

interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 4/3

spring 1975

page

117

Leo Strauss

Xenophon's *Anabasis*

148

Seth Benardete

A Reading of Sophocles'
Antigone: I

197

Mera J. Flaumenhaft

Begetting and Belonging
in Shakespeare's *Othello*

217

Robert C. Grady II

The Law of Nature in the
Christian Commonwealth:
Hobbes' Argument for Civil
Authority



martinus nijhoff, the hague

edited at

queens college of the city university
of new york

interpretation

a journal of political philosophy

volume 4

issue 3

editors

seth g. benardete hilail gildin - robert horwitz - howard b. white (1912-1974)

consulting editors

john hallowell - wilhelm hennis - erich hula - arnaldo mamigliano - michael oakeshott - leo strauss (1899-1973) - kenneth w. thompson

executive editor

hilail gildin

managing editor

ann mcardle

interpretation is a journal devoted to the study of political philosophy. it appears three times a year.

its editors welcome contributions from all those who take a serious interest in political philosophy regardless of their orientation.

all manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be addressed to the executive editor

interpretation

building g101 - queens college - flushing, n.y. 11367 - u.s.a.

subscription price

for institutions and libraries Guilders 36 + Guilders 5.50 postage

for individuals Guilders 28.80 + Guilders 5.50 postage

subscription and correspondence in connection

therewith should be sent to the publisher

martinus nijhoff

9-11 lange voorhout - p.o.b. 269 - the hague - netherlands.

BEGETTING AND BELONGING IN
SHAKESPEARE'S *OTHELLO*

MERA J. FLAUMENHAFT

und mit dem Gefühl des Vaters hatte er auch alle Tugenden eines Bürgers erworben.

—Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [VIII, i]

Although *Othello* contains much talk about birth, delivery, adoption, grandchildren, and the relations between parents and their offspring, neither the hero nor the villain in Shakespeare's play fathers any children. This is especially interesting since the play's single source, Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, draws attention to the villain's child at a critical moment in the action; Cinthio also makes clear the heroine's great affection for the child. Shakespeare's *Othello* is a play about people who, in different ways, misperceive human nature. Their views distort their relations with their community and their attitudes towards love, sex, and childbirth, for men come together in political societies and families as no other animals do. A community is held together not only by voluntary ties between contemporaries but by natural ties between generations. Therefore, marriage and the family are needed for coherent and enduring civil life. Shakespeare's plays repeatedly stress the relationship between "courtship" and the "court" because, as the song says in *As You Like It*, "'Tis Hymen peoples every town" (V, iv, 143).¹

Iago and Othello both have extreme views of human love and human sexuality. Iago reduces men to beasts, who live to satisfy temporary desires without concern for the future. To Iago, love is mere lust, and human procreation is no different from animal breeding. Othello raises men—or, at least, himself and his bride—to near-divinity. He thinks of himself as constant and unchanging like the permanent features of the universe. For him, human love is totally spiritual, a meeting of minds or souls. Human bodies, which produce human children, seem almost superfluous.

Iago and Othello also resemble each other in that they both remain essentially outside the political community in which the events occur. Iago is a native Venetian who will fully isolate himself from the community and in the end leaves nothing behind him. His attitudes towards love, childbearing, possessions, and reputation are related to his desire to separate himself from his fellow citizens and to impose his will upon them. Othello is an outsider too. He is a foreign son who has rejected his own origins and, gradually, has grafted himself to the Venetian community—by defending it as a military commander, by converting to

¹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Albert Gilman (New York, 1963).

its Christian religion, and, at the start of the play, by marrying one of its most esteemed daughters. Othello's attempt to become an adopted son in this city fails primarily because he thinks of himself as more than human. His attitudes towards love, childbearing, possessions, and reputation, like Iago's, are influenced by his view of his position in the state. Despite his noble aspirations, or perhaps because of them, he dies leaving behind him little more than the vile Iago does. Both cases suggest some connections between human citizenship and human generation.

I: Iago

Cinthio's Ensign "fell passionately in love with Desdemona."² Because she did not return this "passion" and appeared, instead, to love the Captain, the Ensign's love "now changed into the bitterest hate,"³ and he directed all his efforts toward destroying her, the Captain, and the Moor. Shakespeare's Iago insists that all passions can be controlled by the will. He is constant in his determination to destroy his victims and never turns from his initial purpose, even when discovery is imminent. His prototype's passion is transferred to a silly courtier who loves Desdemona and whose weakness shows Iago's self-control and his ability to impose his will on others. Iago's emphasis on the will and on self-sufficiency permits him to recognize only two kinds of "love"—sensual lust and self-love. Both involve the use of another person for one's own purposes, and neither produces recognized, legitimate offspring to survive the "lover."

With Roderigo, whom he thoroughly confuses in the course of the play, Iago speaks of the relationship between lust and love. Using the language of parent and offspring, he claims "love to be a sect or scion" (I, iii, 327-28) of lust, thus characteristically reversing the conventional romantic view. In satisfying this lust, or sensual passion not born of love, men resemble beasts which seek others to relieve themselves. Sex that is not the product of the full human love which Iago debases will not generate fully human products. Since lust, unlike love, does not preserve lasting family relations, the products which live after it has burned itself out are either unwanted or disregarded. Since it seeks to be satisfied immediately and does not involve long-term commitments which are sanctioned by the community, bestial lust does not form the kernel of lasting social life. It breeds scions who are not conscious of their relations to their ancestry or their posterity. Human love produces children, families, political orders, and traditions.

Iago's description of the "mating" of Othello and Desdemona in scene 1 is calculated to alarm a city elder who cares deeply about the

² Giraldi Cinthio, "Hecatommithi," in *Othello*, All references to *Othello* are to this Signet edition, ed. Alvin Kernan (New York, 1963), p. 173.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

family line that will survive him. According to Iago, the products of this lascivious elopement will be, not Venetian heirs to Brabantio, but the breed of a Barbary horse, "coursers" and "gennets." The joining of Othello and Desdemona immediately transforms them into beasts, a ram and ewe. These beasts compose, in turn, "the beast with two backs," which lasts only as long as their supposed lust does. Brabantio responds with horror to Iago's description of sex outside family and political contexts and calls for his "kinsmen" and his "brother." He is confident that the Signory will deal justly with him, for Venice is a law-abiding community whose stability is founded on interwoven ties of kinship.

