I would contend, is something

that Brotton crucially misses in his arguments. It is as though in his need to fix the identity of

the 'Turk' from 'Aleppo', he also needs to disregard, or is unable to read the textual

differences. Even within his narratives of deferral and difference, then, there are others that he cannot read.

For Brotton, 'in acting out his stabbing of the Turk, Othello enacts the most remarkable moment of self-division in all of Shakespeare'. Yet once again, this appeal to 'self-division' does not include the division in Othello's claims to the 'turbaned Turk' and the 'circumcisèd dog'. It can also be read to further problematise Brotton's previous claim that the Turk is something Othello cannot be precisely because he is neither '"turbaned"' nor '"circumcised"'. I also read this claim to 'acting out' to indicate that for Brotton, Othello's 'stabbing of the Turk' is an act and that the 'acting out' of this act is a repetition or copy of that previous, historical act because here he stabs himself and not the Turk. It is within this 'acting out', however, that Othello separately and presently 'enacts the most remarkable moment of tragic self-division in all of Shakespeare'. In one sense, then, here Othello is split, because in the act of killing himself there is a division of the self and that which is killed. But in doing so he is also 'acting out' a previous 'kill[ing]' of the 'Turk' which seems to be completely distinct. My argument, however, is those seemingly neat divisions are always caught up in supplementation. These divisions, however, are further complicated in Brotton's claim that although in this 'enact[ment]' within an 'acting out', Othello has 'been interpreted' both 'as the loyal Christian soldier' and as he who 'becomes the raging, violent Turk', he is, in fact 'both simultaneously'. This further split, then, constitutes Othello to be, on the one hand, 'killing the heresy within himself' so that it may be understood that in killing himself 'as the loyal Christian soldier', he is killing the 'Turk within'. Yet Brotton's claims to '"turbaned"' and '"circumcised"' as what makes Othello different from the 'Turk', that these things are what constitute 'Turk' are, as I read above, claims to the external and not to 'within'. On the other hand, however, for Brotton, Othello is also 'finally embracing his true barbarism as a demonic, murderous apostate' and I read, in this, that despite all other readings

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and problematisations of Othello's status as 'Turk', here this is something that is both 'true' and 'his' Brotton's argument here, then, is that Othello, who in one sense is definitively not a Turk is also a Turk killing a Turk.

It is not, however, until the 'split second of Othello saying "thus"' that for Brotton 'Othello becomes a Turk'. Here, then in this final 'moment' Othello 'becomes' that which he was not before. Yet in this 'moment' Othello not only 'becomes a Turk', but he also becomes the only one to ever grace a Shakespeare play', he 'becomes a Turk' who 'appears on the stage for a moment and then exits with' a 'self-inflicted blow'. At this very 'moment', then, this 'split second of Othello saying "thus"', Othello's identity ceases to be textual, all that remains is 'the stage'; it is pure performance, an absolute 'appearance'. When that 'moment' of certainty of identity arrives, there are no linguistic shifts or deferrals; thus, for Brotton, this certainty comes in appearance, therefore, because appearance is certainty. This Turk, however, that 'appears on the stage for just a moment' then 'exits with the self-inflicted blow that kills 'Othello the Moor–Christian–Pagan–Turk–Jew of Venice'. There is a split here in that despite all these multiple claims to identity, what is killed primarily is 'Othello'. His name *is* certain and constant, unlike 'Barbary'. Othello does not have to ask, 'Am I that name?' (4.2.118) This question of the certainty of female names is something that I will return to in my analysis of Toni Morrison's *Desdemona* in the following chapter. It is definitively and constantly 'Othello', then, who is killed but he is also the Moor–Christian–Pagan–Turk–Jew of Venice'. I read this, however, not only as a claim to a divided Othello, but also as one that is, in this very claim stable in that 'finally' these are the things that Othello is. This overdetermined identity, in this sense, is not overdetermined enough because these multiple and various identities are also then the only limited, possible things that Othello can be. All that remains in this is a tension between these very specific things and this can be understood to elide all the other divisions and excesses that these identities are

themselves constituted by. Take for example Brotton's appeal to the 'Jew of Venice'. As I read above, Othello's potential Jewishness is constructed as a likely mistake; as a word that is not in the specific text that Brotton reads here but that is instead from another version as intrinsically linked with Islam in the Elizabethan's understanding of the word in a certain context. In this final 'list', however, in Brotton's stabilizing of these specific identities, all these other differences of meaning are lost.

Chapter 5 – Repetition/Paraphrase

    i)   Honest

     In this chapter, I am concerned with what is, perhaps, the most celebrated critical intervention into *Othello* scholarship, William Empson's 'Honest in Othello' from *The Structure of Complex Words*. Empson approaches the play through 'the page', of course, with a reading that engages the specificity of Shakespeare's language, specifically the various meanings of one particular word: 'The fifty-two uses of honest and honesty in "Othello" are a very queer business; there is no other play in which Shakespeare worries a word like that.'[79] In what follows, I am interested in the queerness of *Othello*, that is, as I read it, its difference. In arguing for the unique quality of the play, it might be expected to find a reading that sets the Tragedy in splendid isolation, but Empson's concern is, in part, with history, and with tradition. To understand the word, Empson places it within a narrative of development. As Gary Wihl suggests:

> Iago's honesty, Empson argues, marks a crucial historical evolution of the word, standing midway between an earlier code of honor and trust, and a subsequent discovery of the Independent Self, verging on the potentially destructive cult of egotism and selfishness, something like being honest first and foremost about one's own impulses and desires.[80]

Despite such a historicist focus, Empson's essay is itself often understood in terms of a textualism that is removed from wider political and social concerns. Take the following from Jessica Slights:

> For critics a generation and more later [than Empson], the suggestion that *Othello* criticism ought to consist in consideration of the play's generic antecedents, in appreciation and explication of what Knight had earlier called the "music" of its

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[79] William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), p. 218.

[80] Gary Wihl, 'Empsonian Honesty and the Beginnings of Individualism' in Christopher Norris and Nigel Mapp (eds.) *William Empson: The Critical Achievement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 122.

language (109), or in analysis of its thematic preoccupation with jealousy as this relates to a generalizable experience of action, emotion, and moral value began to seem at best naïve and at worst politically suspect. In the 1960s, critics on both sides of the Atlantic sought to understand *Othello* not as remote from the social and political effects of its historically specific sites of production and reception but as shaped by them.[81]

Although Slights is surely right to argue thus, her assessment, in my understanding, introduces a range of difficulties. If we are to place Empson's work within an historical tradition of criticism, how is this problematised by Empson's own questioning account of history? What, in Empson, does it mean to repeat, and how might this impact on a reading of Empson's work as repeating certain critical tropes or approaches? In writing on *Othello*, moreover, is Empson repeating the play? And what are the limits of Empson's work? If there is something to be read in Empson that repeats Shakespeare, and finds repetition in the works of other critics, then is such repetition neatly localised? The difficulty I am thinking about here is that of ensuring that a certain critical heritage or movement keeps true to its borders. If *Othello* is, as has been suggested, a play that problematises identity, that worries those boundaries between self and other; and if, as I will argue, Empson's critical account repeats what it analyses, then the danger is that the notion of a discrete critical tradition might be problematised. To think this threat through, this chapter will close by turning from a reading of Empson, to a reading of Toni Morrison's short play *Desdemona*. Moving from a white, male critic championing a depoliticised *Othello*, to a black, female, politically motivated and creative intervention, would, one would think, secure differences. And to an extent it does. But I am interested also in the uncanny doubling between Morrison's work and Empson's. How might thinking of these two authors as a pair help us engage the strange 'reading effect' that can return to any engagement with Shakespeare's play? How might it problematise

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[81] Jessica Slights, 'Othello: A Survey of Criticism', Internet Shakespeare Editions, https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Oth_CriticalSurvey/index.html (accessed 1/6/2022).

issues of identity: critical identity, as well as those personal identities that *Othello* is known to compromise?

ii)   Empson, Paraphrase, and Psychology

In *The Structure of Complex Words* (first published in 1951), William Empson dedicates three of his chapters to the word 'honest'. Following a consideration of the evolution of the word through readings of multiple different 'uses' of 'honest' in a variety of historical texts, he then proposes to 'try to analyse these uses of *honest* and list them as if for a dictionary'[82] before finally moving on to implement this 'list' in his most well-known analysis: the chapter 'Honest in Othello'. Before I consider Empson's reading of *Othello* then, my question here is what, for Empson, is the relationship between a word and its meaning(s)? And what would it mean to 'attempt' to secure all these meanings even when claiming, as Empson does, to have all the 'evidence' and 'conclusions' and 'machinery'[83] to complete such a task? Empson's critique of the N.E.D.'s 'attempt' to do so and reflections on why it fails, reads as follows:

> As a source of historical information, the N.E.D. is particularly good on the word *honest,* and I need to explain why it is not supposed to have done enough. It does little about the interaction of senses with "feelings", which for a word like this is the chief difficulty, and since it has to give a historical survey it does not attempt to show the structure of the word at a given date.[84]

The 'word *honest*' has a history here, but for Empson, the N.E.D. is 'a' (so not the only) 'source' of this information, meaning that there are other sources of 'historical information' which both differ from, and are therefore lacking in, the N.E.D. It is also '[a]s a source of historical information' that the N.E.D is 'particularly good on the word *honest*' and so it must be, therefore, that there are also other types of not-historical information about the 'word

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[82] Empson, p.202.
[83] Empson, p. 202.
[84] Empson, p. 202.

honest' that Empson perceives as lacking. Indeed, because the N.E.D. is also claimed to be restricted in its obligation 'to give a historical survey' it is unable to be anything other than 'a source of historical information', at the expense of all other sources and all other information. This appeal to the N.E.D.'s lack is repeated in the value-judgement 'particularly good' because this indicates that, for Empson, there is an incompleteness in the 'historical information' in the N.E.D., that it may be better than other 'sources of historical information', and that it is 'particularly good' specifically 'on the word *honest*' as opposed to other words, but it also is not exhaustive in either regard. Empson can thus be understood to have knowledge of both historical and not-historical information about the 'word *honest*' that exceeds that which can be sourced from the N.E.D. and is able, due to this, to assess the quality of the N.E.D. as he perceives it.

For Empson, however, the N.E.D. falls short not only because of its incompleteness, or because it points necessarily to its own non-exclusivity, to the existence of other (both historical and not) sources, but also because it has not 'done enough'. This constitutes the N.E.D. as an active 'source', one which has 'done' something 'on the word *honest*', but which has equally failed to do other available and achievable actions. Consequently, the 'word *honest*' can be understood as an inactive entity 'on' which the N.E.D. has and has not 'done'. And because the 'do[ing]' is claimed to be 'on' rather than 'to' the 'word *honest*', the '[do]ing' is above and therefore unconnected to the 'word *honest*' and in this sense, the word is unaffected by the actions of the N.E.D. Although Empson goes on to contend, therefore, that there are shifts and changes in the 'structure of the word at a given date', the 'word *honest*' can only be accessed by the N.E.D. in a fixed and passive state and it is its own actions which, for Empson, constitute both the N.E.D.'s content or lack of it, and its quality.

Empson's first explanation of 'why' the N.E.D.'s actions 'on the word *honest*' are insufficient, then, is that it 'does little about the interaction of senses with "feelings"'. Whilst

this 'little' that the N.E.D. 'does' is not specified here, however, it is the presence of the 'little' which constitutes an absence. For Empson, therefore, the details of the 'little' that the N.E.D. 'does' are not important, the 'little' is not enough, more could be done. I read this non-specificity again in the claim that the 'word *honest*' has multiple 'senses' which interact with multiple '"feelings"'. Unlike the singular and definite 'word *honest*', these collective categories of 'senses' and '"feelings"' are claimed to interact as groups, but separately from the 'word *honest*'. Yet Empson's conviction is worried here by the quotation marks because they suggest that the grouping of '"feelings"' is from a perspective other than his own. What the 'senses' interact 'with', for Empson, can therefore not be known unequivocally.

The categories of 'senses' and '"feelings"' also differ from the 'word *honest*', which I read above to be both fixed and passive, because of their 'interaction'. In this, the 'word *honest*' can be understood to remain inactive and constant, whereas both 'senses' and "feelings"' are constituted as separately-from-'the word', more active and dynamic. Yet in spite of this dynamism, it is neither the 'senses', nor the '"feelings"' that are accessed by the N.E.D. for it is their 'interaction' that the N.E.D. 'does little about'. This 'interaction', then, is yet another separate, discernible entity, but one which is also accessible to the N.E.D. in so far as it is able to do something 'about' it. A distance remains, however, because the 'little' that the N.E.D. 'does' do is 'about' the 'interaction' and not *to* it, and this means that the 'interaction' too is both untouched and unaltered by the N.E.D.'s 'do[ing]' (or lack thereof).

