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Source: *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), pp. 125-144

Published by: [Folger Shakespeare Library](#) in association with [George Washington University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871277>

Accessed: 16/07/2011 13:23

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Iago's Alter Ego: Race as Projection in *Othello*

JANET ADELMAN

OTHELLO FAMOUSLY BEGINS NOT WITH OTHELLO BUT WITH IAGO. Other tragedies begin with ancillary figures commenting on the character who will turn out to be at the center of the tragedy—one thinks of *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*—but no other play subjects its ostensibly tragic hero to so long and intensive a debunking before he even sets foot onstage. And the audience is inevitably complicit in this debunking; before we meet Othello, we are utterly dependent on Iago's and Roderigo's descriptions of him. For the first long minutes of the play, we know only that the Moor, "the thicklips" (1.1.66),¹ has done something that Roderigo (like the audience) feels he should have been told about beforehand; we find out what it is for the first time only through Iago's violently eroticizing and racializing report to Brabantio: "Even now, very now, an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe" (ll. 88–89).²

At this point in my teaching of the play, I normally point to all the ways in which Othello belies Iago's description as soon as he appears; in the classroom my reading of race in *Othello* turns on this contrast as Shakespeare's way of denaturalizing the tropes of race, so that we are made to understand Othello not as the "natural" embodiment of Iago's "old black ram" gone insanely jealous but as the victim of the racist ideology everywhere visible in Venice, an ideology to which he is relentlessly subjected and which increasingly comes to define him as he internalizes it—internalizes it so fully that,

¹ Quotations follow the Arden edition of *Othello*, edited by M. R. Ridley (London: Methuen, 1958). Ridley follows the 1622 quarto, which often differs from the Folio *Othello*; I have noted the differences where they seem significant to my argument. Citations of plays other than *Othello* follow *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969).

² *Race* is of course a vexed term; many have pointed out that the word *race* gained its current meaning only as it was biologized in support of the economic institution of slavery and that the link between race and skin color is a peculiarly contemporary obsession, that (for example) Irish and Jews might in 1604 have been thought of as racially separate from the English. For a particularly lucid account of the questions surrounding the invocation of race as a category in early modern England, see Lynda E. Boose, "The Getting of a Lawful Race": Racial discourse in early modern England and the unrepresentable black woman" in *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 35–54, esp. 35–40; see also John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the geography of difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), for the claim that early modern otherness was based on geography rather than on the anachronistic category of race (25). Nonetheless, in Iago's capacity to make Othello's blackness the primary signifier of his otherness—as Boose observes, "once his Ensign has raised the flag inscribing Othello within the difference of skin color, all the presumably meaningful differences Othello has constructed between himself and the infidel collapse" (38)—the text insists on the visible difference of skin color that will increasingly come to define race, perhaps because, unlike religion, it (proverbially) cannot be changed. For a discussion of the significance of visible difference in early modern England, see Kim Hall, "Reading What Isn't There: 'Black' Studies in Early Modern England," *Stanford Humanities Review* 3 (1993): 23–33, esp. 25–27; in her account "science merely takes up already pre-existing terms of difference, such as skin color and features, that have [previously] been combined with physical and mental characteristics" (25).

searching for a metaphor to convey his sense of the soil attaching both to his name and to Desdemona's body, Othello can come up with no term of comparison other than his own face ("My name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrim'd, and black / As mine own face" [3.3.392–94]).³ Othello's "discovering" that his blackness is a stain—a stain specifically associated with his sexuality—and "discovering" that stain on Desdemona are virtually simultaneous for him; hence the metaphoric transformation of Dian's visage into his own begrimed face. If Desdemona becomes a "black weed" (4.2.69)⁴ for Othello, her "blackening" is a kind of shorthand for his sense that his blackness has in fact contaminated her; as many have argued, his quickness to believe her always-already contaminated is in part a function of his horrified recoil from his suspicion that he is the contaminating agent.⁵

In other words, in the classroom I usually read race in *Othello* through what I take to be the play's representation of Othello's experience of race as it comes to dominate his sense of himself as polluted and polluting, undeserving of Desdemona and hence quick to believe her unfaithful. But although the play locates Othello in a deeply racist society, the sense of pollution attaching to blackness comes first of all (for the audience if not for Othello) from Iago; though Iago needed Brabantio to convince Othello of Desdemona's tendency to deception and the "disproportion" of Othello as her marriage choice, Iago legitimizes and intensifies Brabantio's racism through his initial sexualizing and racializing invocation of Othello. And if the play offers us a rich representation of the effects of racism on Othello, it offers us an equally rich—and in some ways more disturbing—representation of the function of Othello's race for Iago. I offer the following reading of that rep-

³ Ridley follows the Folio reading of line 392, since this line occurs in a passage not found in Q1; Q2 (1630) famously reads "Her name" in place of F's "My name," perhaps to rationalize Othello's peculiar association of his name with the fairness of a figure for female virginity. I prefer "My name," partly because it suggests the identificatory dynamics that underlie Othello's love for Desdemona; but either reading points toward Othello's association of the stain on Desdemona's virgin body with the blackness of his own face.

⁴ Desdemona becomes a "black weed" only in the quartos; F omits the adjective.

⁵ This position was powerfully—and variously—articulated in three classic essays published in 1979–80: Edward A. Snow's "Sexual Anxiety and the Male Order of Things in *Othello*," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 384–412; Stanley Cavell's "Othello and the Stake of the Other" in *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), 125–42 (originally published in 1979 in *The Claim of Reason* [Oxford: Oxford UP]); and Stephen Greenblatt's "The Improvisation of Power" in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1980), 222–54, esp. 232–52. For the association of Othello's blackness specifically with sexual contamination, and Othello's internalization of this association, see especially Snow, 400–402; and Cavell, 136–37. For a fuller reading of the association between blackness and monstrous sexuality in early modern English culture and in *Othello*, see especially Karen Newman, "'And wash the Ethiop white': femininity and the monstrous in *Othello*" in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The text in history and ideology*, Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds. (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 143–62, esp. 148–53; for a fuller reading of the ways in which Othello internalizes the Venetian construction of his blackness, see Edward Berry, "Othello's Alienation," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 30 (1990): 315–33. The "blackening" of Desdemona has become a critical commonplace: see, for example, Michael Neill, "Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 383–412, esp. 410; Berry, 328; Ania Loomba, *Gender, race, Renaissance drama* (Manchester and New York: Manchester UP, 1989), 59; Parker, "Fantasies of 'Race' and 'Gender': Africa, *Othello* and bringing to light" in Hendricks and Parker, eds., 84–100, esp. 95; and especially Newman, 151–52, for whom the blackening of Desdemona indicates the convergence of woman and black in the category of monstrous sexuality.

resentation as a thought-experiment with two aims: first, to test out the applicability of psychoanalytic theory—especially Kleinian theory—to problems of race, an arena in which its applicability is often questioned; and, second, to identify some of the ways in which racism is the psychic property (and rightly the concern) of the racist, not simply of his victim.

Iago erupts out of the night (this play, like *Hamlet*, begins in palpable darkness), as though he were a condensation of its properties. Marking himself as opposite to light through his demonic “I am not what I am,” Iago calls forth a world, I will argue, in which he can see his own darkness localized and reflected in Othello’s blackness, or rather in what he makes—and teaches Othello to make—of Othello’s blackness.

Iago’s voice inducts us into the play: long before Othello has a name, much less a voice, of his own, Iago has a distinctive “I.” The matter of Othello, and satisfaction of the audience’s urgent curiosity about what exactly Roderigo has just learned, are deferred until after we have heard Iago’s catalogue of injuries to that “I” (“I know my price, I am worth no worse a place” [1.1.11]; “And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof, . . . must be lee’d, and calm’d” [ll. 28–30]; “And I, God bless the mark, his worship’s ancient” [l. 33]). Iago’s “I” beats through the dialogue with obsessive insistence, claiming both self-sufficiency (“I follow but myself” [l. 58]) and self-division, defining itself by what it is not (“Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago” [l. 57]), in fact simultaneously proclaiming its existence and nonexistence: “I am not what I am” (l. 65). I, I, I: Iago’s name unfolds from the Italian *io*, Latin *ego*; and the injured “I” is his signature, the ground of his being and the ground, I will argue, of the play. For Iago calls up the action of the play as though in response to this sense of injury: “Call up her father, . . . poison his delight” (ll. 67–68), he says, like a stage manager, or like a magician calling forth spirits to perform his will; and with his words, the action begins.

