LIEUTENANCY, STANDING IN, AND OTHELLO

BY JULIA GENSTER

In its treatment of military offices, with their ordinal structures and their real and emblematic functions, Othello is consistently alive to the ways in which these offices give rise to certain orderings of perception, for the characters within the drama and for the audience without. Arrangements and rearrangements of power—political, social, sexual—are, amid what Frank Whigham has called the “surge of social mobility that occurred at the boundaries between ruling and subject classes in late sixteenth-century England,” a habitual Shakespearean concern. The exact configurations of military power are not. M. R. Ridley reminds us that “Shakespeare’s use of military rank is both limited and loose.” And yet in Othello arrangements of social and sexual power are played out particularly close to the terms of office, of place. Who occupies what offices, military and sexual, how long and how well they hold them, how they gain or lose them: these questions arise so frequently in the drama that they become a kind of ideational tic—a tic which all the characters touch upon, but which Iago palpates with cunning, expert, obsessive urgency. What interests Iago, what interests Shakespeare, are the ways in which the ranks that place soldiers in legible relation to one another may be mapped on to the structures of personal identity, of social and sexual governance.

The metaphoric dovetailing of sexual and military orders is a Renaissance commonplace, as writers probe the Petrarchan vocabulary of erotic attitudes. But Othello suggests what we do not find suggested to the same degree elsewhere in Shakespeare’s works: the ways that particular military offices with their attendant duties may be made to constitute emblematic and rhetorical places, which are then inscribed upon other structures, domestic or social. All of the play’s characters are interested in the possibilities that the different networks may be brought into correspondence, but Iago is the most adept reader in and reader out of place inscriptions. Recasting the clown’s riddling in Iago’s terms, to tell where a person lodges in one structure is to tell where he may be belied in, dislodged from, another.

In Iago’s and in the play’s preoccupation with military places as loci for rhetorical invention and particularly in the office whose assignment is the most frequently interrogated—that of the lieutenancy—Shakespeare presents a figure, an image, which provides a vantage point on the play. (The word appears 26 times in Othello, which makes it half as frequent as “honest.”) In this drama where “all relations are embedded in power and sexuality,” lieutenancy, in its definition, its practice, its very etymology, extends its force over the play as a whole.

As that etymology reminds us, the lieutenant is the place holder for his commanding officer. The lieutenant is at once a sign of his commander’s power and a powerful reminder of his potential absence, since the lieutenant either receives the commands of his superior officer or substitutes for him. In choosing a subordinate a captain is, in effect, choosing a second self; he is empowering someone to play him, to be him in his absence. In Othello the image is most ferocious when it provides the putative cuckold with the emblem of his own cuckolding: someone unauthorized is standing in for him, holding his place, doing his office. Yet the cuckold is present, imaginatively, watching as the adulterous lover displaces him. He is both present and usurped, as Iago’s sharpened pun makes clear: “Would you, the supervisor, grossly gape on, / Behold her topp’d?” (3.3.401–402). In the ocular proof that Iago offers to his mind’s eye, Othello is both supervisor, Cassio’s commander, and yet as supervisor, overseer, doubly impotent. The cuckold’s mind is haunted by the figure of his own absence from the pictures so powerfully present to his imagination.

Lieutenancy appears here at its most obvious and most corrosive, as it collapses military and domestic structures. It describes more generally, however, a suggestive angle on Iago’s mind and the power that he is able to exercise over the play’s other characters, and on the competition between Iago and Desdemona for Othello and for us. Lieutenancy thus thematizes that potential collapse of different structures of signification into one another; for the characters within the drama it figures both their hopes and their terrors; for the audience it patterns their engagement and their defense.

As writers on Renaissance rhetorical theory have demonstrated compellingly, verbal categories are “places of invention as well as places of definition.” To Iago they suggest readings, narratives he may construct and offer to himself and to others. Rhetorical designs may extend even into “way[s] of knowing, of behaving, and of
representing.” 8 My concern here is less with particular rhetorical tropes than with the situational structure of lieutenancy—itself a trope—which gives play to Iago’s imaginative and rhetorical powers; which gives shape, through his narratives, to Othello’s view of Desdemona; which gives unusual prominence to the ordinary roles all audiences assume as they watch or read a drama. In Othello we experience the fluidity of structures as liberating and terrifying; Joel Fineman contends that “like dreamwork, . . . plays are not only means of representative expression but as such constitute strategies of psychological defense, defending, that is, against the very fantasies they represent.” 9 The potential collapse of structures—marital, military, and linguistic—as they converge around the figure of lieutenancy, produces imaginative freedom and terror; it expresses social and sexual anxieties; it foregrounds the experience of what it means to be an audience. In Othello we, like Iago, occupy two roles; we are as ensigns sign bearers, sign readers, and as lieutenants appointed substitutes for absent characters. If lieutenancy, as Iago uses it, probes the collapsibility of structures, we marshal our own linguistic lieutenancy to defend against the collapse, to attempt to reconstitute, or at least to preserve the possibility of reconstituting, those structures which lieutenancy, in his representation, threatens. As we trace the marks of Desdemona’s language in Othello’s vocabulary and his in hers, we defend against the substitution, in Othello’s thought, of Iago’s world for Desdemona’s. And yet for all our apparent powers we are, like the lieutenant as Elizabethan military literature represents him, immensely powerful in potentia and profoundly impotent in fact.

I.