For Empson, the N.E.D. 'does little about the interaction of senses with "feelings"' because this is 'the chief difficulty' for 'a word like' the 'word *honest*'. The N.E.D. is thus held back in its ability to do more 'about the interaction' because of the particular type of word that '*honest*' is. It is not, then, that this 'difficulty' is unique to the 'word *honest*', because there are, by inference, other words 'like' '*honest*' which also pose this difficulty as their 'chief difficulty' and, equally, other words which do not. However, what this means is

that words can, for Empson, be distinguished by their 'like[ness]', or not, to the 'word *honest*', that there is something common and shared between some words and not others. And this commonality is not simply that words either do or do not share 'the chief difficulty' of an entity external to it being able to do something 'about the interaction of senses with "feelings"', what is shared is a 'like[ness]' that is prior to this 'difficulty', the 'like[ness]' is that which, for Empson, causes the 'difficulty' to come about.

Empson's contention that the N.E.D. 'has to give a historical survey' then, produces an idea of restriction imposed by an authority distinct from the N.E.D. It is this external requirement that, according to Empson, prevents the N.E.D. from 'attempt[ing] to show the structure of the word at a given date'. Yet since this indicates that 'the structure of the word' is subject to change, that it is necessarily different 'at a given date', I would argue that the mutable 'structure of the word' is also part of the word's history. There is a 'structur[al]' 'history' of the 'word *honest*', therefore, which is distinct from the history that 'has' to be part of the N.E.D.'s obligatory 'historical survey' and that is consequently also absent from the N.E.D. This absence, however, is not an absence of 'structure', it is an absence of an 'attempt to show' it. In this claim, 'structure' is yet another entity separate from, though also belonging to, '*honest*' because it is 'of' the 'word'. It can also be either 'show[n]' or not, and because 'structure' is here not 'show[n]', Empson can be understood to know the 'structure of the word' to exist regardless of whether or not it is 'show[n]' by the N.E.D. What Empson perceives as absent from the N.E.D., therefore, is not 'structure' itself, but both a derivative 'show[ing]' of the 'structure' by that which is external to the 'structure', and a prior-to-this 'attempt to' do so.

Empson's shifting claims about 'structure' are further problematised in the subsequent sentence, not least because here '"structure"' is, unlike in the previous formulation, presented

in quotation marks which establishes both a split in, and a worrying of, the concept. Empson continues:

> The main point in showing "structure" would be to say which sense acted as the head one, because the interaction of senses with feelings turns largely on that. I do not say that the work could ever be done completely; no doubt different groups would be giving the word different structures even at one date, and to give all the structures of all the words would only mean writing the history of opinion in the most prolix possible manner.[85]

That there is, for Empson, a 'main point in showing "structure"' means that a consequence of the N.E.D. not 'showing "structure"' is that it has also failed to achieve this 'main point': it does not 'say which sense acted as the head one'. To not 'show', therefore, is also to not 'say' and this would suggest not only that the active, 'do[ing]', N.E.D. has the potential to 'show' something other than itself, but that it could also, ostensibly, speak by way of this 'show[ing]'. The idea of mutability I read previously in Empson's claims about 'structure' furthermore, is here expanded to include a notion of it being the 'head' 'sense' which is subject to change, relative to 'date'. This claim to there being a 'head sense' indicates a hierarchy in which there is necessarily more than one 'sense', so the 'structure of the word' can thus be construed as comprised of multiple, distinct 'senses' of varying and changing status within this 'structure'. Yet the position of the 'head' 'sense' is troubled here by the contention that the 'main point in showing "structure" would be to say which sense acted as the head one'. Here, the position of 'head' 'sense' is something that is 'acted as'. It is therefore always a past, performed position, rather than an intrinsic one; it is an historical taking on of the role of 'head' 'sense' by whichever 'sense' happened to be 'act[ing] as the head' at any 'given date'.

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[85] Empson, p. 202.

In addition to the 'main point in showing "structure"', Empson similarly posits a justification for 'say[ing]' which is the 'head' 'sense' since this is what the 'interaction of senses with feelings turns largely on'. Hence for Empson, the N.E.D. fails to do more than 'little about the interaction of senses with "feelings"' because it previously also failed to 'say which sense acted as the head one', and it fails to achieve this because it does not 'attempt to show the structure of the word at a given date'. Each one of these failures of the N.E.D., therefore, can be understood to contribute to the next. In other words, all the conditions put forward here by Empson are a prerequisite for the other and all of them needed to have been secured, in sequence, in order for the N.E.D. to have done more 'about' the 'interaction of senses with feelings' or, indeed, to have 'done enough' on 'the word *honest*'. The N.E.D. thus fails to completely satisfy any of Empson's conditions. Yet Empson's own shifting formulations highlight the difficulty with which these terms can ever be secure. In this second claim, for example, 'feelings' is no longer presented in quotation marks, whereas (as I noted before) '"structure"' here has quotation marks where it did not previously. It would seem, then, that only one of these concepts can, for Empson, be presented with any certainty in a single clause, that definite claims can only be made about them one at a time and this is only at the detriment of the certainty of the other. Indeed, Empson goes on to assert that he does 'not say the work could ever be done completely' which I read as an acknowledgement of the difficulty with which any of the claimed shortcomings of the N.E.D. 'on the word *honest*' could conceivably be averted.

This appeal to the impossibility of the N.E.D.'s 'work', however, is complicated further with the contention also that 'complete[ness]' of this 'work' cannot be achieved because 'different groups would be giving the word different structures even at one date'. Here, 'structures' are 'giv[en]' to 'the word' which means that prior to this they exist in the possession of something other to 'the word', and that they are then actively bestowed upon

'the word' from this external position with 'the word' remaining passive all the while. And even though Empson's claim in this instance can be read as suppositional via 'no doubt', the potential of multiple, diverse 'structures' that can coexist 'at one date' problematises any appeal to there ever being a solitary 'head' 'sense' at a single point in time. The former idea of altering 'structures' also shifts here from a temporal notion of 'date' being the cause of the changes in 'structure' throughout 'history', to there being additionally an external 'giving' of 'structures' by 'groups'. And this can be read in two ways. Firstly, 'structures' and the 'senses' that shape them, are determined, retrospectively, by 'groups' which are distinct from 'the word', its 'senses' and indeed, the 'date' the 'structure' is given for. However, there is a second idea here whereby 'structures' can be given by 'groups' that are similarly external to the 'word' and its 'senses', but that are also contemporaneous to the 'one date' for which 'structures' are given. This would suggest that the 'giving' of 'structures' can either be a retroactive undertaking or a process that is continuously and concurrently evolving through time, or, indeed, both of these. In either reading, however, there is always a requirement for there to be a mutual consensus about the components and the composition of the 'structures' by at least more than one individual 'at one date'; and for this to be repeated, though (necessarily) 'different[ly]' at least once for that specific 'date'; and then for all of this to be repeated again for other dates. What this means, therefore, is that for Empson, there never can be a truly definitive 'structure' of the 'word *honest*' either for, or at, any moment in time because these multiple 'structures' are necessarily subjective, divergent and numerous. Empson's claim that to 'give all the structures of all the words would only mean writing the history of opinion in the most prolix possible manner', then, highlights his perception of both the difficulty and the futility of such a task, not just for '*honest*', but for 'all' words.

The N.E.D., of course, does not even 'attempt' to do any of this, but despite these difficulties, Empson goes on to advance his 'own chart'[86] for the 'word *honest*' which must therefore be different from, or indeed superior to, the N.E.D.'s 'work' in that it ostensibly somehow overcomes some of these issues. Empson's 'own chart' continues for the rest of this chapter, running, according to Empson, 'from the late sixteenth century to the present day'. Yet Empson is unable still to confine all the 'structures' or the 'interaction of senses with "feelings"' as he perceives them into a single scheme because as he contends, 'there is a practical need to form a new chart [...] in the middle sixteenth century'[87] since there is a change in the 'head sense' at this time. This means, in fact, that his 'own chart' is, paradoxically, more than one chart. It is in the light of his 'attempt at idealising the full use of *honest*'[88] that Empson moves to *Othello*. For Empson, 'there is no other play in which Shakespeare worries a word like that'[89] and it is specifically his reading of '*honest*' in the seduction scene that I wish to explore here:

OTH. : *Is he not honest ?*   (Faithful, etc.)

IAGO : *Honest, my lord ?*   (Not stealing, etc. Shocked.)

OTH. : *Ay, honest,*   ("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")

IAGO : *My lord, for aught I know. . . .*   ("In some sense.")

IAGO : *For Michael Cassio*
         I dare be sworn I think that he is honest.

OTH. : *I think so too.*

IAGO : *Men should be what they seem*
         Or, those that be not, would that they might seem none.

OTH. : *Certain, men should be what they seem.*

IAGO : *Why then, I think that Cassio's an honest man.*[90]

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[86] Empson, p. 202.
[87] Empson, p. 202.
[88] Empson, p. 217.
[89] Empson, p. 218.
[90] Empson, p. 221-2.

It would seem, then, that the words in parentheses in this excerpt are Empson's additions to this particular scene from *Othello*, where he professes to specifically consider how Iago 'toys with the word' '*honest*' with regard to Cassio.[91]   Yet from the entirely capital letters of 'OTH. :', to the italics of '*Is he not honest ?*', to the not-italic text of '(Faithful, etc.), the different font styles here can be read, in fact, to establish three discrete sections, or perspectives in this text. These divisions are augmented by the punctuation since I read the colon preceding '*Is he not honest ?*' to mark it as doubly separate from 'OTH.' and, likewise, the parentheses further set '(Faithful, etc.)' apart from the other two sections. These seemingly well-defined divisions, however, are problematised not only because all of this is text no matter how it is presented, but also because each of these sections can be understood as both connected to, and constitutive of, the others. For instance, if 'OTH. :' is to be construed as a perspective that is distinct and separate from '*Is he not honest ?*', these words are only, in my reading, attributable to Othello because of the external 'OTH. :' that claims them to be as such. The claim (Faithful, etc.) can thus be read on the one hand as external and supplementary to '*Is he not honest ?*' , and on the other as interconnected with it because it is an explanation of what, for Empson, '*Is he not honest ?*' means. In other words, if '(Faithful, etc.)' is the 'sense' of '*honest*' in this instance as I understand it to be, then, for Empson, both claims are required to comprehend either one of them. The meaning of '*Is he not honest ?*', therefore, can be read to permeate the apparent boundaries of the parentheses. The meaning is outside of Othello's words.

There are further difficulties with the contention that '*honest*' in '*Is he not honest ?*' means '(Faithful, etc.)' in that it would seem that the words '*Is he not*' do not require the same definition for Empson as '*honest*' does, that their meaning is either irrelevant or obvious. However, since the 'sense' of '*honest*' in the subsequent '*Honest, my lord ?*' is

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[91] Empson, p. 221.

claimed to be different from '(Faithful, etc.)', then it must be that the '*honest*' of '*Honest, my lord ?*' and the '*honest*' of '*Is he not honest ?*' are only distinguishable because of the not-defined words that accompany them. I understand these other words, therefore, to be an inextricable part of the meaning that Empson ascribes to '*honest*' in each instance, that either '*honest*' means '(Faithful, etc.)' here because of the framing '*Is he not […] ?*', or that the entire claim '*Is he not honest ?*' means '(Faithful, etc.)'. It is not simply, then, that what Empson states are 'divergent uses of the key word'[92] are each of the individual occurrences of the word '*honest*' having a distinct 'sense' or meaning, but that these 'sense[s]' can never be discerned from the word in isolation, they necessarily require an excess frame for '*honest*' to have meaning. For Empson, therefore, not only is it the case that '*honest*' does not mean '*honest*', but also that the meaning of '*honest*' is as much outside of the word as it is in it. This is additionally complicated because in '(Faithful, etc.)' there is a notion of a further 'sense' or, indeed, an undefined number of 'sense[s]' which also explain what Othello says, but which are not stated explicitly within the claim in parentheses. In this regard, the word 'Faithful' is insufficient to alone define '*honest*' in this instance because of the appeal to lack in 'etc.' Yet whilst 'etc.' can be read to point to other, absent meanings, their absence suggests that they are not needed in the same way that 'Faithful' is. Indeed, another way of reading this is that '(Faithful, etc.)' is precisely the 'sense', that for Empson what Othello means here is an inadequate 'Faithful' which is essentially undermined by the claim to 'etc.'