The structure of the first scene models Iago’s relation to the world that he calls up, for the play proper seems to arise out of Iago’s injured “I”: it is not only set in motion by Iago’s “I” but becomes in effect a projection of it, as Iago successfully attempts to rid himself of interior pain by replicating it in Othello. Othello—and particularly in relation to Desdemona—becomes Iago’s primary target in part because Othello has the presence, the fullness of being, that Iago lacks.⁶ Othello is everywhere associated with the kind of

⁶ See W. H. Auden’s related account of Iago as practical joker: “The practical joker despises his victims, but at the same time he envies them because their desires, however childish and mistaken, are real to them, whereas he has no desire which he can call his own. . . . If the word motive is given its normal meaning of a positive purpose of the self like sex, money, glory, etc., then the practical joker is without motive. Yet the professional practical joker is certainly driven, . . . but the drive is negative, a fear of lacking a concrete self, of being nobody. In any practical joker to whom playing such jokes is a passion, there is always an element of malice, a projection of his self-hatred onto others, and in the ultimate case of the absolute practical joker, this is projected onto all created things” (*The Dyer’s Hand and other essays* [New York: Random House, 1962], 256–57). The emptiness of Auden’s practical joker is sometimes associated by later critics with Iago’s facility in role-playing; see, e.g., Shelley Orgel, whose Iago gains a temporary sense of self by playing the roles that others project onto him (“Iago,” *American Imago* 25 [1968]: 258–73, esp. 272). Greenblatt’s Iago “has the role-player’s ability to imagine his nonexistence so that he can exist for a moment in another and as another”; but for Greenblatt, Iago’s imagined emptiness is less an ontological state than a cover for his emptying out of his victim (235 and 236). More recently Iago’s emptiness has reminded critics of a Derridean absence of self or meaning; see,

interior solidity and wholeness that stands as a reproach to Iago's interior emptiness and fragmentation: if Iago takes Janus as his patron saint (1.2.33) and repeatedly announces his affiliation with nothingness ("I am not what I am"; "I am nothing, if not critical" [2.1.119]), Othello is initially "all in all sufficient" (4.1.261), a "full soldier" (2.1.36), whose "solid virtue" (4.1.262) and "perfect soul" (1.2.31) allow him to achieve the "full fortune" (1.1.66) of possessing Desdemona. "Tell me what you need to spoil and I will tell you what you want," says Adam Phillips:⁷ the extent to which Othello's fullness and solidity are the object of Iago's envy can be gauged by the extent to which he works to replicate his own self-division in Othello. Split himself, Iago is a master at splitting others: his seduction of Othello works by inscribing in Othello the sense of dangerous interior spaces—thoughts that cannot be known, monsters in the mind—which Othello seems to lack, introducing him to the world of self-alienation that Iago inhabits;⁸ by the end, Othello is so self-divided that he can take arms against himself, Christian against Turk, literalizing self-division by splitting himself graphically down the middle.⁹ Though Iago is not there to see his victory, we might imagine him as invisible commentator, saying in effect, "Look, he is not all-in-all sufficient, self-sustaining and full; he is as self-divided as I am."¹⁰

e.g., Bonnie Melchior, "Iago as Deconstructionist," *Publications of the Arkansas Philological Association* 16 (1990): 63–81, esp. 79; or Karl F. Zender, "The Humiliation of Iago," *SEL* 34 (1994): 323–39, esp. 327–28. In Alessandro Serpieri's brilliant semiotic reading, Iago suffers from an "envy of being" that is the deconstructionist's equivalent of the state Auden describes: "Iago cannot identify with any situation or sign or *énoncé*, and is thus condemned to deconstruct through his own *énonciations* the *énoncés* of others, transforming them into simulacra. Othello is precisely the lord of the *énoncé*" (Serpieri, "Reading the signs: towards a semiotics of Shakespearean drama," trans. Keir Elam, in *Alternative Shakespeares*, John Drakakis, ed. [London and New York: Methuen, 1985], 119–43, esp. 139). In its emphasis on envy and projection, Auden's and Serpieri's work is closest to my own; but see also David Pollard's powerful Baudelairian reading of Iago's emptiness and the sadistic projections through which he attempts to fill it ("Iago's Wound" in Othello: *New Perspectives*, Virginia Mason Vaughan and Kent Cartwright, eds. [Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1991], 89–96).

⁷ Adam Phillips, "Foreword" in Harold N. Boris, *Envy* (Northvale, NJ, and London: Jason Aronson, 1994), vii–xi, esp. ix.

⁸ For some, Othello is split long before Iago begins his work. In Berry's account, for example, Othello is divided from the beginning by the two contradictory self-images he absorbs from Venice; his failure to escape this limiting framework and hence to "achieve a true sense of personal identity" is a powerful source of tragic feeling in the play (323 and 330). But for critics who read Othello as an early instance of a colonized subject, this "failure" is not personal but systemic: both Loomba (32, 48, and 54) and Jyotsna Singh ("Othello's Identity, Postcolonial Theory, and Contemporary African Rewritings of *Othello*" in Hendricks and Parker, eds., 287–99, esp. 288) position Othello specifically in opposition to what Singh calls "the dominant, Western fantasy of a singular, unified identity" (288). But Iago at least insists that he is the divided one, and Othello initially claims that his soul is "perfect" or undivided; whatever the state to which Othello is reduced, *Othello*—like *The Tempest*—seems to me to encode the fantasy that the exotic other possesses a primitive unitary identity before his induction into a Western-style split self.

⁹ I first read this paper to a very helpful and responsive audience at Notre Dame in November 1994, on which occasion Richard Dutton called my attention to the way in which Othello's self-division is literally played out on the stage.

¹⁰ As Iago's self-alienation passes to Othello, so does his habit of soliloquizing. Soliloquies are usually in Shakespearean tragedy the discourse of self-division: only those whose selves are in pieces need to explain themselves to themselves and have distinct-enough interior voices to carry out the job for our benefit. Initially Iago's soliloquies formally mark him as fractured in comparison with Othello's wholeness; by the end, Othello is the soliloquizer.

To shatter the illusion of Othello's fullness and presence is also to shatter the illusion of his erotic power; his division from himself is first of all his division from Desdemona and from the fair portion of himself invested in her. If Cassio is any indication, that erotic power is heavily idealized by the Italians:

Great Jove, Othello guard,
And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath,
That he may bless this bay with his tall ship,
Make love's quick pants in Desdemona's arms
Give renew'd fire to our extincted spirits. . . .
(2.1.77–81)¹¹

But for Iago it is intolerable: what begins as a means to an end (Iago creates Othello's suspicions about Desdemona to discredit Cassio in order to replace him as lieutenant) increasingly becomes an end in itself, as Iago drives Othello toward a murderous reenactment of sexual union on the marriage bed, even though that reenactment will make Othello incapable of bestowing the position Iago initially seeks. The thrust of his plot toward the marriage bed, even at the cost of his own ambition, suggests that what Iago needs to spoil is on that bed: the fullness and presence signified by Othello's possession of Desdemona, the sexual union that reminds him of his own extincted spirits. For Iago's own erotic life takes place only in his head; though he seems to imagine a series of erotic objects—Desdemona (ll. 286–89), Cassio (3.3.419–32), and Othello himself (in the coded language—"the lustful Moor / Hath leap'd into my seat" [2.1.290–91])—that makes cuckoldry an anal invasion of Iago's own body—he imagines them less as realizable erotic objects than as mental counters in his revenge plot, and he imagines them only in sexual unions (Othello with Desdemona, Othello with Emilia, Cassio with Desdemona, Cassio with Emilia) that everywhere exclude and diminish him. And in response, he effectively neutralizes the erotic potency that mocks his own lack.

