"Some Wonder in This Handkerchief": Magic, Early Modern Good Medicine, and Othello's Strange Difference

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Innocent of Othello's irrevocable entrapment by Iago, Desdemona presses for Cassio's restoration to lieutenancy. Othello ignores the subject. Instead, as he demands his handkerchief, he makes a singular comparison between its supposed powers and purity and the embalmed ventricles of the human heart: "The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk, / And it was dyed in mummy, which the skilful / Conserved of maidens' hearts" (3.4.85-87).[1]

The comparison has stirred little notice, though the footnotes in the New Variorum edition of the play quote George Steevens (a friend of Samuel Johnson and a first variorum editor of Shakespeare of 1773) and Alexander Dyce (the editor of a nine-volume Shakespeare of 1857). They respectively gloss "mummy" to mean "the balsamic liquor running from mummies . . . formerly celebrated for its anti-epileptic virtues" and "a preparation for magical purposes, made from dead bodies."[2] The subsequent major modern editions of the play carry analogous, brief notes on "mummy": "embalming fluid";[3] "fluid drained from mummified bodies, supposedly magical";[4] "a preparation made from mummified bodies, thought to have medicinal or magic power";[5] "medicinal or magical preparation drained from mummified bodies"[6]; and "substance from mummified bodies."[7]

The lack of expansiveness in these notes belies their interpretive suggestiveness, particularly if we consider Othello's comparison in the light of epistemological disquiets produced by the religious and medicinal cultures of Shakespeare's moment. On the one hand, far from pronouncing something merely exotic (though ironic if retrospectively viewed), Othello here can be read to advocate his knowledge of magic assimilated from the

Neoplatonic-inflected Christian love that the maternal handkerchief objectifies:

> That handkerchief
> Did an Egyptian to my mother give.
> She was a charmer and could almost read
> The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
> 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
> Entirely to her love. But if she lost it,
> Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
> Should hold her loathèd, and his spirits should hunt
> After new fancies. She, dying, gave it me,
> And bid me, when my fate would have me wived,
> To give it her. I did so; and take heed on 't,
> Make it a darling like your precious eye.
> To lose 't or give 't away were such perdition
> As nothing else could match. (3.4.65-79)

Even more startling still about this comparison is that Othello confers the sacred status on the handkerchief's magic by having colonized the similarly Neoplatonically-informed knowledge of early-modern physiology that Christianized the use of human body as good medicine.

Among critics of *Othello*, Ania Loomba and others have helped us to understand the locus and integrity of Othello's true self in terms of our contemporary binary opposition of Self and Other and illuminated the danger and self-destructiveness inherent in racial boundary-crossing.[8] Today I would like to follow Ania Loomba's exhortation that "Shakespeare's 'others' remind us of our need for expanded conceptual frameworks to analyze Renaissance culture, Shakespearian drama, and their modern-day legacies."[9] Finding magic and medicine to be my congenial "conceptual frameworks," I explore the theory that it is not primarily the much discussed racial exoticism alone that makes Othello, in Roderigo's cynical remark, an "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.151-52). It is rather in his interiorized epistemology of Christian magic that Shakespeare locates Othello's strange difference.[10]

On the face of it, this radical confluence of knowledge, magic, and medicine admittedly may sound incompatible for Shakespeare to hinge Othello's sudden loss of faith in Desdemona's love and fidelity on the "ocular proof,"[11] causing his transformation from loving husband to divine executioner. Huston Diehl remarks in her article, "Religion and Shakespearean Tragedy," that many critics, in fact, have not wholly granted the handkerchief the evidentiary

proof of that fact; they tend to conclude that the handkerchief is too slight to serve as Othello's self-defining, soul-ruining agency.[12] Their critical reluctance appears warranted since, while Othello insists on the oneness of the handkerchief's material essence with his core epistemological self, Shakespeare challengingly juxtaposes that unity with Desdemona's fatal incredulity ("Is 't possible?" [3.4.80]; "I' faith, is 't true?" [3.4.88]). Yet in pitting Othello's inward certitude of love against Desdemona's innocent skepticism, Shakespeare reveals himself to have been keenly engaged in the diverse anatomies of knowledge animating the early-modern culture that inevitably compelled epistemological questions and crises. From first looking closely at the controversy over worship in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, a new possibility emerges: Shakespeare succeeds in raising Othello's handkerchief to a site of moral rigor to be exercised over the "ocular proof" of Desdemona's "revolt" (3.3.219). By penetratively enfolding into Othello's relentless interrogation of Desdemona, particularly two opposing theories of the ceremony in the Church of England liturgy[13]—one, public and material display of faith, and another, private and invisible exercise of faith—Shakespeare marks one aspect of Othello's strange difference in which optically seeing the stability of a material object of faith constitutes ethically knowing the integrity of its interior essences.[14]