Oth:  
\begin{quote}
Come, go with me apart, I will withdraw  
To furnish me with some swift means of death,  
For the fair devil; now art thou my lieutenant.
\end{quote}

Iago:  
\begin{quote}
I am your own for ever.
\end{quote}

(3.3.483–85)

At the close of this, the temptation scene, Edwin Booth explains how Iago ought to be played:

You must seem to be what all the characters think, and say, you are, not what the spectators know you to be; try to win even them by your sincerity. Don’t act the villain, don’t look it, or speak it . . . but think it all the time. Be genial, sometimes jovial, always gentlemanly. Quick in motion as in thought; lithe and sinuous as

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a snake. A certain bluffness (which my temperament does not afford) should be added to preserve the military flavour of the character; in this particular I fail utterly, my Iago lacks the soldierly quality. My consolation is that we know him more as a courtier than as a soldier.10

That Booth should choose this moment to enlarge on earlier directions on playing Iago is unremarkable: for the actor as for the character he enacts, the temptation scene is a minefield through which Iago traces out his brilliant, dangerous improvisations. What is remarkable here, however, is Booth’s extraordinary assimilation of Iago’s argumentative rhythms and of the ancient’s relation to his audience. The suggestive iterations which counsel against a too ready falling in with the speaker’s way of perceiving; the gathering certainty in the easy transitions of affect; the confident control of the sentence fragments—all evoke the double triumphs of Iago’s narrative plot and Booth’s performance of it. Yet the triumphant progress moves toward a lame and impotent conclusion as Booth introduces his shortcomings in the part. The consolation his temperament does afford suggests to him that we often lose the soldier in the courtier.

And so we do. But not in this scene where Iago carries his duties as an ensign—as a standard bearer—from the battlefield to the bedroom. And certainly not at its close, where the characters forcefully inscribe their newly wrought alliance as sexual avengers within the structures of military rank. In recognition of their bond, Othello confers upon him the lieutenancy whose denial, Iago tells Roderigo, first spawned his desires for revenge against Othello and Cassio. The office has been vacant since Cassio was deposed, and it seems, in the verbal transpositions and reversals of the passage, to descend less on Iago than on Othello.11 Nervously touching on the unmilitary “flavour” of his Iago, Booth responds to something potent in the scene and in the play: to the fact that that flavor is present in the complex chemistry of Othello, part of the taste of jealousy itself.

What consoles Edwin Booth enranges Thomas Rymer, whose gleefully intolerant account of the play’s improbabilities (reading Rymer is oddly like hearing Iago interpret the work for Roderigo) includes Shakespeare’s portraits of Iago and Desdemona. Iago, Rymer insists, is no soldier and Desdemona no lady: the soldier’s Machiavellianism and the Venetian donna’s sexual and verbal forthrightness are equally intolerable. Stomping through the play in

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the critical equivalent of sensible shoes, he thumps Iago’s plots and Shakespeare’s designs as they converge around the figure of Desdemona and her place in Iago’s revenge, which Rymer will not comprehend: what is wanted here is fisticuffs, not finesse. If Booth misses the soldiering that is, in Othello, part of jealousy, Rymer forgets the jealousy that is part of soldiering.12 The ancient’s goals are easily satisfied, he maintains, without drawing Desdemona into the plot: “Iago cou’d desire no better than to set . . . his two Enemies, by the Ears together; so he might have been reveng’d on them both at once.”13 Rymer’s brusque idiom has its own suggestiveness here, for it portrays rather accurately what Iago achieves when he pulls Desdemona into his machinery. In the pictures he creates for Othello he succeeds, Patricia Parker maintains, in “transforming . . . the ear into a substitute oculus or eye, . . . providing that form of vivid description which in Latin is evidentia but which Puttenham translates more ominously into English as ‘Counterfeit Representation.’ ”14

As a character, then, Iago persuades us to follow his lead: he incarnates, if in perverse terms, the humanist Agricola’s dictum that “all speech . . . has this for its end, that one person makes another the sharer of his mind.”15 As a speaker, Iago achieves his ends absolutely. “It is clear,” William Empson writes, “that he knows a lot about jealousy; indeed, the broad effect is that he is dragging Othello into his own state of mind.”16 Before, however, we can see how Iago may so colonize Othello’s mind, how he may claim that territory for his own, we must first chart some of the grounds—cultural, metaphoric, emblematic, rhetorical—upon which that state is founded.

II.

If an exploration of military ranks and places is an unusual focus for Shakespeare, his contemporaries were writing busily on the subject. There was in fact a “lively discussion in progress” on military matters “all through the later years of Elizabeth.”17 The works addressed both practical and theoretical issues, presenting the changes in weaponry and fortification, or debating the relative merits of firearm and bow, standing army or citizen militia. They review battle assemblies (providing enough computational tables to engage the energies of an “arithmetician” like Michael Cassio), discuss the characteristics of professional soldiers, and explain the military hierarchy, cataloguing the particular duties and the ideal

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character of each officer. As it reveals the spectrum of discussion, demonstrating the civilian population's increasing interest in military tactics and the configurations of office, the literature records what Gunther Rothenberg argues was a "fundamental shift in the nature of armies and warfare...after 1560," a shift which produced "modern armies, founded on the principle of hierarchical subordination, discipline, and social obligation."18

The codification of discipline is evident in the 1586 Army Orders, Lawes and Ordinances set down by Robert Earle of Leycest, the Queenes Maiesties Lieutenant and Captaine General of her armie and forces in the lowe countries. To this list of 55 articles every chief magistrate, captain, inferior officer, soldier and pioneer was to "swear and by corporall othe be bounde to performe"; the orders set out a strict discipline, which stipulates the behaviors prohibited and the punishments attached to violation. The articles suggest, no doubt, some utopian thinking: the regulations on gaming, whoring and drinking were doubtless dishonored as much in the breech as in the trench or garrison. But they do aim to establish uniform standards of conduct. The first several articles police what might be called moral conduct: they proscribe gaming, blasphemy, habitual drunkenness (the punishment here is expulsion from the army); they require attendance at Holy Service. The fifth, which may be relevant to Cassio's wish that Othello not see him "woman'd" (3.4.193), enjoins: "No man shall carrie into the fielde, or deteine with him at the place of his garrison, any woman whatsoever other than such as be known to be his lawful wife, or such other women to tende the sicke and serve for launders, as shall be thought meete by the Marshall, upon paine of whipping or banishment."19

Other regulations govern military and civilian contact, forbidding physical and economic violence; similar ordinances regulate the internal economy of the army: profiteering in provisions, trafficking in offices and padding the rolls are all outlawed. Many rehearse matters of military discipline per se—the mechanics of the watch, when alarms should be raised and how answered, the necessity for remaining at the post and protecting the ensign. The regulations thus attempt to constitute, as it were, a civil government structure within the army. Private quarrels are to be taken before and adjudicated by superior officers. The orders stipulate that anyone who knows of any "secrete Treason or dangerous Conspiracie or other practise which may be hurtfull and may concern the perill of her

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Maiesties person, or of her General, or the estate of this Armie, and shall not with all diligence reveale the same either to the Generall, or some other officer of especiall trust” will “incurre the paines of death with torments.” The late Renaissance army thus begins to replicate the fears and structures of civil organization. It would ultimately provide, in the words of William McNeill, “a passable substitute for the customary patterns of traditional social groupings—the very groupings which were everywhere dissolving or were at least called into question by the spread of impersonal market relations.”