His primary tool in this neutralization is the creation of Othello as "black": and in fact it is Othello as progenitor that first excites Iago's racializing rage. His first use of the language of black and white is in his call to Brabantio: "An old black ram / Is tuppung your white ewe." If Cassio needs to make Othello into an exotic super-phallus, capable of restoring Italian potency, Iago needs to make him into a black monster, invading the citadel of whiteness. (The idealization and the debasement are of course two sides of the same coin, and they are equally damaging to Othello: both use him only as the container for white fantasies, whether of desire or fear.) *Your white ewe/you*: Iago's half-pun invokes the whiteness of his auditors via the image of Othello's contaminating miscegenation;¹² true to form in racist discourse, "whiteness" emerges as a

¹¹ I here depart from Ridley in following F's version of line 80; Ridley and Q1 (1622) give "And swiftly come to Desdemona's arms." Ridley himself finds Q1's version of line 80 "pallid" and thinks Shakespeare probably revised it for F; that he nonetheless rejects the Folio version on the grounds that it is inconsistent with Cassio's character suggests his resistance to seeing just how eroticized Cassio's idealizing of Othello is (xxix–xxx and 52n). In the context of lovemaking, *spirits* is not a neutral term; for its specifically sexual senses, see Stephen Booth, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1977), 441–43.

¹² See Neill's powerful account of the ways in which the audience is implicated in Iago's invocation of the horrors of miscegenation, the improper sexual mixture that medieval theologians called adultery (395–99 and 407–9). For Arthur L. Little Jr. the whole of the play constitutes "the primal scene of racism," a forbidden sexual sight/site from which the audience

category only when it is imagined as threatened by its opposite. Iago's language here works through separation, works by placing "blackness" outside of "whiteness" even as it provokes terror at the thought of their mixture. But the play has already affiliated Iago himself with darkness and the demonic; the threat of a contaminating blackness is already there, already present inside the "whiteness" he would invoke. Iago creates Othello as "black"—and therefore himself as "white"—when he constructs him as monstrous progenitor; and he uses that racialized blackness to destroy what he cannot tolerate. But the trope through which Iago imagines that destruction makes Iago himself into the monstrous progenitor, filled with a dark conception that only darkness can bring forth: "I ha't, it is engender'd," he tells us; "Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (1.3.401–2). This trope makes the blackness Iago would attribute to Othello—like his monstrous generativity—something already inside Iago himself, something that he must project out into the world: as though Iago were pregnant with the monster he makes of Othello.¹³

If the structure of the first scene predicts the process through which Iago becomes the progenitor of Othello's racialized blackness, the trope of the monstrous birth in the first act's final lines perfectly anticipates the mechanism of projection through which Iago will come to use Othello's black skin as the container for his own interior blackness. Cassio uses Othello as the locus for fantasies of inseminating sexual renewal; Iago uses him as the repository for his own bodily insufficiency and his self-disgust. For Iago needs the blackness of others: even the "white ewe" Desdemona is blackened in his imagination as he turns "her virtue into pitch" (2.3.351). How are we to understand Iago's impulse to blacken, the impulse for which Othello becomes the perfect vehicle? What does it mean to take another person's body as the receptacle for one's own contents? The text gives us, I think, a very exact account of what I've come to call the psycho-physiology of Iago's projection: that is, not simply an account of the psychological processes themselves but also an account of the fantasized bodily processes that underlie them. "Projection" is in its own way comfortingly abstract; by invoking the body behind the abstraction, *Othello* in effect rubs our noses in it.¹⁴

"constructs the significance of race" (" 'An essence that's not seen': The Primal Scene of Racism in *Othello*," *SQ* 44 [1993]: 304–24, esp. 305–6).

¹³ The familiar associations of blackness with monstrosity (see, e.g., Newman, 148; and James R. Aubrey, "Race and the Spectacle of the Monstrous in *Othello*," *Clio* 22 [1993]: 221–38) and specifically with monstrous births (see Neill, 409–10; and Aubrey, 222–27) would probably have made the subterranean connection between Othello and Iago's monstrous birth more available to Shakespeare's audiences than it is to a modern audience.

¹⁴ Projection has classically been invoked as a mechanism in *Othello*, but usually in the other direction, from Othello to Iago; see, e.g., J.I.M. Stewart, *Character and Motive in Shakespeare: Some Recent Appraisals Examined* (London, New York, and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Company, 1949), 102–5), though Stewart ultimately abandons a naturalistic reading of the play through projection for a symbolic reading of Iago and Othello as parts of a single whole. For somewhat later versions of Iago as Othello's projection, see, e.g., Henry L. Warnken, "Iago as a Projection of Othello" in *Shakespeare Encomium 1564–1964*, Anne Paolucci, ed. (New York: The City College, 1964), 1–15; and Orgel, 258–73. In these accounts projection is loosely used to indicate that Iago expresses unacknowledged doubts or desires in Othello's mind (or, in Orgel's reading, Othello's unacknowledged need for a punitive superego); they generally do not explore the mechanism of projection or consider the degree to which the structure of the play posits Iago—not Othello—as its psychic starting point. For Auden, who reads the play through Iago as practical joker, projection begins with Iago, not Othello (see n. 6, above); see also Leslie Y. Rabkin and Jeffrey

Let me begin, then, by thinking about the way Iago thinks about bodies, especially about the insides of bodies. For Iago is the play's spokesman for the idea of the *inside*, the hidden away. At the beginning of his seduction of Othello, he defends the privacy of his thought by asking "where's that palace, whereinto foul things / Sometimes intrude not?" (3.3.141–42); no palace is impregnable, no inside uncontaminated. Characteristically, Othello takes this image and makes it his own, reinscribing it in his later anatomy of Desdemona as "a cistern, for foul toads / To knot and gender in" (4.2.62–63). But merely by insisting on the hidden inwardness of thought, Iago has already succeeded in causing Othello to conflate the *hidden* with the *hideous*, as though that which is inside, invisible, must inevitably be monstrous ("he echoes me, / As if there were some monster in his thought, / Too hideous to be shown" [3.3.110–12]).¹⁵ According to this logic, the case against Desdemona is complete as soon as Iago can insinuate that she, too, has—psychically and anatomically—an inside, unknowable and monstrous because it *is* inside, unseen.

If Iago succeeds in transferring his own sense of hidden contamination to Desdemona, localizing it in her body, the sense of the hideous thing within—monstrous birth or foul intruder—begins with him. Seen from this vantage point, his initial alarum to Brabantio ("Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags. . . . Are all doors lock'd?" [1.1.80, 85]) looks less like a description of danger to Brabantio or Desdemona than like a description of danger to Iago himself. For Iago finds—or creates—in Brabantio's house the perfect analogue for his own sense of vulnerability to intrusion, and he can make of Othello the perfect analogue for the intrusive "foul thing," the old black ram who is tugging your white ewe/you—or, as we later find out, tugging Iago himself in Iago's fantasy, and leaving behind a poisonous residue ("I do suspect the lustful Moor / Hath leap'd into my seat, the thought whereof / Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards" [2.1.290–92]).

But even the image of the body as a breached and contaminated "palace" suggests rather more interior structure than most of Iago's other images for the body. Again and again Iago imagines the body filled with liquid putrefaction, with contents that can and should be vomited out or excreted. The three

Brown, who read Iago as a Horneyan sadist, assuaging his pain by projecting his self-contempt and hopelessness onto others ("Some Monster in His Thought: Sadism and Tragedy in *Othello*," *Literature and Psychology* 23 [1973]: 59–67, esp. 59–60); and Pollard, who reads Iago as Baudelairian sadist, filling the world with sadistic projections with which he then identifies to fill his inner emptiness (92–95). Serpieri sees Iago as the "artificer of a *destructive projection*"; in his semiotic analysis, litotes—Iago's characteristic nay-saying figure—becomes the linguistic equivalent of projection, "a figure of persuasion which, by denying, affirms in the 'other' all that—the diabolical, the lustful, the alien—which it refutes or censures in the 'self'" (134 and 142). Attention to the status of "others" has made contemporary criticism particularly sensitive to Othello as the site of Iago's projections rather than as the originator of projection; see, e.g., Parker on "the violence of projection" (100). My account differs from those cited here largely in giving projection a body and in specifying the mechanisms of projective identification at work in the play.