After Protestantism was established as the official state religion, the one theory of worship, which was adopted by the Puritan reformers and became their devotional essence, is that "worship is a purely mental activity to be exercised by a strictly psychological 'attention' to a subjective emotional or spiritual experience."[15] It is a matter of the mind rather than of external artifacts. In the Puritan scheme of things, ceremony must answer to the natural and unfeigned religious needs of inwardness and the self. If a ceremony contains artifice, it serves no good purpose. As William Bradshaw, a Puritan critic, puts it in "A Treatise of Divine Worship (1604)," "Nature only frameth [ceremonies] well, so if it shall appear they proceed from her, and are not forced and wrung from men (*invita minerva*), she putteth into them such a light, that any of ordinary conceit may in the sign see the thing signified."[16] If not, ceremonies are nothing less than human presumptions. This is a view echoed by Puritan theologian William Ames in his "A Fresh Svit against Human Ceremonies in Gods Worship (1633)": "For humane Ceremonies, imposed and observed as parts of Gods worship, must needs be Worship proceeding from mans Will, or will-Worship."[17]

What the Puritans really objected to in the Anglican theory of ceremony is that ceremony is a man-made, unnatural form of worship. Though conceived as an enduring form that gathers up what is experienced in formless fashion, ceremony, to the Puritan thought, is necessarily removed from the immediacy, as well as the urgency, of the worshipping experience. Because ceremony involves objectification and, to a considerable degree, symbolic abstraction of worshipping experiences, there is a distancing from the true experience of religious faith. Instead of being the ordering instrument by which a man knows his relation to God, to others, and to the world, the Anglican liturgical impulse for ceremony is nothing but the remnants of Popish flummery and pagan superstition, impeding the path to true faith. Therefore, the Anglican ceremonial embodiments of worship—including railing the altar in the east end of the chapel, bowing to the altar in the liturgy, many sacred images and relics, such as a number of candlesticks, basins, crosses, crucifixes, handkerchiefs—are artificial falsehoods. The Puritan distrust and rejection of such practices can be heard in Edmund Hickeringill's *Ceremony Monger* in which he scornfully says, "If I were a Papist . . . who believes that God is enthroned in the east . . . , I profess I would bow and cringe . . . and pay my adoration to that point of the compass [the east]; but if men believe that the Holy One who inhabits eternity is also omnipresent, why do not they make correspondent ceremonies of adoration to every point of the compass?"[18]

The Anglican theory of ceremony, in contrast, is carefully conceived by Richard Hooker, who represents the quintessentially Anglican sensibility in his *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. As he sets forth the defense of ceremony, Hooker recognizes the validity of acts of inward, private worship. Against the Puritan critique of Anglican "excesses and impious modes of expressions" of faith in the liturgy, Hooker observes, "For so it is judged, our prayers, our sacraments, our fasts, our times and places of public meeting together for the worship and service of God, our marriages, our burials, our functions, elections, and ordinations ecclesiastical, almost whatsoever we do in the exercise of our religion according to laws for that purpose established, all things are some way or other thought faulty, all things stained with superstition."[19] The controversy at issue for him is ultimately twofold: the idea of law that is validated by its having derived from "natural law," which itself derived from divine law, and the attendant outward forms of that law's powers.[20] He will therefore focus on the public, external rites of the church.

Hooker lived in a ceremonial and emblematic age, which accepted special color, special garb, words, acts, adornment, and pageantry and the like as expressions of mystical understanding and knowledge of all reality, whether the Puritans agreed or not. Further, such affirmations of ceremony, to Hooker, tap into wide human experiences and form a part of the composite of deep English customs, traditions, and a system of civic law. Hooker notes that although the outward matter and form of the essential actions of worship might be carried out quite simply, as the Puritans had insisted, ceremonial minimalism is not enough: "In every grand or main public duty, which God requireth at the hands of his Church, there is, besides that matter and form wherein the essence thereof consisteth, a certain outward fashion whereby the same is in decent sort administered."[21] Faith coupled with actions, Hooker explains, is more forceful. "Thoughtful composition, rather than 'effusions of undigested prayers,' should be the norm."[22] The traditional and hence formal nature of ceremony is in Hooker's mind linked with personal, social, and cosmic order.