That the regulations were neither scrupulously nor universally enforced is plain from contemporary and historical accounts. (The articles themselves could provide a court-martial transcript for Falstaff, and Leicester lined his pockets and exceeded his instructions in the Netherlands.) Equally plain is that they require, in the officer class, a set of enforcers. In the codification of this hierarchy Elizabeth’s army participated in what two military historians have termed “perhaps the most significant development in armies in the latter part of the sixteenth century”: the “appearance of a modern rank structure and chain of command and of the ranks that have now become familiar.” The alterations were radical, since, as Sir Charles Oman explains, “the nomenclature of the military hierarchy underwent a complete change during the reign of Elizabeth.” In the army of Henry VIII, of all the modern officer-names that of “captain” alone for the commander of a company was in existence. His senior subaltern was known as the “petty captain” right into Elizabeth’s time—certainly as late as 1563; after which the name “lieutenant,” hitherto used for all sorts of locum tenentes (like the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or the Lieutenant of the Tower), begins to appear as the proper designation of the captain’s deputy, who would take his place in his absence. The standard-bearer of the company, known as ensign . . . serves regularly as the junior company officer of commissioned rank, not as a mere bearer of the company flag, by the middle of Elizabeth’s reign. The name of Sergeant (serviens), like lieutenant, had been known from time immemorial for petty officers of all sorts, not merely military, but like the King’s sergeants-at-law, also civil. The first sign of a technical use of it in army organization comes from a royal ordinance of 1528 . . . Corporal (an Italian title, caporale) does not appear until 1585.

Thus the configurations of rank were sometimes confusing, particular rank-names anomalous or misleading. The shifting titles

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may have made it difficult, especially for a civilian population, to be certain who, exactly, was in charge and what, precisely, were his functions: we may detect in Shakespeare’s works some of the “strains and stresses that had made military management so difficult in the centuries of transition from one kind of primary community to the new one.”

Pistol’s precise charge in 2 Henry IV is unclear, but Shakespeare assumes that his audience will get the joke when Mistress Quickly promotes him to captain. Doll Tearsheet’s ribald commentary reminds us of her own preference for Venereal to Martial encounters, underscores the hostess’s ignorance, and suggests a certain unease with rapidly changing nomenclature: “A captain! God’s light, these villains will make the word as odious as the word ‘occupy,’ which was an excellent good word before it was ill sorted. Therefore captains had need look to’t” (2.4.133–36). Later plays assume as common knowledge the rank-names and the duties associated with each rank. When Stephano enlists Caliban under him, “Thou shalt be my lieutenant, monster, or my standard” (3.2.14–15), Trinculo proposes a wry correction: “Your lieutenant, if you list; he’s no standard” (16). In Antony and Cleopatra Ventidius, urged to pursue the fugitive Parthians, explains the perils of the office:

I have done enough. A lower place, note well, May make too great an act. For learn this, Silius, Better to leave undone, than by our deed Acquire too high a fame when him we serve’s away. Caesar and Antony have ever won More in their officer than person. Sossius, One of my place in Syria, his lieutenant, For quick accumulation of renown, Which he achieved by th’minute, lost his favor. Who does i’ th’ wars more than his captain can Becomes his captain’s captain; and ambition (The soldier’s virtue) rather makes choice of loss Than gain which darkens him.

The advice is conventional enough, certainly; but it dramatizes the dangers that attend on an all-sufficient substitute. The hierarchy posits the lieutenant as a place holder; the superior officer fears him as a place taker.

Whether Shakespeare derives his knowledge of military hierarchy from the tracts of his day we cannot know. We can be sure, however, that he assumes that his audience possesses at least a
rudimentary knowledge of army organization and that the flood of publications had helped make that information available.24 Those military treatises not only explain the hierarchy, but also delineate the traits appropriate to each officer. Like Leicester’s ordinances, the characters assigned to the officers are as much gestures toward the ideal as representations of the actual, but they do shape expectations, and for Iago, possibilities.

The ensign is, as his name attests, both the bearer of a symbol and its representative, though he is no longer the “mere bearer of the company flag.”25 Leonard Digges’s 1579 Stratioticos lays the matter out clearly: “the value and vertue of the Ensigne setteth forth the vertue and valoure of the Captayne and whole Band.”26 This chiastic arrangement prepares for still more interesting and, in the world of Othello, more threatening crossovers when Digges outlines the character the ensign should bear, who should hasten “first and foremost” to the front of any action.27 And if he ought to set himself aggressively at the front of the battle, his defense ought to be still more vigorous. His flinty valor should accompany, even breed, a certain tenderness in points of honor.

As it is conuenient for euer Souldior to stand upon hys credite and reputation, accompting no losse of goodes comparable to a dishonorable foile: so ought especialllye this Officer to whom the charge of the Ensigne is committed, aboue al other to haue honorable respect of his charge, and to be no lesse careful and jealous therof, than euer honest and honorable Gentleman should of his wife.28

’Tis probable and palpable to thinking.