Iago's lack of belief in human ties beyond the temporary ones of lust is indicated, in part, by his allusions to children throughout the play. He assures Roderigo, and later hints to his General, that Desdemona will tire of Othello as soon as their lusts are sated. Sure that they have nothing else in common, and unable to fathom their spiritual relationship, he forgets that couples in a place like Venice raise children to live after them, to populate the city, and to be honored in it. In Iago's diatribe against women (II, i), he has only contempt for them as mothers.⁴ The "fair and foolish" woman has a child, as he cynically teaches, "For even her folly helped her to an heir" (II, i, 135). According to him, the paragon whom Desdemona describes is good for nothing but "to suckle fools and chronicle small beer" (II, i, 168). Iago repeatedly associates fruitfulness with lechery. Thus Desdemona is "framed as fruitful/ As the free elements" (II, iii, 341-42), and Cassio's injuries in act V are the "fruits of whoring" (V, i, 116). This association is picked up by Othello throughout the later scenes of the play.

The other notion of love which Iago understands is self-love. The only sincere admiration which he expresses in the play is for those servants who serve their masters in order to serve themselves,⁶ who profess love for others but really love only themselves. Like the lust discussed above, Iago's professed "love" for Emilia, Roderigo, Cassio, or Othello is always intended to satisfy some purpose of his own. He "lusts" after revenge or destruction and his love never goes beyond himself. Although his language throughout abounds in images of marriage, devotion, and love, these terms are always perverted by him.

Iago's extreme self-love, or egoism, precludes not only a sincere relationship with other individuals but also with the community as a whole. Three times we see him break the peace and quiet of orderly settlements, once crying "mutiny" where there is none. In Venice he

⁴ As we shall see, mothers of families are oddly absent, not only from Iago's view, but from the whole play. Granville-Barker says that "The three [Desdemona, Emilia, Bianca] provide the play with something like a pattern of womankind—motherhood and old age omitted," but sees no significance in the omissions. See Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), IV, p. 238.

⁶ A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Cleveland, O., 1961), p. 178.

urges Roderigo to rouse Brabantio and to expose Othello, to

Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen, poison his delight,
And though he in a fertile, climate dwell,
Plague him with flies [I, i, 65-68].

Iago's desire to poison the "fertile climate" is immediately followed by his urgings to give the alarm.

As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities [I, i, 73-74].

For Iago, "people swarm in cities like flies in a hot damp climate."⁷ In act IV he assures Othello that "There's many a beast [cuckold] then in a populous city, / And many a civil monster" (IV, i, 65-66), again linking community fertility with lechery.. Brabantio, on the other hand, thinks the disturbers of the peace are acting as if they were in a "grange," a farm in an unpopulated rural area. Iago is the self-professed enemy of those who come together in love to populate the city to which they belong. His goal is either to poison their fertility or to associate it with bestial lust.

Ironically, Iago depicts his sterile devotion to himself in images of fruitfulness:

Our bodies are our 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 manured with industry—why,
the power and corrigible authority of this lies
in our wills [I, iii, 315-21].

He makes things grow by manuring "with industry." In place of love and care, he exercises his will. His self-serving relations with others are also expressed in the language of love and fertility. To his "friend" Roderigo, he urges that they "be conjunctive in our revenge against him [Othello]" (I, iii, 363), and chides him for expecting to reap fruits from this union too soon:

Though other things grow fair against the sun,
Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe [II, iii, 376-77].

Finally, in the process by which he destroys his "friend" Othello, he plays the part of wooer and devoted lover, and he cultivates the seed of jealousy which undoes him.

By depriving his Ensign of the attractive three-year-old daughter of Cinthio's story, Shakespeare calls attention to Iago's perverted and sterile notions of love. But, in a sense, Shakespeare's Iago does generate:

⁷ G. R. Elliott, *Flaming Minister: A Study of Othello as Tragedy of Love and Hate* (New York, 1965), p. 7.

I have't! It is engendered! Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light [I, iii, 398-99].

Just what is fathered by Shakespeare's Ensign? The product of Iago's inverted self-love is not an enduring child but a merely temporary persona in his plot: "honest Iago." Stanislavsky speaks of the actor's creativity and the birth of a dramatic character. Similarly, Granville-Barker, in his discussion of Iago as an actor, remarks that: "the career of a character in a play from its imagining to its presenting on stage has something in common with the begetting and birth of a child."⁸ But, as he says earlier, Iago is an egoist who loves his own art only because it "is still a part of him."⁹ This points to the impossibility of a man like Iago begetting and loving anything which would not remain part of himself.

The dramatic character, "honest Iago," which Iago fathers, is clearly a "monstrous birth." Also monstrous is the whole plan in which he destroys a nobler man than himself. Instead of perpetuating himself in the form of a child, Iago fathers a plan which results in his own destruction. Sigurd Burckhardt refers to Iago's tragic plot as "art for art's sake" and judges it a sterile triumph.¹⁰ Although Iago delivers his plan perfectly, there are frequent reminders in the play that he is not capable of producing an offspring that is healthy. In his exchange with Desdemona (II, i) he has difficulty delivering his verdict on women:

But my Muse labors,
And thus she is delivered [II, i, 125-26].

To his cynical summary, Desdemona replies, "O most lame and impotent conclusion" (II, i, 159). When he testifies about Cassio's brawl he is warned by Montano to "deliver" a true account. He hypocritically attempts to make nothing of the events which he can be said to have "fathered." Many readers believe that Iago is sexually inadequate, either homosexual or impotent. Shakespeare clearly meant him to be morally sterile.

There is yet another sense in which one can understand Iago's imagery of birth. For, in addition to fathering and bringing to light his monstrous plan, he serves as some kind of midwife to another unnatural monster which, as Emilia says, is "begot upon itself, born on itself" (III, iv, 161). This, of course, is the "green-eyed monster jealousy." Iago may not actually plant the seed in Othello, but he is the agent that brings it swiftly to term: "There are many events in the womb of time, which will be delivered" (I, iii, 365-66).