His paradigm is essentially Neoplatonic and grounded in the mysticism of the visible physical objects expressing the transcendent reality of true faith. Ceremony, "some visible solemnities," is a solemn event different from a common one and is to be manifested in an appropriate visual specialness. Ceremony thus can educate those who observe ceremony about true faith: "The end which is aimed at in setting downe the outward forme of all religious actions is the edification of the Church. Now men are edified, when either their understanding is taught somewhat whereof in such actions it behoveth all men to consider, or when their harts are moved with any affection suteable thereunto, when their minds are in any sorte stirred up unto that reverence, devotion, attention, and due regard, which in those cases semeth requisite."[23]

Christian-Neoplatonic still, ceremonial actions, joined to words and gestures, can also educate those who watch and hear: "Because therefore unto this purpose not only speech but sundry sensible menes besides have always bene thought necessary, and especially those means which being object to the eye, the liveliest and most the apprehensive sense of all other, have in that respect seemed the fittest to make a deepe and strong impression . . . the very strangeness whereof and difference from that which is common, doth cause popular eyes to observe and to marke the same."[24]

Combining visible form and invisible faith, Hooker justifies ceremony by a visual-epistemological processes of sighting ("object to the eye," "depe and strong impression"), moving ("harts are

moved," "their minds are in any sorte stirred up"), and remembering ("remember carefully," "memory whereof is farre more easie and durable"), all of which finally resulting in instruction ("men are edified," "to what effect such duties serve").[25] Ceremony, in other words, is the idealized form through which "the essence" and "the substance" of God, though inconceivable to man, can be perceived indirectly in the external "matter and forme" via the agency of man's natural and intellectual vision. Though only an embodiment of the essence ("a certain outward fashion"), ceremony can be a highly visualized pattern or outline which informs one of the ultimate visions of the higher or transcendental world emanating from God. Born of a Renaissance man's cognition of reality as hierarchy in which correspondences and analogies relate the physical to the spiritual world, ceremony—"a certain outward fashion . . . in decent sort administered"—imitates ideal and universal truth.[26]

Relocating this Reformation contest over ceremony to literary terms in her study of literary self-consciousness and its ethos of seventeenth-century English prose, Joan Webber sums up the fundamental difference between the Puritan and Anglican epistemologies centered on the material as an authorizing agency of one's mystical and integral being: The Anglican quest for knowledge was achieved through idealism, by being "meditative, anti-historical," imaginative, and "symbolic"; the Puritans, on the other hand, reached knowledge by being forever earth-bound, empirical, "active, time-bound," social, linear, and logical.[27]

While pivoting on secular themes—erotic desire, marital love and fidelity, sexual jealousy, female virtues, and so forth—Othello's implacable necessity of the "ocular proof" in the epigraphic scene encapsulates the provocative question concerning this connection between seeing and knowing, between understanding visible objects emblematically in the material world and acquiring confident knowledge from those objects. As Shakespeare coalesces Othello's gesture and the tableaux of the handkerchief into these contemporary theological debates about how one knows the validity of one's faith in the invisible God without any visible, material evidence of Him, he deftly converts Othello's pagan roots and difference embedded in the maternal legacy into the Christianized evidence of a sacral magic of love and fidelity, counter to Puritans' religious rhetoric against the materiality of faith. Namely, Shakespeare grounds its legitimacy in the Anglican materialist epistemology so that Othello can turn society's accusation of his strange difference ("Against all rules of nature" according to Brabantio, Iago, Roderigo [1.3.119]) into monumentalizing it by

his epistemic alliance ("my perfect soul," "Of my whole course of love" [1.2.36, 1.3.106]) with many lay Christians who validated and sustained their faith by the mysticism of the magical powers of protection, healing, and salvation that the objecthood of the material was believed to confer. For Othello, this dense epistemological network of magical difference was first confirmed when "she had eyes and chose me" (3.3.220). That is, Desdemona saw his outward person of difference but *knew* his core being ("heaven had made her such a man" [1.3.189]). But Othello's triumphant difference also prompts a potentially subversive turn because Desdemona's inability to produce the handkerchief here, like Puritan skepticism of artifacts, has the effect of evacuating his interior essences and thus unfixing his core epistemological self, while signaling, in Othello's eye, the implicit rejection of his magic and, in turn her rejection of his strange difference.