Barnabe Rich’s 1587 A Path-Way to Military Practise is less demanding in its description of the office, perhaps because Rich himself had served in Leicester’s forces in Holland, where he rose to the rank of captain. He does, however, stress the ensign’s value as emblem: “As the Ensigne in the fielde is the honour of the bande, so the Ensigne bearer in like case shoulde bee honoured by his company, and this reputation is best attained, by his owne curteous demeanour towards the soouldiers, the loue of whom concerneth greatly his owne safety.” In combat he should be “couragious and cheerefull when he is before the enemie, in any distresse resolute rather to loose his life, then to loose hys Cullours.”29

Edward Davies in the later (1619) Art of War and Englands Traynings reverts to the association of amorous and martial honor: “Hauing solemnly receiued the Ensigne of his Captaine, like a
noble and expert soldier, he ought carefully to keepe the same, and
beare a certayne reuerent respect to it, as to a holy thing, yea & to
be as iealous ouer the safetie thereof, no lesse than an amorous
person over his louing mistresse.”30 We need not imagine Shake-
speare sitting down to read Leonard Digges, or Edward Davies
cribbing from Othello, to see that Iago occupies a rhetorical place
where nervous segues from martial to marital honor are common-
places, where jealousy and honesty are commingled, where the
ensign and his emblem are taken to be one.

Iago is at the play’s opening “his worship’s ancient”; Othello
appoints him lieutenant only at the end of the temptation scene.
M. R. Ridley contends that we might do as well to conceive of him
as Othello’s A.D.C. since we “hear nothing” of him in his capacity
as ancient. But in fact we hear rather a lot about him as a dealer in
signs and emblems, most of it from his own mouth.31 Most obvi-
ously, he alludes to his function when he returns to the Sagittar to
“show out a flag, and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign”
(1.1.156–57).32

His early speeches, beginning with the innocuous oath, “God
bless the mark” (1.1.33), proceeding through the injunction to
“mark” that “knee-crooking knave” (44–45) (which Greenblatt
aptly styles an “emblem”),33 to the applause for those with whom
he classes himself, foreground the language of show, emblem, and
sign. Iago traces, approvingly, the abilities of his fellows, those who
have “some soul” (54). They are able to trim themselves “in forms,
and visages of duty” (50) while “throwing . . . shows of service on
their lords” (52). His largest design in the matter is to present him-
self publicly as eminently legible while keeping the hermeneutical
key private. And his is a mercurial hermeneutic. He restructures his
own service in a pattern—“In following him, I follow but myself”
(58)—which corresponds to his riddling formulation of his own
identity—“I am not what I am” (65).34 To image his unlikely failure
Iago designs a perverse, most unmilitary decoration:

For when my outward action does demonstrate
The native act, and figure of my heart,
In complement extern, "tis not long after,
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,
For doves to peck at.

(1.1.61–65)

As his formulations imply, his duties as ensign transfer readily

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into an ability to construct new signs as he requires them, to turn, as with the hankerchief, sign into emblem. And, most importantly in terms of his influence upon Othello, he and others transpose his talents for bearing signs into an ability to read other signs, to descry meaning. His eye, like his tongue, is “nothing, if not critical” (2.1.119). This quickness in perception meshes easily with others of the ensign’s duties, for he is supposed to be selected for his abilities to lead men. He should, according to William Garrard’s suggestive phrasing in the 1591 Art of Warre, “enforce himselfe to be the first” and “invite the rest forward.” Iago readily transposes his sign bearing into sign reading, inviting others to, in effect, follow the reader. Iago precedes Othello in his actual appearance on the stage and in his experience of jealousy: as interpreter he clearly invites Othello forward.

Iago makes much of the connection between his duty and his suspicions, presenting that connection as painful, but a part of his duties, of his honesty. When Othello turns on Iago and threatens him, the ensign offers to give over altogether, by resigning the office whose requirements have forced his disclosures.

God buy you, take mine office,—O wretched fool,
That livest to make thine honesty a vice!
O monstrous world, take note, take note, O world,
To be direct and honest, is not safe.

(3.3.381–84)36

The offer is particularly calculating: it reminds Othello of what he expects from his ancient, and it recalls the general’s own words in the Senate. There he declared he would renounce his post if Desdemona’s testimony proved him false; here Iago offers to resign his if she proves true. When Othello later demands “a living reason, that she’s disloyal,” Iago replies: “I do not like the office” (3.3.415–16), then proceeds to narrate, with agonizing detail, Cassio’s supposed dream.

The military literature assigns to the lieutenant a more amorphous character. Digges, for example, grumbles at it as supernumerary: “This Officer I find not in the Romane Armies, neither see I any cause why in these Dayes we shoulde neede them, if the Ensigne and other officers sufficiently knewe theyr dutie.”37 Davies too suggests that it might be preferable to collapse the ancientship and lieutenancy into a single office.38 In his A Pathway to Militarie Practise Barnabe Rich describes the place more sympa-

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that etically, the odor of recent service clinging to his outline: "The Liefetenaunt of a companie, in his Captaines absence hath authority to directe all, and in his Captaines presence to disburthen him of some inferiour toyles: His place requires knowledge in the fielde, trust to his Captaine, frendship to his inferiour officers, and loove to the Soultiours. In discharging his duetie, his office is painefull, and therafter to be considered if his Captaine be gratefull." His duties consist, largely, of peacemaking and maintaining order. According to Digges, he handles disputes among the men, bringing them before the captain only, in a phrase which points toward Cassio as a likely choice for the position, "if he cannot by curtesie frame them."39 He also mediates between the captain and the men; Cassio is thus in the unhappy position of having lost the office from which he might argue for his own reinstatement. Desdemona, curiously, moves to fill that position when she takes up Cassio's suit.

The lieutenancy receives a fuller treatment, though not a much more specific one, in Davies's Englands Trayning. Like Digges, he argues that the lieutenant should be tender of his reputation and should maintain peace among the troops. He should, as well, carefully avoid all "stomaking and strife that might arise betwixt him and the Alfierus [ensign], for thereby oftentimes great scandales haue falne out."40 Such emblems' quarrels have apparently been frequent enough for Davies to summon patience to prevent those murmurs.