⁸ Granville-Barker, *Prefaces*, p. 223.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹⁰ Sigurd Burckhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), p. 17. He compares Iago to other Shakespearean plotters (Brutus, Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III) who also are childless. On the questionable morality of "knowledge-for-knowledge's" as well as "art-for-art's" sake, see W. H. Auden, "The Joker in the Pack," *The Dyer's Hand* (New York, 1968), pp. 269-72.

Iago's childlessness is appropriate because he lives totally in the present and totally for himself. If he has any sense of belonging, it is to "the tribe of hell" (I, iii, 353). His greatest satisfaction derives from manipulating others according to his will. Like some of Shakespeare's other tyrants, his energies are devoted to the activity of present tyranny, rather than to securing his work for the future. Richard III, Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth are also childless child-killers who disrupt the relations between parents and their children.¹¹ Iago's childlessness is thus related to his disregard for the city he lives in and for its future. He exemplifies, in reverse, what Shakespeare's contemporary Francis Bacon recognized: "it were great reason that those that have children should have greatest care of future times; unto which they knew they must transmit their dearest pledges."¹²

Iago's peculiar present-mindedness, indicated by his isolated egoism and his childlessness, is reinforced by other attitudes which distinguish him from ordinary men in political communities. Normal men who know they will die generally care to leave behind them, in addition to children, property for their children to inherit. Brabantio is, perhaps, one of these ordinary men. Iago refers to "heirs" only twice in the play, neither time in the ordinary sense of the word. In the first scene he complains that the appointment was made unfairly "and not by old gradation, where each second / Stood heir to th' first" (I, i, 34-35). Roderigo does not notice that Iago also violated this principle of "inheritance" by sending petitioners for himself. The other reference is his quip about foolish women and their "folly that leads them to an heir." Iago's attitudes towards property are usually thoroughly antisocial. As Robert Heilman shows in his discussion of Iago as "Economic Man," he is a petty "thief in the night" who steals both literally and metaphorically from Roderigo, Desdemona, Cassio, and Othello.¹³ Although he is so materialistic, he is, once again, amazingly present-minded about his money. Since he enjoys manipulating others, he enjoys stealing in order to control them, hence his famous linking of "sport" and "profit." If he shows no concern with children to inherit his money, he also shows no concern for preserving it for himself. Heilman sees in Iago's "economics" the same disregard for the future which I have been discussing:

¹¹ I owe this point to Professor Michael Platt of Dartmouth College, who also suggests the connection between childlessness and disregard for lasting fame in these political tyrants. See my discussion of Iago and reputation below.

¹² Francis Bacon, "Of Marriage and the Single Life," *Essays* (New York, 1966), p. 22. He qualifies this here and in "Of Parents and Children," saying that single, childless men, if they are inclined, are more likely to produce great public works, while married men are impeded by their wives and children. See also Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* for the effect of parenthood on political deliberation.

¹³ Robert Heilman, *Magic in the Web: Language and Action in Othello* (Lexington, Ky., 1956), pp. 73-85.

As a figure on the exchange, Iago seems to be the winner taking all and making his victims "poor indeed." . . . However . . . Iago uses only a short-term economics. . . . Iago has a good rational grasp of how to influence people, and the vulgar streak of the profiteer; but in the failure of imagination, he is reckless of his own coming impoverishment . . . he's a gambler; when resentful malice begins to run wild, it can no longer calculate the end; like the gambling spirit, it contains something of the suicidal.¹⁴

Finally, Iago is chillingly unconcerned about the future in his attitudes towards reputation. The man who loves only himself admires only those who "do themselves homage." Like the inverted "love" discussed above, this inverted "homage" dies when the man himself dies. The homage that endures is what Cassio calls "the immortal part of myself," his reputation. Without reputation "what remains is bestial" (II, iii, 262-63). It does not father children who proudly remember their parents, and it has no responsible place in an enduring political community. Iago speaks eloquently or cynically about the worth of reputation, according to his aims in manipulating others. But for his own reputation, he cares not at all, except in so far as it is also useful for those aims. Perhaps this explains his refusal to speak at the end of the play. Iago embraces his isolation, now imposed on him by the community he has rejected, and refuses to leave a story to live beyond him: "What you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak word" (V, ii, 299-300). As we shall see below, the man who would be part of the community cares about the reputation which survives him.

Iago, who thinks little of his fellow citizens or of the future, and who has no noble expectations for himself or for others, excuses any behavior on the grounds that "men are men" (II, iii, 240). On the one occasion when he comes together with other men to celebrate a community victory (II, iii), he is secretly plotting to destroy them. He jubilantly sums up his outlook in the song he sings:

And let me the canakin clink, clink;
And let me the canakin clink.
A soldier's a man;
O man's life's but a span,
Why then, let a soldier drink (II, iii, 66-70).

II. *Othello and Desdemona*

Brabantio is wrong to accuse Othello of having won Desdemona through the use of "magic," "drugs or minerals," or other "arts inhibited and out of warrant." But, in a sense, he rightly associates Othello with the superhuman. For Othello has rejected the common human limits of family, place, changing passions, and, in a strange way, even the body. When he allies himself with Venice, he continues to disregard these limits which, for most men, are not voluntarily chosen. Othello's

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

vulnerability derives largely from his position in Venice and from his superhuman requirements for himself and for Desdemona.¹⁵

Othello can attempt to become an adopted son of Venice only because he has cut himself off from his natural origins. Cinthio, in *The Hecatommithi*, says almost nothing about the Moor's background or his attitude towards it. Shakespeare, however, repeatedly calls attention to Othello's past in presenting his present and his future. Othello's confidence in himself seems to derive vaguely from the fact that he is descended from "men of royal siege" (I, ii, 20). But he has never boasted of this to the Venetians, and never mentions it again. He refers twice to his parents but has separated them from any human family or political context. Instead, he mythologizes them and associates them, as Brabantio does him, with magic, "mummy," and an Egyptian "charmer." It is difficult to conceive of Othello with his mother or father at any specific moment. Furthermore, the handkerchief myth indicates a certain family propensity, or, at least, anxiety on Othello's part about such a propensity, for wandering away from the home. The kerchief was needed to tie Othello's father to his wife and, presumably, to his son.¹⁶ In addition to peculiarities with respect to his birth, Othello apparently did not grow up as ordinary men do. He has been, in his own words, "unhoused," and, since the age of seven, has been engaged in military battles. Finally, Othello's accounts of his past are peculiar in that he usually describes himself battling alone against a generalized "foe," or as a unique human being among "anthropophagi" and "monsters" who dwell in "anters vast and deserts idle." These empty, sterile spaces remind one of the "grange" which Brabantio contrasts with populous Venice and of the cave-dwelling, unpolitical, "monsters" in the Cyclops episode of *The Odyssey*. As Granville-Barker has remarked, this world in which Othello found life's meaning "is a world in which one lives alone."¹⁷