¹⁵ Although Neill emphasizes the hidden/hideousness of the bed rather than of bodily interiors (394–95), my formulation here is very much indebted to his. In the course of her enormously suggestive account of the cultural resonances of the hidden/private in *Othello* and *Hamlet*, Parker comments extensively on the association of the hidden with the woman's private parts, partly via gynecological discourse; see Parker, "*Othello* and *Hamlet*: Dilation, Spying, and the 'Secret Place' of Woman," *Representations* 44 (1993): 60–95, esp. 64–69.

fingers Cassio kisses in show of courtesy to Desdemona should be “clyster-pipes” for his sake (l. 176), Iago says; through the bizarre reworking of Iago’s fantasy, Cassio’s fingers are transformed into enema tubes, an imagistic transformation that violently brings together not only lips and faeces, mouth, vagina, and anus, but also digital, phallic, and emetic penetration of a body—Desdemona’s? Cassio’s?—imagined only as a container for faeces. Early in the play, poor Roderigo is a “sick fool . . . Whom love has turn’d almost the wrong side outward” (2.3.47–48); by the end, he is a “quat” rubbed almost to the sense (5.1.11), that is, a pus-filled pimple about to break. The congruence of these images suggests that Roderigo becomes a “quat” for Iago because he can’t keep his insides from running out: the love that has almost turned him inside out is here refigured as pus that threatens to break through the surface of his body. In Iago’s fantasy of the body, what is inside does not need to be contaminated by a foul intruder because it is already pus or faeces; in fact, anything brought into this interior will be contaminated by it. Iago cannot imagine ordinary eating, in which matter is taken in for the body’s nourishment; any good object taken in will be violently transformed and violently expelled. When he is done with her, Iago tells us, Othello will excrete Desdemona (“The food that to him now is as luscious as locusts, shall be to him shortly as acerb as the coloquintida,” an emetic or purgative [1.3.349–50]); when Desdemona is “sated” with Othello’s body (l. 351), she will “heave the gorge” (2.1.231–32). (Poor Emilia has obviously learned from her husband: in her view men “are all but stomachs, and we all but food; / They eat us hungerly, and when they are full, / They belch us” [3.4.101–3].)

Given this image of the body’s interior as a mass of undifferentiated and contaminated matter, it’s no wonder that Iago propounds the ideal of self-control to Roderigo in the garden metaphor that insists both on the rigid demarcation and differentiation of the body’s interior and on its malleability to the exercise of will:

. . . ’tis in ourselves, that we are thus, or thus: our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners, so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop, and weed up thyme; supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many; either to have it sterile with idleness, or manur’d with industry, why, the power, and corrigible authority of this, lies in our wills.

(1.3.319–26)

This is not, presumably, his experience of his own body’s interior or of his management of it; it seems rather a defensive fantasy of an orderly pseudo-Eden, in which man is wholly in control both of the inner processes of his body/garden and of the troublesome business of gender, and woman is wholly absent.¹⁶ His only explicit representation of his body’s interior belies this defense: the mere “thought” that Othello has leaped into his seat (even though he “know[s] not if’t be true” [l. 386]) “Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw [his] inwards.” No reassuring gardener with his tidy—or even his untidy—rows here: Iago’s “inwards” are hideously vulnerable, subject to a poisonous penetration. Through an imagistic transformation, Othello as penetrator becomes conflated with the “thought” that tortures Iago inwardly;

¹⁶ *Gender* can of course mean “kind”; but, as Ridley notes, “Shakespeare normally uses it of difference of sex” (40n).

Othello thus becomes a toxic object lodged inside him. (The garden passage simultaneously expresses and defends against the homoerotic desire that here makes Othello a poisonous inner object, insofar as it voices a fantasy of “supply[ing]” the body with one gender rather than “distract[ing]” it with many.¹⁷)

What I have earlier called Iago’s injured “I”—his sense that he is chronically slighted and betrayed, his sense of self-division—produces (or perhaps is produced by) fantasies of his body as penetrated and contaminated, especially by Othello. In fact, any traffic between inner and outer is dangerous for Iago, who needs to keep an absolute barrier between them by making his outside opaque, a false “sign” (1.1.156 and 157) of his inside; to do less would be to risk being (Roderigo-like) turned almost the wrong side outward, to “wear [his] heart upon [his] sleeve, / For dawes to peck at” (ll. 64–65).¹⁸ To allow himself to be seen or known is tantamount to being stabbed, eaten alive: pecked at from the outside unless he manages to keep the barrier between inner and outer perfectly intact, gnawed from the inside if he lets anyone in. Iago’s need for sadistic control of others (“Pleasure, and action, make the hours seem short” [2.3.369], he says, after managing Cassio’s cashiering) goes in tandem with his extraordinarily vivid sense of vulnerability: unable to be gardener to himself, he will sadistically manage everyone else, simultaneously demonstrating his superiority to those quats whose insides are so sloppily prone to bursting out, and hiding the contamination and chaos of his own insides.

Roderigo plays a pivotal role in this process. As the embodiment of what Iago would avoid, Roderigo exists largely to give Iago repeated occasions on which to display his mastery over both self and other: in effect, Iago can load his contaminated insides into Roderigo and then rub him to the sense in order to demonstrate the difference between them and, hence, the impermeability of Iago’s own insides. Moreover, in managing Roderigo, Iago can continually replenish himself with the fantasy of new objects to be taken into the self: objects over which—unlike the thought of Othello, which gnaws at his inwards—he can exert full control. Obsessively—six times in fourteen lines—Iago tells Roderigo to “Put money in thy purse . . . fill thy purse with money” (1.3.340, 348). We know that Iago has received enough jewels and gold from Roderigo to have half-corrupted a votarist (4.2.189), but we never see Iago taking the miser’s or even the spendthrift’s ordinary delight in this treasure; detached from any ordinary human motivation, the money accrues almost purely psychic meaning, becoming the sign not of any palpable economic advantage but of Iago’s pleasure in being able to empty Roderigo out, to fill himself at will. “Put money in thy purse,” he repeats insistently, and then adds, “Thus do I ever make my fool my purse” (1.3.381), as though the emptied-out Roderigo becomes the container that holds the illusion of Iago’s fullness. For his repetition signals a compulsive need to fill himself with objects in order to compensate for the contamination and chaos inside: hard shiny objects that might be kept safe and might keep the self safe, objects that could magically repair the sense of what the self is made of and filled with.

¹⁷ Ridley notes that “*supply* = satisfy” (40n); for a specifically sexualized use, see *Measure for Measure*, 5.1.210.

¹⁸ “Doves” is the reading in Ridley and Q1; I here depart from it in giving F’s and Q2’s “dawes.”

Iago's hoarding, his sadism, his references to purgatives and clyster-pipes can be read through the language of classical psychoanalysis as evidence of an anal fixation; in that language the equation of money with faeces is familiar enough, as is the association of sadistic control with the anal phase.¹⁹ Iago's obsessive suspicion that Othello has leaped into his seat, along with his heavily eroticized account of Cassio's dream, similarly lend themselves to a classically psychoanalytic reading of Iago as repressed homosexual.²⁰ While these readings are not "wrong" within their own terms, they nonetheless seem to me limited, and not only insofar as they can be said to assume a historically inaccurate concept of the subject or of "the homosexual":²¹ limited even within the terms of psychoanalysis insofar as they do not get at either the quality of Iago's emotional relationships (his inability to form *any* kind of libidinal bond, his tendency to treat others as poisonous inner objects) or the terrifying theatrical seductiveness of the processes of projection that we witness through him. I want consequently to move from the consideration of libidinal zones and conflicted object choices characteristic of classical psychoanalysis to the areas opened up by the work of Melanie Klein; a Kleinian reading of Iago will, I think, help us to understand the ways in which Iago's imagination of his own interior shapes his object relations as he projects this interior onto the landscape of the play.

¹⁹ On the relationship between money and faeces, see Sigmund Freud, "Character and Anal Eroticism" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953–74), 9:167–76, esp. 171 and 173–74; Ernest Jones, "Anal-Erotic Character Traits," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 13 (1918): 261–84, esp. 272–74 and 276–77; Karl Abraham, "Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character" in *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1927), 370–92, esp. 383; and Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945), 281. On sadism and anality, see Abraham, "The Narcissistic Evaluation of Excretory Processes in Dreams and Neurosis" in *Selected Papers*, 318–22, esp. 319 and 321; Jones, 268; and Fenichel, 283.