The most striking characteristic of the lieutenancy is not explained in the literature, though Digges' discomfort with the office points toward its problematic nature. It is a position that marks an emptying out rather than a presence. As opposed to the earlier "petty captain," which marks diminution, the lieutenancy marks substitution. As a rank, the lieutenancy assigns to a particular place that principle of fungibility which any chain of command both affirms and denies. For the lieutenancy exposes a curious paradox at the center of the structure: on the one hand the chain argues that each occupant must be uniquely suited, by temperament and training, to the office he occupies—each office has its peculiar requirements and each officer should manifest them rightly; on the other it insists that each officer is replaceable by a subordinate who can, if necessary, assume the command which devolves on him. Though not a knave in office and a dog out of it, the lieutenant is a cipher in his captain's presence, a power in his absence. Thus Digges: "In

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absence of the Captaine, he oughte to be obeyed and honoured as the Chiefe, but in presence of the Captaine not to take upon him any such authoritie." DAVIES is equally emphatic: in the captain’s presence the lieutenant must "neuer appropriate vnto himselfe any one point of authoritie." HE is something of a counter, put into play only when the space above him empties out. What is freely given in the captain’s absence becomes, in his presence, theft, appropriation, arrogation.

The lieutenancy is thus a strangely, doubly valent place. And, as Ventidius makes clear, it is potentially a dangerous one. The condition of replaceability, a condition upon which the office itself is predicated, both registers and produces a generalized anxiety. The captain fears that his junior officer, whose function is defined by the possibility that he may stand in, is merely marking time until he does stand in. The lieutenant himself is keenly aware of the jealousy from above, and of the danger that he himself may be replaced from below. Cassio acknowledges as much when he expresses his fears "That I being absent, and my place supplied, / My general will forget my love and service" (3.3.17–18). Cassio’s fears describe his own circumstance, and to us, Desdemona’s. The lieutenant thus bears a value much like the one Polixenes assigns to himself in The Winter’s Tale: he is “a cipher / Yet standing in rich place” (1.2.6–7). And if the military structures give to this arithmetical nothing a local habitation and a name the domestic structure does so too, and gives him the name Leontes assigns to Polixenes: his cuckolder.

III.

We know, from the play’s opening scene, that Iago covets the lieutenancy and that he has been denied it. In many ways it seems the ideal place for a man who is not what he is, whose identity is, like lieutenancy, a locus for substitution, impersonation, displacement. Iago in fact excels at imagining the other as himself, but the capacity for such imaginings, as Stephen Greenblatt has demonstrated admirably, does not always issue in generosity: affective substitution may sometimes not so much draw the empathizer into the other as empty the other out of himself. The empathizer may collapse the other’s story into his own. When, for example, Iago presents the narrative which will lead to Cassio’s cashiering, he appropriates Othello’s story. Describing how Cassio and Montano came to blows Iago explains:

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I do not know, friends all but now, even now,
In quarter, and in terms, like bride and groom,
Devesting them to bed, and then but now,
As if some planet had unwitting men,
Swords out, and tilting one at other's breast,
In opposition bloody.

(2.3.170–75)

Othello's interrupted bridal is replayed, transposed into the terms of the brawl, artfully mingling sexual anxieties—sex is violence, death—with social and military ones.44

Iago plays in the temptation scene with the very terms he has collapsed, reasserting the borders to test his work, even as he urges Othello to test his wife. Delay Cassio's restoration, he advises Othello, so that you may know, from your wife's response, whether she be true or false: "Though it be fit that Cassio have his place, / For sure he fills it up with great ability" (3.3.250–51).

There is, in Iago's speech, a particular, even obsessional attention to place and rank (and to some very rank places). In part such attention derives from his festering sense of his own improper subordination; but it stems primarily from his belief in his own power to make and remake identities, to place and displace. All dispositions, whether blessed or cursed, are in his making, as when he asserts that he may form Desdemona's character as he likes: "knowing what I am, I know what she shall be" (4.1.73). Early in the play he makes opportunities to call Othello by his title. Later he concentrates on forcing Othello to say the word and give himself the title of cuckold, just as he presses Desdemona to say "whore" (4.2.120). He enjoys calling Cassio "lieutenant" during the watch which will end with Cassio's cashiering. He delights, even more, in using that appellation when Cassio has lost the right to it: "How do you now, lieutenant?" To which Cassio replies: "The worser, that you give me the addition, / Whose want even kills me" (4.1.103–05). The dramatic protests with which he calls the brawlers to silence are studded with titles, social and military: "Lieutenant,—sir,—Montano,—gentlemen,— / Have you forgot all place of sense, and duty? / Hold, the general speaks to you" (2.3.157–59). Presenting himself as a kind of military Malvolio, he reminds Othello that he has all respect for persons, places, and times, and that he reveres the hierarchy which governs them.

He seems, in line with his peculiarly concretizing imagination, to conceive of places, military, social, and sexual, in spatial terms, so
that one occupant drives the other out. He sets the pattern up early, where classifying the two types of servants, he derides the type who “wears out his time much like his master’s ass, / For naught but provender” (1.1.47-48). His soliloquy at the act’s close establishes him as master, Othello as ass. “The Moor a free and open nature too, / That thinks men honest that but seems to be so: / And will as tenderly be led by the nose . . . / As asses are” (1.3.397-400). Looking on as Cassio speaks to Desdemona, he crowns that Cassio’s courtly “tricks” will, with the aid of Iago’s own interpretive prestidigitation, “strip you out of your / lieutenancy” (2.1.171-72; my italics). Whereas Cassio describes Desdemona as “our great captain’s captain” (2.1.74), blending military role and erotic rule, Iago declares that “Our general’s / wife is now the general” (2.3.305-06), suggesting Othello’s dispossession. The formulation here also, and not incidentally, encapsulates Iago’s suasive strategy: he will suggest that Desdemona’s affections are no longer particular to Othello. She will come to possess, in his representations, what he half seriously accuses Emilia of having: “a common thing” (3.3.306).

As he thus represents her, Iago reveals the ways in which his social and sexual imaginations meet. Envisioning his own supposed cuckolding he sees the cuckold, whether Cassio or Othello, as having all the accoutrements of the dispossessed husband: his first version of his cuckolding explains that “I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad, that ‘twixt my sheets / He’s done my office” (1.3.384-86). In equally vivid tableaux he imagines that “the lustful Moor / Hath leap’d into my seat” (2.1.290-91), and “I fear Cassio with my night-cap too” (2.1.302).

IV.