By putting himself in the service of Venice, Othello has not simply abandoned his past; he has committed himself to destroying that which produced him. He proves his Christian allegiance to Venice by fighting against Turks and other infidels. But even after he has his "unhoused free condition / Put into circumscription" (I, ii, 25-26) by marrying into the populous Venetian community, Othello continues to view himself

¹⁵ Readers familiar with Alan Bloom's "Cosmopolitan Man" in *Shakespeare's Politics* (New York, 1964) will recognize that parts of the following discussion owe much to Bloom's point of view. Auden, Heilman, and, less interestingly, Lawrence Lerner, in "The Machiavel and the Moor" (*Essays in Criticism* 9 [1959]: 339-60), also discuss the "political" foundations of Othello's sexual passion.

¹⁶ Many readers have noticed that the handkerchief was supposed to ensure against *male* infidelity. They interpret Othello's outbursts as projections of anxiety about his own shortcomings as a lover. See, for example, Heilman, *Magic in the Web*, pp. 211-14.

¹⁷ Granville-Barker, *Prefaces*, p. 236.

as a man alone. Many readers have seen instances of extreme egoism in his public and domestic conduct. By the end of the play, Othello once more sees himself as the sole human inhabitant of the vast spaces of the universe, among the heavens, seas, moon, and "chaste stars."

It is ironic and appropriate that Othello, who has changed his entire life and allegiance, views himself as almost superhumanly unchangeable and enduring. His conversion to Christianity has supported this view. No longer associated with a two-hundred-year-old sibyl and "mummy," which preserved dead bodies forever, Othello now finds in Christianity another kind of immortality—that of his "perfect soul." In contrast to Iago, whose materialistic present-mindedness leads him either to pervert the notion of the soul¹⁸ or to use it to manipulate others who believe, Othello frequently and reverently refers to his soul and its future. When he realizes that he has murdered his innocent wife he anticipates with horror the unending agony his soul will suffer in hell (V, ii, 270-77).¹⁹

Othello's view of his own permanence is also indicated in his attitude towards his steadfastness. Like Iago, he denies, from the beginning, that he might lose his self-control and submit to passion. Unlike Cinthio's Moor, who is at least "troubled" and "melancholy" before he develops his jealous passion, Othello appears untroubled and constant in his behavior. Iago's first description of him tells how Othello refused to change his mind about the appointment. With Brabantio, Iago, the Signory, and even after the Cassio brawl, the General is in complete control of himself.²⁰ Iago, who prides himself on his own constant will, appears in different guises—although always "honest"—to different people, in order to be constant to himself. His great project can be seen as an attempt to deprive the Moor of his "constant, loving, noble nature" (II, i, 289). He tells Roderigo that "these Moors are changeable in their wills" and convinces him that Desdemona "must change for youth" (I, iii, 330ff.). When he first insinuates that Othello has cause to be suspicious, the "constant" Moor replies:

Why? Why is this?

Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
To follow still the changes of the Moon
With fresh suspicions? No! [III, iii, 177-80].

Soon, however, Iago realizes that the General is "moved" and that "the Moor already changes with my poison" (III, iii, 322). By the next act, we watch in horror as Othello vacillates between his former trust and his new "knowledge." His rigid self-control, once shaken, breaks down completely. As Emilia remarks, "Here's a change indeed" (IV, ii, 105).

¹⁸ See Heilman, *Magic in the Web*, p. 266.

¹⁹ See n. 38 below.

²⁰ Othello's behavior after the brawl should not be wild and passionate. Actors must be careful to show the *strain* of maintaining rigid control without losing it.

Lodovico, who recalls Othello's former steadiness and control, is assured by Iago that "he is much changed" (IV, i, 268).

Although Iago is successful, there is a sense in which Othello never abandons his desire to be superhumanly resistant to change. Like the heavenly bodies he so often mentions, he must follow a relentless and regular course, unaffected by human desires and acts. He now compares himself to the sea, which resembles them in this respect. Once sure of his wife's infidelity, he emphasizes his constant determination to be avenged. When Iago invidiously counsels patience and suggests that his "mind may change," Othello absolutely denies the possibility:

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic Sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Nevr keeps retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thought, with violent pace,
Shall nev'r look back . . . [III, iii, 450-55].

At the end he refuses to change his plan to murder Desdemona that night: "Being done, there is no pause" (V, ii, 83).

Othello's insistence on an almost superhuman self-control with regard to his emotions extends to his attitude about the nature of his and Desdemona's love, which he regards as overwhelmingly spiritual. This may be necessary to divorce himself from the Venetian stereotype of the "lusty" Moor, but his preoccupations with the spiritual side of love do seem excessive. Shakespeare's Moor is older than Cinthio's and claims that "the young affects" in him are not only less pressing than in younger men, but that they are "defunct." Seemingly undisturbed that his military duties interrupt the physical consummation of his spiritual love, he accepts his departure for Cyprus on his wedding night "with all my heart" (I, iii, 274). He married Desdemona for the "pity" with which she responded to his experiences, and finally asks that she be permitted to accompany him, not because he wants to enjoy her body, or even to be near it, but "to be free and bounteous to her mind" (I, iii, 260). In a man whose language is permeated with sensual imagery,²¹ it is surprising to find none of it attached to Desdemona until after he suspects her of cuckolding him. Surely this indicates some inner strain.²²

²¹ For examples, see Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (New York, 1952), pp. 124-25.