²⁰ The *loci classici* for this reading are Martin Wanhg, "Othello: The Tragedy of Iago," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 19 (1950): 202–12; and Gordon Ross Smith, "Iago the Paranoiac," *American Imago* 16 (1959): 155–67. Both essays are based on Freud's account of delusional jealousy as a defense against homosexual desire in the Schreber case. For an extension and elaboration of this view, with particular focus on Iago's hatred of women, see also Stanley Edgar Hyman, *Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of His Motivation* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 101–21. Contemporary critics who comment on the homoerotic dynamic between Iago and Othello tend to locate their readings not in this model but in the complex of metaphors that makes Iago's seduction of Othello into an aural penetration and insemination, with a resulting monstrous (and miscegenetic) conception; see, e.g., Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California P, 1981), 144–45; and Parker in Hendricks and Parker, eds., 99–100. Parker notes that the imagined penetration is anal as well as aural (99); see also, e.g., Graham Hammill's brief discussion of Iago's anal eroticism, "The Epistemology of Expurgation: Bacon and *The Masculine Birth of Time*" in *Queering the Renaissance*, Jonathan Goldberg, ed. (Durham, NC, and London: Duke UP, 1994), 236–52, esp. 251n.

²¹ For historically based arguments against Iago-as-repressed-homosexual, see Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 157–62; and Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1991), 61–63 and 75. Both Dollimore and Smith stress the social functions of the male homosocial bond rather than the dynamics of homoerotic feeling partly on the grounds that the homosexual subject is an anachronism in the early modern period. But Shakespeare does not need to have the category of the "homosexual subject" available to him in order to represent Iago as acting out of desires inadmissible to him, including sodomitical desires; and critics who insist that we do away with "the homosexual" as a category sometimes throw out the baby with the bathwater. In "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England" (in Goldberg, ed., 40–61) Alan Bray demonstrates the cultural (nonsexual) uses to which the

In Klein's account the primitive self is composed in part of remnants of internalized objects (people, or bits and pieces of people, taken into the self as part of the self's continual negotiation with what an outside observer would call the world) and the world is composed in part of projected bits and pieces of the self. Ideally, "the good breast is taken in and becomes part of the ego, and the infant who was first inside the mother now has the mother inside himself."²² Internalization of the good object "is the basis for trust in one's own goodness";²³ "full identification with a good object goes with a feeling of the self possessing goodness of its own" and hence enables the return of goodness to the world: "Through processes of projection and introjection, through inner wealth given out and re-introjected, an enrichment and deepening of the ego comes about. . . . Inner wealth derives from having assimilated the good object so that the individual becomes able to share its gifts with others."²⁴ And the corollary is clear: if the infant cannot take in the experience of the good breast (either because of his/her own constitutional conditions or because the experience is not there to be had in a consistent way), the bad breast may be introjected, with accompanying feelings of one's own internal badness, poverty, poisonousness, one's own inability to give back anything good to the world.

But, in the words of Harold Boris, a contemporary post-Kleinian analyst of envy, "the infant who cannot, sooner or later, feed the hand from which it feeds . . . is the child who will then attempt to bite it."²⁵ The infant stuck with a depleted or contaminated inner world will, Klein suggests, exist in a peculiar relation to the good breast: even if it is there and apparently available, the infant may not be able to use it. For if the infant cannot tolerate either the discrepancy between its own badness and the goodness outside itself or the sense of dependency on this external source of goodness, the good breast will not be available for the infant's use: its goodness will in effect be spoiled by the infant's own envious rage. The prototype for Kleinian envy is the hungry baby, experiencing itself as helplessly dependent, empty, or filled only with badness, confronted with the imagined fullness of a source of goodness outside itself: "the first object to be envied is the feeding breast, for the infant feels that it possesses everything he desires and that it has an unlimited flow

"bedfellow" could be put; but in order for Smith, for example, to invoke Iago's report of Cassio's "bedfellow" dream to make the argument that Iago is a self-conscious male-bonder rather than a repressed homosexual, he has to ignore the explicit sexiness of the dream (the hard kisses plucked up by the roots, the leg over the thigh). The dream clearly crosses the line—between male friendship and sodomy—that Bray delineates, more strikingly because Iago need not have included all that sexiness to convey his "information" to Othello; and whether or not the reported dream proclaims Iago a "repressed homosexual," its effect on Othello clearly depends as much on its crossing of that line as on the information that Cassio dreams about Desdemona. As for subjectivity: whether or not the Renaissance shared our sense of the bourgeois subject—in any case, emphatically not the subject as it is construed by psychoanalysis—*Othello* is obsessively about what is hidden away within the person, the inner, private, and unknowable self that might harbor inaccessible desires. For a good summary of these controversies—and a sensible middle position—see Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics—Queer Reading* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 12–14.

²² Melanie Klein, "Envy and Gratitude" (1957) in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works 1946–1963* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975), 176–235, esp. 179.

²³ Klein, 188.

²⁴ Klein, 192 and 189.

²⁵ Boris, xvi.

of milk, and love which the breast keeps for its own gratification."²⁶ Klein's insistence on the priority of the breast as the first object of envy effectively reverses Freud's concept of penis envy; in Klein's account even penis envy becomes secondary, derivative from this earlier prototype.²⁷ But Klein's concept of envy turns on an even more startling innovation: for most analysts of infantile destructiveness and rage, the source and target is the frustrating "bad" object—a maternal object that doesn't provide enough, is not at the infant's beck and call, provides milk that in some way is felt to be spoiled; but in Klein's reading of envy, the source and target of rage is not the frustrating or poisonous bad breast but the good breast, and it is exactly its goodness that provokes the rage. Hence the peculiar sensitivity of the envious to the good—and the consequent need not to possess but to destroy it, or, in Klein's terms, "to put badness, primarily bad excrement and bad parts of the self, into the mother, and first of all into her breast, in order to spoil and destroy her."²⁸ But the breast so destroyed is of course no longer available to the child as a source of good: "The breast attacked in this way has lost its value, it has become bad by being bitten up and poisoned by urine and faeces."²⁹ Insofar as the infant has succeeded in destroying the good object, he has confirmed its destruction as a source of goodness within himself; hence the peculiarly vicious circle of envy, which destroys all good both in the world and in the self, and hence also its peculiar despair.

We do not, of course, need the help of a Kleinian perspective to identify Iago as envious. His willingness to kill Cassio simply because "He has a daily beauty in his life, / That makes me ugly" (5.1.19–20) marks the extent to which he is driven by envy; in an older theatrical tradition he might well have been named Envy. Here, for example, is Envy from *Impatient Poverty*:

A syr is not thys a ioly game . . .
 Enuy in fayth I am the same . . .
 I hate conscience, peace loue and reste
 Debate and stryfe that loue I beste
 Accordynge to my properte
 When a man louethe well hys wyfe
 I brynge theym at debate and stryfe.³⁰

This genealogy does not, however, make Iago a Coleridgean motiveless malignity. For in Iago, Shakespeare gives motiveless malignity a body: incorporating this element of the morality tradition, he releases through Iago the range of bodily fantasies associated with a specifically Kleinian envy.

Klein describes an envy so primal—and so despairing—that it cannot tolerate the existence of goodness in the world: its whole delight lies not in possessing what is good but in spoiling it. And that spoiling takes place in fantasy through a special form of object-relating: through the violent projec-

²⁶ Klein, 183.

²⁷ For an early statement of this position, see Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict" (1928) in *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921–1945* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975), 186–98, esp. 190–91 and 193–96.

²⁸ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 181.

²⁹ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 186.

³⁰ Quoted here from Bernard Spivack's discussion of Iago and the morality tradition in *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil: The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia UP, 1958), 184.

tion of bits of the self and its contaminated objects—often localized as contaminated bodily products—into the good object. By means of this projection, the self succeeds in replicating its own inner world “out there” and thus in destroying the goodness it cannot tolerate; at the end of the process, in the words of one Kleinian analyst, “There is nothing left to envy.”³¹ Through the lens of a Kleinian perspective, we can see traces of this process as Iago fills Othello with the poison that fills him.