Considered in this way, the logical movement of Othello's mystical knowing must compel his subsequent action to a forbidding end because Shakespeare inscribes yet another mark of difference on Othello by ascribing its genesis to another related idea of magic that the contemporary good medicine embodied. Magic's broad philosophical affinity to and practices of medicine are investigated by Walter Pagel who has examined the derivation and development of early-modern medicine in Europe and its experimental exploration of nature and humanity. Pagel defends his methodology that measures a scientist or medical man of the past against the intellectual background of his own time, however incongruous it would seem today. On this premise, throughout his *Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine*, Pagel finds the linkages between magicians ("religious scientists") and physicians during the seventeenth century[28] in order to argue his larger thesis that certain aspects of sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century medicine are indeed a fusion of religion, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism, a distinct feature of this genesis of difference being its attempt to reconcile Hellenistic philosophy with Christian doctrine during the Renaissance.[29]

Richard Sugg, for instance, follows Paget's intellectual premise in his *Murder after Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early-Modern England*. His is a study that demonstrates that magic—the ethical corollary of medicine—finds its distinct form in Renaissance England in the notion of good medicine, which was believed and practiced during the mid-Elizabethan era through the outbreak of civil war, when anatomy especially was a topic of fascination and autopsies were a spectators' theatre.[30] Rather than regard such

preoccupations as purely macabre, Sugg considers them to be a profoundly epistemological discourse on religion and science and traces their literary implications. Sugg finds that it was thought good medicine to take a dose of mummified human corpse (the dried, often powered flesh of embalmed Egyptian corpses).[31] It was also good medicine to use substances derived from recently-dead bodies, or parts extracted from corpses, including fat and fresh blood, along with muscular flesh, carefully treated and dried before use. The use of a human skull, as well as "usnea," a kind of moss which grew on skulls some time after death, was also accepted as good medicine; both blood and powdered or distilled skull were found effective to cure epilepsy.[32] Various authorities held that mummy was good, particularly to treat haemorrhage or bruising. "Mummy and associated treatment feature[ed] most heavily in the literature of the revolutionary period, with references clustering before the Restoration."[33]

In its actual applications, then, Pagel's words reinforce Sugg's argument on good medicine: "true medicine is the gift of God" and "the secrets of nature, to which the true divine medicine leads, represent the development ('explicatio') of God and therefore accomplish what is known as 'ars magica.' Magic, in this sense, is the highest, the most perfect and the richest knowledge of 'philosophia naturalis.'"[34] Like Pagel, Sugg presents the contemporary view that "philosophical insight and metaphysical views were not always detrimental to scientific work and discovery"[35] and links good medicine's relation to magic as dependent not on the powers of "science" alone, but on "the interaction of the things corporeal and spiritual"[36] in medical biology. Indeed, behind various ostensibly macabre medicinal uses of human remains, there existed the contemporaries' profoundly sacral way of knowing the interior body as the source of the anatomical repository of the soul, since "[man] consists of a divine spirit, an astral body and an elemental body."[37] Hence, Sugg speculates that good medicine was a spiritual consumption of the life-force in the body. Drawing his evidence on the literary and medical language of sermons, plays, and sonnets,[38] Sugg argues that such corpse medicine was by no means on the fringe, nor was it thought to be superstitious magic, but a way of knowing "intriguing clues pointing the way to salvation."[39] As such, it was accepted and practiced by such luminaries as Queen Elizabeth's surgeon John Banister; mystic philosopher and physician Robert Fludd; the Puritan Richard Baxter; the proto-scientific philosopher Francis Bacon; the poet and preacher John Donne; and the chemist