²² One must account for the passages in which Othello does refer positively to his physical relationship with his wife. As I have argued, they are most striking in their rarity. But more must be said. On the first occasion Othello kisses his wife when he arrives at Cyprus. (He refers to the "music" their kisses make as "discords.") On the second, he bids her to come to bed as the victory celebration begins: "The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue, / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you" (II, iii, 9-10). Heilman explains the first passage by noting Othello's selfish concern with his own happiness and his joyful self-confidence at

Othello finds his feminine image of unchanging spiritual perfection in the lovely Desdemona. She seems to have fallen in love with him despite his "visage," which was eclipsed by his mind and speech. (In act IV she finds Lodovico attractive, not physically as Emilia does, but because "he speaks well" [IV, iii, 38].) She wants to live with him to share the dangerous and romantic conditions which inspired her love. She refers to her wedding bed only when she thinks of interceding for Cassio (III, iii, 29), and when she has premonitions of her early death (IV, ii, 104). Many characters refer to Desdemona's innocent, unworldly, even "divine" qualities. Cassio associates her with the purity of Eden; she is

One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,
And in th' essential vesture of creation
Does tire the ingener [II, i, 63-65].

Only Iago is cynical. He tells Cassio that Othello's desire for his wife will make him obey her as a "god" (II, iii, 345ff.), and assures him that this lady of "so blessed a disposition" (II, iii, 320) will certainly sue for his reappointment. But his personal opinion is more directly expressed to Roderigo, who sincerely thinks her "blessed" and later compares her to a "votarist" (IV, ii, 186):

"Blessed fig's-end! The wine she drinks
is made of grapes. If she had been
blessed, she would never have loved the
Moor. Blessed pudding!" [II, i, 251-53].

Desdemona's innocence of evil and her attitude towards love make her seem not quite part of the world of ordinary men and women. At one point she must remind herself not to expect too much of them:

Nay, we must think men are not gods,
Nor of them look for such observancy
As fits the bridal [III, iv, 148-50].

Unlike Iago, who accepts that "men are men" because he expects so little from them, she persists in thinking that imperfect human beings can be improved. Thus, she petitions heaven to send her "such uses," "Not

this point. Thus, he relaxes and expresses the desires and pleasures of ordinary men (*Magic in the Web*, p. 175). The second passage oddly refers to the consummation of their love in economic terms. Othello also kisses Desdemona when he dies: "I kissed thee ere I kill'd thee. No way but this / Killing myself to die upon a kiss" (V, ii, 354-55). One unusual feature of the second and third references to physical relations is that both are expressed in rhyming couplets. Othello is explicitly distinguished by his ornate, expansive language, and he uses couplets only five times during the entire play. On the other hand, conventional men like Brabantio and the Duke, and a man who wants to appear conventional, like Iago, frequently speak in them. Othello's rare use of couplets at these moments in the play calls attention to the unusualness of *what* he is saying. Only here does this superhuman man, who, with disastrous consequences, ignores civil conventions and formalities, speak in the conventional cadences of an ordinary citizen.

to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend" (IV, iii, 107-8). Othello expects the same permanence and constancy from Desdemona that he demands in himself. When he thinks he has been cuckolded, he emphasizes the inconstancy of her behavior. In Venice he had assured Brabantio of his faith in her unchanging loyalty: "My life upon her faith" (I, iii, 289). In Cyprus he calls Desdemona back after striking her, and assures Lodovico that:

You did wish that I would make her turn.
Sir, she can turn, and turn, and yet go on
And turn again [IV, i, 252-54].

Shakespeare seems to suggest that she really is unlike other people who last only as long as the mortal bodies that house their immortal souls. In life she is repeatedly compared to immortal or unchanging, insensible things like jewels, chrysolite, or alabaster monuments.²³ In her eerie last words she seems to speak from beyond the grave²⁴ and, at the end of the play, Shakespeare avoids calling attention to her dead body. Wrongly accused of being false, it does not even have to be removed from the stage.²⁵

Brabantio, like Iago, is unable to comprehend a relationship which is utterly devoid of sensual attractions. To his coarse mind this is not a natural human relationship.²⁶ Although we recognize his limitations and are deeply moved by the fineness of this love affair, we must see that there is some truth to Brabantio's point of view, for changelessness and bodilessness are *not* human. Like Iago, Othello fails to admit the composite nature of man. Iago denies the value of spiritual love and transforms all men into monsters. Othello condemns physical desire as beastly and glorifies the youth he spent fighting monsters. Like Cassio, who loses "the immortal part" of himself "to be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast!" (II, iii, 304-5), and like Roderigo, the fool whom Iago urges to be a man and then turns into a beast, Othello, too, is reduced by Iago's urgings to be a man from something more than human, to the agent of a "monstrous act" (V, ii, 187), to a "Fool! Fool! Fool!" (V, ii, 319). The man who refuses to recognize the animal in himself is, at last, more monstrous than the ordinary human being: "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds" (Sonnet 94). Ironically, Othello's perfect spiritual marriage begins at the Sagittary, the inn whose centaur sign—part man, part beast—points out what Othello refuses to recognize about the nature of man.²⁷

²³ D. A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare* (New York, 1969), II, p. 110.

²⁴ Heilmann says she becomes a saint (*Magic in the Web*, pp. 214-18).

²⁵ See appendices for contrasts of other Shakespearean heroines with Desdemona.

²⁶ Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*, p. 41.

²⁷ The centaur is part man, part horse. In I, i, Iago specifically calls Othello a "Barbary horse" who will sire "gennets" (Spanish horses) and "coursers" (war horses).

As we have seen, however, accepting the centaur as an emblem for human nature may raise other problems. If men renounce their aspirations to God-like perfection—the Othello view—what is to keep them from sinking to the ways of beasts, in the Iago view?²⁸ Shakespeare does not offer an answer in this play. But one might begin to consider the problem by recognizing that Othello's self-elevation eliminates anything higher than himself, and thus precludes the possibility of worship and its effects on human behavior.

Othello is a mercenary soldier who, in addition to being useful to a society which is mercantile rather than military, is also exotic and attractive. Venice is willing to pay him, to respect his position, and to obey him in military matters, but, as the play shows, her citizens do not fully accept him as one of themselves.²⁹ Brabantio, although he has entertained Othello in his home for the last nine months,³⁰ has had anxious dreams about his daughter and the Moor. His outbursts, which repeatedly emphasize the difference between his countrymen and the black warrior, indicate his limited acceptance of the General. The Duke is also a father and admits that Othello's tale might have won his daughter too (I, ii, 170). But his sententious comfort after the Signory hears Desdemona indicates some sympathy for Brabantio's point of view. He calls the marriage a "mangled matter" and refers to Brabantio as the "robbed" and Othello as the "thief."³¹ In Cyprus, the greetings of Lodovico are official and formal, rather than warm and personal, as one might expect to a newly married couple. Venice seems to view the marriage by which Othello seeks to tie himself permanently to the state less as the gain of an adopted son than as the loss of a natural daughter.