This appeal to lack or inadequacy is repeated in 'Not stealing, etc.', indicating that although for Empson the '*honest*' in Iago's '*Honest, my lord ?*' has an entirely different 'sense' from the previous '*honest*', neither instance of '*honest*' can be defined unequivocally because each definition always entails a lack. Another difference here, however, is the additional claim 'Shocked' that is within the parentheses but subsequent to 'Not stealing,

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[92] Empson, p. 218.

etc.' and which can, therefore, be read as separate from Empson's claim to 'sense'. It may be argued that this is simply a claim to Iago's state of mind, that, for Empson, Iago's 'shock' can somehow be discerned from his question '*Honest, my lord ?*'. Yet I also read this as an appeal to Empson's previous contention about the 'interaction of senses with feelings', that in this respect 'Shocked' is the 'feeling', and 'Not stealing, etc.' is the 'sense', and within Iago's '*Honest, my lord ?*' the two interact. Iago's '*Honest, my lord ?*' is thus constituted as the site of an 'interaction of senses with feelings'. Since I have previously read, however, that the 'sense[s]' of Iago's words are also located elsewhere from the words, then the location of the 'interaction of senses with feelings' must be elsewhere also. Both Iago's words and the meaning(s) of his words, then, are comprised of this 'interaction' that is also in excess of meaning. The 'interaction', however, does not seem to be integral to every occurrence of the word '*honest*', indeed there is no such appeal to 'feelings' in or after the claim '(Faithful, etc.)'. For Empson, therefore, Iago's '*Honest, my lord ?*' also differs from Othello's '*Is he not honest ?*' because Iago's words have an excess 'interaction of senses with feelings' that Othello's do not. Othello's words can thus be construed as inferior due to their lack of interactivity. Indeed, for Empson, it is only Iago who 'toys with the word'. Further, the distinction between Othello and Iago's words is expanded in Othello's subsequent '*Ay, honest*' because here neither 'sense' nor 'feeling' is presented in the parentheses in the same way as before. This claim, rather, is followed by '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")' which indicates that not only does Othello's '*Ay, honest,*' once again lack the 'interaction of senses with feelings' that Iago's words are claimed to have, but also that Othello's '*honest*' in this instance does not even have meaning in the same way that Iago's '*honest*' does because Empson does not directly attribute a 'sense' to it. And whilst it may be argued that the claim '("In some sense.")' which follows Iago's '*My lord, for aught I know. . . .*' is, to some extent, a repeat of, or at least comparable to '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")', the

distinction is that there is no '*honest*' in Iago's assertion for Empson to make 'sense' of. Yet the contention must still be that '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")' is a form of explanation of what, for Empson, Othello's '*Ay, honest,*' means despite the fact that the formulation here diverges from both his previous claims to meaning.

Another way in which '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")' differs from that which precedes it, then, is that unlike before, there are quotation marks here. These quotation marks can be understood not only to construct the words within them as speech, but to also produce a division or split between the parentheses and the words that are within them. In other words, the quotation marks constitute all the words within (but not including) the parentheses as something that is spoken from a perspective other to Empson, but which is also, as I read above, an explanation of what Othello's '*Ay, honest,*' means. I understand '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")', therefore, as Empson's perspective of something that is spoken by Othello. This is further complicated, however, by '*Ay, honest,*', as also attributable to Othello by the 'OTH. :', because this would suggest that that '*Ay, honest,*' is not speech because it does not have quotation marks. Yet if Empson's '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")' can be understood to explain the meaning of '*Ay, honest,*', then it can equally be construed to constitute '*Ay, honest,*' as Othello's speech because that is what Empson claims to read '*Ay, honest,*' as. Empson's '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")' can thus be read as a claim to that which is spoken by Othello in a manner that is distinct from, but in addition to '*Ay, honest,*' which for Empson is also spoken by Othello. Consequently, '("In some sense.")' can likewise be construed as Empson's reading of Iago's speech, as what Iago says in addition to '*My lord, for aught I know. . . .*'. I would contend, therefore, that here Empson can be understood to state what for him are both Othello and Iago's ability to mean something in excess of what they actually say, he is, in this regard, asserting what their speech *really* means for him.

To a certain extent, then, I can understand Empson's reading of Othello's '*Ay,*

honest,' as Othello also meaning or saying '("Why repeat? The word is clear enough.")', in

that this reading is supported by the repetition of '*honest*' in 'OTH. : […] *Is he not honest ?*'

and 'IAGO : […] *Honest, my lord ?*', so that it is plausible that Othello might question this

repetition by repeating it once again. However, Iago's '*My lord, for aught I know. . . .*' is a

claim to ignorance in which he declares his limited knowledge of whether or not Cassio is

'*honest*', whereas Empson's contention that alongside this Iago also says/means that Cassio is

'*honest*' '("In some sense.")' can be read as contrary to Iago's assertion of his own limits.

The claim '("In some sense."), therefore, is also a claim to Iago's duplicity, that for Empson,

Iago can say one thing whilst at the same time also meaning/saying the opposite of what is

spoken. Much like Empson's previous contention about 'divergent uses of the key word',[93]

then, his readings here suggest that Othello and Iago both 'utilize' language in diverse ways

and that this can be discerned from the words that are attributed to them in this text. Yet what

this also indicates is that from these words Empson can also discern Othello and Iago's

different intentions in their 'utility' of language in that, for Empson, Othello 'uses' his words

in an 'honest' and straightforward manner to mean what he says, expressing precisely what

his intentions are, whereas Iago 'uses' or, indeed, 'toys' with his words to mean something

different.

The difficulty here, however, is that in reading Empson in this way, I am also 'in some

sense' repeating his move of appealing to what the claims in this text *really* mean. What I

understand in this is what Shoshana Felman has termed an 'uncanny reading effect', where

my reading is caught up within, and perpetuates, that which it moves to critique. Felman's

reading of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* raises, for her, a number of important

questions about the relationship between the text and the reading of the text:

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[93] Empson, p. 218.

Taking such reading-effects into consideration, we shall here undertake a reading
of the text which will at the same time be articulated with a reading of its
readings. This two-level reading—which also must return upon itself—will be
concerned with the following questions: What is the nature of a reading-effect as
such? and by extension: what is a reading? What does the text have to say about
its own reading? What is a "Freudian reading" (and what is it *not*)? What in a text
invites—and what in a text *resists*—a psychoanalytical interpretation? In what
way does literature *authorize* psychoanalysis to elaborate a discourse about
literature, and in what way, having granted its authorization, does literature
disqualify that discourse?[94]

It is with these questions about the 'reading-effect' in mind, then, that I wish to consider not

only the extent to which Empson can be read to '*authorize*' a certain reading, but also how far

this reading 'must return upon itself'. In other words, in what way is Empson's reading of the

repetition of Iago and Othello in the seduction scene of *Othello* trapped in this 'inescapable

reading-effect'[95] as much as my own reading? Felman argues:

The scene of the critical debate is thus a *repetition* of the scene dramatized in the
text. The critical interpretation, in other words, not only elucidates the text but
also reproduces it dramatically, unwittingly *participates in it*. Through its very
reading, the text, so to speak, acts itself out. As a reading effect, this inadvertent
"acting out" is indeed uncanny: whichever way the reader turns, he can but be
turned by the text, he can but *perform* it by *repeating it*.[96]

For Felman then, in 'elucidat[ing]' the text, the 'critical interpretation' also 'reproduces it

dramatically' because the text, through its 'very reading', 'acts itself out'. This '"acting out"'

is 'inadvertent' and as such is a 'reading effect' that is neither intentional nor avoidable, the

'reader' inevitably and 'unwittingly *participates in*' the text. Yet both the 'reader' and the

text are here implicated in this 'uncanny' 'reading effect' because 'whichever way the reader

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[94] Shoshana Felman, 'Turning the Screw of Interpretation' in *Literature and Psychoanalysis: The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. by Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 94-207 (p.102).
[95] Felman, 'Turning the Screw', p. 102.
[96] Felman, 'Turning the Screw', p. 101.

turns' – which means the 'reader' can, to an extent, 'turn' of 'his' own volition – 'he can but

be turned by the text' so that the text forcibly 'turns' the 'reader' in addition to, and because

of, the reader's own 'turns'. As much as Empson can be understood to 'repeat' *Othello*,

therefore, my own reading of Empson's readings of *Othello* is equally problematic because

these '*repetition*[s]' do not cease prior to my reading, and nor can I approach this, or any text,

in such way that allows circumvention of such '*repetition*[s]'. Felman's constitution of

'*repetition*', however, can be understood here to also appeal necessarily to differences

between the 'critical interpretation' and the 'text'. For example, despite the 'scene of the

critical debate' being 'a *repetition* of the scene dramatized in the text' it is still distinctly the

'scene of the critical debate', with a discrete location, therefore, and is 'of' or belongs to the

'critical debate' rather than being 'dramatized in the text'. It is not, then, that Felman's text is

the framing authority, indeed her terms here can be read to *repeat* the scene of seduction in

Othello in that both texts *repeat* these ideas of sameness and difference in '*repetition*'. And

further examples of these ideas can be read in Empson's reading of the seduction scene by

returning to Empson's '("In some sense.")'. Here, the quotation marks can be understood as a

'*repetition*' of the parentheses in that they repeat what I previously read as the containment of

the words 'In some sense', and also as that which marks them as discrete from the text of

Othello, from Iago's '*My lord, for aught I know. . . .*', because they are not part of what is

claimed to be spoken. The parentheses and the quotation marks can also be read as

'*repetition*[s]' because there are two of each of them, but even in this '*repetition*' the

parenthesis and the quotation mark before 'In some sense' are the opposite of the ones that

follow, in other words '(' and ')' are simultaneously the same and different because they both

repeat and deviate from one another. This 'very reading', then, this very idea of containment,

can thus be construed also as a '*repetition*' of the sameness and difference that can be read in

Iago and Othello's '*repetition*[s]' of the word '*honest*' in the seduction scene whereby even

the parentheses and quotation marks, the boundaries that are seemingly not included in the reading, 'inadvertently' get caught up with, and repeat what is being read.

Empson's parentheses cease after '("In some sense.")', but in the following he continues to analyse the way in which Iago's 'divergent uses' of '*honest*' shift his claims about Cassio's honesty from the limited '*My lord, for aught I know*', to conceding that '*Why then, I think that Cassio's an honest man*':

> The point of his riddles is to get "not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature" accepted as the relevant sense; Iago will readily call him honest on that basis, and Othello cannot be reassured. 'Chaste' (the sense normally used of women) Cassio is not, but he is 'not a hypocrite' about Bianca. [...] I fancy too, that the idea of 'not being men' gives an extra twist. Iago does not think Cassio manly nor that it is specially manly to be chaste; this allows him to agree that Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona and still keep a tone which seems to deny it—if he is, after so much encouragement, he must be 'effeminate' (there is a strong idea of 'manly' in honest, and an irony on that gives its opposite). […] It is a bad piece of writing unless you are geared up for the shifts of the word.[97]

An appeal to Iago's intentions in his 'use' of language can be read again here since Empson claims to have knowledge of the 'point of his riddles', which is to ensure that the 'sense' of 'honest' that Iago intends is accepted by Othello so that he 'cannot be reassured' about Cassio and Desdemona. For Empson, Iago's 'riddles', which as such belong to him, have a separate and excess 'point' which is also 'of' and therefore belongs to, the 'riddles'. What this means, however, is that there is more to Iago's 'riddles' than simply 'the point': the 'riddles' are more than that which Empson perceives to be their purpose. I also read Iago's 'riddles' here as both excess and other to the word '*honest*'; but they are, for Empson, also the way in which Iago is able to control how his words are construed. Thus, in addition to his

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[97] Empson, p. 222.

duplicitous ability to mean something different from what he says, here Iago is claimed to also be able to mean what he wants to mean, and be understood to mean precisely what he wants to mean as a consequence of his intention. Iago's intended 'sense', then, is 'accepted' by Othello when he 'call[s]' Cassio 'honest' on the 'basis' of the 'relevant sense'. In my reading, the 'relevant sense' – which is '"not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature"' – is 'relevant' to Iago's assertion that '*Men should be what they seem / Or, those that be not, would that they might seem none*'. For Empson, therefore, Iago's claim here is also his 'riddles' and it is via these 'riddles' that he constructs the 'sense' of 'honest' as '"not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature"' in order for Othello to 'accept' it as the 'relevant sense' when Iago finally states that '*I think that Cassio's an honest man'*. Yet in constructing this particular 'sense' with his 'riddles', Iago is also claimed to lay the foundation or 'basis' 'on' which he can 'call [Cassio] honest'. Iago's 'riddles' can therefore be construed as the construction of a specific 'sense' of 'honest' which is both prior to, and separate from, the word: the 'sense' exists before the word is spoken.