Robert Boyle.[40] Specific to Shakespearean connections, two more physicians may be added to this list: John Hall, Shakespeare's future-son-in-law, and Thomas Lodge, whose pastoral novel *Rosalynde* was the source of Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* As David Hoeniger corroborates Sugg's theory, Shakespeare knew and used the wealth of medieval and Renaissance English medicine-lore in other works.[41] As an educated Elizabethan, Shakespeare must have been acculturated to, perhaps even believed in, good medicine. Therefore, it is not surprising that Shakespeare has Othello express his knowledge about the mummy's efficacy in the anatomical rhetoric of good medicine.[42]

Based on the contemporary practice of "the spirit-matter continuum,"[43] Othello's epistemic posture in the epigraphic scene further particularizes his strange knowledge of Christianized physiology where he embeds into the mummy very specific meanings of the human heart, echoing both the contemporary view that "God's writing must be reanimated in the heart" and that of poet and Puritan clergy Henry King who similarly notes that "the immortal soul [was] localized within the heart."[44] William Harvey, the discoverer the of circulation of the blood, also visualizes the heart as the microcosmic copy of a general macrocosmic pattern and principle: "The heart like a prince in a kingdom, in whose hands lie the chief and highest authority, rules over all; it is the original and the foundation from which all power is derived, on which all power depends in the animal body."[45] It is no surprise, then, that the human heart assumes the moral quality in surgeon Edward May's preaching that "the serpent should be found in the *left* ventricle of Pennant' heart," "the most securely defended region of that organ, and arguably so well defended just because the soul, the very seat of life, was situated in that spot,"[46] and purest spirits of the soul themselves were thought to locate in the left ventricle of the heart.[47]

No longer Branbantio's belittled "spells and medicines bought of mountebanks" (1.3.74), the mutually implicated mummy and heart construct Othello's ineluctable moral logic. More implacable still, he further strengthens that logic by investing another powerful knowledge of purity in the handkerchief by claiming that it had been "conserved of maidens' hearts" (3.4.74). This combination of hearts and maidens could not be more antagonistic to Desdemona's skepticism since the state of virginity was believed to be a highly valued moral condition. As it has come down through Christian thought, the central mystical theme of virgins is that virginity is the quintessence of female holiness, sexual purity, and

incorruptible virtue aspiring to an ideal embodied in the Virgin Mary. It is extremely fragile, and a virgin must be guarded with the utmost care. Medieval monastic writers repeatedly express the fear about the virgins in their care, since "a virgin's flesh is an earthen vessel in which gold is stored for testing."[48] In the Middle English *Ancrene Wisse,* virginity is "a treasure in earthen vessels" and "this frail vessel is as fragile as any glass, for one it is broken it may never be mended."[49] Like Othello's handkerchief of exquisite beauty and ineffable worth given as a wedding gift to Desdemona, once lost, its sacred charisma and virtue will never be restored intact. In his *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, R. Howard Bloch also notes that the idealization of virginity was founded in a belief that its powers enabled women, as well as men, "to triumph over death" through "a clarity of vision," "the purity of virginity," and "incorruptibility."[50]

When Othello empowers the embalmed ventricles of the virgin's heart in this scene, therefore, he intriguingly conjoins two ways of knowing the truth drawn from the epistemology of good medicine: the knowledge that the heart was the great receptacle of affections and other passions[51] and the knowledge that maidens or virgins possessed a remarkably high degree of spiritual purity.[52] Othello's handkerchief, dipped in a virgin mummy's embalming fluid, permits, therefore, a special kind of physical knowing of absolute purity through the contact with the most sacred essence of a human being. For Othello, magic means the knowledge of spiritual physiology, and the handkerchief is its spiritual manifestation. Grounded in Christianized medicine, the handkerchief thus takes on soul-imperiling powers for Othello. In Othello, evil—the ethical corollary of Desdemona's loss of the handkerchief—triggers the onset of cognitive rupture, disabling him from knowing any loyalty, or connection, to any object (the fountain of his knowledge). Thus when he convicts her soul as no longer that of a morally "virgin" wife,[53] he reinforces his strange difference.