In the figures he uses to represent his supposed cuckolding, Iago works variations on familiar Elizabethan and Shakespearean conceptions: adultery is theft, a violation of property rights. Varchi’s Blazon of Jealousie, for example, presents the jealous lover as inflamed by offenses against his mercantile and agricultural interests, as enraged “when this our high pris’d Commoditie chanceth to light into some other merchants hands, and that this our private Inclosure proveth to be a Common for others.”45 Falstaff expresses the conventional view when he envisions Mistress Ford as the key to her husband’s coffers. In the conception of the wife as property or estate, capital and patriarchal power structures converge powerfully, suggesting their increasingly central role in representing hu-

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man relations. Such conceptions, however, not only enact some fundamental anxieties; they also displace others. Shakespeare’s Leontes reveals that such metaphors are tools for expression and defense:

> And many a man there is, even at this present,
> Now while I speak this, holds his wife by th’arm,
> That little thinks she has been sluiced in’s absence
> And his pond fished by his next neighbor, by
> Sir Smile, his neighbor. Nay, there’s comfort in’t
> While other men have gates and those gates opened,
> As mine, against their will.

(1.2.191–97)

The metonymic distance which represents his wife as pond (where, it seems, the “slime that sticks on filthy deeds” (5.2.149–50) surfaces in the sluicing) defends against the picture of Hermione and Polixenes engaged in what Othello calls “the act of shame” (5.2.212). That picture threatens constantly—in the iteration of “this present, now while I speak this” and the neighbor’s recurrence—to intrude itself. Even the elisions (especially “in’s absence”) may suggest the pressure to close a gap, to cancel an unwanted addition. The picture which Leontes guards against here explodes into his later charge, provoked by Hermione’s assertion that he mistakes her: “You have mistook, my lady, / Polixenes for Leontes” (2.1.81–82). Ford’s hysterical ruminations on his wife’s imminent liaison with Falstaff again present adultery as a trespass against property, but Ford is at least as terrified by what he shall gain as by what he shall lose. “My bed shall be abused, my coffers ransacked, my reputation gnawn at; and I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. Terms! names! Amaimon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason, well; yet they are devils’ additions, the names of fiends. But Cuckold! Wittol!—Cuckold! the devil himself hath not such a name” (Merry Wives, 2.2.263–71). In the adoption of such terms Ford is rechristened, translated out of one identity and into another.

Coppélia Kahn says, aptly, that “Iago is not alone . . . in his imaginings; but he is unique in his ability to use men’s fantasies against them.” But there is this difference in Iago’s imaginings, in Othello’s and in Othello’s: as Iago develops those familiar images he presents what we might call, to extend the metaphor, contact prints. For Othello keeps before us, centrally and hideously, as Iago keeps
it before Othello, the image of Desdemona and Cassio as the beast with two backs. The metaphor in which we see a thief making off with the cuckold’s goods is returned here to the (auricular) sight of the cuckolder vanquishing the cuckold’s own self. Returning to Iago’s conceptions of his own cuckoldling, we notice that he himself is more intimately involved in the images than Ford or Leontes is. He sees his property wrongfully appropriated, but it is more intimate property, and the cuckolder is more closely framed. Othello does his office betwixt the sheets; Cassio wears his nightcap. Othello has leapt into his seat which, for all its imperial resonances, brings us into much closer contact with the scene he presents, brings Othello into actual contact with Emilia.

William Empson suggests that Iago knows a lot about jealousy. He does. And Othello knows still more about the jealous mind, about its particular attraction to narrative, to construction, about the curious fact that the pictures which the imagination conjures most powerfully, the narratives it constructs most intensely, are those in which the conjurer, the constructor, is not actor, but onlooker. The jealous mind projects the scene so strongly that it becomes present, yet what that mind creates is, in a sense, the erotic fantasy of another. Henri Wallon describes the jealousy of a child, which he takes as the model for adult sexual jealousy: “In jealousy the couple made up of the child creating a spectacle and the child admiring him is of concern to the latter: the jealous child would like to be the one being watched.” If the cuckold’s shame is that he is rearing another man’s children, in Othello where the self’s continued existence depends on the capacity to turn its life into narrative, the cuckold’s shame, and Othello’s tragedy, is that his imagination is no longer his own: he is bringing up the children of another man’s fancy. The conventional iconography of horns depicts the cuckold’s loss in terms of his gains, publishing his shame to the world. In Othello, still more potently, they proclaim that his forehead—his imagination itself—is now in service to the cuckolder. In the stories that they tell themselves, as they imagine the cuckolders doing their office, the supposed cuckold are doing the narrative work of another. Othello is not, of course, doing the imaginative work of Cassio, but of Iago; his military lieutenant is not doing Othello’s sexual business, but Othello has become Iago’s lieutenant, doing his imaginative work. Stanley Cavell explains, eloquently, just how disastrous this loss is for Othello: “To say he loses Desdemona’s power to confirm his image of himself is to say that he loses his old

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power of imagination. And this is to say that he loses his grasp of his own nature; he no longer has the same voice in his history. So then the question becomes: How has he come to displace Desdemona’s imagination by Iago’s? 49 Iago comes to displace Desdemona’s imagination because he is able “to use men’s fantasies against them” 50 by manipulating those terms and names which so terrify Ford, and which are the most potent weapons in Iago’s magazine. What gives Iago his power, his access to Othello’s fantasies, is that he uses terms, names, offices, places, grounding his suggestions in the hierarchies that structure Othello’s days, using them to structure his dreams. When he makes Othello his lieutenant in imagination, he is freed into narrativity, and thus, I think, we may partly account for his improvisational zest: he is a prisoner given his role. Othello will no longer be the subject whose erotic imaginings Iago does for him, but the dreamer of those nightmares. When he leads Othello to take his place as jealous imaginist Iago frees himself to have a voice in his own history.

V.