It is, then, only under the limitations of this pre-constructed 'relevant sense', that Empson asserts Iago 'will readily call [Cassio] honest'. In this claim to 'readily', I read Iago to have also constructed the conditions in which he can 'call [Cassio] honest' without hesitation, meaning that for Empson, the 'honest' in Iago's '*Why then, I think that Cassio's an honest man'* is spoken with certainty (ostensibly despite '*Why then, I think*') because of his pre-constructed 'relevant sense'. In this regard, Iago is reluctant to 'use' the word if it could mean, or be understood to mean, anything other than '"not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature"' which ironically suggests that, for Empson, Iago will not 'use' 'honest' in a 'sense' that is, from Iago's perspective, not 'honest'. According to Empson, it is because Othello 'accept[s]' this 'sense', therefore, that he 'cannot be reassured'. He is, in this, aware that in spite of Iago's 'honesty' and indeed in spite of his contention that '*I think that*

Cassio's an honest man', the question that Iago has answered is not the '*Is he not honest ?*'
that he was asked. For Empson, therefore, Iago is able to exploit the fact that there are
multiple 'senses' of '*honest*' in order to manipulate Othello into doubting Cassio's 'honesty'
'("In some sense")'.

Empson's contention that Iago is reluctant to 'call [Cassio] honest' if it means
something that is untrue is expanded in the claim that '"Chaste" (the sense normally used of
women) Cassio is not, but he is "not a hypocrite" about Bianca'. For Empson, Iago 'will
readily call him honest on [the] basis' of '"not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature"'
because Cassio is '"not a hypocrite" about Bianca', but he equally 'will' not, therefore, 'call'
him '"Chaste"', specifically with regard to Bianca, because that is what 'Cassio is not'. Thus
for Empson, Iago has taken to omit, in his construction of the 'relevant sense', the 'sense'
'"Chaste"' because he cannot 'honestly' 'call him honest' in these terms. Yet this notion of
omission is problematised because Empson's subsequent assertion that 'the idea of "not being
men" gives an extra twist' can be read to shift his previous claims about Iago's constructed
'sense'. This 'extra twist', according to Empson, also 'allows him to agree that Cassio may be
honest in the female sense about Desdemona' which indicates that he does, to an extent,
mean '"Chaste"', but *only* with regard to Desdemona. The 'point of [Iago's] riddles' for
Empson, therefore, is also to pre-construct a 'sense' of '*honest*' which simultaneously
includes '"Chaste"' and not '"Chaste"', and to control to whom either of these 'senses' do
and do not relate.

For Empson, then, the 'sense' '"Chaste"' is the 'sense normally used of women',
which means it is neither exclusively, nor always 'used of women'. However, because it is
'*normally* used of women',[98] it can be read on the one hand as 'normally used', for Empson,
in reference to women, that is, to label women as either '"Chaste"' or not '"Chaste"', and on

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[98] My italics.

the other hand, when not 'used' in this 'normal' way, it is 'used' in reference to men 'about' women (as it is here in Empson's claims to whether or not Cassio is '"Chaste"' 'about Desdemona' or '"Chaste"' 'about Bianca'). What this also indicates, however, is that for Empson, '"Chaste"' is also 'the' singular and therefore *only* 'sense' that is 'normally used of women', that of all the 'senses' in all of his 'structures', '"Chaste"' is what '*honest*' means when '*honest*' is 'used of women'. Indeed, Empson's contention further on, that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense' demonstrates that for him there is a single, distinct 'female sense' of 'honest' which can seemingly be applied to men, but which even then does not lose its status as 'the female sense'. I also read a connection here with Empson's claim 'I fancy too, that the idea of "not being men" gives an extra twist', which as I argue above, can be understood to alter his previous claims about the 'relevant sense' and the 'point of [Iago's] riddles'. Here, I understand the 'idea of "not being men"' as an 'idea' that, like 'Iago's riddles', relates to Iago's assertion that '*Men should be what they seem / Or, those that be not, would that they might seem none*'. This 'idea', therefore, is distinct from 'Iago's riddles', and it is also separate from the 'relevant sense' because, for Empson, the 'idea' 'gives' a supplementary 'extra twist' to the 'relevant sense'. The 'idea of "not being men"' is therefore not a 'sense' of 'honest' in this instance per se, but it can be understood here to 'twist' the 'relevant sense', for Empson, in such a way that ultimately 'allows [Iago] to agree that Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona and still keep a tone which seems to deny it' concurrent with, and as a result of, him 'call[ing]' Cassio 'honest' on the 'basis' of '"not hypocritical"—"frank about his own nature"' being the 'relevant sense'.

I also read a connection between 'the idea of "not being men"' and Empson's claim that Iago 'does not think Cassio manly nor that it is specially manly to be chaste'. According to Empson, though, it is not Iago's contention that Cassio is not a man as the appeal to 'the idea of "not being men"' would suggest, but that he is 'not' 'manly'. In this, 'manly' can be

construed as excess to and separate from 'man' in that it is something distinctly related to what 'man' is, but at the same time is not a necessary constituent of 'man' because it is also that which a 'man' may or may not be. Unlike Empson's previous claims to knowledge of the intended meaning(s) of what is *spoken* in the text, however, this is an appeal to Iago's *thoughts*, or rather, to that which Iago 'does not think'. It can thus be understood that the absence of a specific thought is, for Empson, also a negation of that thought which is absent. The absence of 'manly', in other words, is the presence of 'not' 'manly'; Cassio is 'not' 'manly' for Iago because Iago 'does not think' that he is. This appeal to the absence of a thought necessitating its opposite can be read again in the assertion that Iago also 'does not think [...] that it is specially manly to be chaste'. However, this claim also shifts my previous reading of 'manly' for here 'manly' does not simply have an absolute opposite, but is something that can be measured as more or less 'manly' depending on whether or not someone is 'chaste'. Thus to be 'chaste' does not here negate 'manly', even though it is 'the sense normally used of women', but it does reduce it to 'not' 'specially manly'. For Empson, then, what Iago 'think[s]' is that Cassio is fundamentally 'not' 'manly', but '*if* he is'[99] 'chaste' (specifically 'about Desdemona') then he would additionally and, hence, paradoxically, be 'not' 'specially manly' too. My reading of the connection between 'chaste' and 'manly', however, shifts further due to the contention, that 'if [Cassio] is ['chaste'], after so much encouragement [from Desdemona], he must be "effeminate"'. As I read above, Empson's claim is that for Iago, Cassio is not 'chaste' 'about Bianca', but he 'may be' 'chaste' 'about Desdemona' which means that 'chaste' is a status that can be present and absent at the same time. It can also, for Empson, be known or not known, thought or not thought, and 'agree[d]' upon (or not) from different external perspectives, so it is a status that is neither objective nor obvious. Here, however, 'chaste' is also a primary status that is

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[99] My italics.

subject to change relative to Cassio's resistance to Desdemona's 'encouragement'; relative, therefore, to his actions or lack thereof. In other words, Cassio is 'chaste' unless or until he has succumbed to Desdemona's 'encouragement' and been '[un]Faithful' with her. And if he has managed to resist 'so much encouragement', then he is not only 'not' 'specially manly', but he 'must be "effeminate"' as well, which, according to Empson is the 'opposite' of '"manly"'. For Iago, therefore, Cassio's resistance to 'so much encouragement', is for him to *remain* 'chaste', and consequently 'not' 'specially manly', and to simultaneously also be the 'opposite' of 'manly'.

This uncertainty about whether or not Cassio is 'chaste' 'about Desdemona' despite 'so much encouragement' then, is for Empson, also what 'allows [Iago] to agree that Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona and still keep a tone which seems to deny it'. I read this 'agree[ment]', like the 'extra twist', as concurrent with, but also supplementary to Iago 'readily call[ing]' Cassio 'honest' on the 'basis' of 'the relevant sense' because here Iago 'agree[s]' that Cassio '*may* be honest in'[100] a different, 'female sense'. Thus rather than independently and unequivocally labelling Cassio 'honest' in his own pre-constructed 'sense', here Empson argues that Iago 'agree[s]' with a claim that is both uncertain and not his own. This would also suggest, therefore, that unlike what I read before as Iago answering Othello's '*Is he not honest?*' with a 'sense' of 'honest' distinct from the question he is asked, for Empson, Iago 'agree[s]' in this instance to a 'sense' that is ostensibly the same as the question put to him by Othello, meaning that '(Faithful, etc.)' is also what Iago 'agree[s]' to here. However, this claim to 'agree[ment]' is further problematised by Empson's contention that along with this, Iago is also able to 'still keep a tone which seems to deny' that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona'.

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[100] My italics.

I read 'tone' as distinct from 'sense' here, and also as distinct from and in opposition to the claim that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense' because it is a 'tone that seems to deny' this claim. Even without the 'tone that seems to deny it', however, whether or not Cassio is 'honest' is already unclear in Iago's 'agree[ment]' because here it is only what Cassio 'may be'. The 'tone that seems to deny it' can therefore be read to both contradict this uncertainty, because it is a 'tone' of 'den[ial]', and to perpetuate it because the 'tone' only '*seems* to deny it'[101] meaning that the 'den[ial]' is equally as uncertain. That Iago is able to 'still keep a tone which seems to deny it', furthermore, indicates that for Empson, this 'tone' of 'den[ial]' was already in Iago's 'agree[ment]' prior to his 'agree[ment]', that this is a retention of something that was, and therefore also is, always there. Nonetheless, the 'tone' is not obligatory because the contention is that Iago 'still keep[s]' this 'tone' in spite of his 'agree[ment]' that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona', meaning that the 'agree[ment]' would, conceivably, hold even without this supplementary 'tone' because it would not be in the 'agree[ment]' but for being 'kept' there by Iago. The 'tone that seems to deny it' is thus not only constituted as that which contradicts and opposes the meaning of Iago's 'agree[ment]' that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona', but also as a constant, yet surplus, element of the 'agree[ment]' that it 'den[ies]'. This appeal to the 'tone which seems to deny' Iago's 'agree[ment]', then, can be read as connected to the claim that 'if [Cassio] is ['chaste'], after so much encouragement, he must be "effeminate"' because of the long dash that I read to both separate and join the two claims. Iago's retention of the 'tone' of 'den[ial]' that 'Cassio may be honest in the female sense about Desdemona', therefore, is linked, for Empson, both to the implausibility of Cassio's resistance to 'so much encouragement' from Desdemona, and to the idea that 'if' he has managed to do so, 'if' he is still 'honest in the female sense', then he 'must be

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[101] My italics.

"effeminate"' which means there can be no other explanation for his remaining 'chaste' under these conditions.

Empson's contention that for Iago, Cassio 'must be "effeminate"' 'if he is' still 'chaste' can be also read as supported by his subsequent assertion in parentheses that 'there is a strong idea of "manly" in honest, and an irony on that gives its opposite'. Yet this claim also shifts, once again, my previous readings of 'sense' and 'manly', and indeed 'the point of [Iago's] riddles'. I read the 'strong idea of "manly"' then, as distinct from the 'word *honest*' because it is an 'idea' that is claimed to be contained inside it. It is also distinct from the many 'senses' of 'honest' and the 'structures' of these 'senses' that Empson argues evolve through time because this is a separate 'idea' that apparently does not change. For Empson, therefore, this intrinsic, 'strong idea of "manly"' is always 'in honest' regardless of which 'sense' of 'honest' is being 'used'. Indeed, this also means that even when the 'sense' is '"Chaste"' which is 'the sense normally used of women' and is 'the female sense', the 'strong idea of "manly"' is also 'in' the word 'honest' all the while. Because it is a 'strong idea', furthermore, it can also be understood to have a degree of power over the meaning of '*honest*' so that in the case of '"Chaste"', for example, the 'strong idea of "manly" in honest' can potentially exceed or overpower the 'female sense of the word' that it can already be understood to contradict.

This is further complicated, however, because as well as there being 'a strong idea of "manly" in honest', it is also Empson's contention that 'an irony on that gives his opposite'. Unlike the previous construction of 'manly' in 'Iago does not think […] that it is specially manly to be chaste' where 'manly' is constituted as measurable against 'chaste', here '"manly"' is an 'idea' that is stated to have a single and therefore absolute 'opposite'. Yet the difficulty in this is that what precisely the 'opposite' might be is not specified here. If it is to be understood that the 'opposite' is the reverse of the claim that 'there is a strong idea of

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"manly"', then there are multiple available readings; that is, the 'opposite' may be construed as *not* "manly"', or unmanly, or 'a strong idea of [not] "manly"', or 'a strong idea of' unmanly, and so on. Indeed, because I read this claim in parentheses to support the claim that precedes it, the 'opposite' can also be understood as '"effeminate"'. In addition to my reading of multiple 'opposite[s]', there are also a number of distinctions here which further problematise any notion of these 'opposite[s]' simply being the reverse of 'a strong idea of "manly"'. For instance, rather than being 'in honest' as '"manly"' is claimed to be, the 'opposite' is 'its opposite' and as such belongs to the 'strong idea of "manly"' and not to the word 'honest'. The 'opposite' is also 'give[n]' by an 'irony on' the 'strong idea of "manly"', so that as well as belonging to the 'strong idea of "manly"', it is also at one stage in the possession of an 'irony on' top of the 'strong idea of "manly"' in order for it to then be bestowed by, and moved away from, the 'irony'. What this means is that whilst the 'strong idea of "manly"' can be understood, for Empson, as a static 'idea' that is a constant 'in honest', 'its opposite' is also 'its opposite' because it, conversely, can be located in different places and can travel from one point to another.