In the end, this scene crystallizes a continual and repetitive chain of the magic-medicine-heart epistemology and calls for a more differentiated reading of Othello and Desdemona's eventual tragedy. As Iago incessantly reminds others, class, gender and, most conspicuously, race are inevitably invoked to point out Othello's fundamental difference, even in cosmopolitan Venice. In fact, Othello himself is keenly aware of and articulates the problematics of that difference. The following soliloquy represents Othello's self-consciousness of the vagaries of difference:

> Haply, for I am black
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have, or for I am declined
> Into the vale of years—yet that's not much—
> She's gone, I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours
> And not their appetites! (3.3.304-11)

The handkerchief, believed to contain his strange magic, is yet another signifier of that difference. But how essentially do these outward signs of difference "denote me truly" as Hamlet says of himself (1.2.86)?[54] Further, what is it that Othello has within "which passes show," to quote Hamlet again (1.2.88)? An expanded understanding of Othello's epistemology based on spiritual physiology and ontology of objects underpinning the handkerchief can determine the root of his strange difference: Othello is a spiritually absolutist Christian whose problem is compounded, not by physical markers alone, but more by the epistemological double bind. By the double bind, I mean two types of knowledge about what a human body is all about: on the one hand, his Christian knowledge of the spirituality and sanctity of the human body (inherent in the handkerchief, uniting its magical and medicinal properties; namely, divine and material worlds); on the other hand, his newly acquired learning of the body as an alien and corruptible entity. Othello betrays the latter in his hasty credulity about Desdemona's "liberal hand!" declaring, "The hearts of old gave hands; / But our new heraldry is ['Hot, hot and moist'] hands not hearts" (3.4.53-54, 45). Because she has lost his handkerchief, according to Othello's epistemic calculus, she changes from a "Bride of Christ" to a "Devil's Gateway."[55] Such drastic undermining of Desdemona's body in turn renders him a stranger to his own heart that is his bodily receptacle of love for her. No longer a man "great of heart" (5.2.423), he finds his own body equally foul and corrupt as his own heart, the "fountain" of his life-force, turning into "a cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in":

> But there where I have garnered up my heart,
> Where either I must live or bear no life,
> The fountain from the which my current runs
> Or else dries up—to be discarded thence,
> Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads
> To knot and gender in. (4.2.68-72)

Othello's problem thus becomes twofold. His absolutist magical knowledge of love blocks him from reconciling and even

overcoming this double bind crystallized in the jealous "green-eyed monster" leading to epilepsy, while Iago urges its destructive work: "My medicine, work!" (3.3.196; 4.1.54). In the terms of spiritualized good medicine, epilepsy is not only a physical illness, but also a sign of cognitive disturbance.[56] Considered retrospectively, Shakespeare has already hinted at the eventual arrival of Othello's mental block in the opening scenes where Othello denies any knowledge of magic in response to Brabantio's accusation that he, Othello, could never have honestly won Desdemona's hand: "For nature so prepost'rously to err— / Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense— / Sans witchcraft could not" (1.3.75-77).

At the same time, writing at a critical moment of the epistemic shift in the earlier seventeenth century that Michel Foucault writes about,[57] Shakespeare articulates, in Othello's increasing epistemological decay after this scene, his own keen awareness of the fate of Renaissance good medicine as well as the absolutist philosophy of love. As the seventeenth century progressed, "the body [had] now grown too defiantly, purely material to be easily manipulated by religious rhetoric."[58] The failure to pinpoint the precise location of the soul posed a real threat to those who believed in an "anatomically verifiable continuity between body and soul."[59] Like the fate of seventeenth-century good medicine, Othello represents a Christian soul lost in a transition in which increasingly enlightened science and traditional religiosity diverge from and eventually oppose each other because Othello anchors his soul in the magical handkerchief. In this respect, one crucial cause for Desdemona's tragedy stems from her ultimate inability to see beyond the materiality of the handkerchief. Her exclamation, "some wonder in this handkerchief," signals her progressivist incredulity (3.4.118). Her tragedy deepens because she makes this declaration despite her first heart-surrendering, soul-ennobling loving of Othello's inscape when she averred, publicly, "I saw Othello's visage in his mind" (1.3.287), an ironic reversal of her initial reliance on her inner knowing through the denial of Othello's physical appearance.

Thus far, I have presented the position that in *Othello* Shakespeare quietly plants a challenging idea of Christian magic and its epistemological allure in good medicine in order to re-ground a fundamental source of the tragedy. Shakespeare's knowledge of popular medicine-lore and use of Christian-Neoplatonic philosophy has allowed me to refocus the much discussed racial iconography to an inquiry into Othello's strangely

ironic ontology and to locate its suppressed Christian core of being to be the tragic cause.