In Iago’s fantasy, as I have suggested, there is no uncontaminated interior space: he can allow no one access to his interior and has to keep it hidden away because it is more a cesspool than a palace or a garden. And there are no uncontaminated inner objects: every intruder is foul; everything taken in turns to pus or faeces or poison; everything swallowed must be vomited out. This sense of inner contamination leaves him—as Klein would predict—particularly subject to the sense of goodness in others and particularly ambivalent toward that goodness. His goal is to make those around him as ugly as he is; but that goal depends on his unusual sensitivity to their beauty. Even after he has managed to bring out the quarrelsome drunkard and class-conscious snob in Cassio, transforming him into a man who clearly enjoys sneaking around to see his general’s wife, Iago remains struck by the daily beauty in Cassio’s life—at a point when that beauty has become largely invisible to the audience. To Roderigo, Iago always contemptuously denies the goodness of Othello and Desdemona (he is an erring barbarian and she a supersubtle Venetian); but in soliloquy he specifically affirms their goodness—and affirms it in order to imagine spoiling it. Othello’s “free and open nature” he will remake as the stupidity of an ass who can be led by the nose (1.3.397–400). He will not only use Desdemona’s virtue; he will turn it into pitch, in a near-perfect replication of the projection of faeces into the good breast that Klein posits.

For Iago the desire to spoil always takes precedence over the desire to possess; one need only contrast him with Othello to see the difference in their relation to good objects.³² Othello’s anguish over the loss of the good object gives the play much of its emotional resonance. He imagines himself as safely enclosed in its garnery, nourished and protected by it, and then cast out: “But there, where I have garner’d up my heart, / Where either I must live, or bear no life, / The fountain, from the which my current runs, / Or else dries up, to be discarded thence” (4.2.58–61). When he is made to imagine that object as spoiled—“a cistern, for foul toads / To knot and gender in”—its loss is wholly intolerable to him; even at the end, as he kills Desdemona, he is working very hard to restore some remnant of the good object in her. Although he approaches Desdemona’s bed planning to bloody it (“Thy bed, lust-stain’d, shall with lust’s blood be spotted” [5.1.36]), his deepest desire is

³¹ Betty Joseph, “Envy in everyday life” in *Psychic Equilibrium and Psychic Change: Selected Papers of Betty Joseph*, ed. Michael Feldman and Elizabeth Bott Spillius (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1989), 181–91, esp. 185.

³² In Kleinian terms, Othello has reached the depressive position, characterized by the capacity to mourn for the damaged object and to make reparations to it (see especially Klein, “A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States” [1935] and “Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States” [1940], both in *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 262–89 and 344–69); Iago functions from within the more primitive paranoid-schizoid position, with its characteristic mechanisms of splitting and projection/introjection (see especially Klein, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” in *Envy and Gratitude*, 1–24).

not to stain but to restore the purity of the good object, rescuing it from contamination, even the contamination he himself has visited upon it. By the time he reaches her bed, he has decided not to shed her blood (5.2.3). Instead he attempts to recreate her unviolated wholeness ("that whiter skin of hers than snow, / And smooth, as monumental alabaster" [ll. 4–5]) in a death that he imagines as a revirgination;³³ in fantasy he cleanses "the slime / That sticks on filthy deeds," remaking her unmarred and unpenetrated, "one entire and perfect chrysolite" (ll. 149–50, 146).

But Iago's only joy comes in spoiling good objects: Othello mourns being cast out from the garnery/fountain that has nourished him; Iago mocks the meat he feeds on (3.3.170–71). His description of the green-eyed monster he cautions Othello against marks the workings of a very Kleinian envy in him:³⁴ like the empty infant who cannot tolerate the fullness of the breast, he will mock the objects that might nourish and sustain him, spoiling them by means of his corrosive wit.³⁵ (Or perhaps—in good Kleinian fashion—by tearing at them with his teeth: especially in conjunction with the image of feeding on meat, "mock" may carry traces of *mammock*,³⁶ to tear into pieces, suggesting the oral aggression behind Iago's biting mockery and hence the talion logic in his fantasy of being pecked at.) Mockery—especially of the meat he might feed on—is Iago's signature: different as they are, Othello, Cassio, and Roderigo share an almost religious awe toward Desdemona; Iago insists that "the wine she drinks is made of grapes" (2.1.249–50), that even the best woman is only good enough "To suckle fools, and chronicle small beer" (l. 160). If

³³ As many have argued: see especially Cavell, 134; and Snow, 392. See also my *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 69–70.

³⁴ Iago's words here, like Emilia's at 3.4.157–60, refer explicitly to *jealousy* but nonetheless define the self-referential qualities of *envy*. Although the two terms are sometimes popularly confused, they are distinct in psychoanalytic thought: jealousy occurs in a three-body relationship, derived from the oedipus complex, in which the loss of a good object to a rival is at stake; envy occurs in a pre-oedipal two-body relationship, in which the "good" qualities of the object are felt to be intolerable. Jealousy seeks to preserve the good object, if necessary by killing it; envy seeks to spoil the good object. (For these distinctions, see Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 196–99; and Joseph in Feldman and Spillius, eds., 182.) Jealousy is a derivative of envy but is more easily recognized and more socially acceptable (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 198; Joseph in Feldman and Spillius, eds., 182); partly as a consequence, it can sometimes serve as "an important defence against envy" (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 198). This defensive structure seems to me at work both in Iago and in the play at large: in Iago, who repeatedly comes up with narratives of jealousy as though to justify his intolerable envy to himself (tellingly, he uses the traditional language of envy—Spenser's Envy "inwardly . . . chawed his owne maw" in *The Faerie Queene* [l.iv.30]—to register the gnawing effects of jealousy on him); and in *Othello* itself, insofar as its own narratives of jealousy are far more legible and recognizably "human" than the envy represented through Iago and dismissed in him as unrecognizable, inhuman, or demonic.

³⁵ "Mock" has puzzled commentators for years, occasioning five pages of commentary in the New Variorum edition of *Othello* (ed. Horace Howard Furness [Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1886]). William Warburton (1747) glosses "mocke" (in terms strikingly close to my own) as "loaths that which nourishes and sustains it" (176). With very little plausibility but some interest for my argument, Andrew Becket (1815) transforms "mocke" to "*muck*," glossing it as to "*bedaub or make foul*"; two other commentators—Zachariah Jackson and Lord John Chedworth—approved of this emendation enough to come up with candidates for the monstrous animal that befouls its food, mouse and dragon-fly, respectively (179).

³⁶ Zachary Grey suggested in 1754 that "mock" is a contraction for "mammock" (Furness, ed., 176); as far as I can tell, his suggestion has been entirely ignored.

“the first object to be envied is the feeding breast,” Iago’s devaluation of maternal nurturance here is just what we might expect.

But envy does not stop there. As Klein suggests, “Excessive envy of the breast is likely to extend to all feminine attributes, in particular to the woman’s capacity to bear children. . . . The capacity to give and to preserve life is felt as the greatest gift and therefore creativeness becomes the deepest cause for envy.”³⁷ If Othello’s potency and fullness make him the immediate target of Iago’s envious rage, the destruction of Desdemona’s generativity has been Iago’s ultimate goal from the beginning: “poison his delight,” he says; “And though he in a fertile climate dwell, / Plague him with flies” (1.1.70–71). The image half-echoes Hamlet’s linking of conception and breeding with the stirring of maggots in dead flesh,³⁸ for the “fertile climate” that Iago will transform into a breeding ground for plague is Desdemona’s generative body. Hence, I think, the urgency with which Iago propels the plot toward the marriage bed (“Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated” [4.1.203–4]): the ultimate game is to make father destroy mother on that bed in a parody of the life-giving insemination that might have taken place there.³⁹

And hence the subterranean logic of Iago’s favorite metaphor for that destruction, his monstrous birth. For if Iago enviously devalues Desdemona’s generativity (she can only suckle, and only suckle fools; her body will breed only flies), he also appropriates it, and appropriates it specifically through imitation. Here both senses of *mock*—as devaluation and derisive imitation—come together, as Boris’s work on envy predicts: “The urge to take charge of the envied object has several components to it. First, of course, is the denuding (an idea) and disparagement (an emotion) of the inherent value of the original. This makes possible what follows, namely the idea that the ‘knock-off’ (the ‘as-if’) is in every way the equal of the real thing.”⁴⁰ In conceiving of his monstrous birth, that is, Iago not only mocks but also displaces Desdemona’s generativity by taking on its powers for himself, denying the difference—between her fruitfulness and his barrenness, between her fullness and his emptiness—that he cannot tolerate. Iago’s substitution in fact proceeds by stages. When he first invokes the metaphor of pregnancy, he is merely the midwife/observer: “There are many events in the womb of time, which will be delivered” (1.3.369–70). But his triumphant “I ha’t” only thirty lines later—“I ha’t, it is engender’d; Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light”—replaces time’s womb with his own: as I have already argued, his is the body in which the monstrous birth is engendered, and hell and night have become the midwives.