For Empson, then, regardless of what 'relevant sense' Iago has pre-constructed for Othello to 'accept' when he 'call[s]' Cassio 'honest' and/or 'agree[s] that Cassio may be honest in the female sense', there is always 'a strong idea of "manly" in honest'. It may be argued, therefore, that the 'strong idea of "manly" in honest' is the point where Iago is ultimately no longer able to manipulate and control both his intended and accepted 'sense' of the word '*honest*' because this constant 'idea' is necessarily 'in' there no matter what the 'point of his riddles' might be. Yet for Empson, Iago 'uses', or indeed 'toys with', even this 'strong idea' in his 'riddles' via the 'idea of "not being men"' that 'gives an extra twist' of 'irony' upon the 'strong idea of "manly"', 'allow[ing] him', therefore, to 'agree that Cassio may be honest in the female sense' with a 'tone that seems to deny it'. Thus Empson's

contention is that Iago has the same degree of mastery of the word '*honest*' that he claims

himself to have in being 'geared up for the shifts of the word'. For Empson, Iago knows these

'shifts' and this enables him to ensure that Othello 'cannot be reassured' when he states '*Why*

then, I think that Cassio's an honest man'.

Despite Empson's acknowledgement, however, of these 'shifts' in his contention that

it 'is a bad piece of writing unless you are geared up for the shifts of the word', even in this

claim to master and secure these 'shifts', he is unable to account for the many further shifts,

divisions and contradictions that are prevalent throughout his reading of the word '*honest*' in

Othello. Once again, I am here reminded of Felman's argument that in the attempt to master

or resolve the divisions in a text, the critic, instead, succeeds in 'act[ing] the division out':

> In repeating as they do the primal scene of the text's meaning as division, the
> critics can by no means master or exhaust the very meaning of that division, but
> only act the division out, perform it, be part of it. […] The attempt, however, to
> eliminate contradiction itself partakes of the contradiction: the affirmation of
> meaning as *undivided* is simultaneously one that *excludes* the position of the
> opponent; the homogeneity of meaning can be asserted but through the expulsion
> of its heterogeneity. In precisely trying to unify the meaning of the text and to
> proclaim it as unambiguous, the critics only mark more forcefully its constitutive
> *division* and duplicity. Contradiction reappears with ironical tenacity in the very
> words used to banish it.[102]

Empson's explicit 'attempt' to clarify and secure the meaning(s) of each of the 'fifty-two uses

of *honest* and *honesty* in *Othello*',[103] then, according to Felman, only 'mark[s] more

forcefully its constitutive *division* and duplicity'. Indeed, every turn, every appeal to 'sense'

or 'idea' or 'opposite', for example, further splits that which it reads and in doing so is itself a

reading in which 'constitutive *division* and duplicity' can be read. And as I argue earlier in

this chapter, my readings, too, are implicated in this very issue. For as a reading of a reading,

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[102] Felman, 'Turning the Screw', pp. 113-4.
[103] Empson, p. 218.

I cannot claim to 'master or exhaust the very meaning of that division' or avoid 'perform[ing]' or 'be[ing] part of' the division in Empson's text any more than Empson can 'master' Shakespeare.

iii)   Eliot

Before turning to Morrison's dramatic intervention, I find it helpful at this point to offer a brief reading from another early twentieth-century critic who offers a detailed account of the language of *Othello*. In his 1927 essay, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', T.S Eliot states that 'I have always felt that I have never read a more terrible exposure of human weakness—of universal human weakness—than the last great speech of Othello'.[104] For Eliot, then, the 'terrible exposure of human weakness' is something that he has 'read'. Yet although the 'last great speech of Othello' is stated here to be this 'terrible exposure of human weakness', the fact that Eliot claims specifically to have 'read' the 'terrible exposure' rather than the 'speech' itself, means that his reading is of that which is in excess of the 'speech'. The 'last great speech of Othello' is thus constituted as both a 'speech' which does not need to be 'read' and as an 'exposure' which can be 'read'.

That the 'speech' is a 'terrible exposure of human weakness—of universal human weakness' constitutes 'universal human weakness' as otherwise hidden. However, there are, for Eliot, other less 'terrible exposure[s] of' 'universal human weakness', meaning that although it is not always the case that 'universal human weakness' is not 'expos[ed]', this 'exposure' is simply 'more terrible' than the others and can thus be read as superior in its status as an 'exposure'. Eliot expands on these ideas of Othello's 'speech' as that which exposes 'universal human weakness' in the following:

> What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is *cheering himself up*. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona,

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[104] T.S. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' in *T.S. Eliot: Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1932), p. 130.

and is thinking about himself. Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think of oneself. Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself. I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this bovarysme, the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare.[105]

Despite the fact that Eliot's claim to Othello 'making this speech' can be read as retrospective in that the entire 'speech' is available to Eliot as a text which he indeed 'cites' prior to these claims, Eliot nonetheless knows it to be a 'speech' which is both presently and continuously of Othello's 'making', meaning that there is also a sense in which 'this speech' can never be read as complete. And because 'this speech' is always of his 'making', Othello can also be understood, for Eliot, to be an inextricable and instrumental constant in its constitution whilst at the same time existing beyond the 'speech' because it is he who is 'making' it. The 'making' of 'this speech', however, is not Othello's sole act since he is claimed also to be 'doing' something in addition to this, and it is not simply that 'making' 'this speech' subsequently enables the additional 'doing' because the 'doing' is equally present and continuous, parallel with the 'making' of the speech. Indeed, the 'doing' is claimed to be 'in' the 'making' of the speech and is therefore a fundamental part of its construction. The 'doing', for Eliot, thus precedes the speech, occurs concurrently with the speech and at the same time *is* 'this speech'. That Othello's prior acts of 'making' and 'doing' form 'this speech' constitutes 'this speech' at once as object, product and action with Othello as the creative authority whose intention of 'doing' is fulfilled via his creation of 'this speech', precisely because the 'doing' and 'this speech' are, in Othello's 'making', inseparable.

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[105] Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', pp. 130-31.

For Eliot, then, Othello is definitely 'doing' something additional 'in making this speech'. 'What' he is 'doing', however, is less of a certainty because of the contention that he only 'seems' to be '*cheering himself up*' and that this is what 'seems' to be specifically 'to' Eliot. Othello's 'doing' is thus divided between the act of 'doing' which is fixed and knowable, and '[w]hat' this 'doing' is, which is subjective, requiring the observation and construal of another. The 'doing' can be read, however, as divided further still because Eliot states that in addition to '*cheering himself up*', Othello is also 'endeavouring to escape reality' and that 'he has ceased to think about Desdemona and is thinking about himself'. Here, 'doing' becomes a group of simultaneous acts. These acts are all distinct, divisible into '*cheering himself up*' or 'endeavouring to escape reality', for example, but they are also indivisible as they are all part of the same 'doing' act, mutually dependent, all contributing to the achievement of the other, and all 'in' Othello's speech 'making'.

Another appeal to division can be read here given that 'in making this speech' the Othello who is 'making' and 'doing' is ostensibly '*cheering* […] *up*' a separate '*himself*'. Othello's 'making' of 'this speech', therefore, is an interaction between Othello and a distinct '*himself*'. But in doing so, the '*himself*' is altered from being a previously not '*cheer*[ed …] *up*' self to a self that is continuously '*cheering* […] *up*'. Othello, who I previously read as the constant creator of 'this speech', is consequently also both a split Othello and a continuously changing Othello. That he is 'endeavouring to escape reality', furthermore, constitutes Othello as *in* reality, indeed he is *confined* by it, and as this is a continuous 'endeavouring', Othello's attempt to 'escape' is never realised in 'this speech'. Since Othello 'seems' to be '*cheering himself up*', then, the alteration of '*himself*' is connected not to a movement from his position in 'reality', but to his unsuccessful endeavour to 'escape' it. In this sense, it is his 'endeavouring' that is '*cheering himself up*'.

Also part of Othello's 'doing' though, is the claim that 'he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about' another distinct 'himself'. Not only does this mean that both Othello's current and prior thoughts are, for Eliot, available in 'this speech' and knowable, but also that 'reality', Othello's unsuccessful endeavour to 'escape' it, and that he 'seems' to be '*cheering himself up*' are all directly related to the subject of Othello's thoughts, to what he is and is not 'thinking about'. Indeed, the fact that Othello is 'thinking about himself' and no longer 'about Desdemona', and that this is also a claim to him '*cheering himself up*' constitutes '*himself*' not only as that which Othello is changing as part of his 'doing' but also as that which is known and accessible to him precisely because he is 'thinking about himself'. '[T]hinking about himself' and no longer 'about Desdemona' is also Othello's endeavour to 'escape reality', but whilst it may be understood that thoughts 'about himself' are connected with the not-reality Othello is ostensibly pursuing in his endeavour, my reading is that 'thinking about himself' is what confines Othello in 'reality' because his endeavour to 'escape' is unfulfilled regardless of what or whom Othello is 'thinking about'.

The narration then goes on to shift perspective from claims specifically related to Othello and 'this speech' to the more general, or indeed 'universal', claim that '[h]umility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think of oneself'. Here, to 'think of oneself' is an inability to 'achieve' '[h]umility' which is one of several 'virtue[s]' that *can* be 'achieve[d]', but is also the 'most difficult of all […] *to* achieve'.[106] It is not 'virtu[ous]' to 'think of oneself' then, but neither is it 'difficult', for to 'achieve' '[h]umility', 'one' must do the 'difficult' thing and not 'think about oneself'. This difficulty, according to Eliot, also lies in the fact that 'to think of oneself' is a 'desire'. And although 'desire[s]' (including the 'desire to think of oneself') do 'die' (meaning here that they are otherwise 'alive'), this particular 'desire' is especially resilient to death as 'nothing

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[106] My italics.

dies harder than [this] desire'. 'Humility', the 'most difficult of all virtues to achieve',

therefore, can only be 'achieve[d]' if and when the 'desire to think of oneself', which

'nothing dies harder than', 'dies'. In this, 'to think of oneself' is constituted as the more

natural or normal position; as that which is both effortless and gratifying because it involves

no 'difficult[y]' or 'hard[ness]' and is motivated by a 'desire'. Thus, for Eliot, Othello's

move from thinking 'about Desdemona' to instead 'thinking about himself' is something that

is unique neither to Othello nor 'this speech', but is the natural, expected case for all

'onesel[ves]' and is therefore something that Othello cannot avoid. In ceasing to 'think about

Desdemona', Othello has reverted to the not 'difficult' alternative which is also his innate,

but shared, 'desire' to think 'about himself'. He fails to 'achieve' '[h]umility' because it is

inherently too 'difficult' for him to do so.

According to Eliot, however, what Othello's inability to 'achieve' '[h]umility' *does*

enable him to succeed 'in' doing is 'turning himself into a pathetic figure'. Unlike the

contention that Othello 'seems […] to be' continuously '*cheering himself up*', this second

claim to Othello's alteration of (yet another) 'himself' can, to some extent, be read as

absolute, that on this occasion he conclusively 'succeeds' in becoming a 'pathetic figure',

something that prior to 'this speech' he was not. Yet whilst this reading can be understood to

secure Othello as a stable and singular 'figure', it is only through further divisions and

alterations of the many and distinct 'himsel[ves]' that Othello 'succeeds' in doing so. Another

problem with this reading of absolute change is that Othello's success is not stated to be 'in'

any final outcome; rather, it is specifically 'in' the process of 'turning himself into a pathetic

figure' that Othello 'succeeds'. The claim to 'turning himself into', moreover, indicates that

'a pathetic figure' is already available to Othello as something that exists with an 'in' 'into'

which Othello is able to turn. In this sense, therefore, it is not that Othello completely

converts 'himself' and becomes an entirely new entity, but rather that he is, for Eliot,

'succe[ssfully]' caught up in an ongoing process of 'turning himself into a pathetic figure' which is necessarily already accessible to him.

In spite of Othello's prior access to the 'pathetic figure', however, this 'figure' cannot be read as a single, stable object entirely distinct and separate from Othello because its constitution is reliant upon the 'himself' that is 'turning into' it. The constitution of 'figure' is additionally reliant upon the adjective 'pathetic' which does not simply modify 'figure' by conveying what type of 'figure' it is, distinguishing it from other not 'pathetic figure[s]', but establishes this 'figure' as that which cannot stand in isolation as it always requires supplements for its constitution. Yet in addition to my reading of 'pathetic figure' as a 'figure' that *is* 'pathetic', it can equally be understood here that Othello is 'turning himself into' a 'figure' *of* the 'pathetic' or, in other words, a 'figure' that represents pathos. Similar to the way in which the 'figure' is dependent on the addition of 'pathetic', therefore, 'pathetic' is also constituted as that which requires a representative 'figure' meaning that pathos always exists in a different location from the 'figure' that represents it. The stability of Othello's 'turning himself into a pathetic figure' is thus further problematized because what he is 'turning himself into' is necessarily divided.