Even so, Othello in the play's conclusion still raises a delicate question about the integrity of his Christian posture. In the final scene, after savagely killing Desdemona and finally knowing the truth about the handkerchief, he puts himself on trial as if before the Venetian tribunal:

> O, fool, fool, fool!
> . . . . . .
> Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
> . . . . . .
> Set you down this.
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turbanned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him, thus. (5.2.382; 5.2.407; 5.2.412-16)

These lines complete his epistemological trajectory—from emotional knowing ("I loved her that she did pity them" [1.3.194]) to spiritual knowing ("It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul" [5.2.1]). It is a passage from one of epistemological certainty to one of dilemma and loss. His visions are now moral fragments; they have none of the proud monumentality of his love's morally perfected beauty in Desdemona. Not only that, they have become alien. Though he has known his soul within the Christian framework of the age, before he stabs himself to death, Othello likens himself to the hated heathen ("the base Judean," "a malignant, and turban'd Turk," and "the circumcised dog"), as if admitting that he is no better than the hated heathen. In fact, he kills himself as if killing the infidel enemy to Venice that he himself has become, exposing his incapacity to hold onto the Christian magical epistemology to the end.

Early in the presentation, I referred to Roderigo cynically dismissing Othello as an "extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere" (1.1.151-52). The irony turns out to be that Roderigo's lines retrospectively haunt Othello's last act because Roderigo has unwittingly prophesized what Othello will have become in the end: a double outsider—an epistemologically displaced being—not only to others but also to himself.[60] To me, that strange difference is finally the core of the tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice.

Notes

1. All quoted lines of the play come from William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, The New Folger Library Shakespeare, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1993).

2. *A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), 222. However, Furness in his responding commentary doubts if Steevens' and Dyce's "mummey" refer to Egyptian mummies.

3. *The Complete Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare,* ed. William Allan Neilson and Charles Jarvis Hill (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), 1120.

4. *The Norton Shakespeare*, Based on the Oxford Edition, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 2143.

5. Shakespeare, *Othello,* 156.

6. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* ed. David Bevington (New York: Longman, 1997), 1148.

7. *The Cambridge School Shakespeare: Othello*, ed. Jane Coles (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 132.

8. Ania Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 48; Patricia Parker, "Fantasies of 'Race' and 'Gender': Africa, Othello and Bringing to Light" in *Women, Race and Writing in the Early Modern Period,* ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London: Routledge, 1994), 84-110; Jonathan Burton, "'A Most Wily Bird': Leo Africanus, Othello, and the Trafficking in Difference," in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin (London: Routledge, 1998), 43-63, 57, 58.

9. Ania Loomba, "Outsiders in Shakespeare's England," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163.

10. In some ways, I seem to be participating in the ongoing debates on whether or not Othello is Christian. As Robert H. West once warned about the virtues and dangers of determining Othello's Christianness ("The Christianness of Othello," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 4 [Autumn 1964]: 333-43), my purpose here is not to argue for that still unsettled point; I rather wish to see him in the contemporary Christian context in order to discover another direction to understand his essential difference. Even so, I was delightfully surprised to notice that Jonathan Earl Peck, the Othello actor of this year's (2008) Utah Shakespearean Festival, was wearing a silver cross; it was very visible on his chest.

11. For the phenomenological approach to the "ocular" proof, refer to James A. Knapp's article, "'Ocular Proof': Archival Revelations and Aesthetic Response," *Poetics Today* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 695-727.

12. Huston, Diehl, "Religion and Shakespearean Tragedy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94. Though I take a different approach and draw a different conclusion, I agree with Diehl on the crucial importance of Othello's handkerchief.

13. This part of my presentation derives from my study of the ceremony controversy in early seventeenth-century England in my dissertation on John Ford, written at Loyola University Chicago, 1982. I revisited especially its section "Inquiry into the Concept of Ceremony," 10-51.

14. The following materials were consulted in writing the section of my dissertation on the Anglican liturgy, noted in note 13 above: G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1969); D. E. W. Harison, *Common Prayer in the Church of England* (London: S.P.C.K., 1969); H. R. McAdoo, *The Sprit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the*

Seventeenth Century (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965); J. F. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1964* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1964).

15. Dom G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 312.

16. William Bradshaw, "A Treatise of Divine Worship (1604)," quoted in John D. Eusden, *Puritans, Lawyers, and Politics in Early Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 74.