³⁷ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 201–2.

³⁸ See *Hamlet*, 2.2.181–82.

³⁹ This destruction also has the effect of separating the two figures whose conjunction has haunted Iago’s imagination. Klein hypothesizes the combined parent figure as a special target of envy (“the suspicion that the parents are always getting sexual gratification from one another reinforces the phantasy . . . that they are always combined” [*Envy and Gratitude*, 198]); Iago in fact evokes such a fantasy-figure in his initial description of Othello and Desdemona as fused, a “beast with two backs” (1.1.116), always in the process of achieving the “incorporate conclusion” (2.1.258–59) that is always denied him.

⁴⁰ Boris, 36.

Through this metaphor, Iago's mental production becomes his substitute birth, in which he replaces the world outside himself⁴¹—the world of time's womb, or of Desdemona's—with the projection of his own interior monstrosity; thus conceived, his plot manages simultaneously to destroy the generativity that he cannot tolerate and to proclaim the superior efficacy of his own product. Emilia's description of the jealousy Iago creates in Othello—it is "a monster, / Begot upon itself, born on itself" (3.4.159–60)—is not accurate about Othello, but it suggestively tracks Iago's own envy to its psychic sources. If Iago imagines himself enacting a substitute birth, making the world conform to the shape of his envy by undoing the contours of the already-existing generative world, Emilia expresses the wish behind his metaphor: the wish to *be* begot upon oneself, born on oneself, no longer subject to—dependent on, vulnerable to—the generative fullness outside the self and the unendurable envy it provokes.⁴² Unable to achieve that end, he will empty himself out on the wedding bed, substituting his own monstrous conception for the generative fullness that torments him, and destroying in the process the envied good object in Desdemona.

And it is just here, in this fantasy, that Othello's blackness becomes such a powerful vehicle for Iago. I have already suggested that Iago's capacity to spoil good objects rests on his capacity to blacken them, and to blacken them through a bodily process of projection. His monstrous birth is from the first associated with the darkness of hell and night; and when, in his conversation with Desdemona, he imagines his invention as his baby, that baby is associated specifically with the extrusion of a dark and sticky substance:

my invention
Comes from my pate as birdlime does from frieze,
It plucks out brain and all: but my Muse labours,
And thus she is deliver'd. . . .

(2.1.125–28)⁴³

⁴¹ My formulation here is partly indebted to Janine Chausseguet-Smirgel's work on perversion, especially anal perversion, which she sees as an attempt to dissolve generational and gender differences in order to defend against acknowledgment of the pervert's own puniness and vulnerability; though she does not draw specifically on Klein's concept of envy, her work sometimes intersects usefully with Klein's. In Chausseguet-Smirgel's reading, Sade's intention, for example, is "to reduce the universe to faeces, or rather to annihilate the universe of differences" ("Perversion and the Universal Law" in Chausseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1984], 4). Insofar as perversion attempts to replace God's differentiated universe with its own undifferentiation, it is "the equivalent of Devil religion" (9); the undifferentiated anal universe "constitutes an imitation or parody of the genital universe of the father" (11). While this formulation is suggestive for Iago, I think that Chausseguet-Smirgel is hampered by her Lacanian milieu, with its overvaluation of the phallus and the father's law; Iago is at least as intent on imitating and ultimately replacing the mother's generative function as the father's law.

⁴² With the kind of psychological intuition that everywhere animates his portrayal of Satan, Milton reworks Emilia's comment: unable to stand the "debt immense of endless gratitude" to the God who has created him (*Paradise Lost*, Bk. 4, l. 52), Satan proclaims himself "self-begot, self-raised / By our own quick'ning power" (Bk. 5, ll. 860–61). Klein cites Milton's Satan as an instance of "the spoiling of creativity implied in envy" (*Envy and Gratitude*, 202).

⁴³ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, birdlime is a sticky substance made out of the bark of the holly tree and smeared on branches to entrap birds; "With the barks of Holme they make Bird-lyme," cited from Henry Lyte's 1578 *Niewe herball or historie of plantes* (*Oxford English Dictionary*, prep. J. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2d ed., 20 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], 2:216). *Holme* is confusing; it is cited as "blacke Holme" in Spenser's *Virgils Gnat* (l. 215), but there apparently refers to the oak, not the holly. In any case, despite the echo of lime, birdlime seems to have been dark, not white.

Presumably Iago means that his invention is as slow—as laborious—as the process of removing birdlime from rough cloth (frieze), in which the nap of the cloth is removed along with the soiling agent (hence “plucks out brain and all”). But the route to this relatively rational meaning is treacherous: the syntax first presents us with birdlime oozing from his head (“invention / Comes from my pate as birdlime does”), takes us on an apparent detour through the soiling of cloth (the birdlime stuck to the frieze), and ends with the image of his head emptied out altogether (“plucks out brain and all”), as though in a dangerous evacuation. Then, through a buried pun on *conception*, the concealed intermediary term, the evacuation becomes a pregnancy and delivery, displaced from his own body to that of the Muse, who labors and is delivered.

Invention, in other words, becomes the male equivalent of pregnancy, the production of a sticky dark baby. What we have here, I suggest, is the vindictive fantasy of a faecal pregnancy and delivery that can project Iago’s inner monstrosity and darkness into the world:⁴⁴ initially displaced upward to the evacuated pate, this faecal baby is then returned to its source as his monstrous birth, the baby he has conceived in response to Desdemona’s request for praise (2.1.124) and the easy generativity (his own is a difficult labor) that he envies in her. This baby’s emergence here marks, I think, both the source of his envy and the exchange that envy will demand: he will attempt in effect to replicate his dark sticky baby in her, soiling her generative body by turning her virtue into pitch,⁴⁵ spoiling the object whose fullness and goodness he cannot tolerate by making it the receptacle for his own bodily contents. And he counts on the contagion of this contaminated object: he will turn Desdemona into pitch not only because pitch is black and sticky—hence entrapping—but because it is notoriously defiling;⁴⁶ his scheme depends on using Desdemona as a kind of tar baby, counting on her defilement—her blackening—to make Othello “black.” In fantasy, that is, Iago uses Desdemona and Othello to contaminate each other; they become for him one defiled object as he imagines them on that wedding bed. But at the same time, Othello plays a special role for Iago: in Othello’s black skin Iago can find a fortuitous external sign for the entire process, or, more accurately, a container for the internal blackness that he would project outward, the dark baby that hell and night must bring to the world’s light; emptying himself out, Iago can project his faecal baby into Othello, blackening him with his own inner waste.

Iago plainly needs an Othello who can carry the burden of his own contamination; and to some extent the play makes us complicit in the process, as

⁴⁴ The equation of faeces with baby is familiar to psychoanalysis; see, e.g., Freud, “On the Sexual Theories of Children,” on the cloacal theory of birth (“If babies are born through the anus, then a man can give birth just as well as a woman” [9:205–26, esp. 219–20]); Jones, 274–75; and Susan Isaacs, “Penis-Feces-Child,” *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 8 (1927): 74–76. For fantasies that overvalue the power of faecal creation “to create or destroy every object,” see Abraham, “The Narcissistic Evaluation of Excretory Processes,” 322; about one of his patients he reports, “That night he dreamed that he had to expel the universe out of his anus” (320).

⁴⁵ Oddly, Ridley associates the pitch into which Iago will turn Desdemona’s virtue with birdlime without noting its source in Iago’s earlier metaphor (88n).