Brabantio describes Desdemona's rebellion as a "treason of the blood" (I, i, 166). He means that she has married without her father's permission, but his anger is especially violent because she has betrayed her "blood" by marrying a foreigner. Her defense before the Signory ignores this second reason for his anger and speaks only of a woman's divided duties to her father and *any* husband. Her mother, to whom she compares herself, was presumably a Venetian who married a Venetian. Her defense also puts her in a position something like Othello's with respect to her

²⁸ See I, iii, 315-18: "Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon."

²⁹ See Bloom, *Shakespeare's Politics*; Auden, "Joker"; and Lerner, "Machiavel."

³⁰ I, iii, 83. Othello says he has been engaged in action until nine months ago. Since then he has been idle in Venice, spending at least some of his time visiting Brabantio. During this period he has wooed Desdemona and decided to join the Venetian community by marrying her; during this time he has decided to become an adopted son. Is not nine months an appropriate term to precede a "second birth"?

³¹ See Heilman, *Magic in the Web*, p. 261. Auden suggests that the Signory upholds the marriage because it cannot afford to alienate its best general during the Cyprus crisis ("Joker," p. 264).

past. She expected her duty to be divided between the past and the future. But as Brabantio's refusal to have anything more to do with her shows, the marriage will require a more complete split than she thought. In Cyprus she realizes this:

If haply you my father do suspect
An instrument of this your calling back,
Lay not your blame on me. If you have lost him,
I have lost him too [IV, ii, 43-46].

Finally Brabantio condemns such a marriage because it destroys the reasons for having children by generating them: "Who would be a father?" (I, i, 161), he cries. If one's "blood" is to be adulterated, he "had rather to adopt a child than to get it" (I, iii, 189). Fortunately, Desdemona dies before she can hear that she has been the cause of her father's death. Before he kills this child of Venice Othello exclaims, "would thou hadst never been born" (IV, ii, 68).

If Othello and Desdemona fail in their capacities as "children" of the Venetian community, Shakespeare also raises some doubt about them as potential parents. The extreme spirituality of the relationship and the emphasis on their own permanence prevents us from thinking of them as father and mother. Cinthio's couple have been happily married for some time before they go to Cyprus, and his Desdemona is represented as extremely fond of the Ensign's child. It is easy to imagine that Cinthio's Moor, who is said to have been "vanquished by her *beauty*" (emphasis added) as well as by her character, and his Desdemona eventually will have children. Shakespeare seems deliberately to avoid this suggestion. The action occurs in the first few days of marriage. Desdemona is portrayed as almost sexless and speaks of herself as a child (IV, ii, 109-12). Othello is older than Cinthio's Moor, and one might expect this adopted son to be eager to become a city father in order to secure his union with Venice. In the early scenes there is no suggestion of this. Later, like Iago, he consistently associates procreation or fruitfulness exclusively with lust or with animal sex.³² Thus, his wife's "moist hand" argues "fruitfulness and liberal heart" (III, iv, 38). In the "brothel" scene he orders Emilia, the "madam," to "leave procreants alone and shut the door" (IV, ii, 29). Emphasizing again his cut-off origins, he agonizes over the thought that Desdemona, "the fountain from the which my current runs / Or else dries up," is to be kept "as a cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in" (IV, ii, 58-61). Shortly after, he thinks that she is as "honest" "as summer flies are in the shambles, / That quicken even with blowing" (IV, ii, 65-66). Othello sees cuckoldry as the curse of all mortal men from the moment they are born:

'Tis destiny unshunnable, like death.
Even then this forked plaque is fated to us
When we do quicken [III, iii, 274-76].

³² Except for the one passage discussed in n. 22.

The problem is that he does not recognize that human mortality necessitates "fruitful" sexual activity between lawful and pure lovers as well as lustful or guilty ones. Othello's high spirituality, which, when questioned, erupts into deep sexual horror, seems to preclude the possibility of human children in a human society as much as do Iago's low animal attitudes. His marriage bed, which should produce new life to succeed him, is a place of death. For Othello, love's too-spiritual ecstasy—"death"—leads directly to literal death.³³ Like Iago, Othello is delivered only of a monster, the green-eyed one, "begot upon itself, born on itself."

This discussion of Othello's childlessness has been based on metaphorical expressions of his attitudes towards himself, Desdemona, and his love. But Shakespeare makes it clear that other people are thinking about the probable offspring of this unusual marriage. The main problem, of course, is that these children would be black in fair Venice. There are usually difficulties attending the children of marriages which disregard the political contexts in which they occur. Although Othello and Desdemona are married, Shakespeare avoids references to conventional formalities (the ceremony, a ring) which would indicate society's recognition of the union.³⁴ One need only look at the products of other Shakespearean love affairs which disregard political or social conventions to spot difficulties.³⁵ They are either politically ignored, as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, or ostracized bastards, as in *Titus Andronicus*,³⁶ *King John*, *Much Ado*, or *King Lear*.

The problems surrounding Othello's perpetuation of himself in children are emphasized, like those of Iago, by his attitude to material possessions. The "heirloom" which Othello retains from his own ancestors is the cause of his undoing. He has kept the handkerchief as an exotic totem, while rejecting the life it came from, and it appropriately destroys his new alliance. At the end of the play, Othello realizes that he has thrown away the one "heirloom" he did receive from the family he married into, Brabantio's "jewel," the "pearl" which Othello recognized as "richer than all his tribe." Finally, as the Venetians prepare to return to their city, Lodovico disposes of Othello's estate:

³³ See Heilman, *Magic in the Web*, pp. 187-93.

³⁴ Burckhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings*, p. 274.

³⁵ Romeo and Juliet are social equals of similar backgrounds who are separated by a political barrier which is condemned in the play. These lovers are quite different from Desdemona and Othello. Their attraction is extremely sensual, they yearn for physical union, and Juliet is said to be old enough to be a mother. I am not speaking here of "political" marriages (like that of Henry V) whose offspring are expected to unite separate nations.