Eliot also states that it is 'by adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude' that Othello 'succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure. Here, both the 'aesthetic' and the 'moral attitude[s]' are claimed to require 'adopting', constituting 'attitude' as that which is assumed or acquired and, as such, separate from, and foreign to, Othello, whilst at the same time being something he can take on *as if* it is his own. There are also different *types* of 'attitude' in this claim and since Othello is 'adopting' one 'rather than' the other, this indicates that a selection has to be made between the two. Both 'attitude[s]' are mutually exclusive and cannot be adopted at the same time, but this also means that neither 'attitude' is essential to Othello because he could equally have 'adopt[ed]' either. In this, I also read an

opposition between the two different 'attitude[s]', with the 'moral attitude' that Eliot claims

Othello is *not* 'adopting' related to the previous claims that he fails to 'achieve' the 'virtue'

'[h]umility' and, likewise, the 'aesthetic' 'attitude' he *is* 'adopting' related to his 'thinking

about himself'.

In this sense, then, the 'aesthetic' 'attitude' that Othello is 'adopting' can be

understood, for Eliot, to be the least favourable of the two, firstly because of its opposition to

'a moral attitude', and secondly because it prevents Othello from 'achiev[ing]' the 'virtue'

'[h]umility'. Yet if these connections are to be read as secure, then my previous reading of

Othello's 'desire to think' 'about himself' as inherent and unavoidable is called into question

because this would mean that whether or not he acts on his 'desire' is dependent on the

'attitude' he adopts which is, conversely, constituted here as neither inherent nor

unavoidable. There is another way to read this, however, because it could also be argued that

it is precisely because '[h]umility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve' and because

'nothing dies harder than the desire to think of oneself' that Othello is 'adopting an aesthetic'

'attitude', that his doing so is simply part of his inability to 'achieve' '[h]umility'. The

'attitude' Othello adopts may be one of two that he could be 'adopting', therefore, but for

Eliot, it is both the case that Othello's 'desire' motivates the selection of one 'rather than' the

other and also that the one he is 'adopting' is why he is unable to withstand his 'desire'.

Othello's adoption of 'an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude', then, can be understood here

to be that which makes it possible for him to succeed 'in turning himself into a pathetic

figure' because it is the 'aesthetic' 'attitude' he is 'adopting' which both enables, and is

enabled by, his 'desire to think about' 'himself'.

Eliot's subsequent contention that Othello is 'dramatizing himself against his

environment' can also be read in these terms since here Othello's act of 'dramatizing himself'

is formulated not as additional to Othello's adoption of 'an aesthetic rather than a moral

attitude', but rather as part of the same claim. Also in this statement, however, I read yet another appeal to division because of the claim to yet another 'himself' which, in this instance, is being 'dramatiz[ed]' by Othello. That Othello is 'dramatizing himself' also indicates that this 'himself' does not, for Eliot, always necessarily exist in a 'dramatiz[ed] state since this is something that is currently being done *to* it by Othello (who, because he is the one doing the 'dramatizing', is also constituted as not 'dramatiz[ed]'). '[D]ramatzing' can thus be read as an act which changes something that is previously and otherwise not 'dramatiz[ed]' to become 'drama[tic]'. The 'dramatiz[ed]' state, then, is not a natural, but an assumed state, it is the 'adopting' of an 'attitude'. Because the 'dramatizing [of] himself' is stated to be specifically 'against his environment', furthermore, this 'himself' can be read also as that which could potentially be 'dramatiz[ed]' *not* 'against' Othello's environment. In other words, this particular 'himself' is able exist in a number of different states: either 'dramatiz[ed]' or not 'dramatiz[ed]', and either 'dramatiz[ed]' 'against' or not 'against' Othello's environment. In the claim that Othello is 'dramatizing himself against his environment' I also read 'environment' to indicate Othello's particular situation or surroundings which belong specifically to him because it is 'his'. Yet since he is 'dramatizing himself *against* his environment',[107] neither this 'himself', nor Othello's 'dramatizing [of] himself' are, for Eliot, part of Othello's 'environment' because both are positioned in opposition to 'his environment' in this claim, both are acting 'against' it. Othello's 'environment', therefore, is not 'dramatiz[ed]' but exists separately from, and in contradiction of, Othello's 'dramatizing'. The environment is that which Othello cannot change and he is only able to it oppose through his adoption of 'an aesthetic' 'attitude' which is assumed, and and his 'dramatiz[ation]' of 'himself' which is not normally 'dramatiz[ed]', 'against' an environment which is uniquely 'his'.

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[107] My italics.

I read these ideas of things being what they ordinarily are not again in Eliot's contention that Othello 'takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself'. This claim indicates that what Othello is doing in 'adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment' is a deception on Othello's part, both of 'the spectator' and of 'himself' and is therefore not absolutely part of the 'reality' of either. Since Othello 'takes in the spectator', then, it must be understood that there is something about Othello's 'dramatizing [of] himself against his environment' that is necessarily observable and observed by 'the spectator'. The 'spectator', however, is 'take[n] in' by Othello meaning that the observations of 'the spectator' may be from the perspective of 'the spectator', but are also from the position of an 'in' that Othello is able to 'take' 'the spectator' into. Although Eliot does not claim to know precisely what 'the spectator' sees, therefore, what he does claim to know is that 'the spectator' sees what Othello *allows* 'the spectator' to see. Indeed, Eliot later expands on this with the claim that what Shakespeare exposes here is 'the human will to see things as they are not'. Thus, the 'spectator' does 'see things' but 'as' something other than they really 'are', but this is not from the 'will' of the 'spectator' but rather is under the control of Othello, it is his 'will' which enables him to 'take' the 'spectator' 'in'.

Indeed, for Eliot, Othello's 'tak[ing] in [of] the spectator' is a consequence of 'the human motive' which 'is primarily to take in himself'. Othello does not 'primarily' seek to 'take in the spectator', then, but inadvertently does so due to his motivation to 'take in himself'. Because Othello is not stated to be a 'spectator', however, his 'tak[ing] in [of] himself' can be read as different since Othello necessarily does not see what it is that 'the spectator' sees. It is by means other than seeing, therefore, that Othello is, or would be, able to 'take in himself'. The reason why I argue here that this is a claim to a potential 'tak[ing] in [of] himself' rather than a definite one is because although Eliot states that Othello

unequivocally 'takes in the spectator', whether or not he is successful in 'tak[ing] in himself' is not at all certain as Eliot's contention is that it is only 'the human motive […] to take in himself'. Othello is definitely not 'the spectator' here, so how can Othello 'see things as they are not' if it is 'the spectator' and not him who 'see[s]'? This uncertainty of whether or not Othello is able to 'take in himself' can also be linked to my previous readings of, for example, Othello's 'adopt[ion]' of 'an aesthetic' 'attitude' and that he is 'dramatizing himself against his environment' because even if it is the case that Othello assumes an 'attitude' which is not his own, thereby going 'against his environment' but only through the 'dramatiz[ation]' of a separate and distinct 'himself', and is also unable to see this from the point of view of 'the spectator' who *is* 'take[n] in', it does not necessarily follow that 'the human will to see things as they are not' can be fulfilled.

Eliot's appeal to the universality of human nature can be read again in both his assertion that the 'human motive is primarily to take in himself' and that Shakespeare has 'exposed' 'the human will to see things as they are not'. Here, Othello cannot be understood simply as construction representative of 'human motive' or 'human will', but instead also as a 'human' who shares these traits with other 'human[s]'. Othello, for instance, has the 'human motive […] to take in himself' which is not a claim to a universality that exists separately from Othello, but is a claim to Othello 'himself'. Unlike Eliot's previous contention about the 'desire to think of oneself' in which I read a correlation with Othello but not an explicit claim to 'himself', this appeal to 'human motive' is specifically related to, and additionally is constitutive of, 'himself'. As I argue above, however, that Eliot's statement that this universal 'human will to see things as they are not', which for Eliot is 'bovarysme', is 'exposed' by Shakespeare does not necessarily mean that it is not 'exposed' elsewhere. Indeed, the claim here is that Eliot does 'not believe any other writer has ever exposed' this 'more clearly than Shakespeare' indicating that there are other 'writer[s]' who have 'exposed'

it, only they have done so less 'clearly' than Shakespeare. Despite my reading of Othello as a 'human' with 'human motive[s]' and 'will[s]', then, it is not Othello, but Shakespeare as 'writer' who has 'exposed this bovarysme'. For Eliot, therefore, Shakespeare is both superior to 'any writer' because of the clarity with which he has 'exposed this bovarysme' and, as 'writer' is the authority which enables this 'expos[ure]' to take place.

iv)   Moisan and Seduction

I would like to introduce one further critic at this stage, to help think about a further repetition. If Eliot can be read to repeat something of Empson's psychological reading, and, through this, his strange, disruptive insistence on paraphrase, Thomas Moisan offers an analysis of the same sequence that is of interest to Empson, and, through this, engages what can be taken as an even more precise problematisation of identity within the play.

In his reading of *Othello*'s 'seduction' scene, Thomas Moisan challenges claims to secure distinctions between, and essentialist accounts of, the characters of Iago and Othello offered by critics of this text. Moisan is able to locate these difficulties through his own consideration of the ways in which repetition in exchange of language can be understood to worry character distinctions. I will argue here, however, that Moisan's readings nonetheless have an investment in ideas of character, language and exchange that do not fully address the unstable and shifting constitutions of these ideas in *Othello,* his work thus staging a return to Empson's in some perhaps unexpected ways. Moisan claims:

> The often stichomythic and catechetical exchanges through which Iago "works"
> upon Othello turn the two into rhetorical mirrors of each other in which
> distinctions of character are effaced, with the result, not so much of transforming
> the "noble" Othello into the clone of the "ignoble" Iago—though Othello's
> ultimate behaviour might suggest that—but of revealing the character of Othello

to be as much of an enigma, his motivations as far beyond accountability, as are the character and motivations of his adversary.[108]

For Moisan, Othello and Iago are involved in multiple 'exchanges' which are 'often' and therefore not always 'stichomythic and catechetical'. In this, the 'exchanges' that *are* 'stichomythic and catechetical' are simultaneously constituted by a notion of lack (since their status as 'stichomythic' indicates 'exchanges' of short, single lines which necessarily differ from, and are lesser than, other not-'stichomythic' 'exchanges'), and by that which is in excess of themselves because they additionally function to educate and instruct. Yet in spite of the 'catechetical' nature of some of these 'exchanges', the 'exchanges' themselves only enable Iago to 'arouse Othello's curiosity'[109] in so far as he '"works" upon Othello' 'through' them. Because the 'exchanges' are merely the channel 'through' which 'Iago "works" upon Othello', Iago's 'work' and undertaking of this 'work' are, in fact, not part of, but separate from and supplementary to his and Othello's 'exchanges'. What this means is that these 'exchanges' are, for Moisan, not simply a matter of Iago and Othello taking turns in alternating` speech; nor, indeed, is it a claim to the giving and receiving of objects of equal value as the word 'exchanges' would suggest because this is troubled by the fact that Iago '"works" upon Othello' 'through' them. The 'exchanges' are thus constituted as something more than the mere exchange of language (although it is significant here that it is only 'through' the exchange of language that Iago *can* 'work') and, more crucially, as acts which are not equally balanced between Iago and Othello because Iago additionally utilises the 'exchanges' both in a way that Othello does not and in a way that positions him 'upon' Othello.

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[108] Thomas Moisan, 'Repetition and Interrogation in *Othello*' in *Othello: New Perspectives*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1991), pp. 56-7.
[109] Moisan, p. 55.

Moisan's claim that the 'exchanges' 'turn the two into rhetorical mirrors of each other' then, is problematized by my reading of inequality and imbalance in their 'exchanges' because the sense of reflection and repetition in 'rhetorical mirrors' indicates an equivalence between the two in terms of their rhetoric. Indeed, the contention here is that their imbalanced 'exchanges' both precede and cause the 'turn[ing]' of Iago and Othello 'into rhetorical mirrors of each other in which distinctions of character are effaced'. Here, the 'exchanges' in which Iago can previously be understood as distinct and dominant, not only alter, but also eliminate any distinction(s) between the two in terms both of 'character' and power relations, they become the same and equal in this regard. Both are needed in order for them to be 'rhetorical mirrors of each other', but in doing so, the differences between them are lost. However, because they become 'rhetorical mirrors', it is not that Iago and Othello themselves 'turn […] into' a reflection or repetition of one another, they are merely the means by which reflection can occur and be shown back to the other and it is 'in' this that 'distinctions of character are effaced'. Their sameness is constituted only by their newly-established matching ability to repeat and display one another's rhetoric. I would argue, therefore, that if it is the case that this specific and limited sameness is a condition in which 'distinctions of character are effaced', then 'character' can be understood here as that which is determined by rhetoric; as that which is external and visible because, in this instance, it is *displayed* by Iago and Othello in their position as 'rhetorical mirrors'; and as that which, on the one hand, can be reflected and shown by someone else meaning that 'character' is not exclusive to the person to whom the 'character' belongs, but on the other hand, what is reflected can only ever be a 'character' which is 'rhetorical[ly]' the same as the one it reflects.