17. William Ames, "A Fresh Svit Against Human Ceremonies in Gods Worship (1633)," quoted in Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 89.

18. Edmund Hickeringill, *Ceremony Monger (1689)*, quoted in John Brand, *Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, vol. 2 (New York: AMS Press, 1848), 319. Though the book came out late—1689—Hickeringill is quoted by Brand as summing-up the Puritan sentiment.

19. Book 5, chapter 4, section 3 of Richard Hooker, *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. S. Hill, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977). From here on, Hooker is cited in numerals by book, chapter, and section.

20. Ibid., 1.1.3.

21. Ibid., 1.1.273.

22. Egil Grislis, "Richard Hooker and Mysticism," *Anglican Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 253.

23. Hooker, 4.1.3.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 4.1.2.

27. Joan Webber, *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 7, 8, 256.

28. Walter Pagel, *Religion and Neoplatonism in Renaissance Medicine* (London, Variorum Reprints, 1985), 2:100, 2:113-14, 2:116, 2:216-18, 3:31, 5:274, 6:156.

29. Ibid., 6:125-26, 6:128, 6:131, 6:150, 6:163-64.

30. For a good visual understanding of how anatomy and dissection of the human body were conducted after Henry VIII licensed The Company of Barber Surgeons, see the frontispiece painting wherein John Banister is delivering an anatomical lecture at the Barber-Surgeons' Hall, ca. 1580. University of Glasgow Homepage, http://special.lib.gla.ac.uk//anatomy/banister.html, accessed_21 June 2008.

31. Richard Sugg, *Murder after Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early-Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 40-49.

32. Ibid., 42-43.

33. Ibid., 44.

34. Pagel, *Religion and Neoplatonism*, 2:216.

35. Pagel, "'The Vindication of 'Rubbish,'" *Milldesex Hospital Journal* 45 (1945): 42-45.

36. Pagel, *Religion and Neoplatonism*, 3:22.

37. Ibid., 6:153.

38. For various references to Shakespeare's works, see also F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1992).

39. Sugg, *Murder After Death*, 96.

40. Ibid., 40-41.

41. See notes 8 and 18 above.

42. Sugg, *Murder After Death*, 43-44. Also refer to David Hoeniger's *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1992).

43. Sugg, *Murder After Death*, 92-93.

44. Robert A. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart, 1600-1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), xvii-xvii, quoted in Sugg, 97.

45. William Harvey, *The Circulation of the Blood (1628)*, quoted in Pagel, 6:6.

46. Edward May, *A Most Certaine and True Relation of a Strange Monster or Serpent Found in the Left Ventricle of the Heart of John Pennant (1639)*, quoted in Sugg, 97.

47. My claim based on Sugg, 97-98.

48. Quoted in Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 29.

49. *Ancrene Wisse*, quoted in Newman, 29.

50. R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 237, 241.

51. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart,* 11-15; F. David Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare*, 115-16, 145-46, 166-68.

52. Refer, for example, to chapter 4, "The Poetics of Virginity," of R. Howard Bloch's *Medieval Misogyny*. Refer also to the following for pragmatic spirituality: Elizabeth Robertson's "The Rule of the Body: Feminine Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse*," in *Seeking the Woman in Late Medieval and Renaissance Writings: Essays in Feminist Contextual Criticism*, ed. Sheila Fisher and Janet E. Halley (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 109-34.

53. This phrase is a paraphrasing of Amy Hollywood's book title, *The Soul as Virgin Wife* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), in which she explores the mystical and religious experience the writings of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century mystical women. Relevant for my paper was chapter 1, "Visionary Imagination and Apophasis" (1-25), the topic of which is the human soul's relation to the will of God.

54. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, The New Folger Library Shakespeare, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992).

55. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, 65.

56. Hoeniger, *Medicine and Shakespeare,* 203-204.

57. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper, 1972), 4-10.

58. Sugg, *Murder After Death*, 142.

59. Ibid., 159.

60. Though we have different approaches, I agree with the importance of Othello's self-image in the last scene. Refer to Steven Doloff, "The 'Process' of Prejudice: *Othello* 1.3.128-145," *Notes and Queries* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 1994): 491-94; and Gale Kern Paster, "The Tragic Subject and Its Passions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 142-159, especially 148-49.