One of the greatest attractions of Othello, when we first see him, is his insistence that he and his place are seamlessly joined, even as he works to interweave his new role as husband: “My parts, my title, and my perfect soul, / Shall manifest me rightly” (1.2.31–32). His abilities, his title—here surely that of general and husband—and his guiltless conscience meld absolutely: he is emblem and emblematized. The investment he has made in that bond between private self and public structure draws him to enlarge upon the theme as he confronts Brabantio’s accusations in the Senate:

 Send for the lady to the Sagittar,  
And let her speak of me before her father;  
If you do find me foul in her report,  
The trust, the office, I do hold of you,  
Not only take away, but let your sentence  
Even fall upon my life.

(1.3.115–20)

While it provides an early and alarming instance of the permeability of that phalanxed trust, office, and life to linguistic breach—report may be commuted to death sentence within three lines—Othello’s formulation insists that he and his place are of a piece, and that his wife’s truth will witness that bond. Insofar, however, as
Othello’s words touch on Desdemona his syntax reminds us that any new arrangement of places will undo the arrangements of an earlier structure, will create a new and rival hierarchy. When he says that Desdemona will “speak of me before her father” he puts his preposition on double duty: the “before” acts less as a directional signal than as an affectional one. When Brabantio’s daughter arrives, she speaks as Othello’s wife:

I am hitherto your daughter: but here’s my husband:  
And so much duty as my mother show’d  
To you, preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge, that I may profess,  
Due to the Moor my lord.

(1.3.185–89)51

The language of physical and temporal placement (here, hitherto, before) displaces Brabantio’s authority (though by connecting Desdemona to a different—matrilineal—authority) and replaces it with Othello’s. In its combination of aggressive and sacramental vocabularies—Desdemona prefers her husband, challenges her father and professes her devotion to the Moor, her speech looks forward to her eloquent trumpeting of her actions where she pleads to accompany the man to whom she has consecrated her soul and fortunes, lest she lose the “rites” of marriage. In that powerful speech (prefaced, like Othello’s narrative of the wooing, by a claim of verbal insufficiency) Desdemona assimilates the vocabulary of Othello’s place and mind to her own.

The scene in the Senate chamber derives much of its power from the hopes it raises that Othello’s calm command and Desdemona’s aggressive gentleness may be brought together, from the promise that such an assimilation may be possible. In the Senate scene we see that, in Cavell’s words, “his perfection is now opened toward hers.”52 But its power arises as well from the fears it inspires, from our sense of the potential stops to that opening, of the harrowings up its unfolding may demand. Both elements are present in Desdemona’s speech, which even as it resolves the competition between Othello and Brabantio sets up another competition by recalling Iago’s speech at the play’s opening. There Iago, like Desdemona here, uses the terms of a previous order to explain how he will constitute a new one. There he meditates, as Desdemona does in the Senate, on the operations of preferment, on what duties are owing to the Moor, on what he shall profess and to whom.

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The competition thus begins immediately; for Othello to choose between rival hierarchies is to choose a version of himself, to decide who shall, from our perspective, represent him. Each has access to a central part of Othello: Desdemona has seen Othello’s “visage in his mind” (1.3.252) and Iago has intuited the “cistern, for foul toads / To knot and gender in” (4.2.62–63) that exists beside it. Their vocabularies often run parallel, and sometimes cross, but they exist in “spaces of rival signification.” Desdemona’s linguistic world in many ways parodies Iago’s world, as his hers; as he moves from military to erotic structures, she extends the erotic into the military: she will be no “moth of peace” (1.3.256). When she pleads for Cassio’s reinstatement, she presents her argument as wifely concern. And, indeed, Shakespeare holds up, on the quay of Cyprus, the possibility that Desdemona may be more equal to Iago than she seems: she too knows disguise (she can “beguile / The thing I am, by seeming otherwise” [2.1.122–23]); she keeps march with his bawdy talk; she challenges the issue of his “most lame and impotent conclusion” (2.1.161).

Yet in Cyprus we watch as Iago claims the grounds, drawing the rival signification of Desdemona’s speech into his own camp. But in Desdemona’s speech, and in its resonances in Othello’s, we can recover the “noble Othello of the beginning” who, as John Traugott has it, “is all the more present by his absence at the end”; we can, however fleetingly, reconstitute the union between the Moor and Desdemona. Eamon Grennan rightly asserts that they “are divorced initially in their speech,” but the decree is never final. When, for example, Desdemona dismisses the false indictment brought against Othello while she “was (unhandsome warrior as I am) / Arraigning his unkindness with my soul” (3.4.149–50), she reinscribes herself as the “fair warrior” (2.1.182) Othello greeted on the quay, and recovers for a moment that more perfect union. When, in the willow song, she takes Barbary’s part, she also—in the act of recalling her mother’s maid’s name—assimilates Othello’s Moorish identity. Her last words are not an act of submission but a challenge: she asks to be commended to her kind lord, but such commendations would be audible only to an Othello who has recovered some part of himself, who has become his own kind again. Liberated, pained, and bewildered by the withdrawal of Iago’s linguistic world, Othello attempts to find again his own narrative, and rises to Desdemona’s challenge though he cannot fully meet it. He does, however, meet her metaphorically: imaging himself as
“one whose subdued eyes” (5.2.349) “drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees / Their medicinal gum” (351–52), he circles back to Desdemona’s willow song, offering his own exotic version of her weeping willow.\footnote{57} He has incorporated her, as she did him, even though he has not heard her, and she has not heard him.

But we have heard both. And in such hearing lie the pleasures and the terrors of the drama.\footnote{58} If plays, like dreamwork, both express our fantasies and defend, however inadequately, against them, \textit{Othello} offers us, in our experience of lieutenancy, both expression and defense. Iago tenders, in his claim to radical freedom, a world which we may remake at our own wills, a world in which rhetorical \textit{evidentia} comes to replace “ocular proof.” Desdemona allows us to defend against that fantasy—though she cannot defend herself against it—by using her lieutenancy to forge linguistic links with Othello, to rebuild the structures which are collapsing about her, and about us. In her refusal to imagine evil, to grant it a place in her world, she awes and infuriates us. And yet we enter these rival spheres, moving forward with Iago’s rapid plot, yet marking our resistance by tracing out in Othello’s and Desdemona’s speeches the marks of the other’s presence, holding, if only for a moment, the fragile structure of their love, bringing them together in our minds as we cannot on the stage.