However, for Moisan, the 'turn[ing]' of 'the two into rhetorical mirrors' is 'not so much of transforming the "noble" Othello into the clone of the "ignoble" Iago' – they still remain separate and distinct from one another in the same way that they were prior to the

'exchanges', even though they have equally been 'turn[ed]' into 'rhetorical mirrors of one another in which distinctions of character' have been 'effaced'. The effacing of 'distinctions of character' then, is not about 'transform[ation]' or change of either Iago or Othello, it, in fact, brings about the 'revealing' of 'the character of Othello to be as much of an enigma, his motivations as far beyond accountability, as are the character and motivations of his adversary'. Prior to their 'exchanges', therefore, Othello's 'character' was hidden, whilst Iago's character was apparent and known. Yet what is 'reveal[ed]' by the 'exchanges' and their subsequent 'turn[ing]' of 'the two into rhetorical mirrors of each other' is that the 'characters' of the two are only the same because they are both 'an enigma', they are equally enigmatic, but they cannot be known to be the same beyond this because their characters are necessarily unknowable. There is, therefore, a limitation, or indeed an impossibility, of what can be known about the characters of both Iago and Othello from their 'exchanges'. The 'distinctions of character are effaced' because they repeat and reflect one another, but distinctions remain regardless.

It is this appeal to 'exchanges' and 'rhetorical mirrors' that I wish to pursue further in my own reading of the 'celebrated "seduction" scene of act 3'[110] of *Othello*. However, prior to this, I would like to address Moisan's further remarks about communication and text in the following quotation. Moisan continues:

> One senses that Othello and Iago may be communicants in the same rhetorical idiom in that exchange I cited just above, where, from Iago's first "indeed?" Othello's "victimization" is triggered by Othello's ability to read Iago's words closely, scrutinizing them rather as if he were interpreting a text, offering a commentary on both the verbal and nonverbal inflections of Iago's remarks.'[111]

The previous notion of 'rhetorical mirrors' is challenged by the claim that 'Othello and Iago may be communicants in the same rhetorical idiom'. Here, what is the same is not Iago and

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[110] Moisan, p. 54.
[111] Moisan, p. 57.

Othello, but the 'rhetorical idiom' 'in' which they communicate. The 'rhetorical idiom' is that which *contains* Othello and Iago in their capacity as 'communicants' because they are 'in' it and 'that exchange I cited just above' is also the container of the 'rhetorical idiom' since it is 'in that exchange' that the 'rhetorical idiom' is located. Othello and Iago are thus doubly contained within and restricted by their communication with one another and contained yet again within Moisan's citation of 'that exchange'. Yet for Moisan this is merely something that 'One senses' and that 'may be' the case so the fixity and restriction of this containment is, once more, something that cannot be known for certain.

In addition to my reading of Moisan's citation as that which may or may not contain and restrict Othello and Iago's communication, the claim that 'Othello's "victimization" is triggered by Othello's ability to read Iago's words closely, scrutinizing them rather as if he were interpreting a text' indicates that, for Moisan, his citation of the 'exchange' is something in which distinctions between speech and text can be determined. In his citation, the 'first "indeed?"' belongs to Iago, these are 'Iago's words', and it is 'from' them that 'Othello's "victimization" is triggered' meaning that prior to 'Iago's first "indeed?"', 'Othello's "victimization"' was already there, but required this catalyst for its manifestation. It is not 'Iago's first "indeed?"' per se, however, which triggers 'Othello's "victimization"', but Othello's own 'ability to read Iago's words closely'. In this, 'Iago's words' are ostensibly available to Othello since he has the 'ability to read' them, meaning that there is an Othello within Moisan's citation who can 'read […] closely' the words which belong to another. Iago's 'words', furthermore, are constituted here as not 'text', because Othello 'scrutiniz[es] them rather as if he were interpreting a text'. Othello can thus be understood to have access to Iago's words in a medium which is different from the way in which they are presented in Moisan's citation of them. However, that Othello 'scrutiniz[es] them rather as if he were interpreting a text' means, in my reading, that there is something about 'Iago's words' which

is shared by the textual because they can be treated 'as if' they are such. Any appeal to the absolute distinction between text and *not* text is thus problematized by Moisan's reading of Othello's interpretation of 'Iago's words'.

For Moisan, then, the textual citation of Othello and Iago's 'exchange' signifies 'words' which are not text but can be 'read […] closely' and interpreted 'as if' they were text by Othello who is also contained within the 'exchange' that he cites. In addition to this, however, the claim that Othello's part in the 'exchange' is to offer a 'commentary on both the verbal and nonverbal inflections of Iago's remarks' means that as well as being non-textual, 'Iago's remarks' also work on two distinct and opposing levels and that Othello is able to comment on and therefore access 'both'. Moisan's claims about language, character, exchange and repetition in the 'seduction' scene are produced here as complex and uncertain. In the following I will consider the extent to which these ideas can be further problematized with a close analysis of that scene from *Othello*:

> **OTHELLO**   What dost thou think?
> **IAGO** Think, my lord?
> **OTHELLO**
> 'Think, my lord'? By heaven, thou echo'st me,
> As if there were some monster in thy thought
> Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean something: (3.3.108-11)

The words 'Think, my lord?' are repeated in this text, and because there are two, separate instances of 'Think, my lord?' they are necessarily different from one another. Yet there are, of course, further distinctions here and I will, firstly, consider these in terms of the way in which each one is related to either the claim '**IAGO'** or '**OTHELLO**'. There are alternating and successive claims to '**OTHELLO** […] **IAGO** […] **OTHELLO**', but each is separated by other words which are not wholly in capital letters or bold text and, indeed, the other words are likewise separated also by either '**IAGO**' or '**OTHELLO**'. Yet in this separation, each '**OTHELLO**' or '**IAGO**' can also be understood as connected to the text that follows it

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because '**OTHELLO** What dost thou think?' is separate and distinct again from '**IAGO**

Think, my lord?'. This simultaneous separation of, and connection between, for instance,

'**IAGO'** and 'Think, my lord?', further, can be read as differences in perspective, that the

perspective of the claim '**IAGO'** is different from the 'Think, my lord?' perspective. '**IAGO**'

can thus be understood as an attribution of the subsequent 'Think, my lord?' to '**IAGO'** from

a perspective that is not '**IAGO**'. If, as Moisan contends, these are 'Iago's words'[112], then

they are only constituted as such because of the external narrative frame: there is no claim

within what can be understood as 'Iago's words' that these are 'Iago's words'.

Returning to my reading of the repetition of 'Think my lord?', there is a further

distinction because of the quotation marks in '"Think, my lord"? By heaven, thou echo'st me'

which are not in '**IAGO** Think, my lord?'. These quotation marks may simply be understood

as a claim to speech, that '"Think, my lord"?' is spoken by '**OTHELLO**' in light of my

reading of '**OTHELLO**' as an attribution of these words to '**OTHELLO**', and that this is

therefore a spoken repetition of 'Think, my lord?' which in the same regard must be initially

spoken by '**IAGO**' in order for '**OTHELLO**' to speak the repetition of it. However, this

notion of speech is problematized by the fact that '"Think, my lord"?' is different not only

from the '**IAGO** Think, my lord?', but all the other words in this text due to the quotation

marks. If it is the case that the '**OTHELLO**' '"Think, my lord"?' is speech because speech is

what the quotation marks represent, then consequently, the subsequent 'By heaven, thou

echo'st me' and indeed the '**IAGO** Think, my lord?' can be understood as *not* speech because

they do not have quotation marks. If, however, the words that follow '**OTHELLO**' in this

text are spoken by '**OTHELLO**', and, correspondingly, the words following '**IAGO**' are

spoken by '**IAGO**', then my understanding of '"Think, my lord"?' also as the speech of

'**OTHELLO**' is problematized because any appeal to quotation marks as that which

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[112] Moisan, p. 57.

represent speech is challenged in this reading. Another way in which the quotation marks may be construed here, however, is as a claim to the repetition of 'Think, my lord?' being the 'quotation' or 'citation' of words which have an 'original' source located elsewhere. In this sense, the quotation marks in '"Think, my lord"?' signify the duplication or appropriation of the 'Think, my lord?' which follows the claim '**IAGO**. Yet if this is the case, then '"Think, my lord"?' does not belong to '**OTHELLO**' and can thus be read not as the speech of '**OTHELLO**' because it already 'belongs' to '**IAGO**'. What can be understood as spoken by '**OTHELLO**', therefore, is the speech of another; and what can and cannot be read as speech is thus not secure and definite, but subject to numerous problematic and shifting claims which challenge not only any appeal to the ownership or site of speech in this text, but also to the idea that any of this can be read as speech at all.

v)   *Desdemona*

To turn, finally, to Toni Morrison's *Desdemona*, one might expect to encounter something entirely new, something significantly different from the work of Moisan, Eliot, or Empson. And, to an extent, one would be right. Rather than a critical response in the form of an essay, *Desdemona* is a short play, centred around the songs of composer Rokia Traoré. Within it, and in a way that is not the case for the other three critics, female experience is foregrounded, as is a history that rejects the European framing of Shakespeare, and the three critics discussed above, in favour of a complex dialogue with Malian song-writing traditions.

In one sense, *Desdemona* can be understood in terms of a recent tradition of plays such as Paula Vogel's *Desdemona: A Play about a Handkerchief* (1994) and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988), that respond to Shakespeare's tragedy within a Feminist reframing. Morrison also offers something quite different, however. In place of Vogel's bawdy inversions featuring a sexually active and controlling Desdemona, Morrison's work offers what I take to be a more thorough

problematisation of binaries, and against MacDonald's celebration of the subversive potential of comedy, *Desdemona* works through questions of loss and transformation in what I take to be a ghostly and subdued staging.

As will be read below, the transformations that *Desdemona* reads are various: one might say that within the play the question of transformation is transformed. In so far as it turns on transformation – the living to the dead, anger to love and back again, European to African, self to other, myself to my name – the play opens up questions of tradition and repetition. Yes, there is a clear move away from a 'dead white male' New Critical tradition of response, yet, in following the play, one could begin to think about the difficulty of a separation that is wholly successful. What persists in Morrison's transformation? Not only what persists of Shakespeare – one could argue that the transformation of Shakespeare is explicitly taken up within Morrison's meditation on the instabilities of identity – but also what persists of Empson? How to keep Morrison from a New Critical tradition? How to police that border? Or, one might say, how to keep Empson from the radical re-imaginings of *Desdemona*? Might Morrison's play not retroactively transform our readings of Empson, or Eliot? In *Desdemona*'s reading of the shifts and impossibilities that are constitutive of identity, could we read what is necessary to a radical reworking of Shakespeare, as well as its other?

Let us begin with the following, Desdemona's self-introduction in the play:

DESDEMONA   My name is Desdemona. The word,
                          Desdemona, means misery. It means ill
                          fated. It means doomed. Perhaps my parents
                          believed or imagined or knew my fortune
                          at the moment of my birth. Perhaps being
                          born a girl gave them all they needed to
                          know of what my life would be like. That it
                          would be subject to the whims of my elders

and the control of men. Certainly that was

the standard, no, the obligation of females

in Venice when I was a girl. Men made the

rules; women followed them. A step away

was doom, indeed, and misery without relief.

My parents, keenly aware and approving of

that system, could anticipate the future of a

girl child accurately.

They were wrong. They knew the system,

but they did not know me.