⁴⁶ For Shakespeare’s reworkings of the proverbially defiling properties of pitch, see, e.g., *Love’s Labor’s Lost*, 4.3.3; *1 Henry IV*, 2.4.394–96; and *Much Ado About Nothing*, 3.3.53.

it makes Othello in effect into Iago's monstrous creation, carrying out Iago's "conception" as he murders Desdemona on her wedding bed, enacting a perverse version of the childbirth that might have taken place there. Othello himself seems to recognize that a birth of sorts is taking place, though he does not recognize it as Iago's: preparing to kill Desdemona on that bed, he says that her denials "Cannot remove, nor choke the strong conception, / That I do groan withal" (5.2.56–57),⁴⁷ as though he has been impregnated through Iago's monstrous birth. And in fact he has: part of the peculiar horror of this play is that Othello becomes so effective a receptacle for—and enactor of—Iago's fantasies. If Iago imagines himself filled with a gnawing poisonous mineral through what amounts to Othello's anal insemination of him (2.1.290–92), he turns that poison back on Othello: "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear" (2.3.347). This retaliatory aural/anal insemination fills Othello with Iago's own contents, allowing Iago to serve his turn on Othello by doing to Othello what he imagines Othello has done to him. ("I follow him to serve my turn upon him" is sexualized in ways not likely to be audible to a modern audience [1.1.42]. For *turn*, see Othello's later "she can turn, and turn, and yet go on, / And turn again" [4.1.249–50];⁴⁸ characteristically, Othello replicates in Desdemona the "turn" Iago has replicated in him.) And "The Moor already changes with my poison," Iago says, adding for our benefit—in case we have not noticed the links between his poisonous conceit and Othello's—"Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons, / Which . . . Burn like the mines of sulphur" (3.3.330–34).

"The Moor already changes with my poison": the line marks what is distinctive about projection in this play—and distinctively Kleinian. Before Klein, projection was usually understood as a relatively uncomplicated process in which disowned ideas and emotions were displaced onto an external figure. Klein insisted both on the fantasies of bodily function accompanying this process and on the extent to which it is specifically pieces of the self and its inner objects that are thus relocated, with the consequence that pieces of the self are now felt to be "out there," both controlling the object into which they have been projected and subject to dangers from it; Klein renamed this process "projective identification." And her followers have expanded on the concept, stressing the effects of these projected contents on the recipient of the projection, the ways in which the projector can in fact control the recipient. In this version of projective identification, the recipient will not only experience the bits of self projected into him but also enact the projector's fantasy scenarios, hence relieving the projector of all responsibility for

⁴⁷ I here depart from Ridley in following F and Q2; Q1, Ridley's copytext, gives "conceit." The half-buried metaphor of childbirth is, I think, present in either case, both through the association of "groan"—especially in proximity to a bed—with childbirth (see, e.g., *All's Well That Ends Well*, 1.3.140 and 4.5.10; and *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.15) and through the family relation between *conceit* and Latin *conceptus*, cited in the *OED*; the *OED* also gives "Conception of offspring" as an obsolete meaning for *conceit* with a 1589 instance, though it notes that this usage is "Perhaps only a pun" (3:647–48, esp. 648).

⁴⁸ See also "the best turn i' th' bed" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 2.5.59). For *serve*, see *Lear's* Oswald, "A serviceable villain, / As duteous to the vices of thy mistress / As badness would desire" (4.6.248–50); for *serve my turn*, see Costard's exchange with the king (*Love's Labor's Lost*, 1.1.281–82). For *follow/fallow*, see Parker in Hendricks and Parker, eds., 99, citing Herbert A. Ellis, *Shakespeare's Lusty Punning in Love's Labour's Lost* (1973).

them.⁴⁹ When Iago imagines Roderigo turned inside out, his body filled with pus, he seems to me to be engaging in something close to garden-variety projection: he is attributing to Roderigo portions of himself, or ideas about himself, that he would like to disown; and, as far as we know, Roderigo does not come to experience himself as pus-filled or inside out. But when Iago imagines filling Othello with his poison, when he imagines (in Klein's formulation) "the forceful entry into the object and control of the object by parts of the self,"⁵⁰ he is much closer to a specifically Kleinian projective identification; and, as Klein's followers would predict, Othello really does change with Iago's poison, as he begins to experience himself as contaminated and hence to act out Iago's scenarios.

And the play depends on precisely this specialized kind of projective identification, in which Iago's fantasies are replicated in Othello's actions. When we first meet Othello, he is confident enough about his status and his color that he wishes to be found; he can confidently wish "the goodness of the night" (1.2.35) on Cassio and the duke's servants because blackness has not yet been poisoned for him. But as Iago projects his faecal baby into him, Othello comes more and more to imagine himself as the foul thing—the old black ram—intruding into the palace of Venetian civilization or the palace of Desdemona's body; as Iago succeeds in making Othello the container for his own interior waste, Othello himself increasingly affiliates his blackness with soiling (he becomes "collied" or blackened by passion [2.3.197],⁵¹ his name is "begrim'd, and black" as his face) and with bad interior objects. (In "Arise, black vengeance, from thy hollow cell" [3.3.454], he calls on "black vengeance" to arise as though from within the hollow of himself.)⁵² His experience of himself, that is, comes increasingly to resemble what Iago has projected into him; and he begins to act in accordance with that projection, replicating in Desdemona the contagion of projection itself. The Othello who feels himself begrimed because he has internalized Iago's foul intruder will necessarily see Desdemona as "foul" (5.2.201), as a "begrim'd" Diana or a "black weed," and will evacuate his good object as Iago had predicted (1.3.350); by the end of the play, Emilia can call Othello "the blacker devil," Desdemona's "most filthy bargain," "As ignorant as dirt" (5.2.132, 158, 165) because he has so perfectly introjected Iago's sense of inner filth.

⁴⁹ This is an oversimplified summary of a very complex development in psychoanalytic theory; for a fuller summary, see "Projective Identification" in R. D. Hinshelwood's *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 179–208; or Elizabeth Bott Spillius's "Clinical experiences of projective identification" in *Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion*, Robin Anderson, ed. (London and New York: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992), 59–73, esp. 59–64. For Klein's initial development of the concept of projective identification, see *Envy and Gratitude*, 8–11. The development of the concept by her followers has had broad ramifications for clinical work; for a particularly lucid account of some of these, see, in addition to Spillius, Joseph, "Projective identification—some clinical aspects" in *Melanie Klein Today: Developments in Theory and Practice*, Elizabeth Bott Spillius, ed., 2 vols. (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 1:138–50.

⁵⁰ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 11.

⁵¹ *Collied* is conjecturally related to *coaly* by the *OED*, 3:390–91.

⁵² Folio gives "hell" for Q1's "cell." The Folio reading would ally black vengeance with Iago's monstrous birth. In either reading, the apparently superfluous hollowness suggests an inner space; as Ridley notes, it occurs, again redundantly, in the reference to a "hollow mine" (4.2.81). Shortly after he calls up black vengeance, and again in 5.2, Othello imagines his revenge swallowing up his victims (3.3.467 and 5.2.76), as though returning them to the interior source of his vengeance.

Insofar as Iago can make Othello experience his own blackness as a contamination that contaminates Desdemona, he succeeds in emptying himself out into Othello; and insofar as Othello becomes in effect Iago's faecal baby, Othello—rather than Iago—becomes the bearer of the fantasy of inner filth. Through projective identification, that is, Iago invents blackness as a contaminated category before our eyes, enacting his monstrous birth through Othello, and then allowing the Venetians (and most members of the audience) to congratulate themselves—as he does—on their distance from the now-racialized Othello. Through this process, Othello becomes assimilated to, and motivated by, his racial “type”—becomes the monstrous Moor easily made jealous—and Iago escapes our human categories altogether, becoming unknowable, a motiveless malignity.

But this emptying out of Iago is no more than Iago has already performed on himself: if the projection of his own inner contamination into Othello is Iago's relief, it is also his undoing, and in a way that corroborates both the bodiliness of the fantasy of projection and its dangers to the projector as well as the recipient. Klein notes that excessive use of projective identification results in the “weakening and impoverishment of the ego”; in the words of Betty Joseph, “at times the mind can be . . . so evacuated by projective identification that the individual appears empty.”⁵³ If at the end of the play there is nothing left to envy, there is also no one left to experience envy: Iago's projection of himself into the racial other he constructs as the container for his contamination ends not only by destroying his (and our) good objects but also by leaving him entirely evacuated. Having poured the pestilence of himself into Othello, Iago has nothing left inside him: his antigerative birth hollows him out, leaving him empty. The closer he is to his goal, the flatter his language becomes; by the end, there is no inside left, no place to speak from. The play that begins with his insistent “I” ends with his silence: from this time forth he never will speak word.

⁵³ Klein, *Envy and Gratitude*, 11; Joseph in Spillius, ed., *Melanie Klein Today*, 140.