The verbal repetitions, the complex networks of reference, are not unique to \textit{Othello}—we might demand of Shakespeare, as Othello of Emilia, “What needs this iteration?”—but the ideational matrix of this play puts its audience under a particular kind of pressure, one to which anecdotal history bears witness. Fielding’s Partridge has his analogues in those outraged theatergoers who have stood, shaking their fists, shouting to Othello that Iago is lying. Those naive theatergoers, I believe, go with us in our experience of the play, however well we know it. But the play demonstrates, compellingly, terrifyingly, sadly, that we must mark our presence, must make room for Desdemona’s truth, for Othello’s nobility, not by standing up but by standing in.

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\textbf{NOTES}

\footnote{1}{Frank Whigham, \textit{Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory} (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1984), xi.}

\footnote{2}{M. R. Ridley, ed., \textit{Othello} (London: The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare, 1958), 6n. All citations from \textit{Othello} are to this edition; other Shake-}

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More Pronunciation works.

Heroic Antient, period, appeared (eight) Shakespeare.

Rosenberg, are redress October social directions (1886).


8 Altman (note 7), 134.
9 Fineman (note 5), 73.
10 Quoted by Horace Howard Furness, ed., Othello (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1886), 214.
11 See Reuben A. Brower, Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition (N.Y.: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), 18: “Iago’s reply, enforcing the direct opposite of what both he and Othello are saying, ends this scene of darkness.” Classroom experience bears this out: students almost invariably hear Iago as claiming Othello, not offering himself.
12 See McBride (note 5) for an insightful view of social and military jealousy.
14 Parker (note 7), 64.
15 Quoted by Trousdale (note 7), 33.

806 Lieutenancy in Othello
22 Oman (note 17), 377.
23 McNeill (note 20), 132.
25 Oman (note 17), 377.
27 Digges (note 26), 88.
28 Digges (note 26), 88.
31 Ridley, 6n.
32 See James L. Calderwood, “Speech and Self in Othello,” Shakespeare Quarterly 38 (1987): “As this reminds us, Iago is Othello’s Ancient, and ancient is a variant of ensign, which means flag or sign. Iago’s style is to run up flags or signs” that “are really‘designs’ in a double sense: they ‘de-sign’ or divest signs of meaning in order to fulfill his villainous designs” (296). See Stanley Edgar Hyman, Iago: Some Approaches to the Illusion of His Motivation (N.Y.: Atheneum, 1970), 12, for a similar point. I would disagree with Calderwood’s analysis: Iago cancels less than he multiplies.
33 Greenblatt (note 4), 233.
34 Although Viola says exactly the same thing in Twelfth Night, the hermeneutics are closer to hand; we know what little thing she lacks. I am grateful to Stephen Booth for pointing out the echo, and for his insight that Twelfth Night is in many ways Othello’s twin. See Altman’s persuasive reading of “In following him, I follow but myself” as an instance of hysteron proteron (note7), 134.
36 Paul A. Jorgensen argues that “the ‘Office’ here might easily be mistaken by modern readers for Iago’s military rank; almost certainly Iago meant his function as Honesty”: Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1962), 18. As the military literature suggests, the two are near allied.
37 Digges (note 26), 91.
38 Davies (note 30), 98. Rich (note 29), unpaged.
39 Digges (note 26), 90.
40 Davies (note 30), 99.
41 Digges (note 26), 91.
42 Davies (note 30), 95.
43 As is clear, my account and Greenblatt’s overlap at several points: cf. Renaissance Self-Fashioning, Chapter 6. I am particularly indebted to his views on narrative self-construction and empathetic emptying out of the other. In contrast to Greenblatt I would, however, emphasize the military structures of substitution as feeding into and feeding Iago’s narratives.

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44. In being forced to leave his bridal bed Othello has of course been “unwilled”: Iago here works to forestall other generations which might compete with his own.


47. Empson (note 16), 246.


49. Stanley Cavell, Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 130. My answer is rather different from Cavell’s, though I find his argument on “the stake of the other” convincing and powerfully wrought. The “stake of the other” as Cavell explains it, makes skepticism akin, as a system of belief, to romance as a literary genre: just as doubt for the skeptic inheres in belief, so contamination of the desired woman inheres in the romance hero’s desire for her. John Traugott sets the matter out clearly when he notes that “Othello and Claudio are equally dangerous and for the same reason, that they are fools to the code of romance” (“Creating a Rational Rinaldo: A Study in the Mixture of the Genres of Comedy and Romance in Much Ado About Nothing” in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance [Norman, OK: Pilgrim Press, 1982], 163).

50. Kahn (note 46), 141.


52. Cavell (note 49), 130.

53. I take the phrase from William Beatty Warner’s excellent discussion of Clarissa, a novel which has strong and strange connections, by direct and indirect allusion, to Othello. The reader of that novel, like the audience of this play, operates under extreme pressures as it moves between two correspondences which are both sullied and connected by their common metaphoric imaginations. (Warner, Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979].)

54. The dangers of trying “to turn the professional issue into a personal one” (Jane Adamson, Othello as Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgment and Feeling [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980], 138) are clear, and Desdemona has often been scolded or praised for her actions. Linda Woodbridge reminds us that for a military wife in Elizabethan literature, “the line between allowable influence and domineering behavior was exceedingly fine.... Desdemona, by adopting the shrew’s attributes, is making Iago’s task easier”: Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind 1540–1620 (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1984), 195. But the domestication of the command structure is also dangerous for Iago; he comes closest to losing Othello when the Moor submits that “the world has not a sweeter creature, she might lie by an emperor’s side, and command him tasks.” Iago supplies a quick corrective: “Nay, that’s not your way” (4.1.179–82).

The refusal to "speak word" is of course Iago's final cruelty; he will carry Othello's narrative only as far as it remains entangled with his own.

See Marianne L. Novy, *Love's Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1984), 145-46, for a similar point. I would not, however, subscribe to her analysis that Othello here reclaims his "feminine self" before moving into the "code of violence and control."

Adamson (note 54) is particularly good on our forced complicity and the pains it engenders (66-67).