³⁶ Aaron, the type of lustful Moor from whose image Othello so seeks to separate himself, has a fantastic plan to make his bastard king. The plan is doomed from the start.

Gratiano, keep the house,
 And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
 For they succeed on you [V, ii, 362-64].

Othello's end is, again, peculiarly final, since the inheritance which, in ordinary circumstances, would pass to the next generation here reverts to the preceding one, to Desdemona's uncle, the brother for whom Brabantio called on the night she eloped.

Othello's desire to extend himself beyond human limits and his inability to perpetuate himself as ordinary men do make reputation of the utmost value to him. He is like Achilles, who sacrifices potential prosperity, wife, children, and old age in his homeland for the promise of everlasting glory based on his military reputation, and who, at one point, even imagines himself in a world devoid of all comrades but Patroclus.³⁷ Like Cassio, Othello believes that reputation is the "immortal part" of himself. Iago manipulates him by associating reputation with the valuable and unchanging:

Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
 Is the immediate jewel of their souls [III, iii, 155-56].

Knowing that a bad reputation, as well as a good one, is immortal, Othello despairs at the contempt his alleged cuckolding will bring on him:

But, alas, to make me
 The fixed figure for the time of scorn
 To point his slow and moving finger at [IV, ii, 52-54].

He makes the same extreme demands on his reputation as he does on his love. It is no accident that his "name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage" (III, iii, 383) is described in the same chaste—and sterile—terms (Diana) as his love.³⁸

³⁷ Homer *The Iliad* IX.393-416, XVI.97-100.

³⁸ One might ask why a man who believes in the immortality of his soul should care so much for his earthly reputation, a question which may be like the infamous one about Lady Macbeth, but Othello's behavior and Shakespeare's detail seem to warrant them. Although Othello disregards the usual material signs of continuity and emphasizes his lasting soul, there are signs that, for a person of his experience, the notion of an everlasting soul is too ethereal. He attempts to preserve his reputation much as his shadowy forebears may have attempted to preserve their bodies. His allusions to an Egyptian, a sybil, and "mummy" suggest that the Islam of the North Africans among whom he spent his childhood was a thin veneer over a pagan faith in magic and amulets. Perhaps this is why Christianity, with its spiritual emphasis, would appeal to him. But again, one might wonder why he allied himself to Christians rather than to Moslems, who also believe in the soul's immortality. The Venetians in the play emphasize not their Christian theology but their Christian manners. Othello seems attracted to them mainly because they are a civilized and self-controlled people, in contrast to the passionate and sensual Moslems. Thus his Christianity may not be as orthodox as he thinks, and his emphasis on his everlasting soul may not preclude the desire for an enduring reputation.

Although he leaves nothing tangible behind him as a result of his brief and failed attempt to assimilate, Othello dies as he lived, willing to Venice's posterity, if not his own, a lasting picture of himself. Unlike Achilles, who knows the poets will sing of his exploits, Othello must be his own poet.³⁹ Too grand for human society, unable to limit himself to the institutions and conventions which make possible enduring family and city life, Othello seeks throughout the play to perpetuate himself as an individual in the legends he tells. By the last act he speaks distantly of himself in the third person and presents at his death a fixed tableau for the memory of his witnesses. Unlike Iago, who refuses to explain himself and who remains, for others, "not what I am," Othello begs his audience to "speak of me as I am" and tells them one last story about himself.⁴⁰

Appendices

In examining Shakespeare's plays we are often fortunate to have other plays against which we can check our interpretations. I began by noticing how different Desdemona is from other innocent, marriageable maidens in Shakespeare, and found several strong confirmations of my thesis about Shakespeare's interest in the relations between love, generation, and political communities.

The Merchant of Venice examines some of the problems raised by *Othello*. The two marriages in this second Venetian play bring the union between Desdemona and Othello into relief.⁴¹

³⁹ As both the actor and poet of his actions, Othello more resembles Odysseus, another great general, some of whose adventures, as noted above, are similar to those of Shakespeare's Moor. But Odysseus is a supremely politic man whose words and deeds are calculated. Throughout his travels he remembers who he is, resisting conversion and even marriage and refusing to be used by foreigners. It is no accident that he maintains some distance from the heroic exploits of his comrades, and that he returns home to his kingdom and his wife, to his father, and, most important, to his son.

⁴⁰ As many readers have seen, the poet Othello lacks the insight of the poet Shakespeare, especially about himself. Othello's creator wrote love poetry as grand and as spiritual as Othello's, and he knew that there could be no such poetry were there no difference between human and animal sexuality. But he also knew that the attempt to *live* unremittingly on the highest spiritual level would lead, in ordinary circumstances, only to tragedy. Is this why he expressed such notions in a private and literary form, the sonnet, but qualified them repeatedly in the public works which depict the choices and actions of human beings in social and political situations? With this question we may end. Trying to answer it would be to begin another long discussion.

⁴¹ See Alan Bloom, "Christian and Jew," *Shakespeare's Politics*, and Sigurd Burckhardt, "The Gentle Bond," *Shakespearean Meanings*, for views similar to mine on these two marriages.

"Amorous" Jessica lacks Desdemona's ethereal fineness, but her situation is similar. She forsakes her family bonds "to seal love's bonds" (II, vi, 6)⁴² by eloping in a gondola at night with a man of different origins. This happens at a time when her father has been dealing with her husband's friends and, like Brabantio, has had anxious dreams of foreboding. Like Desdemona's "treason of the blood," Jessica's marriage requires the rejection of her ancestors:

But though I am a daughter to his blood,
I am not to his manners [II, iii, 18-19].

Shylock decides to exact a pound of Antonio's "flesh" in part because he thinks that Antonio helped his "own flesh and blood to rebel" (III, i, 32). Unlike Desdemona, who perceives a duty divided between her father and her new husband, Jessica coldly forsakes her father for

Lorenzo, certain, and my love indeed,
For who love I so much? [II, vi, 29-30].

Later we hear that she has squandered the family money which she has stolen, as well as an heirloom, her mother's ring. Like the socially unsanctioned marriage of Desdemona and her Moor, the ceremony which unites Jessica and Lorenzo is never specifically referred to. They are attended by Launcelot, who mistreats his own father and fathers bastards himself. He jokes that Jessica may be a bastard and not "the Jew's daughter." She replies that she "shall be saved by my husband" (III, v, 18), again emphasizing her rejection of her origins.