I am not the meaning of a name I did not

choose.[113]

Here, 'Desdemona' is that by which she is identified because it is her 'name'. Yet 'My name

is Desdemona', can also be read as a claim to possession which constitutes the 'my'

perspective as separate from the 'name' that belongs to her. In this very assertion, then,

Desdemona simultaneously separates herself from, takes ownership of, and identifies herself

as, 'Desdemona'. This complex relationship between Desdemona and her 'name', however,

is additionally problematised with the claim that 'The word, / Desdemona, means misery' for

here 'Desdemona' is further split into 'name' and 'word'. And since it is specifically as

'name' that she claims possession of 'Desdemona', therefore, there is necessarily a part of

this divided 'Desdemona' that eludes her ownership. 'Desdemona' is neither wholly hers and

nor is it solely a 'name'. There are additional divisions here also in the claim that the 'word,

Desdemona', has three different 'mean[ings]' and all of this, as in my reading of Empson,

raises a number of crucial questions about what being a 'word' entails in this text. I will

return to these issues later in this chapter, but these three 'mean[ings]' also have important

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[113] Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*, Lyrics by Rokia Traoré, (London: Oberon Books, 2012), p. 13.

implications for Desdemona's relationship with her 'name'. According to Desdemona, then, 'Desdemona', 'means misery', 'ill / fated' and 'doomed'. What these three 'mean[ings]' share here beyond their correlation to the 'word, Desdemona', however, is that they all appeal to varying ideas of time. For example, although as a noun 'misery' can be understood as a single, albeit abstract, *thing*, I also read here a notion of a state of being which is both present and constant. The other 'mean[ings]', 'ill / fated' and 'doomed', on the other hand, construct both a present *and* a future state of being. In other words, to be 'ill / fated' and 'doomed', is to be so in the now, but it is also to be constantly in the anticipation of a 'fate' or 'doom' that is always in the future and, as such, is perpetually out of reach. These tensions between present and future, and between the certain and the impossible are for Desdemona, therefore, also what 'Desdemona' 'means' in this text.

I read a connection between these ideas and the claim that '[p]erhaps my parents / believed or imagined or knew my fortune / at the moment of my birth'. Here, an opposition can be read between the unreliability of the 'believed or imagined' and the certainty of 'kn[owledge]'; but whether or not Desdemona's parents 'believed or imagined or knew' is not known for certain by Desdemona because she opens this claim with '[p]erhaps'. It could be, therefore, that either one, or none of these took place. Notwithstanding this uncertainty, her contention is that 'at the moment of [her] birth' is was possible for her parents to have 'believed or imagined or kn[own]' her 'fortune' and this means that there is, for Desdemona, something in that past 'moment' that had the potential to inform her parents of what her future might be. The past can thus be understood to contain the future. Indeed, the irony here is that Desdemona's assertion is retrospective. This is a speculative claim to others' past 'believ[ing] or imagin[ing] or kn[owing]' about a future 'fortune' that is, from this perspective, also in the past; a 'fortune' that is consequently known by, or at least available to Desdemona, in so far as, for her, it has already taken place. Indeed, the claim to her 'fortune'

is not included in the '[p]erhaps' clause, it is not questioned. Whether her parents 'believed or imagined or knew', therefore, may not be certain, but Desdemona's contention here that they may have done so can equally be read to validate their supposed foresight because she has access to information that they necessarily did not.

There is, for Desdemona, a link then, between what 'Desdemona' 'means' and the 'fortune' that her parents 'could anticipate' from the 'moment' of her birth. And as I understand it, this, she believes, is why she has that name. Yet these ideas are subsequently complicated further due to the contention that it was specifically her 'being / born a girl' that determined the future her parents may have envisioned. The reiterated '[p]erhaps' in this claim once again produces uncertainty about her parents' past perspective on the future, but the difference is that what is questioned here is no longer what they 'believed or imagined', but whether her birth 'gave' them '*all* they needed to / know'.[114] Her 'being / born a girl', in a sense, is thus the potential giver of absolute 'know[ledge]' about the future, and that not 'being / born a girl', therefore, could not have done the same. But although it is claimed here that 'being / born a girl' may have given Desdemona's parents 'all they needed to / know', this potential absolute 'know[ledge]' is not of her precise future, but is only ever of a 'like[ness]' of what her life 'would be' and what is more, what is given here is only that which 'they needed to / know' which also indicates that there are necessarily gaps in the 'know[ledge]' that they may or may not have received.

That Desdemona was 'born a girl', then, '[p]erhaps' 'gave' her parents the partial 'know[ledge]' of what her life 'would be subject to' and this, for Desdemona is sufficient for them to 'know of what [her] life would be like'. Irrespective of the gaps in her parents' know[ledge], therefore, for Desdemona it is definite that her life 'would be subject to the whims of [her] elders / and the control of men'. In this claim to her future 'subject[ion]'

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[114] My italics.

Desdemona maintains that it is 'my life' which can be construed, once again, as an appeal to both her ownership of, and separation from it. It is not, therefore, that Desdemona 'would be' 'subject to' anything but rather that her 'life' would: she would be deprived of authority over that which is hers. Further oppositions can be read in this claim since it constitutes Desdemona as neither 'elders' nor 'men', positioning her as unequal to, or indeed, beneath, both of these by dint of her 'being / born a girl' and her 'life' being 'subject to' them. This future 'subject[ion]' is thus related to both her relative age and sex. Yet there is another opposition here between 'the whims of my elders' and 'the control of men' because in this her 'whims[ical]' 'elders' presumably lack the restraint and discipline of the 'men' who simply 'control'. Also unlike the 'control[ling]' 'men' – a group I read to include any man of any age – Desdemona's 'elders' are categorised as such only in relation to her. It is a group limited by age, then, but not by sex and can therefore include women as well as men. Thus for Desdemona, it is only the group that consists entirely of men that can exclusively 'control'; her 'elders', conversely, do not 'control', they act upon their 'whims' and this, as I read it, is precisely because women are included within this group.

Desdemona's shift of perspective in the subsequent sentence can be read not only in terms of the firmness of the opening '[c]ertainly', but also because it moves from her perception of her parents' past expectations of her future, to wider retrospective claims about 'Venice when [she] was a girl'. Yet the 'that' which 'was / the standard, no, the obligation of females' at that time and in that place, can be read to refer to the previous claim that her life 'would be subject to the whims of [her] elders / and the control of men'. Desdemona's claims about the future she supposes her parents may or may not have envisioned are therefore bound to her own perspective on the time when she 'was a girl' in Venice. There is a distinction here between 'the standard' and 'the obligation' in that the former can be read as a claim to that which was commonplace and therefore not absolute, whereas the latter is about

a constraint on all 'females' at that time and in that place. Yet whilst the assertion 'that was / the standard, no, the obligation' can be read as a retraction of 'standard' in favour of 'obligation', the 'no' can also be understood to alter or modify the previous claim to 'standard' rather than cancelling it out. I read a similar appeal in 'the obligation of females / in Venice when I was a girl'. Desdemona's assertion here splits the 'I' in 'I was a girl' so that even at the point when 'I was a girl' the 'I and 'a girl' can be read as both separate and the same. Because the claim is 'I was a girl', however, this also places 'a girl' in the past, but the separate 'I' that makes this claim endures; the 'I' is no longer 'a girl' but is still an 'I' that 'was a girl'. These ideas are further complicated though, with Desdemona's previous claim that she was 'born a girl' for this means that 'being / born a girl', which already constitutes a split in that 'girl' is supplementary to birth, is also not permanently constitutive of that which is 'born'. In other words, for Desdemona, 'being / born a girl' does not necessarily signify the birth of 'a girl', but rather an 'I' that is a 'girl' at the 'moment of [...] birth'. Desdemona also contends, further on in this excerpt, that her parents 'could anticipate the future of a / girl child accurately' and in this I read a connection between Desdemona's claims to no longer be a 'girl' and 'child[hood]'.

Compare this construction to Desdemona's contention at the end of this passage that 'I am not the meaning of a name I did not choose'. This formulation distances that 'I' from both meaning and name. The now unspecified 'a name' indicates this is the case irrespective of the name, that the detail of the name and what it may mean, is not relevant in this instance. What is evident, however, is that for Desdemona, 'a name' is split in that it has a separate meaning which is uniquely 'of', or belongs to, that 'name' and that this is also separate and distinct from her. She is not what that meaning is. Yet since this is also 'a name I did not choose', this constitutes 'a name' as that which can be chosen or not chosen, but it can also be chosen or not by something that is or is not that to which it refers. In other words, the

'name' was not chosen by her, it may not have been chosen at all, but it also may equally have been chosen by someone other than her. My reading here, then, is that for Desdemona it is specifically choice which determines her relationship with 'the meaning of a name', that her 'not choos[ing]' is the reason why she is 'not the meaning'. A name can be imposed upon her because of her absence of choice, then, but its 'meaning' cannot.

As much as this text raises questions about names, it also appeals to a distinction between 'name' and 'word' and it is more specifically its claims about 'word' in this text that I want to read through here. Returning to Desdemona's assertion that 'The word, / Desdemona, means misery. It means ill / fated. It means doomed' then, for Desdemona, what is her 'name' is also 'The word' and in this split I read that 'name' and 'word' are the same thing here whilst at the same time also being different from one another. Even though, therefore, there is a sense that her individual appeals to either 'name' or 'word' can be understood to point to the same thing: to 'Desdemona', the claims she makes about them establish distinctions that demonstrate that the two are not absolutely interchangeable.

As I argue earlier, then, the claim 'My name is Desdemona' constitutes 'name' and therefore 'Desdemona' as both possession and identity. Conversely, in 'The word, / Desdemona, means misery', 'Desdemona' is set apart as 'The' definite and singular 'word'; it is different, therefore, not only from the 'name' 'Desdemona', but also from all of the other words in this claim. It is also independent of ownership and, moreover, is that alone which is specifically claimed to 'mean' something. The 'word' 'Desdemona' can, in this sense, be understood as the more authoritative of the two parts; it is the sole, unconstrained site of the 'mean[ing]' of 'Desdemona' as opposed to being Desdemona's possession. Yet the difficulty with this reading is that although the precise contention is that 'The word, / Desdemona, means misery' and not, therefore, the 'name', the 'name' can still be construed as a 'word' here, the 'name' is still 'Desdemona'. Desdemona's assertion at the end of this passage,

furthermore, that she 'is not the meaning of a name' she 'did not choose', confirms that for

her, 'name[s]' are not without 'meaning', even though she assigns the specifics of what

'Desdemona' 'means' to 'The word' and not to the 'name'.

These appeals to the 'mean[ing]' of 'The word, / Desdemona' are problematised

further still with the claim that what 'Desdemona' 'means' is 'misery', 'ill / fated' and

'doomed' because this constitutes the 'mean[ing]' of 'Desdemona' as located elsewhere from

'The word'. The same claim to 'mean[ing]' in which I read an appeal to the authority of 'The

word', therefore, simultaneously undermines this authority; for the very fact that

'Desdemona' 'means' something also constitutes 'The word, / Desdemona' as an indicator or

symbol that points to something other to itself. In other words, 'The word, / Desdemona' does

not 'mean' 'Desdemona', it necessarily requires something in excess of itself to be

understood here. What 'The word, / Desdemona, means' can thus be read as both separate

and distinct from the 'The word, / Desdemona'. Yet even though 'misery', 'ill / fated' and

'doomed' are not, for Desdemona, 'The word', they are nonetheless still words in this text.

Unlike 'The word, / Desdemona', therefore, these words are additionally 'mean[ings]'; and

what is more, they can be construed as words which do not require definition. Hence, for

Desdemona, the 'mean[ing]' of these words that are also 'mean[ings]' is self-evident, they

ostensibly define themselves precisely because they are not 'The word'.

The 'mean[ing]' of 'The word, / Desdemona', then, lies not with the 'word' itself, but

with other words which are also 'mean[ings]': namely, 'misery', 'ill / fated' and 'doomed'.

And since 'The word, / Desdemona,' has more than one 'mean[ing]' here, what 'Desdemona'

'means' is located in three discrete locations. Furthermore, as each 'mean[ing]' is presented

in a separate, distinct sentence, each of them can also be read as both equal to, and

independent from, the other. Thus each 'mean[ing] does not require any of the other

'mean[ings]' to be that which 'The word, / Desdemona, means'. Each 'mean[ing]' here can

and does define 'Desdemona' in isolation. Indeed, these three distinct claims to 'mean[ing]' also constitute further divisions in 'Desdemona'. Here, what is 'The word' in the first instance, becomes an 'It' in the second claim, which is then repeated in the third. The 'It' that 'means ill / fated', however, is necessarily different from the 'It' that 'means doomed'. That 'The word' has three distinct meanings, therefore, produces three separate constructions of 'Desdemona' and this has implications not only for the location of the 'mean[ing]' of 'The word', but also for the stability and authority of 'The word, / Desdemona' itself.

Complex words. Complex words and their limits. What would it mean to read Empson in the light of Morrison's *Desdemona*? Certainly, both can be understood to respond to the challenge of the name or word *Othello* introduces. The seduction scene is often understood in terms of deferral, or the impossibility of ever locating the transcendental signifier, of fixing identity in terms of proof, ocular or otherwise. I am – and I understand at least something of the irony of this - suggesting a slightly different approach. What would it mean to start thinking about criticism and play as theories of history, of time, and repetition? In what different ways do these texts challenge or reinstitute notions of the psychological, of the recoverable essence of self? How is meaning to be secured? And if the answer is doubtful, how is the meaning of *Desdemona* to be secured against 'Honest in Othello'?

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