Although fair Venice is not able to accept black Othello and, as a result, loses Desdemona, it is possible to believe that it might be easier for Christian Venice to absorb a Jewish adopted daughter. However, there are indications that Lorenzo's and Jessica's future will be as overcast as that of the marriage discussed above would have been. Many have noticed that their lovely talk about lovers in the night describes love affairs with tragic ends. Two of these were, interestingly, matches between foreigners and a third was opposed by parents.⁴³ Finally, one cannot help thinking of the difficulties which they will encounter in Venice, if for no other reason than that they have broken the law by stealing. Perhaps this is why Shakespeare leads them (and leaves them when everyone else goes to the trial in Venice) to the protected and private paradise of Belmont.

Although there has been much discussion of the limitations of the marriage between Portia and Bassanio, it is clear that it is a more viable match than either Jessica's sordid elopement or Desdemona's saintly one. It follows, at least in spirit, the will of Portia's father and it pairs her with an appropriate man of her own background. She objects to a proud

⁴² All references to *The Merchant of Venice* are to the Signet edition, ed. Kenneth Myrick (New York, 1965).

⁴³ Bloom, "Christian and Jew," p. 34.

black Moroccan, largely on the grounds of his "complexion," and to several other foreigners. But she is eager to marry Bassanio, "a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier" (I, ii, 112), who visited Belmont when her father was alive, and thus must have had his approval. It is clear that she does not marry only for "fancy," which is "bred in the eyes," but for spiritual love as well. However, although she is described as a "goddess," she lacks the ethereal qualities which raise the "divine Desdemona" above the human community. She supervises a valuable estate and dons a man's clothes to participate in the political business of Venice. Unlike Desdemona, she enjoys a bawdy joke with her waiting woman and, later, with her husband and friends. Finally, unlike Jessica and Desdemona, she will bear children. Her husband's friend, Gratiano, who ends the play with sexual joking, and his wife, Nerissa, offer to "play with them [Portia and Bassanio] the first boy for a thousand ducats" (III, ii, 214). The products of these marriages will be equally comfortable in Venice and in Belmont.

Othello is often compared with Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, the man whose morbid and unfounded jealousy is not complicated by a treacherous advisor, or anxiety about his foreignness. Leontes and Shakespeare's other conventionally jealous men differ from Othello in that, while they are horrified by their wives' supposed infidelity, they do not view all sex and procreation as *animal* activities. Leontes never expects himself to live up to superhuman standards, and his supposed cuckolding does not reduce him, in his own eyes, to a beast. Aside from his personal agony, the main result of Leontes' jealous rage is political. He endangers his country by depriving it of heirs. But this self-induced childlessness is the result of poor judgment and temper, and is not, like Othello's, related to his peculiar position in society. Shakespeare shows this by making him salvagable. His wise wife and her friends save his heirs and teach him to repent so that he can return to his position as a secure political leader.

The difference between Leontes' jealousy and Othello's can be seen by comparing their wrongly accused wives. Hermione is a warm sensual woman who is pregnant and gives birth during the play. There is repeated reference to her children and how they have inherited the features of their parents. Unlike Desdemona, whose saintly chastity is described in terms of cold stone ("monumental alabaster"), by the end of *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione, the statue ("dear stone") in a chapel, comes to life as a wife and mother.

Perdita and Florizel also bring into focus the overspiritual sterility of Desdemona and Othello. The marriage in this "Winter's Tale," a play about renewal and regeneration, is at first opposed by a parent on the grounds that the lovers' differing backgrounds are not compatible. When it becomes clear that their fathers were brought up like brothers, the marriage is welcomed. The insistence on premarital chastity for these passionate young lovers is necessary so that, when they marry, they can inherit the throne and continue their parents' line. But Perdita's temporary

home emphasizes for the audience her earthy, fruitful side. E. M. W. Tillyard contrasts her fertility with Iago's destructive power instinct,⁴⁴ but we should also compare her with Desdemona, who is also strikingly sterile. Perdita cares for the "ewes" to whom Iago nastily compares Desdemona, and lives gracefully among the animals with whom Othello fears to have anything in common. Desdemona is purer and holier than Perdita, but her purity will not produce another like her. Frank Kermode comments on the conclusion of the play:

At one masterly moment Perdita herself stands like a statue beside the supposed statue of her mother, to remind us that created things work their own perfection and continuance in time, as well as suffer under it. And in the end the play seems to say (I borrow the language of Yeats) that "whatever is begotten, born, and dies" is nobler than "monuments of unaging intellect"—and also, when truly considered, more truly lasting.⁴⁵

Maybe not "nobler," but certainly more appropriate for human beings in human communities. For Othello and Desdemona are tragically noble in that they show how human yearnings for superhuman permanence and spirituality sometimes interfere with human life.

As the chess tableau in *The Tempest* reveals, Prospero planned to wed Miranda to a husband like her. Unlike Desdemona, Miranda has a Prospero to advise and guide her.⁴⁶ In connection with the discussion of Othello above, it is important to note that Prospero, who now has political wisdom, also provides for children to succeed her. While Miranda is as "perfect and so peerless" as Desdemona, her chastity is to be preserved only so that she will be properly fertile within the confines of a social order. Thus, Prospero exclaims, "Heavens rain grace / On that which breeds between 'em!" (III, i, 74).⁴⁷ The Juno-Ceres masque is designed to secure the fertility of the couple, "that they may prosperous be / And honored in their issue" (IV, i, 103). This kind of language and theme is strikingly absent from the marriage in Othello.

Caliban's loyalty to his mother is an aberration in this beast-man, who would "people" "this isle with Calibans" (I, ii, 350) by indiscriminate sex or rape. When the young couple and all their kin return to the court at the end of the play, Caliban, appropriately, is left alone on the island. As *Othello* shows, human coupling in a human community must be neither excessively spiritual nor excessively sensual.

⁴⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (London, 1951), p. 44.

⁴⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, 1963), p. xxv.

⁴⁶ Bloom, "Cosmopolitan Man," p. 62.

⁴⁷ All references to *The Tempest* are to the Signet edition, ed. Robert Langbaum (New York, 1964).